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The Christian Brethren Research Fellowship

FOR HE IS OUR PEACE

This is a sad issue of the Journal. Yet it has been published, not to seek any sensation, but with a calmly objective purpose. There are many facile laments to be heard on the wastage of talent from assemblies of Brethren, and many a favourite remedy is advocated. Here, for the first time, an attempt is made to gather together a few first hand accounts from individuals who have, in an inaccurate but useful phrase, 'left the Brethren'.

Our reactions will vary: but in the long run there is only one reaction which will profit, and that is the only reaction which ought to occur between any Christians who differ. Doctrines, theories, experiences, leave their marks—but in the last analysis my brother and I stand each alone before God, each to answer to his Master. Moreover, we stand on precisely equal ground, and have each only the same claim upon His mercy—the claim of His unbounded graciousness. Between us as individuals there can be only one link: and that link is our common Lord, Jesus Christ. 'He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us'. What was written of the most intractable religious difference which the human race has known, must surely be the answer to our own problem also.

From the ecclesiastical point of view, the 'problem' of wastage can only be faced in this day and age from the context of the whole Church. A merely denominational attitude is not only sectarian, but it is irrelevant. No careful student of the New Testament can now believe that Scripture presents us with an absolute of church order (nor, probably, have thoughtful Brethren ever imagined that it did—after all, Henry Craik wrote in 1863 that most forms of church order could claim the favour of some passages of Scripture). But Brethren assemblies do represent one very important, if minority, form of church life, and a form which has been used time and again when it has been necessary for new wine to burst out of old bottles. It is for this reason that the independency of the local congregation is adhered to so strictly: not as the most ideal or even an absolutely scriptural concept, but because it is an essential part of this gift given to us, and one which becomes increasingly important to the whole Church as the movement for Christian unity in an outward sense gathers strength. Many fear the potential totalitarianism of ecumenism, but no organisation can, at one and the same time, both become totalitarian and also recognise the full freedom and brotherhood of the independent. But how can that gift play this ordained part, while it is nurtured in fierce isolation from others: if we do not allow them to recognise us? Exclusivism, whatever its form, then becomes not only sterile, but a hiding of the light given us by God.

The following matters will be of interest to members:—

1. We give our hearty good wishes to Mr. H. C. Smith of E.C.L. Bristol, on his recovery from a most serious illness and operation. Mr. Smith's help in the production and circulation of the Journal (he is not responsible for its contents!) has been invaluable, and we take this opportunity of expressing both our deep gratitude to him and our warm wishes for his future. (One or two changes of address were missed during Mr. Smith's illness—we know that members will bear with this.)
2. E.C.L. also have on sale a reprint of A. N. Groves's famous letter to J. N. Darby, in which he foresaw the mounting evils of an exclusive system of church government. The letter is still of profound importance. Copies are obtainable from 60 Park Street, Bristol, 1 at 4½d. per copy, 8d. including postage.
3. Alas, our correspondence editor records not one letter on the subject matter of the Christian and education (issue No. 7). Surely, all members did not agree with the points of view expressed! He anxiously hopes that this issue will see the dykes burst!
4. The only back numbers of the Journal now available (3/- plus postage) are numbers 2, 3, 6 and 7. These are obtainable from the Secretary at 229 Village Way, Beckenham, Kent, and *NOT* from E.C.L.
5. The next Young Men's Bible Teaching Conference at Balliol, St. Peter's and Pembroke Colleges, Oxford, takes place from 10th to 12th September, 1965. The subject is *The Bible and the Problems of Today* and covers a wide and interesting syllabus. Details from Mr. J. J. Rose, 63 Stoke Lane, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol.

WHY I LEFT THE BRETHREN

INTRODUCTION

It has been said of the composer Vivaldi that he wrote not 400 concerti, but one concerto 400 times, and reading through the contributions that follow may provoke the thought that we have here not 12 or so pieces, but successive drafts of but two essays. One is by a hungry sheep, who having looked up and not been fed has gone elsewhere, and the other by a shepherd constantly thwarted in his attempts to feed the hungry sheep.

It is certainly true that the pieces that follow are remarkably consistent. One reason, of course, is that they are all from one type of person, i.e. those who are in membership of, or contact with, CBRF. It follows that there are several types of experience not documented here, and it will not necessarily be true that, if we attempted to put right everything mentioned by our contributors, all leakage would cease. Let us spare a thought for some of these other experiences.

Many, in leaving the Brethren, renounce all Christian profession. As Christians, we re-present Christ, and if the image presented is insipid, irrelevant, or even hypocritical, it need not surprise us that some, in abandoning Brethrenism, will abandon Christ Himself. This will be particularly true of young people, and all who have special responsibility for youth should ponder over Luke 6.39-45. Then let them read a book like Diana Dewar's *Backward Christian Soldiers*, and ask themselves how much regard they pay to teaching methods. Does it still happen that a pupil may have to plod through the life of Moses in three consecutive years with three different teachers? Does the syllabus attempt to complement the local Agreed Syllabus? Is the Bible Class exposed to a 30-minute monologue every week, with no opportunity for questions or discussion?

Those who cannot stomach Diana Dewar's book should avoid at all costs *Religious Development from Childhood to Adolescence*, by R. Goldman, with its monstrous suggestion that religious education should be child-based rather than Bible-based! That is, we should pay more attention to the needs and capacities of differing age-groups than to a rigid pre-occupation with 'teaching the Bible'.

Youth which is repelled by a Pharasaical tendency to invent 'virtues which are sterile and cruel' and 'sins which are no sins at all' (Edmund Gosse's phrases), and by a pathetic inflexibility of mind towards matters raised by science and psychology, may well write off all forms of Christianity, and never realise that larger and more charitable outlooks are to be found.

Again, there are many who leave to find fellowship elsewhere without taking with them the respect and goodwill towards the Brethren evidenced by our contributors. In what follows, you will read of steps taken reluctantly, and even of the possibility of returning, should circumstances so alter. But what of those who leave in anger, bitterness, or under a cloud? To them, Brethrenism is a sick joke, a bad dream. The movement that started in a spirit of free enquiry with particular reference to the unity of Christians is now apparently satisfied with its findings, and refuses to hear further evidence. Afraid of fresh 'soundings', it has 'cast four (at least) anchors out of the stern', and wishes for the Day (Acts 27.29).

We may, perhaps, indulge in a little typology, and identify these anchors which so effectively impede progress. There is our canonisation of the Authorised (King James) Version of the scriptures. Like the medieval church, we have elevated an inaccurate and unvernacular translation, and justified it on the grounds of common usage. Modern attempts, which seem to delight in perverting proof texts for our cherished ideas, are anathema.

Secondly, we have again followed medieval practice with our crystallised interpretation of the Bible (some of us have Bibles where it is printed at the foot of the page!). God, it seems, has no further light to break out of

His holy Word. In morality, for example, we forget the mystery of the Incarnation, that, in H. A. Williams's words (*Jesus and the Resurrection*, p. 92), "He (Jesus) is every man's ideal, and every man's individuality finds in Him its perfect expression, because His manhood embraces every type of personality". Mr. Williams goes on to refer to certain Christians who 'waste a considerable amount of energy in trying to model themselves upon a type of sanctity which is not their own and which God never meant them to have. They dress themselves up in ready-made spiritual clothes which do not fit, and in consequence feel perpetually uncomfortable and ill at ease. It is even worse when, having chosen their own clothes from the peg, they look down on everybody who is not dressed according to their particular style'.

The third anchor is pre-occupation with the future. 'Ye men of Plymouth, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?' asked Spurgeon, and Edward Gibbon might have been writing prophetically of some such Brethren when he wrote of the primitive Christians: 'It was not in *this* life that they were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful'. The Seventy Weeks of Daniel are much more fascinating than Amos's words about social injustice or Haggai's about affluence. We are insensitive to what lies around us, so that when Monica Furlong writes 'What one longs to see is no trace of a clerical attitude towards life, but a joyful and imaginative opening towards people, towards experience, and towards art' (*With Love to the Church*, p. 67), the very people most qualified in the terms of her opening remark to display this are among its worst exponents. Again we need to see the implications of the Incarnation for the here-and-now.

Fourthly, we are weighed down by inertia or paralysis in the face of any change that may be mooted. We have not the cumbersome machinery of Convocation or Conference, but the heavy hand of traditionalism and of our brand of hero-worship is just as effective. A frank examination of the structure of our church life like the 'No Small Change' study recently undertaken by many Anglican parishes is needed. For, as was written in connection with that project, 'No other imperative better catches the life-or-death choice facing Christian congregations everywhere than All Change! If the Church is to be truly the body of Christ in this rapidly changing world situation, nothing less than a complete transformation of attitude and priorities will suffice'.

The last category of those who have left the Brethren but who are not represented in the statements that follow contains those who lack the powers of introspection, reasoning, and expression necessary to produce such a piece. Our contributors are, it will be seen, a remarkably articulate bunch, and could muster an impressive array of degrees. So their tendency to concentrate on short-comings in Biblical teaching is understandable.

But we are prone to lament the departure of gifted and trained young men, and not to heed the silent sufferings of the less gifted. Does everyone relish the prospect of systematic Bible teaching? If so, in what form is it

to be given? Is the sermon or address, delivered from a pulpit in the Bishop of Woolwich's phrase 'six feet above contradiction', an efficient teaching instrument? How far should the main teaching be given when the whole assembly is present, with its differences of age, sex and intellect? Local conditions must surely be taken into account before we rush off to organise a series of 50-minute lectures on Romans!

So to our contributors, to whom we are grateful for the trouble they have taken to express clearly and frankly their position. Let us rejoice with them in their assurance of doing the Lord's will in their present position, moved, as one of them puts it, to another sector of the battle-front. Some have asked that they remain anonymous, and in view of the personal factors often involved we have felt it right to grant this. Finally, lest this issue of the Journal should seem to some too depressing (or too persuasive!), we have included a couple of statements on *Why I Joined the Brethren*.

JOHN SOMERVILLE-MEIKLE

WHY I LEFT THE BRETHREN

(1) Harry Young

'Chapel-goers appear to run in families, like asthma' wrote George Eliot in tones of ironic comment in *The Mill on the Floss*. Her unfriendly words have some truth in them, her simile excepted, of course! In my boyhood and youth, I belonged to an assembly of the Brethren, a circumstance I look back on not with regret, but with pride and gratitude.

I no longer meet regularly with the Brethren, but I do not admit to having 'left' them. I surely belong to them still, even as I belong to the Church which is Christ's body. No theological surgery could ever separate me from any who love the Lord and manifest His Spirit.

The change came when as a young man of twenty-seven I accepted a call to the honorary ministry of a local Baptist Chapel. My wife and I needed a home, and the church which called us could provide one. But we had a much deeper need. I was a busy preacher, itinerating widely in the work of evangelism and ministry. Peripatetic preaching is an exhausting form of Christian service, and curiously unsatisfying. I had the least scope where I was best known, and found that the measure of my acceptance as a preacher seemed, strangely, to be related to the distance travelled. As a young man, I was being propelled into an itinerant ministry which was as exhausting as it was exciting. My wife had no share in my work, only rarely accompanying me, and my children were deprived of my company when they needed it most. My home assembly rarely saw me!

In almost crisis-circumstances of a personal and domestic nature, I needed an opportunity for a settled Bible ministry, with pastoral care in

which my wife, and later, my family could share. This was exactly the kind of sphere the Baptist Church provided, a ministry unknown in the assemblies.

We have never had any cause to regret the step we took in obedience to God's will. It brought a new joy and unity into our lives, a new liberty, and an infinitely more rewarding form of service. Our home became a focal point, a place of fellowship and hospitality, our married life took on a new colour—it was united service, not divided—and, what is more important, we discovered that our lives mattered! The people to whom we preached were the people among whom we lived. I was no longer Mr. Y from X, but a personality whose life and walk could be observed.

We have had the privilege of serving the Lord in three different places. In each case, the number of disciples was multiplied, and there are now three living memorials to the work and service the Lord enabled us to do.

I never at any time regarded the ministry as a monopoly, but shared the pulpit with those who were able to accept its responsibilities, thus stirring up the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the disadvantages of 'one man ministry' and its tendency of mediocrity were largely avoided, yet a consecutive ministry, a recognised leadership, and an affectionate pastoral service could be enjoyed.

Rather more than a year ago, I withdrew from the stress and strain that such a way of life imposed to concentrate on my profession as a school-master, and undertook further theological study. It is proving to be an Arabian period (Galatians 1.17), combining a Renaissance with the Middle Ages! But one day, I truly believe, Barnabas will come to Tarsus to seek His servant and bring him to Antioch (Acts 11.25-6).

It is my belief that if the assemblies could discover the real functions of the Christian ministry, rejecting also the presumptuous exclusiveness that has so often marred their fellowship with other believers, they might be an instrument of revival, and experience a period of unprecedented growth.

(2) K. N. S. Counter

'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'. Liberty is not secured by the absence of form, but by the presence of the Spirit of God. My wife and I recently left an assembly and joined an evangelical Anglican Church where the Spirit of God is manifestly active.

Principles enunciated by early representatives of the Brethren movement were lost under an overlay of legalism, a rigidity of outlook which throttled spiritual development and enterprise. Unfortunately such situations usually have deep psychological implications, especially when accompanied by male dominance and the almost total subjugation of half the worshipping community, but even putting these implications on one side, regulations—especially the type frequently associated with headgear

—soon come to mean more than spiritual vitality (a booklet prepared locally for presentation to 'outside' young people got round to hats by page 2!). Deadness in many services would be relieved if women exercised their full New Testament function—especially in making their unique contribution to corporate prayer. Do the brethren who forbid such participation have any private experience of praying together with their wives, or is that something they have missed to their inestimable cost? Narrowmindedness and bigotry characterised the attitude of certain individuals, whose control of others seems to have been permanently secured by the sheer weakness of their brethren. Nor was there even the hope of the wider range of fellowship secured by contacts with other local Christian communities, the effect of which must inevitably be to dethrone dictators who secure power through collective introspection. The fact is that autonomy has become so entrenched a principle that while some assemblies join their local Council of Churches, there are others where few deadlier sins can be imagined.

A similar dichotomy is revealed when one compares the attitude adopted in various localities to social responsibility; here and there, a real awareness of privilege and duty in the social sphere are to be found, but generally the attitude is one of withdrawal and consequent ineffectiveness, and those who are active will be subjected to criticism.

Pride of material possessions and of presumed social standing can reach an alarming level in such a context. Marriage must be within the 'club', interdenominational activity is specifically condemned. Those who fail to achieve leadership in the outside world are inclined to grab it in a closed group. There is, in truth, frequently no real leadership at all, but only the reiteration of fixed ideas. Absence of readiness to go ahead in faith is a further characteristic begotten of rigidity. The sad thing about a situation which I may appear to have painted incredibly black is that all too often men who have known the will of God have been afraid to speak it; some who have, have suffered for doing so. Younger 'rebels' are often no more than the spokesmen of a distasteful, broader view, held by many, expressed by few. It is distasteful, not to the majority, but to the ruling clique. From the point of view of one's children, it must be added that sentimentalism at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the appalling absence of systematic teaching were further problems. Perhaps our greatest anxiety arose from the misunderstanding of young people by their elders. Here many problems could well have arisen in later years for our own children.

We have been privileged to enter a community in which an atmosphere of true and honest self-giving to one another is experienced. Through the goodness of God, many opportunities of Christian service have become available, though the presence or absence of these cannot by itself be made the criterion of any decision.

(3) David G. Lillie

In view of the fact that this question is in the schedule, I assume that in the minds of those who are responsible, there exists a denomination known as 'Brethren'. Without wishing to press this issue, I must make it clear that I have never willingly been identified with this or any other denominational body. I love all the brethren by whatever name they choose to be called. I am deeply concerned to further the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer 'that they all may be one' (John 17: 23), nor do I forget His words (in Matt. 23: 8) 'For one is your Master and ye all are brethren'.

However, for the purpose of your present study, it may be helpful to give some details of the circumstances which led to my withdrawal some 25 years ago from a local assembly of believers (known as Open Brethren) to join another (undesigned) company in a neighbouring town.

Brought up among 'Open Brethren', at 19 I was baptised and received into the fellowship of a local assembly in Brighton. Shortly after, I moved to London and joined another assembly. My job was in the City and it was frequently my habit to go to Tower Hill during my lunch hour. One young man who used to preach the Gospel there impressed me by his sincerity and lack of histrionics. He seemed to know God.

I conversed with him on several occasions, and he gave me some literature to read. This was about the Holy Spirit, Who was presented in a way quite new to me—although as far as I could see, nothing was said contrary to Scripture. Attention was drawn to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including those which were (or are?) spectacular, e.g. tongues, prophecy, healings etc. It was claimed that these gifts were in operation today. I had never before been taught anything like this, but did remember that some years before, a party of evangelists had visited my home town on the South Coast, and it was rumoured that they claimed to exercise some of these gifts. However, I had been informed quite emphatically by my elders that these people were 'deluded of the devil', and being then only in my early teens, I could only assume that my elders must be right.

I was now confronted with this teaching personally for the first time. However, I was living a pretty full life as a young man actively interested in Sunday School work and assembly life generally, and the whole issue was shelved, and I suppose more or less forgotten.

My job then took me down to the West Country, and I joined an inter-assembly young men's Bible class. A man—perhaps in his early 30's—used to attend the class, who somehow seemed to be an 'odd man out'. He intrigued me, and on enquiring about him, I was informed that he was 'pentecostal'. My inbred orthodoxy must by now have been fully restored, for I recall that I was somewhat shocked when I discovered that my colleagues seemed to accept him as a 'brother', even though they were not particularly anxious to imbibe all that he stood for.

Some time after this, whether on his or my initiative I cannot recall, he visited me at my flat. He always carried his Bible, and conversation invariably turned to the Scriptures, and frequently to the subject of the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. Much that he said was in line with what was taught in the literature which I had received some while before from the man I met on Tower Hill. He spoke of a personal experience of an infilling of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking with tongues 'as at the beginning'.

I resisted him tooth and nail. But the more I argued, the less sure I became of my own ground. In spite of an innate fear of the supernatural, there came a time when I was challenged deeply by our Lord's words in John 7: 37—'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me . . . out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water'. I realised that up to that time, although zealous for God and eager to win souls for Christ, I had never really experienced a real thirst for a deeper personal experience of communion with God. My convictions and zeal were mostly in the realm of the intellect.

My discovery soon created in me at least some sense of need. I remember the time when I began to know what it was really to *thirst* for God. Along with this I began for the first time to have a real personal interest in the Holy Spirit and what He could do to meet my need as a born-again believer in Christ. The background of my continuing fellowship with brethren who were not sympathetic to my state of heart, only added to my difficulty. It is not surprising that at this time I began to share my convictions concerning the Holy Spirit with some of my friends.

The elders of my assembly became aware of this. They were genuinely concerned on my behalf, and I recall conversations with two of them in their respective homes, when they used all their powers of persuasion to discourage me from seeking a further experience from God. They asserted that I already had 'everything in Christ'. I must admit that even during this period, though I probably did not disclose it, I did have certain lingering doubts and fears relative to what I was seeking, but if there was one factor more than another which dispelled these doubts, it was the flimsy Scriptural evidence which these dear brethren brought in support of their conventional viewpoint.

Over a period of some weeks, they apparently discussed my case among themselves, and two special meetings of the assembly were called which I was not invited to attend. The outcome was that I received a letter from the brethren in oversight stating that so long as I held these views concerning the Holy Spirit, although they would not forbid my partaking of the Lord's Supper, they must ask me to refrain from taking any further part in the ministry in the assembly.

I was fully aware that these brethren acted in love, and no hard feelings, I believe, were aroused on either side, except on the part of one

aged brother, formerly with the Exclusive Brethren, who himself withdrew from the fellowship because the brethren refused to ex-communicate me. I continued in the assembly under this arrangement for some months. However, I was young, and eager to serve the Lord, and being unable to recant, I was unwilling to face the prospect of a lifetime sentence to inaction such as seemed inevitable if I stayed on in that assembly. I was still unmarried and living in lodgings, and the simple answer seemed to be to move to an assembly in a neighbouring town which was open to what I believed to be the full truth concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So that is how I came to withdraw from that particular assembly, and I am thankful to say that I lost no friends through this event.

I have never 'left the brethren'. Indeed, I trust the day will soon come when my bonds of fellowship with these brethren will be closer than ever before. Two important factors seem to hinder this at present.

(1) The sectarian concept of 'Brethrenism', which seems to me to be quite contrary to New Testament principles.

(2) The strange inability of 'Brethren' generally to realise that the spiritual insights of George Müller, A. N. Groves and others of some 130 years ago were not necessarily the last or fullest revelation of truth which the Holy Spirit desires to restore to the Church in this age, and a consequent tendency to view with disfavour or suspicion any who do not accept their 'standard interpretation of Scripture' as handed down from those days.

If C.B.R.F. has been raised up to face these issues fearlessly, it could result in a forward move of infinite possibilities.

(4) J. S. Short

'Preach the Word!' was a command which I received from the Lord some ten or twelve years ago. I therefore applied myself to the task of preaching, and found in the Brethren a wide open door of opportunity. So extensive was the opportunity to preach, that by 1960 my diary was comfortably filled for about two years hence. But I found myself in a disturbing dilemma. For about five years I had been preaching in many assemblies in and around London, and it was tempting to think that I was perhaps beginning to fulfil the ministry to which I had been called. I felt aware, however, that something was basically at fault with the methods I was obliged to adopt. I was doing much, but felt that a large proportion of effort (spiritual and physical) was being dissipated. After much thought, I came to the conclusion that the system of itinerant preaching—which has come to be regarded as the Brethren norm—left much to be desired. One week I was here, the next there, and then somewhere else. I found no opportunity to 'build' in my preaching, for not knowing what had gone before, I did not know the teaching foundation on which to build. And since most of my preaching was away from home, I found no regular links with my hearers other than at services. As a result of this, I found develop-

ing within me a conviction that the majority of assemblies were functioning, as far as the ministry of the word was concerned, on basically unsatisfactory lines. I began to long for two things: a pulpit in which I could regularly preach, and a congregation to which I could regularly minister as a pastor.

These convictions grew over a number of years, during which I became increasingly aware of the Lord's call to full time ministry. But to whom was I to minister? Counties Evangelistic Work had kindly offered me a caravan in about 1954, but I did not believe myself to be called for the ministry of an itinerant evangelist. I concluded that if the Lord was really calling me to the work of a pastor, an assembly somewhere would invite me to occupy such a position. I had heard of precedents for this situation. My decision, therefore, was to continue in prayer and to await the inevitable invitation; and I would accept no more preaching engagements until the way ahead clarified.

It would be wrong, however, for me to leave matters there. Other influences than mere dissatisfaction with a preaching set-up were at work within me. One such influence was the ministry of the Rev. Dick Lucas at St. Helen's Church, Bishopsgate. Every Tuesday, at lunchtime, it was my habit to hear Mr. Lucas preach; and as the months passed, I saw for myself a perfect example of the exercise of the gift of ministry. Week by week the same man opened the Scriptures, building this week on a foundation laid previously. There was no 'procession' of different preachers, but the same God-sent man each week. This was the pattern which I had come to believe was right. It might be said that I had a rose-tinted glimpse of the Church of England at its best. And during—perhaps even before—this time, a friendship between another young clergyman and myself deepened, which gave me another insight into the Church of England. Through this man too (Rev. Michael Baughen) I saw something of what the Lord was doing in the fellowship of that Church. So although the ministry being exercised by these men may well have given me an uncharacteristically favourable view of the Church of England at large, I could not escape the fact that the Lord was using them mightily whilst they were adopting ministerial methods which, in principle, were what I believed to be right.

After two years of waiting upon the Lord, by October 1962 I was in a state of great uncertainty. I was convinced of God's call to the ministry of the Word, but no opening, as yet, had appeared. No assembly had invited me to join them in the capacity which I had envisaged; but this lack of response was now being regarded by me as being from the Lord. Having seen the Church of England in action to good effect and having experienced dissatisfaction with the essentially itinerant nature of the assemblies' preaching set-up, I was strongly attracted to that church. Moreover, I found myself in agreement with the official doctrinal position of the established church, as set out in the *39 Articles of Religion*. At this point I received a startling invitation, which was to be used of the Lord to precipitate my decision to leave the Brethren.

The invitation to which I refer was for me to serve as a pastor to a Chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion (Congregational). I was suddenly confronted with a proposition, to which a definite response had to be given. This invitation served to establish a principle in my mind: the Lord was calling me to minister outside of the Brethren. I came to this conclusion without difficulty, since such opportunity of full-time pastoral ministry as presented itself, came from without. The work to which I was called was a work for which there was evidently no scope amongst the assemblies. Had there been so, I would surely have received the invitation for which I had waited so long. But more than this, the Chairman of the Committee offering me the pastorate quite spontaneously observed that, whilst he would welcome my acceptance of his offer, he thought I would be of more use in the Church of England! This astonishing remark was entirely unsolicited. Thus the choice now confronting me was between the Congregational pastorate, or the Church of England ministry. Every conviction within me pointed to the latter course, and the chairman's remark clinched the matter. In October, 1962, I resigned my will to the fact that the Lord has called me to this work, and from that moment to this I have rejoiced in the peaceful knowledge that I have done the will of the Lord.

From this simple narrative, it is clear that my departure from the Brethren was by no means 'under a cloud'. We continue in fellowship as brethren in the Lord! For reasons best known to Him, I have been moved to another sector of the battle-front. I warmly acknowledge the debt which I owe to the Brethren. It was in their midst that I was taught as a child, was converted as a boy, and received instruction in the years of my formative Christian growth. Through opportunities and encouragements given to me by many brethren, I have found numerous avenues of Christian service. This is a rich spiritual heritage for which I am profoundly thankful to the Lord.

(5) Robert G. Cochran

Before proceeding to give the reasons for my leaving the fellowship of those Christians known as the 'Brethren', I feel it is necessary to give a brief description of the background to this decision, i.e. my environment and upbringing. Having been brought up in a Christian home, worshipping God in the manner of the Brethren, and living in an area where there are a larger number of Brethren congregations than is, perhaps, usually the case, it is clear that I had ample opportunity to see Brethren principles in action in congregations other than my own. Upon reaching my mid 'teens', I soon started to examine these principles for myself, since I have an inquiring nature. Before long, I was personally satisfied as to the truth and Scriptural basis of these. However, being a firm believer in the dictum 'Practice what you preach', the disparities existing between the theoretical principles and their practical outworking became increasingly obvious to even a casual observer, becoming matters for serious consideration to a

more critical observer such as myself. It was these discrepancies which led, eventually, to my seeking the fellowship of Christians of a different outlook to that of the Brethren.

I will now enlarge upon a few of the matters alluded to above, in order to clarify what I mean. First, let me mention the matter of the autonomy of the local church. The clear outworking of this principle (some might even consider it to be the underlying principle) is surely the 'autonomy' of the individual believer. Yet it is all too common to find oneself being opposed, whether openly or tacitly, because of one's views on a very minor point, perhaps. Linked to this, I might mention that a common factor of all congregations of Brethren of which I have any intimate knowledge is the frequent, if not constant, internal unrest and dis-unity culminating from disagreements over relatively trivial matters such as, for example, the public ministry of women, or the place of musical instruments in public worship. (Such matters are important, but not to the extent of disrupting the life of the local church, as I have known them to do.) This has often ruled out the possibility of having any true unity in the Spirit in a congregation. Another matter which influenced me greatly is the over-emphasis of the so-called 'non-denominational' nature of the Brethren system. I have known Christian workers who refused to co-operate with other Christians in evangelistic outreach simply because they were from the 'Denominations'!! Others who would not go to such extremes yet seem to regard themselves as somewhat superior to those Christians who do not worship God in as legalistically Scriptural fashion as themselves.

The examples given are only a few specific matters chosen to illustrate my case. To put this in more general terms, Brethren practices often tend to contradict their principles, thus betraying a fundamental weakness, I believe. To sum up the position as I have observed it, this weakness seems to lie in the fact that the Brethren way of worship is based on the assumption that each believer is filled with the Holy Spirit all the time. Unfortunate and tragic as it may be, facing the facts in reality reveals that this is not the case. This, in many cases, leaves assemblies open to discord and chaos, with great harm being done thereby to the image of the Brethren in the eyes of the world and, in particular, in the eyes of fellow Christians.

As a result of observing the above and allied matters over a considerable period of time, I came to the conclusion, after much thought and prayer, that I would be happier making my spiritual home with a congregation of Christians (in the denominations!) who believe, both in practice and doctrine, almost identically the same as the Brethren, but who adopt a more sensible approach, I believe, to the more practical issues inherent in such matters as the autonomy of the local church, for example. Since taking the step of leaving the Brethren about two years ago, I believe I have benefited in my Christian life as a result. However, I continue to hope and pray that the Brethren may express their Scriptural principles in a more realistic way for this day and age, to the praise of Christ, the Head of the Church.

(6) Anonymous

'There is no gift of the Spirit which has been less regarded than that of the teacher in the majority of assemblies'. (H. L. Ellison, *The Household Church*, p. 92) With this verdict many of us must reluctantly agree. Meetings for the ministry of the Word are usually held at a time when the majority in fellowship cannot, or will not, attend. Teachers, even when they are recognised as elders, are given little scope to exercise their ministry in their own local church. Many of them, certainly, are busy, perhaps too busy, ministering in assemblies scattered over a wide area, but the church for which they have accepted responsibility of oversight is left to the tender mercies of visiting strangers.

The resultant ministry is what one would expect. Given by men who cannot know the particular needs of the church, who are rarely given sufficient time for adequate treatment of the major Biblical themes, and, alas, sometimes by men whose qualifications as teachers are by no means apparent, the ministry is often superficial, restricted to a small number of themes or Scripture passages, and irrelevant to the particular needs of the church. The most depressing feature of all is that no one seems to accept responsibility for what is taught in the assembly. Theoretically, the elders are ultimately responsible, but they seem so often to leave everything to the visiting speakers.

That is why I left the Brethren. The hungry will always go where they can be fed, and I am now a member of a church of another tradition. Here, the ministry is mainly, but by no means exclusively, in the hands of the full-time pastor. It is difficult for anyone brought up in the Brethren to accept this as the ideal solution. But the fact remains that in this church Christian doctrine is taught, and the Bible is expounded in a way not usually possible in the Brethren.

Because he knows the church intimately, the pastor is able to minister to specific local needs and also maintain a balance between expository, doctrinal, and practical teaching. When he takes a series of studies, he does not have to limit himself to four or five occasions as is so often the case in the assembly, and can therefore deal more adequately with his subject. Such ministry is not confined to a week-night meeting, but is a vital part of the Sunday worship attended by the majority of church members.

The result of this regular systematic teaching is to focus the attention of the congregation on the Word of God itself rather than on the gifts and personality of the preacher. At least this has been my experience so far. The opinion is often expressed in Brethren circles that people do not want to listen to the same speaker on more than three or four consecutive occasions. If this is true, it is a most damning indictment of the state of the ministry among the Brethren today.

There is, of course, no reason why ministry such as I now enjoy should not be given in a Brethren assembly. It will however require a radical change in Brethren customs and traditions—not principles—before the Brethren again deserve the reputation they once had for Bible teaching. In many cases the teachers are there. The desire for such Ministry is certainly there.

(7) Leonard E. Greene

I joined a Brethren assembly in 1953, and left ten years later to go to an Evangelical Church of England. During my time with the Brethren I was active in the Sunday School and young people's work.

I started going to the Brethren soon after my conversion simply because some friends went there. But it was not long before I came to regard the Brethren as the one and only church. I also found that there were ample opportunities for my energy and intellect within this particular church.

But why leave? It can be summed up in one word—frustration. I am in my late twenties, with a family of two children under five; and as is quite normal with a young serious-minded person I need to feel a sense of achievement, or at least to feel that one's efforts are worthwhile. This need applies equally to secular and spiritual life. Hence in secular life we have the 'Brain Drain'. Once frustration sets in, the door is wide open for criticism and cynicism. A multitude of unpleasant features become apparent in the organisation one is frustrated with, but really these are only secondary, and are not the main cause of discontent. Without frustration one can accept the imperfections and work towards their elimination. But with frustration there is only intolerance and unhappiness.

Whilst with the Brethren my main field of activity was in Sunday School and youth work, but I found my ideas far too radical for our elders. Time and time again the brake was applied, and this or that was vetoed. An example of this was a total ban on home Bible Studies; to be fair, it was caused by an unpleasant piece of history in our assembly, but I was unable to accept the rigidity of the stand that the elders took. One is left with two choices—obey or defy. Eventually I came to believe that my efforts were being wasted because the framework for the effective running of my particular interests just was not there. I saw my work as a fruitless waste of time.

Having become frustrated, I found the secondary things came looming up; the whole system appeared rotten; nothing was right. To illustrate this, I will list some of the things I saw to criticise. An oppressive attitude to women in the church; no provision for young children, especially with regard to worship; a bigoted attitude over the so-called privileged position of the brethren; the system of succession of elders, which can only work towards the perpetuation of their own kind; a rigid and sometimes incorrect way of interpreting scripture, especially over 'assembly truth', where early church practice seemed more important than declared

principles; an almost mystical interpretation of things like the Tabernacle and the parables of Jesus. I could go on, but you see how one quickly gets to the point where nothing is right. Yet, I repeat, if I am honest, the real root of my leaving was frustration.

To many it will seem unspiritual to be frustrated in the work of God, simply because self should be surrendered, eclipsed, and governed by the greater authority. But should this be so? Is it not a fact that each of us needs to have his personality drives satisfied? I still believe that the most content in the Brethren are those on the sidelines, those very often whose secular jobs satisfy this essential need for achievement. There are others, of course, who have carved a niche for themselves and are doing a great work, very often insufficiently supported. But large numbers of young men and women are leaving the Brethren, for many declared reasons. I would suggest that frustration has claimed more than a few of these, and that the reasons given for leaving are in fact but the last straw.

(8) Anonymous

Believe me, I have no heart for writing this; it is never pleasant to criticise fellow Christians, but the hard fact remains that, generally, someone else has to do us the kindness of seeing ourselves, for we find it so difficult. Further, I remember with gratitude the years I spent with Christian Brethren; within that circle I experienced strong ties of fellowship, but gradually I found their isolationism intolerable. It seemed to me that, whilst they protested they were not a sect, they had become the most sectarian of the sects. I found the self-delusion unbelievable.

I felt sadly that the Brethren had separated themselves from other Christians; their styles of praying, their way of speaking of missionary activity and of Christian service generally, their guest-houses, and even their non-religious pictures on Christmas cards had all the stamp of their own particular brand of Christianity. I was once informed that Brethren missionaries never became involved in political troubles, the inference being that all other missionaries did! I was also told that *really* keen Christians (meaning Brethren) never took an interest in politics. It seemed to me that they had withdrawn from ordinary life into their own religious order.

They made an issue of not using the customary 'Rev.' in referring to ordained ministers of other denominations, yet some gloried in 'qualifications' of suspect quality. Sunday evening services were always for 'preaching the gospel' (meaning *only* the offer of forgiveness of sins to the sinner), Bank Holidays were usually for addresses of greater length at meetings called 'conferences', and hymns were often read aloud before they were sung. All these and a hundred other little shibboleths turned me against the churches always known as 'assemblies' at least so far as church membership was concerned. Brethren, it seemed to me, had become too much 'peculiar people'.

I found that the intellectual wardrobe of the average 'Brother' contained few whole pieces; he shunned ordinary social life, local affairs, culture, the arts, and even sport. I speak in a generalised way—obviously there are plenty of exceptions, but so many Brethren seemed to 'live in one room'. They kept only books by their own authors, but possibly alongside a few Victorian works of fiction.

I could not see that the Brethren church order was any more in accord with what prevailed in the infant Church, and I still deplore their often bitter dislike of other forms of denominational church government. But I still enjoy good fellowship with many Brethren, although some, I understand, have ruled me off their list of 'acceptable speakers', on the ground that I have 'judged' them. I find this line of argument, as I find others which they use concerning the punctilio of their beliefs, difficult to follow.

The assemblies seemed most reluctant to provide for the needs of the children and youth. It was assumed they would like what their parents liked by way of religious exercises—prayer meetings, bible readings, etc. When, at the age of fifteen, my eldest child went off and was baptised at another local church, we felt the point of no return had been reached.

(9) Miss Jean Morris

There were many small and immediate reasons why I left the Assemblies and joined the Church of England, but the real and basic reason is that I like the order of Anglican worship. There was no serious doctrinal consideration involved, and where Evangelicals are concerned, I do not believe that there ever need be. There are too many positive Christians in every denomination for them all to be wrong, save one group.

Let me make it quite clear that I had nothing against the meeting in which I was brought up. It was, on the whole, a very happy one, with nothing exclusive about it. But I found it increasingly difficult to worship there, or in any Brethren meeting. There is a lack of orderliness and of spaciousness in the assemblies, and one is dependent upon personalities. One man pushing his own point of view can wreck a worship service; in an Anglican service, even if the clergy are indifferent, or even inaudible, the liturgy is satisfying and beautiful, and even the most obtrusive personalities cannot wholly obscure it.

Long years of boredom with a one and a half hour meeting made me too ready to be amused at trivialities and impatient with people's less amusing foibles. As I grew older I became increasingly critical. Added to that, I received very little teaching. All the time I was at school I was unable to go to a midweek meeting. Sunday mornings were given entirely to worship of a rather transported kind, and Sunday evenings to the 'simple Gospel message'. The real teaching that all young people need, was in neither of these and I received it in a Crusader Class. It was there

that I learnt to enjoy Bible study, and it was there that I learnt to pray, and except on rare occasions, I have found little enjoyment of either in Brethren meetings. Bible studies were, all too frequently, repetition in only too well-known phraseology of well worn themes; there was seldom any group study and when there was it was less study than the handing round of texts. Prayer meetings were similar; prayers were, more often than not, twenty minute addresses—whether to or about, God, was often not clear. Specific requests were usually dealt with by one brother who happened to have a good memory.

One last thing I should add, in all fairness. In Brethren assemblies, ministry meetings, when in the hands of really capable men, and missionary meetings, are of the greatest possible benefit. With similar meetings in all denominations they stand as very real helps to all Christians.

(10) Anonymous

I was baptised at an assembly in November 1939. I was converted as a boy, and am now in my early seventies. I am in whole-hearted sympathy with your aims (i.e. in CBRF). To me, they are excellent, but frankly from my experiences in the assemblies with which I have been connected, I cannot visualise the possibility of a practical issue. You will be up against almost invincible opposition. My conviction is that you will be called upon to launch out afresh. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that what issued from 1830 has now spent itself.

Let me mention some of the things calling for immediate adjustment.

1. *The complete autonomy prevailing in the individual meeting*

We hear much regarding adherence to New Testament order. I have doubts as to whether or not complete autonomy is in agreement with New Testament guidance. After all, there was in existence the Jerusalem Council, and apparently it had its place and use. Even Paul acknowledged it and made use of it.

During the twenty years or so that I moved in assembly circles, it has been my misfortune to find an autocrat dominating the meeting, as a rule; generally one who elbowed his way on to the oversight during the difficult period of the Second World War. During the passing of the years he has succeeded in getting 'yes' men alongside him, for to my amazement there seems to exist little difficulty in his way to do according to his wishes.

In one particular meeting, seven of us spent three evenings with the oversight in an effort to get certain reasonable adjustments. It was all time wasted. One of the seven remarked to me at the conclusion that they (the oversight) had determined beforehand that not one inch would they yield.

2. *The common practice in selecting Overseers*

From what I have witnessed, the dominating member fills any vacancies that may occur. The membership of the assembly count for little or nothing. The meeting is informed that so and so has been invited to join the oversight and has accepted. Apparently the membership cannot be trusted to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making such appointments.

3. *The indefinite term of office on the Oversight*

It is my conviction that the membership of an assembly should be responsible for the appointment of the oversight, and, further, that appointment should be for a period not exceeding five years, with re-appointment at the wish of the assembly. Someone once expressed the view to me that an oversight is not appointed: it appoints itself. That is, leaders of various activities in the assembly are the oversight. If this method is approved, a man should be replaced on the oversight by his successor on vacating his post.

4. *Ministry at the Breaking of Bread*

I remember a few years ago on arriving to take the Gospel service finding a dear old brother greatly upset. That day a well known speaker was present at the Breaking of Bread. There was eager expectation to receive a special word of ministry. Up rose a member, more noted for aggressiveness than godliness, and utilised the time. My friend had a word with him after the meeting, only to be told that he had been led of the Spirit. Alas, how often I have heard God's name being taken in vain in this manner within assembly circles.

The time has come when every Sunday morning the ministry should be pre-arranged, despite the hue and cry from certain quarters that the Holy Spirit is being limited. That would certainly come from the type of man I have mentioned. In bygone days, Brethren conferences were addressed by 'whosoever will', likewise the Sunday evening service. But it became obvious that the Spirit of God does not bless such practices. Our God is a God of order.

5. *The position of Women in the assemblies*

During the War, I sought refreshment one evening by going to an assembly prayer meeting. Present—a brother, his wife, and another sister. I knew both sisters to be active Christian workers in the assembly. But Brethren procedure forbids women to pray in the presence of men, so my friend and I had to keep an hour's prayer session going. Surely we have travelled along the Christian path far enough to entertain misgivings about this attitude towards the sisters. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

I dare say that after what I have been recording, you will not be surprised that I am now in fellowship elsewhere. The climax came when I ministered one Sunday morning on the perfection of Christ's humanity. I was accused by a well known speaker, who was present, of belittling the

divinity of the Lord. The oversight apparently found nothing in what I had said to justify the accusation, but decided that it would be too complicated to approach the bible teacher on the subject. My wife and I quietly withdrew. The oversight sent a letter asking for an interview for a delegation. I advised them our decision was final.

To rescue the Brethren movement from its present chaos and complacency would demand persistent action, and in the end, a new beginning. It could mean leaving the dying cause to meet its inevitable end. Will CBRF be prepared to go all the way?

(11) Andrew R. Anderson

Whilst I suppose it is technically true that I 'left the Brethren' I must say that I have never regarded it in that light. Perhaps that is because movements or denominations have always seemed of secondary importance to me. I just felt that I was leaving one local church, the Brethren assembly in which I was brought up, and joining another local church, the Evangelical Free Church of which I am now the minister. I write therefore with no critical axe to grind against the Brethren movement, and indeed only set down my observations because invited to do so.

There were two main reasons why I took the course of undertaking a settled ministry outside the Brethren. The first was a growing personal conviction, over a number of years, of the call of God to a settled preaching and pastoral ministry. Pressed on the matter of loyalty to the assemblies to whom I owed so much, I first of all tried to repress this and thought in terms of an itinerant Bible ministry. When I became convinced that this was not right for me, I tested the ground as thoroughly as I could as to the possibility of a settled ministry among Brethren. The nearest I could get to this was an assembly who were considering having a pastor who would do one-third of the preaching. Such an arrangement seemed quite impracticable. One would have had to have been ministering away so much that pastoral contact would have been minimal, and this problem was surpassed by the impossibility of pursuing the consecutive ministry of the Word which is a great lack in the assemblies to-day. There seemed no alternative, therefore, but to look outside the Brethren movement for a local church where a ministry such as I have outlined would be open to me.

The second reason was that, along with this inner conviction of a call to a settled ministry, many questions arose in my mind as to whether the traditional pattern of assembly life was the only truly Scriptural pattern. I began to feel that the insistence on Brethren church order as being cut-and-dried in the New Testament was a case that was somewhat overstated. Could one really see the morning meeting in 1 Corinthians 14? And where was there room for a Titus or a Timothy, except on the mission field? Should the Lord's Table be given the centrality in our worship to the detriment of the preaching of the Word?

Of course these doctrinal questions were also accompanied by practical ones. Whilst I could see, and still do see, the dangers of the 'one man ministry', were there not even greater dangers in the self-appointed ministry and leadership in many assemblies? Is the gift of preaching as diffused among the members of an assembly as is so often claimed? And—perhaps the most disturbing question of all—was there really evidence for a *unique* leading of the Spirit in the morning meeting, that, it was claimed, placed the worship there on a superior plane to that of other forms of worship?

I am aware that I have mentioned matters which are of the deepest and most sincere conviction for many in the Assemblies. I have done so because they were matters which I was forced to consider in seeking to be realistic and Scriptural in my thinking. I would not wish to claim that my present arrangement is perfect, but it does permit me to fulfil a preaching and pastoral ministry, in a setting which I believe to be no less Scriptural than that which I left.

Perhaps one may be permitted to add two observations about matters that are at the heart of our understanding of the doctrine of the Church: the one on the nature of Scriptural authority; the other on the unity of all believers.

Those who take the Brethren position generally hold the belief that there is in Scripture a *detailed pattern* regulating Church life. But is this in fact so? Would it not be more true to say that the New Testament lays down *principles* of Church life, and that, providing we seek to conform our Churches to the principles, there is liberty for variation in the details of methods of worship, government, ministry, etc.?

If this be granted, and it is therefore agreed that Brethren practice is not the only Scriptural order, my second observation concerning the unity of all believers may be considered. The genius of the early Brethren was surely that they held to the unity of the body of Christ. Sadly we have to admit that though this is expressed by some assemblies to-day, largely the movement has been a contradiction of this principle. Is this not because folk have become wrapped up in a *movement* (however unorganised) uniting churches of a strictly defined pattern?

It may seem idealistic, but would not the sectarian spirit be dealt a death blow if we could dispense altogether with the idea of a movement (a grouping of churches), and bring to the forefront of our thinking the only two Scriptural aspects of the Church: the one, local; the other, universal. In practical terms this would mean that evangelical Christians should have two levels of concern. First, we should be concerned with our own local church, which we should seek to conform to the principles of Scripture, and secondly, with the whole work of God. In this surely our horizons could be as wide as to include all who hold the great doctrines of our evangelical faith, even if their Church practices varied from our own.

And could not our missionary interest be similarly as broad, instead of being confined to those who go out from churches like our own, to found churches stamped after the same pattern?

Such a situation of evangelical ecumenism may seem idealistic, but is not this the idealism of Scripture, and does not the present spiritual condition of our country demand it? What blessings would accrue from a closer unity with all of like precious faith, though of differing church practice. Devotion to Christ could surmount the barriers—

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall,*
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

(12) Shorter Extracts

. . . we are in happy fellowship with the local Baptist Church (along with at least 15 other ex-P.B's), and feel that we are worshipping much nearer to the New Testament pattern than was the case in the assembly, where the narrow introspective attitude inhibited any real spirit of the Unity of Believers.

. . . I have made a number of drafts of this, but in each case I have found it difficult to avoid putting part of the reason on the attitude adopted by the elders in the local assembly here.

. . . had I found an assembly with scope and a willingness to have a man in residence, *not* presiding over their business meetings or over the Lord's Table, but doing regular visitation in the area of the Hall and preaching and teaching pretty regularly there or in a fairly close circuit (as distinct from almost perpetual iteration), I would probably have settled down among the assemblies. But the Lord knows what He is doing! I know I've been where He wanted me.

. . . Mr. R. said to me on one occasion that he went to the Brethren when he came out of the forces (he was a Chaplain in the Army, doing a great work), because he was troubled about 'one man ministry'. But five years among Brethren made him more troubled still about 'any man ministry' or—at times—'no man ministry', and he felt free in spirit to return to the Church of England ministry.

* Except 'evangelical'? (F.R.C.)

WHY I JOINED THE BRETHREN

(1) H. L. Ellison

Or did I? In 1936 I was working in the mission field as an ordained clergyman of the Church of England. The compulsion of an inner voice, which to this day I am convinced was Christ's, caused me to receive 'believer's baptism'. My bishop refused to recognize that I had any standing in the Church of England either as clergyman or layman. He indubitably exceeded his authority, and had I returned to England I should doubtless have found a bishop ready to ignore my action. My staying on in the field made acquiescence in his action inevitable. The nature of my work made it possible for me to adopt a completely independent position having fellowship with all Protestants in the area including Anglicans.

I came home in 1939 and by the spring of 1940 discovered that there was no hope of going out again. I could have made my peace with the Church of England, but I already felt that 'Too much water has flowed under the bridges', to use a phrase I employed about 1956 when one of the evangelical bishops asked me to let bygones be bygones and to come back. This meant that I had to find regular Church fellowship.

From my conversion till now, and I trust to my dying day, I have been able to enjoy Christian fellowship wherever Christ is truly preached and served; I have preached gladly wherever liberty has been given me to proclaim the truth as I have come to understand it. But denominationalism, i.e. the restricting of fellowship to less than the totality of true believers and the stretching out of one's hands to others who share in these limitations and not to those who do not, has been from the earliest days of my spiritual life an abomination. I was able to be ordained in the Church of England just because it professed to be the Church of all believers in England—that it has in recent years virtually abandoned that position is another matter.

The local churches round me gloried in belonging to denominations. There were only two possibilities open to me. There was a small independent church, where I should have been like a whale in a goldfish bowl, a position that held no attractions for me. There remained the assembly.

It would be easy to draw up a list of its faults and that would be poor gratitude for over twenty-five years of fellowship. Let me rather say that, in spite of tradition, they recognized that their only binding authority was the Bible as interpreted by spiritual men. In spite of varying views they cordially welcomed all whose lives showed the fruit of the Spirit. Whatever this one or that one might do himself, they recognized the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in guiding those in fellowship along varying paths. I did not join them, they received and welcomed me.

To those that can see only the spots and not the glory which reveals the spots I would say, 'Where else could I have found these things?' It is not in Brethren Principles that I am primarily interested; they can co-exist with a dead orthodoxy, which is a thousand times worse than a dead heterodoxy. I am concerned with the spiritual life that can use these principles to the glory of God and the building up of His Church.

(2) P. D. Warren

I joined 'the Brethren' when I was in my late teens, largely as a result of the influence of one who was in the assemblies, and who under God was the last link in the chain that led to my entering into assurance. I had been brought up in the Church of England, and had been baptised and confirmed. I was also considering going into the ministry, so the step was a far-reaching one for me.

The matters which convinced me that it was a right step for me to take were firstly negative and secondly positive. I felt that the Church of England through its baptismal teaching in the Prayer Book and as given in its churches clouded the issue as to the way of salvation, and however the baptismal service could be explained by Evangelicals a great deal of misconception had and would flow from the words of the service themselves and from the teaching that was normally given.

Also I felt that a state Church to which all who went through the ceremonies belonged, without any proper enquiry as to spiritual experience, (I recognised that there were exceptions) was far too mixed a multitude to purport to represent the gathered Church as conceived in the New Testament, and that although I recognised that mistakes could occur, profession of faith was the only safe entrance requirement, with baptism as its outward and visible sign.

The positive points in favour of the Brethren's claim for my allegiance were first their emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and practical expression of it in the freedom given at the 'open' worship meeting. I valued the centrality of the Lord's Supper which I had found in High Church circles, but missed in Evangelical Churches (established and free). I felt also that the Brethren gave full opportunity for the exercise of spiritual gifts, which were found in differing measure in all believers. I had noticed that some ministers were good preachers but no good at visiting, and others were good visitors but no good preachers. But under the system each had to do both, while gifted laymen were not given any encouragement or opportunity. Among the Brethren, however, the gifted Bible Teacher had full scope, even though he had not had a University education. (In those days, educational barriers were more formidable than today.)

Lastly, I was impressed by the Brethren concept of the oneness of all believers, and their practice of receiving to the Lord's Table all true believers without regard to denominational affiliation.

I was duly baptised and received into fellowship (actually in reverse order, because of parental unhappiness about my being baptised), and have now been among Brethren some 30 years. Of course I soon discovered that all is not gold that glitters. Unhappily quarrels soon appeared among the elders of my assembly, and I realised in more than one situation the perils of a false literalism. Judgments were issued in the name of Scripture, which persons outside the assembly felt were scarcely Christian.

Furthermore I found that in spite of their acceptance of the oneness of all believers, they would not invite a local Evangelical Anglican church to join them officially for a Gospel campaign in the local Cinema, for that would involve fellowship with the 'God dishonouring sects' (a phrase often used by one of the elders), though the believers from that church were welcome as individuals. I also discovered that in other assemblies open reception was not practised. In fact mine seemed then (the late 1930's) to be in the minority.

I felt confident however that as every assembly professed to regulate its affairs by the New Testament and believed in the regular study and exposition of the Word of God, these were aberrations from New Testament teaching that, if realised, would be put right. Experience has shown that I was rather optimistic about this, but in any case the other denominations had similar restrictive practices.

On the other hand, I became the more impressed with the value and spiritual blessing that flowed from our open worship service and the centrality of the Lord's Supper, and with the value for the development of gift of our rejection of a clergy/laity distinction.

I have also come to see more and more the value of the independent church principle, first as a safeguard against disunity, which has wrecked many denominations and formally linked fellowships of churches even in recent history, and secondly as a basis from which relationships of fellowship may be made with other congregations without involving other 'assemblies'.

Lastly, I have come to realise that no church or identifiable group of churches is perfect, that the choice of one's own local church is the vital matter for oneself and one's family, and that having made that choice, one gets out of it in proportion to what one puts in.

Accordingly, in spite of imperfections, I am happy to remain in my own local assembly (not the one referred to above!), and to seek to serve the Lord there and in the wider sphere as the Lord enables, but with a special sense of the privilege and responsibility of serving among the assemblies, which, if guided aright on principles which make them open to receive any fresh light that the Holy Spirit may give from the Word of God and to receive all true believers in His name, seem likely to have a tremendous lot to offer the Church Universal in the future.

MEMBERS' SECTION

Correspondence for the Journal will be welcomed by the Correspondence Editor, 229 Village Way, Beckenham, Kent, and should reach him within four weeks of the Journal being received.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

The Place of Women in the Church

STANLEY HOYTE, Dungate Manor, Reigate Heath, Surrey, writes:

Of the various customs that have characterised the Brethren Movement since it began some hundred and thirty years ago, one of the most marked has been that of forbidding women to speak at meetings of the church. They have not been allowed to take part at the Breaking of Bread, nor at the Prayer Meeting, nor at Business Meetings, nor have they been allowed to preach at the Gospel Meeting. As one of the elder brethren recently wrote to me, 'In the church, men may speak, but women are commanded to be silent. They must be content with the lower place in which it has pleased God to place them'. For practical purposes this works out that if only women are present they may all speak freely, but if any men are present the women must be silent.

The brethren did not originate this practice, they found it established in the churches and took it over without question. Yet it is strange that such a custom should have taken root and persisted in the Christian Church, a company in which both men and women are equally members of the body of Christ, for it is entirely without foundation in either fact or common-sense. It is so out of character with Christianity that it is as though one looked into the heart of a flower and discovered there a small stone.

I have just been re-reading the article in CBRFJ No. 6, pp. 20-24, on whether women should pray audibly or not, and whilst I welcome Mr. Martin's conclusion that they should be free to do so, I feel that, with all respect, I must take issue with him over two points. The first is that he states that the subjection of woman to man dates from the creation and so is inherent in nature, by God's ordinance. May I ask where does he get this teaching? The first two chapters of Genesis describe the creation, and immediately after saying that God made them male and female comes the statement that He gave them dominion over all living creatures, but there is not a word about the man having dominion over the woman. *That* does not come in the Bible until the third chapter in which we read about the Fall, of which the subjection of women to men was one of the consequences. God did not command it, He foretold what was going to happen, and what has actually happened, and is in its essence and in its out-working the work of the Devil. The subjection of woman to man is not by God's ordinance, it is not inherent in nature. It does not date from Creation.

The second point in which I find Mr. Martin's article so astonishing is that it makes no reference to Our Lord Jesus Christ. From beginning

to end it takes no notice of His teaching, example, attitude or wishes. When Our Lord washed the disciples' feet He left us an example that we should do likewise. He left us an example in His care for the sick and for the lepers, and in His compassion for the multitude who were as sheep without a shepherd. In His own daily life He demonstrated how we should pray to our Heavenly Father and trust Him to supply our needs. He left us an example in His attitude towards hypocrites and the self-righteous. He left us an example in His attitude towards the disciples; having loved them, He loved them to the end. He equally left us an example in His attitude towards women, admitting them to His fellowship on the same terms as men, namely repentance and faith. His whole life was a demonstration, God manifest in the flesh. And He emphasized this when He said 'Learn of Me', 'Follow Me', 'Take My yoke upon you'. And having thus once for all time, lived out a demonstration of God on earth, He never changes. He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. Our Father in His love has made it easy for us to obtain guidance. If we want to know what pleases Him all we have to do is to look at Jesus Christ.

People have often said to me 'But Jesus Christ never said anything about the difference between men and women'. Of course not. Why should He? He never spoke of the difference between the old and the young. He never spoke of the difference between black men and white. He said nothing because there was nothing to be said. To Him old and young, black and white, men and women were all just human beings, sinners needing redemption and the new life that He came to give. It is the glory of Our Lord that of all the world's great religious teachers He is the only one who made no difference between men and women. He saw to the bottom truth of things and if there had been any difference He would have mentioned it, but because there was no difference He said nothing.

What is the good of singing hymns of adoration every Sunday morning, of claiming that we meet in Christ's name alone, that we are His church, assuring each other that He is personally present at every meeting, and then when we write about how to conduct those meetings blandly ignoring what He taught about women by His life on earth? His whole life was an emphatic repudiation of the idea that in the presence of men women were to be silent.

The testimony of scripture is that when God made man He made two sorts, male and female, neither being given authority to rule over the other. But when sin came in, the stronger of the two began to dominate the weaker. Joel foretold that when Christ came He would restore the original equality when he said 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy'. Our Lord lived out this doctrine when He was on earth. The Holy Spirit confirmed it when the tongues of fire sat upon both men and women and both spoke with tongues. The apostles showed up the theory behind this when they taught that if people are in Christ, the difference between the sexes is of no importance, it does not count. That is the testimony of scripture. It bases the position of women in the church on three unshakable foundations, the nature that God gave them at creation, the place that Jesus Christ gave them in real life, and the fact that He never changes.

Then since Christ has made both men and women fellow-members of His body, it follows that all ought to be free to exercise whatever gift He has given them.

I have sometimes listened to men praying earnestly for light on this matter. What do you think God answers? I may be mistaken, but I think He replies 'Stop praying for light. Act on what you have got. I have given you Jesus Christ. What more do you want?'

In the first number of the Journal it was stated that we stood for 'the freedom of every member of the body of Christ to contribute to its life . . . irrespective of standing or position'. That was two years ago. We ought not to go hesitating on in inconclusive debate. As honourable men we ought either to retract that statement or abide by it.

JOHN LIDBETTER, 1 Claremont Avenue, Southport, writes:

I feel the issue is beclouded by thinking in terms of a church prayer-meeting as something apart from a meeting of the church. It appears to be taken for granted that the current practice of a separate meeting for prayer, at which a small proportion of the church is present, is what is envisaged in the New Testament. But is this so? I am not sufficiently informed to know when mid-week prayer meetings began to be held as an expression of the prayer-life of the local church. In the Acts they appear to have been held whenever an emergency arose and emergencies have driven Christians to pray in groups ever since.

But I very much doubt if these emergency meetings for prayer, as distinct from the general gatherings of the church, are primarily in view in *the prayers* of Acts 2: 42 or 1 Timothy 2. I get the impression that when the believers met together in church fellowship there was opportunity for all the gifts to be exercised and all church activities to be engaged in. They had fellowship; they edified one another with apostolic teaching; they broke bread and engaged in the prayers. Their common life in Christ expressed itself in these ways.

In these gatherings the sisters were forbidden to take a leading or audible part. In 1 Corinthians they were forbidden to teach, and in 1 Timothy 2: 8 it is the men who are exhorted to pray, not the women. I am sure Mr. Martin is aware that the word used for men in the passage can only refer to the males of the congregation. I submit it is better to be guided by the direct statements of Scripture than to draw inferences from its silences. There is no indication that women were expected to pray audibly or that they ever did so on these occasions.

It is when we see the prayer-life of the church integrated with its life as a whole that we see it aright and in that context it would seem out of place for a woman to lead in prayer or worship.

We have complicated the matter and impoverished the prayer-life of the church by divorcing the church prayer-meeting from the meeting of the church where, according to the slogan 'we come to give and not to get'. This slogan has exercised its subtle force and been allowed to stifle the prayers

any brother might be stirred to offer at the meeting of the church on Sunday morning for 'worship and breaking of bread'.

I am not suggesting we should have less worship or relegate the breaking of bread to a place less worthy of it in the worship of the church, but I do plead for a simpler approach to the meeting of the church so that the *whole church* may take part in the prayers and be edified by the ministry of the Word of God.

FROM THE MONITORS

A letter in the 31st March 1965 issue of *The Guardian*, from Dr. Trevor Ling, Lecturer in Comparative Religion at Leeds University, made the suggestion that the recent version of religionless Christianity is undistinguishable from extreme nineteenth century nonconformity, and cited in particular the Plymouth Brethren. Mr. J. S. Andrews, assistant librarian of the Brotherton Library at Leeds, had discussed his views with Dr. Ling, and wrote to C.B.R.F. of which he is a member. The correspondence is reproduced below, and readers' comments would be welcomed:—

Mr. J. S. Andrews:—(Dr. Ling) has some idea that the Bishop of Woolwich and the Cambridge Theologians (e.g. H. Williams and Alec Vidler) are simply restating what the early Brethren were trying to say . . . Most Brethren would throw up their hands in horror at any suggestion of a link, especially in view of the emphasis on doctrine by most Brethren. But I suspect that at a deeper level the position is more complicated. Have you any ideas? . . .

Mr. F. R. Coad:—The ideas put up to you by Dr. Ling interest me greatly, as I myself have often felt on familiar ground when engaged in the little reading which I have done in the field of theological thought represented by the modern authors which you mention. One is struck by the occurrence of ideas from time to time which seem to harmonise with insights gained from among Brethren. I have often thought it an interesting field in which to wander, but have never attempted to collect these impressions together consistently. The same applies to much modern ecumenical thinking—I did in fact list some points of coincidence at the end of my address on the ecumenical movement at the last Swanwick conference, which you may have noticed if you should have seen the reprint of the addresses.

There are two matters where, it seems to me, parallels may be found. The first, and the easier, is in ecclesiology. However conservative Brethren may have been in other fields, they were undoubtedly exceedingly radical in their views of church order, and thus one would expect to find parallels to their thought in modern radical thinking. For example, Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Fontana edn. p. 166) says that the Church 'should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. The clergy should live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling.' This is pure George Müller. Then again, the Bishop of Woolwich, in his article which opens

the symposium '*Layman's Church*' says many things which Brethren find very familiar indeed—although he hedges it carefully to preserve his ecclesiastical position. In fact, Brethren's criticism of even modern ecclesiology can well be that it is not radical enough.

The second matter is subtler, and I suspect that the parallels arise because Brethren and these modern thinkers find themselves at those extreme opposite positions, where the arguments come full circle and meet up with one another again. This matter is of course that of 'religionless Christianity' (the very phrase is surely familiar to one bred beneath the sound of denunciations of 'mere religion'!) Basically, Brethren are at the opposite pole to the moderns: they are, or were, pietistic, while to the modern, pietism is almost a heresy. Yet, in the last analysis, the two add up to something very similar, despite the fact that the modern will do all that he can to denounce pietistic ways of thinking. 'Life is indivisible' says the pietist, in effect, 'therefore the whole of life is sacred'. 'Life is indivisible' says the modern, 'therefore the whole of life is secular: but the secular is under the continuous judgment of God'. Now, clearly, these two ways of thinking can lead to opposite errors. The first can lead to the sort of outlook which suggests that God is only interested in us when we pray (or 'go to meetings'). The second can lead to the idea that the life of the worshipping community is unnecessary—that God is interested in us at every stage *except* when we pray (or 'go to meetings').

But equally, they can lead to precisely the same outlook, so that the difference becomes only a matter of names and words. This clearly depends upon definition: upon *how* we define 'sacred' and 'secular'. For, in the basic sense of the word, is not anything which is under the continuous judgment of God *sacred*, i.e. 'devoted' to God? This is where I feel that Brethren thinking needs correction—for in this way we shall avoid both of the errors which we have described. Behind this—and perhaps a touchstone as to where we stand—is the matter of 'separation'. We must here apply to the whole of life, that contrast which opened up in the very beginning of the Brethren movement between Darby and Groves. On the one hand there is Darby's slogan—'separation from evil, God's principle of unity': which leads directly to exclusivism, and ultimately to 'Big Jim' Taylor. On the other hand there is the slogan of Groves, which ought to be characteristic of 'open' Brethren, that 'I would rather bear with all their evils, rather than separate from their good'. (By 'evil' of course we mean what Darby and Groves meant by the word—not real 'evil' in the moral sense, from which all are agreed that personal cleansing is essential).

The aspects of the *Honest to God* controversy which gave rise to offence to many were of course rather beside this point, and dealt with matters of Christology, and also the very incomplete ethical formulations which some have lumped together with the ultra permissive views of certain agnostic writers and broadcasters (wrongly in my opinion) and have dubbed 'The New Morality'. Those of course are different issues altogether, and not concerned with the matters discussed in this letter.

The Bookshelf

Some Recent Books on the Christian and Society

'Why I left the Brethren' does not seem to be a very productive theme for a book page. In fact it is difficult to think of many relevant books, unless it be *The Seceders* by J. H. Philpot, the story of two 19th century seceders from the established church (Banner of Truth, 6s.—see the review article on it in the *March Witness*)—or that other 19th century book in which Bishop J. C. Ryle remarked that those leaving the Church of England for the Brethren would find that the fire smoked just as badly in the house next door. Instead, it might be a useful corrective to look away from our own ecclesiastical preoccupations on to the godless society around us. How is it to be won for Christ? How should a Christian live in a secularized society? How can the church reach the industrial masses?

These are vast questions, and there are a large number of books on them, but there seems little point in listing them here.¹ All I propose to do is to mention a few books which have appeared in the last few months, all roughly on the subject of the Christian attitude to the society around him.

To start with a book which is the heaviest from amongst the mainly rather lightweight selection listed below, *The Enforcement of Morals* by Lord Devlin (OUP, 25s.) serves to introduce a question which is being widely debated just now: how much should Christian standards be applied to a mixed society, and influence its laws? The same question is taken up more in connection with industry and commerce by H. F. R. Catherwood in *The Christian in Industrial Society* (Tyndale Press, 12s. 6d.); written from a definitely evangelical point of view, the latter takes up the question of the Christian's attitude to politics, big business, government planning, taxation, trade unions and many other matters of often very urgent practical concern. The underlying question of the Christian's attitude to his daily work is also discussed by R. Manwaring in a smaller book, *A Christian's Guide to Daily Work* (Hodder, 3s. 6d.); and the question of 'The Christian Mastery of Money' by K. F. W. Prior in another Hodder series in a book entitled *God and Mammon* (3s. 6d.). (The latter series, incidentally, is entitled *Christian Foundations*, and is a project of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion designed to put forward the evangelical point of view to their fellow churchmen. Other recent titles of special interest are *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, by J. I. Packer, and *The Body of Christ: A New Testament Image of the Church*, by R. A. Cole (both 3s. 6d.).)

Turning now to some very readable books which concentrate more on what can be done to clean up the mess which sections at least of society can get into, there is hardly need to introduce *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson (Revell, distributed by Marshall, Morgan and

¹ Though I could send a rather random list of about 30 titles from the past 10 years or so to anyone who would like to send a stamp and envelope to the Secretary.

Scott, 5s.), as it has already had a phenomenal sale. It is the exciting, well-told story of a Pentecostal pastor who was called to pioneer work amongst the dope-addicts and gangs of Harlem. It carries its own challenge, if not necessarily to go about things in the same way elsewhere. The Pentecostalism does not obtrude too much until the last chapter (though one would not want to emulate the author's methods of getting guidance), otherwise it is a first-rate story. It is balanced up to some extent by *Come Out the Wilderness* by Bruce Kenrick (now in Fontana edition, 3s. 6d.), already mentioned more than once in this Journal: this describes the work of the East Harlem Protestant Parish, with particular emphasis on the idea of the group ministry. A more recent book, and one set in this country, is by George Burton, Youth Leader of the Mayflower Family Centre in the East End of London. Entitled *People Matter More Than Things* (Hodder, 5s.), it reflects the colourful personality of its author as well as a lot of thought and concern for Christian youth club work.

Two other recent books may be mentioned here, though the connection may be rather tenuous. Both depict Christians living in a society which is not just apathetic but actively hostile to their faith. Both should help us to see our own Christian comforts in perspective. *The Christians from Siberia* is yet another book from the prolific J. C. Pollock (Hodder and Stoughton, 18s.), and describes in a readable, informed and balanced way the history and present situation of mainly evangelical groups in Russia. *The Seed Must Die* by Yong Choon Ahn (IVF, 4s.) is the moving true story of a pastor's family under the occupation of Korea first by the Japanese and then the Communists, and of the faith and love which not only survived but went to almost incredible lengths to see the work of Christ forwarded and His name honoured.

Such books may well help us as we face our own problems: not so that we should escape from them into the different world of Harlem or Russia or Korea, but so that we should work out and apply the same biblical principles, and trust the same Lord as we try to put them into practice in our daily lives.

DAVID ALEXANDER

'One special mistake both of the Quakers and of Plymouth Brethren is the notion that a form hinders the Spirit. Nothing can be a greater delusion. The Spirit, like air or water, can fill any form, if only it is received. You may, indeed, have bottles without wine; but if you wish to keep the wine the bottles are useful. It is the miserable fact that so many professed believers and ministers are 'bottles without wine' which makes these Plymouth people cry out so much against bottles'.

ANDREW JUKES. *Letters*.

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