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*The Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*

## THE THIRD YEAR

With this issue the CBRF *Journal* enters the third year of its life. The second Annual Meeting is behind us, and with it have come changes in the personnel of the council, and among the officers of the Fellowship. Members are asked to take careful note of the names and addresses of the new secretary and editor of the *Journal*, which appear in a special announcement later in this issue. We should take this opportunity, on behalf of all members of the Fellowship, of paying a very special tribute to Mr. Somerville-Meikle, who has felt it necessary to pass on the two responsibilities of secretary and of correspondence editor, after shouldering them so very efficiently in the early years of the life of the Fellowship. The growth of the Fellowship—for well over 850 persons have applied for membership to date—involved no light task of correspondence and administration, and the Fellowship will always be deeply in his debt for the calm efficiency with which he absorbed this load of work, into a life by no means over-endowed with available time. We are happy that Mr. Somerville-Meikle will continue to serve on the council, and particularly that in this issue of the *Journal* we have yet another number which he has organised and introduces to us.

Our warm thanks are also due to Mr. P. H. Stunt, who assumes the burden of the secretaryship, and to Mr. D. H. Thompson, who continues to serve as treasurer—a particularly irksome and time-consuming task.

This issue also contains two first-fruits of the deeper studies which it is the main purpose of the Fellowship to encourage and develop. The main topic of the issue provides some 'raw material' for study (as did the issue no. 8, to which it is a sequel), but in the two papers from the pens of Mr. David Clines and Mr. Timothy Stunt respectively, we have contributions which come nearer to justifying the name of the Fellowship as a 'research' fellowship than have most previous issues. The announcement of the study competition later in this issue, is also a step in the same direction.

Among future issues in the hands of different members of the council for compilation is one on the subject of *Addictions*. That issue will be intended to cover those personality problems which are often so intractable to those who meet them in the course of their Christian work. Members who are qualified to write on any aspect of this subject are particularly invited to contribute to that issue—further details may be obtained from Mr. D. J. Ellis at 12 Burcote Road, London, S.W.18. Aspects on which contributions would be especially welcome are: drug addiction, suicidal tendencies and sexual mal-adjustment. Contributions are desired which might be of practical assistance to youth leaders, elders and others who meet such problems, but have no technical knowledge.

It is not to be expected that the contents of this present issue will prove to be less controversial than those of number 8. It is suggested that any correspondents who wish to follow up the matters dealt with might well give attention to two basic questions:—

1. Do churches of Brethren in fact put into practice the principles which they profess? In nearly all discussion of denominational differences it is found that partisan contributions tend to concentrate if favourable on *principles*, and if adverse on errors of *practice*. All persons—and this applies to all sections of the Church—tend to resent such criticism, which appears to them misguided, because they understand what is *intended* while the critic sees only what in fact *happens*.

2. Do other churches in fact disagree with these principles, and if so, to what extent? We may find that differences are far smaller than we imagine.

We might also give some thought to an even more pointed question. If it should please God to give to the Brethren a prophet of the calibre of a Calvin, a Luther or a Wesley—would it be possible for him to be heard? The answer to that question is not as obvious as the traditional and superficial explanations of our principles might lead us to expect; and it probably involves some pretty deep thinking over the structure of authority within assemblies. Comments from members would be welcomed.

The writer of these prefaces has an apology to make. One member suggested at the Annual Meeting that they show signs of 'intellectual arrogance'—and quoted specifically a sentence from issue no. 8 beginning 'no careful student of the New Testament can now believe . . .' The writer is sorry if, in attempting to provoke response, he gave an impression which he had no wish to give. (It is hardly an explanation if he remarks that he *thought* that he was making a simple statement of fact!)

### IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Members are asked to take careful note of the following new addresses:—

#### SECRETARY

Mr. Philip Handley Stunt  
71 Duke Street, Chelmsford, Essex

#### JOURNAL CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. F. Roy Coad  
29 Crossways, Sutton, Surrey

#### OCCASIONAL PAPERS AND 'PENTECOSTALISM' ISSUE obtainable from:—

Mr. H. S. Coad, 34 Tewkesbury Avenue, Pinner, Middlesex.  
(Other issues of the *Journal* from the Secretary: No. 7 onwards only available.)

# ON BEING WITH THE BRETHREN

## INTRODUCTION

Before the appearance of the articles on *Why I left the Brethren*, the Correspondence Editor would have said that the only subject of apparent interest to members was women (regarded from an ecclesiastical point of view!). He can now add, not Pentecostalism, on which the old lethargy has set in, but the step of leaving the Brethren, as documented in issue no. 8.

This present *Journal* is, in effect, a members' issue. A pleasing number of unsolicited articles have been received, and in addition certain members were invited to contribute either in comment on the previously published material or from their own experience. Despite complete silence from about a quarter of these, I have had an invidious, yet privileged, task selecting from the many well-chosen words that have been submitted. To all who contributed we express our thanks, and trust that the exercise will have been profitable, even if the product remains unpublished.

The personal statements fall into three categories: (1) from those who have always been with Brethren, (2) from those who have joined the Brethren at some stage, and (3) from those who have left the Brethren, but are now at various stages of the return journey. These are followed by the comments on topics raised in the earlier issue, with, in one case, a reply.

One is impressed in the statements by three things at least:

1. **A wariness in generalising about assemblies.** We have a different, and happier, cross-section of experience than that exposed in the earlier issue. Both sets of experience are valid, and neither side can claim to have won. How many of us who are Crusader leaders could have written as Mr. Sanders does (p. 9) of the value of the assembly as a place to which to take our Christian boys? It must be the practices, not the label, of the local church which persuade us of our place there.

2. **A charitable spirit in referring to those in other denominations.** Undoubtedly the fellowship enjoyed by many in such activities as Crusaders and Christian Unions has done much to foster a spirit of understanding towards those whose conclusions about practice in the church differ from our own. It is a fact to be faced up to that Christians whose convictions as to the inspiration of the Bible are as staunch as our own yet

hold very different views about matters of practice. It has been a hard lesson for some of us to realise that they do not come to hold these views by jettisoning their belief in Biblical inspiration.

3. **An acknowledgement of the deficiencies in many assemblies.** This issue will not prove to be a eulogy of Brethrenism.<sup>1</sup> Much of what was written earlier will here be endorsed, and in particular the subject of pastoral work looms large. Mr. Rendell warns us from experience that some of the apparent advantages of entering an ordained ministry may prove unreal. But the combination of an assembly framework and a properly supported, resident pastorate demands our attention. We might well set before us the example of Richard Baxter, who wrote in 1655 of his work in Kidderminster: 'We spend Monday and Tuesday from morning to almost night in the work, taking about fifteen or sixteen families in a week, that we may go through the parish, which hath above eight hundred families, in a year; and I cannot say yet that one family hath refused to come to me, nor but few persons excused and shifted it off'.<sup>2</sup>

In the later pages of this issue will be found a careful study of current opinion about those passages in the New Testament referring to the place of women, with special emphasis on the views of those outside the Brethren. We welcome this as a reminder that others can and do take these passages seriously, and also as the first of what we trust will prove a fruitful series of contributions from the enterprising group in Cambridge (although Mr. Clines has now left to join the Department of Biblical History and Literature at Sheffield). From their monthly meetings much profitable material is being produced and made available to the Fellowship as a whole.

As we read through this and the other discussions, let us remember that we are never very far away from the practical and urgent problems of evangelism. Let Richard Baxter speak to each one of us: 'What have we our time and strength for, but to lay them out for God? What is a candle made for but to burn? Burned and wasted we must be; and is it not fitter it should be in lighting men to heaven and in working for God than in living to the flesh?'<sup>3</sup>

JOHN SOMERVILLE-MEIKLE

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Alan Cole, *The Body of Christ*, p. 76: "The New Testament knows nothing of 'liking' a church; but it does know of 'love of the brethren' (I John 3: 14)".

<sup>2</sup> *The Reformed Pastor*, p. 19 in Hugh Martin's edition.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.* p. 122.

# WHY I HAVE STAYED WITH THE BRETHREN

(1) Prof. F. F. Bruce

Although this is a question I am asked from time to time, I find a difficulty in answering it because I have doubts about its implications. Ecclesiastically speaking, I belong (1) to the Church Universal and (2) to the local church which meets in Crescent Road, Stockport; and ecclesiastically speaking I belong to nothing else. The only alternative to staying in the Church Universal would be to renounce the faith once delivered; and if I am asked why I stay in the church at Crescent Road, Stockport, my reply must be: 'If you only knew that church, you would have no need to ask why I stay in it!'

I have been a member of the Crescent Road church for between five and six years, but for many years now I have belonged to churches of the same general pattern, and when people ask me, 'Why do you stay with the Brethren?' what they mean is, 'Why do you stay in the churches of that particular pattern?' And I have to think around for an answer, for it has never occurred to me to seek membership in a church of any other pattern. No doubt inertia has something to do with it; people tend to remain in the church fellowship in which they began unless they have some compelling reason for changing, and I have never been conscious of any such reason.

But, as I think the matter over, I discover some positive reasons for staying, and I can mention two which have considerable importance in my eyes.

One is that in these churches I am encouraged to recognize my membership in the Church Universal. It is never suggested to me that 'our denomination' or 'our circle of assemblies' has a special claim upon my loyalty, beyond the claim in which my fellow-Christians everywhere have a share. Here is a setting in which true Christian unity can be sincerely and unreservedly practiced. To a church of this pattern all believers in our Lord may come and be sure of a welcome for His sake; and I should find it intolerable to belong to a church which would not receive all whom Christ has received. From a church of this pattern I can go and have fellowship with all believers in our Lord, without any compromise of 'denominational principles', because in such a church there are no denominational principles to compromise. It is, indeed, against the background of wide experience of occasional fellowship in churches of many different orders that I rest in the conviction that, for me, a church of this pattern is the right one.

The other positive reason is that in these churches I have found an atmosphere of spiritual and intellectual freedom so congenial and indeed exhilarating that I doubt if it could be matched elsewhere. I know, too,

that this experience is not peculiar to myself, or to the churches of which I have had the good fortune to be a member over the years. In a letter which he sent as Chairman of the Committee to members of the Young Men's Bible Teaching Conference in 1961, Dr. W. M. Capper said: 'One of the things that attracts many of us to the Christian Brethren is its breadth, not its narrowness'. With proper reservations about this usage of the phrase 'the Christian Brethren', I say Amen to these words.

## (2) A. L. Elvidge

I am not sure that I know why I have not left the Brethren. At the close of the war I was interviewed by a Joint Selection Board choosing candidates for the Baptist and Congregational Ministries, and I was accepted for training for the Baptist Ministry. When I was asked to choose a Theological College, however, I decided to remain with the 'Brethren'. And yet I have departed, in my thinking, from many of the traditions of historic Brethrenism. I am at variance with myself. I think that I am still with the 'Brethren' because:—

(a) My roots go deep into the soil of Brethrenism. All my life I have been with them and for nearly forty years a member of an Assembly. As a child I first respected, then loved, the brethren and sisters who made up my religious world. When I was saved, their joy knew no bounds, and when I was received into fellowship they welcomed me with warm and genuine love. These same people instructed me in the Scriptures, encouraged me in Christian Service, and helped me to become a useful (I hope) member of the assembly.

Their successors have been equally kind, and recently recognised me as an elder in the Church. Although, to some, my churchmanship now seems a little 'high' they are patient and understanding. Their fellowship is warm, vital and valuable. I love them in Christ.

(b) The process of conversion (in the context of this series of articles) is painful and exhausting. Mental reservations are easy to make, but the last step away from people, principles, and institutions you have known and loved into a new society is, for me at least, a desperately hard one to take. I confess that, in spite of what I have said in (a) I have moved a long way along this road, but I draw back as yet from that last step. To cause pain and disappointment to one time friends is unpleasant indeed. The possibility, too, of others following my example is always in my mind and I would not like to lead one soul from Brethrenism. My difficulties are my own, and must always remain such. It is, or ought to be, possible for a Christian to decide on such a course of action whilst discouraging others from merely following. But one cannot be certain that this will be the case.

What, then, makes me unsettled?

I believe that Brethrenism is in danger from itself. Its basic principles are excellent, but to these it adds principles for which it claims scriptural authority which, in fact, does not exist. These principles may be excellent under certain conditions and are certainly not unscriptural but they have



not the force of scripture claimed for them. An example of this brings me to my second unsettling point.

I feel that the attitude, generally, of the assemblies to a full-time salaried, pastoral ministry is prejudiced rather than scriptural, and the assemblies suffer therefrom. Why an itinerant, non pastoral, ministry should be considered good and a resident, pastoral ministry bad, is beyond my understanding. The advantages to be gained from the ministry of a man with time for sermon study, and time to shepherd the flock of God are obvious to me.

Failure to recognise that orders of service and systems of church government may differ from theirs and still be scriptural keeps the assemblies aloof and weakens their influence. There is an ecumenical movement in evangelical churches which is good and should be encouraged. A Prayer Book order of service, devoutly and sincerely used, can be just as acceptable to God as many of our Breaking of Bread services where so many seem to have so little to contribute. Beauty in a service is not necessarily carnal, neither is austerity necessarily spiritual.

But we must guard against comparing the poorest that Brethrenism can offer with the best that other Churches can offer. There is a movement towards Brethrenism as well as away from it. Christian people still find deep satisfaction in it, and I shall stay until I am certain that I ought to move on.

### (3) K. G. Hyland

One is inevitably the product of one's historical background, and in my case a determining factor is that I am a third generation 'brother'. My maternal grandparents on grounds of conscience left the 'establishment' and were thereby cut out of a will, and lost a sizeable fortune. They were received into the Walham Green assembly to which, in those days, was attached one of George Müller's Day-Schools.

Here, my parents first met each other and were influenced by the influence of many eminent brethren, including Sir Robert Anderson.

Later in Wimborne, Dorset, my father commenced an 'open' gathering and, rather than the financial loss referred to above inducing a spirit of intolerance, he became the instigator of a wide fellowship of true evangelicals of all communions.

As a student in Bristol it was my privilege to be in fellowship with one of the Bethesda group of churches, in all of which the elders were men who had served their apprenticeship under George Müller and Henry Craik. Dr. Rendle Short, as he then was, was at the height of his powers. His influence, and that of the early M.S.C. Conferences were to us young men of incalculable value. It was at those Conferences that he saw to it that, among other important matters, Biblical reasons for our ecclesiastical position were clearly given and discussed.

In addition the student fellowship, which later became a part of I.V.F., and student conferences, effectively acted as antidotes to any narrow views of the body of Christ.

To-day, the church to which I belong is a member of an Evangelical Council of some twenty churches in the area. I have served on this council for some fourteen years and the net effect has been to deepen my convictions as to my ecclesiastical heritage.

To turn to Biblical reasons. I am where I am to-day by deep conviction. Moreover, in all the churches of 'brethren' with which I have been associated it has been my good fortune to be where the following principles have obtained; principles which I believe profoundly to be Biblical.

1. The lordship of Christ alone, over His Church, is acknowledged; this being mediated to us in the sole authority of Holy Scripture. Professor Rendle Short used to indicate that the New Testament alone decides church order. He used to enquire—'Where would you go to find a pure specimen of water from the Thames? London Bridge? No!' he would say, 'you would follow the stream until past the last house, you would come to the source'. So, we return to the spring in the New Testament rejecting not only that which has been deducted from what is found therein, but also that which, by a doctrine of development has been added. I would say that the church where I now worship has never been freer, or more disposed, to modify its thinking and practice by a developing understanding of New Testament principles.

2. We hold, as against the Constantinian and Reformed position, that the church is not co-extensive with the total community; but is composed solely of the re-born. For this reason we believe that baptism is to be administered as a result of the free choice of the candidate on personal confession of Christ as Lord and Saviour. This position derives from the New Testament's clear distinction between the church and the world, involving the freedom of the church from the state.

3. We believe that whoever possesses a living faith in Christ is thereupon baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ. I Cor. 10: 16, 17 and I Cor. 12: 12, 13. Therefore 'we ought to receive all whom Christ has received' (G. Müller) and so we practise open communion irrespective of the Christian communion to which anyone belongs, on confession of his or her personal faith. I Cor. 11: 28.

4. We believe in the autonomy of each local church as individually linked with and responsible to Christ the Head. Rev. 1: 12, 13. We therefore reject any form of linking organisation or grouping, beyond a living and spiritual fellowship between individual congregations. This has two important effects. First it means that division is almost automatically obviated. It is not possible to divide what does not exist! Second, in the words of A. N. Groves, 'It enables one congregation to give to any other congregation the status Christ gives it'.

5. We believe, not in theory, but in practice, in the priesthood of all believers, and, by implication, in the absolute rights of the Holy Spirit in the House of God to raise up gifts in His Church as He will. I Cor. 12: 4-11. Therefore we believe that those to whom the Spirit has given different gifts should be recognised by the rulers of God's House, and in

addition those in whom the Spirit is developing His gifts. Matt. 25: 14, 15. We believe therefore in a recognised, but not exclusive ministry. The defect of the latter, as Professor Bruce has put it is 'that the minister is required to exercise not only the gifts God has given him, but also all the others God has not given him'.

6. We believe that there should be a godly rule in God's House. Heb. 13: 17. That the affairs therefore of a congregation are cared for by the offices of elders and deacons; an amazing blend of theocracy and democracy. Acts 6: 1-6. We believe that the main duty of elders is the shepherd care of the flock; especially as to an adequate and expository ministry of the word. Luke 12: 42. John 21: 15-17. Acts 20: 28. I Peter 5: 1, 2.

Perhaps I may be allowed to close with the four freedoms of the 'brethren' as formulated by Mr. F. R. Coad (CBRFJ 1.10):—

1. The Freedom of the word of God in my thinking.
2. The Freedom of the Lord Christ in my living.
3. The Freedom of the Holy Spirit in my worship.
4. The Freedom of the whole body of Christ in my fellowship.

#### (4) D. K. Sanders

When contemplating this question I am aware that I can only give the reasons why I remain in the particular assembly with which I am associated and, moreover, that the conditions which make this fellowship so attractive are certainly not to be found in every local gathering of 'Open Brethren'.

I would not be happy in any church where the authority of the Word of God was not acknowledged or where the priesthood of all believers was not only taught but was upheld in practice. These two principles are important, but a third essential requirement is that I must be able to introduce to the church the young Christians who come under my care as a Crusader leader, and to be assured that it will be to their spiritual good.

Twenty years experience of the work has taught me that if these young folk are to stand, and to go on towards spiritual maturity, they must be given a real understanding of the basic truths of the faith, a love for Bible study together with a working knowledge of elementary Christian apologetics, and I know of no better way of developing these characteristics than by encouraging them to take part in the ministry of an assembly. To be dependent on lay-ministry has its problems but under the firm and prayerful direction of elders whose vision is wide and whose aim is to provide an instructive and thought provoking ministry it can be a greater source of strength.

In our assembly we believe it is our responsibility to provide systematic Bible teaching and have integrated with the Worship and Breaking of Bread Service a period of planned teaching; the subjects for which are co-ordinated with those for the week-night meeting to give a balanced ministry of the Word. We still have much re-thinking to do but I am

convinced that, if like-minded fellows can get together and use the intelligence that the Lord has given them for the guidance of the local church, such can be a very great blessing.

I therefore remain where I am because I have found that an assembly can be, I repeat can be, an effective body in the Lord's service for worship, for witness and for the development of its members; and I recommend those who are tempted to leave to examine the possibility of joining or helping to form one of those truly open and enlightened meetings before they abandon the whole assembly position.

### (5) Dr. Stephen S. Short

The basic reason why I have remained in the fellowship of the assemblies of 'Open Brethren' is because I believe that there is a closer approximation to the Biblical teaching concerning the Church in these assemblies than can be found elsewhere. This, to me, is the paramount consideration when determining the particular association in which a Christian should make his spiritual 'home'. Considerations such as: 'Which church order appeals to me most?' 'Where can I hear the best preaching?' 'Where can I find most scope for exercising my gifts?' 'Where can I find the most congenial companions?' 'To which kind of church do I "feel called"?' etc. weigh very little with me. Believing that Holy Scripture has been given to Christians by God, not only for guidance in general matters, but for guidance also in the ordering of church life, I consult it to discover what principles it lays down with regard to this matter, and then the church to which I attach myself is the one which, in my judgment, makes the sincerest efforts to put those principles into effect. Until I come across some churches which I consider to do this more adequately than 'Brethren' churches, I propose to stay with them.

That, in many Brethren churches, there is an element of failure due to the 'human factor', I acknowledge; (and the same, of course, applies in churches of all types and associations); but I am far more influenced by the kind of thing that is being attempted (i.e. being true to the Word of God), than by the particular degree in which such an aspiration is in fact realised. I can nevertheless testify, as one who is in personal contact with hundreds of Brethren assemblies throughout Britain, and as one too who has had many happy associations with Christians from other denominational groups, that, even in the realm of practical outworking, taken as a whole, Brethren assemblies do not seem to me to suffer adversely by comparison with the rest. The number of towns and villages, for instance, where the Brethren assembly is the only place where there can be heard a clear statement of the Christian Gospel is considerable.

It is not altogether surprising that the Anglican communion should present a strong attraction for those seeking congenial Christian fellowship, for this communion has some fine qualities, and in its evangelical wing there are some outstanding personalities and preachers. Among, however, the reasons why, without presuming to judge others, I personally would not feel free to become an Anglican, are: (i) its being a 'State

Church', with its principal officers appointed by the secular authorities, (with all the confusion that inevitably results); (ii) its doctrine of 'baptismal regeneration', (so explicitly taught in the Prayer Book); (iii) the virtual impossibility of local churches in its communion being able to reform themselves by the Word of God beyond the position of the Prayer Book formularies.

Whilst I am convinced that Brethren assemblies have more truth concerning the Church still to learn from God's Word, I believe nevertheless that they stand up to the test of Scripture better than do the other church bodies, and so long as this is so, I intend to remain among them.

## (6) F. F. Stunt

It seems to me that I must have been more fortunate than many. For in my home and in the local church fellowship the principles which the early 'Brethren' originally stood for were both understood and practised. It was not uncommon to have an Anglican clergyman joining with us at the Lord's Table and freely ministering if he so desired. Christians of many denominations were welcomed and we joined with such for united witness, Keswick meetings, Bible Society and other undenominational activities. Many came to our meeting-place to hear special ministry, the like of which they said was unobtainable elsewhere in the district. Some came to stay, joining the fellowship. They spoke of their trials having to listen to the same voice and (sometimes) the same formularies week after week and month after month. My mother had had such an experience having left the Church of England some years before she met my father.

At home the Rector of the Parish was a regular visitor. Our neighbour, the Bishop of the newly-created diocese, was a friend with whom my family joined for special prayer sessions (the Great War was then taking place). Another Clergyman (later to become the equivalent of a Dean) of the adjoining County Town, was an extremely high Anglican but was also, in some ways, my father's best friend. He unburdened himself to my father about the 'low church' influences in the diocese, and the 'low church' people did likewise about the 'ritualists'. Baptists and Congregationalists alike sought advice from my father about the 'modernist' teachings which were splitting their congregations. He knew and loved them all as his Christian friends and brethren, members of the Body of Christ, and he and others of our fellowship regularly preached in their village chapels.

My father was thirty-eight when I was born. I was given his confidence from a very early age. I went with him to worship and on preaching expeditions. The high church Dean coached me in Latin and I knew much of what was going on. So the divisions which had afflicted the 'Brethren' were seen by me in their true perspective. Divisions (though lamentable) were common amongst Christians and our job was to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit.

I do not know when I first realised that I was a Christian resting in the work of Christ but I confessed this in baptism when I was thirteen. My 'Exclusive' friends (for we knew and loved them as well as the others!) were very cold when I told them about it. Later the Dean assured me that as the proper formula had been used I was indeed a Child of God. I found myself telling him that my new birth was 'by faith'. I was then fifteen and thought I would like to join the Church of England, mainly, I confess, because the music was of the highest quality! My father had told me I should need to be confirmed and so I went to his friend the Dean, for preparation classes. It was soon apparent to me that the catechism did not 'gee' with Scripture and the dear man avoided further argument by telling me that in any case schism was wrong whether in family or Church, and I found I had to renounce the music and sometimes endure ministry which was ungrammatical and boring!

Divisions between Christians seemed to me inevitable. Such things were recorded in the New Testament. But their evil effect was restricted where the local church was independent and the need for independency was explained to me by the elder brethren and I have since realised how important it is to avoid any attempt to group churches together in any constitutional or ecclesiastical system or even in World Councils. The only true unity is that of Children of God through Christ—a family which includes people from the whole gamut of ecclesiastical association, from Roman Catholic to Open Brethren.

About this time I discovered that Christian graces were more frequently manifested by the 'poor' and uneducated 'rich in faith' than by the cultured and 'better class'. A converted drunkard who could not read or write became my firm friend and prayed me through all my examinations. I discovered a heart-reality of worship and Christian living in the local church (or Assembly) which compared very well with what I saw going on around me in the 'denominations'. And I also found that, with all their imperfections, the 'Brethren' were honestly seeking to fulfil the example and precept of the Apostles and sometimes succeeding to a surprising degree. It was clear that they were more likely to succeed by God's grace if I gave my whole-hearted support, and I have never regretted trying to do so. I still meet with some who 'gave up'. I doubt if they are happier.

## **WHY I JOINED THE BRETHREN**

(1) **E. G. Ashby**

Brought up in the Church of England, passing various diocesan examinations in the history of the Prayer Book, in my later teens I felt a growing dissatisfaction with the Church and its service. This was doubtless due to a number of contributory factors, amongst them being the substitution of a Crusader Class with its vivid study of Bible passages for a Church Sunday School where a Collect was learnt but there was little or no real teaching about the Bible. Further it was becoming clear that in

the New Testament a local church was a company of regenerate believers not merely a collection of those baptized in infancy, and I have never found evangelical attempts to explain away the difficulties of infant baptism very convincing. In addition there was a strong personal element, for a Bible Class leader may exercise a potent influence subconsciously however much he may seek not to sway his flock unduly in favour of his own personal opinions. In brief, I made the change in search of the spontaneous and vital to replace a dead formality.

Doubtless I was as unfortunate in my Anglican connections as were some of your previous contributors in their Brethren environment and fortunate in their change to the established church or elsewhere. I am convinced that a true man of God, really filled with the Spirit can and will be a power for God in whatever regiment he may find himself. But will he be *equally* effective in all such settings, or do some offer greater spheres of usefulness? Are all churches equally close to the pattern of the New Testament? Did I find among the Brethren the living power I sought? To answer the middle question first, there are some who deny that the New Testament offers any specific pattern, in which case, as Dr. Streeter says, quoting *Alice in Wonderland*, 'Everyone has won, and all shall have prizes'. If we view the New Testament as an historical development it is not so easy to state the answer precisely, but if we take a static view there is a pattern, a local community as at Corinth where individuals are free to take part under the guidance of the Spirit. But such a type of gathering requires a high degree of spirituality, failing which there will be faults and disorders as at Corinth. Is not this where some of our meetings fail? Those who meet with us merely from parental tradition are never likely to match up to this standard: it requires personal convictions of a high order, and a frequent self-examination on the part of us all, and a close walk with God. This leads on quite naturally to my third question. I must confess that the living power and spontaneous vitality have often seemed to be lacking, though of course it is possible the fault may be in one's own spiritual state and lack of perception. But however true this may be, I do not think it an adequate explanation: the chronic condition of not a few meetings, with small numbers and few conversions is evidence of something amiss, the fact all too often that the present generation is living on past traditions. There can be as much formality in a meeting as was deplored in other spheres, and it is surely the realization of this which has prompted such a movement as C.B.R.F. Is the solution to leave the assemblies to sit under the ministry of a godly preacher or even to be such ourselves? Some see that as the answer, and we can only wish them God-speed, as they follow what they see to be the guidance of God. It must further be admitted that some men of God may find a wider sphere and exercise a more fruitful ministry in other fields of service, though the silent years of John the Baptist and of the Lord Himself suggest that opportunity and activity in service is not the sole criterion of usefulness. What counts most is response to the call of God whenever and wherever it may come. In addition it would appear that this wider sphere is normally limited to one class, those intellectually fitted to take an intensive course of study.

But in the meetings there are many men of God who would never be likely to take a degree or diploma, but who are spiritually gifted teachers whose gift should be developed and used in the local church in a way not so easily possible in other circles.

Here I feel we are beginning to get to grips with the answer to our problem. Many are seeking the solution in greater organization, the planned syllabus and the like. Organization is what the Church tried at the end of the First Century when the spiritual glow subsided. Fervour gave place to form, and the organism pulsating with a living prophecy tended to become an organization with a programme of set service. We need not be less intellectual nor need we be disorganized, but rather let us be infinitely more spiritual, leaving adequate scope for the operation of the Holy Spirit. In a local assembly there may be a brother qualified to take a series of studies for six months or a year: if such is the gift the Spirit has given him let him use it and us profit by it, without fear of a 'one-man ministry'. It may well be that only to one has the Spirit given such a gift in that church. But let us not over-hastily think that a scheduled programme of intellectual lectures will adequately replace the spiritual food to be imparted by a teacher sent from God filled with the Spirit. I came from system to seek spiritual vitality: I continue to this day, hoping to see more of it.

## (2) H. Lowman

I did not begin with a 'P.B.' background! As a child I was sent to a Church of England Sunday School, from which after a few years my parents allowed me to transfer to one of the so-called Churches of Christ (a kind of Baptist denomination), at which I was subsequently converted at the age of sixteen. After a few years I came to feel that the Churches of Christ were not sufficiently faithful to the Scriptures, and left them to join a group of Christians, which met in a private house and endeavoured to get back to early church doctrine and practice. However, some years later some of us came to the conclusion that our existence as an isolated group was not satisfactory, for we had no fellowship with any other group of Christians, and so we left our little group, which then disbanded, for it was quite small. I looked around a good deal, and was ultimately attracted to a small hall outside which texts of Scripture were displayed. I thought that if their desire to display the Word of God was any indication of their esteem for it, I might be happy among them, and so I found myself a member of an 'Open Brethren' assembly.

'Open Brethren' are very far from perfect, and the down-grade drift evident in other church communities is to be seen among them, but the following are some of the reasons why, although I have every reason to be fully aware of their shortcomings, and throughout my forty-one years in their assemblies have always had my eyes open to see any other churches nearer the Scriptural pattern, I still remain among 'Open Brethren':—

1. The prominence given by them to the Bible as the Word of God, and the Christian's guide.



2. The soundness and uniformity in all essentials of their doctrine and practice throughout their assemblies, and in particular their observance in Scriptural simplicity of the two ordinances expressly appointed by the Lord Jesus, viz. the Lord's Supper and the baptism of believers by immersion.

3. The practical expression of the truth that the true Church is that body which comprises all in any land who are truly born again, and only such.

4. Their evangelical zeal both at home and abroad.

5. The natural delight in the things of God so generally found among them.

6. The absence of a clerical class (which in the early church so soon led to the abomination of the Mass and kindred evils), and of the many accretions in services, vestments, general practices, elaborations of church buildings, etc. devoid of divine authority, and which the general tenor of Scripture so strongly condemns.

To conclude, I find other ecclesiastical communities so deficient today in the above matters, and so unlikely ever to alter for the better, that I cannot conscientiously take my place among them, in spite of the virtues which some of them possess, and of the fact that I have benefited tremendously throughout my Christian life from the written and spoken ministry of gifted men among them.

### (3) Michael Thomas

After reading the eleven and more contributions in No. 8 of this *Journal*, I can only conclude that I have been very fortunate. I joined the Brethren in the expectation that among them would be found a better expression of the will of God for His children in matters of church life and order than elsewhere and I have not been disappointed—but to go back to the beginning.

I was brought up in a God-fearing Methodist family with prayers learned at my Mother's knee, grace at meals and family prayers after breakfast on Sundays. By the time I was twenty, confirmation at boarding school, some sporadic church going and a lack of interest in the family place of worship left me lost and uncertain. But at that age I was led to Christ by a friend of mine whom I met through my students' society and I was quickly plunged into the fellowship of the local evangelical Church of England and the work of the local Crusader class.

After the war I moved to various parts of the country, never really at ease nor at home in any church I attended. But I had by then enough contact with Brethrenism generally and a local assembly in particular to make it practicable and easy to join—in fact they asked me to preach and I did! I was old enough and wary enough not to expect perfection but, looking back, there were three things I looked for and which in substantial measure are or should be found in assembly life today. For these I sought and have not been wholly disappointed.

I. *A respect for Scripture.* By and large, we are a people of the open Book. It does not always work out that way but in principle, and broadly speaking in practice, we seek to do things, e.g. to regulate our church life and order, according to whatever there may be found on the matter in the Bible. It is true, of course, that there are also a fair ingredient of tradition and some stuffy prejudice, but the latter are more than outweighed in my experience by a practical application of God's word to our particular situation.

II. *A recognition of Gift.* It would indeed be a wonderful church where there was a complete fulfilment of this principle. It would involve an assessment by someone (?elders) of the true calling of every member and the adjustment of our arrangements so that everyone functions to that calling. Call it idealism or what you will, it does not quite happen like that one hundred per cent, but then I am fortunate, as the assembly to which I belong is noted for its open-hearted way of doing things. No one is reprobated for engaging in all sorts of 'outside' work, such as Crusaders in our case, or in the case of others visiting Old Peoples' Homes.

III. *A relevance to the mid-twentieth century.* Potentially we are in an excellent position to be continuously up to date and therefore to speak to those around us according to the will of God and their present need. We have only a short history as a denomination, so we are not burdened with centuries-old controversies. We are quite genuinely independent as an assembly, so that we are free from cumbersome organisational top-hammer. In the best sense of the words we ought to be really efficient and effective. It is in this respect that I have been a little disappointed with Brethrenism, but I would not exchange our present liberties and opportunities for the restrictions and frustrations of other forms of church life and order.

So I joined the Brethren and have not left them. May God give me grace to remain with them in love and charity.

#### (4) S. F. Warren

Reading the scripture, in a Church of England which had no evangelical leanings, led to my conversion and to a love of the Word as the sole authority for faith and practice. Baptism followed in a Baptist Church. I longed increasingly for fellowship with true believers but disillusionment followed as I was moved from place to place in my Forces days, when I found no consistency in denominational churches. I was deeply disturbed to find church membership open to all and sundry, whether professed believers or not.

Eventually I was 'fished' off the street by a faithful sister from an assembly and my joy was full as I discovered groups of Christians who looked to the Word of God for their authority and guidance, who welcomed true believers into their fellowship, who in a simple act of remembrance demonstrated the priesthood of all believers, who had a concern for the lost and a massive missionary outreach. Five years had then elapsed since my conversion.

I soon learnt that assemblies varied in strength, in doctrinal emphasis, in the calibre of their leadership, and in their spiritual power. Nevertheless the basic conditions I had sought were satisfied and I accepted that God had brought me to these companies and that they were to be my spiritual home. In my misguided zeal, particularly in my early days, I was a rebel but the assemblies have been, and remain, the school of God for me. Godly men have taught me by precept and example. Difficult situations (and fellow believers!) have been used to further my knowledge of God. There have been times when I have felt frustrated and ready to run away, but the consciousness that this is where God wants me to be has been paramount.

To me the indigenous character of assemblies is a strength. I soon learnt that my idea of the perfect assembly was not necessarily the will of God for a particular locality. The responsibility before God for the guidance of each company rested squarely on the local elders (however appointed and whatever their limitations). I saw again and again that true spiritual leadership eventually was given its opportunity.

My wife had a similar, although separate experience. Together we have always been associated with small, struggling assemblies. Our general principle has been to go the nearest, whatever its colour or limitations, and to give ourselves in its service. We have never been short of something to do. When, despite entreaty, elders have been hesitant or opposed (fortunately this has been rare if due deference has been given to their position by early consultation), God has opened other ways of service. There has been ample opportunity for systematic Bible teaching, evangelistic effort, and missionary endeavour from the home, if not always in the assembly building. Looking back neither of us has ever found the customary restrictions have hindered our service for God.

Whilst recognising that every company of Christians has its limitations, we know where we stand and we are confident that the assemblies are where God wants us to be.

## **ON RETURNING TO THE BRETHREN**

### **(1) R. D. Finch**

All the points mentioned in the June issue have been encountered during my experience in assemblies in several parts of the country, the degree or intensity varying from assembly to assembly. To summarise, the complaints are thus:

1. Bigotry and non-cooperation with other denominations.
2. Only part of the Gospel is preached (albeit the most important part).
3. Ungifted speakers on the gospel platform (usually from an outside area on a casual visit).
4. Total subjection of the women in the meetings.

5. Dictatorial elders who will not tolerate new ideas.
6. Boring morning meetings.
7. Lack of Bible teaching (although I have found that one hour's private study is worth more than a whole series by a gifted teacher).
8. Frustration at a sense of achievement.

Of these, items 6 - 8 reveal a lack of spirituality on the part of the individual.

One more common complaint is the way elders are appointed, a voting system being preferred to that system—a system which only reflects the popularity of the person, and may not be in any way related to his suitability to guide in spiritual matters.

I had nothing to do with assemblies, until I was sixteen, in fact I never knew they existed, having been brought up in a pagan home and saved at a Crusader Class. Having tried several local churches without satisfaction, I eventually landed in an assembly through a friend. After a while, owing to the immovability of the elders, two of us made up and had printed at our own cost, invitations to the Gospel Service along with an outline of the Gospel itself. Having distributed them door to door, again by ourselves, the result was that we were called before the elders and warned.

Owing to the war being in progress, I left the district, and over a period of years moved around several assemblies, eventually ending up at a very 'live' Baptist church for my wife's sake. After a short while we moved back into the area where I first made contact with the assemblies.

Shortly after, seeing the need, I started a Bible reading for young Christians in my home, which, although the elders agreed to it in the beginning, was soon stopped, anyone coming to it was threatened with disciplinary action. I bought some modern texts to display outside the Hall, but they were politely returned to me as unacceptable.

My work took me to another part of the Country. Here we came across an assembly dominated by one man, who threw up his arms in horror at the thought that there might be Christians in any other denomination.

Having memories of the few months we were at the Baptist Church, we decided to leave the Brethren for precisely the reasons given previously. For five years we went Baptist, which we now consider to be five lost years of our lives. The services make one spiritually lazy (if one is not already lazy) and not only are women subject to silence in the church but men as well. In many places such things as prayer meetings have not been heard of, and fellowship is non-existent.

\* \* \*

But what should be concerning us all more, is why we as a movement make no impact on the unsaved, because that is the best source of recruitment and the field is unlimited. I suggest one reason is that one of the golden rules given in the Word of God has long been overlooked i.e. Psalm 51: 12, 13 and 126: 2. One can usually tell who are going to an assembly on the Lord's Day morning by the miserable look on their faces!

## (2) Dr. E. W. Ives

I found the subject of your June number a thoroughly fascinating one, and the contributions both disturbing and stimulating. My own departure from the Brethren, after fifteen years in fellowship was accompanied by none of the traumas and frustrations which others experienced—I simply moved to a new district where there was no assembly. I could have travelled nine miles to a tiny meeting but I have always believed that a Christian is called to witness in the place where he lives and works. Thus I set out to find a spiritual home. The local Church of England was moribund so I went to the Baptists, to discover that they believed in religion. Another of the Free Churches believed in God and it was with relief that I arrived at the Methodists to discover that they believed in and preached Christ. The Methodists welcomed me and opportunities for service opened, first in the Sunday School and then in the pulpit. Few Methodist societies would be described as 'sound' and 'conservative evangelicals' are a minority. Nevertheless I found my preaching welcomed and my views listened to with sympathy. Therefore, when I moved again to my present district where there are several assemblies, it nevertheless seemed right to continue with the Methodists, a decision which has been confirmed by an ever increasing opportunity for witness.

First of all, what do I miss? Above all the Lord's Table which, as observed in the assemblies, can be the purest form of worship. Of course it is often ruined by the imperceptive, the unimaginative and the hide-bound, but my experience has been that complete disaster is less common than critics suggest. Admittedly the Brethren form is difficult, requiring time, patience and concentration; admittedly it allows any participant to mar the worship of all; but the more ordered forms found elsewhere do, in my opinion, sacrifice richness and variety for safety. Another thing which I miss elsewhere is that absence, in a good assembly, of clerical element. There are gatherings where a local 'high priest' presides, but the best assemblies nurture the development of gifts of all kind in a way impossible in a society which has one recognised minister. The incidence of 'passengers' is, consequently, lower in the assemblies than elsewhere. Among the virtues of the Brethren I must not, finally, omit their doctrinal uniformity. The parent can be sure that the Sunday School will teach sound doctrine, the preacher know that his message will fit in with all the other messages delivered before. Where everyone understands the faith in approximately the same way there is agreement on direction and 'working together'.

What disturbs me when I visit an assembly? First of all the atmosphere of holy isolation, the evil consequence of the virtue of uniformity. Since working with others who understand the Faith in a way which differs from my understanding, I have had continually to ask what I mean by this expression or that which would have been greeted in an assembly with routine approval. The average 'gospel' message is couched in a private language, and very often Brethren conversation is the exchange of clichés. Akin to this is the general air of unreality which pervades assembly life

and especially assembly speaking; it has no relevance to the real world of everyday life. Typology, analogy and allegory are sources of spiritual profit to some, but to outsiders (and others?) they are meaningless. In what other Christian denomination would it be possible to argue that the Sermon on the Mount has application only to a future 'Kingdom Age' or to fall out about prophecy? In attempting any evangelism there is need to start with the actual needs of men now, not with their theological condition (however important); in ministry there is need to explain the requirements, the potential and the practice of following Christ. I have always felt that a discourse on the Tabernacle was not the simplest way of achieving either of these results. This leads to the third point. The 'gospel' proclaimed so regularly in the assemblies is a weakling version of the real thing. Instead of declaring the whole counsel of God for the salvation of the whole man, one theory of the Atonement alone constitutes the message. How often do pulpits tell of right and wrong, how often of the discipline of the narrow way, how often of the character of God? And yet these were major themes of our Lord's teaching. Many evangelicals (for the Brethren are not alone at fault here) have reduced the gospel to theological algebra (man + sin = hell); men are not saved thus. Of course the gospel is a redemptive gospel, but that is not to say that preaching the gospel consists in explaining the mechanism of redemption.

Another deficiency which I observe is the absence of any care or provision for the 'fringe member'. Having made no profession he, or she, is condemned to an endless diet of gospel services unless they leave for another denomination where the distinction between 'ins' and 'outs' is less marked. No-one wishes to admit the unconverted to fellowship, but the idea that there is a clear distinction between the converted and the unconverted is false. For many their journey to God is very slow; such people must be catered for by an assembly, not brow-beaten to make a decision for which they are not yet ready. The Brethren thus need to make provision for a morning family service before the Breaking of Bread. The address should be expository (expounding the faith and applying it to modern living), rather than evangelistic—although all preaching and ministry calls for a response. Far too many assemblies (though less than of old) 'fence' the table; it would be perfectly scriptural to invite those of the family service who wished to obey the Lord's command to stay to His table. I stress the notion of a family service, for the traditional Brethren Sunday morning makes no room for the children. My small daughter accompanies us to the first part of our Methodist service; when we visit the assembly where my parents are in fellowship she has to stay at home.

What I have learned from my sojourn in a 'denomination'? Principally two things. I realise more and more the importance of continuing in the Christian faith. While with the assemblies, the emphasis was all upon being converted, now I lean to the view that a conversion experience may or may not be significant, and all according to whether the individual continues in a state of being converted. And 'walking with the Lord' is not the way of negative goodness so often propounded, but the road of

active positive righteousness—‘doing’ not ‘being’ good. In the second place I see more and more the glorious simplicity of the gospel. In the assemblies I learned that conversion had definite stages—conviction etc., etc.; I no longer believe that any norm can be laid down. The response which God requires is so simple and the story of the penitent thief the measure of the knowledge and faith that is necessary.

Have I left the Brethren? I do not think so. There may be a time when I am called again to work within that fellowship, and with the ecumenical problems in Methodism that time may not be long away. If I do, I trust that I shall bring a greater perception of the gospel stripped to its bare essentials, a greater appreciation of the virtues of the assemblies, and some experience which will help to meet the deficiencies I now perceive. In the meantime, I regard the assemblies with affection as the fellowship in which I was nurtured and to which in spirit I so much belong.

### (3) J. J. Wales

Many of the reasons which prompted me to leave the Brethren over eighteen years ago were the same as those given by a number of contributors to the June issue. Principally they were excessive legalism and a spirit of exclusivism.

My wife and I have been in fellowship with a large Baptist church in our district during these eighteen years, our family have in turn all been baptised as believers, we have found many things to do, and I have served as an elected deacon for fifteen years. Such a large church has many disadvantages, the services are generally attractive and well run, there is a lively missionary interest, a good standard of musical accompaniment at all the services and there is always something going on.

On the other hand there are problems. There is the question of affiliation to the Baptist Union (only a nominal adherence in our case) and a lack of provision for eldership as such, the elected deacons attempting, rather inadequately I feel, to fill the dual role.

The two greatest weaknesses spring, firstly, from the relegation of the Lord’s Table to be a mere appendage of the morning or evening service, thereby robbing it of that essential element of real spirit of worship; and secondly, the overall acceptance of the ‘one man ministry’ set-up which, while giving a recognised leadership, undoubtedly has the effect of precluding gifted members from exercising and developing latent gifts for teaching, preaching, exhorting, pastoral care and so on.

The ‘reasons for joining the Brethren’, both positive and negative, set forth by one of your contributors, seem to me to touch upon the most vital issues. On the positive side the opportunity of giving practical expression to worship at the open and more centrally placed worship meeting provides a most valuable spiritual exercise and also gives time for quietness and meditation which is not normally found, at least in non-conformist services. In addition, emphasis is laid upon the priesthood of all believers in this approach to corporate worship and by the rejection of any form of clerisy a greater sense of personal responsibility is fostered.

Finally, local autonomy can produce a healthy independence while at the same time leaving freedom to realise the concept of the oneness of all believers.

If some of these basic ideas were acted upon generally in assemblies of Brethren with vision and spiritual energy then the much needed 'religionless Christianity' and the search for ecumenicity might be realised; there would be a common meeting ground for all believers and a fold would exist to which many of the 'wandering sheep' might return! Above all, the Lord might find here an instrument for revival which is so sorely needed everywhere.

#### (4) Anonymous

As one who left the 'Brethren' and then returned nearly twenty years later, I would like to record a few thoughts. I was brought up in assemblies, and stayed there until I was about thirty. Then I moved to a different part of the country, and the Christians there were in a watertight compartment as regard other Christians, and worried themselves about small matters such as the length of women's hair. At the same time most of my Christian interests were inter-denominational, and I think also that at that stage of my life I was not ready to make the social sacrifice involved in attending the Assembly. For this and other reasons I tended to drift during the war period and for some years afterwards, and I was not happy in the Lord.

After periods in different churches, the Lord was gracious to me in bringing me to a small village assembly where I was joyfully received in His name, and I am still there.

In this assembly we receive all who know and love the Lord. As there are several with different traditions behind them, we have no rules regarding baptism, which is left to the individual conscience. We permit sisters to pray, give out hymns or words of exhortation, not only at the prayer meeting but also at the Lord's Table—it is illogical to do one without the other. We would also permit a missionary sister to give a talk about her work to the whole assembly. We have a musical instrument at all services, there being no efficient leader.

Finally, I rejoice to know the grace, mercy and love of my Lord, who brought me back, not to the 'Brethren', but to the brethren, and I am sure that He is able to do the same for others who may be in the same position as I was.



# COMMENTS

## (1) Prof. J. W. Fairbairn

Some of the criticisms centre round Ministry and Church order, and raise the question whether the New Testament gives any detailed pattern at all for these important activities. It is clear that the local churches gathered together for various purposes: such as the Breaking of Bread, prayer, one-man (or two-man) ministry meeting (Acts 11: 23-26), missionary meeting (Acts 14: 27), Bible reading (Col. 4: 16), disciplinary meeting (I Cor. 5: 4-5) for speaking in tongues and for 'open' meetings (I Cor. 14). No details for the conduct of these meetings is given, *except for the latter two*, and this fact in itself ought to make us take I Cor. 14 and associated chapters seriously. The instructions given cannot be brushed off because they refer to a local or temporary situation, because the Epistle itself is unique among Paul's writings in being addressed to 'all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord'. Furthermore, the instructions themselves are specifically stated to be the commandments of the Lord (I Cor. 14: 37), so that is it not possible that they give us the pattern for the normal gatherings of the Church? And do we know any denomination which seriously attempts to put them into practice, apart from the Brethren and the Pentecostal Churches? (It seems clear that public speaking in tongues is a sign of immaturity and edification by prophecy is much to be preferred, but we ought to remember the Lord's commandment, 'Covet to prophesy but *forbid not* to speak in tongues'). This willingness to go all the way with New Testament teaching on church order and ministry is a strong feature of the Brethren movement, and ought to be maintained not only because God requires faithfulness to His Word, but because it works. It may be inappropriate to speak of the 'efficiency' of ecclesiastical systems, but it would be interesting to relate the amount of human effort expressed as money spent per 100 church members on such things as buildings, colleges, salaries and administration, with the spiritual results. I think that any hundred members of the assemblies would compare favourably with an equal random group from other denominations with regard to general Bible knowledge, sense of Christian responsibility, devotion to the Lord and support of evangelism at home and overseas. And all this is achieved without an expensive apparatus of human organisation. God's methods do work best in the long run. There have been numerous instances of failure; the initial enthusiasm may long have run out, but the remedy is surely to pray that God will revive *us*, rather than attempt to change the pattern.

Nevertheless, the attitude that we have arrived at, that no outsider can instruct us on these matters, is greatly to be deplored. Almost half of those who wrote last time left us because of a remarkable blind-spot in the Brethren view of the ministry, namely the fruitful possibilities of a local full-time pastorate. I have much sympathy with this idea, but it can only hope to win a hearing if it can be shown to be Biblical. Maybe the C.B.R.F. could help by studying and expounding this theme. It is clearly stated in

I Tim. 5: 17 that the elders that laboured (locally) in word and doctrine were to receive a double stipend (NEB), and surely this implies full-time (or part-time, but paid) pastors in the local Church.

The difficulties about women's ministry and headgear arise largely because the Brethren take the N.T. instructions seriously. Although it is an unpalatable fact in this century of sex equality, the N.T. clearly requires a difference between the sexes to be observed in Church order and ministry. This difference is based on such fundamental aspects of the divine economy as creation (I Cor. 11: 2-14; I Tim. 2: 13-14), the Law, the Word of God, and the Commandments of the Lord (I Cor. 14: 34-37). We should certainly welcome help from all sources on this problem, but our instructors will have to produce more weighty arguments than references to women chattering in Jewish synagogues or prostitutes in Corinth going about unveiled. I personally would welcome sober advice, for if my four daughters develop like those of Philip the Evangelist I wonder how the assemblies would take it!

As the problem of our Gospel meetings was also raised by some, it should also be noted that a 'Gospel meeting' is not included in the list of N.T. church activities. The Good News was spread either by mass evangelism with specially gifted speakers, or by lay evangelism in which every church member presumably participated (Acts 2 and 8: 4: see also I Thess. 1: 5 and 8, in conjunction with Acts 17: 2-4). An increase in weekday activities which would involve us all in going 'everywhere' with the gospel could allow us to concentrate on regular Bible exposition on Sunday evenings. Although this would be primarily for the edification of the saints, it need not lack evangelistic fruit; the only references I know to unbelievers coming to Church in the N.T. is when they come to a meeting for edification . . . and *there* they are saved! (I Cor. 14: 24-25.)

A final point arises from the contributions of Mr. Cochran and Miss Morris, who draw attention to some all too familiar weaknesses especially in the worship meetings. They imply that the pattern is faulty, but I suggest that, in these very instances, the pattern is right if for no other reason than that it acts as a sensitive barometer reflecting the low spiritual state of the church. To advocate a formal system which would mask this spiritual weakness hardly seems consistent with the genius of Christianity, whose emphasis is on truth in the inward parts, and which so vigorously warns against anything merely outward. One answer to our problems would be to pray earnestly that we may live what we know, and be that which we say we are.

## (2) Kingsley G. Rendell

### Revival or retreat?

In recent years an increasing number of brethren employed in full time itinerant ministry among the assemblies, have left to undertake pastoral ministry in churches, whose form of church government is congregational. It is quite possible that this drift from the assemblies will continue. Indeed, it is probable that it will gain momentum, especially

since an increasing number of our young men are likely to undertake theological studies in the rapidly growing number of Bible Colleges in the country.

To a young man, on the threshold of life, with a zeal for God, full time ministry in a settled pastorate seems particularly attractive. Those of us, who have undertaken such work in favourable circumstances, have indeed found it most rewarding. There is undoubtedly great satisfaction in exercising a systematic ministry of the Word, witnessing souls saved and edified in the faith. By contrast, the lot of a Brethren evangelist or Bible teacher is apparently most unenviable. He has to live out of his suitcase. He is constantly on the move. While he may have the joy of seeing decisions for Christ recorded, he does not have the opportunity of following up his evangelistic work. When he leaves the sphere of his evangelism, he may have grave doubts as to whether his converts will be followed up by the assembly responsible. It is relatively easy for the bachelor to exercise an itinerant ministry, but the family man is often harassed by the thought that he is neglecting his wife and family—God given responsibilities.

Some of our brethren maintain that there is need for some form of settled ministry in the assemblies. They argue, that there is no difference of principle in inviting a brother to minister to the assembly for three weeks, or three years. The time factor is quite irrelevant to principle. Those who are of this opinion assure us that there need be no danger of clericalism, nor indeed need the assembly leave the ministering brother to shoulder all the tasks of the assembly, exercising a one man ministry. These brethren certainly have history on their side, since many of the early assemblies, such as those at Plymouth and Bristol, had recognised pastors and ministers of the Word. In the heyday of exclusivism there was drift to the 'any man ministry'. Now, in our rejection of this unhappy state of affairs, the idea of some form of settled ministry might be reconsidered. It might be argued that many of our assemblies are so small, they could not support a brother engaged in full time work, but it must be remembered that many a brother who has submitted himself to Biblical study, either at home or in some Bible college, would most willingly like Paul pursue his 'tent making', providing that his gift of ministry were recognised by the assembly. Alternatively, a number of assemblies might covenant to support a brother engaged in full time work for the Lord in the locality. This is the case in a number of districts, with most pleasing results.

What of the brother who seeks to serve the Lord elsewhere? Alas, he may not fare so well. Undoubtedly, if he is an able and gifted brother he will not find any great difficulty in receiving a call from a church. However, once he is inducted and ordained, he may find that in the denominational fraternal, he has to live under the shadow of being a 'back door man', that is, one who has not come into the ministry through the recognised denominational channels. If he is a sensitive soul, he may find that this breeds in him an embarrassing sense of inferiority. If he has been fortunate to receive a call from one of 'the plums' of the denomina-

tion he may well incur the jealousy of older and more experienced, but less gifted men, who have been forced to toil faithfully in the smaller churches, dependent upon denominational aid, and only able to offer the minimum stipend.

It is only the 'back doors' of those churches with a congregational form of government, which are open to those brethren seeking a full time ministry in the churches. Those denominations with a more centralised form of church government, exercise greater control over entrance into the ministry. They demand, and it seems quite logically so, training in a denominational seminary before a man can be accepted and ordained to the ministry of the church.

Not a few, who have left the assemblies for the ministry of a church whose ecclesiastical pattern is independency, and whose government is congregational, have been disillusioned. They discover that far from being a servant of the Word, they are the servant of the local church. Some have found it is by no means a happy experience having to submit to the dictation of an unspiritual and unprogressive deacons' court. Others have found their spiritual energies diverted into the raising of money for church funds, mainly in order that their monthly stipend might be forthcoming. Those of us who are able to stand back and view the movement of ministers impartially, see a steady stream of men leaving the free churches for the establishment, both in England and Scotland, while their ranks are filled by aspirants from mission halls and brethren assemblies.

Undoubtedly many of our full time evangelists and ministering brethren have much of which to complain within our assemblies. There is often as much lack of vision as in the churches, but we hold a charismatic view of church fellowship, and an allegiance to the Word which is the envy of our brethren in those denominations which have most in common with us. It is so tragically easy, Esau like, to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage. Those of us who have been nurtured in Brethren circles owe our forefathers a debt we shall never be able to repay.

In view of the modern mania for ecumenicity, who knows, but what within a generation the whole denominational landscape will be radically altered. From every Protestant denomination there may well be evangelical remnants eager for united fellowship according to the principles of the New Testament. A revived and progressive Brethren movement could be used by God as a centre of fellowship for all evangelicals.

It is a well known fact of ecclesiastical history that, within a century movements raised up by God for some specific purpose to emphasise some neglected truth, lose their spiritual force and become formal. Organism degenerates into organisation. Is the Brethren movement fossilising? If so, then we must raise our heads from the sand and face the fact. We must campaign for its rebirth, and pray that it might again be used by God. It is surely better to reform than retreat.

### (3) Herbert E. Pope

#### The town with no assembly

What happens when a Christian's work takes him to a town where there is no Assembly? The majority of contributors to CBRFJ viii who 'left the Brethren' would presumably have no problem; they would see the occasion as a happy release and move to the house next door (where we trust they would not be too pained to find that Bp. Ryle's phrase cuts both ways). This contribution is offered to plead for more patient and persevering prayer about these weaknesses in our practice—the Lord is so good at removing mountains, we have found,—and, without reiterating principles already well expressed, to commend two virtues that have come into sharper focus since our own small company made a fresh start and began to break bread together seven years ago.

The first of these is the flexibility possible when believers start from the simple practice of Acts 2:42. No law here that requires your own hall, with perhaps its burdensome mortgage; no veto on an instrument to help the small company make true melody in praising God; no restriction to one or two old and over familiar hymn books; no hour of the day prescribed; no rule about whether the breaking of bread should precede or follow or divide periods of ministry, or whether that ministry shall be prearranged or unpremeditated; no requirements that unbelievers shall be invited under your roof at a certain hour once a week or that the Gospel shall be preached to them even if they are not there. Starting from scratch permits an emancipation from dead tradition, and,—an important and enriching experience this,—enables us to give a lead to united activities among true believers in all denominations. If we are freed from mechanical routine, no one is better placed than we are to encourage united prayer and witness as a demonstration of the oneness of all believers and a denial of sectarianism, two tenets of our belief which have so often been theoretical rather than practical.

The second point that stands out, especially at the stage of small beginnings, is the spiritual stimulus of an open gathering. It seems undeniable that the vitality of a company of Christians is the sum total of what they each contribute rather than the dynamism of a single leader: to us this *responsibility to give* generates a greater spiritual appetite and eventually a greater spiritual output than the *opportunity to get* afforded in churches where the existence of a responsible leader, paid or not, may encourage indolence and lack of responsibility.

One further point. No optimum or minimum size is prescribed for the local church, and I wonder why it should be assumed that the best witness is a large and apparently flourishing company. The blessing that accrued for example in Barcelona during the Civil War, when believers were forced to meet from house to house, could remind us it was not God's purpose that the salt of the earth should be collected in ever bigger and better salt-cellars, and that perhaps the earliest pattern in the Acts was the best. Why not then a number of small cells for worship and witness, with of course occasional united gatherings for fellowship, teaching, and no

doubt thanksgiving? May I suggest that there is a better way of 'leaving the Brethren' than swelling the numbers of other and more prosperous churches: it is to pray into existence a fellowship of like-minded believers (this took four years in our case), and humbly seek God's grace to practise the principles of Scripture and avoid the mistakes we think we see in the practice of others.

#### (4) Robert Boyd

##### **Do criticisms cut both ways?**

Several of the writers seem to fall into the error of assessing their old and new homes by different measuring sticks. They generalise when they write of the assemblies they have left, but when admiring some excellent virtues in the new church, they seem to forget that this church may have a sister only a few streets away which follows a pattern and doctrine very different from its evangelical relative.

I wonder if it is not the case that all the complaints made by the letter writers are being made simultaneously by old members of the denominations to which they have gone. Many of them are expressed to me. I hear of a kirk session where every evangelical elder is balanced by the appointment of an unconverted one with Masonic backing in the struggle for power. I hear of 'legalism', 'rigidity of outlook', 'male dominance', etc., etc., in many places. I have, however, heard young members complain of boredom because their minister followed a series of consecutive studies. One teen-ager was heard saying 'Oh boy!' when she learned that the minister's studies were to be interrupted by the visit of one of the Brethren who indulged in an itinerant ministry!

It would be interesting to know the feelings of the writers about unconverted members and office-bearers. One church known to me where the membership is strict relaxes things for its office-bearers. The treasurer is not a member, whilst the precentor, or leader of praise, was for some time another non-member whose Saturday drunkenness was well-known. They had an excellent evangelical minister, but the use of such non-members was excused on the grounds of fewness of numbers.

Having said all this, I must remark that I am pleased to have read the eleven articles, and trust that many of us who remain will redouble our efforts to contribute better to the improvement of our assembly's testimony. It is so much easier to grumble about the squeaky door than to take the trouble to find and use an oil-can on the hinges.

#### (5) G. F. Fowler

##### **On the importance of prayer**

It is evident from the criticisms voiced in this series that we are apt to forget one of the basic principles on which we gather; that the Lord Jesus Himself is the Head of the Church, both universal and local.

It is seen from the New Testament that the Lord hands down His authority to the elders in each local gathering of believers. It is inconceiv-

able to me that if we fully recognize the Lord's authority in the life of the assembly there would be anything in its affairs that should merit criticism. The breakdown occurs when the elders ignore the Lord's authority, and rule in their own.

When we see that the Lord's authority is being abused, surely it is our duty to bring the matter to His notice in prayer, asking that this intolerable position be brought to an end, that the reproach be removed, and that the Lord's authority be re-established. He is waiting for someone to lay hold on Him in prayer to intervene. Without this He may leave the assembly to itself to drift gradually away, but with the prevailing prayer of one believing soul He will surely come to the rescue; and nothing can stay His hand! The results may not be swift, but they will be sure, and possibly terrible. He always acts in mercy, but where mercy is scorned judgment will swiftly follow. He will plead with the oversight to mend their ways. Those who resist, He will remove, by circumstance, sickness or death. Those who are willing to yield and learn, He will nourish up to full spiritual strength and vitality, bringing blessing and freedom to the whole assembly.

Surely the Lord will not let us down! or leave us to a choice between two evils! or force us to give up scriptural principles just because our fellow believers let us down! We should not keep our eyes on our stumbling brethren and run away, but fix our eyes on Him, and He will surely lead us forward.

#### (6) H. Lowman

##### **On false doctrine**

None of the leavers tell us how they have succeeded in 'blinking' the *very serious* false doctrine and thoroughly unscriptural practices which exist in the communities to which they have gone (I think of the 'Established Church'—the 'great tree' in which any clerical bird up to Archbishop or layman may roost, whether modernist, spiritist or person with no beliefs at all as to the Deity, the Holy Scriptures, the Cross, etc. How do the leavers reconcile themselves to the everlasting 'vain repetition' from the prayer book, altars, vestments, and so on?)

Is our attitude to these things, or our being linked in the same communion to be of very trifling consequence? Are a careful observance of Scriptural appointments whether as to doctrine, or, say, as to the observance of the Lord's Supper in *simplicity* (not as a Mass), baptism by immersion, and other things merely immaterial, provided we are with nice people, whose beliefs are not too hard and fast, and who, if it comes to it, are willing to be as wide as the world on any doctrine or practice?

#### (7) J. S. Short

##### **A reply to the preceding comment**

It is not difficult for anyone with his eyes open to observe, as the contemporary condition of the Established Church is surveyed, that there is more to repel than to encourage. It is lamentably true that false doctrines

are abroad and unscriptural practices are openly tolerated. But it would be incorrect for the observer to conclude that those who, like myself, have joined the ranks of that Church have done so only at the expense of the truth.

In order to appreciate how those with an ‘assemblies up-bringing’ are able, in all good conscience, to become full members of the Church of England, it is important to recognise what the doctrinal position of that Church really is. It is not a free-for-all for those ‘whose beliefs are not too hard and fast’. Neither does the doctrinal position of the C. of E. consist of the sum of opinions held by the most voluble members of its clergy. The doctrinal limits of the Church have been formulated clearly and written down in the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, which are to be found at the back of any copy of the Prayer Book.

These Articles are statements of Biblical, evangelical doctrine, as Article 6 emphasises:—

‘Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation’.

Concerning principles of church practice, Article 20 declares that although ‘the Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies . . . , it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written’. Thus, for the Church of England, Scripture is the only authority in matters of faith and practice.

In order to substantiate this specifically, one or two examples may be cited. Masses (to which Mr. Lowman refers) are firmly rejected as ‘blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits’ (Art. 31), whilst Purgatory is rejected simply because it is ‘grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather (is) repugnant to the Word of God’ (Art. 22). Salvation hinges on the fact that ‘we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings’. (Art. 11); and this has been made possible by the death of Christ alone (Art. 31). I have found the theology of the Articles throughout to be good, Biblical, evangelical.

In common with your correspondent, the C. of E. believes in baptism by immersion (‘dip him in the water’), but it does not insist upon it (‘or pour water upon him’: quoted from the rubrics to the baptism service). Many weighty works have been written on this subject and I can do no more here than to observe that, since down the ages equally godly men, whose reverence for the Lord and His Word are beyond question, have come to opposite conclusions on this matter (and on that of infant baptism), we do well to be cautious before emphatically insisting that only one interpretation is correct. Some difficulties are inevitable, since Scripture (much to our annoyance, perhaps!) does not explicitly state that the baptizand must be immersed completely.

My own position concerning baptism generally is that, whilst maintaining my belief in ‘believer’s baptism’, I also accept that there is a sound



Scriptural case for the baptism of the children of believing parents. The validity of this case, as I understand it, depends on maintaining that the relationship of children to God under the Old Covenant has a direct parallel under the New—an interpretation which commends itself to me as a reasonable one, but one which in no way absolves the grown child from exercising faith in Christ in order to be saved!

With regard to the use of set forms of worship, as in the Book of Common Prayer, it is, perhaps, necessary to point out that no detailed pattern of worship, as regards outward form, is detailed in Scripture; what is insisted upon is that everything must be done in an orderly fashion, with the edification of the church mainly in view. (I Cor. 14.) The people of Israel used set forms in their worship (e.g. the Psalms), just as much as all modern-day users of hymn books do. I personally am equally happy, in principle, with liturgical and non-liturgical worship; neither can justly claim more scriptural support than the other. For worship is to be 'in spirit and in truth'; it is with the content and quality that the Lord is concerned, not the mere outward form.

There is, I freely admit, plenty of scope in the use of the Prayer Book for what your correspondent describes as 'vain repetition', but the mere use of written forms by no means reduces the level of worship from what it would otherwise be. Indeed, it frequently enriches it. And yet truthfulness compels me to recall that I have probably experienced as much repetition in Brethren services as in Prayer Book ones, although I would not dare to write off this 'extempore repetition' as vain. What concerns me in the manner of worship is not the form itself so much as the Scripturalness of what the form contains; and it would be difficult to find a more Scriptural emphasis than is to be found in the Book of Common Prayer. Similarly the normal Brethren forms are Scriptural too.

Your correspondent will now want to ask (if he is still reading) for a big explanation. He will want to know how I reconcile the doctrine of the Church of England's formularies with the spiritual condition of the vast majority of its members. The painful answer, which is all too clear to see, is that the C. of E. at large (but by no means in its entirety) has departed from the doctrines which its ministers have pledged themselves (many of them falsely) to preach. Nevertheless, the 39 Articles remain as the standard of doctrine for the Established Church. The ship, it has been said, is sound enough, but the crew have mutinied. But I praise God that there are many exceptions to this, who remain true to the Lord and to His Word.

What is one to do with such a Church? The alternatives are clear. One is either to give this 'great tree' a thoroughly cold shoulder and leave it to rot on the spiritual slagheap of our national decline, thus enabling oneself to worship in peace and quiet somewhere else; or one is going to strive, for the sake of the nation, the church and the populace of this land to restore the message of the Articles (which is the message of the Bible) to the pulpits which at present are under the control of the powers of darkness. A third alternative is, perhaps, to strive for the latter end without becoming personally involved in the National Church, but I

regard this as impossible, or at least unlikely to be effective.

I trust that what I have written will at least clear the leavers of the stigma of having entered the Church of England with parts of their doctrinal vision intentionally blurred in order to salve uneasy consciences. I testify to a good conscience toward God and toward man. And while the Established Church remains in any state of corruption and darkness it is my prayer that the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt. 5: 13, 14) will be on the spot to purify and to lead it back into the paths of the Lord. At the same time, I readily appreciate that many believers, such as your correspondent, could not under any circumstances bring themselves either to depart from the Brethren or to join the C. of E. Such convictions I warmly respect. May we all spend our days in mutual love, the one for the other, bearing out the truth of the old but valuable dictum which enjoins 'in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity'.

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## **The First C.B.R.F. Competition**

Two prizes, consisting of book tokens to the value of £10 10s. 0d. each, are offered for the best papers on each of the following topics. Contributions should be typed, double spaced, on one side only of quarto sized paper, and should be submitted not later than 30th June, 1966 to the editor of the *CBRF Journal*, 29 Crossways, Sutton, Surrey. (An extension of time will be granted to overseas members, provided they notify the editor by air mail of their intention to submit a paper, before 15th March, 1966.) Members may submit papers on either or both topics.

Suitable papers will be published in the *CBRF Journal*, whether prize-winners or not, at the discretion of the council of the Fellowship.

Dr. Stephen Short and Mr. G. C. D. Howley have agreed to act as judges of the competition:

**SUBJECTS:—**

1. **THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.** Being a critique or discussion of the paper by Dr. Stephen S. Short published as *CBRF Occasional Paper No. 1*. Aspects which may be dealt with (although competitors have complete freedom in this respect) are:—
  - (a) The practice and principles of different denominations in relation to the matters dealt with in the paper.
  - (b) Further exegesis of the relevant scriptures, in the light of doctrinal and practical developments within the New Testament.
2. **BRETHREN PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES.** Being an analysis of the contributions to *CBRF Journal* issues 8 and 10, bringing out and discussing:—
  - (a) The main concerns over practical church matters which are expressed in the contributions.
  - (b) The differing ideas on church doctrine which lie behind the contributions.
  - (c) Such other points as the competitor feels may usefully advance objective discussion and study.

# Topics from Previous Issues

## WOMEN IN THE CHURCH—A SURVEY OF RECENT OPINION

David J. A. Clines

Did women take part in the public worship of the church in New Testament times? Had I Cor. 14: 34f. and I Tim. 2: 12 been the only references to the subject in the New Testament, the answer would doubtless have been an unequivocal no.

Second thoughts, however, on our understanding of these passages are demanded by I Cor. 11: 5, which speaks of a woman praying or prophesying, and that, to all appearances, in church. How can such a statement be reconciled with the instructions of I Cor. 14: 34 and I Tim. 2: 11-12, that women are to remain silent in the churches?

### I.

To take first the conflict between the two passages in I Corinthians, six possible harmonisations of these verses have been suggested by commentators. The first two of these remove the difficulty by referring the two passages to different situations.

1. Most scholars assume that chapter 11, from v. 2, deals with disorders in public worship and therefore that the praying or prophesying took place at a gathering of the church.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is open to question whether 11: 2-16 is about *public* worship at all. One scholar at least, P. Bachmann, has regarded this passage as instruction concerning domestic, or family, worship.

His main arguments were these: (i) Chapters 8-10 deal with private and domestic life. 11: 2-16 follows directly upon that section without any explicit change of subject. (ii) It is just as probable that the gift of prophecy was exercised in smaller gatherings as in larger ones. (iii) The words 'When you come together' in vv. 17f. may suggest that here *for the first time* Paul is turning his attention to problems of church worship.<sup>2</sup>

This is an attractive suggestion, and it is surprising that apart from an admission of its theoretical possibility by Hans Lietzmann,<sup>3</sup> who himself held a different view, it has received little attention. It is true, as F. W. Grosheide points out,<sup>4</sup> that none of these arguments is compelling, yet in historical criticism we do not always demand watertight arguments. Grosheide has two main criticisms to make of Bachmann's view: (i) That the nature of prophecy demands a *public* exercise of it. The gift of prophecy is not intended for the good of the individual but for the benefit of the whole church, and thus a prophet or prophetess would not have prophesied in private.<sup>5</sup> But we might reply that teaching and gifts of healing were also for the benefit of the whole church, but not thereby excluded from

being practised in private. And was Agabus's prophecy necessarily given in public or for the good of the whole church in the first instance (Ac. 21: 11f.)? (ii) That Paul surely would not have thought it disgraceful for a woman to pray or prophesy unveiled in her own home, before her husband and children.<sup>6</sup> However, Paul may have felt that by praying (i.e. 'leading in prayer', as praying must mean here) or prophesying, even in the home, a woman is temporarily taking the leading place; this is in order so long as she acknowledges by her covering that she is not abandoning the authority of her husband. It is very possible also that household slaves would have been present at family worship (rather in Victorian style), in which case the worship, though by no means public, is less private than if the husband and children are the only audience.

A further objection to Bachmann's view is the statement at the end of this section 'If any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither do the *churches of God*' (v. 16), which may seem to put this paragraph within a church context. But 'churches of God' may equally well just mean 'Christians everywhere', so that the sense of the verse is: 'If anyone disagrees with the views I have expressed, let me remind him that he is opposing the general practice of Christian people'. There is no need to share Grosheide's interpretation, that the 'custom' referred to is 'not one of praying or prophesying, but of being contentious';<sup>7</sup> this is a most improbable view, not least because being contentious has only too frequently been a custom in the 'churches of God', both then and now.

2. Grosheide's own view is that the praying and prophesying is public, but not in the congregation, 'not when the congregation officially meets'.<sup>8</sup> The praying and prophesying must be public, he argues, because 'the praying of which the apostle speaks, be it a form of supplication or of praise, is clearly a praying with and for other people', and the gift of prophecy is likewise given for the sake of the whole church. But they cannot take place in the official services of the church, because this is forbidden by 14: 34. He emphasises that there is no equivalent in chapter 11 of the explicit phrase 'in the churches' found in 14: 34.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty with this view is to imagine the sort of situation Grosheide envisages, in which women pray and prophesy, neither in private nor in meetings of the congregation. Is it in the street or some public place? One can perhaps imagine prophesying there, but hardly praying. Is it in a 'women's meeting'? If such existed, were they 'public' or 'private'? Why the reference to the praying and prophesying of men in the same context (v. 4)? Grosheide unfortunately does not tell us where he thinks women prayed and prophesied. Further, if Paul permitted women to pray and prophesy in public, why did he regard it as scandalous for them to do so in the congregation?

It seems to me, in fact, that the dichotomy 'public' versus 'private' is a misleading one, and that the only meaning that can be given to 'public' and 'private' in Corinth is 'in the street, out of doors' and 'at home, in the house'. Church meetings and family worship alike would have been private in this sense.

3. No modern expositor can be found to support the once popular view that 14: 34 refers to women chattering in their separate section of the congregation. True, *laleō* frequently did mean 'chatter' in classical Greek, but there is no example of this meaning in the N.T., and the verb is frequently used of authoritative speaking (e.g. 2 Cor. 11: 17; John 8: 44; Luke 1: 70), and has already in chapter 14 been used several times of the speaking of prophets and speaking in tongues.

4. Some have suggested that 14: 34-35, which breaks the sequence of thought between vv. 33 and 36, is a non-Pauline interpolation.<sup>10</sup> Support for this is found in the order of some manuscripts, which place vv. 34-35 at the end of the chapter. But even if these verses are an interpolation, they are not necessarily non-Pauline, and in any case it is easier to assume that the verses have in some manuscripts been put to the end of the chapter because they break the connection of thought than that in others they were wrongly inserted in such an unlikely place. This is too short a way with dissenting verses!

5. Another interpretation is shared by several scholars who have otherwise little in common; these include Hans Lietzmann, E. B. Allo, and Marcus Dods. According to this view, some women in the church were behaving in a manner that was objectionable on two counts: in the first place, they were speaking in public meetings of the church, and in the second, they were not even wearing a covering on their heads while doing so. Rather than seem too overbearing, Paul deals with these faults separately, one in chapter 11, the other in chapter 14. Thus Dods believed that while Paul was against women addressing meetings, 'a mere prohibition preventing women from addressing public meetings will not touch the more serious transgression of female modesty involved in the discarding of the veil. He could not pass over this violent assertion of independence without separate treatment'.<sup>11</sup> Lietzmann similarly wrote: 'In chapter 11 the praying and prophesying of women is grudgingly conceded, but the veil is unconditionally insisted upon. In chapter 14 the true intention of Paul becomes apparent: the woman must be silent'.<sup>12</sup> In the same strain Charles Hodge remarked: 'It was Paul's manner to attend to one thing at a time'.<sup>13</sup> He is here speaking of the propriety of women speaking in public unveiled, and therefore he says nothing about the propriety of their speaking in public itself. When that subject comes up, he expresses his judgment in the clearest terms, 14: 34. In here disapproving of the one, says Calvin, he does not approve of the other'.<sup>14</sup>

It may be objected to this view that it gives no answer to the question, Why should women wear coverings if they are not going to take any public part? Its supporters are bound to say that since the veil is not related to praying or prophesying in public—which is not permitted—it must be related to the status of women vis-à-vis men; this is something permanent, and therefore it would follow that the covering must be worn at all times. This is how Exclusive Brethren argue; it is more rational than the Open Brethren's custom of forbidding their women to pray or prophesy in church, but insisting that they should wear head-coverings there, a practice which is logically indefensible.

6. A final possibility is that the silence of 14: 34 should be understood in a sense which did not include praying or prophesying in church gatherings. The restriction of 14: 34 may seem at first sight to be too categorical to admit of this interpretation, but suppose the situation had been this: Paul had allowed, even encouraged, women to pray and prophesy in church under the inspiration of the Spirit, and his views on the subject were well-known. While he was away, some women had not only been praying and prophesying, but also attempting to give teaching and to join in discussion of the meaning of prophetic utterances. If 14: 34 were written against such a background it would be understood that Paul did not intend to debar women from their permitted functions in church. This is the view of J. Hering, that Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy in church, providing they were decently veiled. Women praying and prophesying would be speaking by way of inspiration, and it would be improper to silence the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through them.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, to ask questions and to discuss the meaning of prophetic oracles would have been to speak 'of themselves', and would be in-subordinate, being under the headship neither of their husband nor of the Holy Spirit.

J. Moffatt interpreted similarly, contrasting Paul with his younger contemporary R. Eliezer, who maintained that a woman should devote herself to her domestic duties and not even ask questions about the Torah. Paul grants Christian women the 'right to ask questions at home, and to speak under the moving of the Spirit in church, [but] pronounces it disgraceful for them to put themselves forward voluntarily in church services where the word was spoken'.<sup>16</sup>

The same view is taken by F. J. Leenhardt in his monograph on the place of women in the church according to the New Testament.<sup>17</sup> Paul deplored the 'speaking' of the women because it betokened a faulty apprehension of the correct relationship between husband and wife. The wife was taking initiatives in such a way as to step outside her role vis-à-vis her husband; the error of such women 'stemmed from the fact that they did not realise that the man is the "head" of the woman'. Prophecy on the other hand comes from the Holy Spirit, and when He chooses a woman to speak in the congregation, there is no longer any question of submission to her husband; the only rule is 'Quench not the Spirit' (I Th. 5: 19). Leenhardt is less convincing when he suggests that Paul's real objection to women asking questions was that they disrupted the meeting and did not contribute to edification. If this were so, would not the asking of questions by *men* be equally open to abuse? Leenhardt agrees, but thinks it improbable that men would interrupt in this way—only women would; it is a 'question of temperament'! This may be true in France, but not, one suspects, in England, and as for Corinth, who knows? (Leenhardt tells of an old lady in the south of France, 'an excellent woman, a former teacher, an undoubted Christian, but fond of disputation, very hard of hearing, [who] would position herself on a chair below the pulpit, facing the congregation, and from this strategic position would

interrupt the pastor in order to harangue the audience whenever a statement of the preacher did not suit her'!)

Leon Morris is also apparently a supporter of this view: it is 'possible that Paul contemplated the possibility that a woman might occasionally prophesy in church'<sup>18</sup> (not an extravagantly feminist way of putting it!). But even more doubtful of the possibility were Robertson and Plummer: 'Very possibly the women had urged that, if the Spirit moved them to speak, they must speak; and how could they speak if their faces were veiled? In that extreme case, *which perhaps would never occur*,<sup>19</sup> the Apostle says that they must speak veiled. They must not outrage propriety by coming to public worship unveiled because of the bare possibility that the Spirit may compel them to speak'.<sup>20</sup> The text gives no hint of support for this implausible interpretation, the natural reading clearly being that women did in fact pray and prophesy (whether in church or in the family is beside the point here). Further, there can be no question here of the modern oriental full veil,<sup>21</sup> which is due to Islamic influence,<sup>22</sup> and therefore the problem of how a veiled woman could manage to speak (or rather, to be understood) did not arise.

One difficulty, however, in this interpretation is whether praying would in fact have been regarded as speaking by way of inspiration. Prayer is not one of the gifts of the Spirit, like prophecy or tongues, so would it have been thought that the Holy Spirit was speaking through the one who prayed? The answer may well be that (free) prayer was regarded as part of the function of the prophet and is therefore omitted from catalogues of the gifts of the Spirit; if this is so, the close connection between prayer and prophecy both in I Cor. 11 and 14, as well as in I Th. 5: 17-20, is the more easily understood.<sup>23</sup> We also have the phrase 'praying in the Spirit' (Eph. 6: 18; cf. Jude 20; Rom. 15: 30), and if we compare the new-found freedom of extempore Christian prayer with Jewish liturgical formulas, we may well think it not improbable that the early Christians felt their prayers to have been inspired by the Spirit. An interesting sidelight on early practice of prayer comes from the Didache, where after the formula for the eucharistic prayer we read 'But let the prophets give thanks as much as (or, in whatever terms) they wish'.<sup>24</sup>

## II.

In the second place, the references in I Tim. 2: 8-12 to the place of women in the church should be considered in the light of I Cor. 11: 5.

It is sometimes said that because v. 8 commands that the men (*andres*, the males, not *anthrōpoi*, human beings) are to pray in every place, women are excluded from praying in some places, presumably in church. The same conclusion is reached if, following a somewhat different interpretation, we understand 'in every place' as 'wherever you meet for public worship'.<sup>25</sup> Most scholars take this view, and comment, for example: 'Men (not women) are to pray publicly in church',<sup>26</sup> or 'The men, whose place it is to conduct the public worship'.<sup>27</sup> J. N. D. Kelly suggests interestingly that the stress laid here on the *men* may reflect a tendency in

Ephesus to follow the Corinthian custom and abandon the Jewish practice of recitation of the prayers by men alone.<sup>28</sup>

Here also, however, several alternative views may be proposed.

1. Some commentators, noting that v. 9 lacks a main verb and that one needs to be supplied from v. 8, read 'I desire likewise that the women should pray in modest apparel . . .'.<sup>29</sup> This view, although it has the merit of giving full weight to the word 'likewise', leaves us with an improbable construction in v. 9: two clauses set side by side without any connective particle. Most agree that what should be supplied from v. 8 is simply 'I desire', so that the clause runs 'I desire that the women adorn themselves with comely apparel'.

2. Few would go so far as to say of v. 9 that 'it has no reference to the demeanour of women while in church',<sup>30</sup> and that the contrast is therefore not between men and women in church, but between modes of behaviour appropriate to the sexes—the men praying 'without wrath and doubting', the women clothing themselves with modesty. While it may be readily granted that these instructions about female apparel were intended to have a wider reference than church gatherings (the author does not mean to imply that outside church hours Christian women may dress as they please),<sup>31</sup> the context (especially vv. 8, 11-12) plainly points to a church situation.

3. Attempts at reconciliation of these verses with I Cor. 11 may be abandoned altogether by denying the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. Their author may then be thought to have imitated, in a more rigorous form, the rule he read in I Cor. 14: 34. F. J. Leenhardt, for instance, speaks of the enormous distance that separates this formulation in I Timothy from the genuine Pauline utterance of I Corinthians: 'another spirit breathes in these pages . . . It appears to us neither biblical nor evangelical'. To make matters worse, the author supports his categorical prohibition by some 'deplorable theology', to which Paul would never have assented for a moment (for example, to make Eve primarily responsible for the Fall is in poor taste, as well as bad theology). In short, it is necessary to choose between Paul and the author of the Pastorals.<sup>32</sup>

We may well feel that to set down Biblical contradictions side by side and to be told to take one's pick is not the way to go about interpreting the Bible; contradictions have to be treated far more subtly than that. Sometimes it will be a case of a contradiction between two authors because each is presenting one side of a two-sided truth; sometimes the contradiction will be explicable in terms of promise and fulfilment; sometimes the contradiction will only be apparent because the writers are using categories different from ours. But surely not either-or! Further, even if the Pastorals are not Pauline (and they may well not be, at least in the way we have been accustomed to think),<sup>33</sup> they are still Scripture, and the difficult task of interpretation is not shelved by a decision against their authenticity.<sup>34</sup>



4. Perhaps the most satisfactory approach is to argue that the praying of v. 8 is not the same kind of praying as in I Cor. 11. The prayers and supplications for kings and those in authority, which are conducted with uplifted hands, seem somewhat more formal than the spontaneous Spirit-inspired prayers we know of the Corinthian church. There is in fact considerable evidence in the New Testament for the co-existence of free prayer and liturgical forms in the early church,<sup>35</sup> and it would be a not unnatural distinction to restrict the leading of the formal prayers to the men (which was also the case in the synagogue), while giving opportunity for a woman to pray (or prophesy) under the inspiration of the Spirit. It is not without significance that the specific prohibition in v. 12 is of a woman's teaching, not of praying or prophesying.

That women did in fact speak in the early church under the inspiration of the Spirit seems to be the most popular opinion among the more recent expositors, and it is indeed a view which has few difficulties and much to recommend it. But Bachmann has not been answered, and his interpretation remains a challenge to those whose sympathies incline them to the view of Héring and Leenhardt. None of the other positions, in my opinion, has a very high degree of probability.

1. Thus, for example, J. Héring writes: 'No exegete has ever doubted that the point there [11: 5] concerns women speaking in Church gatherings' (*The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* [ET] [London, 1962], p. 154).

2. P. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 353ff.

3. *An die Korinther, I, II*, 2nd edn. (Tübingen, 1923), p. 76.

4. *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1953), p. 252.

5. *op. cit.*, p. 251. So also E. B. Allo, *Saint Paul: Première Epître aux Corinthiens* 2nd ed. (Paris, 1956), p. 257.

6. *op. cit.*, p. 253.

7. *op. cit.*, pp. 251, 261.

8. *op. cit.*, p. 341.

9. The objection of D. E. H. Whitely (*The Theology of St. Paul* [Oxford, 1964], p. 224) to Grosheide's view, that 'the whole subject of I Cor. xi. 2-16 is public worship, begs the very question Grosheide is discussing.

10. So Bousset, J. Weiss, Anderson Scott (cf. Whitely, *op. cit.*, p. 224); and A. J. B. Higgins, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. M. Black, H. H. Rowley (London, 1962) p. 1003.

11. *I Corinthians* (London, 1887), p. 255.

12. Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

13. A proposition I should not care to defend.

14. *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1877, r.p. 1958). pp. 208f. Cf. E. B. Allo, *op. cit.* pp. 258f.

15. Héring, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

16. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London, 1938), pp. 233f.

17. *La place de la femme dans l'église d'après le Nouveau Testament* (Montpelier, 1948) pp. 16, 34-39.

18. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London, 1958), p. 201.

19. My italics.

20. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, 1913), p. 325.

21. Cf. F. J. Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 16; H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. iii (München, 1926), p. 427.

22. B. S. Easton, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 5, p. 3047.

23. So G. Friedrich, s.v. *prophètes*, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, vol. vi (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 854.

24. x.11.
25. W. Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh, 1924), p. 30.
26. A. R. C. Leaney, *The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (London, 1960), p. 52.
27. E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1936), p. 24.
28. *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1963), p. 65.
29. M. Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 3rd edn. revised by H. Conzelmann (Tübingen, 1955), p. 37; D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1957), p. 74. C. K. Barrett also supplies 'pray' as the main verb of v. 9, but apparently regards the women's prayer as silent (*The Pastoral Epistles* [Oxford, 1963], p. 55).
30. N. J. D. White, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. iv (London, 1910), p. 107.
31. B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1948), p. 124.
32. Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-44.
33. They may 'represent the posthumous recension of several pieces of Pauline correspondence and other fragments, together possibly with notes on his oral instruction on church order' (F. F. Bruce, *An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul* [Exeter, 1965], p. 287).
34. This at least is the common view; I myself think a good case can be made for expelling from the canon writings that can be shown to be inauthentic.
35. O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (ET) (London, 1953), pp. 12-14, 21-25.

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## IRVINGITE PENTECOSTALISM AND THE EARLY BRETHREN

Timothy C. F. Stunt

(Quotations in this article from Dr. John Hill's diary are reproduced by kind permission of the Bodleian Library)

Irvingism like the Brethren movement was the product of a widespread quest for purity within the Church and for spiritual revival among Christians. There were spiritual revivals in French speaking Switzerland in the first quarter of the 19th century, there was a Roman Catholic revival at Carlshuld, north of Vienna in 1827 and 1828, and there had also been a deeply spiritual movement in Russia under the influence of the Director of St. Peter's Theological College, in 1820. Irvingism and the Brethren movement were similar to these movements in their origins. Greatly dissatisfied with contemporary Christianity, and awaiting the second coming with expectancy, there were many people with a real spiritual experience of God and his truth in Christ.

One can discern three particular strands in their outlook and each of these is very apparent in the teaching of Irvingites and Brethren alike. First, separation from the world. Second, belief in the imminent return of our Lord. Third, a high doctrine of the authority of the Church under the government and direction of the Holy Spirit rather than human forms.

The world for these people took a variety of forms, but in the final analysis, it was represented by anything that could tempt the believer to esteem the material and visible world more highly than unseen spiritual reality. Hence the comforts derived from luxuries, carpets, insurance societies and entertainment could be worldly. (Lord Congleton had

bare wooden floorboards in his house.<sup>1</sup>) Similarly human systems and institutions like missionary societies, an established Church ruled by the state, and man-made doctrinal articles could be worldly. Knowledge and happiness could, unless centred upon Christ, be worldly. Thus Newman recalled that Darby's attitude had been: 'What would it avail even to become a second La Place after thirty years' study, if in five and thirty years the Lord descended from heaven, snatched up all his saints to meet him, and burned to ashes all the works of the earth?'<sup>2</sup> Likewise with regard to the enjoyment of the natural beauty of the earth, Groves in his Diary was very critical: 'The mere physical beauty or barrenness of any country have little interest to my own mind . . . Why spend our thoughts and praises on that which . . . being under the curse is to be burnt up; instead of upon the beauties of Christ and of His world, moral and spiritual, which shall endure for ever?'<sup>3</sup> This is an attitude common in the Irvingite writings of men like Wolff and Drummond.<sup>4</sup>

Stemming from this strong separatism there is the sense of expectancy with regard to the second coming. It is indicated in the attitudes of Darby and Groves quoted above. In many ways it is perhaps the source of the separatism rather than vice-versa. Irvingism traces its rise to the prophetic conferences at Drummond's home at Albury from 1826-1830.<sup>5</sup> Prophetic studies exercised a peculiar fascination over these men and became the main topic of discussion at Powerscourt when Brethren met there in conference. The idea of a secret rapture was taken over by Irving and his followers and by Darby and many of the Brethren. It is uncertain who taught it first, but both accepted it. The imminence of the second coming is the key note of *The Morning Watch*, (Irving's prophetic magazine) as also of much Brethren writing.

Seeking to be ready and answerable to Christ alone in a spiritually pure and uncompromised church, naturally led these people to investigate the rôle of the Spirit in the Church. In the face of a worldly church men sought a Church ruled by the Spirit. In this respect the basic attitude of Irvingites and Brethren were similar though differing in a matter of degree. The liberty of the Spirit was found by Brethren in their dispensing with a liturgy and an ordained ministry. One of Darby's earliest tracts was entitled: 'The notion of a clergyman dispensationally the sin against the Holy Ghost'.<sup>6</sup> Irvingites went further. They believed that Christians should expect the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that had been exercised by the early Church. When the outbreak of tongues was reported from Row to the Albury circle of which Irving had become the leader, the assumption even before the phenomenon was investigated was that such gifts were to be expected and prayed for, and that their absence was a sign of the Church's unspiritual state.

Having established some distinct resemblances between the Irvingite movement and that of the Brethren, it seems right to enquire whether there were in fact historic links between the movements.

The only mention of Irving in Neatby's *History of the Plymouth Brethren* occurs in his discussion of the Powerscourt conferences.<sup>7</sup> One

of those who attended the Albury discussions was Lady Powerscourt who soon started similar meetings in her own home in Ireland. Irving who was frequently at Albury, visited Powerscourt in autumn 1830,<sup>7a</sup> and as late as 1838 according to J. Butler Stoney there were Irvingites at the conferences there.<sup>8</sup> The Rev. Peter Roe noted in his diary for Sept. 29th, 1832, after visiting Powerscourt House for one of the conferences, that he found the meeting rather unprofitable. 'The duty of seeking for miraculous gifts was strongly insisted upon'.<sup>8a</sup> The great emphasis on the imminence of the second coming and the rôle of the Holy Spirit is very apparent in the writings of Lady Powerscourt herself. For example her expectancy of suffering and trial as the prelude to the end: 'Does it not seem that the world is breaking up? . . . How we should be bespeaking strength for the day of trial. I cannot help thinking, we also shall have trial though not to partake in the despair and desolation of the last end'.<sup>9</sup> Or her lament at the state of the professing church: 'The transcript of the Spirit though executed with exquisite nicety, is scarcely perceptible through the thick veil of flesh that covers it. . . Whether we look at the want of his power in his church or of the fruit of his Spirit in his members, still are we inclined to ask, Has the Spirit of the Lord fainted? Is he exhausted? Where is he?'<sup>10</sup> It is hardly surprising that Professor G. T. Stokes commented that Lady Powerscourt's letters 'show how much of the spirit of the ancient Montanists was in the whole [brethren] movement. Her letters read in many places like the writings of Tertullian after he had joined that sect'.<sup>11</sup> Montanist is indeed the adjective truly applicable to both of the movements that we are considering. Montanism was strongly millennial in its expectation, uncompromisingly separatist, and believed in the rule of the Holy Spirit rather than the worldly institutions of men.

Are there, however, further links, apart from the Albury-Powerscourt connection? There are a number of pieces of evidence coming from a wide field. Though sometimes fragmentary, they do point to an obvious conclusion when taken as a whole. The first example that we shall consider, is in fact, much later than the others.

We referred earlier to the revival in French speaking Switzerland. This largely centred upon Geneva and the Canton de Vaud. The revival was separatist and broke away from the Established Church though it remained ecclesiastically very Presbyterian in outlook. Darby came to Switzerland in 1838 and to Geneva in 1839.<sup>12</sup> He was well received by the pastors of one of the separatist churches, l'Église de la Pélisserie and his ministerial abilities soon proved to be of great assistance to them.

In 1835, however, before Darby's arrival, missionaries of Irvingism had begun to be active in Geneva. Drummond had taken part in the earlier revival and another Irvingite, Méjanel, began to exercise great influence. There was no large Irvingite community but their ideas were naturally well received in a separatist church striving after the apostolic ideal. In the Pélisserie Church, this influence was noticeably felt.

Contrary to the wishes of the pastors who were strongly presbyterian, the Church voted in 1837 to have a more democratic system of church

government. They arranged meetings for discussion without their pastors, and though Emile Guers their oldest pastor, protested strongly against such 'réunions acéphales', the congregational principle of government was established.

For his first year or two Darby seems to have accepted the church as it was. Then in 1840-1 he began to preach about the ruin of the Church and the impossibility of Church order as found in the New Testament. In March 1842, while Darby was away in Lausanne, one of his supporters, named O'Donnell, led sixty of the most 'radical' members of the church to secede without warning and to set up another assembly. The principles of exclusivism were being enunciated five years before the question of Bethesda had been heard of. The depleted Pélisserie Church went back to a presbyterian system and when Darby returned to Geneva he joined the new assembly. His rôle in the episode is not quite clear, but evidently Darbyism in Switzerland absorbed a large part of evangelicalism that was already prepared by Irvingites.

Such was the link in Geneva. This was, however, much later than the other instances that we shall note. In Ireland we have a clear instance much earlier than 1838. The Rev. Edward Hardman was an assistant curate at Westport and later at Ballincholla in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> Around 1831 he came into contact with Darby and a number of strongly ascetical and other-worldly Christians who wanted him to separate from the Established Church. Hardman felt this would be schismatic and refused though strongly critical of his own communion. At the same time he was favourably disposed to Irvingite opinions about Spirit outpouring, gifts, Anti-Christ etc., as, according to the biographer of the Archbishop of Tuam, 'some of these verbally coincided with the common language of the separating school above referred to'. (i.e. the Brethren.)<sup>14</sup> Darby in a letter of August, 1833 wrote: 'Hardman, a dear brother in the Lord, a clergyman, was here lately and he was speaking at large on the Seven Churches. I was not here, but this ground I hear he took . . . It is an important consideration in the present state of things. It commends itself morally to one's mind'.<sup>15</sup> Soon after Hardman published a sermon on I Cor. 12-14 in which he took an Irvingite interpretation and also attacked the nature of the Establishment of his own church. He was suspended in 1834. Evidently the influence of Darby and Irvingites combined to make him take the course he did. Ultimately he came to London and joined with the (Irvingite) Catholic Apostolic Church, but clearly Darby and Bellett, and other Brethren like John Code and Charles Hargrove who also had left the Established Church, affected his opinions considerably.

The question however, is not simply one of establishing links of influence. We should also ask ourselves whether Brethren themselves were favourably disposed to the idea of exercising Pentecostal gifts. The answer differs from person to person. B. W. Newton seems never to have seriously sought such experiences though at one time he had an open mind about them as we shall see. Darby's notion of guidance and control by the Holy Spirit does not seem to have been the impulsive one characteristic of Irvingism. According to Newton,<sup>16</sup> however, one of the leading Plymouth

figures among the early Brethren did earnestly desire the gifts of tongues and healing. Captain Percy Hall whom Darby found preaching in the villages when he arrived in Plymouth, was evidently influenced by Irvingite views. He was one of the first to teach the immediate Advent with no intermediate events, which was Irving's position, and Newton recalled as an old man: 'I have heard Hall pray that the same gifts that were working in London might be given to them'.<sup>17</sup> Hall was probably not alone in his wish. Another naval man, Captain W. G. Rhind, was evidently favourably disposed to Irvingism. In the later part of 1831, he and Rev. Nicholas Armstrong, one of the leading Irvingites, made a preaching tour of Guildford, Gloucester, Bristol, Carrington and Taunton, representing the Reformation Society of which Rhind was the Secretary. Trouble arose because Armstrong taught that the Church should expect miraculous gifts of the spirit, and he and Rhind defended themselves before the society's committee. First Armstrong and then Rhind severed their connection with the society and went their different ways.<sup>17a</sup> Rhind moved to Ireland where he joined with Christians at Powerscourt and soon adopted 'Brethren' principles.<sup>17b</sup> Evidently the Pentecostal aspects of Irvingism were not questioned by many Brethren, even though Irving's doctrinal views sometimes were.

In many ways Oxford<sup>18</sup> was as important a seed-bed for the ideas of the early Brethren as Southern Ireland and Plymouth. Separatism became a great issue in the Evangelical party at Oxford in the early 1830s, and among those who separated from the Established Church were F. W. Newman, B. W. Newton, Henry Bulteel, and G. V. Wigram, all of whom were associated with the Brethren for a time. There was also great interest in prophetic matters. The influence of Lewis Way, Henry Drummond, William Marsh, Hugh McNeile and others of the Albury group was considerable and the Jews Conversion Society had an active auxiliary at Oxford with B. W. Newton as Secretary.<sup>19</sup> In 1829 a former member of Exeter College, who supported Catholic emancipation, came up to Oxford to vote for Peel at the by-election. His name was Harris. He met Newton who was also at Exeter and was persuaded to attend a 'reading meeting' at the house of the Vice-Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Dr. John Hill. Here he heard William Marsh expounding Isaiah XI and according to Newton it was the occasion of his conversion.<sup>20</sup> Harris was already a clergyman, with a perpetual curacy at Plymstock, but in 1832 he seceded and joined the Brethren and became the second editor of the *Christian Witness* when Henry Borlase died. It will thus be seen that more than one of the group that was soon to be associated with the Brethren was under the influence of the Albury group that gave rise to Irvingism.<sup>21</sup>

In 1830 came the news that there had been an outbreak of unknown tongues at Row in the West of Scotland. The validity of these and other manifestations became a burning question. Some among the Albury group, like Drummond, Irving and Armstrong accepted them as genuine while others like Marsh and Sibthorp remained uncommitted. At Oxford there was great interest. Newton recalled many years later, that F. W. Newman received a letter about the occurrences and 'came triumphantly

to my study and gave me the letter to read—"There Newton, what can you say to that?"<sup>22</sup> Newton apparently suggested that Darby who had come to Oxford and been introduced to Newton only three weeks before (towards the end of May) should go and investigate the phenomena. His account of Darby's report is interesting. 'He stayed a fortnight or three weeks and returned saying he had carefully watched everything, and one thing he noticed decidedly—that was that they denied the application of prophetic Scriptures and promises to Israel. In a moment that decided me. It convinced me unhesitatingly that the work was not of God, furnishing me with a clear proof'.<sup>23</sup> In retrospect it seemed very clearcut to Newton, but at the time he had been quite open-minded.

Darby was not the only one to go and investigate. We have a letter written by Newton to G. V. Wigram, dated 31 July 1830. In it Newton was offering some advice to Wigram with reference to his investigations in Scotland. 'If it can be *clearly* proved that a language is really spoken by a person who never learned it—that a disease *confirmed* and *known*, has been cured without means—then I am bound to believe that the power is of God . . . My own mind remains just as when I left Oxford—undecided . . .'<sup>24</sup> Evidently the possibility was by no means ruled out but rather it was to be expected that such gifts were genuine. It was only the rejection of prophetic truth as he understood it that turned Newton against the possibility.

Meanwhile the separatist movement at Oxford was growing and late in 1830 Bulteel, the curate of St. Ebbe's, told Newton of his intention to secede.<sup>25</sup> He waited however until February 6th when he delivered a most dramatic sermon<sup>25a</sup> criticising the Established Church from the pulpit of the University Church. He then went on a tour of the West Country preaching in a number of nonconformist chapels for which his Bishop suspended him and withdrew his licence in August. Within two months Bulteel underwent a striking change in his views. The entry in John Hill's Diary for Oct. 18, 1831 will indicate its extent. 'Heard today that Miss Charniese who has been so long and hopelessly ill has been suddenly restored so as to be able to walk &c. without any sensation of pain or weakness. This result connected with the fact that Bulteel prayed earnestly with her on Saturday and she for herself on Sunday for such restoration. Bulteel has been spending a week with some of Mr. Irving's friends and is come back satisfied of the genuineness of the miracles of healing and tongues:—and convinced moreover of their doctrine of general redemption. For myself this does not appear to be the testimony of Scripture:—as to the facts I dare not form a judgment . . .'<sup>26</sup> We do not know what Newton's judgment was at the time but later he attested that the cure was genuine as he had known the lady in question.

In March 1832 Bulteel performed a further cure and Hill thought it was again quite genuine.<sup>27</sup> Other people thought the patient was imposing upon Bulteel. In the same month Newton left Oxford for good. He recalled later that he was deeply troubled by the whole atmosphere of Irvingism. 'I was myself at one of the meetings and I felt a supernatural power over me. I went home and couldn't read my Bible and I resolved

never to be again within that circle'.<sup>28</sup> It was evidently a time of extravagances. Newton said that Tiptaft told him of a group of Christians who at dinner toasted the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup> He also recalled that a group in Bulteel's congregation once rushed out in the middle of the night to baptise each other in the river Isis.<sup>30</sup> Little wonder that Newton who was a particularly orderly person, fled from Oxford. 'I left it entirely, I couldn't bear to view the state of affairs'.<sup>31</sup>

Bulteel had come to set an inordinately high premium upon spontaneity. He 'used to minister without knowing what he would say till he was saying it'.<sup>32</sup> No wonder Hill in his Diary was constrained to pray: 'Oh mercifully regulate the mind and heart of my dear friend Bulteel who is I fear the victim of some sad delusion'.<sup>33</sup> Bulteel's Irvingite period lasted for about a year and a half. With great relief Hill recorded on May 18, 1833 that Bulteel had called and 'gave me an account of his gracious deliverance from the awful delusions concerning supernatural gifts . . . He spake too with horror of two of Irving's errors—concerning the human nature of Christ—and perfectability on earth'.<sup>34</sup> According to Newton, Bulteel later said that his deliverance came when he discovered that though he could speak about the second coming, or holiness and other subjects, he found difficulty in speaking of the Cross.<sup>35</sup> After 1833 he was associated with the Brethren at Oxford (until 1848 when he sided with Newton and became a Presbyterian) and in 'The Inquirer' (a Brethren journal) we find a report of his baptizing R. M. Beverley (also with the Brethren) in 1838 at Oxford.<sup>36</sup>

Is the episode relevant, it may be asked. Surely the answer is: Yes. In the midst of a strongly Separatist and Millenarian movement not only are people sympathetic to the idea of supernatural gifts but they begin to exercise them. In due course the gift becomes an obsession and there is a revulsion from the extravagances that the obsession led to, with the result that a person like Newton says that the gifts came to Bulteel as a punishment from God.<sup>37</sup> (Newton did not indicate what the punishment was for.) The case is significant. Bulteel may be the only actual case among the Brethren of complete adoption of Irvingism in its most extreme form but his case is sufficient to underline the kindred attitudes of Brethren and Irvingites.

There are of course other connections. For instance it is noticeable that in turn, Irving, Newton and finally Darby were accused of belittling the sinlessness of Christ, in their attempts to expound the mysteries of incarnation and atonement.

S. P. Tregelles, who was with the Brethren until 1848-9, and then became a trenchant critic of the movement, said that the teaching of the secret rapture was taken by the Brethren from an Irvingite utterance,<sup>38</sup> and wondered if they had not received from Irvingites the idea that the standing of the Church was far superior to that of Israel and that their identities were for ever separate and unrelated.<sup>39</sup> This latter teaching was recognised by Tregelles to be the basis of Darby's dispensationalism, and, being very critical of it, he was not surprised to learn that Irvingites taught it also. It



is interesting that in one of his letters to Newton, Tregelles maintained that similar ideas were to be found in the Montanist writings of Tertullian.<sup>40</sup>

A final point may be made. Shortly before Bulteel's death in 1866, Tregelles used to visit him in his final illness. Describing one of these visits to Newton in a letter he made the following remark about Bulteel: 'The first step, he tells me, in the course which connected him with Irvingism was getting some mystical notion into his mind about *Christ risen* being the only main truth to be contemplated, instead of seeing our abiding relation to the cross'.<sup>41</sup> It may be remembered that great emphasis was laid by Darby in particular and by many of the early brethren upon the fact that Christ is risen and that we are risen with him and seated with him in the heavenly places and hence our separateness from the world. Bulteel became an Irvingite after five years of Calvinist evangelism that had been abundantly blessed of God. Newton recalled that in one year, seventy-five gownsmen were converted by the means of Bulteel's ministry.<sup>42</sup> Could it be, that the evidently arresting and very impressive character of J. N. Darby who came to Oxford in 1830 made a great impact upon Bulteel and that his emphasis upon Christ's resurrection led Bulteel in the direction that brought him first to secession and finally to Irvingism? It is a possibility. Certainly the relationship between the two movements and their similar emphases seems beyond question. Even today, after more than a hundred and thirty years, many brethren believe that spontaneity is a trustworthy indication of spirituality.

1. For Congleton's asceticism at Teignmouth see H. Groves: *Not of the world. A memoir of Lord Congleton*. London, 1884, pp. 62-3.

2. F. W. Newman: *Phases of Faith*. London, 1850, p. 35. Compare this with the following in the same work. 'the highest Christian must necessarily decline the pursuit of science, knowledge, art, history,—except so far as any of these things might be made useful tools for immediate spiritual results'. p. 37.

3. A. N. Groves: *A Memoir compiled by his widow*. London, 1856, p. 45.

4. See for example the Irvingite journal *The Morning Watch*, London 1829-1833. *passim*.

5. For Irvingism see: M. O. W. Oliphant: *Life of Edward Irving*, London, 1862. (The first and classic biography.) A. L. Drummond: *Edward Irving and his circle*. London, 1938. (This makes Oliphant more readable and also incorporates the later evidence of people like Carlyle.) For a brief but very perceptive essay see G. W. E. Russell: *The Restored Apostolate, in The Household of Faith*, London, 1902. pp. 264-74.

6. J. N. Darby: *Collected Writings* (ed. W. Kelly) New ed. p. 36ff.

7. W. B. Neatby: *History of the Plymouth Brethren*. London, 1902. pp. 38-9.

7a. Oliphant: *op. cit.*, pp. 148-153 (Vol. II.)

8. Quoted in Neatby: *op. cit.*, p. 39. For Powerscourt conferences also see Mrs. H. Madden: *Memoir of Robert Daly*. London, 1875. pp. 149-58, and also her anonymous *Recollections of Robert Daly*. By an old Parishioner. Dublin, 1872. pp. 18-19.

8a. Samuel Madden: *Memoir of the Life of the late Rev. Peter Roe*. Dublin, 1842. p. 445.

9. *Letters and Papers of the late Theodosia A. Viscountess Powerscourt* (ed. R. Daly) new edition, London, n.d. p. 134.

10. *Ibid.* p. 129. Both extracts are dated 1831.

11. G. T. Stokes: *John Nelson Darby* in *Contemporary Review*. Oct. 1885. p. 544 (footnote).

12. For events in Geneva see H. de Goltz: *Geneve religieuse au dix-neuvieme siecle ou tableau des faits qui depuis 1815 ont accompagné dans cette ville le développement de l'individualisme ecclésiastique du reveil mis en regard de l'ancien systeme théocratique de l'église de Calvin*. Genève et Bâle 1862. pp. 437-455, and E. Guers: *Le premier réveil et la première église indépendante a Geneve d'après ses archives et les notes et souvenirs de l'un de ses pasteurs, 1810-1826. Suivis d'un coup d'œil sur l'état de cette meme église*

- de 1826-1849. Genève 1871. pp. 331-342, and *La Vie et les travaux de Cesar Malan par un de ses fils*. Genève : Paris, 1869.
13. See J. D'Arcy Sirr: *A Memoir of the honourable and most reverend Power Le Poer Trench last Archbishop of Tuam*. Dublin, 1845. pp. 420-423.
14. Sirr: *op. cit.* p. 421.
15. *Letters of J. N. D[arby]* Vol. I. 1832-68. London. n.d. pp. 22-3.
16. In the next paragraphs there occur a number of quotations from the recorded reminiscences of B. W. Newton in his old age. They are in a series of MS Books in the Isle of Wight together with copies of a number of letters he wrote in the course of his early years with the Brethren. They are the property of Mr. C. E. Fry of Newport I.O.W.
17. Fry MS Book 10. p. 81.
- 17a. Annual Report of the British Society for promoting the religious principles of the Reformation. London, 1832. pp. 25-29.
- 17b. *Faithful Unto Death*. A memoir of W. G. Rhind, R.N. by J. B. I. London, 1863. pp. 39-46.
18. For religious life at Oxford at this time see J. S. Reynolds: *The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735-1871*. Oxford, 1953. pp. 82-108. This book however is not always accurate and in the particular aspect we are dealing with leaves large gaps.
19. *Fry MS Book 1*. p. 330.
20. *Fry MS Book 1*. pp. 330-1, 360-362.
21. It should perhaps be observed that Newton himself was converted at Oxford and underwent a deep spiritual revival through his being introduced to the study of prophecy by F. W. Newman, who had just returned from Ireland where he had been under the influence of J. N. Darby.
22. *Fry MS Book 1*. p. 331.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Fry MS Book 2*. p. 47.
25. *Fry MS Book 4*. pp. 111-2, 118.
- 25a. A Sermon on I Corinthians 11 v. 12. Oxford (1831).
26. The Diary of the Vice-Principal of St. Edmund Hall is an invaluable aid to the account of this episode as he was at the heart of Evangelical Society at Oxford. Every good Evangelical went regularly to 'drink tea' with Dr. Hill. This quotation is dated Oct. 18, 1831 and is in vol. 8, p. 65.
27. *Hill's Diary*. Vol. 9, p. 14. Mar. 8, 1832, and p. 16, Mar. 10 and 12.
28. *Fry MS Book 2*, p. 2.
29. *Fry MS Book 2*, p. 2, *MS Book 4*, p. 109.
30. *Fry MS Book 2*, p. 2.
31. *Fry MS Book 1*, p. 331.
32. *Fry MS Book 1*, p. 331.
33. *Hill Diary* vol. 9, p. 14. 8 Mar., 1832.
34. *Hill Diary* vol. 9, p. 65. 18 May, '32.
35. *Fry MS Book 1*. pp. 331-2.
36. *The Inquirer*: vol. I, p. 352 (Nov. 1838).
37. *Fry MS Book 11*, p. 150.
38. *The hope of Christ's second Coming*. London (2nd ed.) 1886, p. 35 (footnote).
39. *Letter from Tregelles to Newton*. Nov. 20, 1865. (In Fry collection, Isle of Wight.)
40. *Letter from Tregelles to Newton*. April 25, 1866. (Fry Collection.)
41. *Letter from Tregelles to Newton*. Jan. 21, 1864. (Fry Collection.)
42. *Fry MS Book 2*, p. 2.

### Biographical Notes and Queries

We are grateful to those members who have helped with answers to the queries listed in this column in CBRFJ ix, p. 46.

2. *G. F. Vallance*. His full names were George Frederick, and he lived from 1899 to 1951. The address from which some of his publications appeared in the 1930s was Dedham (not Dereham), Essex.

3. *Ernest Feasey*. No definite information has been received, but he is believed to have lived in Palmers Green, N. London.

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