

EXCLUSIVE BRETHREN

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There is a lot of false information given in books, and on the internet, about the Exclusive Brethren.

Some branches of Exclusive Brethren today, and perhaps since 1929, have departed from Biblical teaching and have become strict to the point of insensitivity.

The modern Exclusive teaching is that you cannot keep a pet; you cannot own a television; you must marry within the Exclusives; you must be separate from family and friends if they are not Exclusives; you cannot have a meal with unbelievers; you cannot go to university; you cannot live in a semi-detached house if the people next door were not Exclusives; if you ran a business from home you could not share a wall of those premises with non-believers; you cannot share drainage or a sewer with non-believers; you cannot belong to any other religious organisation or a trade union if you are an Exclusive and so on.

I have used the expression non-believers which, in this context, means non-Exclusives.

There are two sides to each story.

The word exclusive refers to separation from evil and evil influences. In other words, they exclude that which is evil or potentially harmful. If you mix with people who are, for example, atheistic or anti-Christian, it could have a harmful influence. If one goes to university one will encounter people of different views and many who are violently opposed to Christian beliefs.

You might meet drunks, drug addicts, immoral people and people in trouble with the law, those who swear and blaspheme and those who indulge sexual immorality.

The misleading 'information' which is rife states that Exclusive Brethren began with the earliest brethren such as J G Bellet (1795-1864), G V Wigram (1805-1879), Lord Congleton (1776-1842), Edward Cronin (1801-1882),

C H Mackintosh (1820-1896), J N Darby (1800-1882) and William Trotter (1818-1865). For this article I will call these men the Seven but this has no significance outside of this article.

The Seven and other early Exclusives did not teach

1. you cannot keep a pet
2. you cannot go to university
3. you are not to be separated from family and friends
4. you can have meals with unbelievers
5. you can share drainage and sewers with houses of unbelievers
6. if you lived next to unbelievers that did not have to be corrected
7. you can be a member of another religious organisation. Many early brethren belonged to missionary societies.

There were no televisions in those days. There were no trade unions.

It is therefore wrong to link the early Exclusive Brethren with those of the twentieth century Exclusives who continue to this day.

The Seven which I have named, and there were very many more, were godly men noted for their gentleness, grace and love. They worked among the poor and the unbelievers. They took the Gospel to those who did not know it; they set up homes for deprived children; they went abroad as missionaries, set up hospitals and made life better for people. Some brethren were privileged and wealthy and gave their money to help the

destitute. Many sought and achieved better living conditions for thousands.

They were nothing like the modern Exclusives.

Darby died in April 1882. At his funeral one speaker was C E Stuart of Reading. Within a few years, Stuart was to be branded a heretic over his booklet *Christian Standing and Condition*, where some minor points disagreed with views by J B Stoney who was considered to be Darby's successor. Stuart said that Christ did not make propitiation on the Cross but in Heaven after His resurrection. Apparently Stuart refused to shake hands with two brethren who objected to his ministry. A meeting was convened in London and Stuart and the Reading meeting were put out of fellowship because of their absence. The Reading side was never heard or even considered. One can only be appalled at such a hasty, dictatorial and anti-Christian attitude. Hence, the Stuart divergence of 1885.

Bearing in mind that the Grant brothers had disapproved of Darby's acceptance of some aspects of Calvinism there was a curious division in Montreal in 1884. F W Grant taught that the Old Testament saints were saved in exactly the same way as New Testament people were and as people are today. He published a pamphlet extolling these Calvinistic views despite being advised not to. The Natural History Hall in Montreal denounced Grant as a heretic. Grant and his followers joined another meeting in Craig Street. An assembly in Philadelphia separated from the Montreal one.

There followed further disagreements between Stuart and Kelly. Stuart had already said that the work of propitiation was accomplished in Heaven after the resurrection. This gave rise to when the Lord Jesus became a High Priest. Perhaps this dispute was also over mere semantics yet some claimed that this was vital doctrine and Stuart was accused of being in gross doctrinal error.

The next division was in 1890. This became known as the Bexhill- Greenwich controversy or the Raven schism. J B Stoney, like Darby before him, was educated as a barrister and they had become close friends. For over sixty years Stoney was a leading figure in the brethren movement but in his last years had developed mystical views while confined with an illness. He said that he saw visions of bright lights which he claimed was celestial glory. One of Stoney's friends was F E Raven who was even more mystical than Stoney and probably influenced by him.

Raven's unguarded comments on several issues were ill-advised.

He denied that Christ was both God and man.

At a meeting in Witney in 1888 some of Raven's teachings were called into question.

One of the leaders in this investigation was J H Lowe who objected strongly to some of Raven's teachings including the question as to when a believer receives eternal life. Raven's vagueness as to the Divine and human natures in Christ were also criticised. Again the debates seem to be about words and secondary issues and perhaps this matter was dealt with without adequate prayerful consideration. Raven left the Greenwich meeting and with some of his friends joined the meeting in Bexhill. Later Raven stated that Christ was not personally man but the Logos in Human form. Kelly found this unacceptable and therefore agreed with Lowe and others. On the other hand C H Mackintosh went along with the Park Street meeting which exonerated Raven and did not accept that Bexhill receiving Raven was schismatic. Consequently, Raven took over from Stoney the leadership position once held by Darby. It was a time of great confusion, hasty actions, obvious impatience and intolerance.

There was trouble at a meeting in Ainwick, Northumberland. On 4 January 1905, nineteen members of the meeting at Green Bat Hall were locked out of the meeting and so they appealed for help from the meeting nearest to them which was at Glanton.

The Alnwick problem largely stemmed from a meeting with four brethren in a private house and not in the meeting room. These brethren felt that another four brethren in the meeting had for eighteen months sowed seeds of division and confusion and that they should be removed

Glanton replied that they felt that they could not break bread with either group over this sorrowful business. Because of these troubles these nineteen members were not accepted elsewhere. There were efforts to seek reconciliation. The issues became very complex and outside the scope of this brief essay.

In 1908 the Raven party split again. The issue this time was simple. How should simple believers be advised or treated when an assembly disbanded due to the ill-behaviour of its overseers, elders by another name. Overseers and elders can behave badly, unwisely and unscripturally.

The Glanton meeting were concerned about this. The London meeting excommunicated them for caring for young believers and highlighting a problem! Obviously, London believed that the decision of elders was binding even if wrong!

The Bexhill party had a division in 1909 concerning whether the overseers of an assembly could silence a brother from ministering the Word when some thought his ministry was unprofitable. Mr C Strange's ministry was enjoyed in Acton, London but when he moved to Tunbridge Wells not everyone enjoyed his ministry. This Mr Strange was considered to have become difficult in his advanced years and some thought he was eccentric and that he suffered from lapses of memory. Whether Tunbridge Wells treated him well initially we do not know but bitterness developed.

A Mr Sibthorpe discussed this problem with a visiting brother, Mr R J Kell. Subsequently a meeting was held where Mr Strange and Mr Sibthorpe met face to face. Mr Kell found in favour of Mr Strange. But the trouble did not go away. Tensions increased between the Sibthorpe and Strange families. At an assembly meeting ten out of twenty one agreed that Mr Strange should not take audible part in the meetings. Six of the ten belonged to the Sibthorpe family. To Mr Strange's credit he respected the wishes of the meeting but continued to come but was silent. But in 1907 three members disallowed him breaking bread. Mr Sibthorpe wrote a letter calling Mr Strange an anti-Christ, a very severe comment whereas others called Mr Sibthorpe a confessed slanderer. He retorted by saying that the assembly met in his room at 41 York Road. The pressure being so great Mr Stange and a few supporters then met in his daughter's house in the High Street.

A further split took place in Tunbridge Wells in 1917. A brother in the meeting in Ilford went to prison for being drunk and committing a sexual offence. Another brother was rebuked for keeping company with the offender after he had been released from prison. The problem was whether the offender should be readmitted to the assembly. Brethren in the Kingsland Road meeting in London wrote to Ilford to ask whether this man was truly repentant and if he could be restored to break bread. Ilford replied that they were satisfied that he was indeed repentant and so he was received again. Kingsland Road was not happy with this reply and refused to have fellowship with Ilford until the matter was resolved to their satisfaction.

The Raven meeting split again in 1920 over the teachings of the American James Taylor who had risen to power and was considered to be Raven's successor. Objections were made to Taylor's teachings on the book of Revelation. Taylor did not accept that chapters two and three gave a chronological history of the church from Pentecost until the rapture.

In 1928 there was a split in Philadelphia. C J Grant and C A Mory were business partners. When Mory audited the books he found discrepancies and sought advice from the assembly in Philadelphia. Grant was found guilty of serious fraud. Two brethren, Booth and Ridout, decided that a rebuke was all that was required. Grant confessed his wrong but continued to justify his actions. The assembly made no

decision. At the same time James Boyd taught that the Lord Jesus had no human spirit. Mory and a few supporters separated and became the Mory brethren. In 1953 they merged with the Kelly brethren. In fact, around this time, many groups of brethren settled their differences and amalgamated.

In 1932, the Grant brethren split. Many left to join the open brethren. The question was over the question of each assembly being independent.

Yet again the Raven meeting divided. This was in 1929 over the teachings of Taylor who seemingly denied the eternal Sonship of Christ. The dispute was again over semantics. No Christian would deny the Deity of Christ or that He is eternal as is the Father and the Holy Spirit. But before creation and in the days of the Old Testament was this Divine One, who was to be born of a Virgin and become a man, known as Son? In the time of Abraham was he known in Heaven as Christ? We read in the Scriptures that the Eternal Word became flesh. We do not read that in the Old Testament times He was known as the Christ although, of course, He was destined from eternity past to be that.

There is a lot of false information given today about the brethren.

It is said that J N Darby was the originator of the Exclusive Brethren. They may be true in that he separated from the Open Brethren but it must not be taken that the Exclusives of today are Darbyites. Darby would have strongly disapproved of a lot of teaching that has arisen since his death in 1882 and some of that teaching arose very soon after his death.

As with the Catholics and their selection of respective Popes, there has been a curious handing down of leadership in the Exclusives since the death of Darby from F.E. Raven through the Taylors and up to J Hales who died in 2002 and the leadership has passed to his son Bruce. There are some cases where the Exclusives are now making compensation payments to those they consider that they may have wronged but in some meetings leaders are being called priests.

Darby would not have agreed with the Calvinistic views held by some later Exclusives particularly the nonsense that Old Testament believers were saved in the same way as people are today and that there was a church in the Old Testament where salvation in the finished work of Christ was then available

The other commonly held but equally false notion is that the Open Brethren still hold to Newton's views that Christ in taking on sinful flesh could sin. That is simply not true. I have been with Open Brethren for thirty years and not met anyone who subscribes to that view.

There are people who believe that Exclusives are Plymouth Brethren. That is also untrue.

Once error crept into the Exclusives and was unchecked one would expect a decline.

When Raven died in 1903, and, as we have said, James (Jim) Taylor took over the leadership of the Exclusives. He was born in County Sligo, Ireland, in 1870 but emigrated to the USA. He believed in separation and in 1929 he said that Jesus Christ was not the Eternal Son of God.

It may be wise to repeat some facts. This is not an easy issue. The Trinity is eternal and therefore the three that make up the trinity are eternal. They are also Divine. God all three. All three God. Yet we read that the Eternal Word became flesh and therefore became a man. The Hebrew epistle says that He inherited a name and that name is Son. If he were known as the Son from the beginning He could not have inherited or been given a name that was already His. We read of the Eternal Word in the Scriptures but we do not read of the Eternal Son although it is accepted that all three in the trinity are Divine and Eternal. Is this what Taylor meant? The Eternal Word became flesh, became a man, was born as a Baby in Bethlehem. Was He a man of flesh in the days of Abraham or Isaiah? Of course not; otherwise the scriptures would not say that He became flesh.

But Taylor did not say this. He said that when Jesus was born He was not God. That is blasphemous. Taylor implied that Jesus only received Divinity when He was 12 and in the Temple or when He was baptised by John. That is nonsense. He was the Eternal Word that existed before Abraham. He did not become God. He was God and always God.

Taylor perpetrated another serious doctrinal error, an error which the Pentecostals and charismatics still perpetuate. Taylor said that the Holy Spirit reveals new truths which the apostles knew nothing about Therefore the Bible is incomplete since God had left out things essential to our knowledge of Him. That is also blasphemous. He also said that he was God's elect servant and that it was a sin to reject new truths that the Lord had revealed to Him as His special servant. In this, the nonsense of the infallibility of the Pope bears a comparison. In Pentecostal and charismatic churches, particularly with the erroneous speaking in tongues, people are hoodwinked into believing God has special servants to whom truth is revealed for the first time in prophecies and new manifestations of the Spirit. This is especially used in the fraudulent speaking in tongues; many examples of such fraud could be listed here.

It is all down to control.

Taylor was claimed to be God's sole representative on earth just as the Pope is so named as the Vicar of Christ. Every member of any Exclusive assembly had to submit to Taylor's teachings or they would be excommunicated, or, to use their term, 'put out of fellowship'.

This was a type of clericalism which the original brethren wanted to eradicate.

He also introduced the praying to the Holy Spirit which has no authority in the Scriptures.

He was also strict on the submission of women as taught in the New Testament that they should always wear long dresses or skirts to maintain modesty and at no time show their thighs unless in essential medical circumstances. I agree with this because it is clear Biblical teaching. But he went too far with how the women should wear their hair. The Bible teaches women having their heads covered so that the hair is not completely seen. How they wore it thus seems superfluous.

There was also a teaching that women should not cut their hair. And I had an embarrassing experience which caused me to discover that this rule also referred to body hair. When it was unfortunately made known that I had accidentally seen this, the young woman concerned was 'put out of fellowship' for this yet it was a misfortune and involved an aggressive child who had to be picked up in an attempt to control or comfort it and its foot caught in her skirt..

Taylor died in 1953 and six years later his son, another James, took over the leadership of the Exclusives. He introduced the doctrine that you could not have a meal with anyone over the age of 12 if they were not in an Exclusive assembly. This caused dreadful damage. It tore families and loved ones apart and it is certainly anti-scriptural.

But he went further. Children were not allowed to eat school dinners but could take a packed lunch or have a meal at the home of some Exclusives. Fishermen in Scotland who were Exclusive brethren could not eat with crew members who were not Exclusives and special tables were reserved for the Exclusives. This was also ridiculous.

About 8,000 left the Taylor brethren as a result of these absurd rules which have no endorsement in Scripture.

It did not stop there. Exclusives were told who they were to marry and, of course, it had to be another Exclusive. They were told how many children they could have and there were strict rules as to what activities the children were allowed to engage in at school. Further education, college and university

were not allowed. You could not use a computer. You could not have professional qualifications. You could not belong to a Trade Union or any other body even if it were a charitable concern. You should have the minimum contact with people who were not Exclusives. If you lived in an apartment building you could not share a front door with an unbeliever. You were forbidden to tell a relative who was not an Exclusive of the death or funeral of a family member in the Exclusives.

But you were allowed to drink alcohol, and whisky and gin were recommended. In the 1960s Taylor began making vulgar and lewd remarks in his addresses and some said that this was due to his drinking. His remarks became sexual and it was being said that he had an appetite for drink, women and sex.

In July 1970 Taylor travelled to Britain to take some meetings. He was drinking heavily and excusing himself by saying that alcohol was a pleasure God had given and so it was not wrong. From many a platform he cracked jokes, some of a very disgraceful nature. He entertained and made his audiences laugh. His father would not have approved. He made sexual remarks as to how Adam would look at naked Eve.

While staying in Aberdeen he had sex with a married woman and with the husband's apparent consent. At a meeting he made absurd gestures while a brother was praying, made abusive remarks about some of the people present and told dirty stories.

Stanley McCallum, Mr Taylor's second in command, accompanied by another brother walked into the bedroom in his host's house and found Taylor in bed with this married woman who was naked; The two brethren asked Taylor if his behaviour was right. He replied that it was and said that he expected the two brethren to report this to Irene, his wife.

The brethren at Aberdeen acted and withdrew from Taylor and reported these incidents to Exclusives worldwide where care meetings were held. Taylor produced alternative versions of events and the assemblies did not know who to believe. Taylor said that the woman had come into his room to wash his tired feet and that her husband had suggested that she give him a massage regularly and, furthermore, other women in various venues had offered him this service as well.

More people left the Exclusives who were now known as Taylor brethren. Those who stayed in the Taylor groups were known as Jims.

When Taylor died the leadership passed to James Harvey Symington. He introduced other rules. There was ban on any technology that used electromagnetic waves including remote garage door openers. Facsimile machines were banned. When some Taylor brethren visited me during Symington's leadership they said that television was banned. They were undecided about the radio. They said that I could not keep certain pets. When I asked about the stories of Jim Taylor's drunkenness they became angry and said that if I did not withdraw that remark they would leave at once. All sport was banned. I asked them about times of meetings which they were reluctant to give but eventually told me that the breaking of bread meeting was at 6 am on a Sunday and that meetings went on non-stop throughout Sunday. I asked why the meeting had no notice board outside or words of welcome. I was told that on some Sundays there were no meetings but that the whole fellowship would travel miles to another venue to have fellowship. I asked why all the windows of the meeting room were boarded up. I was told that this was to prevent any distractions in the holy place. They were rather dismissive of J N Darby and his teachings saying that they had moved on from there.

The next leader was John Stephen Hales who eliminated small meetings and removed other Taylor meetings both from South Africa and India to eliminate the expense of both visiting these meetings and supporting them. He made up a schedule of meetings and presided over the finances of all the assemblies. All Exclusives meeting were Taylor meetings although to confuse the issue there are some Exclusive meetings known as the Kelly brethren, after William Kelly, but they do not have extreme

ideas. They are conservative evangelicals.

At one Exclusive conference Hales was presented as the personification of the Holy Spirit.

One can only lament at such things and, sadly, we have to say that modern Exclusives are unkind and even cruel. Some of their leaders call themselves priests and are not allowed to wear ties!

Let us, by comparison, consider some of these early Exclusive Brethren.

John Vesey Parnall. He studied at Edinburg University (what would modern Exclusives say to that?). He became Lord Congleton. With Anthony Norris Groves he went as a missionary to Baghdad and to India returning to England where he continued to help people not only by preaching the Gospel but in many practical ways.

William Trotter wrote many articles in a simple style for people to read and understand. He also wrote a booklet about the Bethesda trouble with a view to reconciliation of this dispute. He was diplomatic and not autocratic as modern day Exclusives are.

George Vicesimus Wigram was the twentieth child of Sir Robert Wigram, a merchant and ship owner and G V Wigram was converted as a soldier in the Army. He spent his money on preparing an Englishman's Concordance. He edited a hymn book in 1856 and, although he was scholarly, he was a humble and gentle man, nothing like the Exclusives of today.

John Gifford Bellett had a fine education at Exeter Grammar School. Although he was associated with J N Darby he always regarded himself as a layman. Unlike the modern Exclusives, he would preach in any church and his ministry was well-received. Like Darby, he initially went to University to study law.

John Nelson Darby broke away from the established church and, with others, sent up the simple form of brethren worship. He rejected clericalism and advocated the unity of all true believers. He did not believe in church hierarchy. He was a tireless worker of the Gospel and Bible Ministry and, although there were divisions among the Brethren over doctrine and practice, he would help anyone whether a believer or not. Hundreds of his letters have been published which shows he was a caring man and, like the Lord, mixed with all kinds of people. He was not judgmental.

And so, all these books and articles linking the early exclusive brethren with these modern day Exclusives is misleading and wrong and calling into dispute these godly men of the past.

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