

the
Fourth Generation

Bud Morris

www.BudMorris.net

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Morton C. (Bud) Morris
800 East Eighth Street
Delavan, Illinois 61734-9316
(309) 244-7471

bud@BudMorris.net

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Introduction

If you were to ask me if this narrative is true, I would reply that it is my perception of the truth. I was born and raised a fairly typical product of the NHH branch of what is generally known as the Tunbridge-Wells (TW) division of the Exclusive Brethren. I have attempted to show you where these Brethren came from, and have walked you through my life to help you understand what they have become.

The Brethren have influenced fundamental Christianity more than you may have realized. C.H. MacIntosh's Notes on the Pentateuch, W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, and H.A. Ironside's popular Christian writings are found in many church libraries. The venerated Scofield Reference Bible had a Brethren author. U.S. News and World Report (November 19, 1990 pp 66-67) credits fundamental Christianity's expectation of the Rapture and the following Tribulation to the "Teachings of John Nelson Darby." The non-sectarian approach of many Bible Churches is probably a spin-off from the Brethren Movement.

In all fairness, I should explain that no division of the Brethren can be fairly characterized by any other, and there is considerably more variation among the Opens than the Exclusives. The TWs are the largest Exclusive group in North America.

Finally, I would like for you to know that my tears stain the manuscripts of this chronicle. My heart's desire and prayer for the Brethren is that their eyes would be opened, that they would realize that they are not what they started out to be, and they would find their way back to the Scriptural basis of their heritage.

*Sincerely,
Bud Morris*

Prologue

A barely audible sob from the other side of the bed woke me from my fitful sleep. Sliding my arm under my wife's shoulders, I rolled over and kissed the salty tears from her cheek. Not a word was needed as I folded her close to myself. My sympathy intensified into a passion that displaced our anguish, and we both slept. We were part of the Fourth Generation.

Superlative God

God surpasses comprehension,
Overwhelming every doubt;
How unsearchable His judgments,
And His ways past finding out.
No one fully grasps the wonder
Of His covenant to save;
But His love which passes knowledge
Brought our Savior to the grave.

By the death and resurrection
Of Incarnate Deity,
He provides a great salvation,
Offers Sovereign clemency.
Peace which passes understanding,
Access to the Holy Place,
Joy unspeakable with glory,
Are the riches of His grace.

What a great and precious promise!
In the twinkling of an eye,
We'll be changed into His likeness
When we see Him in the sky.
Eyes and ears have not encountered,
Human hearts cannot conceive,
Nor could any language utter,
What His loved ones will receive.

Praise the God who deigned to save us,
Who has made our care His task,
Who is able to accomplish
More than we can think or ask.
Praise Him for the sacred mystery
Of Revealed Divinity.
Bow in humble adoration
Of the gracious Trinity.

1) THE FIRST GENERATION

"Because you have done well in executing what is right in my eyes,.. Your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." (2 Kings 10:30, NASB)

A generation is distinguished from its contiguous generations by the characteristic attitudes that determine its behavior.

Edward Cronin was born in Cork, Ireland in 1801. He was obviously a conscientious Christian when he came to Dublin for his health around 1825. The various Congregational churches in Dublin gladly received him for communion as a visitor, but when he established residency as a medical student there, they demanded that he join any one of their several congregations for regular communion.

The concept of church membership bothered Mr. Cronin. The Scriptures stressed that there was only one body, and he was already a member of it. He could not join any faction within the body of Christ without contributing to the practical division of it. When he did not comply, he was publicly renounced by one of the Independent congregations in 1826. He began meeting for Bible study and prayer in the home of Mr. Edward Wilson, the secretary of the Bible Society, who had objected to his excommunication. They soon began taking the Lord's Supper together, and were shortly joined by a few others.

Anthony Norris Groves was born in England in 1795. Although he was a very successful dentist, he gave up his practice to study for ordination as a foreign missionary. But studying the Bible led him to question the whole concept of ordination. He came to the conclusion that believers "Should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or minister, but trusting that the Lord would edify *them* together, by ministering as He pleased and saw good from the midst of *themselves*."

J.G. Bellett was born in Dublin in 1795. Francis Hutchinson was born in 1802. They shared similar spiritual perspectives including a mutual disenchantment with the Established Church. They visited the various dissenting churches together, and were as disappointed with the intellectual approach of the dissenters as they were with the official pretensions of the Establishment. Acting on Mr. Groves' proposal that no human authorization was necessary, they began communing together in the Breaking of Bread at Mr. Hutchinson's home in 1827, without any ecclesiastical pretensions at all. They welcomed all who loved the Lord in sincerity, being careful not to meet at times that would exclude them by conflicting with their regular church schedules.

John Nelson Darby was born in London in 1800. He was a gold medalist in classical studies at Trinity College in Dublin, and was converted to Christ while studying Law. He could not personally reconcile the life style of a lawyer with his convictions, and opted for ordination as an Anglican clergyman in Ireland.

Mr. Darby's ordination appears to have amounted to a search for inner peace through consecration to the service of Christ. In October of 1827 Mr. Darby's horse threw him, and he went to his brother's house to recuperate. While studying the Word of God during this involuntary repose, his soul finally grasped the Christian's place as one with Christ before God. The issue was no longer what he was trying to be, but what he already was in Christ. He now understood that the Church consisted of every true believer in Christ, all united to Christ as their head in heaven, and baptized by the Holy Spirit into a single indivisible body--the very body of Christ--on earth. Why, then, were Christians divided into so many factions on earth?

Cronin, Bellett, Hutchinson, Groves, and Darby were well known to each other. Their ecclesiastic viewpoints were obviously similar, and each undoubtedly influenced the others in those first faltering steps of the newborn Brethren Movement. Cronin's concern for the practical unity of the body of Christ, Bellett and Hutchinson's disenchantment with the official pretensions of the Establishment, Groves' belief that the Holy Spirit should be free to minister through the congregation without human officiation, and Darby's apprehension of the heavenly character and calling of the church, were all complimentary concepts that blended together into a refreshingly Scriptural ecclesiastic ideology.

By the year 1828, or possibly 1829, Dr. Cronin, Mr. Bellett, Mr. Hutchinson, and Mr. Darby were all gathering simply in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to Break Bread together. The initial objective of this new generation of Christian brethren was simply the satisfaction of their own spiritual longings and needs. And they were not entirely alone, for rumor has it that similar steps were being taken by other Christians throughout much of Europe.

From the first, the "Brethren" determined that they would have no constitution or catechism other than the Word of God. They consciously strove to set aside human opinion and prejudice, and earnestly searched their Bibles for personal and ecclesiastical guidance. They believed the Holy Spirit could show them the answer to every question through the Scriptures, and virtually everything they advocated was derived from their sincere interpretation of the Word of God. They considered the Scriptures on early church procedure to be the divine pattern for ecclesiastic protocol for all times.

They differed from others in that:

- 1) They were non-sectarian. They deliberately refused to become a separately identifiable faction within the Body of Christ. They fellowshiped together on an equal basis with whatever other reasonably godly Christians cared to be there at the moment. They refused to take any name that would distinguish them from the rest of the Body of Christ. They rejected the concept of membership, and welcomed all Christians who did not disqualify themselves by sin according to the Scriptures.

- 2) They were unpretentious. They did not consider themselves anything official. They didn't claim to be God's approved Church or any other kind of an official Church. They didn't rally on the basis of any specific ecclesiastical or doctrinal consensus, except that they were fellow members of the Body of Christ behaving uprightly. Their authority for meeting was simply the Lord's promise of Matthew 18:20, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* They were nothing but some Christian brethren who met together according to the Scriptures.
- 3) They refused any human organization. They did not find a specific minister for any congregation mentioned in the Scriptures. Individuals were expected to more or less defer to the obvious spiritual elders among them as recognized by the criteria in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They did not officially appoint Elders because there was no specific mechanism by which to do so in the Bible. They recognized the priesthood of all believers, and relied on the Holy Spirit to lead the worship through the entire congregation. *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ Jesus."* (1 Peter 2:5). Although they had many addresses from various gifted and mature brothers, their other meetings were conducted according to the open format of 1 Corinthians 14.
- 4) They partook of the Lord's Supper every Sunday, citing Acts 20:7 as their cue: *"Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..."*(KJV). They considered the Breaking of Bread a remembrance meeting for the collective worship of the Lord, and a symbol of Christian unity. They distinguished between worship, which magnifies the Lord and ministry, which edifies the congregation.
- 5) They expected the Lord to return and take His people to heaven momentarily. *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13, KJV.) Though it is plainly asserted in Scriptures like 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, the immediate hope of the Lord's coming was not generally anticipated before the Brethren popularized it.

The evangelical zeal, personal godliness, and Scriptural protocol of this little group were apparently just what many Christians hungered for. They grew rapidly, and soon spread from Ireland to England, and on throughout much of Europe. And although they steadfastly refused any name that would define them as a separate entity from the rest of the body of Christ, others bequeathed the title of "Plymouth Brethren" on them, derived from the large "Meeting" at Plymouth, England. The Brethren Movement became a spiritual oasis for multitudes of desert-weary Christians.

WHAT CHRISTIANS HAVE COME TO

Hebrews 12:22-24 & 28

We are authorized to gather
In our Saviors precious name,¹
Meeting as repentant sinners
Cleansed from every trace of blame.²
So we gladly take our places
In the sacred realms above,³
Seated at our Saviors table,
Feasting on our Fathers love;
And we sing the songs of Zion
In the city of our God,
Robed in spotless wedding garments
Garnered from the worlds sod.⁴

When the saints of God assemble,
Angels see a grand display
Of the wisdom He exhibits
Through His people in this way,⁵
For we join the whole assembly
Of the Fathers firstborn Son,
While the archives of the ages
Tout the victories they've won;⁶
And we come with holy boldness
To the Judge of all the earth,⁷
With the spirits of the righteous
Perfected through their rebirth.⁸

Gathered joyfully to Jesus,⁹
Willing knees begin to bow,
Grateful that His blood is sprinkled
In the sanctuary now;¹⁰
For the covenant He brokered
Is forgiveness from our sin,
With Gods holiness implanted
In us when were born again.¹¹
So with gratitude we praise Him
For the blessings He imparts,
While such heavenly communion
Renders worship from our hearts.¹²

1) Matthew 18:20

2) 1 Corinthians 6:11

3) Ephesians 2:6

4) Revelation 21:2 & 19:7-8

5) Ephesians 3:10 & 1 Corinthians 11:10

6) Malachi 3:16

7) Hebrews 10:19-25

8) 1 John 3:9

9) Genesis 49:10 (KJV)

10) Hebrews 9:19-28

11) Hebrews 10:15-18

12) Hebrews 13:15

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5

2) ROOTS

I was born in the Third Generation of what is commonly known as the Tunbridge-Wells (TW) division of the Exclusive Brethren.

My mother met up with the Brethren when she was a teenager. She was impressed by a neighbor's Sunday School paper, and brought it to her father. He declined to read it at first, suspecting it to be Jehovah's Witness literature. But Mother insisted that it was "Just what we Baptists believe," until the old man grudgingly read it over. He was enthused enough to attend the humble services down the street and investigate its origin.

Grandfather was ecstatic with the little Open Brethren Assembly in St. Louis. He soon declared it to be the "Old fashioned Baptist" going under a different name. The family was soon enjoying happy Christian fellowship at the North End Gospel Hall. But my grandfather was not well, and didn't live very much longer.

Disaster soon struck the North End Gospel Hall. A couple of supercilious young girls accused one of the truly godly Elders there of an unholy relationship with a female communicant. The whole congregation was soon embroiled in consternation and conflict. The Christian fellowship of the place disintegrated.

It was at the lowest ebb of things at the North End Gospel Hall that my mother met up with a couple of young women from the Exclusive Brethren. They worked at Bible Truth Depot, the main publishing house of the TW division of Exclusives. They were truly dedicated Christians whose conservative demeanor contrasted strikingly with the young culprits of the North End Gospel Hall fiasco. Mother was absolutely enamored with their consecration to the Lord, their knowledge of the Scriptures, and the dignity of their Exclusive serenity. She began attending their meetings, and was eventually "Received" into fellowship by their Assembly.

Mother was sent on a business trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma, while still a fledgling Exclusive. It was during the Great Depression, and my father had found summer employment at the soda fountain of the hotel where she happened to stay. After a whirlwind courtship, they were married within a month. I question whether he was even born again at the time, but if not, he was shortly, because he was soon received into Exclusive fellowship. I was born their second of four sons in 1940.

My parents took up residence in Tulsa. They met with a small group of their division of Exclusives in a home there. They also became acquainted with a small group of Opens that met in another home nearby. Although they broke bread with the Exclusives, they

attended meetings at both places for a while. This, of course, was unacceptable to the Exclusives, who solved their problem with this ignorant young couple by changing their schedule to coincide with the Opens so they couldn't go to both places.

As the nation finally began shaking off the Depression, my father landed a good job in the field of his education as a chemical engineer. His giant employer had offices all over the country. Mother joked that she was willing to go anywhere with him except Borger, Texas. She had been there once on business, and thought it was the most desolate place in the world. Sure enough, within a month they were on their way to Borger where Dad would help develop synthetic rubber for tires for World War Two.

There was no Exclusive Meeting in Borger. The folks tried the Baptist Church, but their hearts were with the Brethren. They wrote Mr. Clifford Brown, the unofficial guru of the TW/NHH Meetings in the U.S.A., and explained their predicament. He came to visit them. He was a small man with a long skinny neck that made his head appear several sizes too large, and he spoke with the authority of an old school teacher. He suggested that they start an Assembly in their home, but my father just didn't feel competent to conduct a Breaking of Bread meeting all alone. Brother Brown explained that it didn't have to be formal affair. He advised them just to clear the table after breakfast on Lord's Day, and the two of them remember the Lord together with a loaf of bread and a glass of wine. The two years my parents spent in Texas became a virtual spiritual feast for both of them, with only an occasional visit from other Brethren during their whole time of "Isolation."

I remember little of our ecclesiastical experiences in Texas. Mother was an enthusiastic evangelical Christian, and we frequently passed out gospel tracts from Bible Truth Depot as we walked to the grocery store. I remember that a couple of visits from other Brethren were very happy highlights of our time there, but my immature mind that still confused Hitler with Superman didn't really comprehend why. I'll always cherish the memory of my mother singing "In Heavenly Love Abiding," as she went about her housework. Dad was transferred to the rubber capital in Akron, Ohio when I was five years old.

3) ASSEMBLY LIFE

The Exclusive Meeting in Akron was a vibrant place. Seven or eight families and a couple of widows met in a adequately converted old grocery store building. Several of the men were rubber executives. They could have afforded better accommodations, but I believe they preferred the non-pretentiousness of where they were.

It was my first experience in Christian fellowship, and it was a genuinely rich one. Folks would linger interminably after the meetings, just chatting together. Someone was always having someone else over for dinner, especially on Sundays. Any squabbles, and I'm sure there must have been some, were hushed and forgotten long before we children found out about them. To my mind, it was a veritable Utopia.

We started with Sunday School on Lord's Day morning. After the opening singing, the children went downstairs to their age-gaited classes while the adults stayed upstairs to enjoy the Word of God together. Quite a few families brought neighbor children to hear the gospel, which swelled our ranks a mite. They were generally taken home when Sunday School was over so we could concentrate more fully on the Breaking of Bread.

The Breaking of Bread was a worship meeting. A simple table was set in the center of the room with a single loaf of bread on a plate, a goblet of wine, and a collection box. Every adult brother was free to contribute to the worship as the Holy Spirit led, avoiding any exhortation that might interrupt the worship until after the remembrance feast was over. There was absolutely no prearrangement or human leadership, and there was no confusion, either, although the silent periods could occasionally stretch considerably too long. The meeting often developed a theme as neatly as anyone could have planned.

This weekly meeting always started with a hymn, sung a capella. No instrumental music of any kind was ever used in any Assembly meeting. Various brothers continued announcing hymns of praise, reading appropriate Scriptures, or pouring out their hearts to the Lord in prayers of thanksgiving and profound worship. The intensity of the worship eventually climaxed as one brother would go up to the table, give thanks for the loaf, break it down the center, and pass it on to the congregation. Each person in fellowship pinched off a piece of bread and began eating it as he passed the plate on to the next communicant. When the loaf had made its circle and was returned to the table, the same brother who had given thanks for it went back to the table to give thanks for the cup. The wine (or grape juice in some congregations) was passed along the same way as the loaf had been, each communicant taking a sip from the common cup. There was generally a slight pause after the cup was returned to the table before the collection plate was passed to the communicants only, without any comment whatsoever. The remainder of the meeting was open for the ministry of the Word by anyone who felt led to speak for a few minutes. Sometimes a couple of brothers would stand by their chairs and speak before the meeting was closed, generally with a hymn

but always with prayer. The solemnity of the service bore mute testimony that we really believed the Lord Himself was there in our midst, and He was!

Despite our open format, the admonition for women to keep silent in the church was taken literally. (I Corinthians 14:34 & 35). Women would never consider opening their mouths at any official Assembly meeting except to join in the singing. They also complied literally with the Scriptural exhortation for longer hair and head coverings. (I Corinthians 11:3-16). Every woman was expected to wear a head covering of some sort in every meeting. The actual length of hair was generally left to the individual's own discretion, although there was a minor division in the Meeting during my childhood when a German Assembly refused to receive some sisters in fellowship in Britain who had their hair bobbed.

Several families frequently spent Sunday afternoon together. But there were no cliques. We were as likely to be at one family's home as another, or they might be at our's. The adults generally sat around and discussed spiritual topics, or had a Bible reading together while the younger children played. We weren't allowed to get too rambunctious on the "Lord's Day." If the adults didn't get together, we kids would frequently connive to go to each other's homes for the afternoon. We were a close-knit group, and we reveled in it.

There was always a Gospel Meeting Sunday evenings. A pre-determined brother prepared a message, primarily evangelical, but sometimes more for our edification in Christ. We started with a hymn or two, and the message stretched the meeting to about an hour in length. I quickly learned the meaning of "Gift," as some of the local brothers had a lot more of it than others did.

We had a "Reading Meeting" on Tuesday evenings, and a Prayer Meeting Thursday evenings. Both these meetings followed the open format of the Breaking of Bread, with all brothers being free to speak up as they were led by the Holy Spirit. Almost everyone attended them, although a couple of families were noticeably more lax than the rest of us were.

The Reading Meeting was our weekly Bible study, but tradition forbade us to speak of studying the Bible. Studying produced head knowledge, but we wanted the Word of God deep in our hearts. The "Systems" had their seminaries and Bible schools where the Word of God was studied, but somehow they were never able to come to a knowledge of the "Truth." So we were careful not to study the Word as we poured over it Book by Book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and word by word. We covered each Book of the Bible we took up in such detail that it took months to finish it; and I found that we were much better versed in the Scriptures than most of our non-Brethren acquaintances that studied it.

During the summer months the men and older children also got together biweekly, or perhaps it was monthly, for "Street Meetings." We gathered for prayer on Saturday

evening, and then determined which of the surrounding communities to go to for an open-air service. We generally stood on a street corner and sang hymns until some passerbys would stop to watch. One brother at a time would step forward with his Bible and preach a mini gospel sermon. We'd intersperse a lot of singing to keep up the interest. We kids would saturate the area with gospel tracts while the brothers preached. Sometimes people would get angry at the message, or just the noise, and try to yell us down. Always, we left the sidewalk littered with gospel tracts that, like as not, people assumed was Jehovah's Witness literature.

Those who were free to do so used to go to the County Farm on a regular schedule too. This was the welfare farm, where the homeless and disabled were housed. The residents who were able farmed the grounds to help provide food for the rest. We would go there to sing and preach the gospel to these mostly aged folks who really appreciated this break in their monotonous lives. My own family did not seem as involved there as some of the others were.

Once a month was "Tea" meeting (Reflecting our British roots?). The whole crowd stayed together for a meal. I can't remember just which regularly scheduled meeting it was associated with. But I do remember that the food was as sumptuous as the fellowship was. I think the "Brother's Meeting," where the funds were allocated and other assembly matters were settled was probably held upstairs while the women fixed the food downstairs. The kids played outside until it was time to eat.

Besides all the regularly scheduled meetings, there were occasional special meetings when a "Laboring Brother" came through. These were generally gifted speakers who had been commended by their home assemblies to go full time in the Lord's work. According to Ephesians 4:8-16, gifts were to the whole church, so they traveled around among the "Lord's people" ministering His Word. There were no apostles in our day, but there were still evangelists, pastors, and teachers. And anyone could prophesy in the sense of building up the church. They were generally gifted enough speakers that I enjoyed listening to them, even as a child.

Mr. Harry Hayhoe was a "Laborer," and the undisputed pundit of the Canadian Assemblies. His daughter was married to a brother in our Assembly so we saw a fair amount of him. He was a smallish man with a powerful voice that boomed throughout the room. He gesticulated a lot as he spoke, and he frequently hit the flat of his fist on the podium for emphasis. Like the Apostle Paul, his speech was contemptible in a way. He had a peculiar habit of pausing in the middle of a sentence, loudly inhaling a huge breath, and exhaling it all in a short exaggerated wheeze that forcefully cleared his lungs. As I got older, I suspected that he could play this tic for special effects on occasion.

The Akron meeting hosted a general conference for several summers. All Assemblies in the U.S. and Canada were formally invited by letter. We rented a school auditorium for the meetings, which were attended by several hundred people including ourselves.

Meals were catered in to the school cafeteria with a lot of help from our own people. Visitors were housed in our homes, guest rooms for rent in private homes, or hotels and motels if there were too many for the available cheaper accommodations. Our family put up close to a dozen guests in our own beds and on folding army cots in the basement. Accommodations were not luxurious, but everything was provided from our local funds and the Sunday morning collection. Rich and poor alike could come, as the only individual expense was transportation to and from Akron, and I suspect that those who couldn't afford that were often invited to ride along with others from their home Assemblies. I understand now, that those who could afford it must have given quite generously on Sunday morning to help cover the expenses of the less fortunate.

These conferences were meant to be a spiritual feast. They were scheduled on a fairly standard format of a Prayer Meeting at about 9:00 AM followed by a one-and-a-half hour Reading Meeting at 10:30 AM. Dinner was followed by a Young Peoples Address by a pre-selected speaker at 2:00 PM, and there was a second Reading Meeting at 3:30 PM. There was always a Gospel Meeting after supper. Sunday's format substituted a childrens Sunday School meeting for the Prayer Meeting, and the Breaking of Bread for the morning Reading Meeting and an Address to Christians by a selected speaker for the afternoon one.

Although the conference Reading Meetings were conducted on the same open format as the regular ones were, there were always several "Laborers" present. They were highly esteemed, and the rest of the brothers deferred to them most of the time. In my childhood days it was generally Mr. Harry Hayhoe that picked the special passage for the day that we dutifully declined to "study;" and the meeting almost consisted of a dialogue between Harry Hayhoe and Clifford Brown, with occasional input from Armistead Barry and a few other respected brothers--mostly full time "Laborers."

I was genuinely ministered to at these meetings, even as a child. But one evening when Harry Hayhoe was preaching the gospel, the temptation got too great. My brother and I got carried away and began to mimic his gesticulations and peculiar huff from our seats in the balcony. I was totally chagrined when brought back to my senses by the sudden arrival of my horrifically humiliated mother. We were grounded for the rest of the summer despite our bona fide repentance.

4) ASSEMBLY DEATH

My father was transferred into plastics research and development when I was about eleven years old. We moved to Elyria, about fifty miles from Akron. By convention deviously derived from Deuteronomy chapter twenty-one, we had to go to the nearest recognized Assembly, which was twenty-five miles away in Cleveland.

The Cleveland Meeting consisted of an elderly established couple, a younger less conventional couple with a son about our age, a Czechoslovakian immigrant, and two ancient gentlemen. They met in the storefront end of a huge ancient brick tenement building. The plate glass windows had been curtained off; and a painted opaque glass placard displayed outside the curtain announced our schedule, except for the Breaking of Bread, without yielding the slightest hint of our identity. The twelve foot or higher ceiling was the old decorative embossed sheet metal block type that was antiquated even then. The old wooden chairs were arranged on a threadbare Persian rug which afforded some relief to our knees during prayer meeting. A couple of open-front vented gas heaters with the kind of ceramic reflectors that glowed red hot in the flame provided heat. There was no ventilation or air conditioning. There was a flush toilet and wash bowl in a dank basement bathroom at the bottom of a steep dusky stairwell. There were always long-legged spiders down there, because no one disturbed the area except during our meetings.

This small Meeting functioned on the schedule that virtually all our recognized Assemblies considered more or less basic. The Lord's Day consisted of Sunday school in the morning followed by the Breaking of Bread ending around noon, and a Gospel Meeting or Address in the evening. The Prayer and Reading meetings were combined on a week-day evening. We had to drive forty-five minutes each way, so both the Sunday and the week-night meetings pretty well used up a whole evening apiece. The elderly couple often asked us to Sunday dinner and supper at their home to save us the trip home and back again. My brothers and I considered them right next to family, which included taking their hospitality for granted.

The aged regulars came together week after week to Break Bread, pray, and reiterate the accepted Brethren viewpoints on the Scripture at hand. While everyone shuddered at the very idea of a creed or catechism, they all had a couple of shelves full of THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF J.N. DARBY and his SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE to prevent any disagreements about the right interpretation of the Scriptures. Although the doctrine was pretty well standardized, ingenuity was encouraged in its applications. I'll always remember how one old man used to illustrate why Christ had become a man. He loved to tell about the man who had accidentally damaged an anthill, and watched all the little creatures scurrying to carry their eggs safely out of his reach. "How could he have told them that he didn't mean them any harm?" he would ask. Then he would break out in the ecstasy of his point. "Oh, be an ant," he would cry with a beaming face, "Be an ant."

Cleveland had no viable outreach when we came there. My parents canvassed the huge old apartment complex that housed the meeting room, and persuaded a few children to try our Sunday School. One family came for several months, until one of them requested that we sing Jingle Bells during the opening exercises, just before Christmas. We pled an exaggerated ignorance rather than singing something so a-spiritual in Sunday School, and they quit coming. We supposed that they were miffed because we hadn't given them any Christmas presents, but that was the price of faithfulness. While we didn't consider it a sin to celebrate Christmas, we certainly weren't going to validate anything with such a heathen origin in any way, shape, or form in the Assembly.

After we had been at Cleveland for several years, another family of Brethren moved there. They had younger children than our family, but we were encouraged by the youthful replacements of our diminishing congregation that was literally dying off. Another older couple with a different Brethren background also started coming for a while, but their health failed and they weren't able to get out much. People came and went, but we never established any significant outreach that resulted in souls getting saved or brought to a knowledge of the "Truth."

The Cleveland Meeting struggled on for years after we left. Its elderly congregation completely died off, but the younger family hung on tenaciously to maintain the "Testimony" in the community. Other families came and went, and still they bravely persevered until they were conclusively all alone. The Assembly gasped its last when they finally gave up and began attending the closest recognized Assembly elsewhere. They were brave souls, totally committed to the Meeting in the face of virtual isolation from the rest of the Christian community.

5) ASSEMBLY BIRTH

While we were still going to Cleveland, a Baptist minister in New London, Ohio, about thirty-five miles from Elyria, became interested in the "Truth." He contacted the Akron Assembly, and a dialogue began. Some of his congregation followed hungrily as he pursued his investigation of the truths peculiar to the Brethren. Others locked him out of the Baptist parsonage and Church.

As the dialogue progressed with this now churchless group of enlightened Baptists, they detected the official presumptions of our group. One of them asked point blank if we believed that we were the only group that had the Lord in their midst according to Matthew 18:20. Everyone was quite disgusted that the wife of one of the negotiators emphatically confirmed this to be true, though every one of us down to the youngest school child believed it from the bottom of our hearts. I think the minister himself ended up with the Open Brethren, but one family began having Reading Meetings in their home with our Brethren and a couple of widow women. After some months of grounding these searching souls in the "Truth" (Or drowning them in our traditions) the Lord's Table was "Spread" in New London.

The newborn Assembly was too weak and shaky to stand on its own. Folks from Akron, and our family had gone regularly to the Reading Meetings there from the beginning. Their Breaking of Bread was scheduled in the afternoon so people from other assemblies could come and help. Besides going to Cleveland in the morning, we also went to New London in the afternoon. And I can personally assure those who say that the weekly remembrance of the Lord is so frequent that it could lose its preciousness, I broke bread twice a week for several years, and it became more precious to me all the time.

My mother had organized a children's Bible class in our home one afternoon a week after school. Needless to say, our schedule was getting rather heavy, and my parents were beginning to wear down. They finally decided to give up Cleveland, which couldn't seem to prosper anyway, and concentrate on our own community. But when they asked the folks in Cleveland for their fellowship in establishing a "Testimony" in Elyria, it was refused. The testimony in Cleveland was bound to suffer without us. It would be shameful to let a testimony to the Lord's name fail. No way!

We continued Breaking Bread in Cleveland and New London each Sunday for quite a while. But we gradually quit going to the midweek meeting in Cleveland, and eventually started having one in our own home. Then a family with two children about our ages from a recognized Canadian Assembly was transferred to Elyria. We children were ecstatic. The opposition in Cleveland relented when they saw that the biggest part of the Assembly would be driving in from Elyria, and we started Breaking Bread two weeks before the other family arrived. Someone from Cleveland had to come to Elyria that

first day, when the table was spread, to express their fellowship with us even though it was given so grudgingly. And the new family was miffed enough because we didn't wait for them so we could begin the Assembly together that our fellowship was never the quality that it should have been. I found out later that a laboring brother had advised my father to do this because of the alleged domineering personality of the new man. Just what was supposed to be gained either way still eludes me.

We Remember

Do this in remembrance of Me

Luke 22:19

We remember we were sinners,
And we all deserved to die;
We remember that you loved us,
From Your home beyond the sky;
We remember we were hopeless,
So You left your throne on high.
We remember, we remember
You **came**.

We remember they condemned You
Out of malice and deceit.
We remember nails were driven
Through Your holy hands and feet.
We remember God forsook You
Till our judgment was complete.
We remember, we remember
Your **shame**.

We remember why You suffered
On the cross of Calvary.
We remember that You bore our sins,
And died to set us free.
We remember that You rose again,
To reign eternally.
We remember, we remember
Your **fame**.

We remember You with bread and wine,
Just like You said to do.
We remember they're the emblems
Of our covenant with You.
We remember that they symbolize
Your blood and body too.
We remember, we remember
Your **name**.

6) GROWING UP IN THE MEETING

I can't remember a lot about my spiritual development before we moved to Akron. My older brother and I were genuinely saved at a very young age. I must have been about three or four years old when my mother told us the story of Samuel. She explained that she had dedicated us to the Lord in much the same way as Hannah had dedicated Samuel to Him. "Oh goodie," we exclaimed. "When are you going to take us up?"

After we came to Akron, my parents decided to have all of us children baptized. "Household" baptism was derived from Acts 16:15 & 35, and I Corinthians 1:16. It was looked at as the believing parents' appropriating God's sanctification of their children. (I Corinthians 7:14). Although it is not practiced by a majority of Brethren, it is the one major difference tolerated among the Exclusives, because the early Brethren had agreed to disagree on it. When Brother Brown was in town, the known sympathizers of the custom were invited to a private ceremony at our house, where we children were immersed in the bathtub after a discourse on baptism and a hymn or two.

The Meeting stressed the Christian family. Although wives were admonished to be subject to their husbands, the men were reminded that the Scriptures didn't authorize them to try to enforce compliance. The spare-the-rod-and-spoil-the-child philosophy of Proverbs was also well balanced with the Scriptural admonition for fathers not to provoke their children. Strong family ties were the rule, although there were some very overbearing husbands that seemed to flaunt their authority far beyond what God ever intended. A problem that developed in a few Assemblies was an obvious competition among certain young parents to be exemplary families, with undue burdens placed on some very young children.

From the time that we started to school, we read a chapter of the Word, discussed it briefly, and prayed around the little family circle every school day. We also worked on our weekly memory verse prescribed in the MESSAGES OF LOVE Sunday school paper during that time. Whenever anything unfortunate happened in the family, Mom was quick to point it out if we had failed to read and pray together that morning.

Our daily reading of the Bible and our regular attendance at virtually all the Assembly meetings established us reasonably well in the Lord, the Scriptures, and the Meeting traditions. Of course we accepted the standard interpretations of the Meeting without question, on all but the most insignificant details. We didn't exactly revere the King James version of the Bible, but we used it universally for consistency and because the later translations were thought to be laced with modernistic doctrines. We corrected its significant errors with the NEW TRANSLATION by Mr. Darby, who died in the 1880's. I always cringed when Mr. Darby's translation was mentioned in the meetings, lest any visitors might think we had translated the Bible our own way to substantiate our many contentions with the "Systems," as the Jehovah's Witnesses had.

My parents made it plain that we were not to get into trouble at school, and we rarely did. But once when my first or second grade teacher was out of the room I rolled a pea sized wad of cotton and school paste and flipped it with my thumb. I was afraid I was in trouble when the gooey missile stuck on the ceiling directly above my head, but it went unnoticed. A few weeks later the teacher spotted it and thought it was a spider egg sack. She knocked it down and put it in a jar for a science lesson. It never hatched and I never told why.

The Meeting stressed the heavenly character of the church. We were exhorted to obey the powers that be because they were ordained by God. But as citizens of heaven, we were taught not to vote. Most of the adults in the Meeting took no part in the world's politics--except, of course, to critique them from our heavenly viewpoint.

We were taught to distinguish between the things of the world and the things of God in early childhood. I never attended a movie theater, and probably never will. Pool was never even thought of. Bowling was considered worldly in the U.S.A., but I learned later that the young people in Canada often went bowling as a group. My own family tended to look at organized sports as self-glorification, and a distraction from the Lord's things. We played the same sports together, even at Sunday School picnics, but avoided any organized competition. A lot of others in our area felt similarly, but many from other areas competed freely in interscholastic sports.

Radios were not consider kosher in the Meeting in my childhood. When television became popular it was positively condemned. Very few people wanted these worldly things in their homes, and those who did were slow to buck the tide. I watched TV occasionally at other kids' homes, and even took a job in a TV repair shop after school; but I would have died of humiliation if my parents had bought one.

I sincerely concurred with practically all the things the Meeting deplored, and generally avoided them voluntarily. But a couple of times when I was about ten years old I tried smoking some cigarettes one of my friends swiped from his parents. I did inhale, but I got so choked up that I wished that I hadn't. And I repented despite the fact that my parents didn't find out about it for years. By the time I was a teenager, when a school chum asked me to go to an unapproved place, I replied that I didn't think Christians should do that. Several other unapproved activities were suggested, and I said that I couldn't do them either. "What **can** you do?" he queried disgustedly. But I remember feeling very strongly that I honestly didn't care to do such things because I belonged to Christ. We were dedicated Christians and devoted Plymouth Brethren, though we would never admit that to anyone.

I was aware that some things were carried a mite far. In my own family, whenever we purchased a board game that required the use of dice, we had to devise a way to play it without them. My older brother eventually made us an approved family spinner with all the number combinations available by chance with dice, so we could play all those games without touching the nasty little things. We weren't permitted to touch playing

cards either, although I saw as little difference between them and the game cards we did use as I saw between the dice and the spinner. Perhaps that's why so many Brethren never really learned how to call a spade a spade.

One night I was uncharacteristically unable to get to sleep. I finally crawled out of bed and sneaked downstairs to where my parents were totally engrossed in a conversation over coffee at the kitchen table. I slipped undetected under the table, and soon discovered that there were other groups of Brethren besides us. My parents were upset when they discovered my intrusion, but the cat was out of the bag. They explained that there were some Open Brethren who allowed Christians who weren't in fellowship to Break Bread with them. It sounded pretty good to me until they asserted that the Opens couldn't practice Assembly discipline because of their independence from each other. Anyone put out of one Assembly could supposedly just go Break Bread at another Assembly.

After we moved to Elyria, any Laboring Brothers that came through usually stayed in our home. One summer afternoon as we were awaiting the arrival of one of them our dog got killed by a car in front of the house. The old gentleman arrived to find our distraught mother trying to comfort our many tears. His understanding and his offer to preach a "Funeral" the following day will always be a cherished memory. Fifteen or twenty neighbor kids got a memorable reminder of the brevity of life and the need for salvation. And the tears at that funeral were tears of laughter as we listened to stories told as only J.R. Gill could tell them.

My youthful mind was shocked at the sacrilege when the woman that always brought the loaf for the Cleveland Breaking of Bread began passing the left over fragments out for us kids to eat after the meeting. But as I mulled over the options, I realized that throwing them in the garbage wasn't exactly respectful either. Ceremoniously burying them as the symbolic body of Christ was obviously inappropriate, and burning them was just too much like an Old Testament sacrifice. I came to the conclusion that any special mode of disposal of those fragments would only be adding ritual to our simple way of meeting that I believed was derived entirely from the Scriptures. I began accepting the snack with a better conscience.

When I was about thirteen years old, I decided that I was mature enough to "Take my place" at the Lord's Table. It was while we were still Breaking Bread at both Cleveland and New London. I approached my father about it, and he was agreeable. He discussed it with the Cleveland brothers, who were evidently pleased with my demeanor, and deferred to my parents' judgment. I was relieved to be spared the usual and customary questioning by a delegation of brethren, though I was totally immersed in all the doctrines and traditions of the Meeting, and could have answered them well. Although everyone already knew that I had asked for my place at the Lord's Table, I was "Announced" at both Cleveland and New London the next week or so, so that anyone who questioned my readiness could confer with the brethren. At the beginning of the Cleveland Breaking of Bread the following week, it was announced that in the absence

of any objections I would be "Received" at the Lord's Table that morning. I was officially "In Fellowship," and began partaking of the Emblems at the Breaking of Bread from then on.

During this time I began to have nagging doubts about my own salvation. I believed in the Bible, and that the Lord Jesus Christ had died for my sins. But the Devil would get me questioning my own sincerity. Did I really believe, or was I just riding on my parents' faith? One day a neighbor kid and I climbed up into an egg shaped hollow in a huge rock at the park. I led him to Christ as we sat there. But as we walked away, I was thinking, "Now he's saved. I wonder if I really am." This state of mind haunted me off and on for years. I'd get it settled for a while, but the Devil wouldn't let me rest. I came home from more than one Gospel Meeting praying, "Lord, if I've never really been saved, I want to be saved now." And yet, I knew deep down that I really was saved. It was not until I was well into high school that I obtained a lasting deliverance through an understanding that my natural life would always respond to Satan's doubts, but the spiritual life I got when I was born again was supposed to reckon that old life dead, and live in newness of life. I've often wondered if a better understanding of baptism might have impressed that on me earlier.

The Feast of Gods Provision

Luke 22:14-20

Gathered at this feast, Lord Jesus,
In re-mem-br-ance of You,
It is our delight to ponder
What these emblems bring to view.
Earnestly Your presence with us
Bids us share this loaf and cup;
Symbols of the blood and body
You so freely offered up.

Exodus 12:1-13

Righteous judgment fell on Egypt;
Grace abounded all the more;
Death's dark angel would not enter
Where the blood was on the door.
Sheltered by its application
On the lintel and the jamb,
Your redeemed ones feasted safely
On the goodness of the Lamb.

Luke 15:11-32

Like the prodigal we'd wandered
From the Father's house of love.
He received us back as children;
Made us fit to dwell above.
Clothed us with His great salvation;
Gave us shoes to walk His way;
Makes us feast together with Him
On the Fattened Calf today.

2 Samuel 9:1-13

Our great David was rejected;
Nailed in hatred to a Tree;
Died in agonies unequaled
For our sins at Calvary.
Though we were but loathsome sinners
Scavenging at Lodebar,
You would feast us at the table
of the Bright and Morning Star.

Genesis 14:17-20

Now our Savior reigns in glory.
Heavens highest name belongs
To the One God raised in splendor,
Who deserves our praise and songs.
Our Melchizedek has met us.
Now in victory we dine;
Feasting by Your own provision
On symbolic bread and wine.

Revelation 19:7-8

We anticipate the supper
Of the marriage of the Lamb.
We are making ourselves ready
As the bride of the I AM.
When the symbolism's over,
And we're safely at Your side,
We will feast our eyes upon You
And be fully satisfied.

7) THE SECOND GENERATION

"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs,...Then in the fourth generation they shall return here..." (Genesis 15:13, 16 NASB)

Generations come and generations go. Each successive generation coexists for a while, not only with the last one, but also with the next one. And every generation has some elements of all the preceding ones. It is not always possible to say just when one abstract generation slides into the next one. A retrospective analysis of the Brethren Movement reveals that the roots of its second generation sprouted early within its first generation.

After the "Brethren" had been meeting for about two and a half years, Mr. Darby began promoting a more official perspective of the group. When he asked the others what principles they were acting on, they answered that they were meeting on the ground of being children of one God and possessors of one life. Darby replied that the assembly of God was not set up on that ground, and that if they should continue to think so they would have no true basis on which to refuse association with evildoers. He later expressed regrets that he had initially "Swamped" certain truths needed for the church, for the sake of peace and unity in those early days.

Darby considered the Church to be in ruins, and the Brethren to be a testimony that God had raised up to its ruin. There was a sense in which they all believed that. They felt that the Holy Spirit had used the Scriptures to show them the error of sectarianism, and teach them to meet as nothing but Christians on the grounds of the church of Christ. But Darby's view of the Brethren Movement as a more definitive work of God introduced the subtle implications of an official status for the group that was to become the ideology for the Second Generation of the Brethren Movement.

Within fifteen years of the birth of the Brethren Movement, Mr. B.W. Newton began insisting that only certain approved brethren could speak up at the large Plymouth Assembly. When Mr. Darby was unable to correct this reinstatement of clericalism, he declared that Mr. Newton's group could no longer be considered a Scriptural Assembly, and withdrew from its fellowship. A minority of the congregation began meeting elsewhere with Mr. Darby, as the Scriptural Assembly in the area.

When Mr. Newton was later found to be teaching doctrines whose logical conclusions were derogatory to the deity of Christ, the opposing Assembly began refusing to receive anyone who fellowshipped with him at the Lord's Table because of their "Indifference to Christ." The Assembly at Bethesda continued receiving people from such places if they did not personally hold the bad doctrines, and Darby's side excommunicated the entire Bethesda Assembly for "Willful association with evil." Anyone who continued Breaking

Bread with anyone from the Bethesda side was also excommunicated for adopting the "Bethesda principle."

Many Brethren perceived the Darby contention to be a return to sectarianism, and rejected it. But they remained adamant, and forced a universal division on the Brethren. This resulted in an Open branch that refused to make ecclesiastical associations a "Test" for fellowship, and an Exclusive branch that continued receiving godly Christians from other places that tolerated both moral and doctrinal evil, but not if they fellowshipped with the Opens.

The split in the Brethren ranks left two opposing groups, each claiming to meet on the Scriptural principles of the original Movement. The Opens insisted on the independence of each local Assembly, responsible to Christ alone under the leadership of its locally recognized elders. This led to considerable variation between Open Assemblies. The Exclusives insisted that God had established them as His "Corporate testimony" to the unity of the body on earth, with each Assembly responsible to maintain the unity of the Spirit by submitting to all the other recognized Assemblies. This led to the development of a system of doctrine on the "Divine ground of gathering" that arrogated a virtual franchise on the Lord's Table to their coalition of Assemblies. These second generation Brethren considered themselves to be the only ones truly meeting on the grounds of the church of Christ.

The first generation of Brethren took Matthew 18:20 at face value. They understood that Christians could count on the Lord's presence wherever even as few as two or three of them gathered in His name. But after the division, the Exclusives abandoned the ubiquitous concept of "Wherever." "Where two or three are gathered together unto My name" became the definition of the official place where the Lord chose to meet with His people on earth. They insisted that the passive (KJV) phraseology of "Are gathered" meant that the Holy Spirit gathered Christians to the official place where the Lord was. Thus the Opens gathered themselves together in contradiction to the "Truth," while the Holy Spirit gathered the Exclusives to the place where Christ was in the midst. They referred to themselves as the "Gathered" saints.

The official assumptions of the Second Generation led them to the conclusion that Matthew 18:18 obligated both individuals and other Assemblies to submit to absolutely everything that any recognized Assembly did in the Lord's name. Everything that any of their Assemblies decreed on earth was considered bound in heaven. They insisted that the authority of Christ in their midst even validated erroneous Assembly decisions, until He saw fit to correct them. Anyone who rebelled against an Assembly decision or displayed contempt towards an Assembly was in danger of excommunication. An Assembly that was insubordinate to another Assembly's decrees was no longer considered an Assembly. Bethesda had disqualified itself for Assembly status because it had rejected Mr. Darby's Assembly's excommunication of everyone who continued to fellowship with Mr. Newton.

But all the devices developed to discredit the Opens backfired. As disagreements arose within Exclusive ranks, the swords they had wielded against the Opens were ruthlessly turned on each other. One division after another devastated their leagues. Some of them were over serious doctrinal aberrations, some simply over what constituted the legitimate "Assembly decision" in squabbles between Assemblies. But instead of re-evaluating and backtracking, they attempted to justify their own sides of the divisions by biased interpretations of Old Testament types based on their own pretentiousness. They increasingly likened themselves to the faithful Israelites, and everyone else to the heathen or the idolaters in these Old Testament types. But Christians who really worship the Lord simply can not be compared to the idolaters and heathens that deny Him, no matter how wrong their way of worship!

The spiritual suffering of the divided assemblies, friends, families, and even husbands and wives can only be measured by the heart of Christ, Who prayed just before He died:

That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst sent Me. John 17:21 NASB

Dr. Cronin, perhaps the first of all the Brethren, was actually put out of fellowship for helping establish a new Assembly where there was already a strife-torn recognized one. He is reported to have sat through the Exclusive Breaking of Bread meetings for years, sometimes with tears streaming down his face, unable to participate. G.V. Wigram, a prominent early leader and writer, is said to have ceased ministering among the Brethren, accusing them of "Blowing Ecclesiastical bubbles" and "Playing church."

Where Dweldest Thou?

John 1:39:39

Where dwellest Thou? my Master
Where can I be with Thee?
Oh! Do I hear Thy bidding,
Simply to Come and see?

John 6:18 & Hebrews 13:13

To Whom should we go? my Savior.
Thou hast the words of life.
Let us go forth to Jesus,
Leaving the Camp of strife.

Matthew 18:20 & Hebrews 13:13

Where two or three are gathered
Unto Thy holy name,*
There-in the midst-I've found Thee,
There I will bear Thy shame.

John 14:5-6 & John 14:2

Where goest Thou? Beloved,
Thou Who art called, The Way.
Up in the heavens preparing
Mansions for you to stay.

Revelation 22:20

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!
Take Thy poor pilgrims home,
Never again to grieve Thee,
Never again to roam.

I was still a staunch TW (and a poor poet) when I wrote this. Note the King James English and the typical reference to being gathered to the name of Christ (Where Christ already is) instead of gathering in His name with the confidence that He will be there with us.

8) DEDICATION

I was in the eleventh grade when my father was transferred to Calvert City, Kentucky. We moved to Paducah, where the school system was supposed to be good. High School started with tenth grade, so Sophomores got the same harassment there that Freshmen got in Ohio. I was happy to be a Junior and escape a second year of hazing. The school system was at least as good as my motivation was. I made decent grades, but I certainly didn't bother to overly apply myself.

We had to drive fifty miles to a Meeting in the country near Columbus, a very small town at a historic Civil War site on the Mississippi River. We soon came to know the meaning of Southern hospitality, as the Brethren there welcomed us with opened arms. Although this Assembly had some smoldering problems from past disagreements, all sides seemed to accept us as ignorant Yankees. We learned to eat chess pie politely, and to relish pecan pie and hickory smoked barbecue. I really took to these country folks, and unconsciously assimilated their accents and colloquialisms into my own speech. I believe they loved me as much as I loved them.

If I didn't apply myself at school, I made up for it at the Meeting. I made it a point to get familiar with everyone, and to get as close as I could to most. I was confident that we had the "Truth," and I reveled in the enjoyment of it. I loved to chat with everyone as they came in, and I encouraged them and they encouraged me. I was in Utopia again.

My brother and I used go with another brother across the rivers to Cairo, Illinois, to preach the gospel at the jail on Sunday afternoons. It was a good chance to get some experience at public preaching to a genuinely captive audience. We were amazed at how some of the sin-hardened inmates could often finish the Scripture verses we started to quote in our short gospel messages. It only confirmed to us that studying the Word of God was a lot different from hiding it in our hearts.

We had Young People's Meetings at various homes. An older brother always attended to insure that there was no appearance of any independence among the youth. These were not considered official "Assembly" meetings, so we could sing with a piano accompaniment. One Assembly put a piano in the basement of their regular meeting room so they could have their Young People's Meeting there. But when an older Laboring Brother saw the piano down there he insisted that they "Get that wooden brother out of the Meeting."

A real encouragement at this stage of my life was the "Cottage" at Otter Lake, near Gordon Bay, Ontario. It was a privately owned camp operated by Harry Hayhoe's son, but he felt that "Camp" sounded too denominational. He would invite young people from the Assemblies to spend a week or two there without charge. He was supported by various Brethren and Assemblies, and always sent any money we forced on him while

we were there on to other projects in the Lord's work to discourage us from trying to pay our own way.

We were expected to adhere to a rigid schedule of Bible meetings at the Cottage, but had a lot of free time to get acquainted with the other young people in the Meeting. The Bible teaching was appropriate and practical, the fellowship was good, and we had a chance to meet the eligible girls from the other Assemblies in a non-threatening situation. And Gordon and Pearl Hayhoe were always available to give us godly counsel on our youthful problems. I'll always appreciate their labor of love among the young people of the Meeting.

One time Mrs. Hayhoe asked me about the spiritual welfare of another visitor at the Cottage from my area. He was a good Christian, though not quite as kosher an Exclusive as I. In the course of our discussion I told her that I knew that he went to such worldly things as the auto races. The reason I knew this is that the fairgrounds were close to my home, and I saw him there when I slipped in to watch the races myself. I suppose I self-righteously justified my hypocrisy by telling myself that I only went there once, and it really wasn't typical of my behavior.

By this time we were old enough to go to many of the general conferences held in the Midwestern United States and Canada. There was one somewhere on nearly every National holiday, and we did our best to drive or ride with a carload of friends to Toronto on Easter, Lawrenceville in the Spring, Des Moines on Memorial Day, Chicago in the Summer, Our own Kentucky conference on Labor Day, and Detroit on Thanksgiving. The Christmas conference was on the West coast, too far away for us. As was customary, meals and lodging were provided free of charge through funds donated by the various Assemblies, individuals, and at the regular collection during the Breaking of Bread at the conferences themselves.

Like the Cottage, the conferences were a great place to meet other dedicated Brethren friends. We were continually admonished to marry in the Meeting, and the conferences provided another chance to get a good look at the eligible members of the opposite sex. We usually came home from these conferences spiritually renewed, and a little bit disappointed that we hadn't had the courage to use the opportunity to get better acquainted with one girl or another.

One time at the Kentucky conference a rather peculiar little old man startled everyone by suggesting a Scripture for consideration. A Laboring Brother who had more or less dominated the conference turned and rebuked him, saying, "We haven't even prayed yet." He proceeded to pray for the Lord's guidance in the meeting, and after a shocked silence, suggested that we take up the Scripture he had on his own mind. I had never heard of anything like that happening in the Meeting before. I don't think anyone appreciated it. I was glad when my Dad raised the issue of whether or not the Laborers were developing into a special class of Christians in the Meeting on our way home that evening.

I was riding in a car one day with an up-and-coming Kentucky brother who shared my total dedication to the Meeting. We were disparaging the fact that so many of our young people were marrying outside of the Meeting. It was difficult to remain committed to the Lord when one's spouse wasn't. I cited II Corinthians 6:14 (KJV), "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*" He objected that many of these people actually were believers, they just weren't in the Meeting. I replied, "Yeah, but they don't believe all the Truth." He liked it.

One Spring morning one of the less traditional sisters brought a vase full of daffodils to Meeting, and placed them on the table that we used for the Breaking of Bread. She was artistic and they were lovely. They posed no problem during Sunday School, but they were left on the table when it was set for the Breaking of Bread. Several of us stood uneasily at the door trying to figure out how to diplomatically get rid of that "Honey in the offering" (Leviticus 2:11.) I solved the panic by telling them I was young enough that she wouldn't stay angry with me, and boldly went up and moved the flowers to the podium behind the table.

A rumor was circulating that a woman who had always been irregular in the Meeting was teaching Sunday School at the Methodist Church. Three respected brothers were sent to investigate this breach in the integrity of our fellowship. I personally thought she should be excommunicated, but each delegate returned with a considerably different slant on the situation, depending on how bad he personally regarded the crime. I didn't question the honesty of any of them, but I began to wonder how much individual biases like these had affected some of the divisions in our history.

After high school, I attended a small State college about fifty miles from home. The day that I arrived at Murray, I ran across the verse:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. Colossians 2:8 KJV

I felt that God had appropriately brought it to my attention, and I made it my motto throughout my college days. I started out in a pre-medical curriculum, and knew that I would have to start applying myself academically if I really expected to go on to medical school. My grades proved my resolve to do so.

Literature classes posed a special problem for me. They required reading some morally filthy books. I explained my predicament to my first professor, and he cheerfully assigned me other books. My second Literature professor was an older lady teaching her last semester before retirement. She told us that we would be tested over six books, but she would only grade three of the tests. She also asked questions around the class and graded the student responses during her discussions of the books. I determined before the Lord to only read the three acceptable books. One day I picked up another student's copy of one of the books I hadn't read and randomly scanned two

pages before class. She asked me a question on that very part of the book. Another time I totally muffed my answer to a question on one of the books I hadn't read. She was evidently hard of hearing, and confirmed that I was right with a glowing face. She graded the tests on the three books I read, and I got an A in the class.

The next school year I took Zoology. The professor was an avid evolutionist, and spent the first several lectures on a brief historical sketch of science skewed to be subversive to Biblical Christianity. Everyone considered his remarks prefatory, and no one had studied them when he popped a detailed quiz on the material. But I had been so engrossed in his seductive approach that I remembered every name, date, and detail he demanded. He was rather indignant when the only student who aced the first quiz dropped the course under protest of conscience the next week. I considered this the end of my medical career, but I just couldn't stand watching all those kids being seduced away from the Scriptures. Without my former motivation, school became more of a chore than the pleasure it had been.

Our family was visited by a Laboring Brother and his family during one of my summer breaks. I was absolutely infatuated with my conception of what his daughter, whom I hardly knew, was. She was not nearly as impressed with her more realistic perception of me. I was really disappointed that she wasn't interested in me.

I got a small room in the downstairs of a large garage that had a bigger apartment upstairs the next semester. I soon began experiencing a lot of depression, and spells of unexplainable terror. I would wake up feeling that the Devil himself was staring maliciously at me from behind my back. I would pray for the Lord's protection until the terror would suddenly subside and I could drift back to sleep. I attributed this to discouragement over my failure with the girl. My grades dropped significantly, and I was beginning to wonder if this was a pathologic depression. My Student Teaching location allowed me to move back home when that semester was over, and I soon forgot both the girl and the depression. After I graduated, I found that the upstairs apartment had housed a Spiritist medium who had wrecked the lives of several students and one of my professors with his perversions. I was actually relieved to discover that my depression and terrors had been caused by harassment by Demons rather than my own psyche.

Evolution?

*By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God,
so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. Hebrews 11:3*

Just a chemical reaction
In the substance of the earth
By some marvelous abstraction
Brought organic life to earth.

First a sea of protoplasm,
Then a strand of DNA,
Which evolved across the chasm
To the forms we know today.

Thus the vain imaginations
Of man's foolish heart advance;
In his darkened mind "Creation"
Is a godless happenstance.

I believe the Bible story;
I don't think it sounds so odd;
I'm created in the glory
Of the likeness of my God!

And in my Redeemer's image
I can comprehend His love.
Only thus could I companion
With the One who dwells above.

9) MATURATION

My first teaching job was in Chemistry and Science at Louisiana High School in Louisiana, Missouri. The school had moved to a brand new building over the summer. The Junior class that was ready to take Chemistry that year had been outstanding from first grade on. They were a pleasure to teach, and really learned whatever I presented - generally by the next day. Often when I'd be setting up for a laboratory experiment in the evening, a couple of students would knock at the window for admission. We'd shoot the breeze together as we finished setting up the lab. I wasn't much older than the students, and I thoroughly enjoyed my first year of teaching.

On the first Chemistry test I spread the class over the room and away from the temptation of each other's papers. They feigned indignance, and one of them asked, "Don't you believe in the basic goodness of human nature?" I replied emphatically that I didn't, and the subject was dropped as the kids applied themselves to the test. A few weeks later we finished a section early, and the kids began to ply me with personal questions. They brought up my rejection of basic human goodness, and I gave them the Biblical concept of the fallen nature. They evidently discussed it with their friends, because several hours later my next Chemistry class attacked me from the start. I allowed a brief discussion before proceeding with Chemistry. But I told them that if they really wanted to discuss this, I would meet them at the park where I would be more free to express my views. They scheduled a wiener roast and discussion several weeks later.

Our wiener roast was a great success. I used my Bible to explain the sinfulness of man from Adam and Eve to the final judgment, and opened the floor for discussion. The only comment was the question, "If we're so bad, what should we do?" Starting with the coats of skins that God provided for Adam and Eve, I showed them that God Himself had provided a Savior for us. I didn't press anyone, but I think several of those students accepted Christ as their Savior over the school year,

One evening the PTA held a dinner meeting that I was expected to attend. Some of the more mature high school girls presented a Broadway type dance for our entertainment. They performed with considerably more sophistication than modesty. One of my students who was there astutely detected my uneasiness. She enjoyed ribbing me for my embarrassment, claiming that I alternatively refused to watch and couldn't keep from watching. But I really felt that she understood my predicament, too

I was assigned as a faculty sponsor to the Junior class that year. Among other things, I helped the kids design the float that won the contest for Homecoming. But I was in a quandary about my role in the Junior/Senior prom. I was uncomfortable just watching a dance, and now I was supposed to be sponsoring one. I discussed my dilemma with the school Principal, and he agreed to take over my responsibilities at the dance if I would oversee the kids while they decorated the gym, which we did elaborately

I had to drive over eighty miles each way from Louisiana to the Meeting in St. Louis. The congregation literally took me in, and I was invited to Sunday dinner somewhere almost every week. I often came down on Friday night and stayed the week-end with my Aunt. My teaching experience helped a lot when I was asked to take the Sunday School, and the kids enjoyed it so much that I ended up doing it most of the time. I also found that teaching had eliminated most of my stage fright in preaching the gospel Sunday evenings, whenever I was asked.

Our Gospel Meetings had always bothered me. Most of the time there were no outsiders, and we were reasonably certain that the entire audience already belonged to the Lord. I hated to give up the spiritual uplift of the gospel, but ministry for Christians seemed more appropriate for the congregation. I also felt that the greatest internal evidence for the inspiration of the Bible was the consistency between the Old and the New Testaments. I determined to try to present the gospel by relating the Old Testament types to the New Testament doctrines with themes that could be expanded to Christian exhortation. This eliminated the need for detailed imaginary illustrations that I felt detracted from some speaker's messages. The folks at St. Louis seemed to enjoy this approach, and I got a fair amount of experience at it even though I never became a consistently good speaker.

My experiences at teaching at Louisiana and preaching at St. Louis rekindled my old desire to be a doctor--just maybe a medical missionary if the Lord so led. I went back to Murray that summer to take the biology courses I needed for pre-med. I got the same professor in Zoology, but Summer school was a mite abbreviated, and he launched directly into the subject. My only run-in with him was when he asked a leading question on evolution that no one else could answer. Going around the class, he eventually called directly on me. I prefaced the answer he wanted with, "I don't believe it, but you want me to say..." He grinned and muttered something about the only one who could see it not believing it.

I moved to St. Louis and taught another year to save up some money for medical school. A widow lady in the Meeting asked me to work evenings at her boat shop for a while, and we found out that she had been in my Mother's graduating class in High School. When summer came, she gave me a full time job with room and board, to help me save more for school. She arranged some Young Peoples Meetings that I spoke at in her home every other week or so, and she somehow got some young people she knew from another group of Exclusives to come. Despite everything I had heard about other Brethren, I found them to be every bit as committed to Christ as we were.

As we went through the fifth chapter of Matthew in the St. Louis adult Sunday school class, several tenuous interpretations were offered for verse thirty-seven:

But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

One of the better suggestions was that our reputations for honesty should be such that we shouldn't continually have to confirm the verity of our statements. One woman finally complained that she didn't feel that we were explaining this verse satisfactorily. The brashness of a woman speaking up in a Sunday school class stimulated me to try to understand what the passage meant for myself. When I looked at the verses leading up to this one, its meaning became obvious. "State your intentions without insisting that you absolutely will carry them out no matter what happens, because such determination might conflict with the ultimate sovereignty of God." I realized that our phrase-by-phrase approach to the Bible had an inherent tendency to isolate fragments of Scripture from their context. Not that there was anything wrong with meticulousness, but sometimes we failed to see the forest for the trees.

10) REALITY

My study habits were a mite rusty when I started medical school in Chicago. I found that I'd read without concentrating, and finish a page without the slightest idea of what I had been reading. I had to knuckle down and study pretty much full time. I believed the Lord was able to make up whatever time I spent for Him. I made it my habit to get to every meeting of the Assembly, and read my Bible through from cover to cover during that year or the next.

It seemed that the Chicago Meeting lacked the warmth of most of the other Assemblies I had attended. At first I was hurt. Then I decided that I was going to establish some relationships there no matter how cool the people seemed. When I took the initiative, a family with a couple of young men near my own age and a cute little daughter in high school responded quite warmly. After a time the others also became more friendly, and I began to realize that what I perceive as coolness was simply the natural restraint of the big city.

Bible Truth Depot had reorganized some years back, and moved to Chicago under the name of Bible Truth Publishers. The husband of one of the two sisters that had impressed my Mother so favorably when she first met up with the Meeting managed it. This couple had all the single men over for dinner regularly. I valued their hospitality, especially when the others had seemed so reserved.

I discovered that there were two distinct factions in Chicago. One was an ultra-legal group that objected to renting facilities to host the Chicago conference from religious organizations. The majority were ultra-conservatives who insisted that the objectors would be in contempt of the Assembly if they didn't attend the conference even though it was held in such places. I always suspected that there might have been some personal hurts from way back that fueled the embers of contention. Everything was subsurface, and I was considered much too young to get involved.

I was asked to take the Gospel meeting shortly after I moved to Chicago. Using the pattern I had developed in St. Louis. I mentioned the generally accepted superficial interpretation of my text, and went on to demonstrate its deeper typological meaning. That week I got a four page letter from one of the brothers saying that I had missed the point of the passage, and proceeding to explain it pretty much as I had done. He obviously hadn't heard a word I had said after I mentioned the "Denominational" interpretation of the passage.

A group from the Meeting used to go to the TB Hospital regularly to pass out gospel tracts. I went when I could, but never really felt enthused about it. Another group went down to skid row to preach the gospel in a vacant lot during the summer, and I went there with the same unexplainable reserve. There was also a Street preaching during the summer in Chicago proper that I attended with only a little more enthusiasm. There

just seemed to be a hindrance. I learned later that some visitors felt the same way while preaching at the Chicago Gospel Meeting. I think it was probably the daunting effect of a couple of doctrinal watchdogs in that assembly.

The Chicago men always went directly to the basement to pray for the Gospel Meeting on Sunday evenings. The women and children were left alone upstairs until the men returned just before the meeting. One evening I pointed out that we were down there praying for outsiders to come in, but if any man were to enter the building he would feel very out of place with only the women upstairs. A general titter at my youthful presumption to analyze the tradition of the wise older brothers ensued. But one middle aged brother evidently saw my point and began staying upstairs to greet any man that might happen to come in.

One time there was an unusually long pause at the Prayer Meeting after all the prayer requests had been aired. I felt a special burden for something, and prayed first. Afterwards a leading Brother extended a congratulatory hand to me, saying, "I don't blame you." When I finally understood what he was referring to I realized that they had an unofficial sort of pecking order. It bothered me so much that I kept a record of the order in which everyone prayed for a month. Except for the last couple of participants, everyone always prayed in the same order. More surprising yet, each man had his own particular length of prayer that rarely varied more than ten or fifteen seconds from his norm.

Besides symbolizing the Lord's physical body, the Meeting stressed that the single loaf of the Lord's Supper symbolized the essential unity of all Christians as part of the one body of Christ:

For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17 KJV).

At larger meetings the one loaf was passed around on several plates after it was broken, to speed up the service. The brother who returned the leftovers to the table in Chicago always stacked the two plates with the fragments roughly put back together on the top plate. I just assumed that this was simply a matter of tidying up a bit. But once when a visitor replaced the plates without doing it, a local brother came forward to perform the ritual. I found that they believed that this should be done because they felt that the fragmented loaf symbolized the church in its divided state. I wondered how such an unfounded tradition could get started when we were so critical of the deductions other groups of believers came up with without any clear cut Scriptural basis.

A brother in the Meeting bragged that a Christian co-worker kept insisting that it was his Christian duty to vote against an ungodly candidate. When that candidate won, the brother from the Meeting asked his cohort if he had indeed voted against the newly elected candidate. "Of course," he replied indignantly. "Well, you voted against God's man for the job," was the smug rejoinder.

The Meeting traditionally frowned on women wearing slacks. Deuteronomy 22:5 forbids either sex to wear whatever pertains to the other. Some of the single women wore slacks to an outside get-together among themselves, and were reprimanded by some of the older brothers. That winter we had an ice skating party, and one of the more mature single women asked me if I thought it would be alright to wear slacks for obvious reasons. I told her that I thought it might be more pleasing to the Lord to sacrifice the ice skating--which I personally hated anyway. I found out later that there was little difference between men and women's clothing in Old Testament days. The verse probably forbids the perversion of transvestism, which I learned about in medical school.

A bunch of the guys got together to play football one Saturday. The opposing team successfully executed a long pass play that was really stretching our level of finesse. When I "Congratulated" them on their luck, an older brother that had come along with his kids good-naturedly reprimanded my worldly language; "Luck, Bud?" I asked him if he really thought their achievement was the Lord's mercy.

I went with a girl from New Orleans for a while, and she came up to Chicago for a visit. When we sat down together at the Breaking of Bread, an older brother requested her "Letter of commendation." I explained that she was the only one "In fellowship" in Louisiana, and didn't have one. He raised the possibility that she might not be permitted to Break Bread. I was flabbergasted that they couldn't trust my testimony of her status when they Broke Bread with me every week. I determined to "Sit back" with her if they turned her down. I might well have come under Assembly discipline had that happened, but they received her without any further ado.

I was dreaming of taking my internship in New Orleans to be nearer this girl. When another brother asked where I would Break Bread, I suggested that maybe we would be married by then, and could Break Bread together that year. He objected to any such temporary "Testimony" that would cease when we left. I was too immature with the opposite sex to keep that courtship alive, so it never became an issue.

Perhaps these brethren had more reason to distrust me than I realized. As I said my last good-bye to this girl, I momentarily brushed against her in a less than holy way. It was so totally impulsive and instantaneous that I was caught more by surprise than she was. I couldn't believe that I had done such a thing, and still blush with shame every time I think of it.

There was a Laboring Brother from Des Moines who I especially appreciated. As a child I had noticed that he worked harder than most of the other Laborers whenever he visited our home. He was continually finding some way to reach people with the gospel. While I was in Chicago his wife contracted dermatomyositis, and he personally nursed her through its prolonged and fatal course at home. He visited St. Louis some months after she died, and understandably fell madly in love with the widow woman that had been so good to me at the boat shop. But the Des Moines Assembly declared that it would be

a bad testimony for them to get married until his wife had been dead at least a year. They went ahead and got married, and Des Moines sent around letters withdrawing his commendation to the Lord's work and prohibiting him from all "Public and private" ministry. I was beginning to realize that all our rules were not necessarily Scriptural.

My parents had moved back to Elyria. I finished my term exams one Friday, and was anxious to get the five or six hour drive home for my summer break over with. As I walked past the hospital to get to my car, I felt that the Lord was telling me to stop and give the gospel to a dying patient that I knew. I was always suspicious of special revelations, and shrugged it off. The urging got stronger all the way home, and was really bugging me on Sunday. After the Breaking of Bread I made a flying trip to beat the whale back to Chicago. The dying man drank in the Gospel thirstily, and accepted the Lord as his Savior on the spot. I left him in the care of an earnest young man in the Assembly, and he told me the man was genuinely rejoicing in the Lord until he died a few weeks later.

During my last year of school there was a massive snow storm in Chicago. I lived close to the Meeting Room, and was one of the few that were able to get there that evening. When the family that I had gotten closest to came in, that cute little girl who was now a college mathematics major flashed me the sweetest smile I had ever seen. I already liked her, but from then on I just plain had to have her. Shirley tells me that once while we were going together I expressed my concern at the total isolation of the Meeting from other Christians, and I remember explaining that I hoped, Lord willing, to be a medical missionary some day when I proposed to her. Shirley and I were married during my internship, while she was Student Teaching.

I took my internship at Chicago's gigantic Cook County Hospital because of the responsibility and independence it afforded. We had to spend a tremendous amount of time working with patients in the hospital. Our unofficial slogan, "See one, do one, teach one," was not entirely unrealistic. We learned to traverse the halls in a slouch that reflected our total exhaustion enough to keep patients from bothering us unnecessarily. Free time was at a premium, and I jealously watched for every moment that I could possibly get away for more personal pursuits. But I became downright ashamed of myself when I realized how freely some of the others who didn't even claim to be Christians volunteered their free time to help others get a break, while I was so selfish with mine.

We were young and thought we were full of energy until we visited my parents. Sunday mornings my father and two of my brothers collected a bunch of neighborhood kids in their cars and brought them to my parents' basement for breakfast and Sunday School. They took them home, and were ready for Breaking of Bread in the living room by about eleven o'clock. Then half the group ate while the other half went to the Children's Hospital to hold a Sunday School for the patients. The Hospital group came home and ate while the other half collected an entirely different group of neighbor kids for an afternoon Sunday School. After the third Sunday School they had a couple hour's rest

and a bite to eat before heading out for the Gospel Meeting at Cleveland. Their pace exhausted me.

On one of these visits back home my brother mentioned the "Saints" in obvious reference to the people in the Meeting in the area we were discussing. I had always felt that this common expression among us exposed an inexcusable pride in our position. I asked him what he thought all the other Christians in the area were if we were the "Saints."

About this time a visiting Laboring Brother attempted to help proselytize a few denominational Christian ladies my mother had been working with. He promised them that he would substantiate the Meeting's ecclesiastical stance entirely from the Bible; but he had to get into Brethren history to rationalize the official status the Meeting claimed for itself. What he substantiated was that our stance was as dependent on some rather obscure and questionable history as it was on the Word of God. My mother was frustrated that he had been so foolish as to boast that he could authenticate the Meeting from nothing but the Scriptures.

Near the end of our stay in Chicago, a Laboring Brother proposed giving a series of lectures on prophecy in Chicago. He more or less specialized in eschatology, and was probably better able to defend his views than anyone else in the Meeting. But because he differed a mite with the early Brethren writers, he was not allowed to present his program at our Assembly.

I had always felt that one advantage of getting good education would be its silent demonstration that Christianity was not just a delusion of the uneducated and ignorant. But as the end of my formal education approached I became impressed with the Apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:1,2:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (NASB).

I realized that Christian humility would go a lot further in the work of Christ than all the worldly credentials I could ever amass; and determined to try to live my professional life by that principle.

11) BOMBSHELL

My internship was nearly finished when we got a call from a doctor in the Meeting at Delavan, Illinois. He invited us to come down and look over the little hospital at Hopedale. It was love at first sight, but my Draft Board informed us that I would be called up soon. They had given me a Conscientious Objector status when I was eighteen, so I would have to find an approved alternate service somewhere, and work for what I would have earned if I were in the Military. Hopedale Hospital qualified, and I began my two years working for the Hospital as soon as my internship was over.

The Meeting at Delavan was as neat as any I had ever attended. There were no smoldering conflicts. Everyone cared for everyone else. We met in a country home, and we brought food and ate dinner together every Sunday after Breaking of Bread. The brothers met together to distribute the funds and pray for the Gospel Meeting while the sisters prepared the food. Any problem that arose was freely discussed, and nothing was done until we were all in agreement. There was a pond on the farm where we met, and we had frequent picnics there. We swam, fished, hunted frogs, or just sat and enjoyed the fellowship while we fed the mosquitoes together. What more could Utopia on earth be?

The doctor that had encouraged me to come to Hopedale became my closest friend. We had continual discussions together over coffee, and pretty much saw everything from medicine to the Meeting alike. His example helped reinforce my resolve not to tout my medical degree.

I had always been concerned that my soul was not more occupied with Christ than the "Truth." When I began praying that the Lord would make me more of a worshiper, the worship in my heart began spilling over more in the Breaking of Bread. I didn't want to become obnoxious, and asked the brothers if they felt I was taking too much part in the meeting. They replied that my own conscience should be my guide about such issues.

The Delavan brethren lacked some of the legalities that I had always imposed on myself. Even the leaders talked freely of the news they heard on the radio. I realized that this was their way of keeping current on everything from the news to the price of hogs and grain. I had always felt a mite guilty about listening to the radio before, but in this environment I soon got to where I could enjoy listening to conservative music stations myself without the pangs of legalistic "Touch not" conscience.

One evening at the Reading Meeting I was rhetorically asked why we used "Thees and Thous" to address God. I gave the standard answer on how we should revere God, depreciating the popular tendency outside the Meeting to get too familiar with the Lord. On the way home an elderly sister who always rode with us quietly explained that "Thees and Thous" were actually the familiar forms of English when the King James translation was made. Shirley confirmed this, and I lost another of my many legalities,

though I wouldn't have thought of offending anyone by abandoning standard Meeting decorum.

I was bothered that the Delavan young people played volleyball and baseball and the like outside before our afternoon Sunday school on the Lord's Day. The lack of enthusiasm for my suggestion that this was a bad testimony for our group was obvious, but the sports stopped for a while. Although I knew that virtually every laboring brother among us would have agreed with me, I was actually relieved when the kids gradually picked them up again. The group had tolerated my legalism, but their attitude helped me to understand that such prohibitions had probably originated centuries ago from confusing the Jewish Sabbath with the Christian Lord's Day.

While I could not claim a great zeal for evangelism, I made at least sporadic efforts to share the gospel with my patients. One time I had an obviously ungodly young woman dying in the hospital of end-stage kidney failure. I felt an explicit urging to present the gospel to her over the week-end. I literally squelched the Holy Spirit for forty-eight hours, and when I made rounds on Monday morning she had already slipped into her final coma. I felt that I would have to answer for my negligence at the judgment seat of Christ if she was in hell. I definitely didn't want anything like that to happen again, and at least tried to be a little more zealous in the gospel after that.

During this time my oldest brother dropped a bombshell on us. He had a good job in Akron, but he kept buying dilapidated old apartment buildings to fix up for rent or resale. He worked all day on his job and most of the night on these projects, neglecting both the Meeting and his family. Just when we thought he was becoming hopelessly materialistic, he became interested in the spiritual welfare of his renters, and led some of them to Christ. These were inner-city folks with special needs, and he took them anywhere he thought they might be helped. This got him associating with a lot of Christians who were not in the Meeting. Before long he began claiming that the Meeting was sectarian, and He and his wife started meeting with the Open Brethren.

We had known of other people leaving the Meeting. We had been constantly warned of the danger of "Missing the path," especially at conferences. We always figured that those who left were probably un-established Christians who were tempted away by the dazzle of the larger denominational churches. Or maybe they were younger people who had been raised in the Meeting but fell into the temptation of marrying someone who didn't understand the Truth. Or maybe they became so angry with some of their brethren that they would actually leave the Lord's presence. But we had never previously faced up to the fact that anyone could conscientiously leave the Meeting.

12) THE THIRD GENERATION

He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations. Exodus 34:7.

A generation is not responsible for its own genetic make-up. It is a natural composite of the generations before it. Nor is it responsible for the culture it awakens in. But it should be concerned for what it passes on to the next generation.

The Exclusive Brethren initially continued to receive godly Christians from other places, except for the Opens. But the mechanisms used to exclude the Opens and the subsequent divisions among themselves were gradually applied to other places too. If God had established a specific corporate testimony to the unity of the body of Christ, it was ecclesiastically evil to go elsewhere. And if other Brethren groups which differed so little from themselves were ecclesiastically evil, those groups that differed even more from them obviously were too. Most Exclusives became steadily more and more exclusive, to the point that they eventually became more sectarian than the denominations that the Brethren originally repudiated because of their sectarianism. They had slipped imperceptibly into the third generation.

The Third Generation of Brethren are blissfully unaware that they are significantly different from the First Generation. They love the status quo, and live in a past that is not the real past. They use the same language as the first generation, but the terms have taken on different, sometimes opposite, meanings. They are so deluded that they will earnestly state abstractions about "Meeting" policies that are grossly inconsistent with its practices without ever knowing that they are not telling the truth.

The ecclesiastical absolute of the Third Generation is that they are in the "Place" where the Lord has chosen to put His Name. This corollary of the "Corporate testimony" doctrine is derived from the twelfth chapter of Deuteronomy:

Then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord: (Deuteronomy 12:11 κΙV).

But Israel's "Place" was the temple, which typified Christ as much as the tabernacle before it did. The typical lesson of the passage is that Christians are to gather to the "Person" of the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than to some obscure ecclesiastical "Place" that most Christians have never even heard of.

The repose the "Place" dogma creates is an impenetrable wall around the whole third generation of Brethren. They nestle in a smug little box that they believe the Lord established through the early Brethren. With the Lord Himself there, what more could they want? And their private interpretations of many Scriptures leaves them serenely

confident that they have all the answers from the Word of God, and need no input from the tainted outside. Why risk a look outside a box so nearly perfect as this?

These people have such absolute confidence in their ecclesiastical position that they vaunt an official succession of divine approbation from the beginnings of the Brethren right down to their own specific divisions of the Movement with little or no concept of what transpired in those divisions. They firmly believe they are following the Scriptural precepts originally recovered by the early Brethren like Mr. Darby. But although his notion of official status may have led to the sectarian degeneration of the Exclusives, Mr. Darby personally resisted the development sectarianism to his death. He wrote that he would not go to an Assembly where godly Christians were refused simply because they were not part of it.

The first generation of Brethren honestly had no membership. Every reasonably godly Christian was welcome to participate at the Lord's Table with them, and even to share in the ministry of the Word of God. The Third Generation still adamantly denies that they have a membership, even though virtually no one that is not "In fellowship" with them is permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper with them, let alone speak up in their meetings. They could go to any place in the whole world, contact one responsible brother, and find every single person in fellowship there. All godly Christians are still welcome--when and if they sever their relationships with everything else and "Take their place at the Lord's Table." There is no written membership roll, but their membership is undeniable and absolutely definitive.

The third generation of Brethren freely agree that there are many other godly Christians besides themselves. They hope and pray that those they meet will some day be "Gathered" from the "Systems" they are in. But those systems are all considered defiled by moral, doctrinal, or at least, ecclesiastical evil. Numbers 19 is claimed to indicate that this "Death in the Tent" contaminates everyone in these religious systems, and is passed on to anyone who "Touches" them by Breaking Bread with them. The resulting "*Stand by thy self, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou*" attitude of Isaiah 65:5 (KJV) has wounded many an earnest Christian that naively sought communion with them. A major flaw in this application of Numbers 19 is that no distinction is made between errors fatal to the fundamentals of Christianity (Death) and non-vital disagreements between fundamental Christians. Even the severest of illnesses did not defile the occupants of the tent.

The third generation's isolation from other Christians is further sustained by the presumption that their Assemblies represent the legitimate House of God of I Timothy 3:15, in contrast to the Great House of both true and false professing Christianity of II Timothy 2:14-23.

...Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor,

sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. (2 Timothy 3:19b-21 KJV).

All other religious confederations are assumed to tolerate evil men. No one associated with them is considered to have purged himself from these vessels to dishonor, so they cannot be considered vessels to honor. Since they remain vessels to dishonor, anyone that associates himself with them by Breaking Bread with them also disqualifies himself as a vessel to honor. This exegesis of the passage encourages a separation from other godly Christians that is condemned elsewhere in the Scriptures, instead of the separation from evil that the Scriptures really exhort.

But despite the sectarian degeneration of Third Generation of Brethren, they love the Lord. They believe with all their hearts that they are following His Word. Those who might despise their eccentricity should understand that the quality of the worship that ascends from their remembrance feasts is second to none. A richer table is rarely spread for the Lord, and the odor of the ointment from their alabaster boxes is at least as precious as anywhere else. The Lord looks not so much on the outward appearance as on the heart.

Exclusively Yours

There's a host of people out there
That have trusted in the Lord,
But they're serving their traditions
As a great rebellious horde.
They're so hung up in their "Systems"
That they won't obey the Word,
And they think the "Truth" we value
Is peculiar and absurd.

Thank the Lord that we've been "Gathered"
From the crowd that's gone astray,
With the "Remnant" that is faithful
To the straight and narrow way;
And rejecting the defilement
Of their presence at our side,
We must bear with the reproaches
Of their ignorance and pride

Surely we'll be vindicated
At the coming judgment seat,
And they'll all congratulate us
When the circle is complete;
They'll extend their hands to greet us
And with cordial voices say,
"Welcome to the family table,
We're so glad you came today."

13) CONSTERNATION

We finished our stint for Uncle Sam, and bought a practice from a retiring doctor in Delavan, Illinois. The practice took off nicely. We were comfortable, and had two little boys in the crib. Without anything else to get out of the way, I felt that my adult life was finally fully functional. It was time to quit getting ready and start getting busy definitively serving the Lord.

As I tried to share the gospel with my patients, I found that a lot of them were already truly born again Christians. As it became known that I was a Christian doctor, even more dedicated Christians tended to drift towards my office. I really loved them, and wanted to see them come to a knowledge of the Truth in fellowship with the Meeting.

In my zeal for spreading the Truth, I suggested that we put up a sign posting a schedule of our meetings. The brother that hosted the group in his home was reluctant to put up a sign that might legally obligate us to tolerate the presence of unregenerate or unruly people in the Breaking of Bread. I was downright pushy in insisting that we should be able to trust the Lord to prevent such things even to the point of hinting that maybe we should meet somewhere else if our host was unwilling to have such a testimony at his home. I got my sign. It never brought an outsider in to a single meeting. Neither did it endear me to my brethren. My apologies! How I wish I could take that one back.

Our town did not have an ambulance, so I ended up being called to many of the accidents and tragedies in the area. I loaded my car with several thousand dollars' worth of advanced life support equipment so I could be a genuine help when these disasters struck. One time I was called to an accident where a child was reported to be hurt. I arrived with all my paraphernalia just in time to see the school Superintendent pull a band aid out of his wallet and solve the wailing child's problems on the spot. I've tried to carry a band aid in my wallet ever since.

I felt that it would be proper Christian charity to help establish a good emergency system for the town, and applied myself to it whole heartedly. I taught Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) classes and organized a program to get things started. I was also on the staff at the new Medical School in Peoria in addition to teaching in a hospital Family Practice residency program. One morning I was hospitalized with severe abdominal pain that turned out to be a red hot gastritis from stress. I finally realized that I was trying to make a name for myself instead of my Lord, and dropped everything but my own practice and the necessary work with the local emergency system.

The Director of the Hospital laboratory was in the Meeting. He and I spent many late hours struggling to save critically ill patients together, and had become very close friends. He was married, but I noticed him spending an awful lot of time with an X-Ray technician. I finally warned him that I feared for him. He assured me there was nothing wrong. After some time a nurse made a comment about it, and I pleaded with him that

it was becoming a bad testimony. Shirley and I began praying earnestly about it, and He eventually came and confessed his ongoing immorality to me.

We had to put adulterers out of fellowship according to the fifth chapter of I Corinthians. After the Breaking of Bread the younger children were ask to leave. The oldest brother stood to speak for the Assembly, but he burst into tears and couldn't proceed. Another brother rose to speak, and he also lost his composure. There was scarcely a dry eye in the room as I finally stood and stated the charge for putting the adulterer out of fellowship as a wicked person. We were absolutely devastated. The beloved perpetrator died of brain cancer a few years later, but he had gotten right with the Lord before he died.

A young single brother in our Assembly was arrested for drunk driving. He had stomped on the gas pedal as he left after having a single beer, and the police jumped him instantly. A breath test read the alcoholic residue in his mouth as legal intoxication. Meeting people just didn't drink, and we were humbled at this blight on our testimony. We should have understood that condemning moderate drinking is condemning the One who was called a glutton and a winebibber because He came eating and drinking. (Luke 7:34) But even though I averaged a speeding ticket about every three years myself, I suggested that we rebuke this contrite kid, whose real crime was a traffic violation, before the congregation according to 1 Timothy 5:20. Please! I see a lot of misery and sin in my profession from drinking; and would urge Christians to abstain from alcohol in the absence of their Lord. (Luke 5:33-35)

One afternoon an irate mother brought a child to the office for medical documentation that he had been roughed up by another child on the way home from school. I was troubled to find that the perpetrator was a child from the Meeting. A week or so later it happened again. When I got home Shirley and I prayed fervently about whether to confront the child, tell his parents, or stay out of it. I went on out to the garage, and the child rode up on his bicycle for a visit. I knew the answer to our prayers, and we had a confidential chat about the issue that actually solidified our relationship and definitely put a stop to the problem.

A teenage boy came to a Meeting picnic wearing a graphic T-shirt featuring a popular Hollywood sex idol in a bathing suit pose that lustfully emphasized all her endowments. I had never seen anything so blatantly lascivious in the Meeting before or since, and was really shocked. I caught up with him alone and pleaded earnestly with him not to lower himself and us to the world's level of wickedness this way. I suspect that others objected too, and I never saw him in that shirt again.

In preparing for a gospel meeting, I noticed that hyssop, the grass-like weed used to paint the blood on the door posts of the homes of the faithful at the Passover, had a comparable function in several other Scriptures. David referred to its use for sprinkling the Water of Separation on the unclean in his prayer of repentance:

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalms 51:7 KJV)

When I suggested that hyssop implied "Application" in the Bible, I was gently reminded of I Kings 4:33 (KJV) after the meeting:

And (Solomon) spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.

Meeting tradition held that hyssop implied humility in contrast to the proud loftiness of the cedars of Lebanon. Although the two ideas are actually complimentary, my slight divergence was not received very open mindedly. But the Brother who wasn't allowed to speak on prophecy in Chicago was welcomed in Delavan. And everyone really enjoyed the whole series of less traditional lectures that reminded us how quickly the rapture could occur.

Shirley and I had grown up believing that the Meeting was the visible expression of the "One Body" of Christ. I had been taught that we represented the whole body of Christ, whether they chose to leave their sects and come into fellowship with us or not, because we were non-sectarian. Shirley was raised in a large Assembly without ever learning that we weren't supposed to be sectarian. She was taught more that the Meeting expressed the unity of the Body by abiding by all the Assembly decisions of all the other recognized Assemblies.

We had naturally been hurt that the family circle was flawed without my oldest brother and his wife in the Meeting. But we were confident that they were sincere people who would return to the flock just as soon as we could convince them of the error of their ways. We searched what we considered the ultimate authority on ecclesiastical truth, but everything we found in THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF J.N. DARBY was more consistent with what they said than with what we had been taught. And although we still argued vehemently that the Meeting was not really sectarian, we were beginning to realize that it definitely was not operating the way that it originally did. Shirley finally remarked in exasperation that the Meeting was going to have to change either its doctrines or its literature.

In actuality, my youngest brother worked at Bible Truth Publishers when they reprinted one of William Kelly's books on the Scriptures. This venerable old Brethren writer had asserted that Assemblies were accountable to defend the validity of their official Assembly actions to other concerned Assemblies, but the modern Meeting contended that heaven bound every Assembly decision made in the Lord's name whether it was right or not. Although we didn't know it at the time, Bible Truth Publishers left the paragraphs they disagreed with out of the new edition of this old expository book.

One Sunday morning I discussed our consternation at the differences we had found between the Meeting's original and present policies on reception with the oldest and most respected brother in our Assembly. How could it have been wrong to refuse other reasonably upright Christians at the Lord's Table in the beginning, and wrong to receive

such people now? He was a kind and loving man, and a true elder in the real sense of the word. He told us that Delavan used to receive others who were not "In fellowship," but esteemed brethren from elsewhere always remonstrated with them when they did it. That evening he brought me a reference he had found on the topic, that he hoped would help us. But even his own son agreed that it only documented what we were saying.

One of our young men just out of high school took a fancy to a girl from an out-of-state Meeting. Most of us felt that they were fairly well matched, but her father tried to break it up, supposedly because he had dated her without asking his permission. They carried on a clandestine courtship, and when she was of age she moved to Delavan with the intention of marrying him. Her father insisted that we should discipline her for parental insubjection. The responsible brothers in our Assembly spent weeks agonizing over this, but we did not feel that it was an Assembly matter since she was of age and there was no immorality involved. The father even refused to come to the wedding. I personally felt that this man was almost impiously overbearing, but we were "In fellowship" with him and definitely not "In fellowship" with many other pious Christians we knew who behaved much more temperately.

An uncle of this young married woman used to visit us occasionally. He was a godly and outgoing Christian from another group of Exclusive Brethren, and whenever he showed up at the Breaking of Bread we all greeted him enthusiastically. Then we proceeded with the Lord's Supper without passing the Emblems to him. We always urged him to stay for dinner after the meeting, and enjoyed his company whenever he did. Shirley and I realized that we were expressing our Christian unity with this man in every way except the symbolic way that the Lord had prescribed.

Shirley's parents had retired and moved about two hours away from us. I don't think they had ever considered the non-sectarian claims of the Meeting before we raised the issue. Shortly after we had discussed them together, a germane case came up in their little Assembly. When my father-in-law suggested that the person in question should to be allowed to Break Bread, the elderly Laboring Brother residing there replied that it would only cause trouble in the Meeting. That was the last hint of any concession from there.

We visited my parents in western Kentucky during the week of the Kentucky conference. While we were there an earnest young Baptist preacher called my brothers to tell them that he had lost his job for insisting on some Scriptural point that we agreed with. We invited him to the conference, hoping that he would be allowed to participate in the Breaking of Bread since he had no religious association at all. The visiting laboring brother who interrogated him reported that he "Still had a lot of flesh in him." We knew he was not being allowed to Break Bread even though he was every bit as godly as the rest of us simply because he did not accept the Meeting as the only ecclesiastic position approved by God.

A brother in our assembly convinced his brother in central Kentucky of the validity of the Meeting. This man was received into fellowship when he moved to our area to be near a Meeting. When an older couple who had left the Baptist church with them in deference to Meeting principles came to visit them, they were not allowed to Break Bread. They were discouraged that we refused them when the Lord had accepted them. I pressed the local brothers to receive them the next time they came, and after considerable discussion they decided to allow them to Break Bread "As Christians," even though they were not "In Fellowship." I replied, "If there is a difference, please consider me to be Breaking Bread as a Christian," as that was the only Scriptural grounds I could find for Breaking Bread at all.

The brother who had moved here from Kentucky was continually being harassed by his boss because of his Christian testimony. He finally lost his temper and threatened to clobber the man. He became so discouraged at his own unseemly behavior that he quit his job and moved back to Kentucky. A year or so later we learned that his family was meeting with that other couple in his home, but they couldn't Break Bread because no one had "Spread" the table there. I contacted all the surrounding assemblies, but each lackadaisically felt that someone else should be responsible for them because they were closer, or knew them better, or they had been "In fellowship" with us. I finally got approval from all the involved assemblies to go and Break Bread with them as expressing all of our fellowship with them so they could start Breaking Bread. I was really disturbed to find that we were so bound by our traditions that it could even be difficult to arrange for someone "In fellowship" to Break Bread in simple obedience to Christ.

A Meeting conference speaker insisted that the blood that flowed from the Savior's side was the blood of the atonement. A venerated old missionary in the group responded that the Lord was already dead when His side was pierced, and all the blood shed in the crucifixion was equally efficacious towards our atonement. A couple of men from the Eastern U.S.A. pressed the retired missionary's Assembly to excommunicate him for depreciating the atoning blood of Christ and substituting "Some other blood" for it. The missionary and his son were put out of fellowship against the remonstrances of many responsible brothers in the Meeting, and all the assemblies that the son had established in Borneo and Malaysia were abandoned from Meeting fellowship because no one wanted to disturb them by suggesting that they excommunicate him. Quite a few people left the Exclusives for the Opens over this situation.

A younger Laborer from the Assembly of one of the men that had engineered the case against these missionaries had more or less distanced himself from the conflict. His Assembly finally demanded that he tell them his views on the issue. When he refused to submit to an interrogation on this subject, which he had carefully declined to discuss with anyone, he was also put out of fellowship.

There was a rift in a small Meeting in Minnesota. When things didn't work out locally, one side appealed for outside help. The Des Moines Assembly declared that Assembly a

"Leprous house." Citing Leviticus fourteen for their modus, their delegates "Emptied the house" by suspending the fellowship status of everyone in the Assembly. The "House" was "Shut up" without any Assembly status while they investigated the situation. The diseased bricks were removed by excommunicating the offending communicants, and the restored Assembly was recognized again. Although I had always accepted this as the proper application of the Leprous House before, when I actually saw it applied so brashly I realized that there was not the slightest hint of its appropriateness in any of the cases of sin in an assembly in the whole New Testament. And where did Des Moines derive the authority to be the ones to do this if it did apply? And wasn't it Christ Himself that threatened to remove the Ephesian Candlestick? (Revelation 2:4).

A young Optometrist from Canada took a job teaching his profession in Kenya. I believe it was a sort of self-supporting missionary endeavor, but his home Assembly evidently had too little confidence in his dedication to our traditions to allow an official "Table" to be "Spread" under his administration. They allowed him and his wife to Break Bread in Africa "In fellowship" with his home Assembly, so he could not receive anyone into fellowship without their approval. How could we criticize other places for not following Scriptural protocol while devising such unscriptural mechanisms ourselves?

The Delavan Assembly sent out letters inviting all the young people from the surrounding Assemblies to a week-end of fun and fellowship over the Word. The Des Moines Assembly objected that Assemblies should include everyone in Assembly functions so as not to divide the body of Christ by age or anything else. Against my objections, we rephrased our letter to indicate that two brothers from Delavan were inviting the young people from the surrounding Assemblies to the get-together. But we planned, executed, and I think financed the whole shindig together as an Assembly. Des Moines was looking more like a self-appointed archdiocese all the time.

While we were at a conference in Toledo, a scuffle broke out between some of the younger teenagers. I had never seen any disagreement in the Meeting come to blows before. But one of these kids actually stabbed another. I doubt that any serious injury was intended, but the victim ended up in surgery with a potentially fatal wound. It seemed to me that the Lord was allowing the only "Testimony" He approved of to get pretty low.

THROUGH THE WATERS

(Inspired by a sermon by Nick Pyle)

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God. Isaiah 43:2, 3a

Hebrews 13:5,6

When you're passing through the waters
And your soul is sorely tried,
Be assured they cannot harm you
With the Savior at your side.
Though your earthly circumstances
May appear to be a threat,
He has promised to be with you;
And He's never failed you yet.

Psalms 69

He passed through deepest waters
Where there was no place to stand,
When He bore the awful judgment
That your selfish sins demand;
And if all those waves and billows
Could not quench His love for you,
When you're passing through the waters
He will surely be there too.

Matthew 14:22-33

Christ is not an apparition
In the mist beyond the wave,
But the Son of God from heaven
With the power of God to save--
Walking calmly on the waters,
Treading down their dreadful force,
Bidding you to walk there with Him
While the tempest runs its course.

14) BANKRUPTCY

Both Shirley and I had been totally dedicated to the Meeting since childhood. We grew up believing it was the only ecclesiastical position that the Lord acknowledged. We felt this so strongly that we equated faithfulness to the Meeting with faithfulness to Him. Our claim on this position was that we were the one group that had been faithful to the Scriptural Assembly principles throughout all the divisions since the Brethren first recovered the principles of Christian gathering from the Scriptures. The paradox we were faced with was that the Meeting's practices were not consistent with how they began. Our ecclesiastical position depended on our history, but our history condemned our present ecclesiastical position.

We loved the Meeting. We desperately wanted to justify it. Over the years we shared some of the things that troubled us in the literature with other responsible brothers in the Meeting. Some were surprised, but they obviously didn't want to rock the boat. Some tried to tell us that we were taking things out of context, but we knew we weren't. Some tried to justify the changes in the Meeting by saying that the denominations were more infiltrated with evil doctrines now than they were in the times of the early Brethren. But we knew that the Meeting wouldn't receive anyone from the known godly places any more than from the bad ones. A few simply thought that the early Brethren were wrong, and the modern Meeting had learned better. That totally destroyed the historical arguments for the Meeting. It couldn't claim to be **the** "Place" because of the non-sectarian way it began, and then operate on exactly opposite sectarian principles because it was **the** "Place."

A highly esteemed younger brother in the Meeting told me that what we needed was a firm conviction that we were in the place where the Lord would have us to be. I responded that what we needed was to honestly face the inconsistencies in our position. He assured me that I had taken his statement wrongly, but he wrote me a few days later that he had carefully reviewed his ecclesiastical position, and was just as convinced as ever that it was right.

One of the things that bothered us most was the psychologic denial we ran into in these discussions. Many people absolutely could not see what was bothering us. We all knew that many of the visitor we passed the Emblems by were godly people, but everyone glibly denied that we ever refused any godly Christian. One brother touted an isolated case of the reception of someone not "In fellowship" as Meeting policy until I made him admit that he could not name ten such cases worldwide in his whole lifetime. Another adamantly insisted that if anyone brought in visitors not previously "In fellowship" and simply announced that they were godly Christians the Emblems would be passed to them without hesitation. And when we got to where we could look back, we realized that we had used the same denial mechanisms on my brother who had awoken before us.

The early Brethren had been careful not to label themselves with the word, "Church," lest they conceptually exclude the rest of the Body of Christ. The Meeting still avoided that label. We always went to "Meeting," rather than "Church." A Christian school teacher was evidently impressed with one of the families in our Assembly, and asked one of the children what church they attended. "We don't go to church," he replied; "Its against our religion." But the small child from elsewhere that quoted Ephesians 5:25 as, "Christ also loved the Meeting, and gave himself for it" helped me to understand the word game that we were playing.

One brother soothed my conscience for a while by differentiating between the church as the universal body of Christ, and the Assembly as the official body of believers fellowshiping together in obedience to the "Truth." Then I discovered that the Greek word for "Assembly" had been translated "Church" sometimes in the King James Bible to help authenticate the official claims of the Church of England. There was no distinction between "Church" and "Assembly" in the Scriptures. I was beginning to realize how much our concepts depreciated the rest of the body of Christ. Another brother quoted, "Call not that a sect which God has set up," from an earlier generation. We might not be a "Sect" because of our origin, but our practices were certainly very sectarian.

We were invited to a Bible Study at some enthusiastic Christian patients' homes. After a few visits, I presented the non-sectarian ground of gathering that I still insisted we met on. They couldn't see that coming into fellowship at the Meeting was any different from joining any other church. Although I went through all the standard Brethren arguments, I realized that they weren't very convincing to anyone who wasn't already biased. I was beaten, and we quit going. I knew once and for all that the Meeting that I loved so much really did have a membership. And that made it a sect by their own definition. If the Meeting really had an exclusive franchise on the Lords Table, our only hope was to get the Meeting to change. But no one else saw any need to change.

Although I had striven unsuccessfully all my life to bring other Christians into the Meeting, it was only after I could admit to its faults that I was able to accomplish it. The first time that school teacher who had expressed some interest in our children came to the Breaking of Bread, he and his wife were miffed that the emblems were not passed to them. They didn't come back until after he finally attended the Chicago conference with us. When they were ready to attend the Breaking of Bread again, we contacted virtually every brother in the assembly to ask why they couldn't Break Bread with us when they weren't associated with anything else to "Defile" us. Each brother said that he personally thought it would be all right for such people to Break Bread, but they didn't want to offend the others by supporting it. When we confronted them again with the fact that everyone claimed to feel this way, this couple who were not "In fellowship" were allowed to Break Bread. But such things only happened when we pushed for them. And the more desperately we pushed to prove to ourselves that the Meeting was not really sectarian, the more domineering we were considered to be.

We wrestled conscientiously with these issues for nearly ten years. We'd get everything suppressed and enjoy the meetings for a while. Then something would happen to stir things up again. A Laboring Brother who was aware of our problems might come by and talk in paradoxes. We couldn't bring other Christians out to any of their special meetings because they might give sectarian talks. Worse yet, they might give non-sectarian talks that contrasted glaringly with our practices. We were miserable!

We had hurt when my brother had left the Meeting. Now we hurt even more because we knew they had good reasons for leaving. We struggled to justify the Meeting, and hurt because we couldn't. We hurt because the more we said the less we were trusted. We hurt because I was no longer being asked to take any Gospel Meetings unless there was going to be unsaved visitors. We hurt because we were alone, and afraid to leave, and afraid to stay.

One of us would be distressed for a while. Then the other one would be. Then we'd both be distressed at the same time. For years we'd wake up after restless nights and ask if the other had cried or slept that night. We honestly didn't hold anything against anyone because we knew that we used to feel exactly the way they did. We clung desperately to the Meeting, hoping the others would wake up, and things would change. I wrote a ten page paper absolutely documenting the 180 degree change in the Meeting by the standard literature that we all had on our bookshelves. It scarcely rated a comment. I met with the local brothers, and presented our problems to them formally. They were as blind and brainwashed as we had ever been. Things weren't going to change. After a decade of agonizing over the issues we were ecclesiastically bankrupt.

A LEGEND

His zeal could not be questioned;
His quest, the holy grail.
Sir Lancelot's earthly mission
Was destined but to fail.

Spurred on by tales and visions
So mythicly profound,
He spent his life in searching
For what could not be found.

Anon this empty legend
Soon spun his whole life's tale,
Nor was he even worthy
To find the holy grail.

There was a different legend
That once consumed my life;
A Humble arrogation
Embroided in pride and strife.

I found myself believing
We were the only place
Where Christ could lend His presence
In unrestricted grace.

Complacently divided
From Christians of my day,
I Did my God a service
By turning them away.

Some strained interpretations
Of old Judaic rites
Applied in private contexts
Had warped my spirits sights.

But sleepless nights harassed me,
With fallacies laid bare;
And myths were finally realized
As tears gave way to prayer.

Traditions are traditions
No matter where they're taught;
A member is a member,
Admitted to or not.

The Scriptures need no history
They're meanings to expound;
The assembly is Christ's body
Wherever it is found.

The church is separated
By failures far and wide,
Nor is it represented
By claims from any side.

But two or three may gather
In Jesus precious name
And always find Him present,
Who always is the same.

15) Escape

One night at Prayer Meeting a young man showed around a notice from the Peoria newspaper, searching for others who would like to gather simply in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We all knew that someone from another group of Brethren had to have placed it. Everyone was curious, and one of the brothers posted an inquiry. The letter we got back contained a pamphlet from an Open Brethren publisher, which cooled the interest of the group. I wasn't about to expose my personal interest by writing down the return address from that letter, but I quietly memorized it.

We wondered if the Lord was providing us an answer by that notice, but we were wary of missing the path. A few weeks later we got up the courage to drive by the home in East Peoria, but we were afraid to stop. Were we really in earnest, or just rebellious? Were we courting disaster? We drove around the block several times before we finally braced ourselves and stopped. This was their Bible Study night so there were several very congenial Christians there, but we just weren't prepared to stay. Except for things like funerals, neither of us had ever attended any formal religious service outside of the Meeting.

Shirley was pregnant with our fifth son when I began attending the Bible studies at East Peoria. A man we had not previously known from rural Delavan, and a full time worker from Springfield also attended. There were some single young men from even further away that got there periodically. The Bible studies were not significantly different from the ones at the Meeting, except that there was not that constant assumption of a special position before God. I kept my mouth shut at first, but soon relaxed and began to take part. We continued going to the Meeting as well.

When the baby came, I used it as an excuse to quit going to the Open Bible study. We needed to reconnoiter. We tried to settle down in the Meeting again. A few months later a sister of that teacher I had helped bring into the Meeting got saved. He would have liked to bring her to the Breaking of Bread, but he feared that she would be stumbled because he knew that she wouldn't be allowed to participate. His disappointment was my shame. Just to check out another option, we invited a couple from the other major group of Exclusives in the USA over to find out what their policies on reception were like. They were frank and open about what we could expect from their group, and we decided that going there would probably amount to hopping out of the frying pan into the fire. I determined to find out what the Breaking of Bread in East Peoria was like.

We attended the Breaking of Bread in East Peoria several times without seeing any bright lights or being struck by lightning. It was similar to what we were used to without all the unwritten rules. The biggest noticeable differences were that the Emblems habitually came nearer the end of the meeting, and different brothers might give thanks for the loaf and the cup. We explained to the others that we would be burning our

bridges if we actually partook of the Loaf and Cup there, but I began partaking freely in the worship. I finally told Shirley that I was going to start Breaking Bread there, and she was determined to do it if I did it. We Broke Bread and were outside the Third Generation of Brethren.

We truly hurt for the pain we knew everyone would feel at the Meeting. We kept going to their Gospel meeting just to show them that we still loved and respected them. The older brother that we regarded so highly met me outside under a monstrous Hackberry tree after the meeting one evening to ask if it were true that we had cast our lot with the Open Brethren. I can still see his chin quivering with agony in the moonlight as he reminded me that we were severing our ties with the Meeting. They could never understand that we were not leaving them. It was them that were cutting us off because we could no longer conscientiously be subject to their sectarianism. Our relationship with them was awkward, and we noticed that one couple even seemed hesitant to shake our hands. Our presence at their Gospel Meeting was obviously painful to everyone, so we quit going.

A few months later the Meeting sent a delegation to our house to be sure we understood each other. They assured us of their love, which we took for granted. We still loved them too. But they still rejected our contention that they were sectarian. When they insisted that they had never refused any godly Christians, Shirley asked if they still considered us godly. When they affirmed that they did, she asked if she could Break Bread there instead of Peoria whenever I was tied up with an emergency. "Well," they said, "There would be problems." But they couldn't see the paradox in their stand, and we were reassured that we were doing the right thing. As far as we know they never formally read us out of fellowship, but we certainly weren't considered In fellowship.

Of course our families were the greatest source of pain on both sides. My Mother had been with the Opens, and knew they were not the wicked people the Meeting claimed they were. My brother and his wife had already left, and my family understood all the arguments, though they were still fighting them. The break in ecclesiastic fellowship hurt, and we had some pretty intense arguments, but they rarely actually disrupted the family integrity. Frankly, my Father all but acknowledged that we were right, but didn't feel that we gained anything by fellowshipping with the Opens. Shirley's family took it harder. The issues were newer to them, and obviously very hard to face. An awkwardness developed that resulted in noticeably fewer visits between us, and spiritual topics were avoided on anything but a very superficial level.

Shortly after we began Breaking Bread with the Opens, Shirley's father asked us if we had ever met a Open brother named Floyd Pierce. Floyd had shared the gospel with a distant relative of Shirley's years ago. The man had doubted that he could ever be saved because he had thrown a grenade at a German sniper in a basement during World War Two that killed an entire class of school children who were hiding there. After twenty

years of praying for this man, Floyd had inquired if Bible Truth Publishers knew how to contact him, because he had mentioned them in their conversation. The inquiry had been referred to my father-in-law, who must have been impressed with this example of Open brethren faithfulness. Floyd attended the Bible Study with us in East Peoria regularly.

As the news that we had "Left" the Meeting spread, we got occasional phone calls and letters from old acquaintances who hoped to bring us back to the fold. A typical letter came from a Laboring Brother I had been particularly close to in Kentucky. He pointed out that although our brethren in the Meeting might have failed miserably, Christ Himself had never let us down. So why were we leaving Him? Most of these people could not conceive that Christ could possibly be in the midst of any other Christians who claimed His promises aside from their authorization to do so, or that we were really acting conscientiously before the Lord.

The East Peoria experience was good. I felt that we were truly meeting on the Scriptural grounds that had been recovered by the early Brethren. We were truly nothing but Christians gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We received other Christians at face value, and dealt with anything that needed discipline as it came up. We were not inundated with the unwritten rules of men to hinder the leading of the Holy Spirit during our meetings. People were free to disagree without everyone coming unglued. The quality of the worship at the Breaking of Bread was neither worse nor better than it had been at the Meeting, but we didn't have to be afraid to bring our Christian friends.

The patience and kindness with which these Open Brethren tolerated the Exclusive hang-ups of our wounded spirits was Christ-like. Never a complaint or a push, even when I suggested preposterous things like attending denominational churches was analogous to idolatry or spiritual adultery against the Lord. Gradually the open wounds became scars that could function again. But we knew the scars of Exclusivism would always be there.

We always used a piano in the East Peoria Sunday School, but not in the Breaking of Bread. But in one Breaking of Bread Meeting while we were struggling to sing a hymn of worship that we only half knew, a more musical brother slipped over to the piano and played so we could follow the melody. We all recognized that it helped us keep our minds on the words instead of the music. The proper use of instrumental music did not necessarily detract from our worship!

We had always been led to believe that the Open Brethren received just about anyone who claimed to be a Christian. We found that some Open Assemblies had indeed gotten so loose over the years that others had broken fellowship with them. Most of the American Assemblies were in the same published list, but the "Gospel Halls" generally would not fellowship with the "Chapels." The Chapels were not a definitive affiliation of Assemblies, and varied considerably from one another. The "Gospel Hall" coalition maintained an "In fellowship" type of membership, although not as rigidly as

the Exclusives Brethren did. We were essentially a conservative "Chapel" that tried to acknowledge the whole Body of Christ except where self-disqualified by sin.

One of the distant young men that used to visit us frequently began slipping back into his former habits of drug abuse. He stole some drugs from the pharmacy where he worked, and started abusing his wife. Another Open Assembly became aware of the problem, and eventually excommunicated him. They knew about his relationship with us, and informed us of their verdict. We also stopped fellowshipping with him because it was the Scriptural thing to do. The Open Assemblies were not quite as independent of each other as the Exclusives would like to believe. Neither were they obligated to perpetuate each other's mistakes.

Insistence on the King James Version of the Scriptures had bothered me for some time. After reading that Peter's wife's mother began ministering to the Lord after He had healed her (Matthew 8:14,15), a Kentucky brother quipped, "Ain't that just like a woman, to start preachin' at the Lord." But it wasn't the propensity for such misinterpretations of archaic English that bothered me as much as it was that fundamental Christians seemed to be promoting archaic English as a form of godliness. The world already considered us hopelessly behind the times. Did we absolutely have to prove that they were right?

Now that no one would object, I decided to switch to a less archaic translation of the Bible. The obvious choices were the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version. I opted for the NASB even though it still used archaic address for Deity, because it was the more literal translation. I found the change downright difficult. I had to look up familiar passages in a King James concordance because different key words were used. My word-for-word memorization of King James passages were no longer so pleasantly precise. It was hard to read familiar Scriptures aloud because of the tendency to intersperse half memorized KJV phrases with the less familiar version. And many of my old clichés on words didn't work anymore. But I found the discipline of comparing Greek words and concepts instead of optional King James English words beneficial to a more accurate understanding of the Scriptures. And the New American Standard was remarkably similar to Mr. Darby's New Translation in most places, despite the Meeting's aversion to the more modern translation.

Our ecclesiastical distress seemed to be over. We had built a new home big enough for our six boys. We were settling in, perhaps too much. As we moved into the new house, which was purposely as modest as it was functional, I almost felt like writing, "TO BE BURNED" over the door. We didn't want to lose sight of the city whose builder and maker was God. We needed to get away from this ecclesiastical emphasis, and on with serving the Lord. My old desire to be a medical missionary was free to stir again.

GOD OF PEACE

(Hebrews 12:5,6)

Romans 15:33

God of Peace pick up the pieces
Of our shattered spirits now;
Gently put us back together
In Your will, no matter how.

Romans 5:1

How we cherish the assurance
Of eternal peace with God!
All our sins and all our failures
Covered by Christ's precious blood.

Philippians 4:7

But our anxious souls are troubled;
And we need the peace of God,
In these necessary sessions
With Your guiding staff and rod.

16) THE OTHER SIDE

Christian Missions in Many Lands (CMML) is an Open Brethren missionary aid organization. They provide help and logistic support for missionaries, like a tax deductible way for individuals to donate funds. They are not a mission board and do not attempt to direct the missionaries or their work. They crated our belongings for shipment, and helped us immensely in many other ways. God bless them!

We would have had to sign our own letter of commendation, but another assembly joined in commending us to the Lord's work in Africa. We arrived in Zambia with our six boys, our suitcases, and the clothes on our backs. My shoes were stolen within a couple of weeks, but the parents of the missionary next door brought him a new pair of Hush Puppies from Canada that were way too small for him, and exactly my size, that very week. The Lord cares!

There was no deputation. We spoke in three places, and CMML introduced us to the Open assemblies in their monthly magazine. We were always sent enough money, and never had any extra. When we needed a car, we received enough money to pay for it from funds that my former nurse in Delavan collected from my old inactive accounts. We couldn't afford the newly developed refrigerator and deep freeze that worked on three hours of electricity a day, but someone brought an extra one of each up from South Africa for us, and the entire price came in that month without us ever telling a soul about it. The Lord provides!

After an introduction to third world medicine and surgery at Chitokoloki, we moved to Loloma Mission Hospital, which had been functioning without a doctor for several years. I frequently found myself doing emergency surgery far beyond my training, but if I didn't do it the patients died. The Lord really helped me, and I was able to save most of the salvageable cases.

Shirley got right into language study, and was soon able to communicate in one of the native dialects. I was glad that the official language was English because I never got beyond basic greetings in any dialect. At first my work was mostly medical and maintenance. But when we became close to some very dedicated young English speaking African men who could translate for me, I began speaking by translator in the vernacular assemblies.

As their confidence in us grew, these men began to share their problems with us. They were college graduates who could read and understand the Scriptures as well as we could. I'll never forget one of them explaining the futility of "Those in 'Conspicuous garments' trying to confer salvation by the 'Spiritual technology' of infant baptism." But most of the appointed Elders in the Assemblies could not read well enough to

understand what they were reading. The Elders' ultimate doctrinal authority was what they believed the first missionary in the area had taught them. Anything they disagreed with was "Not what Mr. Suckling taught us." We knew that Mr. Suckling was not entirely responsible for what his doctrine had evolved to. The primary issue was "Eternal Insecurity." Some of the Elders were preaching that Christians would still go to hell if they sinned significantly. Some even taught that anyone who left the "CMML" Church would go to hell.

African society places such a premium on the rank of age that there was no way these young spiritually intelligent men could significantly influence Assembly doctrine. The Elders rejected their complaints, and the missionaries assured them that they were right, but that the Scriptures mandated that they should be subject to the Elders. One missionary couple returning from a trip into the bush complained that they actually doubted that the Elders in one assembly were born again. But they were appalled when Shirley objected that such people were not really the Elders. The problem was deeper than Eternal Security. Many of the Open Brethren were as hung up on the authority of their Elders as the Exclusives were on the authority of their Assemblies.

This hang-up on eldership was so great that the Africans would not consider having a Breaking of Bread meeting unless there was an Elder present. The Elder who was appointed to stay at the mission Assembly one week-end while the rest went to a nearby vernacular conference ministered on how much the Elders should be appreciated for the sacrifices they made for the Assembly. A young brother got up afterwards and suggested that the real heroes of the Assembly were the unrecognized men and women who cleaned the latrines.

I approached the Elders at the large assembly on the mission station at Loloma about correcting the eternal insecurity doctrine whenever it was preached there. Their first concern was whether my father had been an Elder or not. They all claimed that they believed in Eternal Security, but they obviously considered my dialogue with them an insult, and weren't about to regard anything I said seriously. Things continued as before, except that we started going out to the village assemblies instead of there. At least they honestly didn't know any better. We wrote our commending assembly, and they were in agreement with our stance.

One of the Africans that translated a lot for me asked me to give a series of meetings on the Church at a neat little village assembly near his home. I traced the origin and development of the Church throughout the New Testament in a series of about ten lectures that had a real effect on the way that little assembly functioned. Others requested it, and soon I was busy sharing these things many places with various translators. I think the translators themselves gained the most. I don't know for sure whether any souls were saved through our efforts during our four years in Zambia. If we accomplished anything else beyond doing good for the medically needy in Zambia, it was confirming to these dedicated young Christian men that the Word of God takes precedence over all human authority.

Shirley volunteered to teach the required Religious Education class at the local African grade school. Everything was supposed to be taught in English, but she found that many of the children didn't understand enough English to follow the lesson. She ended up teaching in Luvale. As we went around to the village assemblies, she noticed that nothing was being done for the children. She would gather them around her and give a flannel graph Bible story in Luvale with the hopes that the children would be saved and her example would be noticed.

While we were in Zambia a young TW brother from Bloomington was convicted of murdering his wife and children. We had considered this man a model TW whose ministry had always been appreciated. A young Open brother from Chicago was convicted of a different murder almost simultaneously. Both men were subsequently cleared on retrials. But in the Exclusive's nationally publicized trial the prosecutors were able to dig up a lot of moral impropriety that the Meeting would never have knowingly tolerated, while the only significant thing they could find on the Open brother was that he had smoked marijuana once--before he was saved. It seemed that the Lord was demonstrating that the Opens really weren't any worse than the Exclusives by these unprecedented incidents among "Brethren."

Another fairly esteemed TW brother apparently became radically obsessed with the authority ascribed to the Meeting. Among other things, he and his sidekicks "Silenced" a bachelor brother who always did his grocery shopping on the way to meeting, for rejecting their official Assembly directive to stop placing his groceries on the seat next to him during the meeting. The fanatical brother's ministry had deteriorated to the point that a neighboring Assembly forbade him to minister there. But the other Meeting Assemblies objected to any such "Solemn Assembly decision" that did not purport to apply to all the rest of the Meeting Assemblies. When that Assembly, which was one of the ones that had insisted on prosecuting the old missionary earlier, refused to rescind their locally independent Assembly mandate, the other TW Assemblies excommunicated that whole Assembly.

A small group of less than a dozen Assemblies sided with the belligerent Assembly. They considered themselves the ones who were being faithful to the Scriptural Assembly precedents established in earlier Assembly disagreements. In typical Exclusive tradition, this legalistic little group now assumed that they were the sole proprietors of the Lord's Table on earth. One of my brothers fellowshipped with them for a while after he had been asked to leave the TW's for refusing to be silenced on the Meeting's abandonment of its original non-sectarian position. But he received a letter excommunicating him for "Worshiping the Lord in the Breaking of Bread with saints from the Open Brethren and elsewhere" when they found that he did not limit his communion to their fellowship.

We had fully intended to remain on the mission field indefinitely. But as the only doctor for miles around, I felt that I had become an attraction for something I seriously disagreed with. If we stayed we would be at odds with a work that others had

established and literally poured their lives into. After four years, we felt that the fairest thing for us to do was to go back home.

We came back to Delavan in culture shock. Whatever else we imagined our responsibilities might be, we had always known for certain that our children were one of them. We had determined to keep the family together in Africa by home schooling the kids. Now we were concerned about how they would do at school back in the U.S.A. One of their teachers set our minds at ease by telling Shirley, "I don't know what you did, but you obviously did it right."

The large Open Assembly that had commended us to the Lord's work in Zambia had contributed well to our support while we were away. They let us know that they felt we owed it to them to come there. We drove fifty miles to get there Sunday mornings and one evening a week. We had scarcely gotten settled when a family with roots in a different Exclusive group than the one we were raised in asked if we could start Breaking Bread together in our own area. We began breaking bread as nothing but Christians gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ at their home fifteen miles away in rural Tremont Sunday evenings. The folks we used to meet with in East Peoria joined us, but retired and moved elsewhere a few months later. We also attended a weekly evening Bible study for a while with a family that was trying to establish an Open Assembly in Rushville, about sixty miles from Delavan.

When a few of my patients became interested in our weekly Bible study, the Tremont activities were moved to our home. The brother from Tremont was too blind to contribute significantly to a contextual verse-by-verse discussion, and things appeared to be deteriorating. When a young Christian had asked me to lead a Bible study with some of his acquaintances before we went to Africa, I had rejected any leadership role, and the study had slowly fizzled out. I was determined not to let that happen again, and assumed an unofficial leadership role at our present study with everyone's blessings. I came prepared and tried to make sure that things moved rapidly enough that they wouldn't bog down on peripheral issues. I did my best to maintain a semblance of the open format that I had always touted, but our circumstances required more direction than I was really comfortable with.

I began working in the emergency room of the hospital that had bought my practice when we went to Zambia because I didn't feel right about trying to take my old patients back from them, even though my contractual exclusion had expired. I had a lot of difficulty knowing who could be admitted to the hospital and who had to be sent home under the new Medicare rules that had changed medicine so much while we were in Zambia. I wasn't free to use my own judgment, and couldn't seem to concur with the government's. I would have been relieved when I was finally fired if it hadn't been such a humbling experience. I struggled with bitterness for quite a while, but the Lord helped me conquer it. I can honestly say that I genuinely hurt for the administrator that fired me when he was fired a year or so later.

I warned the hospital that they were leaving me no option but to compete with their office in Delavan. That practice had already dwindled considerably from poor management, and it folded soon after my old patients heard that I was in general practice again. I practiced for a while from the night office we had included when we built the house. When the practice got too big, the kids and I built an office behind the house. One of them wrote me an outstanding computer program that handled most of the secretarial work, and I was able to operate without hired help. Shirley could run back any time she was needed for propriety. I had a completely outpatient practice devoid of the general airs of the profession. I could wear blue jeans and just be one of the people.

We hadn't found it terribly difficult to trust the Lord for our finances while we were in Zambia. We had no other choice. We were amazed at how quickly our faith gave way to our own resources when we got home. Suddenly the Lord didn't seem so involved. But we were unable to afford malpractice insurance, so we had to trust the Lord for His protection against law suits. He has been gracious!

We were beginning to reconsider the issue of Christians voting together. More and more contests seemed to revolve around immoral issues like abortion. Was it really right to abstain from voting for the more righteous candidate? A special school tax election came up right after we registered to vote. Shirley and I cast our very first votes in favor of the referendum, which won by exactly one vote. We were shocked at how much our votes counted, but still didn't know whether it was for better or for worse!

We had a visit from a TW missionary that I had been pretty close to. When he heard that we had come home from Zambia primarily because of the widespread denial of "Eternal security," he told us that it was somewhat of a problem in the TW Meetings in South America too. It seemed preposterous that the Exclusives considered us indifferent to evil because of our association with the Open Brethren, when they tolerated those who held the very same bad doctrines that we had separated from within their own fellowship.

The large Open Assembly that we attended Sunday mornings was the first place with any successful adult outreach that we had ever attended in the USA. Many of the congregation had been converted from worldly circumstances, and were always bringing in old friends and co-workers to hear the gospel. I was asked to speak approximately once a month, and really enjoyed preaching to people that weren't already as familiar with the Scriptures as I was. Everyone seemed to enjoy the style I had developed over the years.

Shirley attended some very neat ladies' meetings at this Assembly week days. Her knowledge of the Scriptures was evidently appreciated. One time the Elder's wife that usually lead the study asked her to lead the next one. She apologized that none of the Elders' wives would be able to get there, but she really thought it would be all right as

long as Shirley was there. Perhaps the need for a presiding Elder at every meeting didn't originate in Africa.

In one of my sermons, I disagreed with a video that we had watched at the chapel that implied that Christians could legitimately watch the same TV programs as the world does. I had heard a similar statement on Christian radio later that same week, and felt that someone should urge more restraint. I reviewed the typical implications of the Old Testament laws on appropriate foods for the Lord's people, and pled that we not feed our souls on spiritually unclean things that would defile us. Although I had only contended with an incidental statement in the video, the primary Elder was quick to let me know that I should be careful not to say anything that could be construed as criticism of anything the Elders did, lest I undermine their authority. But the next week he was kind enough to tell me how much his own son had been challenged by that meeting.

I noticed that a lot of women in the larger Assembly wore head coverings at the Breaking of Bread, but not at the Prayer Meeting. One day I spoke on the Scriptural symbolism involved in women remaining silent and wearing head coverings in the church. I stated that since head coverings were mentioned in connection with prayer, perhaps they were most appropriate in the Prayer Meeting. The leading Elder came to the front and denounced me bitterly at the close of the meeting. He had asked me to avoid the subject when we first started going there, but I was confident that they trusted me more now that they knew me better. I honestly had no clue that I was contradicting the Elders' decree on the issue, or I would have handled it differently. He had told me that the Elders had already instructed the women that they should wear head coverings at the Breaking of Bread, but I didn't realize that he meant they were not to wear them at the other meetings.

The Elders came to our home to clear up any misunderstandings. They asserted that they stood in Christ's stead as the leaders of His local Church. We were to act however they interpreted the Scriptures. They would answer for how they directed the Assembly, but we would answer more for whether we obeyed them or not. For instance, if the Elders of an Assembly believed that head coverings were Scriptural, it would be wrong not to wear them there. But if the Elders believed they were not applicable in our culture, then it was wrong to wear them there. They deemed that they had been quite patient in tolerating Shirley's wearing a head covering at their Prayer Meetings up until then.

We felt that such exaggerated concepts of eldership authority were inconsistent with Romans 14, where each person's conscience was to be respected by the rest of the body of Christ. Any authority the elders derived from the Scriptures was necessarily subservient to the Scriptures, and Philippians 1:1 confirms that they were written for everyone including the elders. In demanding absolute subjection to themselves, they made themselves the heads of the church. We agreed that the congregation was to be subject to the elders inasmuch as they directed it into the will of Christ through the

Word of God. But if Christ is really the head of the church, His Word should take precedence over the opinions of the Elders. Elders were not Popes in the Scriptures.

I thought I had really struggled with bitterness when I was fired from the hospital. Now I had to struggle with it against a truly godly brother in Christ who had publicly attacked me, and was still adamant that he had done the right thing. I'd suppress it one day only to find it raising its resentful head the next. I'd ask the Lord to help me conquer it, and it would return the next time I thought of it. I finally began praying for the Lord's blessing on this brother, and pretty much conquered the bitterness--I think. This man was a genuinely dedicated Christian operating under the prevailing Open attitudes on eldership. He was as much a product of one set of traditions as we had been of another.

Some time later we found that some friends who were missionaries in Hong Kong had been told essentially the same things we were told on eldership in another Open Assembly. Such Opens weren't exactly first generation Brethren either! If the Assembly usurped the authority of the Word of God among the Exclusives, the Elders were usurping it just as much among many of the Opens.

Looking back, I was struck with the realization that the whole Open/Exclusive controversy had been initiated by Mr. Newton's determination to limit any ministry at the Plymouth Assembly to an approved group of speakers. The prevailing Open attitude on Eldership a century and a half later justified the Exclusive contention that clericalism was being reintroduced into the Brethren Movement. But the same line of reasoning also vindicated the Open contention that the Exclusives were reinstating sectarianism by their stance in the division. Our loyalty simply had to be to the Word of God rather than to any group of Brethren.

17) FALLACY ROAD

My own retrospective analysis of what went wrong with the Brethren Movement was crystallizing. Presumptions of official status seemed to be the problem. The Exclusive pretension that their fellowship is the one Christ sanctions arrogates His authority to their Assemblies. The Open contention that their local assemblies are recognized by God as official New Testament Churches arrogates Christ's authority to their Elders. Both contentions appropriate the privileges of the Body of Christ for themselves in their respective spheres, which do not include, and cannot represent the majority of the Body within their spheres or areas. Why can't we realize the confusion the Church has brought upon itself by two millennia of unfaithfulness, and be content to be nothing, to meet according to the Scriptures with the upright, to remain separate from the wicked, and to get on with the work of Christ without all the squabbling that has characterized the Brethren Movement?

The little group meeting in our home was totally non-pretentious. We met without any claims of being anything at all. We were small and had little fellowship with others in sympathy with our way of meeting, except for an occasional visit from some of the Opens we knew. We had six sons and a daughter, and the other family that Broke Bread with us had four of their own children to consider. The group that they had been associated with had made every effort to reunite all the doctrinally pure Exclusive Brethren back together over the years. We contacted them and told them that we were hungry for spiritual fellowship. We asked them to welcome our young people to their activities, and to let them Break Bread while they were there. We explained that we couldn't assume any pretensions, but we would love to fellowship with them as fellow Christians who tried to meet in a Scriptural way that we would be comfortable with. Could they extend their fellowship to us on that basis?

The "Reunited" Brethren had merged from various Exclusive groups that included some from fanatically exclusive backgrounds, some who had awakened to the pitfalls of exclusivism, and some who had probably never been extremely exclusive. Most of the people in the Assembly we had contacted were not overly exclusive at heart, but some of them were opposed to our non-sectarian approach--one brother adamantly so. He got hardliners from other Assemblies involved. A century-and-a-half of Exclusive traditions were hard for such people to overcome. A radically exclusive brother from another State wrote us that we would split their fellowship if we allowed ourselves to be received. We swallowed our heartache and waited--like sparrows alone on the housetop. After nearly a year we received a letter accepting us on the as-is grounds that we had requested. The unity of the Body of Christ had prevailed over the sectarian seclusion of the group. Their fellowship was precious.

The Reuniteds immediately wanted to list us in their address book of "Some assemblies... known to be walking together as members of the body of Christ and endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace." We were

hesitant to be listed in any way that would identify us as anything separate from the rest of the Body of Christ, but they pled their disclaimer in its preface: "This list does not in any way claim to be a complete or exclusive list of saints who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, nor does it pretend to any authority." We reluctantly agreed to the listing in hopes that it might bring us some visitors, which it rarely did. The Reunited "Assembly Bulletin" listed us as a "New Assembly," but we didn't really feel that fellowshipping with them made us an "Assembly," and whatever we were, it certainly wasn't New.

We purchased our first TV to follow the Desert Storm operations. We made it our policy to avoid the run-of-the-mill trash, but I enjoyed watching football and basketball. One afternoon I was watching a football game between the New Orleans "Saints" and the Los Angeles "Raiders." The California team was really drubbing the visitors. At half time I couldn't resist calling a genuinely non-sectarian friend from the Reuniteds who also enjoyed football to ask in a slanderous tone, "Have you heard what's happening to the Saints in California?" His agonized query, "What?" confirmed how the term was used in "Brethren" circles. I can still hear his chagrined sigh of relief when I smugly replied something like, "They're getting beat 24 to 7 by the Raiders."

We were expecting our eighth child in a couple of months, and our little minivan was already splitting at the seams when it blew an engine. We piled the family into two cars and started out to look for a larger van. It had been a particularly exhausting day at the office, and I must have been half asleep as I topped a hill that I knew had a stop sign at the bottom. I went through several sets of rumble strips and didn't hear a warning from my wife. The horrified kids in the car behind watched us hit another car broadside at fifty-five miles an hour. I was hospitalized for twenty-four hours, Shirley had a broken shoulder, and when I got home I found that the hospital had missed a broken leg on our little girl. The occupant of the other car was not seriously injured.

Our patients flooded us with kindness and food after the accident. And our brethren from the Delavan Meeting we used to attend were every bit as generous with their sympathy and goodies, and even their finances. We appreciated it.

Rumors began filtering down about serious problems in the Meeting we had been raised in. There had apparently been some widespread immorality among the youth in a Midwestern Assembly. It all came out when one of them tried to pacify a victim of his previous abuse by minimizing it as "Child's play." The establishment "Silenced" those who insisted on investigating the matter. When the censured people left the TW Assembly, the believers where they wanted to go requested a conference with the TW Assembly to find out why they had been disciplined. Those who had chastised them conceded that there was no reason why they shouldn't be accepted there, rather than attempting to justify their treatment of them for trying to investigate the evil in their midst. And although many objected, the other TW Assemblies, who really believe they would be defiled by Breaking Bread with anyone else, still remain in fellowship with that Assembly.

Considerably more immorality of a gross nature that would be rather difficult to document leaked out to some TW youth workers. The establishment at their local Assemblies refused to believe that such awful things as incest could happen in the Meeting. Accusations and bitterness ensued as the conflagration gained momentum. Other Assemblies got involved. The old argument of what constituted the valid Assembly Decision surfaced. The Meeting was about to split. The unrelenting independence of the establishment was so obvious that the cleavage was developing somewhat along the lines of radical Exclusivism versus awakening resistance to it.

I got a call from someone in the Meeting out West who was wide awake. He wanted to publish that paper I had drafted to document the changes in the Meeting. He circulated several other things I had written to help emancipate distressed souls, before leaving the Exclusive circle of fellowship himself.

Everyone could see that a division was inevitable. Our former associates in the Delavan Meeting were suffering through virtually the same issues that had bothered us so much. The festering scars of our own ecclesiastical struggles seemed to break down into raw wounds, and we hurt right along with them. We literally begged them to include us when the split overtook them. They recommended that we attend and participate in their evening meetings so they could Get to know us better. Deep down, we couldn't help but feel that since we had been driven away by the Meetings sectarianism, the least they could do was to welcome us back when they finally realized that the sectarianism had been wrong. But they seemed to be mentally twisting our previous differences from the issue of sectarianism to a resentment of the way we had opposed it, and didn't seem to feel any onus at all on themselves for our reconciliation. Instead, we felt more or less delegitimized by their attitudes, as if we were subject to the scrutiny of their authenticity. We were expected to attend their meetings but only one of them showed any interest at all in ours, and my exasperated objection to their unilateral attitude didn't help the situation a bit. My parents finally gave up and began Breaking Bread with us, but Dad died a month later. The anticipated division finally came, and we were left completely out. Nothing ever hurt more!

Emotions are chaotic on both sides after such divisions. Those who leave the Meeting can hardly be expected to renounce the sacred dogma that it is the only place where the Holy Spirit gathers Christians to the Lord Jesus Christ without a bit of trepidation. Those who stay resent the dissenters desecration of this essential doctrine of the Meeting. To deny this dogma is to deny that the Meeting is founded on the Word of God, and that amounts to willful sin that calls for Assembly discipline.

In our own area, a Meeting family refused to invite their own in laws from across the street to their daughter's wedding--in spite of the fact that the man of the house had freely helped me to meet several deadlines on my office building about ten years after I had left the Meeting. Elsewhere, the family of that Laboring Brother who had been "Silenced" for remarrying sooner than a year after his first wife died refused to let his youngest daughter attend his funeral because she had sided with the division.

Whatever their emotions were, we felt that the awakened side had more or less shelved us without ever expressing any legitimate reasons for it. We suspected that some of them objected to our Breaking Bread with the Opens and Reuniteds, but they continued fellowshiping with others who did the same. Even though they were now assuming the very nonsectarian stance we had urged on them when we were together, the fact that we had dared to differ with them in the past seemed to be an albatross around our necks. To put it bluntly, we seem to have been considered troublemakers. Whatever their reasons, they suddenly began driving some thirty miles away to meet with their fellow dissenters in Bloomington without any discussion with us. We had pled with them to express some sort of practical Christian fellowship with us to the point that we were ashamed and reluctant to pursue it any further.

Ode of Anguish

Cherished Brethren, I remember
How we feasted in the Lord,
On those emblems of communion
With the Savior we adored.
Earnestly we came together
In the way we had been taught,
Confident that we were walking
In the "Truth" that we had bought.

How distressed I was to realize
That our emphasis was wrong,
How I tried to reconcile it
With the Scriptures all along,
As I struggled to convince you
We'd imbibed a faulty view,
'Till my conscience took me elsewhere
Lest I force my way on you.

And you grieved that I had left you
For you never understood,
It was you that would not have me
If I acted as I should.
Your traditions wouldn't allow me
At that board we held so dear,
Lest I introduce "defilement"
To its holy atmosphere.

So I shouldered the reproaches,
And I tried to hush my groans,
By confessing I once hurled
Such derogatory stones.
And I prayed that you would realize
Such behavior wasn't right,
So our unity in Jesus
Would be precious in His sight.

And at last you left the system
That restrained our fellowship,
And espoused the very precepts
That still echoed from my lip;
And I thought that I'd be welcome
To enjoy your feast and song,
But instead I am suspected
Of complacency with wrong.

You're reluctant to accept us
With the Christians we embrace,
But the system that condemned them
Brands you with the same disgrace;
So my soul still aches within me,
With a pain that will not die,
And the tears of anguish trickle,
When the cistern should be dry.

18) S.O.S.

(Same Old Stuff)

A meeting was arranged between the liberated side of the division and the Reunited Exclusives that had received us. One would have thought that they would have been anxious to get together, but it didn't work out. Too many of the casualties of the division were still too deep in the sectarian stupor that had separated the two groups in the first place to drop any of the old arguments. And too many of the Reunited's attitudes demanded an unscriptural loyalty to their group that was unacceptable to those who had awakened. They felt that they would just be switching allegiances to a different group of Exclusives that venerated many of the same hang-ups that had caused the division in the first place.

A Reunited "Laborer" who had participated in the meeting between the two groups was asked by fellow Reunited, "How about those former TWs? Are they going to join us?" This non-sectarian brother's aversion to the concept that the Reuniteds were a more legitimate group before God was reflected in his sardonic reply, "I hope not." He wanted the two groups to come together simply as fellow members of the body of Christ. If his spirit of love and respect for the rest of the body had prevailed over the presumptions that either group was the right one, they could probably have merged to the glory of God.

Sometimes it seemed that the sectarian element absolutely dominated the Reuniteds Assemblies. For instance, one brother in the Reunited group had awakened enough to allow some young Christians at a youth retreat who were not "In fellowship" to Break Bread. His home Assembly demanded that he change his views on reception, and put him out of fellowship for his attitudes and non-sectarian activities when he refused to do so. Many aroused Brethren objected, but even a nation-wide conference could not influence the outcome before the specific issue became moot because he chose to go elsewhere. Sectarian isolation literally prevailed against the unity of the body of Christ. And the cohorts of the brother who was excommunicated were still "In fellowship" even though they obviously shared his basic views, primarily because their own particular home Assemblies were less radically Exclusive.

A brother sitting across the dinner table from me at a Reunited conference bragged at how he handled requests to Break Bread from denominational Christians who were visiting his Assembly. He would ask if they would be Breaking Bread if they had gone where they usually did that morning. When they invariably answered, "No," he would reply that it wouldn't hurt them not to Break Bread here either, then.

A couple who had awakened to the problems in the TW Meeting had been received into fellowship with a Reunited Assembly in another city in the Midwest. But when they broke bread on a visit with their acquaintances from the new affiliation of former TWs,

their Reunited Assembly informed them that it was unacceptable. Such objections to fellowshiping with other godly Christians belie any denial that many of the Reuniteds consider themselves on some uniquely divine ground. But although the more exclusive Reunited Assemblies seemed intolerant of non-sectarian individuals in their own particular Assemblies, they somehow seemed to tolerate somewhat less sectarian behavior in other Assemblies within their fellowship.

I didn't see how it could last, but the non-sectarian element seemed reasonably free to act according to their consciences in some Reunited Assemblies. Some of our young people attended a Reunited youth camp in Wisconsin. On Saturday the administration explained how Sunday's Breaking of Bread meeting would be conducted. Those who habitually participated in the Breaking of Bread this way were welcomed to take part as usual. Those who did not usually do so were asked to discuss it with one of the administrators ahead of time if they wished to be included. I was impressed with their obvious avoidance of the concept of membership while properly screening out applicants who had no Scriptural place at the Breaking of Bread.

An unquestionably orthodox TW laborer chose his side in the Meeting division primarily on his conviction that the more traditional side had violated an official Assembly decision. We felt sorry for this brother who we felt had sacrificed his reputation and most of his financial support for his conscience's sake only to find himself associated with the side that increasingly rejected the sectarian conventions he believed in. He finally sent out a rather vaguely supported paper calling for an exclusive circle of fellowship that he somehow confused with the "One body" of Christ. I responded with a more definitively documented review of the non-sectarian circle of fellowship I believe the Scriptures support. It fell into the hands of the editor of a Reunited magazine, who wanted to print a modified version of it, but I could not endorse some changes he wanted to make to mollify the sectarian element of the group, so they got someone else to write a similar article more supportive of their ecclesiastical system.

The new affiliation of Assemblies from the TW division eventually published their own address book with disclaimers similar to the Reunited's List of Assemblies. We felt that we would seem less committed to the sectarian element of either group if we were listed in both books. But they were unwilling to list us in their book because they had people they considered "In fellowship" in our area who drove the thirty miles to Bloomington rather than fellowshiping with us, even though they chose not to be listed themselves. They understandably didn't want to "Offend" anyone in either group, and our disappointment persisted.

We went on vacation about a year after the Delavan group moved to Bloomington. The group that usually met in our home were considering driving two hours each way to Break Bread at Danville that week-end. I encouraged them to check out the possibility of Breaking Bread with the Bloomington group instead. They were welcomed cordially enough that they even felt free to participate significantly in the Meetings. This reinforced our realization that our former colleagues had been as painfully devastated

by their awakening as we had been. Maybe they simply needed more time to recover from the scars of Exclusivism, and think out their new position before the Lord without having to consider our conclusions.

Meanwhile, the distant thunders of division in the Reunited group began drifting in from Europe. It seems that some laboring brothers from the Netherlands had rebelled against sectarianism, and the German assemblies were trying to excommunicate virtually all the assemblies that fellowshipped with them in Holland. A group of more or less self-appointed U.S. brothers who were more familiar with the European assemblies investigated the matter, and eventually sided with the German contention. Their letters indicated that the issues were more procedural than doctrinal, but stated that all assemblies in the Reunited fellowship would eventually have to take sides in the conflict. Letters of declaration began floating in, nearly all siding against the Scandinavian contention. The non-sectarian element took a wait-and-see attitude without declaring themselves either way, but more and more pressure was exerted on them to take a stand against all the assemblies that tolerated the Dutch brothers or their teachings. Eventually, one Illinois assembly excommunicated another one that broke bread with one of the censored brothers, forcing the division on everyone in this country. We refused to take part in the whole affair.

We occasionally attended evening meetings at the Bloomington group. We were always accepted, but couldn't help but feel a bit of reserve in our welcome. There seemed to be little reciprocal interest in our getting together again. Except for a rare visit from a couple that lived about four miles from us, only one other brother from the other group ever came to any of our regular meetings. Then, after several years, that couple dropped by to tell us that their group saw little difference between them and us, and felt that there should be more fellowship between our groups. They were looking for a more suitable meeting room at the time, and we suggested that perhaps a more central location would make it possible for the two groups to merge, but we were not consulted when they chose a new location. Admittedly, logistics would have made it next to impossible for everyone from both groups to meet at a central location, but we were disappointed that we couldn't at least explore the possibilities of getting together. It might have helped establish a bond of fellowship between us.

A year or so later, the blind brother who was the mainstay with us in our little meeting became so discouraged at our isolation and weakness that he decided to move his family to the Bloomington group. We resisted it because we would be deserting the few others that regularly attended some of our meetings, but it was evident that we could not continue without his support. He urged us to come to Bloomington with them so we would still meet together, but we felt that some of the people from the old Delavan group still had reservations about us.

We went to the brother who had told us he saw little difference between the groups to ask how they really felt about us coming there. He volunteered to discuss it with the

rest of the group, and get back to us. The group suggested that we get together to clear up a few things on both sides first.

It was an awkward meeting, and those who called it didn't seem to know how to start it. After perhaps fifteen minutes of silent sitting while the tears rolled down Shirley's cheeks, a late arriving brother asked if everyone was too uneasy to speak, so I told them that we had quit meeting at Delavan, and had to find someplace else to go. We wanted to know whether they really wanted us there, whether they had room for us there, and whether our Open Brethren friends would be welcome there. We assured them we were not trying to impose anything on them, but were just trying to decide where we should go. Some of them obviously had no idea why we had left the old TW group in the first place, and had no reservations about us at all. An older brother who was not from the old Delavan group asked why we would even question our welcome. We pointed out that not only had we been excluded by the group when we broke with their sectarian practices, but that we had been flatly left out when they started meeting on the non-sectarian principles that we had espoused. Another brother wanted to know whether we were trying to merge the two assemblies, or just wanted to start coming there. It finally came out that they had agreed beforehand to tell us we were welcome as long as we were not coming with any agenda.

At the end of the meeting I was asked if I felt assured of a welcome there. I replied, With reservations. We felt that their pre-arranged stipulation that we were welcome as long as we came without any agenda implied a lack of confidence in our motives for coming, and their concern about merging the two groups implied a reluctance to receive us on an equal basis with themselves. Maybe it was our association with the Opens that they had been taught to distrust. Maybe it was an old smoldering grudge. But if we were welcome without the mutual trust necessary to foster a truly reciprocal fellowship between us, we doubted that we would really be accepted as a genuine part of the group. We hoped to break bread with them occasionally, but we just couldn't commit ourselves to a long term relationship where we seemed to be stigmatized.

The elder most related to our difficulties at the Open assembly in Springfield had died, their concept of eldership had moderated, and they were urging us to come back there. We went back to the Opens.

In general, I cannot help but conclude that the Exclusive Brethren's obsession with their own ecclesiastical superiority has all but destroyed their simplicity in Christ. It has made godliness more of a way of meeting than a way of life. It is a poor substitute for the kind of godliness that reaches out to the lost in the testimony of Christian unity that the Lord had in mind for His Church. The smug presumption that they are the only ones that operate with God's official approval is a fallacy that has completely reversed the original non-sectarian thrust of the Brethren movement. The fanatical traditions resulting from this assumption have provoked judgmental dilemmas that literally tear souls apart. The heart-rending anguish that has resulted over the years is beyond imagination. The Scriptures teach that the godly will suffer persecution from the world, but something is

terribly wrong when the godly persecute each other. God help these Brethren to awaken to their non-sectarian heritage of being nothing but some Christians gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

19) Regrets

Many ecclesiastical issues are not absolutely black or white in the Word of God. The reason the Reformation resulted in congregational, presbyterian, and episcopal denominations was because each of these major administrative ideologies has a measure of support from the Scriptures. The whole congregation was to put sinners out of its midst when they came together. (I Corinthians 5:4.) Elders were appointed in newly established assemblies. (Acts 14:23.) A delegation from Antioch was sent to the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem to find out if the Gentiles should be under the Law. (Acts 17.)

The Exclusive Brethren tend more towards a congregational approach to church administration, while the Opens generally emphasize a more presbyterian or "Eldership" type of assembly government. But the Exclusive contention that each Assembly is bound by the decrees of all the other Assemblies they recognize, resembles the episcopal philosophy of outside regulation of assemblies. If we could learn to function as local congregations led to act according to the Word of God by all the spiritual elders among us, while supporting the Scriptural behavior of other Christians, we would have a truly Biblical blend of all of these ideologies.

But the original Brethren contention was not so much with the various ideologies on church administration as it was with the denominational sectarianism that resulted from the emphasis placed upon them. The Brethren initially refused to rally around any particular ecclesiastical ideology. But when they developed their own ideology that depreciated everything else to the point that they wouldn't receive anyone who went anywhere else, the Exclusives became the sect that was opposed to everyone else's sectarianism.

Considering the fragmented state of the post-reformation church, I am not personally able to acknowledge any group or coalition of Christians as anything official before God today. The Exclusive contention that the Brethren Movement was a special work of God that calls for all other godly Christians to leave their "Ecclesiastically evil" associations and join them is remarkably analogous to the "Of Christ" heresy of 1 Corinthians 1:11-13. The Lord has never visibly validated any such official presumptions. I believe that Christians are responsible to meet in conformity with the Scriptures. But the franchise on the Lord's Table that the Exclusives generally arrogate to themselves denies that privilege to Christians who do not arrive at all the same conclusions as they do from the Scriptures. We are as responsible to recognize other groups that meet in reasonable accord with the Scriptures as they are to recognize us.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing in all of my ecclesiastical struggles has been the realization that I can not confirm everything in my Brethren heritage by the Scriptures. I have found the way the Brethren come together to remember the Lord extremely precious. The Lord has revealed Himself to me time and again, as He did to the two

from Emmaus, in the Breaking of Bread. I simply am not willing to exchange our way of remembering Him for the apathetic communion services of most other places. But although the way we Break Bread together is consistent with the Scriptures, the exact way to conduct the Lord's Supper is not prescribed in the Scriptures. Neither do they describe exactly how to conduct Bible Studies or Prayer Meetings. To insist on protocols that can not be documented in the Scriptures is to establish a liturgy.

On the other hand, some of the distinctives that have characterized the Brethren movement are fairly obvious ecclesiastical principles in the Word of God. The fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians demands an open format somewhere in the assembling of Christians. And the almost universal displacement of the open format by an assigned minister or leader is just as conspicuous by its absence from the Scriptures. The exclusion of evil, the reception of the righteous, and the specific rules of order like the injunctions against women speaking in the assembly meeting of 1 Corinthians 14 are definitive. I can't personally consider such matters optional.

Ecclesiastical issues were not a major problem before Christianity became so divided; but now each of us has to decide how and where to meet with other Christians. And no matter how Scripturally we meet, we will rarely be able to include a significant fraction of the body of Christ in our own locality, let alone encompass much of it universally. In our divided condition, I am content to meet in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as nothing but contrite Christians with a forgiving Savior in our midst--without any "Assembly" status at all. I want nothing more than to gather with other like-minded Christians who strive to meet in compliance with the Scriptures in a way that honestly embraces the whole body of Christ. I can accept other Christians who meet according to different protocols as fellow members of the body of Christ without judging them. Though I might hesitate to meet with some in the way they meet, I would welcome all reasonably upright Christians who do not exclude themselves by sin to fellowship with us.

While no one can deny that ecclesiastical issues are consequential, they have literally dominated the traditional Exclusive perspective. Overemphasis on them is no less erroneous than overemphasis on any other doctrine to the exclusion of other truths. And when our ecclesiastic theories separate us from other godly Christians instead of from the unrighteous, they have indeed been carried too far. As I look back over my life, I realize that I have literally majored in ecclesiastical trivia that has separated me from the rest of the body of Christ. I regret it! A personal fixation on such things is one of the scars of Exclusivism that I will probably always have to struggle with.

20) THE FOURTH GENERATION

“And after this Job lived...and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations”

(Job 42:16 NASB)

Nothing can prevent one generation from passing on to the next.

The Third Generation of "Brethren" has effectively isolated itself from the checks and balances of any outside input. That part of it which also suppresses any internal reform that spontaneously awakens within it is a natural set-up for cultic degeneration. May God preserve the Fourth Generation from going that way!

The main thrust of the Brethren Movement was non-sectarianism;

The First Generation of Brethren were as non-sectarian as it is possible to be because they refused to make themselves a separate entity from the rest of the Body of Christ. Their only stipulation of reasonable godliness for reception to the Lord's Supper was Scriptural.

The Second Generation claimed to be non-sectarian because they still received some other godly Christians. Their ever increasing ecclesiastical stipulations made them steadily more and more sectarian.

The Third Generation considers itself non-sectarian because it believes it is the faithful remnant of the early Brethren movement. Since God established it, everything else is a sect that divides the Body of Christ from the true center of gathering. It stipulates that other Christians are responsible to leave everything else and come into fellowship with it.

The Fourth Generation will be non-sectarian only to the extent that they abandon the delusions of the Second and Third Generations. God help them to awaken to the unscriptural stipulations that their ancestors have left them!

Sectarianism pervades virtually every branch of the Exclusive Brethren. It is not simply a procedural error; but rather an obnoxious affront to the rest of the Body of Christ to be repented of. The Fourth Generation needs to confess, as Daniel did:

Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. To the Lord our God belongs compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us...

(Daniel 9:8-10)

Awakening from the sectarianism of the Third Generation is as difficult as it is painful. Exclusive traditions are so deeply ingrained in their souls that they have come to equate

them with godliness. Their mental association of the group with Christ confuses questioning its policies with criticizing Christ Himself. The fact that they have a Scripture for virtually every contention further complicates the issue, until their misapplications and unwarranted assumptions are detected. And life-long patterns of Biblical exegesis are not instinctively re-evaluated until the flaws in their outcome are conceded.

The early Brethren did their best to derive their protocol from the Word of God. The Fourth Generation should understand that while many of their practices were consistent with the Scriptures, a lot of them are not necessarily prescribed by the Scriptures. Such things should not be insisted on. The Lord upbraided the Pharisees for "*Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*" (Mark 7:7, NASB.) A less prejudiced perspective might realize that others sometimes have some pretty good Scriptures for the way they do things too. For instance, our aversion to local pastors supported by the church is a bit difficult to defend if the double honor that the elders who rule well are worthy of refers to financial support (I Timothy 5:17,18).

The first time another former TW Broke Bread with us at our unpretentious little assembly we were told that we should switch to the Little Flock hymn book that the Meeting uses, put the Emblems on a higher table to give them more prominence, dress more respectfully for the Lord, and stand when speaking or praying. Not one of these traditions is either right or wrong, but insisting on such thing without reasonable Scriptural backing can be devastating to the harmony of any fellowship of believers.

Despite the fact that virtually all Exclusive Brethren stand aloof from the Open Brethren, many Opens are more like the early Brethren than any division of the Exclusives are. Most Exclusives have become so sectarian that many fundamental Bible Churches actually resemble the First Generation of Brethren more in that respect than they do. But if the early Brethren were right in not becoming a separate entity within the Body of Christ, the Fourth Generation should not be striving to be "Brethren" anyway. Christians need not acquiesce with anything they feel is downright unscriptural; but they become unscriptural themselves if they reject other reasonably godly Christians coming in compliance with what they do consider Scriptural. It is nothing short of sectarian bigotry that has separated the Third Generation of Brethren so totally from other godly Christians.

Abraham dug his wells in the Promised Land, but his enemies filled them with debris. Isaac had to re-dig them for Himself, or go without. One generation cannot function on the spirituality of another. The Fourth Generation must stand or fall by its own quarrying in the Scriptures. If our ecclesiastical stance requires an excavation of the moldy tomes of biased Brethren literature, we are digging where any water we find will only be tainted by the bias. If the Scriptures alone are not sufficient to justify our way of meeting, let it be condemned. We need to return to the Word of God alone, as the first generation of Brethren did. Then maybe, just maybe, the visitors of the Fourth Generation might proclaim that we meet "Just like the old fashioned church, only under different circumstances."

Addendum) THE AFTERMATH OF DIVISION

In the last ten or twelve years I have been a close observer of significant internal awakenings to the sectarian degeneration of both the TW/NHH and the KLC/Reunited branches of the Exclusive Brethren. Quite predictably, the ensuing divisions in both groups accomplished little more than tightening the stranglehold of exclusivism on the parent groups by removing those who seriously objected to it. What dismayed me was the outcome for the dissidents.

Although they cared enough about ecclesiastical issues to stand up against exclusivism, many who left or were excommunicated from the Exclusives ended up in places with downright unscriptural ecclesiastical practices. The number that ended up in places that even compromise basic Scriptural doctrines on some of the more vital issues was downright disappointing. Why? Why? Why?

Discouragement seems to be a major problem. We struggled to awaken those dearest to us, and only brought their reproaches on our heads. Many agreed with us in substance, but were afraid or unwilling to pay the price of leaving friends or families. And finally, too much of our faith was in the group instead of the Lord. When the rug we were standing on was jerked out from under our feet, we fell hard. Some were too hurt, too tired of fighting, or just too discouraged to care anymore. My heart aches when they throw the baby out with the dirty bath water.

A former Open brethren missionary once asked me where all those people who left the Exclusives were. I told him that many of them just didn't seem to be able to figure out what to do. He answered incredulously, "They've been Christians all their lives, and don't know what to do?" It is impossible for those who have not been through it to understand how devastating it was to lose what we believed in so earnestly. Heartbreaking e-mails and letters from wounded souls that are still grappling with the issues have been trickling in ever since the preliminary edition of this account were released:

For a year now we have been in the wilderness after a split in our own assembly, a split that was precipitated largely by the forceful, clerical actions of one of the brothers... This brother wasn't even a part of our assembly, yet demanded that our brothers overturn a decision they had made concerning the restoration of a fallen brother. There were marriage ties between this...brother's family and a large family in our assembly that served to form an impenetrable "inner circle". Other brothers in the assembly simply had no say, and were rarely even consulted for their input. Those who gave their input were attacked.

The thing rolled on like a tank. Slander and emotional appeals via this (outside) couple eventually stirred up all the women in these two extended families to oppose the brother's original decision. The men submitted to their wives. Things

got very bad indeed. It was like watching a bad soap opera. It ended in the excommunication of the brother who had encouraged the restoration process. I cannot express adequately the pain it has caused so many.

This was just one of many such problems that have occurred over the years. It was not a rare or isolated incident. Those folks now refer to the whole thing as a "sad misunderstanding".

(This Brothers) letter of response to the grieved PB group subscribers sounded so familiar...smooth it over with a proclamation of misunderstanding (lame indeed to anyone who had carefully considered what was actually being said by all), and then subtly attack the messengers (in essence, "How sad that you didn't get what we were REALLY saying, you had no Godly patience, you made this a public rather than a private issue, etc. "). Then, sign it "Maranatha.'

So much for the short history (and my own bitter insertions in the last paragraph)...

Used by permission. Parentheses indicate substitutions, ... indicates deletions of sensitive text.

Each group of Exclusive Brethren derives its legitimacy from claiming to have been on the right side of every division in their history since the original recovery of the truth by the early Plymouth Brethren. The TW/NHH group is absolutely sure it was on the right side of the Exclusive/Open division, the Tunbridge Wells/Kelly division, the Raven division, and the Natural History Hall/Grant division, to mention the main ones. They feel that God has passed the (Perish the word) franchise on **the** Lords Table right down the line to themselves, especially since the Lord cannot recognize the other branches lest He legitimize division among His people. We developed a smug "We are always right" attitude that makes it very hard to admit that we haven't always been right. We subconsciously even try to carry it a step further. We are the ones who were right in these latest divisions over sectarianism. But if we were right in awakening to our own sectarianism, we need to repent of the sectarian attitudes and practices that made us depreciate the rest of the body of Christ before we woke up. We were seriously and sinfully wrong! We hurt others by turning them away from a more Scriptural way of meeting than they were used to

Where numbers are sufficient, there is a tendency to try to become smaller coalitions of like-minded but somewhat less exclusive assemblies. But unless there is true repentance, they will be little more than clones of the parent groups. Such groups are bound to literally die out with time. An obvious help would be for the former members of both groups to actively seek each other out and get together for mutual fellowship, and healing, and encouragement to move on. But unless there is a genuine concern for the unity of the whole body of Christ instead of the unity of the group, little will be accomplished.

Finally, those that really repent and forsake exclusivism need to realize that what they have been taught about the open brethren has been greatly exaggerated. Remember that the Exclusives are already spreading discrediting propaganda about the more recent dissenters too. Bad things have happened in both the Opens and the Exclusives, as they did in the early church. Former Exclusives would do well to get acquainted with the opens in their areas and find out which ones of them they can fellowship with in a Scriptural way. It is true that some of the opens do not exclude some who should be excluded by the Scriptures. Others allow things like women speaking in their meetings. More recently, a significant number of opens seem to be drifting towards one-man ministries by hiring full time workers. But there are still many open brethren assemblies that earnestly strive to meet according to the Scriptures. Many have been legitimate assemblies that genuinely promote the unity of the body of Christ for many years, and have never been tainted with exclusivism. Awakening Exclusives have no call to ignore them and insist on starting their own assemblies in the same areas. After all, it is the awakening exclusives themselves, rather than the established opens, that are in need of a major ecclesiastical overhaul. And both sides could do the other a world of good if the former Exclusives could get just over the attitude that they have always been just a bit more right than anyone else.

P.S.) ADDENDUM 2013

I am pleased to report that that we have enjoyed true non-sectarian Christian fellowship with our brothers and sisters from the Bloomington assembly for the last ten or so years. We now feel welcome there by one and all without stigma, and I am even frequently asked to speak at there. They also welcome our friends from the Springfield assembly. They are a bit closer to us, and we would probably attend their meetings regularly if it were not for the fact that we feel more needed at the Springfield assembly.

Praise the Lord!

TAKE UP YOUR BED AND WALK

Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up your bed, and walk.

Mark 2:11 & John 5:8

I confess my faith is smaller
Than a tiny mustard seed.
I can scarcely trust my Savior
For a simple daily need.
I believe His grace has saved me,
And I'm sure I am His child,
But somehow I seem to doubt Him
When the path seems steep and wild.

Lord, Increase my faith, I beg Him,
Grant my anxious soul relief.
Teach me how to really trust You.
Help my nagging unbelief.
And a still small voice assures me,
Faith is not presumptuous talk,
But a rising to the summons
To take up your bed and walk.

Rise and contest every challenge
To accomplishing Gods will;
Take control of what inclines you
To be spiritually ill;
And the faith that moved the mountain
Of your sins from off your back
Will increase to move each mountain
That may loom up in your track.

GLOSSARY

Announced:

Officially presented to the Assembly for their consideration or action, or the proclamation of an official Assembly action.

Assembly:

A local church recognized by the group.

Church:

The whole body of Christ, all true believers in Christ.

Emblems:

The loaf and cup of the Lord's Supper.

Exclusives, Exclusive Brethren:

That branch of the Brethren Movement that originally excluded the Open Brethren, or any subsequent division of that branch.

Fellowship, In:

The condition of an individual or Assembly as being formally recognized as part of the group.

Gathered:

Having been drawn to Christ in the midst of the Assembly by the Holy Spirit. Always in fellowship with the group because He only gathers to one place. Almost a second blessing as, "Saved" and then "Gathered."

Laboring Brother, Laborer:

A gifted and trusted brother commended to full time service in the Lord's work among all the official Assemblies.

Letter, Letter of Commendation:

A letter from a recognized Assembly certifying the fellowship status of an individual going to another Assembly. Also used to commend gifted brothers to the Lord's work, etc.

Lord's Table:

The position where the Lord's Supper can be taken with Him in the midst. Has to be recognized by the group.

Meeting:

The group as a whole, a local Assembly in fellowship with the group, or an official coming together of the group at a locality.

Opens, Open Brethren:

The branch of the Brethren Movement that was excluded by the Exclusive branch. Some Opens are exclusive in practice.

Place, The:

The ecclesiastical position where the Lord promises to be in the midst of His people. (Always in fellowship with the group)

Receive:

To allow one to Break Bread with the group.

Received:

The condition of having been officially brought into the fellowship of the group.

Saints:

The people of God walking righteously. In practice often, the people in the Meeting.

Sect:

A part of the body of Christ that separates itself from the rest of the body. In practice, any religious organization that did not originate with the Brethren Movement.

Silence:

To officially forbid a communicant to speak up in any official Assembly meeting. Derived from Titus 1:9-11 (KJV).

Spread the Table:

The act of recognizing an Assembly in a new location. A representative from the nearest recognized Assembly should be present on the first Breaking of Bread to express their fellowship with the new one.

System:

A denomination or religious corporation that is devised by men rather than derived from the Word of God. Any religious organization existing outside the Brethren framework.

TW, TWs:

Tunbridge-Wells. One of the divisions of Exclusive Brethren named for the location of the split. They were always careful to label their side by location and the other side by a man's name, thus showing which side was following men.

Testimony:

An established Assembly of the group in an area. At first considered a testimony to the unity of the Body of Christ, but later implied God's "Corporate testimony" against the ecclesiastical evil everywhere else.

Truth, The:

The ecclesiastical doctrines peculiar to the Brethren. In practice, the dogma that leads to fellowship in the group.

APPENDEJ) A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

(The initial paper that I wrote to show the TW "Meeting" how much we had deviated from what the original Brethren started out to be.)

In the winter of 1827-28 four Christian men, driven from existing ecclesiastical systems by faithfulness to conscience based on the Word of God, began to meet together to remember the Lord Jesus in His death. They met simply as Christians gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:20), owning the presence and authority of the Holy Spirit,¹ and believing that the purposes of God would express the unity of the church, the body of Christ, in such a way that the world might know that He was sent from God² (John 17:23). They felt that the "Outward symbol and instrument" of this unity was the partaking of the Lord's Supper,³ recognizing a difference between mere sectarian confederacy and the genuine "Unity of the Spirit."⁴

The availability of the writings of J.N. Darby, coupled with the fact that he was one of these four original brothers, and a respected leader in the "Brethren" movement, provides authoritative documentation of the doctrine and practices of early "Brethren". Any writings subsequently quoted are used only for their historical value, not as dogma. Words in [brackets] were occasionally added to clarify the fragmented context.

Considering the divided testimony and practical lack of holiness in the various sects of Christianity to be analogous to the failing people of Israel described in Exodus 32, brethren felt it necessary to separate from the "Camp" of professing Christianity, seeking the Lord out of pure heart at the antitype of the tabernacle pitched without the camp in Exodus 33:11. (Hebrew 13:13). Mr. Darby later wrote:

*Themselves outside the camp, whatever saints had faith to follow them were companions in their position, and they were not separated in life, love, or essential unity, from those who could not [follow them].*⁵

For these brethren, owning the presence and authority of the Holy Spirit allowed no organization; recognizing the unity of the body of Christ allowed no membership; acknowledging the absolute authority of the entire Word of God allowed no creed; realizing the holiness of the Lord in their midst allowed no evil in persons or doctrine. Thus, the prerequisite for fellowship in the Breaking of Bread was a reasonable assurance that one was a consistent Christian calling on the Lord out of a pure heart.⁶ (1 Timothy 2:22).

In 1833 Mr. Darby wrote:

*The great body of Christians who are accustomed to religion, are scarce capable of understanding anything else... You [brethren] are nothing, nobody, but Christians, and the moment you cease to be an available mount for communion for any consistent Christian, you will go to pieces or help the evil.*⁷

In providing this "Available mount for communion", consistent Christians were emphatically not compelled to separate from other religious systems.

Suppose a person, known to be godly and sound in faith, who has not left some ecclesiastical system--nay, thinks Scripture favors an ordained ministry, but is glad when occasion occurs...: is he to be excluded because he is of some system as to which his conscience is not enlightened, nay, which he may think more right? He is a godly member of the body, known such: is he to be shut out? If so, the degree of light is title to communion, and the unity of the body is denied by the assembly which refuses him..., agreement with us is made the rule, and the assembly becomes a sect with its members like any other.^{8,9} (1869).

Brethren acted on the principle of the unity of the body of Christ in simple obedience to the Word of God. They owned the title of all consistent true believers to be at the Lord's table,^{10,11} apparently trusting God to enlighten souls as they were exposed to scriptural teaching on the proper ground of Christian gathering.

I remember a case where one growing in the truth came to help sometimes in a Sunday School, and from the other side of London, and asked brethren if he might not break bread when there--time even did not allow him to get back to his Baptist service and he enjoyed the communion of saints. Brethren allowed him gladly;

and if my recollections are right, his name was not given out when he came afterwards. Very soon he was amongst Brethren, entirely, but his fellowship was as full when he was not.^{10,11}

Brethren imposed no conditions (except reasonable holiness) for fellowship; nor did they permit any conditions to be imposed on them.¹² Once it was determined that a person could break bread as a Christian, a member of the body of Christ, he was in fellowship with brethren if he desired to be.

*There is no difference (between breaking bread as) a Christian and fellowship...If his heart be pure, (2Timothy 2), I have no reason to exclude him; but if anything in his path require he should be excluded, he is liable [to assembly discipline ?]...I know no fellowship other than of membership in the body of Christ.*⁶
(1870)

Admittedly, brethren were not instantly mature in doctrine or practice. At first, human prearrangement of certain aspects even of the Breaking of Bread were relied on.¹³ The Lord was patient with their ignorance, and soon they learned to rely more fully on the ever present guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many brethren today have apparently concluded that these early brethren were not scripturally mature as to separation from religious systems. Let it be remembered that many of these brethren personally and painfully separated from familiar systems at great cost to themselves. The doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ was the single most compelling factor causing these brethren to "Buy the truth," and they had every intention to "Sell it not." Do brethren understand this doctrine today?

Brethren viewpoints, or at least Mr. Darby's viewpoints, did change over the years:

*For a year or two, at the beginning, I preached everywhere they let me, and others have done it... but...now...the testimony has to be clear.*¹⁴
*Let there be no mixing with the church world,...but shew grace to it.*¹⁴

His convictions on receiving were also modified, especially after the divisions so shamefully shattered the testimony to the unity of the body of Christ professed by those gathered to His precious name.

*The point is to conciliate (1) sound discipline, and (2) being outside the camp, which is of increasing importance, and (3) avoiding being a sect, which I should as anxiously do...If therefore they came claiming as a condition liberty to go elsewhere. I could not allow it because I know it is wrong, and the church of God cannot allow what is wrong. If it was ignorance, and they came bonafide in the spirit of unity...I should not reject them, because they had not in fact broken...[with the camp?], but I could not accept what made us part of the camp, nor any sort of claim to go to both, to be inside and outside. This is equally pretentious and dishonest...But I receive a person who comes in simplicity, with a good conscience, for the sake of spiritual communion, though they may not yet see clearly ecclesiastically; but the assembly is bound to exercise discipline as to them, and know their walk and purity of heart in coming whenever they do. They cannot come in and out and just as they please...looseness in this is more fatal than ever now.*¹⁵ (1873)

But Mr. Darby ever cautioned against sectarian degeneration with the practical establishment of a membership, whether admitted to or not. He defined a sect as:

*A religious corporation united upon another principle than that of the body of Christ. It is formally such when those who compose this particular corporation are regarded as being members of it. It is to walk in the spirit of a sect when those alone are recognized in a practical manner, without giving themselves out as properly members of a corporation.*¹⁶

He spoke (earlier?) of the possibility of brethren becoming a sect. "Say with more light, that is all."^{8,9} In 1869, he wrote:

If people must be all of you, it is practically a membership in your body. The Lord keep you from it: that is simply dissenting ground.^{8,9}

He cautioned brethren that God could set them aside, "And spread His truth by others...if they be not faithful."¹⁴ As late as 1875 he wrote:

*When persons break bread, they are in the only fellowship I know, owned members of the body of Christ. The moment you make a full fellowship, you make people members of your assembly, and the whole principle of meeting is falsified.*¹¹ (1875)

Perhaps his strongest statement was:

*If an assembly refused a person known to be a Christian, and blameless, because he was not of the assembly, I should not go. I own no membership but of Christ. An assembly composed as such of its members is at once a sect.*¹² (Date?)

It is argued that religious systems are worse today—more rampant with blasphemous doctrines and moral evil. It is true that "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse" (2 Timothy 3:13), but the heart of man is no more desperate now than it was in Jeremiah's day (Jeremiah 17:9). Were things fundamentally different from now in the nineteenth century? Was not the Anglican Church, from which brethren regularly received, formed partly because the Roman Catholic Church would not allow King Henry VIII to divorce his wife? Edward Denney¹⁷ (1875) acknowledged bad doctrine in the Anglican and Baptist churches, pointing out that the Anglicans made no attempt to exclude unbelievers. His letter to a friend stated:

*Indeed, besides yourself, I never met with a Dissenting minister who held the verbal inspiration of the scriptures.*¹⁷

The seeds of sectarian evils and modernism were conclusively active in the days of early brethren. It is admitted that they were more generally opposed then, and godly caution is more necessary now, but the denominational congregations tend to be more locally independent today, and many places vigorously oppose these evils even now.

Mr. A. H. Rule (1905) wrote:

*Our habit has been to receive a godly Baptist or Presbyterian and the like. But where the avowed creed of a sect involves wickedness—bad fundamental doctrine, or immoral conduct, a person still connected with such would not be received. He must sever his connection with a position in which he supports such a creed, before being received.*¹⁸

A Memorandum of A.G., quoted by the editor of the Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule implies that in Mr. Darby's day, membership in (certain) systems, backed by known moral ways, might have been accepted as GROUNDS for admittance into fellowship. Mr. A.G. felt that admittance **IN SPITE OF** membership in such a system was more appropriate in his own day. He stated that:

*It is not a light matter whether a saint of God habitually meets in **RELIGIOUS** fellowship with the world.*¹⁹

He stressed that:

*Each visitor should be clearly informed, with becoming lowliness... that he is linked with what signally dishonors the Lord who bought him, and this with direct reference to the Word of God... [usually] before the visiting brother takes his place at the table.**⁹

Thus informed, earnest Christians who do not agree with brethren's condemnation of sectarian systems are privileged to withhold fellowship with their stand. But Mr. A.G. is careful to maintain that even then, it should be explained that "It is the Lord's table, at which there is a place for every saint walking godly and therefore for you. The way is freely open."¹⁹ His sympathies were with brethren who had "Scruples" regarding laxity in receiving from systems, though he recognized the danger of a "Pharisaic" spirit and acknowledged that "Apart from grace we shall surely fail on the one side or the other."¹⁹

{Mr. Rule himself disagreed with this way of practically excluding most Christians by implying that they are not welcome:

Why exclude them, or at least make the conditions so hard they cannot participate, without being rude and forcing their own wills.

Collected Writings of A. H. Rule, Vol. II, P. 123

Walter Potter²⁰ (around 1900), stated that the denominations and divisions from brethren partake of the Lord's supper, but not at the Lord's table, where "His authority, His claims, and love are realized and confessed in a special way." On receiving denominational Christians at the Lord's table "As Christians" for the convenience of the occasion, he wrote:

It has seemed to me that in such cases our responsibility is not to refuse them, but to put before them why we are thus gathered, that our position is a practical protest against the unscripturalness of denominations, and that they are...for the time, identifying themselves with us in this position...Are they willing...?

He made it clear that he was not happy to have to consider the Lord's table as a convenience. Where souls were spiritually "Exercised" as to "Our position and their church", he wrote:

Where souls are exercised, it is another matter, and it seems to me one would feel quite free in sitting at the table with them. Is not exercise of soul the important thing? Hence, no one rule can be laid down. It would surely not be of the Lord to require a godly exercised soul, connected with any of the, what we may call, orthodox denominations, that he sever his connection with his church, before we allow him to participate with us at the table. To do this, it seems to me, is to practically deny the ground upon which we are gathered.

Mr. Potter considered those from the divisions of brethren to be another matter:

They are professedly gathered to His name, and should know why they are in separation from us and we from them. Should any of them desire to partake of the table with us, their reasons for this should be inquired into and action taken according to what is found. There is always more intelligence with them, as to divine truth than with those saints in the denominations, and I believe, generally speaking, that they are not as ignorant of the causes of division as some of them would sometimes have us to think.

He finished his letter by asking:

Should not each case stand on its own merits and Romans 15:7 and Jude 22 & 23 be our guide?

Mr. C.H. Brown stated in the foreword to the 1951 printing of Mr. Potter's pamphlet.²⁰

A new generation has arisen who never knew Walter Potter, and yet the truth he taught his generation abides as truth today. May we believe it, value it, and contend for it.

Having reviewed the viewpoints of original and second generation brethren, it will be obvious to the honest that things are vastly different today. It is evident that many of today's brethren do not seriously consider the possibility of breaking bread with anyone that is not "In fellowship." Is it honest to deny a membership when brethren "In fellowship" can go anywhere in the world and positively identify their fellow nonmembers from the rest of the body of Christ in the area within moments? Let's not be delusional about what constitutes a membership! (Mr. Darby wasn't)

Much has been spoken on the undeniable fact that "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," (1 Corinthians 5:6, morally; and Galatians 5:9, doctrinally). The question is: "When does ignorance, error, and/or association with them, become leaven or sin?" An older pamphlet²¹, written after the divisions of brethren, addressed this subject.

As to the reception of individual members of Christ, all have their place in the assembly, except the "wicked person," (1 Corinthians 5), and those whose ways, deeds, or doctrine are evil. As to the latter, he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds. Obedience, therefore, necessitates unwilling separation from those who, knowing the evil, will not obey... THERE IS NO TEST BUT CHRIST. Knowledge, intelligence in truth, experience, must not be made tests...

A person who knows of evil, and has fellowship with it, (no matter of what denomination), is not free... Leviticus 5:3 tells us that as soon as the man who touched an unclean thing, knew of it, he became guilty; and Numbers 19:15 states that every open vessel without a covering in the tent where death was, became unclean. The ignorant, therefore, while ignorant, are clean, but no longer. The reception, however, as saints, brings the responsibility of instructing and leading on souls to know what is due to the Lord's house, and His name, and that goes on inside. pp. 16,17

{Perhaps the covered vessel more realistically implies a personal resistance to the morbid state in the tent?}

The same writer plainly states that he would receive the honestly ignorant-"They are not defiled". Should not brethren acknowledge that "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16) applies to these Christians too, and allow them time to

earnestly weigh a humble testimony drawn from the Word of God before categorically declaring them informed, unclean, "Open vessels;" and automatically excluding them because of their associations? The great body of Christians accustomed to religion are just as "Scarce capable of understanding anything else" today as they were in Mr. Darby's day.

If the leaven doctrine were carried out to the extremes pressed by many today, the whole lump was leavened early and consistently by communion with Christians associated with "Evil" for at least the first seventy years of the brethren movement. If ignorance is absolutely no excuse in the systems, it wasn't in the brethren either, and the whole lump would have to be corporately condemned or separated from. Even if it were true that every association (including no association) outside of brethren is analogous to pollution by dead body, could we deny the fact that even the one who sprinkled the water of separation on the poor defiled Israelite had to contaminate himself to a lesser degree to do so? (Numbers 19:21). Who could refuse to sprinkle the water of purification on an earnest soul? The word of God must still be rightly divided. (2 Timothy 2:15).

Several arguments from Israel's history attempt to justify the difference between early and modern brethren's practices in receiving to fellowship. In Hezekiah's day, a few Israelites heeded the invitation to forsake the false altars of Bethel and Dan. Some had not properly cleansed themselves, but they were pardoned of the Lord and permitted to eat Passover at Jerusalem because they had "Prepared their hearts to seek the Lord their God." (2 Chronicles 30:19). Later, when Josiah kept a similar Passover, it was "As it is written in the book of this covenant." (2 Kings 23:21-23). And in Ezra's day, "The children of Israel which were come again out of the captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat. (Ezra 6:21). Let brethren remember these were cases of return from idolatry, not earnest error. If Nehemiah's priests had to prove their genealogy, (Nehemiah 7:63-65), let it be conceded that the Christian's genealogy is that he is indeed born into the family of God, as demonstrated by a consistent life and testimony.

Finally, it is stated that other Christians rarely present themselves for fellowship with brethren today. The painful fact is that Brethren's attitudes and practices preclude it. While attempting to express the unity of the body, they commonly refer to themselves internally as "The saints" or "The Lord's people". Many almost refuse to listen to any spiritual reflection that does not originate internally. They tend to imply that all who are not "In fellowship" with them come under assembly discipline.

Visitors desiring communion, no matter how well known, are generally forced to "Sit back," either for future examination, or to reconsider the stand they would be taking by breaking bread with brethren. If they do not eventually come to agree with most of Brethren's views on church truth, and generally refute everything else as evil, they probably will never be received. Even those associated with nothing at all are largely apt to be met with the same indiscriminate "No," unless they are willing to concede that the brethren assembly is the only place where the Lord's presence is. A Brethren tendency today is to differentiate between the "Assembly" (as themselves), and the "Church" (as the whole body of Christ); and that while professing to meet on the principle of the unity of the body. What a paradox!, when it is all the same word and entity in Scripture.

Even children raised and observed in the assembly for years, besides a perfectly reasonable examination on doctrine and life, are subjected to an almost ritualistic mode of reception to fellowship. Admitting variations, they can expect to:

- (1) Properly request their place at the Lord's Table.
- (2) Await unhurried agreement by the local brethren after examination.
- (3) Correct any mannerisms, etc., these particular brethren disagree with.
- (4) Be "Announced" as having asked for their place at the Lord's Table at a subsequent Breaking of Bread meeting.
- (5) Be re-announced on the following Lord's day, when, barring objections, they are received into fellowship.

Is it any wonder that Christians hesitate to present themselves for fellowship, when they realize that they will be made a public spectacle sitting back under scrutiny as possibly "Defiled?" When Brethren refuse consistent Christians the crumbs from a wealthy table, they can hardly deny them the comfort of having their sores licked at the other side of the gate.

In conclusion, let it be understood that this is not written to encourage laxity or indifference to evil. May brethren never harbor "Tobiah the Ammonite" in the temple, (Nehemiah 13:19), nor even countenance the merchants of Tyre about the gate. (Nehemiah 13:15 21). But neither let them discourage "Ruth the Moabitess" from gleaning in the fields of Boaz. (Ruth 2:417). If brethren profess to meet on the principle of the unity of the body of Christ, they can expect the judgment of Christ if they practically deny it. There is a real danger and tendency of brethren being gathered to the name of **Those Gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ** instead of being gathered simply to the Name, and around the Person, of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Let us go forth therefore unto Him (not brethren) without the camp." (Hebrews 13:13).

Beloved brethren gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ; MAY OUR CONSCIENCES BE EXERCISED!

Submitted humbly, tremulously, and prayerfully,

Bud Morris

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