

An Attempt at

## **LOOKING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

For Light on Practical Questions

**A.N. Groves and the Early Brethren Movement:**

# **REFORMATION TOWARDS THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN**

( *Obedience to GOD'S WORD*

*versus following TRADITION.* )

E. Read.

Mt 15:6, 9. "You nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition." "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

Mk 7:8, 9, 13. "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions." "You nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down."

Col 2:8. "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ."

## FOREWORD and DISCLAIMER.

*This Booklet makes no attempt to cover the great REVIVALS and WORKS OF GOD that He accomplished through His servants LUTHER, ZWINGLI, CALVIN, KNOX, CRANMER, LATIMER ... Whatever their human failings, under God they made the Word of God, and the Truth of God widely available, and obedience to it possible. Any progress since, was made possible through their valiant labours. As were any good results of the Counter-Reformation within the Roman Church which suddenly had to face the challenge of competition. Nor have I attempted to cover the work of those who followed the Reformation- The Puritans, the Moravians, the Wesleys, etc. It isn't that I believe we should not honour them and thank God for their work. It's simply that I have neither the time for adequate research, nor the gift needed to absorb and digest the wealth of information available so as to pass it on in an accurate, simple form. What I know I can't do justice to, cannot be God's will for me, and I'm not pretending to attempt it.*

*What I've written is based on the situation in 1825, and the conviction that "All is yours, Paul, Apollos," Luther, Calvin... and you belong to God, and so we are answerable directly to Him, 1 Cor 3:21-23. The truths they grasped were greater than the men, because they came through the Bible from Christ Himself on whom they gazed and trusted. We dare not assume that ONE MAN, ONE GROUP, or ONE interpretation and application was, or could be, totally RIGHT. But we do have a Stewardship, on behalf of the Church as a whole, to pass on their distinctive insights. My purpose is to encourage readers to follow the FAITH of those I write about, in our changing circumstances, with our eyes on the unchanging Lord, Heb 12:1-2; 13:7-8. - Not necessarily follow the DETAILS of their beliefs and practices.*

### ReferenceBooks Used -

*"Anthony Norris Groves Saint & Pioneer" G.H. Lang. Lang's own comments are prefixed GHL. "A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement" H.A. Ironside. "The Plymouth Brethren" Blair Neatby. "George Muller," F.G. Warne. "The story of the Brethren Movement," T.S. Veitch. "They Were Men Sent from God," E.B. Bromley. (L320) (N92) etc are the author's Initial and the page number where the quote may be found..*

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# 1: The Brethren Movement in Relation to Church History

## The Church and its Formation<sup>1</sup>

The Lord Jesus proclaimed His intention to BUILD His Church, Mt 16:18 And taught that it would function on earth as a brotherly fellowship in human weakness sustained by His presence, Mt 18:15-20 This Church was brought into being on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, and since then the Lord adds to it continually those that He "Saves."

In the original NT language the word "CHURCH" is EKKLESIA = "A company CALLED OUT for a purpose." (It's used in Acts 19:32-41, of the "ASSEMBLY" called out to riot by Demetrius the silversmith.) In a sense Israel called out of Egypt into the wilderness had been an Ekklesia, Acts 7:38 but not the one that Christ, when on earth, promised to build, Mt 16:18 He is building it of Jews and Gentiles, who He "Calls Out" to Himself, Eph 2:11-3:13 Christ Himself is its foundation laid by those who preach the Gospel, 1 Cor 3:11, the solid Rock on which all who trust Him are built, 1 Pet 2:1-8, and the ever-present stricken Rock which sustains their life, 1 Cor 10:4.

They Confess and Trust in who He is, Mt 16:16, and what He has done, 1 Cor 1:18-22, 24 Rom 10:9-11, as preached then, and recorded for us in the NT by His "Foundation-layer stones" Peter and the other Apostles and Prophets, Eph 2:19-22 In its true form this Church is the invisible "BODY OF CHRIST" being made up of all those who are "Born of the Spirit," as He wills, Jn 3:6-8, and baptised by the Spirit into the body, as members together under the Lord's personal headship, 1 Cor 12:13

These members of the invisible Church were to associate themselves with the VISIBLE local congregations by being baptised in water, and continuing in the teaching fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer, as in Acts 2:41-42

## What the Visible Church Became

In order to expand, and to gain power and wealth, ostensibly for the Good of mankind and the Glory of God, "Religious Kingdoms" were set up to rule the world under "Pope" and "Patriarch." These replaced and suppressed the Biblical companies of Believers called out from the world to suffer with Christ now, and reign with Him forever, Rom 8:16-18, 2 Tim 2:12 (Human nature prefers to reign NOW.)

Although enforced by armies, prisons and torture, this "Religious Kingdom" was sinking beneath the weight of its superstitious doctrines and corrupting wealth, when THE REFORMATION broke its stranglehold on Europe.

The PROTESTANT REFORMATION under Luther, Zwingli etc was a PROTEST in favour of the Bible, against the human traditions of the Papal "Church." (The "Counter Reformation" doesn't concern us, as it aimed at purifying and

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<sup>1</sup> This section is effectively a summary of the booklet "PRE-REFORMATION CHURCH HISTORY."

strengthening those "Church Traditions" to enable them to resist pressure to return to a Biblical basis.)

## Reformation Toward Biblical Doctrine & Practice

LUTHER wrote to Erasmus "The Word of God and the traditions of men are opposed to each other with an implacable discord, no other than that with which God and Satan oppose each other; and the one undoes the works and subverts the dogmas of the other like two kings laying waste each other's kingdom." (L320)

In 1526 Luther confessed that the setting up of a Protestant State Church was not Biblical. He excused it as "PROVISIONAL," a compromise between following Tradition, and obeying Scripture, that was needed as a temporary measure because "The right kind of Evangelical order cannot be exhibited among all sorts of people, but those who are seriously determined to be Christians, and confess the Gospel with hand and mouth, must enrol themselves by name and meet apart, in one house, for prayer, for reading, to baptize, to take the sacrament, and exercise other Christian works. With such order it would be possible for those who did not behave in a Christian manner to be known, reprov'd, restored, or excluded, according to the rule of Christ, Mat 18 15

But I cannot yet order, and establish such an assembly, for I have not yet the right people for it. Meantime I will call, excite, preach, help, forward it, until Christians take the Word of God so in earnest that they will find how to do it and continue it." (L341 quoting "The Pilgrim Church," E H B, P148)

Sadly, the Reformers and their followers did not work together to develop the Christian Congregations based on Scripture that Luther looked for. Instead, the stop-gap church systems that seemed expedient for the times were soon set in place and defended against the Papal church and each other by creeds, confessions, constitutions, and forms of service designed to hold at least some of the progress gained towards conformity to Scripture. These automatically established enforceable PROTESTANT TRADITIONS which prevented men depending directly on God and the Bible, and benefitting from the freedom of such direct dependence

Although Luther proclaimed Salvation by Faith, the Lutherans and Church of England in their Christening Service still proclaim that the baptised child is thereby made a child of God (A local Anglican minister tried conducting a more Biblical "Infant Dedication" service as an alternative, for those who requested that, but the Synod has forbidden this.)

Zwingli, Calvin, & Knox stopped short of this claim to "Baptismal Regeneration" but their Reformed / Presbyterian churches still claim that the christened babe has been brought into a "Covenant relationship with God," with the result that whole families and communities are proclaimed as "Christian." (A

local man was told recently that if he followed his conscience by being baptised as a Believer he could no longer be Youth Leader in his Presbyterian church as he would have "Denied the Covenant")

The third group of reformers, the Anabaptists, did grasp the truth that the Church was a "Called-out Company" formed of Believers, who should be baptised on confession of Faith in Christ, and received into a local Church Fellowship made up of such people. BUT, they were taken over by a "Charismatic Revival" whose "Prophets" steered them into proclaiming that they represented God's invincible Kingdom which they were setting up on earth. And they defied all secular authority - briefly. The more sober, Biblical remnants that survived became the Mennonites, and Baptists.

The PROTESTANT STATE CHURCHES, defended by Creeds and Confessions - and when they thought necessary, by force of arms - ensured the preservation of some Biblical doctrines proclaimed by the Reformers. But, it did so at the cost of freedom to move towards that Biblical concept of the Church that Luther had seen and worked for. New and better traditions now stood between Christians and their freedom to simply obey Scripture.

In 1620 Puritan J Robinson wrote that "The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw, whatever part of His will our good God has revealed to Calvin, they will die rather than embrace it. And the Calvinists stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented." (L 317)

By 1800 in the British Isles, the "Non-Conformist /Dissenting" Churches - Baptist, Congregational, four branches of Methodism, Quakers etc were permitted to function outside the "State Church." They had separated from it in order to conform more closely to the NT truth. But, as small groups under the pressure of political and social handicaps, had walled themselves in, and away from each other, in order to survive. Most members were born, lived, married and died within those walls. Fellowship with Christians of other groups was sadly rare. Eg Baptists, the most Biblical, typically refused to receive at the Lord's Table Christians from any other group because they had not been baptised by immersion as Believers. (L 386 L 129)

### The "Brethren Revival": An Attempt to Complete the Reformation<sup>2</sup>

"BRETHREN." - In their rejection of denominational names in favour of Biblical ones like "Believers," and their joy in the fact that ALL born into God's family, whatever their church associations or lack of them, were "Brothers and Sisters in Christ," they tended to refer to themselves as "Brethren / Brothers meeting at."

<sup>2</sup> For order of events, and details of the contribution made by Anthony Norris Groves, see the next section

This attempt at not having a denominational name, was soon used by others as an equivalent to a denominational name, and as a result of the early triumphs and troubles at Plymouth, usually became "Plymouth Brethren."

While some of us still insist on being brethren, others began to act and speak as if they were in a special, unique sense THE Brethren. Often the area of a Christian's strongest profession of faith is the scene of his defeat in practical obedience. Sadly the puffed-up pride in being "Gathered out of the sects and systems of men" was before long deflated by most unbrotherly bitterness among them, and the growth of sectarian attitudes.

REVIVAL." - As with other revivals, it was marked by hymn-writing and singing as Christians expressed their new-found knowledge, experience, and joy in the goodness of God in Salvation through Christ. My court through "Believers Hymn book" "Hymns of Light and Love," and "Hymns for the Little Flock," showed at least 42 Hymn-writers, involved in the "Brethren Revival," and 340 hymns, more than 50 of which I can remember singing congregationally. Many hymns were written for "The Breaking of Bread / Worship Meeting" some of the best being by J.G. Deck who came to NZ, I understand, as part of his refusal to take sides in the "Exclusive Brethren" divisions.

"RESTORATION" - The Brethren were concerned with the restoration of Church Life and Doctrine to that seen in the NT. They had few illusions about founding a great work, but were inspired by the example of the Jews, who returning from Babylon in poverty and weakness, set out to do what they found written in Scripture as best they could, Ezra 3:2; 6:18; Neh 7:73-8:18; 10:34-37; 13:1-3. Like those Jews they saw that they could be a group of Believers gathered to worship God, remember past blessings with thanksgiving and humility, and trust for present provisions joyfully. Men, women, and children all to be taught God's Word, direct from "the book" and to share the good news with the neighbours who were not yet God's people. And, in conscious weakness to accept responsibility for, and rejoice in the privilege of DOING WHAT GOD HAD DECREED even if it had been ignored by greater men in the glorious past, Neh 8:18

"COMPLETE THE REFORMATION" The Reformation had proclaimed great truths, but the reality of church life often fell short of these ideals. Treating the Church as if it was a KINGDOM, which its leaders were to control, and make rules for, was excused by claiming that they were following God's will as David and Solomon had. This ignored the fact that the Kingdom in Israel wasn't GOD'S preference, but in fact the rejection of His Kingship, by His people who were determined to copy the world around 1 Sam 8:7-9, 19-22

DIRECT DEPENDENCE ON GOD BY HIS PEOPLE was God's preferred way then<sup>3</sup>. Whatever their need, they turned to Him to provide. This is obvious if the following Scriptures are studied: Num 20:16; Deu 26:7; Josh 24:7; Jud 39, 15; 4:3; 6:6, 7; 10:10; 1 Sam 12:8, 10; Ps 107:6, 13. After Kings were set up, this corporate calling on the Lord is recorded in 2 Chr 13:14; Lam 2:18 only.

In the same way, Church Organisation frees Christians from the uncertainties and bother of being sufficiently in touch with God, to know His will for what THEY are to do. And frees them from having to trust Him to do and provide whatever is needed which they cannot. The "better, more efficient and successful" (in HUMAN terms) the system is, the more all concerned are likely to be robbed of fellowship with God, and the less influence He and His Word is likely to have on what is done.

The personal, humble Godliness of leaders, and the congregations' constant alertness to the danger, may postpone this drift from dependence on God and obedience to His Word. But, history seems to show that it is inevitable. God then permits spiritual failure to produce visible failure, until reform or a new beginning brings men closer to Him and enables them to glorify His Name again.

Two themes picked up and re-emphasised by the early Brethren were:

Salvation by grace, Received by Faith, Apart from Works

Luther had joyfully trumpeted "The Just shall live by FAITH!" But when Europe became divided into Protestant and Catholic States this truth was pushed to one side as State Churches accepted responsibility to ensure that as far as possible ALL babies born in their territory were "MADE CHRISTIANS, CHILDREN OF GOD, AND INHERITORS OF HIS KINGDOM" by Christening. This idea that everyone processed by the Church qualified for Heaven was balanced by teaching that only by living exceptionally sacrificial lives, constantly and devoutly attending and supporting the church, could one hope that they would qualify for Heaven at the end. Assurance of Salvation in this life was widely viewed as impossible. An Anglican Commentary of the time<sup>4</sup>, commented on Paul's earnest endeavour to experience in this life all he could of resurrection life in fellowship with the risen Christ, Phil 3:11. "We see here that even the great Apostle Paul was unsure whether he would be in Heaven or not," and protested against the gross presumption of "Plymouth Brethren" who pretended that it was possible to know that one already had eternal life.

In their new-found dependence on reading God's Word for themselves "Brethren" soon realised that in the NT, verses like Jn 1:12; 3:36; Rom 3:23-24; 8:1; 10:9-11; Eph 13-7; 2:1-10; 1 Jn 5:13, far outnumbered "He that shall endure to the end shall be saved," Mt 24:13, which they brushed aside joyfully as not

<sup>3</sup> Although we should also note that God graciously accepted and used the Davidic monarchy, making it a central feature of the Messianic vision.

<sup>4</sup> Sadler, in the Church Commentary series, I believe.



applying to eternal salvation. With earnest souls trapped in the vain endeavour to feel they were good enough for God, they shared this "Good News" of assured Salvation available to be received as a GIFT from God on the basis of the Cross of Calvary.

Those complacently relying on both into a "Christian Family in a Christian Land" or on christening, they hammered with Jn 3:3-8, and those relying on Church attendance and Good Works with Rom 3:23 and Eph 2:8-9. But above all they trumpeted Jn 3:16 far and wide, and so played a major part in the "Evangelical Awakening" of the time, and down to this day, in interdenominational Evangelical movements. (Particularly the Scripture Union / CSSM / Crusaders / EU / ISCF movement.) Although in my lifetime this has lost momentum, for many years confident proclamation of the Gospel was a duty and delight, and God has blessed it. If next Sunday, all NZ Christians who had been "saved" through the Gospel efforts of "Open Brethren Assemblies" attended their "Bible Chapels" or "Gospel Halls," there might well not be room to fit them all in. And a good few church pulpits would be empty.

### The Reliability and Sole Authority of the Scriptures

The sole authority of the Scriptures for all matters of doctrine/belief and practice/behaviour, whether personal, or in collective Church life had been earnestly professed and proclaimed by the Reformers as they broke with the "Catholic" Church of Rome. But the pull of tradition meant that, for instance, the State Church of England, while proclaiming in Article 6 (Of the "39 ARTICLES" stating its fundamental beliefs) that the Word of God was the sole source of the knowledge of how to be saved; in Article 20 dares "The Church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies." This is limited by adding that "nothing may be ordained which shall be contrary to Scripture." This gives wide scope to pick and choose, from Old or New Testaments, odd verses which can be used to support church traditions against the developed teachings in the Epistles. As a result the R.C. tradition of Baptismal Regeneration was retained. Each Protestant Church system became entrenched and walled in by its own traditions<sup>5</sup>.

18th Cent. The Wesleys, Whitfield, etc were involved in a great revival but stopped short of abandoning Article 20. The fundamental principles of the Reformation (The Holy Scriptures are the only standard of faith and rule of conduct, and the believer has direct relations with God through Jesus Christ by faith,) tended always to be buried under the expediencies of State Church life.

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<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in creating the "Exclusive Brethren," some years later, JN Darby in effect turned back from this dependence on Scripture alone. He admitted that there was no scriptural authority for cutting off a whole assembly of God's people, but justified it by saying that if some Godly men meet together to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit they may expect that guidance, although there was no Scripture to support the guidance they received. (L410) Such decisions they made were God's will, and so they should enforce them on others. This effectively denies the sole authority of Scripture.

(Peter the Great insisted that priests of the state Church of Russia spy on congregations and report any criticism of the Government. In England Bunyan spent 12 years in Bedford Gaol for preaching, when only ordained State Church ministers were allowed to. When that rule was relaxed, still only members of the State Church could hold public office. Disraeli, a Jew by birth, became Anglican in order to stand for the British Parliament etc.)

AN Groves wrote "Important principles are these: first, to have Christ as your only Head; secondly, His Word as your only guide." (L173) and in 1831 wrote "You cannot accept men, however exalted, as the authorised expositors of God's truth... I prize among my present and happiest privileges that I can examine God's Word without reference to man. Those dear brothers and sisters with whom the Lord has led me to act, demand not my submission to them, nor do I desire their submission to me. Let Christ be all in all, and the true hearty love of Him, the bond that binds His members" (L142).

Dr J. Kittb (Deaf scholar who went to Baghdad as Tutor to Groves' Children, later Editor of "Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature," etc. states this refusal to accept any man-made doctrinal position as follows: "You ask is Mr. Groves an Arminian, a Calvinist, a Papist, or a Lutheran? He is one of those singular characters, a Bible Christian, and a disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus; not nominally, but practically and really such. A man so devotedly, so fervently attached to the Scriptures, I never knew before." (L52)

Muller (Who had taken a full theological course for the ministry, knew Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, German, and English,) wrote "I will mention some points which God began to show me:- that the Word of God alone is our standard of judgment in spiritual things; and can be explained only by the Holy Spirit; and that He is in our day, as well as in former times, the teacher of His people.. The Lord enabled me to put this to the test of experience by laying aside commentaries, and almost every other book, and simply reading the Word of God and studying it. The result of this was, that the first evening I shut myself into my room to give myself to prayer and meditation over the Scriptures, I learned more in a few hours than I had done during a period of several months previously. But the particular difference was that I received real strength for my soul in doing so. I now began to test by the Scriptures the things which I had learned and seen, and found that only those principles that stood the test were really of value." (L59)

## 2 A. N. Groves and the "Early Brethren"

*We have reviewed briefly the History of the Church up to 1825, including the success and failure of the Reformation attempt to "Re-form" Church doctrine and practice to the NT pattern. Anthony Norris Groves (ANG)<sup>1</sup> played a significant role in the early days of the Brethren movement and, as will be seen in a later chapter, in the development of missions. This chapter provides a chronological summary of the development of his spiritual convictions, and his interaction with other Christians<sup>2</sup> in their mutual attempt to discover and practice church life as the NT records it. Hopefully this will encourage us all to examine our own position, and set our hearts on the same goal of honouring our Lord by listening to what He has said, and setting out to have fellowship with Him in doing it more closely.*

1808~~9~~

Groves at school, 13-14 years old with a novel between the pages of his prayer-book at services. "During this open state of rebellion against God, after a sermon preached by John Owen, I thought "Surely it would be a worthy object to die for, to go to India, to win but one sinner from hopeless death to life and peace" (L22)

1814

Groves commenced profession of Dentistry at Plymouth. He was still trying to escape a condemning conscience by keeping the forms of religion strictly, and by volunteering to go to India as a Missionary with the CMS (Church Missionary Society.) (L32)

Groves wished to marry his cousin Mary, but her father refused, as he had doubts of the financial state and wisdom of Groves' father. The disappointment became a blessing to ANG. "My soul had much deep sorrow to go through before it knew the peace or the power of Jesus' blood" (L33)

He "had no object now in life but living to the Lord and the Church" (the Church of England) ... being so high a churchman that I never went to a dissenting place of worship, nor intimately knew a dissenter except Bessie and Charlotte Paget" (L31) His attitude was similar to Wesley who wrote that in his earlier years he would have thought it almost wrong for a sinner to be saved elsewhere than in a Church of England edifice (L129) His friends the Misses Paget helped him understand the Gospel fully, and become less bigoted towards those not in the C. of E. (L3637)

1816

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<sup>1</sup> The use of initials, apart from the saving in space was in fact customary among them, as they hoped it would somehow avoid their making too much fuss of mere human items in quotation marks follow closely the original, MODIFIED by breaking up the too-long sentences, deleting involved asides, and substituting for obscure or outdated words and expressions.

<sup>2</sup> Notably JGB (Bellet), JND (Darby), Dr C. (Crorin), GM (Muller), and BWN (Newton).

Groves was permitted to marry his cousin Mary. They were very happy together, but she was very opposed to Mission service

1822

At 27, Groves had mastered Dentistry, and his annual income from it was £1500. He had studied Chemistry, learnt and worked as a surgeon in a hospital, devoted himself to Science, been a member of a literary society, but was led to lay aside "these false grounds of Christian influence, and gave myself up to the study of His Holy Word, so the Lord would lead me to learn such principles from it, that I should see its sufficiency. From this moment the Lord began to bless me." "My great desire has been to cast myself on the Word of God, that every judgment of my soul, concerning all things, may be right, by being in all the mind of God. For exactly in proportion as this is the case, shall we be a blessing to others" (L53)

"My very constant prayer is, that the Lord would lead my poor wandering heart into all truth, and make His holy Word my light and comfort. I feel how much I need very humble and patient waiting for the Lord's manifestation of His will, that I may not fall into error." (L56) "Whenever I can literally follow the Scripture, I feel easy as to the act. Where I cannot, or fancy I cannot, I feel weak in proportion to my distance from it." (L57)

1825

Groves published his tract "Christian Devotedness". After an interview with Mr. Bickersteth CMS, he decided to give up Dentistry, and become a CMS. missionary. He was told that becoming an ordained Church of England Minister was desirable preparation for this.

1825/1826

Groves went to Trinity College, Dublin to begin a course of study with a view to ordination in the C of E. He found that, as a minority there, Protestants were less divided from each other. He associated with other Christians meeting in homes for Bible study and prayer. (L131) Dr Cronin (Dr. C an ex RC) had had some fellowship with various Dissenting churches, when visiting Dublin. But when he became a resident they insisted that he join ONE group or NONE would receive him. He was publicly denounced from the pulpit of one of them for refusing to commit himself to that group. Rigid control over membership was normal, with no inter-communion with those of other denominations allowed. (L131)

1826

Edward Wilson (Ass Sec Bible Society) resigned in protest against Dr C's expulsion. They met at Wilson's place for Bible Study and prayer. They "broke bread" (Celebrated the Lord's Supper) only if an ordained minister was present to do so. They met together on the basis of the ONE-NESS of the body, and the PRESENCE of the Holy Spirit. The group had expanded to 5 before they met ANG, JG Bellet (JGB) or JN Darby (JND). (N12, 18, 23 L132)

JND was the Anglican Priest at Wicklow, Ireland. He had a "High View" of Church. He believed Luther and Calvin were outside the Church, and considered that they and their followers had hope only in "the uncovenanted mercies of God". The union of state and church was a "Babylonish Bondage" for the Church, but she was still the Church. Archbishop Magee, who'd ordained JND, declared that the Anglican Church of Ireland was to serve the State, and the State owed it protection. Converts must take oath of Allegiance to the British Sovereign. JND said the RC's had been converting to Anglicanism at the rate of 600800 each year in Ireland. This ceased instantly with the new decree (N15-16)<sup>3</sup>

1827

Groves wrote that in Dublin "He became acquainted with many sincere Christians, chiefly members of the Establishment, (C. of E.) who, with him, desired to see more devotedness to Christ, and union among all people of God. To promote these objects, they met continually for prayer and reading of the Word." These included Dr C.'s group which.. at that time had no instinctive Bible Truths or Bible Practices." ANG was said to have "introduced to them those original apostolic principles of Christian fellowship, worship, and ministry which, being joyfully accepted, practised, and propagated, made them so great a blessing to the whole church." (L21)<sup>4</sup>

After one of their happy prayer meetings, already mentioned, it was asked by one of the party: "Are there no principles in the Word of God, which would unite all believers in worship, whatever might be their views or attainments in the divine life?" Groves replied "Yes there are: we are evidently called to know nothing among our fellow-Christians, but this one fact - Do they belong to Christ? Has Christ received them? then we may receive them, to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). This was 1827 (L133)

Groves later wrote to JND reminding him that "At first we sought to meet, not as hostile to, but as embracing other Christians, and made no point of their renouncing their different sects, in order to sit down at the table of the Lord, as our common privilege - theirs and ours" (L157)

<sup>3</sup> The misuse of the Church for political ends led to many Brethren insisting that the "Heavenly Citizenship" of Believers Phil 3:20 meant they should not be involved in politics.

<sup>4</sup> Groves wrote that JGB had reminded him that "I was the first to propose the simple principle of union, the love of Jesus, instead of ONE-NESS of judgment in minor things that may exist with a true love of Jesus." Also "The views that ANG to his death held so strongly, both of the unity of the entire family of God and their liberty to unite together in worship, were, he often said, first opened to him, while searching the Scriptures in Dublin." (L133)

DID THEY NEED AN ORDAINED MINISTER? "Until that time the Feast of Remembrance was observed at considerable, though variable, intervals and only when an ordained person was present to officiate." JGB wrote to Miss Paget: "Groves has just been telling me that it appeared to him from Scripture, that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together, as their Lord admonished them; and that, in as far as the practice of the Apostles (Acts 207) could be a guide, every Lord's day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death, and obeying His parting command This suggestion of ANG was immediately carried out by myself and friends in Dublin; and many who have since followed their example, can speak of the peace and joy they have experienced in thus obeying the Lord's will." (L158)

A century ago the proposal to observe the "Sacrament" without an ordained minister to "Consecrate the Elements" was, for most, if not all, revolutionary, a direct attack upon one of the central, vital rights of the clergy, indeed, a thorough denial of the whole clerical standing and claims. (L159)

Groves wrote "One day the thought was brought to my mind that ordination of any kind to preach the Gospel was not of Scripture." (N9) Groves again "I was still so far attached to the C of E, that I went to London to arrange my going out as a layman, for the CMS, but as they would not allow me to celebrate the Lord's Supper, when no other minister was near, it came to nothing" (L171)

FORMAL or INFORMAL WORSHIP? On the tendency of formally ordered services to conceal spiritual poverty Groves wrote: "Perhaps, then, as we have in a family some regular expressions of attachment, such as the morning and evening salutation, but the greater part irregular. So in every Christian society, the points of public control had better be few, and the great majority of cases left free as every man is disposed in his heart, otherwise you have only a subtle, self-deceiving hypocrisy spreading through your community, appearing like order, but not the order which consists in unity of hearts.." (L175)<sup>5</sup>

182728

At this stage JND first joined the group in observing the Lord's Supper at Dublin. JGB and Hutchinson were still loosely Anglican until 1834 (N17)

1828

JGB wrote that ANG had said "This I do not doubt is the mind of God concerning us. We should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or ministry, but trusting the Lord would edify us together by ministering as he pleased, and saw good from the midst of ourselves."

<sup>5</sup> I take it he is saying that when we meet for worship there should be a routine framework within which there is freedom for spontaneous and varying contributions from individuals according to their exercise of heart.

At that moment.. I was assured in my soul that he had the right idea." (L179 N12) Groves wrote "As for order, if it be God's order, let it stand but if it be man's order. 'Call no man master upon earth; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren..." (L199)

This didn't mean that Brethren didn't expect to prepare what they would speak. Groves wrote "God has promised us that our bread and water shall be sure - but expects us to go to our daily work to earn it. In the same way we are to trust God for words to minister, but should give ourselves to reading, as well as to exhortation and teaching, 1 Tim 4:13" (L185) In 1828 Groves resigned his profession as a Dentist to serve in the Gospel, in direct dependence on God. (N18)

Also in 1828 ND wrote a tract "Consideration of the nature and Unity of the Church of God" It was a sharp attack on the "State-serving" policy of the Church of Ireland, but lacking definite suggestions. At the end of the year JND resigned from being Anglican priest at Wicklow, and went to Dublin. (N18)

## 1829

JGB, on holiday at Kingstown, went to the Scotch Church where all understood to be "new-born" were welcomed. Returned to Dublin, and found F Hutchinson "Quite prepared for communion in the name of the Lord with all, whoever they might be, that loved Him in sincerity and truth. He proposed to have a room in Fitzwilliam Square - designing however so to have it that if any were disposed to attend the services at C of E Parish Churches, or Dissenting Chapels, they might not be hindered in doing so. He proposed a certain line of things as to service - prayer, hymns, and teaching that should be found among us on each day." No mention of JND at this stage. (N22)

JND met Hutchinson, and was invited to the room in Fitzwilliam Square. Dr C wrote that Darby was unenthusiastic at this stage. "...feeling still able to worship in the C. of E. as well as to come occasionally to our little assembly." (N11)

(JND later belittled any contribution from Dr C and his group saying that he didn't know anything about them, and wrongly claimed that they had ceased to meet BEFORE he became involved and things got going. Neatby noted re this "JND never shone in any kind of relation of rivalry."<sup>6</sup> " His attitude encouraged his followers "to re-write the history of (the Brethren in) Dublin in his favour, making him the founder of the movement" (N20)

Groves, who had become well acquainted with JND and appreciated his Tract on the Church, left for Baghdad. He went in Parnell's steam yacht. Parnell and Dr C came later to join him. (N21)

<sup>6</sup> I take it that he means that JND tended to view others as rivals, and wasn't good at giving others their due credit as revealers of God's will from the Scriptures.

1830

J V Parnell. (later Lord Congleton), who was a friend of Dr C, hired a furniture room in Aunger St. Dublin, for a public meeting and "pushed the others to meet there so as to make the Lord's table in our midst somewhat more of a witness" Dr C before going to Baghdad wrote that there had been constant additions of Evangelical Christians to Aunger St. up to the time of his leaving.

BWN (Newton) at the age of 23 met JND at Oxford. He was of Quaker stock. "He had intended to take "Holy Orders" with the C. of E., but conscience forbade" Dr S.P Tregelles (an authority of the NT Greek Text) was BWN's brother-in-law. (V33)

GM (Muller) had held Pastoral roles at Teignmouth, England. As he read his Bible he became convinced of: Believer's Baptism, that the Lord's Supper should be kept weekly, and of the need for room for the Holy Spirit to work in Ministry. (V35)

1832

GM "This evening one brother and four sisters united with brother Craik and me in church fellowship, at Bethesda, (a chapel in Bristol) without any rules, desiring only to act as the Lord shall be pleased to give us light through His word." (L196)

This meant that five or six such small "Assemblies" were now functioning in Ireland, London, Plymouth, and Bristol, all having some link with the above history. But that the "Brethren Revival" was not simply the result of the efforts of one man, or a group of men, is obvious from the fact that without any contact with Dr C, ANG, JND, etc the same truths and the same desire for simple direct dependence on Scripture were discovered by Godly men elsewhere. By then a group in British Guyana were meeting on a similar basis led by E.L. Strong who had resigned from his position as Anglican Vicar - he had been resented as being inconveniently Biblical. A similar group had formed in Italy, with the same Bible-based conviction. (V2931 (L310) From time to time similar groups still arise.



### 3: Basic Convictions of the "Early Brethren"

*The previous chapter has given a general picture of the direction in which the convictions of Groves and his friends had been moving. Going back to Scripture alone, they reached convictions about church order, practices, and fellowship. Here we try to set out those convictions in a more systematic manner. It must be understood that these convictions were in fact generally orthodox doctrines held in common with Bible-believing Christians in all ages. Specifically all Evangelical Christians shared them almost in their entirety, though with varying degrees of emphasis, and adaptation to the realities of their different church situations. These convictions are set out, not as "Godly Traditions" for us to take pride in and be loyal to - that's always deadening - but as a challenge for us in our generation to develop life-changing convictions (doctrinal, devotional and practical) as they did, direct from God's Word in reliance on God the Holy Spirit.*

#### Clergy and Laity: The Priesthood of All Believers

As they couldn't find in Scripture Christians being divided into clergy and laity they rejected that along with the idea that human ordination by a Bishop etc was needed before a man could preach the Gospel, or "Administer the Sacraments," of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or that a Bishop could, at Confirmation, lay hands on someone and convey the Holy Spirit to them, or that a Church was a consecrated building and that repeating formalised ritual "Services" honoured God and blessed men<sup>1</sup>. So they spoke of going to "THE WORSHIP MEETING" and invited their neighbours to "THE GOSPEL MEETING" (not a "SERVICE") at a home, public hall, Gospel Hall, or Chapel. The use of these words witnessed to the fact that a CHURCH was a gathered group of God's children. And that what they did had no formalised spiritual magic.

(A mere 50 years ago a friend of mine invited an Anglican fellow-student home for dinner. My friend's father read the Bible, explained a little, and prayed with the family at the close of the meal. The Anglican lad confided afterwards to my friend that he was shocked at the presumption shown by his father as "An unordained man conducting an unauthorised service, in an un sanctified building." IF, today it's appropriate for us to drop the distinctive vocabulary of our tradition, it's because the use of it has broken the strangeness of the previous tradition.

#### Oral Leadership in Prayer, Preaching and Worship.

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<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Peter commanded others to baptise Cornelius and friends, Acts 10:48 Paul baptised the first few converts at Corinth, and left them to baptise the rest, 1 Cor 1:14-16. There was no church ceremony when Phillip baptised the eunuch, or Paul baptised the Jailer, Acts 8:38-16:33. At Jerusalem the thousands of Believers couldn't all break bread together - they did so in their own homes in association with ordinary meals, Acts 2:46. RC church supports Episcopal ordination from tradition because it cannot be found in the NT.

When men and women were gathered together this was limited to men in view of the teaching in 1 Cor 11:1-16 14:33-38 1 Tim 2:12 (Women were active in personal evangelism, and some written ministry and hymn writing.) Men were expected to come to the "Lord's Supper" prepared to lead the congregation in prayer, praise or worship, or in the reading and exposition of the Scriptures, and the giving out of appropriate hymns for all to sing, 1 Cor 14:26 (In Scotland, following the ruling of Zwingli /Calvin /Knox, no musical instrument was used.)

The degree in which the participation by ALL men was expected and allowed, or restricted to those with recognised gift, varied according to the size of the congregation, and local convictions as to what was Biblical. That God the Holy Spirit could and would guide them as to who would take part, and what they should contribute, was understood from the Scriptures. But such guidance doesn't happen AUTOMATICALLY. Preparation of heart, (and often of material 1 Tim 4:16) spiritual intelligence, brotherly consideration and love for each other that ignores personal idiosyncrasies, and concentrates on what is spiritually helpful to all, is essential. <sup>2</sup>

At first at Dublin, the hour of the "worship meeting" was set so as not to clash with other church services, so that Christians could attend them as well. Later, however, meeting at 11 am became so much a tradition that when, a few years ago, one Assembly changed to beginning at 10.45 an elderly man imagined that he was "Being Faithful" by still coming in at 11, and taking the first opportunity to announce "We will commence our worship this morning by singing Hymn Number ...

As the gathering for "the Worship Meeting" to celebrate "The Lord's Supper" around "The Lord's Table" was the central feature of the movement, I've dealt with it at length. Other activities are dealt with under "CHRISTIAN SERVICE."

FURTHER COMMENT on the value of ARRANGED and/or SPONTANEOUS MINISTRY. In 1848 ANG wrote "there is only one way of union, that is of brothers and sisters with their Lord and Father, holding communion together by one Spirit.. All other things such as forms of church order, are, I believe quite subordinate.. not obligatory on any, open to all to be accepted or modified; as long as the relationship of the body with one another and their common Head and Father be not denied; nor the power of the Spirit hindered. I greatly value and approve a fixed ministry. Those gifted by God to speak to edification will be limited in number and known to the rest. But I will ever protest against an exclusive one, and this preventing the exercise of real gift by anyone else." (L190)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Of course not having an organised programme doesn't guarantee Spirit-led Ministry and Worship. Godly character, and heart exercise is essential whether there be organisation or not. IF the time spent together was disorderly, or dreary and discouraging rather than a delighting in the Lord and being strengthened in Him, repentance was essential. And a measure of organisation as to who was to take part was permissible and/or preferable, as long as there was some freedom for the Holy Spirit to direct participation.

<sup>3</sup> I take it that by "fixed" he meant ministry by competent speakers arranged beforehand. "Exclusive" ministry would restrict the opportunity to speak to the gifted and arranged few speakers, with no chance for others to take part, spontaneously.

GH Lang added that "AN Groves, CV Wigram and S Tregelles agree that at first there was the notion that every brother had an equal right to minister the Word whether qualified by the Spirit or not. Evidence of edifying gift was required later, but it was strenuously maintained that liberty must be given in the gatherings for the Spirit to move whom He would, for how otherwise could it be known which persons He had gifted and called to minister, or how should a continued succession of able ministers of the truth be maintained? Monopoly by a few accepted as Ministers of the Word, excludes unwanted truth." (L191) Lang noted on Acts 15 that there was no absolute ban on Judaizing teachers - they were opposed by the teaching of local leaders, and the matter taken up with Jerusalem. In Titus 1:9-11 those unwilling to respond to Godly rule - "Vain talkers and deceivers" must be stopped from ministering.

## MINISTRY MAY NEED FULL -TIME COMMITMENT

In 1845 Groves wrote "Those whom God has called to minister should.. give themselves wholly to it, 1 Tim 4:14-16, waiting on the Spirit.. to be taught to choose for the flock a proper pasture, and how to divide it." "Of this one thing I can now feel practically convinced (as I ever have in theory) that recognised pastors and teachers are essential to the good order of all assemblies, and as such are required and commanded of God. While happy to fellowship with those where God had not raised up such I should feel quite unable to join personally those who reject them as unnecessary and unscriptural." (L2023)<sup>4</sup>

ANG also wrote "The flock of Christ in whom the Spirit dwells is as competent now to know whom the Holy Spirit has qualified to minister, as in the days of the Apostles, both by comparing the word ministered with the written Word, and by the edification they experience in their own souls. I feel that a stated, recognised ministry (ie not a clerical class, but announced speakers who are known to be Godly and competent) is essential to Church propriety, and spiritual order." (L204)

## Baptism

The Exclusive Brethren maintained traditional "Christening" of infants in the form they called "Household Baptism," claiming that those born into a Christian Household were somehow neither in the world of the unsaved, nor yet in the Church of God, but would join the latter if their consent and conformity could be obtained when they were old enough to understand.

<sup>4</sup> That makes sense in assemblies of more than 1000 members, as in Plymouth, or Bristol then. However, informal mutual dependence on the Lord, and in love for each other, by Believers earning their living in secular employment, works well with 50-100 or more, in my experience.

Open Brethren generally taught, as Baptists did, that only Believers should be baptised, ie buried in water, Rom 6, as a confession of their personal faith in Christ which they had already come to. And that they had been born again by the Spirit, Jn 3:8. Generally this was linked with visibly joining the congregation of known Believers as an expression of their having been invisibly baptised by the Holy Spirit, into the invisible body of Christ, 1 Cor 12:13. Baptism as a Believer was not insisted on where the individual's conscience still considered Baptism as an infant valid, although they hoped and prayed for a change in this conviction. Generally they avoided "Infant Dedication" services because it so easily became seen as a spiritual life-changing event in the babe's life, instead of an expression of hope and prayer by the parents.

In 1820 Groves was baptised as a Believer, in Exeter. When told "Of course you must be a Baptist now," he replied "No! I desire to follow all in those things in which they follow Christ; but I would not by joining one party cut myself off from others." Holding up his ring of keys he said "If these keys were to hold by one another, all would go if one fell, but as each one is attached to this strong ring, so we should each take hold of Christ, not of any of the systems of men, and then we shall be safe and united; we should keep together, not because of any human system, but because Jesus is ONE." (L352)

JND urged him not to preach Believer's Baptism, because he should thereby become a sectarian. He replied "Surely if we are not free to follow ANY where they follow Christ and His will, we have only exchanged one kind of bondage for another. I wish to simply be like Christ. Let us neither seek nor fear a name (Baptist, etc) I wish to have from every sect what they have from Christ." (L353)

In 1833 ANG wrote that "Rom 6:3-4 shows why the form of immersion was chosen, being the fittest to shadow forth our death and resurrection with Christ. I lay no great stress on FORMS, but I love OBEEDIENCE..." (L353) GH Lang wrote that the Voluntaryness of Baptism is of first importance. Unintelligent, involuntary, or constrained acts do not fall under the term "reasonable OR spiritual service" Rom 12:1. (L353)

GHL "Open Brethren generally have preached and practised believers' Baptism but have readily welcomed Exclusives and other Christened Christians into fellowship." ("The reception of wholly unbaptised persons would be contrary to Scripture.") "In 1843 M received a Brother who had been refused by Baptists as not baptised by Immersion as a Believer - 6 weeks later he asked for baptism." (L355)

ANG, in 1834 "We have no authority to call Baptism the seal of the Christian covenant, as circumcision was of the Jewish. NT says nothing about covenant in connection with Christian Baptism, nothing more than a profession of Faith in the triune Jehovah by whose acts of grace and truth the soul has been brought from Death to Life. If it was a sign of the covenant - what covenant was John's baptism a sign of? (He baptised the circumcised, as Christians did in Acts 2.) IF BAPTISM IS THE SIGN OF a covenant, between whom is it made? And what is its purpose? If Baptism of infants is right, all so baptised are entitled to come to communion as in Israel to the Passover." (L356)

GH Lang "As circumcision did not effect natural birth, neither does Baptism effect spiritual birth; but as each born naturally was to be circumcised, so each born spiritually should be baptised." (L356)

ANG's experience of the practical consequences of infant baptism on the nominal Christians in Baghdad strengthened his conviction that it could not be Biblical. He wrote. "The more I trace the existing evils of the Church of Christ, the more I believe they have originated in the natural worldliness of man seizing on that in the Jewish dispensation which suited his carnal nature, and grafting it into the spiritual dispensation of the Lord of Glory" (L177) He lamented that those trusting in the perversion of the Gospel into baptismal regeneration as infants could be even more hardened against the Gospel than Moslems.

### Celebration of the Lord's Supper

From the Scripture the "Early Brethren" saw that the Lord's Supper was in no way a "Mass" repeating Christ's sacrifice of Himself for sinners, or a spiritual event that of itself conveyed life or blessing when correctly performed. It was a simple gathering of some of God's children, at the table of His family / The Lord's Table, in obedience to their Lord and Saviour, to remember and show forth / proclaim His death for them by the Breaking of Bread, and pouring out of wine. And to symbolise by their partaking of them that each had personally received Him / His sacrificial flesh and blood by Faith, and so had eternal life and were His now, and forever, Jn 6:47-63 And to enjoy communing, ie having fellowship with, the Risen Lord in their midst, as they meditated on and responded to, His sacrificial death for them, 1 Cor 10:16 (Is it not the communion / fellowship of the body and blood of Christ?)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> As to the meaning of "This is my Body," I learned something from a SS pupil. I had written BREAD on a blackboard and asked him what it was. When he said "Bread" I asked him to eat it. When asked again what it was he said "It IS chalk, but it MEANS bread."

They did so, seated like David, in response to God's assurance of a finished work, 2 Sam 7:18 They were solemnised and their worship dignified, not by any OUTWARD grandeur of a Church building but by knowing that, no matter how few in number, or how humble their circumstances and gifts, the Lord Himself was present by the assurance given (in other circumstances) "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst," Mt 18:20

The Brethren read "As often as ye break the Bread.." as meaning that it should be OFTEN, not seldom, and so generally every "Lord's Day." Each Believer was exhorted to examine himself spiritually to ensure that he came in a right attitude to His Lord, and his fellow Believers, lest he eat and drink condemnation to himself, 1 Cor 11:29 All Believers were expected to come in a right state of heart for worship, as all were seen to be Priests, capable of offering acceptable worship to God in their hearts, Jn 4:23-4.

### Admission to the Lord's Supper

The Anglican Church Prayer Book insisted that communion was available only to Christened and Confirmed members of their church. These were to notify the Vicar the previous day of an intention to "Take Communion," so that he could assure himself that the communicant didn't insult God by, for instance, if he was at odds with a fellow Christian, kneeling hypocritically beside him to take Communion as a brother in Christ.

The Presbyterian Church generally insisted that the Minister and another elder interview each church member so as to assure themselves that they were in a fit spiritual state to come to the Communion Table. If the interview was considered satisfactory, they were given permission (and often a token to present) so as to be allowed to take the Bread and Wine at the next quarterly Communion Sunday.

Baptist Churches tended to receive only those Baptised by Immersion as Believers.

The requirement for a Believer to be in a fit state of fellowship with God and Man, on the basis of confessing and forsaking sin and claiming cleansing by the Blood of Christ (1 Jn 1:5-10) is Biblical. The Lord washed the Disciples' feet, as defiled since their thorough "Bathing," before instituting the Supper, Jn 13:9-10 and with a view to this each Believer is to "Examine himself" before taking the Bread and Wine, 1 Cor 11:27-30 To be sound in doctrine, and Godly in life is our obligation, and both Ps 19:7-14, and 1 Jn 1:5-9 need to be borne in mind.

At first all Believers - those relying on Christ crucified for Salvation, and desiring to obey Him in daily living - were welcomed to the Lord's Table.

In 1836 ANG wrote "I ever understood our principle of communion to be the possession of the common life or common blood of the family of God (for the life is in the blood); these were our early thoughts and our most matured ones." (L133)

In 1838 a brother wrote: "Though the fullest devotedness and separation from the world are enjoined as a privilege and duty, yet gladly would we have admitted the late Emperor of Russia, or Archbishop Fenelon (RC) whose confessions show them to be true Christians, without calling upon either to give up their thrones. The ONLY ground of communion is real faith in Jesus... all of you who are really Christians, are free to come to the communion with us without yielding any of your opinions, and even while continuing to attend any other place of worship." (L140)

In 1839 JND wrote "Our principle is this. whenever Christ has received a person - we would receive him... as our table is the Lord's, not ours. We receive all that the Lord has received, all who have fled as poor sinners for refuge in the hope set before them, and rest not in themselves, but in Christ as their hope... We do not make a creed, but Christ, the ground and term of union" (L134) Aged JND was asked "If someone wanted to come once only to the Lord's table what should we do?" He replied "You ought to receive him and thank God he did the right thing for once" (L141)

Requiring correct, detailed doctrinal belief, or conformity to rules, before being received at the Lord's Table, is not taught in Scripture. But by excluding those who followed BWN, etc the "Exclusives" began to make "Doctrinal Light," not "Life in Christ," the criteria for reception, and so began to be a sect. As this principle shattered their fellowship, many moved into "Open" assemblies, and taught some of these to apply tests of doctrine, or commitment to Assembly fellowship. While Letters of Commendation are both Scriptural, and an aid to fellowship, by admitting to the Lord's Table only those bearing such a letter from an approved Assembly, some Assemblies formed de-facto sects. Whatever they professed to believe, in practice they cut themselves off from fellowship with Christians of other Groups.

### Distinctive Teachings

While Brethren could rightly say that they believed the orthodox doctrines relating to the Scriptures, the Deity, Creation, the Person and Work of Christ, Sin, Salvation, Judgment, Heaven and Hell, they taught them directly from the Scriptures, and characterised by the following emphases:

#### Christ Central to the Whole of Scripture

He was displayed not only in Creation, and Israel's history, but in the Tabernacle, its furniture, service, sacrifices, etc. These pictured Him as our "Mercy Seat" "Atoning Sacrifice," "High Priest" etc in all their details. The characters of Scripture portrayed Him Eg. Joseph the Saviour of the world, and A senath as His

Bride, the Church taken from Egypt / the world. Israel in the wilderness were a picture of us as Pilgrims on our way to the Promised Land, etc.

While such teaching can be used to edify and encourage believers, and move them to worship, over use or emphasis can crowd out essential plain teachings of God's word. And pre-occupation with clever, fanciful devotional expositions can become an escape into a world of pious day-dreams that allow us to avoid facing the obligations of obedience in the real world confronting us, threatening us, and drifting past us to hell. There is also a risk of popular traditional interpretations becoming established as a rival to Scripture itself.

## Law and Grace

They saw a clear distinction between:

1. LAW, and GRACE. That the OT LAW automatically condemns all, and is intended to bring them to Christ (By showing us God's holiness, our sin, the need for a sacrifice for sin,) and we are no longer under law, Gal 3:24-25 But that in the Gospel, Salvation in Christ is offered to us as a gift of GRACE to be received by Faith, rejoiced in, and used to the full in holy living, Rom 6:14-15; Gal 3:23-29; 4:4-7, 21-26; 5:18 Those who Believe in Christ receive, and have eternal life and can know that they have, Jn 3:16, 38; 1 Jn 5:13 (While there was some excuse for the Pharisees viewing the OT as teaching a religion of works, the NT clearly proclaimed the Gospel of God's grace This is a contrast to all human religion in that it depended on what Christ had DONE, and not on what any man could of himself DO.)

2. The OT "Shadows" - Physical things and actions that pointed forward to Christ that have now lost their relevance, and the solid, invisible Spiritual realities which are now ours in Christ, Col 2:16-17; Heb chapters 8-10

3. The OT nation of Israel, with an earthly land, and material blessings, and the Church which Christ promised to build, which is His body, and future Bride.

4. That the Holy Spirit who had been WITH the Disciples, is, since Pentecost, IN every Believer. Those who receive Christ are Born of God, by the Holy Spirit, Jn 1:12-13; 3:8, and baptised by the Spirit into the Church/ Body of Christ, 1 Cor 12:13 So, no human control of that by Christening, Confirmation, or by pressured Confession of Faith in Christ, etc is possible.

These liberating truths set Believers free from the pride of imagined self-righteousness and the alternative despair at failure to achieve it. And from the endless treadmill of routinely praying for pardon as miserable offenders, and petitioning for time to achieve amendment of life. Instead they saw that having



been saved by Grace- Romans chapters 1-8, being part of God's eternal purposes - Romans chapters 9-11, they faced the challenge to take up whole-heartedly the reasonable service and/or spiritual worship of those already justified by Faith, Romans chapters 12-16

Proclaiming such "Salvation by Faith, apart from works," so shocked an American Methodist that he wrote a book "Antinomianism Revived, Plymouth Brethrenism Exposed." No doubt some hearers of the Gospel DID respond in a shallow way, and trusted an empty repetition of a formula of Saving Faith in Christ, and presumptuously lived to please themselves, falsely confident of Heaven, and some still do. Others over-emphasized the contrast between old and new, and tended to ignore the truths taught by the Lord in the Gospels, relegating them to the "Jewish Dispensation," and concentrating on the Epistles, as did the "Berean Christian" movement. But most, awed by the undeserved mercy and grace of God, and moved to will and do God's pleasure by the Spirit within, Phil 2:12-13, took the business of Christian living seriously enough to be more often accused of being "too strict." Still, we need warnings and examples.

GH Lang "Present justification and future redemption have been taught among Brethren with unsurpassed clearness and fullness but heart holiness has been a comparatively unstressed theme." We need to obey the Lord's injunction to teach converts to obey all He had commanded, to counter this tendency, Mt 28:20 (L36)

In 1833 Groves wrote "Christ puts Himself into the circumstances of the Bond slaves of death to lead them to the Kingdom of light. The character and person of Jesus alone are to be traced and followed after in reading God's Word." "I have this morning been reading two or three times Mt 5, and the more I read, the more I feel our incalculable lowness not only of attainment, but also of aim, we do not even strive after those great and glorious things that seem so clearly promised to Faith..." (L35)

## Prophecy

The interpretation of Prophecy wasn't the original pre-occupation of ANG, or other "Early Brethren." The Second Coming of Christ was a matter of general interest at the time when the "Early Brethren" were developing their convictions (see Appendix II). They, along with many other Christians, saw it as giving urgency to the proclamation of the Gospel as widely as possible. It was also seen as a challenge to sacrificial living and personal devotion to Christ in order to make the best use of the time that remained, and particularly to earnest witnessing. But no particular interpretation was seen as being essential for membership. Agreeing on the interpretation of Prophecy is still neither central, nor essential for those who

wish to honour God by being and functioning as "NT-style Christians in NT-style Churches."

## 4: Life in the "Body of Christ"

*Chapter 3 has attempted to cover matters of Doctrine. The NT gives clear and detailed guidance for these. The organisation and functioning of the Church is less clear. We have no Epistle to do for it what Romans does for doctrine<sup>1</sup>. The Lord deliberately left us a great deal of freedom in the area of church life. First, this provides flexibility so that His people can function as a local manifestation of the invisible body of Christ, in ways that are appropriate and effective in any cultural setting, at any stage of history. Legalistic, robot-like obedience is totally alien to God's purposes for the Church. As individuals He wants us to live in close fellowship with Him by responding to hints as to what would please Him. He wants such individual Christians/Believers to gather in local fellowships which collectively do the same, with due appreciation of each other's varied contributions, Rom 14:1 - 15:7.*

*Among the "Early Brethren" failure to heed those Scriptures brought the disaster of intellectual pride, party spirit, loveless attitudes, and barren divisiveness, 1 Cor 13:1-3. I have included both positive and negative aspects of their history as a matter of honesty, and with a view to both warning and encouragement as we too, whatever our setting, take up the challenge to be NT Churches / Assemblies, and function as such.*

*Christian Revivals all seem to begin with a liberating glorious sense of the power and joy of the Gospel. In the experience of its reality men cast away the sheltering cloak of tradition and rise up to follow Jesus, as Bartimaeus did, Mk 10:50. But, before long, differences of interpretation of Scripture, and of the ordering of personal and Church life become obvious. The natural solution is for the revival movement to identify itself with a great leader. His word becomes its Law. It defines, and protects itself with Creeds, Confessions, and Correct forms so as to become LUTHERan, CALVINist, WESLEYan - In other words NEW Traditions are formed that automatically tend to come between Believers and their direct contact with and reliance on the Word of God, and their fellowship with each other In Christ.*

*It's unlikely that those who set up these new Traditions, see themselves as doing that. Indeed it seems that the Early Brethren imagined that they could totally avoid it*

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<sup>1</sup> An essential point often ignored is that the first churches were formed within the Jewish Community, after the pattern of the Synagogues where Jews met week by week in their own neighbourhood under local elders, to read and teach God's Word, pray, sing praises to God, and worship Him. A local church was a Christian "Synagogue," Jas 2:2. Local churches didn't function after the pattern of the Jerusalem temple, and its hereditary Priests. Our distinctive High Priest, Altar etc is in Glory, equally accessible to all, Heb 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 10:11-14; 13:9-16. The Apostles guided and directed the establishment of churches then. They still do through the instructions they gave in their Epistles. Eg Paul and Peter point out for us those who are suitable for Leaders in 1Tim 3:1-16; Titus 1:5-9; 1Pet 5:1-9.

by avoiding the outward FORMS of Tradition. But the problem is a universal feature of human life, and the elements of fleshly pride, perversity, and legality, so obvious at NT Corinth, or Jerusalem, remain in the most spiritual individual Believers and Congregations. **As Love and Patience wear thin, the effort to maintain spiritual unity amidst diversity is easily abandoned**, and enforced uniformity is seen as an attractive alternative. Its shackles are most effective when those concerned deny their existence, by not stating them as "Our Creed or Rules," but treating them as the self-evident marks of Godly Order<sup>2</sup>.

## The Headship of Christ

That Christ is the Head of the Church is, of course, common Christian belief. But in practice it is generally assumed that His headship is exercised through a church organisation, which may be a relatively loose and flexible structure, or as rigidly hierarchical as the Church of Rome with its Pope as "The Vicar of Christ." The "Early Brethren" saw Christ's Headship as something that applied to all details of the functioning of a local church.

As Head He is to control Church Life, Col 1:18 in each local Assembly / Church fellowship, working through a group of ELDERS (Presbuteros) who work as OVERSEERS (Episkopos). These are to be mature Brothers exercised to shepherd the local flock, 1 Pet 5:1-4, meeting with the Lord in the midst, and looking to Him for direction, Mt 18:20 Under its Elders each local Church Fellowship is to judge its own affairs, and make its own decisions, but with due consideration to the wishes and welfare of all Assemblies, and the Lord's revealed will for them, 1 Cor 7:17; 10:32; 11:16; 14:33-34; 1 Tim 3:1-15, etc.

## Unity and Diversity Within the Congregation

In Vol 1 of "The Christian Witness", the first Brethren Magazine (1837), it was stated that: "A credible profession of faith in the Lamb, and a consistent life is all that we have the right to require. If we demand more we are guilty of the sin of schism; we divide those whom Christ has united that they might strengthen and edify one another." p3069 (L137)

ANG (1838) "I feel every ray of light, given me of God, to be a talent I dare not hide, yet I entirely disallow the right of judging and rejecting OTHERS, seeing the Lord said "Judge nothing before the time." and "Who are you to condemn another man's servant" .. He as strongly tells us by the Apostle that we are to judge OURSELVES that we may not be judged by the Lord." (L206)

ANG "In THEORY.. if all are baptised into one body by one Spirit we ought to speak the same thing, and be of the same judgment. But in FACT it's obvious this is

<sup>2</sup> This was the solution taken up by J N Darby and the exclusives. For the events which divided "Exclusive" and "Open" Brethren see APPENDIX I. Their experience serves as a cautionary tale to those, such as myself, who write today of "the NT pattern" !!

not and never was the case. We must therefore.. leave every man to be "fully persuaded in his own mind." In smaller matters this is easy. In graver, it will be better to form small separate households of faith (ie congregations) in love, each preserving their consciences inviolate, than that either party should coerce others into their views and opinions. Uprightness of conscience is essential to all spiritual prosperity, but coercion and judgment is not. Infinitely better is it for each household of faith to seek to walk in all things well-pleasing to the Lord than to undertake the management and direction of other households." He compares this with the right of each household in a nation to rule itself as long as this isn't "against the welfare of the nation, and within its appointed laws. If they do transgress only the king can try their case." (L2078)

ANG "To receive all, as Christ received them, to the glory of God the Father. More than twenty years this point has been deepening in my mind, and all I hear and see makes it more precious .. amid so much weakness, partial and imperfect views of Truth, I see no other way but committing all judgment to the Son, to whom the Father hath committed it." (L137) (See Rom 14:1-13)

ANG "I pray the Lord will keep you from entering into curious questions (ie questions prompted by our curiosity) - all those subjects that cause dissension are but the small dust of the balances. Be content to appear ignorant about many things that others think they know a great deal (about) if you may be permitted to exhibit Jesus, precious to all - His meekness, tenderness, forbearing. We need a more practical, searching ministry, leaving in a subordinate place dispensational teaching, and the antecedent and/or succeeding circumstances of the Lord's return." (L210211)

In 1851 the British Govt. official Census report said: "The Brethren, therefore, may be represented as consisting of all such, as practically holding all the proofs essential to salvation, recognise each other as, on that account alone, true members of the only Church. A difference of opinion upon aught besides is not regarded as a sufficient ground for separation, and the Brethren, therefore, have withdrawn themselves from those bodies in which tests, expressor virtual, on minor points, are made means of separating Christians from each other." (L138)

The Open Brethren have always had to struggle to accommodate diversity. Some individuals, congregations, and groups of congregations, such as the "Needed Truth" group attempted to develop and enforce consistent interpretations and practices, without displacing Christ as sole Head, and the Scriptures as Sole authority. But they were attempting the impossible, and simply became yet another group of "EXCLUSIVE Brethren," but one insisting on Believers' baptism. Their 1889 declaration said that while other Believers were in the Body of Christ, their group of Assemblies alone were "The Church of God" and "The Fellowship" of Acts 2:42 and their members were strictly forbidden to have anything to do with Christians outside their sect. (V968) I know of one small "Needed Truth" congregation remaining in NZ.

Exclusives still condemn our diversity as a disorderly denial of the unity of the Church. Open Brethren must confess with shame that often we HAVE been

disorderly, unbrotherly, and ineffective as witnesses. This, and changed circumstances in the world around has led to a serious decline in numbers, power and joy in lands such as England, Australia and New Zealand. Yet in spite of the weakness inherent in Diversity (or because it casts them on the Lord) Open Brethren have continued to increase over-all, world-wide, and Exclusive Brethren have become a marginalised minority.

Whatever situation the reader finds himself in, and however he views the way ahead, I urge prayerful consideration of these words:

JND "I do trust that you will keep infinitely far from Sectarianism" "You are nothing and nobody but Christians, and the moment you cease to be an available mount of communion for any consistent Christian (i.e. welcome them to the Lord's Table) you will go to pieces or help evil." (L136)

ANG (183) "By making knowledge the sign of a man in Christ. they sit as critics when they should weep and lament because the Gospel is through them maligned and misunderstood" (L139)

### Inter-Assembly Fellowship

God has made it clear in Romans chapters 14-15, and 1 Corinthians chapters 8-10 that many matters of Belief and Practice are not set out in black and white clarity as RIGHT or WRONG. This isn't a fault which we are to rectify by adding our rulings, but is decreed in His Loving Wisdom as a challenge to us to behave as SONS using our freedom to choose to ask His guidance as to how to apply Scripture to our every circumstance, and so do everything as to Him, and as we judge, after personal exercise, to be to His Glory. And as a challenge to us to accept our inevitable disagreements as a reminder that we might be wrong need to keep studying and praying with a view to total unity, while valuing the person, conscience, and contribution of fellow-believers who inevitably see things not quite as we do. An orchestra that obeys a Conductor doesn't need every member to use the same instrument, technique, or musical score. Similarly, if each of us keeps his / her eyes on our Invisible Head, and follows Him, a Church displays the many-hued Glory of its Lord in a beauty far beyond the black and white of uniformity.

At first it seems that Brethren did indeed see the primary responsibility of each Believer, and Congregation, as being to discover the Lord's will for themselves, and to do it faithfully with their eye on Him. This was easy as they felt their way into

beliefs and routines that became increasingly Biblical. But problems arose as they faced the realities of the many things which Scripture had deliberately left unclear. Disruptive pride in individualism was rightly viewed as sinful. Earnest convictions developed through Bible Study and prayer were sacred. But did that mean that God would lead every Believer to identical convictions, and every congregation to uniformity of practice? It soon became obvious that Congregations as well as Individuals were as likely to differ in their judgments as those in Jerusalem, Antioch or Corinth did in the NT.

JN Darby chose to ignore what the NT taught about the responsibility of Elders and Overseers in each local Church to depend directly on the Lord as head of the Church, in their midst as they made decisions, Mt 18:15-20 He had begun with a strong "High Church" attitude, and it's not surprising that his "Godly Wisdom" insisted that differences of interpretation or practice were a disgrace to the Lord, and a denial of the Unity of the Church that was so dear to Him, Jn 17:21.

His brilliant mind (translations of Scripture into English, French, German and Italian, plus many commentaries), iron-willed sacrificial dedication to the Lord and His work, and successful ministry (many congregations formed throughout Europe), blinded him and his followers to the fact that in the name of UNITY, they enforced a DIVISIVE UNIFORMITY.

This became obvious as the EXCLUSIVE BRETHERN (organising to define and EXCLUDE all error in Doctrine or Practice), found that they must all conform to one decision, or exclude each other. And that by insisting on united action each such decision splintered church fellowships world-wide. (The Reading Grant, etc splinters have re-formed into what might be called an "Alternative Exclusive" group of Assemblies that makes a good attempt at being NT Churches, but I've neither the knowledge nor space to write of them.)

In 1890 WH Bennett writing in "The Witness", expounded Rev 1:12 as dealing with the mutual relations of Assemblies. Local Assemblies were like the 7 Golden candlesticks, distinct from one another but truly linked together by the invisible bond - the presence of Christ, unseen, but real to Faith. Each Church stood in dependence on and subjection to Him, and therefore all were one. .. so any going from one church to another in His Name was welcomed. Not mere uniformity - Unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace (V 63)

In 1939 GH Lang commented "Each assembly is responsible directly to the Lord, and not necessarily bound by the acts of another assembly. In practice the act of one assembly in discipline would be respected by another assembly as a matter of caution, rather than obligation. Nor have I ever known a brother to be refused

fellowship because of a liberal relationship with Christians in other spheres, or because of even marked difference in the interpretation of Scripture on such topics as prophecy, the public ministry of women, or the like. Objection might be made to diverse views being taught publicly, but the person is not debarred the Table of the Lord." "The Church at Corinth was not cut off from other churches in spite of the evils in it. Each church was expected to act within its own congregation as far as discipline was concerned, 1 Cor 5." (L206)

### Fellowship with Traditional Churches

In 1838 JND preached freely in dissenting churches in Switzerland. In 1870 preached in Moody's church in Chicago. (L144). But there was uncertainty about the nature and degree of fellowship which was appropriate.

Denominationalism was recognised as unscriptural, schismatic, a breach of family life of the children of God, a frustrating of the expressed purpose of the Lord, Jn 17:21. Those remaining in denominations were welcomed at the Lord's table. BUT should one refuse to go into their buildings or share in their witness or service? OR to show fellowship with them in whatever was of God and according to the Word?

In 1828 ANG wrote "My full persuasion is, that inasmuch as anyone glories either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan, etc his glory is in his shame, and that is anti-Christian; for as the Apostle said, were any of them crucified for you? The only legitimate ground of glorying is, that we (or others) are among the ransomed of the Lord, by His grace. As bodes, I know none of the sects and parties that divide and disfigure the body of Christ; as individuals I desire to love all who love Him. Oh when will the day come, when the love of Christ will have more power to unite them than our foolish regulations have to divide the family of God" (L1345)

ANG also wrote to JND reminding him that at first all 'brethren' believed "We were free, within the limits of the truth, to share with them in PART, though we could not in ALL their services. We felt ourselves bound to separate from all individuals and systems, so far as they required us to do what our consciences would not allow, or restrained us from doing what our consciences required, and no further.. and in this freedom.. should NOT force liberty on those who were bound, nor withhold liberty from those who were free. We felt constrained to follow the apostolic rule of not judging another's conscience, by our own, Rom 14."

ANG continued "It is their preventing me from, or demanding from me, other than the Lord demands, that divides me in a measure from every system.. but I would infinitely rather bear with all their evils than separate from their good. These were our principles of separation and intercommunion; we had resolved



never to try to get men to ACT in uniformity further than they FELT in uniformity; .. and this for one simple reason, that we saw no authority given us from God so to act; nor did our experience lead us to feel that it was the best means of promoting their spiritual blessing & our common aim of a perfect spiritual uniformity of judgment; whilst to ourselves it (trying to compel uniformity) afforded a ready outlet to the propensities of the flesh, under the appearance of spiritual authority and zeal for the truth..."

"The spirit of Sectarianism is that being "One of Us" has become a stronger bond than the oneness of the power of God in the soul.. The Church of England bore your testimony most patiently.. as long as you separated from them only so far as they separated from Christ, you established them as judges of themselves, and of themselves they were condemned .. but as soon as your position and language implied a perfect separation, alike from the evil and the good and a rejection of them in consequence of their system. you no longer had their consciences with you, as they felt that though only a brother in a Father's house, you exercised more than a Father's power, without a Father's mercy. maximum power over men's consciences comes from our clearly being seen to wish to allow them more than their own conscience allows.. proving that your heart of love is more alive to covering their faults than your eagle eye of light to discover them." (L143 219 225<sup>3</sup>)

ANG again "I do not exclusively join you. this spirit of exclusivism is the essence of schism which the Apostle so strenuously reproves in Corinthians chapter 3. I therefore know no distinction, but am ready to break bread and drink the cup of holy joy with all who love the Lord and will not lightly speak evil of His Name. Every saint. is a holy person, because Christ dwells in him, and manifests Himself where he worships, and though his faults be as the hairs of his head, my duty still is, with my Lord, to join him as a member of the mystical body, and to fellowship with him in any work of the Lord in which he is engaged." (L380)

Groves also wrote "As a visitor in a Church, as in a home, one is in no way responsible for what is done. Gal 5:19-21 rates Schism along with idolatries, sorceries, drunkenness, etc as excommunicable abominations." "It is my duty to depart from every evil thing but the judgement of others, and subsequent separation from them, I am daily more satisfied is not of God. The blessing of God rests on those who are separated BY OTHERS from their company, and it's a mark of apostasy to be of those who SEPARATE THEMSELVES from God's redeemed ones," Jude 19.

In plucking up tares (Mt 13:28-30) "There is so much room for proud self-righteousness Judge nothing before time.. There was much to be condemned in the

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<sup>3</sup> This appeals to me as excellent THEORY. In practice I find myself being blind to it at times, having excused my harsh criticism on the false grounds that vital (to me) truth is a "special case." In fact the more wrong the other person is, and the more important the truth, the more important it is that we teach and defend it in the spirit of 1 Cor 13:1-3; 2 Tim 2:23-26 So, I appreciate those brotherly readers who point out such blindness and I continue to pray Ps 19:12-14 as we all must.

Church at Jerusalem, or at Corinth. The Apostles bore with it, reprov'd it, but never separated from it." (L144145)

In 1834 Groves wrote "With respect to our communion with congregations, where the wheat and chaff are mixed. We have duties to ourselves, and secondly, as members of an immense brotherhood embracing the universal Church throughout the world, in all congregations of the saints, where Christ still walks amidst the Golden Candelsticks, notwithstanding unnumbered weaknesses and errors"

Groves continued "The first duty to ourselves is to select the congregation with whom we should worship; it should be where the form is most scriptural as we see it, the ministrations most spiritual; where there is the sweetest savour of Christ, and our own souls most edified; where the Lord is most plainly present with those who minister, and those who hear. This is what we owe to the Lord, the Church of God, and our own souls. Considering however, agreement in what we think best as to form of worship secondary to heart agreement in the mystery of Christ and Godliness" (L156)

He went on to say that on occasions, for any God-honouring reason, we were free in Christ to worship with any congregation in spite of any failure to obey Scripture in its form of witness and worship. "I dared not call that place unholy where the Lord is present to bless and save"

ANG "Our reason for rejecting the congregations of apostate bodies is that Christ doesn't manifest Himself among them in their public character, though He may save individuals as brands plucked out of the burning, To these churches we cry, standing outside 'Come out of her my people.' Among others we stand as the Lord does in Rev 1:13 telling them to remember their first love, and repent, first purity, first work in doctrine and discipline." "Is this countenancing error? If we must appear to countenance error, or discountenance brotherly love and the visible union of the Church of God, we prefer the former." (P157) (Co-operate with ANY group of Believers, in all that they do in Obedience to the Lord.)

In 1836 Groves wrote a loving earnest letter to Darby insisting that his actions amounted to denial of the original principles of the Assemblies. And that the new idea of basing fellowship on uniformity of doctrinal belief, instead of a shared common life in Christ, would inevitably lead to endless division and bitterness. He warned that those who had not themselves had to struggle out of the darkness in suffering and sorrow, would have no sympathy with those who were still going through that process. Men's opinions about doctrine would rule, rather than life and love. "The moment witnessing for the common life as our bond gives place to a witnessing against errors by separation (errors compatible with the common life).. their conduct and principles having to be examined and approved before they can

be received; the position which this occupation of the seat of judgment will place you in will be this: the most narrow-minded and bigoted will rule, because his conscience cannot give way..."

ANG continued by stating "I feel that no one ever expects me, when an acknowledged visitor in the house of another, to be answerable for the ordering of that house, or as thereby approving it - they would naturally come to mine, where I was in control, to form such a judgment. Some will not have me hold communion with the Scots, because of their unsatisfactory views about the Lord's Supper; others with you, because of your views about baptism; others with the C. of E. because of their thoughts about ministry. On my principles, I receive them all; but on the principle of witnessing against evil, I should reject them all. I feel them all, in their several particulars, sinning against the mind and heart of Christ, and letting in, in principle, the most tremendous disorders, and it is not for me to measure the comparative sin of one kind of disobedience against another.."

Groves added "I naturally unite fixedly with those in whom I see and feel most of the life and power of God, But I am free to visit the houses of my friends, though they govern them not as I wish." And, "I honour, love, and respect your position in the church of God, but I have a deep conviction that your spiritual power was incalculably greater when you walked in the midst of the various congregations of the Lord's people, manifesting forth the life and power of the Gospel, than now." (L 218 225)

In 1845, referring to those born again by faith in Christ crucified, who believed and taught God's Word. Groves wrote "I bless God, I feel able to rejoice in all I see of Christ in any of those systems which my heart grieves over, and which my own sense of duty keeps me in a measure separated from." (L 152) "To make myself one in heart with ALL God's children is one of the principles I have ever held. I love them ten times more because they belong to Christ than I feel separated from them by any comparatively lesser ground" (L 151)

By 1852 Groves was lamenting the bitter language and attitude of Exclusives, and the tragic loss of blessing when they decided that 'Separation from evil is God's principle of unity.' "Let me live and die with such as occupy themselves with beholding the beauty of the Lord, rather than detecting and judging evil in their brethren. Having first taken up the attitude of witnessing against errors in others they were naturally driven to unscriptural separation from them, and were compelled by the same principle to divide themselves again and again." (L 147)

ANG was not suggesting that doctrine didn't matter. With regard to the teaching that punishment was not eternal he wrote "I tell them it is the gospel of Satan, to give unconverted comfort in continuing in a damned state; soothing them by the hope of getting out of it in the end." These were the words of one who gave up wealth, strength, time, love, life in its entirety to endeavour to save some from that doom of sin. (L 229)

In 1931 CF HOGG wrote in "The Witness" (Open Brethren Magazine) "Occasions may arise where it would be wise to take advantage of an opportunity provided to proclaim the Gospel, or open up the Scripture which no man must take from God's servant, Rom 14:4. On such occasions, however, a certain sacrifice of freedom to declare the whole counsel of God may be involved, owing to the claims of Christian courtesy. As a general rule, fellowship with those where confidence and doctrine are helped mutually. In claiming liberty to go here and there at will one may dissipate one's energy and build nothing. But each is answerable to his own Master." (L1545)

## Christian Service

Every Believer, as a member of the Body of Christ, and given whatever gifts God the Holy Spirit chose to give, was to expect to find, under the direction of Christ the head of the Body, work to do for the blessing of mankind and the Glory of God, 1 Cor 12, by giving themselves first to God, and then to the direction of His servants, Rom 12, 2 Cor 8:5. If this work prevented the earning of one's living, those who benefited spiritually from their ministry should contribute to their physical needs, but for good reasons they might opt not to receive it, 1 Cor 9:1-18

That Acts 1:8 applied to ALL Christians, not just clergy, and the example of Acts 11:19-21 stirred them to reach out in Sunday School work, door-to-door-visiting, cottage meetings etc, and a world-wide mission effort that will be treated later. To an unusual degree, Bible Study and Prayer were seen as the responsibility of all. The degree of organisation for such activities varied widely, as did attitudes to full-time "Ministry" by recognised leaders.

All Believers and congregations had a responsibility to show hospitality to those who "Ministered the Word of God and/or Evangelized," and to help them on their way, Mt 10:8; Acts 15:3; Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 16:6, 11; 2 Cor 1:16; Phil 4:10-20; Titus 3:13; 3 Jn 5:8. From the NT Brethren learnt and taught that tithing was rather legalistic, belonging to the era of LAW. Under Grace, having been bought by Christ's precious blood, each was first to give THEMSELVES to the Lord for His service, and use all they had for His Glory, as He directed. Most of "The Lord's Work" was therefore done by individual Believers in their own time and at their own expense, and such service was preferably taken for granted, Mt 6:3. When Cash was needed each was to keep their eyes on Christ the Giver, and give "As the Lord had prospered" them, cheerfully, generously, regularly, and with careful accounting, (and as far as possible to be known by no one else,) Mt 6:1-4; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:1-9:15

The world at large likes to depict all religion as being a "Money-making Racket." Often it is. So care was taken to discourage any idea that preaching was for Money,

or that giving money put one right with God. No money was to be accepted from those who were not God's people, 3 Jn 7. No "collection" was taken up in "Outreach" situations. Traditionally State Churches had levied "Tithes" - in Germany (I have read) until World War I tithes were still being collected by the Government from all citizens, as a tax, and paid to the Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed church organisations to cover the costs of educational and hospital work. The concept was slow to die. I was told that 40 yrs ago in a local district as factories etc replaced houses a Vicar called on them saying things like "Your firm has replaced 5 households. Statistically 3 of them would have been my parishioners, so you owe me £50 a year!"

Among the Brethren no salaries were paid to Church workers, as this tended to make them "Men's servants, seeking to, or required to please men, and looking to them for direction and support," rather than directly to the Lord Himself, in dependent fellowship with Him. Organisation was kept to the minimum needed for accountability, (Eg. A "Trust Board" with duly audited annual accounts, for the Orphan Homes Muller established.)

While they supported the Bible Society, and other Christian organisations, they were uncomfortable with their mixture of trust in God, and trust in Worldly-wise strategy, and set up parallel organisations "On NT lines." An "Exclusive" printer sent an artist to Palestine to get attractive scenes helpful for illustrating Gospels. The SGM he set up to GIVE them away continues to this day, depending on the Lord directly for all salaries, and costs, and still giving away each year millions of Scriptures, Scripture-only booklets etc - in many languages.

George Muller set up a "Scripture Knowledge Institution" which sent out millions of Bibles and other literature<sup>4</sup>. (V 37) He gave the following reasons for setting up a new body rather than depend on the Missions Societies, and Institutions of their time: They aimed at the gradual betterment of the world - not a Scriptural expectation. Their connections with the world. By a large subscription people could become life members while living an evil life. They asked the unconverted for money. The Committee Members managing the Society could be manifestly unconverted, if rich, or influential. They tried to obtain as patrons, president, and chairmen for public meetings, persons of rank, or wealth, to attract the public. Never poor, but devoted, wise and experienced servants of Christ. (He suggested that the Galilean fisherman and their carpenter Lord would have also been passed by.) The contraction of debts by the Societies was contrary to Rom 13:8. (L 28:56)

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<sup>4</sup> Muller's better known work with orphans is covered in the next chapter.

## 5: A.N. Groves: His Missionary Activity and Influence

*The organisation, or lack of it, among the "Open" Brethren group has permitted (Exclusives and others would say CAUSED) many problems, but meant that the problems have been localised. While their weakness and failures have been obvious to them and others, the previous chapter noted their strong conviction that every Believer in Christ, wherever they are, is called to be His witness, in direct accountability to Him. Here we focus on the way in which this conviction lead A N Groves into Missionary activity, and the influence which his example had on others. In order to appreciate his contribution, though, it will first be necessary to briefly review the history of mission activity up to that time.*

### The NT Missionary Model

Before He departed our risen Lord made it clear that His people were to witness for Him, beginning where they were, and reaching out world-wide. His personal presence would always be with them, and the indwelling Holy Spirit would empower them (Mt 28:18-20 Mk 16:15; Acts 1:8).

This is recorded as happening informally/incidentally as a result of circumstances (Acts 8:4,5; 11:19-21). And, in specific situations, as a result of individual exercise (Acts 8:26-38 10:9-48 18:24-28) and congregational guidance (Acts 13:1-3). Paul is recorded as recruiting helpers (Acts 16:1-3) and sometimes directing them (Phil 2:19-30). But in general each worker was directly answerable to the Lord (1 Cor 16:12), although expected to show consideration for other workers (Acts 15:36-41, Gal 2:1-10). The Christian community provided all the needed funds, and they were carefully accounted for (Acts 6:1-6; II Cor 8:16-21; III Jn 15-7). Converts were gathered into local church congregations, under the leadership of locals as elders, directly responsible to the Lord (Acts 14:21-23 20:7-38 I Tim 3:1-10 Titus 1:5-9). In a serious disagreement God's will was sought and found by those involved gathering with the leadership at the original sending centre (Acts 15).

### Mission and Empire<sup>1</sup>

When the European Nations began to build Colonial Empires it was natural for their state churches to provide for the religious needs of their citizens in the colonies by sending out Chaplains, etc. To Christianise the natives made governing easier, and gave a veneer of religious respectability to what otherwise was clearly political or commercial brigandage. In Loanda, Angola, stands a stone throne from which the Bishop Christened all the slaves as they filed down to the ships, fostering the idea that the "Christian" Europeans were doing the Africans a favour in sending them to Heaven by means of the Hell of Slavery. And the Spanish in the Americas at gun point "Converted" the Indian population of whole states to "Christianity" while converting their gold etc into luxurious living for themselves in Spain.

<sup>1</sup> My booklet on "Pre-Reformation Church History" covers missionary activity in that period

Some of the Priests, Chaplains, and Colonists were real Christians, who worked for the welfare of the native populations, and spread the Gospel. And to my knowledge the British, French, Dutch, and Germans didn't practice forced "conversion" to Christianity. (It often wouldn't have been politically or commercially advantageous, and they were less religious than the Spanish and Portuguese.) But, as a system, "Religious Colonialism" under the protection of Political and Commercial Colonialism imposed the forms of the home Church organisation, ritual, etc on those natives willing to go through the forms of admission to that church. To religious patriots, as to national patriots, these political and religious triumphs were both a foretaste of, and the means by which "Jesus shall reign where'er the Sun..."<sup>2</sup>

Educational, Political and Commercial advantage brought some natives into nominal Christianity, while those too poor to be fussy were attracted by charitable handouts. When Independence came such "Rice-Christians" (Jn 626) often reverted to traditional beliefs and practices. Although the beneficial concepts of Schools, Hospitals, etc for all citizens remained as a legacy of Christianity, only those who had been truly "Born Again" into a living relationship with Christ, or those who found religious satisfaction in the forms of their church, remained in any sense Christian.

### Attempts to Emulate the NT Missionary Model

The Moravian Missionaries, (through whom John Wesley came to faith in Christ,) and the Baptist William Carey "I live to preach the Gospel, and I cobble shoes to pay the expenses" were earlier pioneers of NT-style foreign missionary endeavour. But from Anthony Norris Groves and his brother-in-law George Muller we can trace both the world-wide missionary activity connected with "Open Brethren" Assemblies, and the "Faith Missions" that follow the pattern set up by Hudson Taylor and the CIM (Now OMF.)

### "Christian Devotedness"

In 1825 Groves wrote a tract Christian Devotedness or the Consideration of Our Saviour's Precept "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" which had considerable influence on others, including George Muller (N5), Dr Morrison of China, and Dr Duff of Calcutta. (L77). The following quotes reveal some of the attitudes expressed in that tract, and which later motivated, and characterised, his missionary activities

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<sup>2</sup> Islam has always been spread by Imperial and Commercial power. All missionaries benefitted from the opening up of trade and communications, and from the law and order enforced by Colonial Governments. They were also inevitably helped or hindered by the fact that they were or weren't of the same language, race or religion as the Government and its officials. The more closely they, as individuals or missionary organisations, identified themselves with the Government, and claimed privileges from it, or modelled their work on the lines of colonial government, the less their work was built in direct dependence on God - and the more likely it was to collapse when the colony became independent.

"The principle of God's government is paternal. Its primary object is the development in us of the character of dear children, the essential feature of which is total dependence" (L91)

"The great characteristic of the Gospel Dispensation is Love and simple reliance on God. Devotion of self to Christ is His indisputable right, and so also our highest happiness. As we cast all our cares for the future on Him who knows our necessary wants we cease from anxiety. And it is the means by which He will most bless His Church. The state of mind most to be avoided by a searcher after truth is the determination of will and affection not to do what we understand to be God's will. It destroys all honest dealings with God" (L75-6)

Like Wesley, ANG (and G Muller) took seriously the command "Lay not up for yourselves Treasure on earth," and enjoyed the comfort of "Your heavenly Father knows your need of earthly things." To Abraham it meant taking it with him to Canaan. To Gaius, using his large house for the Church, Rom 16:23 To ANG it meant turning all he had into cash and devoting it to the Lord's service, as in Mt 19:21. (L364)<sup>3</sup> He wrote "As to the application of it to another man's conscience, it cannot be so applied; for though I think it is not only a great loss of present comfort, but a great sin, not to trust God's promises - yet all acceptable obedience must be willing and free, or it will be a snare and temptation to enjoin the body, when you cannot give the spirit, which alone gives it worth in God's sight. (1 Cor 13:1-3) Faith depends not on WHAT is commanded, but on WHO commands, whether it is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved." OR "Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth." "My present impression is this, that it is the duty of every one to give up all for Christ, absolutely and unreservedly, though the precise mode must be left to individual conscience" (L78-9)

He also wrote "At first my ideas were Arminian - I thought more of what I was to do for the Lord, than what the Lord had done for me." (L36) God showed me "That the way to love Him with all my heart," was by setting my mind to look at His unspeakable fullness and realise that what the Lord was, mattered so much more than my own deficiency." (L64) "When your love for Christ glows you will have an instinct as to what will please Him. If we believe His love, then all service is sweet, the more time we spend with Him the more we are drawn to Him. We have often (especially as wives and children) to serve Christ through ordinary duties, and we must look through it, and through it that is pleasant, and ask Him to take away our selfishness reactions to those we delight in, and those who oppress us." (L65-6)

ANG's comment on the link between love and sacrificial service ran "Love and sacrifice are as inseparable as sin and sunshine. Sunshine is the sun sacrificing itself." (L68)

<sup>3</sup> Whereas plating ourselves, possessions etc in God's hands to be used as a stewardship, 2 Cor 8:4-5, is what others hear the Lord saying. That this is a personal option, but hypocrisy is a sin, is clear in Acts 5:4. ANG makes a valid point that to set one's heart on riches will, if successful, curse our children with wealth that will make it hard for them to come to Faith in Christ, Mk 10:23 "The love of money is the root of much evil," warns against hoarding up wealth as a bad example that corrupts us and them. (L92125) But Christians living as Hippie-type parasites in a parody of "Faith" are commanded to change, 2 Th 3:6-12 "Take no thought what ye shall eat," doesn't forbid planting fruit trees, or buying food cheaply in bulk.



## Giving Up All

Reactions to ANG's tract included J. Parnell with £1200 a year choosing to live in a house with annual rent £12 RC Chapman as a man of social position feared pride so went and lived in a workman's cottage in the town where he used to drive in his carriage with coachman and footman. (L29) Groves himself waited patiently for his beloved wife to come to the same convictions as himself about resigning his profession and property.

Being permitted to marry, Groves had done so without asking the Lord, as Joshua with Gibeonites. Being married the new joys, settled life, and financial success damped down any desire to be a missionary "I had a wife who loved me, dear little children, and a most lucrative profession, yet I had not the Lord's presence as in days past, and therefore was miserable." (L23)

Having agreed to give at the, Mrs Groves (M) distributed it. In doing so she met and became friends with Mary Walker - in every way a sufferer "a bad husband great poverty, in constant pain, yet faith, love, and praise mounted over all - this poor saint soon taught M there was something in religion of which she knew nothing and a sustaining power of which she felt nothing" This distressed her but she was unwilling to mention it to ANG "for fear the idea of Mission work should rise in my mind again... so determined was her opposition it remained even after she gained peace" (L2356)

In 1828, soon after M came to happy faith in Christ, Groves wrote "I'd never spoken to M about missions, yet seeing the Lord had done so much, I saw no reason to doubt He could do that remained." "Impressed by Bishop Chase of Ohio, talked with him of going there, as a first step.. then going to India where my heart was first set - she burst into tears I replied "Well, my love, I have waited now ten years, and whatever burdens of soul or body I have brought on myself, I will not bring them on you, you had no share in them, nor will I urge you" (L23) Four months later she said "Well Norris you may write to Bishop Chase, and say we will come."

When no reply came his wife's response was "Well Norris you had better write again to the CMS and say we're ready to go anywhere." He did, saying "My whole desire was to do the Lord's will, and the greatest good to the Church at large, more especially the cause of missions, by going or with money. Mr Bickersteth (of the CMS) said "If called of the Lord to the work, money can't be set against it It is men the Lord needs." "I thought his judgment wise". (L24)

Groves promised that before going to the mission-field he would repay a £1000 loan owed by his father. As soon as his leaving was known income decreased, didn't expect wife to get her inheritance - his wife comforted him and was criticised by relatives as being "worse" now than he was. (L24)

Later that year, when asked why waste time in continuing to study with Trinity College Dublin as he intended to go to the East, his reply was "If I return disabled, I shall be able to be a C. of E. Minister in England" As he walked home, Mary said "Don't you think there was much force in Mr. T's question?" He said "I thought there was, but not sufficient to prevent me going at that time; for I had got my examination ready.. if I didn't, my last three terms' study would be wasted.. it would look so unsettled to break off my course so suddenly, it would give pain to those we had already deeply tried, and as I had my money laid by for the journey I was determined to go this time - would then have 9 months to think over the question. She didn't concur, but thought my reasons were more of this world than the next. However I had made up my mind"

He was intending to leave for Dublin on the Monday, but the house was burgled on Saturday night. "There were TWO packets of money, one containing £40 for the Irish trip, (to Trinity College) and one £16 for taxes; the former was taken, and the other left" After the burglary "We spent one of the happiest Sundays I ever recollect, in thinking of the Lord's goodness in so caring to stop on my way up, when He does not wish us to go" (L24§)

### Setting Out In Faith

1829 India had been on his heart for 12 years, but at the pleading of Mr. Bickersteth CMS, Groves agreed to go to Baghdad. (L27) Political unrest in Syria etc meant travelling 6 months Via Russia, through the Caucasus with his wife, 2 sons, and Dr Kitb their tutor. With them went Mrs Taylor, wife of the British Resident in Baghdad, and her party. ANG was now 34 a matured Christian. "After many years reflection about the work of a missionary, am on my way.. no very strong expectations of what we were to do being visibly very great, but that we shall answer a purpose in God's plans I have no doubt. Elijah fulfilled God's purpose; yet he does not appear to have made more than one convert (Elisha) to the Lord his God. Nor did Noah make one convert; yet he fulfilled the Lord's purpose in his preaching so before the Lord comes again, 'as in the days of Noah' we expect to reach out our hands without many regarding but let it be our concern, that we as individuals, and as a mission, preach Christ faithfully and love Him truly. May the Lord, of His great mercy, keep among us a spirit of love and brotherly union." (L24) Afterwards "If we have done the Lord's will we have succeeded; the angels.. to Sodom succeeded, as well as Jonah who went to Nineveh, tho the former destroyed and the latter preserved the city." (L24§) (A few appear to have trusted Christ through his witness at Baghdad. One dear conversion, remained steadfast.)

1831 Plague broke out. No Mails. 134.31 Groves wrote "O, what a blessed portion is ours, to have the God of Israel and His unchangeable promises for our sure and abiding place of rest." Then the river flooded the city, washing away 7000 houses, drowning 15000 people. Followed by a siege of the city by rebels determined to depose the Pasha, and only when they succeeded did order prevail. By then about two thirds of the 80000 population had perished. Food and water had been very scarce; robbery and violence abounded. (L25§)

7.5.31 Groves Diary entry "Anxious evening Dear Mary taken ill. Her heart is reposing on the Lord with perfect peace, and waiting His will. To nature it seems fearful to think of the plague entering our dwelling. In our present situation, nothing but the Lord's especial love could sustain a soul in the contemplation of a young family left in such a land at such a time. She says "I marvel at the Lord's dealings, but more at my own peace in such circumstances."

12.5.31 Mary died... "Though the Lord has taken away the desire of my eyes, (Ezek 24:16), and left me a few hours to cry unto Him in the midst of deep, deep waters, yet these visions of His love have so revived me, that my whole soul is brought to acquiesce in His holy, Fatherly arrangements with respect to her who was once the joy, the help, and companion of all in which I was engaged."

15.5.31. Groves went down with the plague "Should these be my last lines. I desire to ascribe all praise to the sovereign grace and unspeakable love of my heavenly Father, who from the foundation of the world set His eye of redeeming love on me in the person of His dear and well-beloved Son. I bless God for all the way He has led me. As to the dear helpless children, I have committed them to His love, with full assurance that if He takes me hence to Himself He will provide for them much better than I or a thousand earthly fathers. To all the family of the redeemed, especially those I know, I entreat you to abound in His most holy work, for you know your labour is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor 15:58

27.5.31 "My heart longs for Christian communion - someone to whom I can talk of Jesus and His ways, and take counsel." (Kitto, his only adult companion was deaf.)

7.6.31 "The more I see of the trials and anxieties of the missionary life, and the mysteries of God's dealings, the more I feel overwhelmed with the importance of the soul having a deep sense of the love of God in Christ before he ventures on such an undertaking. No doctrine but those of sovereign grace and His love entertained towards the soul before the foundation of the world.. can happily sustain the soul."

(Relevant to the PETTY frictions that born so large in the life of small communities in a foreign land ANG commented on Prov 14:14 Jer 2:12-13 "As I move among Christians, the thought often strikes me, how exceedingly they mar their own peace. Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, are continually ruining each other's happiness about things which are not worth a second thought - and they refuse to see it.) (L 38)

A year after ANG left for Baghdad he was followed by a party of 7. It reached Aleppo but was held up for 15 months. 1 died while delayed, 1 returned, and 1 died after arrival. Eldest son Henry Groves, a child at the time, looking back wrote of the sense of God's presence in "those daily prayer meetings, and Friday meetings for fasting prayer, and for reading the word.. bearing witness that the Spirit of the day of Pentecost was with the Church in very deed." (L 26)

## In India

1833 ANG went to India. (Others and his two sons remained in Baghdad for a time, but seeing no prospect of a permanent work finally left also.) Of his going to India ANG wrote "One very special hope is to become united more truly in heart with all the missionary band there, showing that notwithstanding all differences, we are one in Christ." He travelled widely, enjoying fellowship with Christians in a variety of Denominations, but concerned that none were free to live and work in simple dependence on God and His Word.

1833 Groves wrote that he had "Deep sympathy with the character and piety met with in spiritual members of the C of E. I see the system to be very wrong yet my heart finds great rest in the fair pearls which lie within its shell. We must stand by the truth the Lord has revealed to us, and for which the Lord has made us responsible to Himself and to the Church. Must make every effort that they do not rivet on this land the evils of ecclesiastical dominion, pride and earthliness under which the established churches in Europe have groaned. In all civil matters I will be subject, but the liberty of the church is not mine to yield. I feel happy in having no system to support. Among Christians or Mahometans I can truly say "I do not desire to bring you over to any Church, but the simple truth of the Word of God. We wish you to read the NT to judge God's truth by what you find there." (L2768)

1834 In India "Up to this time everything in the Church has been as free as our hearts could wish. Persons have been converted, through reading God's Word, or through one another, and have accepted spiritual help where they found it. But now the C of E is seeking to extend its power, and the Independents and Methodists are seeking to enclose their little flocks. My object in India is twofold, to try to check the operation of these exclusive systems, by showing the Christian Church they are not necessary for all that is Holy and Moral; and to try to impress upon every member of Christ's body that he has some ministry given him for the body's edification" (I understand that until Gladstone as Prime Minister appointed Moule, and Ryle, as Bishops no Anglican Bishop would authorise an Anglican to go as a Missionary with the Evangelical CMS, so their first missionaries were Lutherans who were now required to become Anglicans. Sometimes Anglican chaplains in India, with the support of the authorities, stopped CMS Missionaries from having Bible studies in homes etc insisting that formal services in the recognised place of Anglican worship was the only permissible form of witness) (B34)

1848 Fourteen years later, in spite of opposition "I often bless God for enabling me to belong to all that belong to Him.. I never feel that I separate from one because I unite with another. If hindered from intimacy with many; it is because their own will sets terms I cannot comply with... I rejoice in all the goodness God has vouchsafed to them, and show my love and oneness with them, as fully and often as I can, publicly and privately owning all the congregations of the faithful in the land but none of their systems." (L274)

1852ANG returned to England and the news he brought stirred Muller and others to found a committee and magazine to gather helpful data to stimulate more intelligent interest, and payee, by publishing letters from Overseas, including ones from Hudson Taylor. In 1872ANG's son Henry took over as editor. (B95) This became "Echoes of Service," which without attempting to control or direct missionaries still provides a channel for news, finance, and advice about conditions overseas.

1853ANG Died at Bristol aged 58 on 20<sup>th</sup> May

## Missionary Convictions

### Organisation and Direction

1831ANG wrote "I have no desire to set myself in opposition to those blessed institutions whose labours roused us from our lethargy- CMS, LMS, BMS, Bib Soc. I do not think their plan is the best, but I desire to bless God for them, and cooperate with them whenever I can." (L279) He saw their activities, and the natural growth of churches, hindered by their working at building the organised church systems of the West, instead of planting NT-type churches.

1834"Wherever I have been, the system of the world and its character of influence has been adopted, instead of the moral power of the self-denial of the Gospel." "Holiness is the only influence in the Church worthy of the ambition of a child of God" (L281) "I trust to show that Societies are not needed to carry on very extensive missionary work, any more than to begin it. That those who think there can be no union or unity of action without systems of man's devising, may see that the cultivation of the spirit of brotherly love, with perfect liberty and freedom of action, would obtain it better." (L280)

### Finance and Lifestyle

1831ANG writing when Baghdad was cut off from all outside contact for more than a year. "I have this day settled all my accounts, and find that our stock will last us, with the Lord's blessing two months longer, and we know not whence we are to be supplied. But He has so wonderfully provided for us hitherto, it would be most ungrateful to have an anxious thought. We may many times be in straits, but the time of our necessity will be the time for the manifestation of our Lord's providential love and generosity." "All my dear wife's conversation for these twelve months past, but especially as our difficulties and trials increased, was on the peace she enjoyed in the Lord. Often she said to me, 'Notwithstanding everything external, I never enjoyed the sweet sense of my Lord's loving care that I have enjoyed in Baghdad' (L7982) "In Baghdad the little carpet I sit on by day is my bed by night, and the cloak covers me. I cannot tell you how comfortable it is to be independent of everything but the sunshine of the Lord's countenance" (L291) (He also commented that "There's nothing wrong with a 'Hand to Mouth' existence, as long as it is His hand to our mouth.")

1833 "We lose our true power by decking ourselves out, and prosecuting our plans, according to the spirit and principles of the world.. I suggested privately to some good and devoted servants of God that certain expensive self-indulgent habits might be avoided, but all resisted. The only true influence in the Church of Christ is our being like Him. But the Church is now feared, not because God is among her, but in proportion to her wealth, numbers and power, just as Nations are." He quotes a Mrs Ward of the Burma Mission, "We were treated with a great deal of respect by all kinds of natives, but it was the respect the poor show for the rich, not for piety.." Helpers and converts, under such circumstances expect financial support (L284) ANG "I don't see how any abiding impression can be made, till Missionaries mix with the Indians in a way that is not now attempted." (L288)

1834 ANG wrote that "Two kinds of self denial are needed by missionaries. One, in clothes, food ornaments. The other in coming down to the natives - rather the spirit of love from which that flows. I feel it infinitely better to say "Let us." rather than "You do." To be generous with a £,000 year is different from being generous with £10 year. If we expect generous self-sacrifice from these people, they must see us acting that way - we are freer to act thus than those in Societies" (L290)

Another form of necessary self-denial is credited to him. "It was a peculiar feature in Mr. Groves' character, that he cheerfully gave up his most valued fellow-labourers if they felt the Lord had led them to another sphere of service." (L297)

ANG wrote that "Organisation largely stops the evangelist from experiencing the direct dependence upon the Lord needed for a rich life in his own soul and in his spiritual children. Paul didn't control Apdlos, 1 Cor 16 12 Timothy served as a son with his father in the furtherance of the Gospel Phil 2 22 as a "fellow-worker" Rom 16 21 not a junior worker. Our Western way is to organise and provide for the needs of native workers because we can't trust the Lord to feed, clothe, and guide them, and we want to save them from hardship. Yet to do so is to rob them of the benefits of direct dependent fellowship with God This is poor preparation for forward movements into the unknown, or for the interruptions of war etc. And the regularity and sufficiency of supplies removes the evangelist from the level of his converts in their daily needs and trials and induces them to become dependent on him rather than on God so that their faith in God and loving support for each other is stunted. The comparative poverty of Paul completely avoided these spiritual perils" (L2935)

ANG On Malachi 1 "In ceasing to rely on the Fatherly character of God, we fall into these sins that He accuses His people of. We provide for ourselves instead of trusting Him to provide, and look to Him as a master who ought to pay us, rather than a Father, all of whose inheritance we share." (L295) When "The native himself is thrown on God - it develops that character that is needed for him to go on with God But the native naturally loves provision and ease, and thereby is kept dependent. The European loves to keep the native in subjection, and himself in the place of rule. But if the native churches be not strengthened by learning to lean on the Lord instead of man, political changes of an hour may sweep away the present form of things, and leave not a trace behind" (L296)

ANG "I find that men would rather suffer any measure of bondage in the things of religion, than dwell in individual responsibility before God for every action, thought, and affection." (L297)

1851ANG wrote "When God's time is come it is wonderful how difficulties are removed. Those who know that having food and raiment they must be content are made to feel the reason why so many of the family of God are in trial is - as a state it most leads to dependence on God. The moment a man feels adequate for his own wants, his tendency is always to self-reliance" (L298)

### Language

ANG "I daily feel more assured that the colloquial use of the language is the very instrument of an evangelist's labours" Conversed in Arabic with Hanmai, a faithful servant sent by God to him in Baghdad, who served him for the rest of his life. Deep opposition to translating into the vulgar dialect existed among clergy and literary men as if it was a disgrace to communicate ideas in a vernacular tongue. It was in the interests of the clergy and literate people to keep the rest illiterate. (L251)

### Property and Institutionalised Witness

1830A Mullah in Baghdad said to ANG "I know you are devoted men and give much away, but I know not what your motives are, or the extent of your riches. If I saw persons labouring from day to day, and giving the fruit of their labour to the poor, or to missions, I should see that they were making sacrifices for God" (L3925)

1834ANG wrote "Missionaries ought to go from place to place, and become stationary only when they are gathering a church. Then they should do as the Apostle did, set some over the church, and go on "Exercised about the best way to develop the native ministers. Finally rested on our dear Lord's plan. That is to get from 2 to 12 and to go about constantly with them, eating what they eat, and sleeping where they sleep, and labouring whether in a rest-house at night, or by the way, to impress on their souls a living exhibition of Jesus." (L400) But he was then 40 yrs old, and the Indian climate much harsher to a European than that of Palestine. Later, rightly or wrongly, he became a settled missionary, referring to his "Station" as others did.

1837In Madras ANG was able to support all the Missionary party by his dentistry, but church controversy there distressed him, and he was concerned to provide employment for natives who lost their means of support by becoming Christians. Moved to Chittoor 96 miles away. Bought land and established a farm which helped to support his household, and many poor children. It seemed that if he had enough finance it could support the "Mission" - including fellow-workers who had lost their main home supporters.

1841 Unasked, a large sum was offered to Groves as a loan, and although no specific guidance is recorded it seemed to them all to be the Lord's will.

They accepted the loan, bought land, and commenced silk farming but disease killed the silkworms. Grew sugar, and sold it at a loss because market price fell. He had a constant struggle to pay interest - it cost him more than the original sum. ANG was spiritually depressed about this and felt deeply that he had failed his Lord by accepting the loan. (L 3935) (He had a sensitive temperament, he was aging, and the climate was a trying one.)

1847 Groves wrote "I had long been bordering on the depths of despair.. yet I know. that there is PEACE in believing and that there is a preciousness in Christ that satisfies when all else fails." (L 404) He referred to his 10 years at Chitbor as being a "blank." But others record that many were saved, and his life one of consistent Godliness That his speaking was with humility and power to the hearts of hearers, to their edification And that "no one is so beloved by all, and respected by the world - so kind, tender, and considerate to all, except where the truth of His Master is concerned, and then he is bold and earnest in commending it." (L 394)

Re Schods: When at Baghdad, ANG had opened a school for Armenian Christians using Scripture to teach reading. He wrote "Education may or may not be a blessing knowledge of Gods Word is. Education leads to pride, rebellion, unbelief, discontent, the other (knowledge of Gods Word from using the Bible as text book) is at least a check where it operates no further; but where it does (operate further) you obtain a valuable subject (graduating student)." Later after visiting Dr Duff's schools in India. "My interest in boarding schools is increasing not because I think it was the way in which the Apostles proclaimed Christianity, but because I see the Lord now blessing it." Speaks of dangers of school absorbing too much time and money, and Govt interference or competition (L 252253)

GH Lang "Settled resident workers rarely see indigenous self-supporting self-governing churches established. The Apostles never undertook personally the support of converts, the educating of the illiterate or young What they did was to demonstrate and teach love for one another, and encourage the rich (converts) to help the poor." (L 397) He also relates his own experience of meeting a distressed missionary whose mission had with "Western wisdom" built a magnificent building in the centre of the town with all the facilities the work of the mission required and shops whose rent made the work self-supporting. The locals resented the foreigners having so much and they so little. Its obvious riches meant their response to the Gospel always involved an expectation that they by conversion would share that wealth. The Godly missionary could do no work for God in the situation, and yet how could he abandon it? (L 284)

Two comments from Zaire a generation later are relevant:

Harry Brown, Pweto. "We must not set up a Mission Base. All churches are built on Native Land granted directly to Native Believers from the Chief." J A Clark "African converts mustn't rely on Missionaries and Mission funds."



# The Response to A.N. Groves Example

## Arodapen

Arodapen/Arulapen, an Indian who had been a salaried preacher for CMS, was distressed at being accused by Hindus of preaching for payment. Through ANG's teaching he decided to depend directly on the Lord. He refused any help from ANG and went to preach in an uncivilised area in 1840 (L299). He established a Christian village (Christianpetah) and church within 2 years, and in a few years there were preachers and congregations in 30 villages. In 1860 a revival at Christianpetah, under Arodapen - spread to Travencore and (B165). In 1867, 7 years after his death his son handed most of them over to the CMS. Two merged into a church which was still flourishing in 1932. Following ANG's pattern there was no paid preacher, but two trained youths were supported to run their two primary schools. (They had resident help of European missionaries for only 7 years in the 90 years of their existence)

## Beer & Bowden

In 1835, during ANG's visit back from India, he visited Barnstaple where Robert Chapman was minister of the "Strict Baptist" Ebenezer Chapel. He urged the need of missionaries for India. Two members of the congregation George Beer, a shoemaker, and William Bowden, a stone-mason volunteered. Interested folk gave to their support. Farewelled by Muller and Craik, Bristol, to go with their wives and families to Madras, India with ANG in 1836 (B13-5).

As soon as they had begun to grasp the Telugu language they moved to the Godavari delta which was unreached by the Gospel and founded the "Narsapur Baptist Mission" (B36).<sup>4</sup> They were 9 months without mail, then a letter from a supporter withdrawing his promise of £50 a year, but enclosing money for their fare home, or to spend as they chose. No more mail for 18 months. Violent opposition from Hindus as they gave out Scriptures etc street preaching, especially at religious festivals. Started a school. Trusted God and received small gifts from passing Europeans etc - lived in extreme poverty. (Supporters back home were distracted by Darby v Newton feuding) Their diaries express confidence that "Your Father knows you have need of these things." They considered hard, testing times to be a blessing to the soul. (B58)

In 1846 the name was changed to "Godavari Delta Mission," supported at first by a Committee in Madras including Evangelical Anglicans and Presbyterians more than from England (B93). In 1851 Indian converts were driven out to stay with

<sup>4</sup> The original name of this first successful "Open Brethren Mission" is a reminder that "Brethren" never intended to be a denomination or even an identifiable, distinct group but simply NT-style Christians meeting in NT-style local church fellowships, and encouraging each other, and everyone else, to move towards closer conformity to the NT. R. Chapman, and most of his congregation soon after left the "Strict Baptist" denomination and Chapel, to join the Brethren, because they believed it unscriptural to refuse to accept only "Baptised by immersion Believers" at the Lord's Table. Beer and Bowden do not seem to have had contact with Baptists after they left England. Chapman later became a missionary to Spain

Missionaries, or had to live in doorway, or corner of house, eat apart from family, etc or family not allowed water from village well. Barber refused to shave them, etc. A small farm for converts set up. (B1202) Bowden became skilled in the use of simple medical remedies. By 1854 after 16 years of Mission - 40 baptised believers, and a similar number of enquirers, many listeners. 100 children taught daily in Bible Truths. (B127). While family hardship and shortened life were part of the price in serving the Lord, in His grace Beer and Bowden children and grandchildren grew up to labour joyfully and fruitfully there.

## George Muller

George Muller is well known for his demonstration of "Living by Faith", which he defined as the Believer putting himself and possessions into the Lord's hands, and depending directly on Him alone. GM took personal responsibility for the care of 10000 orphans, (2000 at a time some years), financed Sunday Schools through which 12,683 children passed, sent out many thousands of Bibles, and more than 1000000 other Scriptural booklets, tracts etc and received £1,500,000 in unsolicited gifts. (A huge sum in modern terms.) This was done deliberately to prove that God was able and willing to meet all the needs of those who were willing to do His work, and to trust Him, without going into debt, or letting any man know his needs. A sick man before his conversion, he carried this overwhelming burden with an easy mind for long years in complete child-like faith in God (L17-18W10511 etc) He started each day by "Soaking himself in the Love of God" His estate at death was £60(V37)

He hadn't started well. As a student in Germany he was so dishonest wild and drunken his father decreed that only as a minister of the state church he would be able to have a secure living! In 1826 after his conversion he lived for two months in free lodgings, provided for poor students of divinity in the Orphan-House, built in dependence on God, by A.H. Franke. This impressed him. (L18)

In 1828 GM came to London to be trained for service as a missionary to Jews. At the end of the year he left the Society in order to obey the Scriptures and do the work of the Lord under His immediate direction and with an immediate faith in Him as to earthly needs - "The Lord most mercifully enabled me to take the promises of His word, such as Mt 7:7-8; Jn 14:13-14; Mt 6:25-34 and rest upon them. The example of brother ANG the dentist who gave up his profession, and went out as a missionary, was a great encouragement to me." 1830 Muller married ANG's sister. (L19)

A comment (1895) of Muller's on Romans 12:1. (I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to present your bodies a living sacrifice..) "Dear Sir, I became a believer in the Lord Jesus in the beginning of Nov. 1825 now 69 years and eight months ago For the first four years afterwards, it was for a good part in great weakness but in July 1829 now 66 years ago I came to an entire and full surrender of heart. I gave myself fully to the Lord. Honour, pleasure, money, my

physical powers, my mental powers, all was laid at the feet of Jesus, and I became a great lover of the Word of God. I found my all in God, and thus, in all my trials of a temporal and spiritual character it has remained for 66 years. My faith is not merely exercised regarding temporal things, but regarding everything, because I cleave to the Word. My knowledge of God and His Word is that which helps me. Yours sincerely, George Muller." (L50)<sup>5</sup>

## Others

Within the next few years, "Open Brethren" missionaries inspired by contact with Groves and Muller, went out with the gospel world wide. For example:

R CHAPMAN visited Spain, and encouraged missionaries to go there. For many years "Open Brethren" were the largest group of Protestants there. Approx 150 congregations today. (Figures are from EOS.)

Lord RADSTOCK and Dr BAE DEKER visited Russia and were the means of starting a large "Assembly" work in Russia. The present Baptist Church in Russia is in fact "The All Russian Union of Evangelical Christians (= Brethren) and Baptist Churches."

F S ARNOT followed by Dan Crawford and many others, pioneered the proclamation of the Gospel in Central Africa and Assembly missionaries continue to work there still. Before Angdan independence Government statistics listed 40000 baptised Believers in "Brethren" church fellowships, half of them the result of evangelising by native converts in an area from which Europeans were banned. Zambia seems to have more than 1000 Assemblies, and there are large numbers also in Zaire.

W SLOAN, an ordinary, quiet man, went to the Faroes. Today about 5% of the population meet in thirty Assemblies there.

Outside "Brethren" circles, Hudson TAYLOR, who founded the CIM (now OMF), was greatly influenced by ANG and George Muller. And his work was regularly featured in the missionary magazine started by Muller (B95).

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<sup>5</sup> Recently I've seen GM's principle (of asking God for all needs without mentioning them to any potential givers,) dismissed by Christian groups who rely heavily on advertising, as being relevant only to the "cosy smallness in which everybody knows everybody" stage England was in at the time. In fact while the population was smaller, most people at that time took little interest in events more than a few miles from their home. When GM sat down hundreds of children for breakfast, and gave thanks to God for it, with no food to set before them, taking the advice of a secular advertising agency would not have brought a baker to the door with a gift of 200 loaves he'd baked by mistake! Those who prefer to "Advertise Needs," can point to Gal 2:10. GM's way isn't the only way, but as he intended, it demonstrated the reality of a God of Love in a way alternatives can never match.

## The Situation Today

I will not attempt a comprehensive survey, or balanced assessment, of world mission effort, much of which is doubtless good and God-honouring, or at least well intentioned. Still, it is distressing to note that many of the issues which concerned A.N. Groves regarding the way in which missions were conducted in his day seem equally concerning today. On the other hand, it is encouraging to see that there are still those who go out in faith, and that many are blessed.

Political Imperialism is now dead, and can no longer be used by Religious Imperialism. But Commercial Imperialism is flourishing and with it Religious Commercialism. Some "Missions" operate along the lines of a business organisation - Paying staff and using professionally produced advertising to collect funds, paying administration staff, paying staff to train missionaries, hiring missionaries on contract and controlling the sphere and nature of their work. These may be commercially successful with only a remote connection with Christianity. In the 1950s Mr. Clapham told me of a "Missionary" in Jordan giving white robes to villagers on condition that they form a smiling group so that he could send a photo of them home labelled "Converts of my Mission," for fund-raising purposes. Unfortunately, this spirit is not dead, particularly with American missions<sup>6</sup>.

I understand that, when US Missionaries were expelled from India some Mission Office staffs avoided redundancy by "Buying" established "Brethren" assemblies with offers of salaries and financial assistance. I was told that one commercially shrewd Elder accepted a salary from one US Mission, as Pastor of an Assembly, and had his son paid as Pastor of the same Assembly by another US Mission. This enabled the US staffs to raise funds for their own salaries, with some to spare for the Mission field, but did no spiritual good to anyone. In one case they demanded the Assembly break bread only once a quarter so as not to offend donors. Only one of the Assembly elders followed his Biblical convictions, and left, commenting sadly "Of course it means my children will not now get secondary education." Similarly, in Botswana some years ago, a Believer transferred to another town by his employer gathered a group for Bible Study and prayer. Competition arrived in the form of an American Mission which gave 1 Kg. of flour to every adult each time they attended a church service at their Mission, but only if they stayed away from all other Christian gatherings!

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<sup>6</sup> I have named the country of origin because "USA-style Christianity" is now having great impact on NZ - for good and ill - and we need to understand it. For some years I subscribed to "The Christian Reader." In it I read an appeal for \$7,000,000 by a man intending to establish a Computer centre to match all volunteers for Mission work with all the needs of all Christian Missions. (I'd thought that was the Lord's responsibility!) Another article warned of the need to read the balance sheets before donating - quoting \$300,000 raised the year before by one Mission being all invested in USA property to provide for its future. Stacy Woods in "The Growth of a work of God" I.V.F. in USA, 1978 Pages 56-70 mentions resigning from a reputable Christian Body when he found that they were spending 93% of their income on administration and advertising. The head of another Evangelical association told him "Competition is good for American business and it's good for Christian work. If you have a first-class staff member I'll do my best to get him from you." He'd offered one double his present salary. Other workers tried to transfer to IVF because they couldn't manage the number of converts per month their contract required. "Christian newsletters claim that a donation of so many dollars guarantees so many converts." He sums up with "One of the causes of unspiritual and unbiblical activity in evangelical circles lies in the way the principles of Business promotion, advertising and competition have been permitted to invade and dominate evangelical societies."

All we possess belongs to our Master, and before we give we must know how it will be spent. A factor that should be considered in our giving is that spending money on paid fund-raisers, and big money on professional fund raising advertisements brings in big money. But, if successful in attracting funds from Christians, it may rob less commercialised Christian work of funds. If unsuccessful, it creates a scandal. After spending a huge sum raising funds for famine relief in Ethiopia, Underground Evangelism hit Newspaper headlines in USA with seemingly convincing evidence that the costs absorbed all the donations. Underground Evangelism apparently responded with a discreet name change.

I checked the 1981 Balance sheets of some fundraisers in NZ. Out of every \$100 donated the amounts taken by Administration and Promotion were: World Vision \$219. Underground Evangelism's "International Christian Aid" \$4517. Both these organisations were working for worthy causes, but obviously it was better stewardship to donate to "World Vision" (I understand that no more than 2% spent on Administration and Promotion is considered acceptable for charitable organisations in NZ.) By way of contrast, though Assembly Missionary Funds had overheads of only \$216 (currently \$5) The amount is so small because promotion is limited to brief reports in "The Treasury" magazine.

We cannot afford to take pleasure in pointing our condemning fingers at anyone. None of us are immune to the temptations inherent in the materialistic, commercially-oriented age in which we live. We all have deceitful hearts, Jer 17:9, that can so easily trick us into well-intentioned actions which bring scandals. The Commercial model, for organising missions or churches, is dangerous for us all.

It might be said that both models operate on Faith in and Obedience to the Lord and His Word, alone. The "NT model", as exemplified by Groves, requires the direct dependence of the individual missionary on the Lord for direction and finance. Other "faith missionaries" depend on the Lord using the Mission Board as the channel for guidance and finance. This may provide a useful counter to any over-individualistic characters, and frees the individual missionaries from many worries. But it tends to deprive them, and their converts, of direct dependence on the Lord. And it seems to me that the temptation to drift towards the "Commercial Mission Model" of reliance on public relations / advertising material and paid fund-raisers can be yielded to more easily and gracefully by a Board, than an individual. Where individual Assembly Missionaries do opt for such methods, we should guard against any tendency for them to monopolise our giving to the detriment of other missionaries.

LIKE BEGETS LIKE IS AS TRUE ON THE MISSION-FIELD AS ELSEWHERE. And if the converts see the Missionary as being sent by, answerable to, controlled, and paid by the Mission, it's reasonable for them to expect also to be paid, etc by the Mission for any spiritual or other work they engage in.

For reasons known only to the Lord some Missionaries SEEM to be successful, others see little response. There's nothing to see in Baghdad for ANG's labours there. But over in Central Africa in Tchad as the result of the work of the Lord through John Olley, his translations of Scripture, and a handful of other missionaries, more than 600 Assemblies now meet without European help. Guatemala has 250 assemblies, Mexico less than 100 Argentine 500 Uruguay about 30 More organised evangelical Missionary Societies experience similar variations in fruitfulness

A common feature in all areas is that the more closely Missionaries attempted to follow the NT pattern of individual direct dependence on the Lord and His Word, the more readily converts learned to do the same. The withdrawal of foreign missionaries and funds, by testing the reality of their individual and collective dealings with God, has often resulted in an expansion of a real work of God in their area although the material trappings deteriorate. Where Missionary Societies operate, the more organised, wealthy, and well-equipped they were, the harder it is for the converts to carry on. In Rumania, under Communist oppression, cut off from Western mission help, the number of Assemblies (often meeting in houses) doubled to 500. It is difficult for Dictators to cripple a work with no human organisation, heads, or properties. Much "Christian" church life and work collapsed with the withdrawal of the "Christian" British Government from India. But more than a thousand Assemblies, following the example of the Missionaries, depend directly on the Lord Jesus, looking to the Holy Spirit and God's Word to guide them. This gives confidence that if they lost the present handful of "Brethren Missionaries" and trickle of foreign financial aid, the continuing growth of NT-style Christians and NT-style Churches in India need not be hindered. Their situation is very close to that of the New Testament itself.

AN Groves, and those who followed him, viewed service in "Foreign Missions" as a natural extension of putting one's self and possessions into the Lord's hands, and living in obedient fellowship with Him. Like Paul, this might involve them in working to earn their living, or in accepting gifts from those they ministered to, or from those Believers in the homelands who wished to have fellowship with them in spreading the Gospel, 1 Cor 9:4-15; 2 Th 3:7-9. Phil 4:10-20. Their example continues to inspire. For example, "Capturing Voices," records the history of "Gospel Recordings," ("Language Recordings") a great work which developed in direct dependence on God, enjoying His miraculous provision, with minimal organisation and without any appeals for funds. P42 mentions the influence of Muller's experience on the founder, Joy Ridderhof.

To depend individually, directly, on the Lord demands real sacrifice of financial security, etc of Assembly Missionaries as they struggle to bring up families, and get the Lord's work done, with no organisation, brochure-producing, and fund-raising publicity machine to rely on. But for 160 years as many as 1200 at a time have been willing to do so. And there's a satisfaction to see, as in Papua New Guinea, the Lord in 40 years build stone-age heathen into strong NT-obeying churches that send out missionaries to neighbouring tribes with maybe only a missionary or two visiting them each year. The converts have seen Missionaries not to let off materially than themselves working for God under conditions not so different from their own, and copied them and their faith in God.

All this calls for prayerful searching of our hearts, and Scripture. My own reaction is to hang my head in shame when I see aging missionaries struggling along almost forgotten and unsupported by prayer and finance, because their home assembly shook itself to pieces with quarrels, or its members decided it was better socially for their families, less work, or cheaper to join a church where they could be a passenger, or a paid worker. We at home should, like the missionaries we send out, "live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us," accepting that it involves us being willing to be "crucified with Christ" no longer deciding where we'll work or worship on the basis of what is pleasing, profitable, or easiest on ourselves and families. And, choosing to be exercised before the Lord and actively seeking information before deciding what and where we give, not swayed by advertising that takes a large share of the funds it raises. And, the joy of our giving to prosper God's work must be weighed against the joy of buying a better car, carpet, home, or overseas tour.

FOR INFORMATION - In addition to our local Missionary Mail in the "Treasury" magazine, and in the Prayer Handbook- I find the U.K. Assemblies' "Echoes of Service" magazine most helpful to extend world-wide Missionary understanding, interest, and prayer.

THE DEEPER NEED, that of being the kind of home churches where young people grow up and learn to "Live by Faith" in the love, and joyful fellowship of the Lord, and under His Lordship, is less easily met. Spiritually shallow Assemblies have only that kind of young person to send out. Enthusiasm may be aroused and launch them overseas, but a change of scene won't make it easier for them to serve God. The harsh realities of the field MAY turn them into men and women of God, that He can use, but the cost to them will be high. I would urge that as many Believers as possible work their way through the excellent Emmaus Course "None Dare Say No." If even 10% of us did so, seriously before God, I believe that it would deepen God's work in us. And challenge our whole Assembly life-style to become oriented towards the Missionary Commitment that our Lord laid on us in Mt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rom 12, 2 Cor 5:14-21, etc.

## 6: Lessons for Today and Tomorrow

*The records of the past which we have been studying are valuable only if we make use of them. We need to ask ourselves whether we are thoughtlessly squandering our heritage. Or, like our spiritual ancestors, committing ourselves to the study of God's Word, with a view to living by it, in fruitful fellowship with each other in the Lord. This last chapter is my attempt at such an evaluation. Hopefully what I have set out will encourage every reader to make their own evaluation in the presence of God, His Word, and the facts of history which we have covered together.*

*I have attempted to draw some lessons from consideration of two aspects of Church life: The invisible, triumphant life of Mt 16:16-18, and the visible human life of Mt 18:15-20. The former is hidden from unsaved people, 1 Cor 2:14, and often unclear to us. The visible work of God committed to us saved sinners shows many features common to fallen human nature in the world around, and at times we can learn from them, Lk 16:8, as in the Lord's Parables features of the natural world may illustrate spiritual truths.*

*As personal bias inevitably clouds and colours any such attempt, please read critically and reject anything that's illogical, uncharitable, or unscriptural<sup>1</sup>. And, remembering your own bias may blind you to the very truth you need to face, seek God's ever-available-to-those-who-really-want-to-live-by-it wisdom, Jas 1:5-8, to judge rightly for yourself as you look back, and plan ahead<sup>2</sup>.*

## Visible Factors

Movements, like People, change character as they age. They pass through fumbling childhood erratic, enthusiastic adolescence, vigorous, purposeful adulthood slow down and become cautious, irrelevant, inert, and move towards their death. Unless any work of God continues to listen to His renewing voice, this is its history. Church life in Ephesus may well have seemed unchanged, but beneath the surface rot had set in that would destroy it if unchecked, Rev 21-5. When a Methodist friend heard Billy Graham preach he said "That man is preaching what

<sup>1</sup> Appendix III discusses an alternative assessment of the current situation, in a recent book by Nathan deLynn Smith.

<sup>2</sup> "What's wrong with the Assemblies?" is a question I've heard often over the years. The answer may well be the fact that we ask THAT question too often, and are content to stop at noting the faults of others, or details about Bible versions or hymnbooks used etc. Please guard against my own tendency in that direction. Ten thousand looking at such questions will do less good than ONE person on their knees asking "LORD what will YOU have ME to do?"



Wesley preached. Our church has become a BE good DO goodclub. I must preach Jn 316"

Movements have to cope with the death of founding Leaders, and the provision of successors to Leadership. (See my booklet "Leadership Among the People of God")

Alfred Macę about 1930 commented "Everything goes out in three generations. A man sets up in business and battles hard to become successful. His son inherits the business, lives by it, but barely maintains it. The grandson takes the benefits it has brought him for granted, finds the whole thing rather boring, and squanders his inheritance. The same is often true of first, second and third generation Christians. Beware the THIRD GENERATION of Brethren."

Young people don't automatically acquire the enthusiasms of their parents and elders. Authoritarian Indoctrination can fast-track them towards learning the approved ANSWERS, and the exercise of strong authority will ensure that the "GOOD" youngfolk will conform. But the Gospel cannot be reduced to a vitamin-packed GOS-PILL to be swallowed whole and automatically guaranteeing Spiritual vigour! Dutiful "Isaacs" content to dig again the wells of their fathers and bring their brides into their mother's tent, and their Assemblies, are likely to simply "mark time" while the world around changes, and God's Spirit challenges others to make a new start for God to meet the needs of that changed world.

Young people rarely become vigorous Christians, depending directly on God and His Word, in such a way that their devotional life is fresh and vital, and their witness joyful and enterprising SIMPLY BY COPYING their physical and spiritual parents. A good family is marked by parental confidence in their children's life that permits its expression in ways not natural to the parents' generation. The spiritual equivalent requires FAITH in God, His Word, and the fact that NT Churches are the natural outcome of the work of God the Holy Spirit. Giving the youngfolk the freedom to explore alternatives, and learn to go to God's Word for answers, opens the possibility that they will be TRANSFORMED by meeting the Lord and His will for themselves, in His Word, and also RISKS their defection from our ranks. Fear and unbelief moves us to clamp down on/discredit all new ideas. In my youth old men thundered against rebellious Rehobams among us, not the autocratic Solomons who, given leadership and wisdom from God, wasted it on proud display.

The above facts make "Evangelise or fossilize" a true insight. Unless we, as Assemblies, win a constant succession of new converts, we're doomed to die out. And if a local Assembly is middle-aged physically and spiritually they may lose the ability to cope with the demands of newborn Christians, fractious infants, difficult adolescents, and the desire to have them. Preferring to hope and pray for "Real converts," = pre-adjusted to the Christian form and style dear to them. God DOES work miracles, but hasn't promised to do that. It's natural for such a church to view present Evangelists, and their converts, as not up to the standard of the past. But, if our method of Evangelising has not been used of God to add anyone from "outside" to our fellowship for ten years or more, have we any right to tell others how they should evangelise?

Whatever methods are used our hope must be in the Sovereign Grace of God, and in my experience, even after a drought of 20 years without addition from "Outside," He can give us a heart's desire for converts, and the joy of receiving those He brings to us, and the grace to adjust to the changes involved. Conscious weakness may be our greatest asset, 2 Cor 12:9-10

The greatest thing we can do for our young people is to involve them in winning converts from the world, and helping them wrestle with Scripture to discover God's will and accomplish it in their lives. To meet all their Doctrinal and Devotional needs within the local church and provide training in all aspects of Christian Service is impossible. Personal commitment to seeking God and His will by individual study of His Word is the first essential for every young Believer, and the second is to commit themselves to fellowship in the life of the local assembly. But generally God will supplement this from outside sources - books, Emmaus, or Bild Bible Study courses, visiting speakers, or Para-church institutions or specialist organisations, within Assemblies, or outside them. GOD uses such means to challenge young believers to seek Him and His will for themselves. Elders need to share their interests to help integrate what is being learnt into the Assembly life and work.

We rejoice in the work of many Para-Church organisations, and may benefit from the training they offer in children's work, one-to-one Bible Study, etc. But, we need to realise that in the measure they are organised on a business model they interact most naturally, and perhaps to greatest mutual advantage with churches similarly organised with paid staff and recruitment channels etc. Our attempt to function in obedience to Scripture means that we haven't set up a system of positive advertisement of "Our Work." We generally don't feel free to require our members to covenant donations to us, or to provide channels for paid service into which we direct youth keen to serve the Lord. So, without being deliberately predatory or parasitic, Para-church organisations may find us a natural recruiting ground for staff, and the funds to support them. It's the responsibility of Elders to work out with them an interaction that produces mutual benefit, and the over-all benefit to the Lord's work as a whole.

Enthusiasm- even blind, falsely based enthusiasm- has a wide appeal, especially to young people, and the grass over the fence DOES look greener. Many of us rightly fear to put on a show of evangelistic or devotional enthusiasm, disdaining it as tinsel, but while there is tinsel out there, there's also the good of rejoicing in the Lord among those to whom He has revealed Himself in the Gospel, even though they as yet lack a Biblical balance of doctrine. We must not abandon what God has taught us, and join them. But surely the Lord who pleads with His churches in Rev 2 and 3 can restore us to our "First Love" and sell us the true Gold, white clothing and eye ointment we need. IF we desire it, 1 Pet 5:6-7.

What we have passed through as, under God, made us what we are. But, doesn't bind us. Each day faces us with the challenge to turn our back on the past, and take up today, setting ourselves to rest in faith on the fact that the Lord's "Finished work" on the cross enables us to be and do His will, Heb 4:16 Exposing ourselves and plans to the scrutiny of His written Word which reveals to us all we

need to know, 2 Tim 3:15-17. Attempting each step of obedience to His will as revealed to us, in confident fellowship with our all-sufficient Lord, 2 Cor 12:9, Phil 4:12-13

All Movements have to cope with changes in society around them. If they're to continue they must Justify their existence by the contribution they are making to the new form society is taking. Joshua must live for God in a different setting from the life he'd lived with Moses, walking with an unchanging God in ways appropriate to that setting. Josh 5:13-15. Elisha must live in a different world from Elijah, but needs the God of Elijah in it, 2 Ki 2:14.

Reforming movements, if successful, by that very fact remove the justification for their existence. In post-war NZ the Labour Party found that its "Socialist Policy Life-jacket," once valued by those drowning in the seas of the "Depression" had become an unpopular "Strait-jacket." In its youth the "Brethren Movement" played a major role in the breaking down of rigid sectarianism, clericalism, etc. But as it succeeded, witnessing AGA INST such evils lost its point, and we in turn tended to become sectarian in our anti-sectarian pride. Humble, sacrificial POSITIVE witness for God and His word is a more difficult option, but the only one that God can bless.

The "Drawing Room Evangelism" of leisured upper class Brethren, and the "Street Marches," through slums of General Booth's Salvation Army, were effective in a world that no longer exists. They are as much "History" as the methods used by Luther or Wesley. And in NZ we can no longer open a "Gospel Hall" in a "State Housing District" and find hundreds of children eager to come to our Sunday School or Rally. But beneath the ever-changing surface of Society is the same self-centred folly, sin, and emptiness of trying to live without God. And the Gospel preached and shared in the power of the Spirit by men and women who are letting that Gospel and that Spirit transform their own lives is still effective.

The "Go... and Lo..." of Mt 28:16-20 remains unchanged. And the fact that our nominally Christian, God-acknowledging Bible-obeying land has moved into a "Post-Christian" phase sharpens that challenge. The world around us is moving into a state of ignorance of the Gospel, and prejudice against it that is becoming more like the world of Jesus and the Apostles every day. The New Testament was written in just such a society for such people, and its message and principles are particularly relevant now. WE may be bewildered, and discouraged, or complacent. But God isn't.

But to change our approach to Christian witness is worse than useless unless it's THE Gospel of Christ Crucified that's preached, as that alone is God's power for Salvation, 1 Cor 1:23-24, 2:1-5, etc. Some pertinent questions were asked in an article by Ken Haanof in 'Reformation Today,' Oct/Nov 1973, p20. After spending 20 years in Pentecostal churches he wrote "I laid hand on the sick, rebuked death, spoke in tongues, prophesied, interpreted. I would say now in all sincerity that I saw and experienced nothing that would lead me to believe that Pentecostalism offers anything along the line of New Testament Churches' experience."

BLESSING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL is not easy to assess - Does one trust how he feels in the first enthusiasm? or ten years down the track? How he says he feels, or what his work-mates think of him?"

BLESSING ON A CHURCH is even harder to assess Is a large Church full of happy people necessarily blessed?" (Eg Laodicea) "Would a large church, with a choreographer, dance team, regular prophesying and claims of healing, that grew simply by drawing in Christians from other churches, be more blessed than a back street Gospel hall from whose ranks a constant stream of ambassadors for Christ had gone forth to the mission-field?" "And will not many of those making the big church flourish, not soon drift off to a more exciting programme somewhere across town? - and then to another!"

Some further quotes relevant to the changes in recent years come from Stacey Woods, Founding Director of the Inter-Varsity Christian fellowship in U.S.A. in his 1978 book "The Growth of a Work of God". He writes that "in our training we emphasised content, not method The personal quiet time .. Bible exposition, and evangelism. God greatly used those early years Only later did the emphasis change from content to method technique, and counselling Then some staff workers tended to become problem-centred and person-centred, rather than truth-centred and God-centred. We can thank God for the current swing back in Inter-Varsity toward the original concept of leadership training with its emphasis on truth and content, and this is producing men and women of Christian conviction and real leadership." (p.82). And "WITNESSING is primarily a matter of BEING, which if it is valid results in DOING." (p62)

Further, since 1950 "Instead of focussing on the Lordship of Christ, the lostness of man and the necessity of repentance, Christians are focussing on the here and now. What Christ can mean to people in this life as a support, comfort and fulfilment." Some suggest that deciding for Christ will ensure success in business, personal life etc." "The Bible teaches that unless we seek salvation from sin, Christ has nothing to offer us." The inevitability of Sowing and Reaping is often ignored. "Present-day evangelism with its four or five point presentation (usually omitting conviction of sin, repentance, the Lordship of Christ and the cost of discipleship) has become the norm. Thousands of decisions are reported. Although some will be valid instances of regeneration, the question is whether this is the Biblical pattern and the usual way the Holy Spirit works." (p99100) Elsewhere he laments that these efficiently organised mass-produced conversions have coincided with the rapid ethical and moral decline obvious in U.S.A.

Some of the things Ex-Brethren say about us aren't flattering either. Time was when Gospel Meetings, especially on "Prophecy" drew crowds. Now, it's folly to confine our evangelising to a "Gospel Meeting" at 7 pm announced on a board outside a "Gospel Hall," imagining that is being "Faithful." But also we must ask if updating our gatherings for "Collective Worship and Witness" so that there is a "Something-for-everyone-to-enjoy Service" that gathers some hundreds of "Saved,"

and "Maybe-saved but it's not obvious in their lives," who come when they feel like it once a week, content that they have thereby given God His place in their lives, is wonderfully better evangelising than a handful of elderly Believers preaching the Gospel to each other. The most Godly, well-intentioned full-time "Pastor," may well

wear himself out in prayer and preaching while his audience view his exhortations tolerantly as what he's supposed to say, knowing they can hire another in his place if he gets too close to challenging their comfortable God's Word-ignoring life-style. Rather than smugly criticising Assemblies who function in ways of which we don't approve, we have reason to confess that "We ALL have come short of the Glory" God intended for His local Churches, and made adequate provision for.

The breakdown of personal and social morality means there are bewildered and suffering people who can be reached with the Gospel through Christians offering help and counselling. But isn't it folly to spend time, effort and money providing "Christian Counselling" if that counselling is guided by compassionate humanistic jargon that helps people to "Cope with life and feel good about themselves," while they continue to live in defiance of God and His revealed will? Are we saying with God "You must not commit adultery?" or "We must be lovingly tolerant of those who are adjusting their socio-sexual life to better meet their current needs by entering a caring relationship with a new partner?" What God calls LOVE moves us to awaken them to their desperate spiritual situation so as to drag them out of their fire-threatened house, Jude 23 It "Sits where they sit," to comfort them by bringing them God's warning message, and offer of Glory, not to make them comfortable in their self-centredness. Its concern isn't to stop them reaping what they have sown, but to get them to sow for a different eternal harvest.

Whether we follow Luther and have musical accompaniment when we sing, or Zwingli/Calvin/Knox and don't. Or whether we have an economical building and seating, or an expensive building with luxurious seating and heating, and what we CALL that building is surely less important than our attitude to the Lord, each other, and our collective responsibility to worship and witness. Whatever is the most help, and least distraction in our local setting is right.

Effective outreach offers something for the Natural Self as a bridge for the Gospel. But those reached may take the one and refuse the other. Of ten lepers healed, one came back to say thanks, and be blessed. Most of the 5000 fed wanted only loaves and fish. When we meet people's hunger for food companionship, or whatever, the same is true. And bridges work both ways. In the Post-war years Every Boys/Girls Rallies met a real social need, and were used of God to bring the Gospel fruitfully to unchurched youth. But where our own young people failed to catch the vision of winning their friends for the Lord, and attended merely for the fun of it, they saw no reason why they should be expected to attend other Assembly meetings which by comparison with the "Rally" they found "boring." "Camps," similarly catered for "Natural" and "Spiritual," needs. And again, there were spiritual triumphs and disappointments. Forty two years ago I attended a large all-age Easter Camp. I rejoiced that an unchurched youth came to Christ. But grieved,

with the Camp Leadership, that 90% of the adults defied them by joining the "Song Service for Teenagers" on the Sunday afternoon, leaving only a handful at the "Adult Bible Study." We must face the fact that only by a miracle of God's Grace can any activity glorify Him, and bless people. And, be willing to follow our Lord as recorded in John chapter 6, by forfeiting numbers and popularity in order to be loyal to the Gospel.

We're committed to Evangelise, Disciple, and Teach, Mt 28:18-20 Acts 1:8, 8:4, and to Worship, Jn 4:23-4. To gather for those purposes, Acts 2:42 11:26 20:7; 1 Cor 11, and to send out Workers when the Lord so directs, Acts 13:2-3, and to hear their reports, Acts 14:27, 15:4. To help them as they travel, Acts 15:3, and support them financially, Phil 4:15 I take from 1 Tim 5:8 that those with first claim on us are "our own," those specifically committed to obeying God's Word, proclaiming the Gospel, and practising NT Christianity in personal and Church life. We're to encourage everyone to live in obedient fellowship with the Lord and ourselves, neither despising or criticising them. Moving ahead one step at a time together as we find we can agree to, overshadowed by the Cross of Christ, humbly confident that He is at work in us all, will enable us to glorify His Name in what we do together, Rom 14:1-15:7; Phil 2:1-16 3:7-16

### The Invisible Spiritual Situation

Because God is God, and Righteous, what has happened in our lifetime must be the best a God of Love and Grace could righteously give us. We can blame no one but ourselves for any failures.

It's God's will that we commit ourselves to the goal of being NT Churches. It's the Enemy's will that we should be proud of having done so, and critical of those who remain in church situations that fail to aim at that ideal. Those who attempt God's will and are proud of doing so, lose God's help, 1 Pet 5:5-11. In terms of Ecc 10:1 the simplicity of Church life, and direct dependent fellowship with its Lord, (which the "Early Brethren" found in the NT and proclaimed,) was at first for many Christians an attractive "Perfume." Until the stench of the "dead flies" of pride in one's position, a judgmental attitude towards others, and quarrelling drove them away. In terms of Rev 3 "When a church calls itself Philadelphia it proves it's Laodicea," warned an "Early Brother." Fifty years ago J B Watson Editor of our British Magazine "The Witness" wrote that following our conversion God transformed our lives, and we rejoiced in doing many things to please Him because we loved Him. But before long we found we were proudly loving ourselves for doing those same things.

It seems to me that being proud of ourselves for being RIGHT in our church position, etc is THE distinctive sin that has crippled the testimony of our assemblies down through the years, and discredited the pattern of organisation and life which is the Lord's will for His church. We shouldn't be surprised that Christians in less Biblical church situations, or with less understanding of God's Word, unselfconsciously rejoicing in what they do know, and praising Him for what He enables them to do should be used of God to do His work, while we are

largely by-passed. The Lord made it clear long ago that self-identity by His people, claiming credit for their beliefs and action, is intolerable to Him, Judges 7:2, Isa 428

### What our Attitude should be

Christian Love requires us to assume that all Christians have some exercise of heart to conform to the revealed will of Our Lord, and we are to rejoice in and encourage every indication of that conformity, and be willing to learn from it. We dare not sin by becoming a smug clique or sect that views itself as distinctively "NT churches" and resent others "copying OUR doctrine or practice" We shouldn't feel threatened if we see a Charismatic congregation become increasingly a "NT Church - Corinth style," Or a S.D.A. or Covenant Theology one become increasingly a "NT Church- Jerusalem style." We should thank God He is free to work where we ourselves are not. We all need to re-read Mt 16:18, 18:20, 23:8-12, 28:18-20, Lk 19:13, Acts 1:8, etc and the first three chapters of Revelation

We have no reason to be proud or despairing of the present state of God's Work in NZ, or of that part of it for which "Open Brethren Assemblies" have direct responsibility. Our decline in numbers and vitality since 1950 isn't surprising, as forty years ago we were sowing heavily on the foreign mission fields (a third of the total Protestant missionaries from NZ were on our "Missionary List,") and most of the handful of full-time workers in NZ under 60 years of age were working among Maori. We reaped where we sowed, and a harvest of many self-sufficient Lord-dependent Assemblies in P.N.G, Africa etc is some consolation for the closing of Assemblies in NZ<sup>3</sup>.

Within NZ we poured money, effort, and favourable publicity into non-denominational work such as SU-CSSM-Crusaders, (42 yrs ago one of their office staff commented to me how distressing it was to see how much Assemblies favoured them financially and neglected their own workers.) Our involvement in Bible in Schools, Youth for Christ, Child Evangelism, Navigators, etc, apart from any benefit to us, has reaped a worthwhile harvest of evangelical Christians, Christian workers and Church Ministers. (I know personally of at least 15 men, converted among "Brethren," who became Church "Ministers.") This has repaid our debt to those churches which in earlier years swelled our numbers with refugees from pulpit rationalism, etc. The lack amongst us of financial or social reward for lecturing in a theological college, or occupying a pulpit, has, under God, meant there has been little temptation to gifted Atheists or Agnostics to function in our fellowships.

<sup>3</sup> If we grow some crops in the same ground year after year, the harvest dwindles, and diseases increase. The harvest from the Gospel seed faces the same problem in "Christian Homelands," where its benefits to the community are taken for granted, and its call to associate with Christ crucified is despised. Yet may flourish in Spiritual Revivals in lands where the opportunity to hear it is given by sacrificial Mission effort.

## The Challenge Today

The Lord has said "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn," Isa 51:1. This booklet is an attempt to do just that. While history can be so slanted as to be in Henry Ford's words "Bunk," it's very easy for those who are ignorant of History to repeat the mistakes of the past while imagining that they are making progress. I have attempted to make a fair statement of the Historical facts, and the implications of Scripture, but every reader will have, I hope, disagreed with me in at least some of the points made. Those who read G. H. Lang's valuable books will find he too has his own unscriptural bias at times, Eg against any form of organisation. No mere mortal can ever FULLY understand the complex, glorious will of God, let alone communicate it to others.

As long as we seek to be "successful churches" by listening to those, perhaps Godly, authors of books and seminars who offer to sell us the secrets of church success we will remain children playing the "Church game." There are no "short cuts" in the things of God. Only those who are already Godly, (i.e. know, love, and have fellowship with the Lord and His will as revealed in His Word) can rightly evaluate and profit from advice as to methods of evangelising or church building, as it's the Lord Himself alone who builds His Church, and with whom they must cooperate. The all-important thing is for each to accept the authority of God's Word, and actively seek personal convictions from it, as to what He wants us to believe and do, right now, and in the future. On that basis our collective life, service, witness and worship is to be built with due regard to the contribution our varied God-given convictions can make to the fruitful whole. We're to discipline our own convictions by loving concern for others, and respect for their differing views, so that they are used to glorify God, Rom 14 and 15; Eph 2:14-21; 4:11-16. And we must avoid uniting divisively with those of like convictions, Rom 16:17-19.

Each generation must face the reality of God, and His Love for us and the world. The reality of God's Word, and His loving wise purposes for mankind. And in prayer, and Bible Reading seek the enlightenment of the indwelling Holy Spirit to see and accept the reality of our own personal life, and the collective life of the Church fellowship to which we belong. And to do this with an eagerness to be transformed by steadfast looking into the "Law of Liberty," and "unto Jesus," 2 Cor 3:17-4:1; Heb 1:21-2; Jas 1:19-25.

This was the challenge faced by the "Early Brethren" 160 years ago. This booklet has tried to let them speak of the challenges they saw, and their responses, and to record honestly the triumphs of God's grace and the tragedies of human pride and individualism. In the History of the Church, as in the Bible, we see that the Solomons weren't always wise, Davids, 2 Sam 23:1; Acts 13:22 not always in



fellowship with God, Elijahs and Peters not always heroic. Moses wasn't always meek, Num 12:3; 20:10-12 Nor was the Apostle Paul necessarily always wise, Acts 23:10

In the records of the "Early Brethren," are glowing accounts of their joy in listening to Gods Word expounded with freshness and the testimony of lives changed by the Gospel, and the Grace of God. They took God and His Word seriously. But unfortunately they soon began to take themselves seriously, with the false assurance that understandings of Scripture which were a delight to their souls must not be challenged by the differing interpretations of other, equally earnest, self-assured, and at times small-minded brothers. As with religious controversy in all ages the bitterness displayed in defence of what they saw as Gods honour (as if the Almighty and His truth needed human defence, or that angry men using the sneers and slanders of worldly wisdom could honour Him, and do His work, Jas 1:20) is incredible to us. Our half-hearted spirituality that is tempted rather by the sins of uncaring tolerance, and by the sales-talk of those who offer programmes guaranteed to double our congregation, if we don't let Scripture trump our style, would give them as good reason for shock.

Too, as you read of founding members of the "Brethren Movement," and the truths they discovered, bear in mind that the best, and most truly "Brethren" today may know little or nothing of these men or their teachings, as they themselves also have learned directly from Gods Word. That they were in a measure in tune with Gods will for Christians and Churches is shown by the fact that individuals and groups world-wide independently discovered / are still discovering the same principles, direct from the word of God.

Being a NT CHRISTIAN isn't a static state of achievement reached by those whose doctrine is correct, and who live sufficiently holy lives. It's an ATTITUDE towards God and His Word, a response of our spirit to the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:14-17, that enjoys an increasing measure of fruitful fellowship with Him as branches of the Vine.

Being a NT CHURCH isn't a static state of correct doctrines, customs, and functioning. It's an ATTITUDE towards God and His Word that, collectively, with other members in His local-church body, seeks His will in glad obedient fellowship with the HEAD, Christ Himself.

Without a willingness to be NT Christians, NT churches will not work. It requires us to be committed to finding out and doing Gods will in our specific situation, with the gifts He has given us and the opportunities He's placed around us. We need a willingness to prayerfully try different methods and programmes, evaluate their progress in the light of Scripture, and their fruit, without our ego being committed to their continuance, or discontinuance, or modification. We can never EARN the right to enjoy Gods blessing, and revival. Only Gods sovereign

Grace can grant that. But there's no virtue in being organised or unorganised in ways that make it a super-miracle for the Lord to use our efforts at serving Him.

We don't have to accept defeat. God Almighty who called us out of being yoked to this world's dirt to be forever "Special to Him," 2 Cor 6:14-18 has said of us, individually and collectively, "Sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not functioning under Law (where you get what you deserve,) but under the Grace of God" (that gives victory in Christ,) Rom 6:14.

AN Groves speaking of the Bible wrote "We are to use its slightest hints as guides to even the smallest ways in which we can show our love to Him by doing what pleases Him in all details of our lives." This involves fighting down the Satanic corollary of trying to force others to believe what we believe, and do what we do. It is an insult to our "Brethren Ancestors" to fail to copy their ATTITUDE of heart and mind to the Lord and His Word, and to imagine that we can be revived to power, and restored to blessing by conforming to the traditions they set up in their endeavour to break from conforming to traditions! Let ANG have the last word:

"I wish no man living to show the least regard to my opinion for any other reason than its being the mind of God and I wish myself and all others to think that it is at our peril we reject the poorest member of Christ's body who speaks according to that mind. It will be the same as rejecting Christ" (L29)

Let's follow him - in the measure in which he followed Christ, 1 Cor 11:1. Being neither bound to "Brethren Tradition" or rejecting it. Being neither entrenched "Fundamentalists," nor anything-goes "Progressives." But being "Biblical Christians" with a brotherly attitude towards all God's family, yet committed to being NT-style Christians, worshipping in NT-style Lord-obedient congregations, eagerly reaching out with the Gospel in new and old ways, in the power of the Spirit, with our eyes on the Lord - Until he Comes. Our Citizenship is in heaven. Our role as suffering Ambassadors may soon give place to Glory. If the "Finishing Tape" is in sight let's Look up to Him, and run the better, echoing His invitation "The Spirit and the Bride say 'COME!' Let him who hears say 'COME!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life... Even so Come, Lord Jesus."

## APPENDIX I

## Exclusive and Open Brethren

A brief history of the events that marked their separation

1828 JN Darby had denounced "Circles and confederations of Assemblies" - yet Exclusive Brethren became just that (V 45)

1838 When JND ministered in Vaud (Switzerland) he welcomed all Believers at the Lord's Table. He preached nothing but the truths of Salvation and never allowed himself a word that was hostile to existing churches.

Benjamin Will's Newton (BWN) was initially supported enthusiastically by JND. He was Co-Pastor (preaching alternate Sundays) at Plymouth where the Assembly grew rapidly. (1840-80) In fellowship. 1845-1200 (V 31) His views on prophecy differed from JND, and he made a rash suggestion that "Christ had been under the Federal headship of Adam, and that in some sense the Lord's body was "Mortal" i.e. "Subject to Death." In 1849 BWN repudiated the idea, left Plymouth, and the Brethren. His later ministry as Pastor of an Independent Chapel in London gave no signs of any heresy. (V 48-49).

But in the meantime JN Darby who, unlike Moses, did not rebuke those of his followers jealous of any preachers not associated with him, Num 11:27, went to Plymouth at the request of his partisans there. Then having failed to convince the Plymouth Assembly to expel BW Newton as a heretic, met with 50 faithful members, proclaiming that they, and they alone, were the local Church at Plymouth. And he declared that the remaining 1150 members of the Assembly congregation were EXCLUDED for the heresy of preferring BWN to JND. Then he declared that any Assembly which received any of them was automatically cut off from Fellowship. G Muller and others at the Bethesda Chapel (Bristol) continued to receive Believers who transferred there from Plymouth if they found them to be "Innocent sheep not holding any heresy of their shepherd," (BWN). Bethesda Believers were therefore declared to be Brethren "OPEN" to infection by "Heresy." And again any assembly receiving anyone from them was cut off from fellowship. (V 52)

This requirement, that all congregations endorse his action, arose from JND's claim that the NT never spoke of more than one Church in a town (He ignored house churches, Col 4:15 etc.) so all their congregations in London, etc. were ONE CHURCH, and to be controlled as such. For example, a room was hired for Saturday Evening Conferences at which all questions such as receiving into fellowship and cutting off Assemblies in the London area were decided - these being binding on all within the area and with JND's support, came to control and dominate their Assemblies world-wide.

While conceding that the Church of God is the aggregate of all Believers in Christ, and the local Church is a similar local aggregate, the Exclusive Assemblies claimed that their "meeting" (church) in any place was the Sole "Expression" of the Church of God there. It was Divinely recognised, and nothing else was. Anyone it expelled was "... outside the Church of God on earth, being outside it in London (or wherever)", so any Assembly that received him automatically cut themselves off from "The Church of God on Earth." (V5963) This meant that any decision about any local disagreement must be enforced world-wide. And clamped a sterile uniformity on them, that had no defence against the future dictatorial whims of the established virtual "Pope" of the movement. A long established oddity was the decision that evangelising the Heathen was not the responsibility of Gods people in the Church Age.

### What is Heresy?

We must take God, and His Word seriously. But to take ourselves, and what we understand Gods Word to say, seriously, is dangerous. It will make us quick to brand as "Heretics" those who disagree with us, and the pride involved in that makes us vulnerable to the temptation of doing what we accuse others of doing. The bitter slanders exchanged between excluding and excluded "Brothers" were sadly typical of religious controversies.

1866 JN Darby himself was accused by some of his followers of teaching almost the same heresy as BWN. His friends decided that his ideas weren't causing MUCH controversy so there was no need for JND to resign - In contrast to the violent attacks on BWN, and anyone remotely associated with him. Some Exclusive Brethren (including Newberry of the "Newberry Bible") left the fellowship because of this inconsistency. (V6972)

1890 FE Raven declared that "The Lord was not personally man. He was personally the Logos in human condition," and this became the approved Exclusive Brethren doctrine. (Another group left) He also decreed that New birth is granted by Gods sovereign decision to enable a person to believe, not a blessing granted when Christ is accepted. (V878)

Among the "Heresies" FW Grant was accused of, and expelled for, was teaching that when born again we are at that moment forgiven, justified, no longer in the flesh, but in Christ, dead to sin and the Law, and sons of God, sealed with the Holy Spirit. And that Rom 7 describes the experience of one who is justified in Christ, sealed, seeking to abide in Christ, and to be fruitful and holy.

The difficulty of defining Bible Truths in the same terms is illustrated by the following incident. DL Moody invited JN Darby to address meetings. JND said that man's will was so perverted that he could not even "will to be saved." Moody insisted on man's responsibility to believe the Gospel when presented to him, as "Gods biddings are Gods enablings." As a result of heated disagreement, JND closed his Bible and refused to proceed. (V65)

While it's true that soundness of doctrine with regard to the Person and work of Christ is vital, the folly of attempting precise definitions is pointed out by AN Groves re Col 3:10-11, and 1Cor 1:30<sup>31</sup> "I always feel the very attempt to subject the one adorable Christ of God to a process of mental analysis, is in its very operation, desecrating. It has engendered the worst divisions in the Church, and will, I believe ever do so, however carefully, however cautiously pursued." (L214 39)

The contrast between the following two quotes is interesting. They represent attitudes found on ~~the~~ sides, of course.

JN Darby wrote, in 1867, "I reject Bethesda (That is the Assembly of that name at Bristol, and their "Open" attitudes,) as wickedness as I ever did... when the blasphemous doctrine of Newton came out, Bethesda deliberately sheltered and accredited it.. no persuasion with the help of God will ever lead me a step nearer to it (Bethesda)." (L217)

RC Chapman (Open Brethren, and in fellowship with Bethesda) refused to even call them "Exclusive Brethren." Instead he referred to them as "Brethren dearly beloved and longed for, whose consciences lead them to refuse my fellowship and to deprive me of theirs." (V68)

As in fact Bethesda never approved Newton's doctrine it is not surprising that some OPEN Brethren were not so charitable as Chapman. G Muller records that when JN Darby came to him in 1849 ~~eh~~ (JND) said "As you have judged Newton's tracts there is no longer any reason why we should be separated." Godly GM, embittered by constant slanders from JND followers, showed that his reaction was not the meekness of the crucified Christ. He brushed JND aside saying "I have this moment only ten minutes' time, having an important engagement before me (a monthly Committee meeting of the Orphanage) and as you have acted so wickedly in the matter I cannot now enter into it as I have no time." (V54) When Godly JND heard that version of the interview he dismissed what GM said as being "Totally False." Many took this as a denial that the interview took place. But W. Kelly writing in defence of JND in "The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdism" wrote "It must be stated that Mr D's hopefulness was not shared by his brethren.. Mr. M's rude repulse only compelled Mr D to feel, as others already felt, the hollowness of Bethesda throughout"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It seems that JN Darby never gave any explanation. He was HUMAN, and a warning to us less gifted, less Godly, but still pugnacious Believers that these qualities can be used by the Devil as easily with us as with Peter, even in our hour of triumphant blessing Mt 16:16-19, 22-23 "The first casualty in any war is truth." That's why the enemy is so keen to set us quarrelling. Not being as great or Godly as GM or JND we can't do as much damage by demanding "Our RIGHTS" but we can easily wreck years of faithful work by one unguarded outburst.

Darby and others attended meetings on prophecy organised by Lady Powerscourt at her home in Ireland presided over by the Rector of the parish. He allowed all sorts of views to be expressed, saying that right understanding of the Gospel was vital, of Prophecy less so, as the first determined whether one got to Glory, whereas misunderstandings about prophecy could easily be corrected on arrival. Meanwhile the best way to correct error, and attain more light, was to encourage free discussion upon it. (L367)

The "Early Brethren" rejected the headings in the old Bibles which arbitrarily labelled the prophecies of Isaiah, Zechariah, etc "Curses on Israel," or "Blessings on the Church." (If it's good it's for us, if bad, it's for them.) Instead they took up the hints in the OT and Gospels, the fact that the Lord Himself deflected the question as to when the Kingdom would be restored to Israel, by telling the Apostles the time wasn't their business, Acts 1:6-8, and the systematically set out arguments of Romans 11.

These assured them that although the Jews had refused their Messiah, and crucified Him, that after the Lord called His Church home, 1 Th 4:13-18 the Jewish nation, and the Gentile world at large would face the Coming of Christ in Glory and Judgment. As a result He would set up His Kingdom on earth with material prosperity, physical health, and long life, and perfect Government, Isa 9:6-8; 65:20-24 etc. This to last a thousand years, free from Satanic influence, Rev 20:1-10. And then, the final test which would show that even a perfect environment wouldn't make humans Godly, and that the Grace of God would produce the only triumphs with them.

When, and wherever, men systematised it to claim that every detail was known, and every verse of Scripture could be neatly pigeon-holed under "Jew, Gentile and Church of God," 1 Cor 10:32 it, like the Creeds before it, took on a life and power of its own that established a tradition of men that cancelled out some of the Word of God that it attempted to clarify. Thus a reaction set in, to keep a balance of truth, so that verses which did not readily fit in could still be given their due weight. To gain the necessary perspective that will enable us to give such "Dispensational" teaching its true place as an aid to understanding God's Word as a whole, we need to see it as one system among many that arose in the 19th century, and compare it with the others, as tested by Scripture, and subsequent History.

THE CHURCHES IN GENERAL saw themselves as poised to bring "God's Kingdom" into being on earth, through political and social reform at home, ("Build Jerusalem, in England's green and pleasant land!" as the poet Blake put it) And in association with the establishment of colonial Empires dictate its extension world-wide. Some believed that when they had made the world good enough for Christ to come and take it over, He would. Such Christians did much to make the world a better place to live in, but World War I so battered the doctrine of inevitable world-

betterment under Church-led rule that I expected World War II to demolish it. However, within generally doctrinally sound churches various forms of identifying the Church with God's kingdom on earth (covenant theology or, alternatively, claiming kingdom blessing now by faith) continue. They ignore the setting up of national Israel after 1900 years, rather than seeing it as a miracle of God's promised intervention.

I've neither the knowledge, time, nor space to do justice to the varied CURRENT interpretations of Prophecy with regard to the Church as a Kingdom, and/or the future. Or the deliberate ignoring of Prophetic Scriptures defended by the excesses of Prophecy enthusiasts. But I will attempt a summary of those which were more or less contemporaneous with the "Early Brethren," with some comment on how they have stood the test of time.

EDWARD IRVING, 150 years ago, founded his Catholic Apostolic Church in England claiming to have revived the "Pentecostal Gifts" - and his "prophets" promised that Christ would come in the lifetime of the "12 Apostles that the Holy Spirit appointed from their number."

MILLER, in USA, promised that Christ would come at various dates, 1844 etc - hundreds of his followers spending all night on hilltops, dressed in white ready to go, on one occasion. When he confessed that he was wrong Mrs. WHITE explained that Christ had in fact come, but only to "The Heavenly Sanctuary to deal with the sins of the Saints," and would soon complete that and come to deal with the sins of the world at large. Meanwhile as "The Spirit of Prophecy" she had been ordained to set up the S.D.A. church. They by keeping the OT Law, especially the Sabbath, would escape Judgment at Christ's coming, when He would condemn to the Lake of Fire all who worshipped on Sunday/ the First day of the week, worshipping on that day being the "Mark of the Beast." She insisted that God would never permit the Jews to return to Israel, as her Church had now taken the place of the Jews.

JOSEPH SMITH claimed that an angel directed him to dig up and translate Gold Plates which became the "Book of Mormon" of equal value to the Bible. He and his friends claimed to have experienced a "Second Pentecost" with tongues of Fire, etc and a visible revelation of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They claimed the ability to heal the sick, raise the dead, etc. And that by this, after centuries when He had had no people on earth, God set up His true church - that of "The Latter Day Saints." Polygamy was advocated, linked with the importance of maximising births to reduce the queue of spirits (produced by God and his female partners) for whom the next step was birth into this world. Recently two Mormons answered every Scriptural Belief I stated - Jn 11-3; 12-14; 3:16 etc with "Yes WE believe that." Only when specifically challenged did they admit that they believed we had a "Mother" in Heaven as well as a Father, and that Adam and Eve's rebellion was "A fall UPWARD," etc.

CT RUSSELL proclaimed the "Dawn of the Millennium" insisting that Christ was coming in 1914 and that those who joined his "Watchtower," movement would

reign with Christ. Although claiming that Christ DID return invisibly they built a palace

"Beth Sharim" for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to live in as they prophesied they would return in 1925. They claimed that Christ was almost certainly coming visibly in 1975 with world-wide campaigns under the banner "Millions now Living May Never Die." What these "Jehovah's Witnesses" witness to / against changes often?

MARY BAKER EDDY With her "Christian Science" insisted that as "God is Love," therefore "Love is God." And that sickness and sin were errors (Illusions) of mortal (Human) mind, to be fought down and dismissed by "Faith." I have known a man die of Peritonitis in his endeavour to live up to that "Faith."

ANNIE BEZANT founded "Theosophy" which claimed to combine all that was "good" in Christianity and Eastern Religions. She proclaimed that her adopted son Krishna Murthi was The CHRIST. I understand that his promise to demonstrate his Christ-hood by walking on the water at Sydney about 70 yrs back drew great crowds to, I think, Bond Beach. But at the last minute he backed down saying he hadn't realised there might be sharks in the water, and while his faith ran to walking on water, it didn't include sharks!

There is no point in talking further of the succession of other false Prophets and false Christs and people who claim that they alone have the key to what Scripture means, and their followers alone qualify for Salvation, or some privileged place of blessing

In contrast with this, many Evangelical Christians, including the Brethren, understood Scripture as teaching

1. A personal return of Christ to take His Church Home. That Church being made up of ALL Believers, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox or whatever, who trusted in Christ Crucified for Salvation. Most, not all, believed this coming would precede the Tribulation described in Revelation

2. That the traditional Protestant churches would largely drift into apostasy, and re-unite with each other, and finally with the Roman Church.

3. Europe would be reunited as a commercial unit that had absolute control over buying and selling, and form in effect a revival of the Roman Empire. At first the Apostate Roman Church would dominate that political unit, but then be destroyed by its head, so that his image alone would be worshipped. Fear of a Northern Power, under Russia, would be a force in welding the West European Kingdoms together.

<sup>2</sup> In my youth, according to the JW's, THE sin was to sing the National Anthem, or be in the armed forces, as George V. and the Pope were the Anti-Christ, and men must save themselves for battle on Christ's side at Armageddon. Tragically although they may claim Christ as Saviour, they always seem to have held onto the belief that He is only A God (as if there could be a Being who was neither God, Angel (Holy or Fallen) or Human) and that the whole Christian Gospel is irrelevant having expired in 1914 with only the 144,000 produced by it ever going to Heaven. While their witnessing is a frantic effort to qualify for the earthly Kingdom, they shame me for not proclaiming the Christian Gospel more fearlessly.



4. The Jews would be restored to their Land of Israel, but generally be in unbelief of God, His promised forgiveness and Kingdom. They would be constantly under

threat, and just when defeated by an invasion from the North would be delivered by the physical return of Christ to the Mount of Olives from which He had ascended, Zech 14

(The "Early Brethren" didn't invent such FUTURIST interpretations of prophecy - elements can be found much earlier. HISTORICISTS who apply the prophecies to the Papal persecution of Protestants discredit the futurist interpretation by tracing to a Jesuit. On the other hand, the historicists' own identification of the Pope with "the man of Sin" etc [See KJV preface] can be traced to a Franciscan monk. See my booklet on 2 Thessalonians. E.R.)

From the first, interpretations of prophecy varied among the Brethren, and were not seen as a bar to fellowship. All accepted the Inspiration, and Sole Authority of the Scriptures. But, depending on which Scripture they started with, and made the key to their interpretation, their conclusions differed. As long as any ministry honoured God, and encouraged the saints, it was permitted and appreciated. This served to maintain a balance JND and his followers insisted that the church would escape the "Tribulation." Many Open Brethren agreed as it seemed most strongly supported in Scripture. But GM and others believed that Scripture didn't clearly teach that ANG, RC Chapman, and others, thought that in spite of 1 Th 4:13-18, 5:9-11 etc, Rom 8:17 meant that only those Believers willing to suffer with Christ now will share in the first resurrection and reign with Him in the millennial Kingdom. (The rest apparently being raised and going to Heaven only after that Kingdom ended.) (L369)

GH Lang wrote "What is needed is a Spirit-infused revival of the eagerness to learn, and liberty to speak, as in those first days instead of the tacit assumptions that all is known, that this or that scheme is perfect and must not be revised.."

The "Early Brethren" saw the world around falling into disorder and violence, and expected Christ's return soon, as did Luther and the other Reformers of his time. This helped them to value this world lightly, although Mt 24:36 kept them from setting dates. The conviction that Christ MIGHT return at any moment, was used as an incentive to urgent proclamation of the Gospel, and the need for hearers to get right with God. (L371) Although over-use of this Hope and Challenge (or Threat) dulled its edge, many have been moved to Christ by it. Years ago an old man lamented "Fifty Years ago we were all standing on tip-toe expecting the Lord to come any moment - it's not like that now." I callously pointed out that it was difficult to stand on tip-toe for 50 years.

By 1950 the Apostasy from orthodox Biblical doctrines was obvious in mainline churches, and was taken by us, and some other Evangelicals as proving that Christ's Coming was near. For some that made the increasing failure of our Gospel efforts seem almost a positive sign of virtue, and it discouraged earnest seeking for a revival as it was assumed that revival couldn't be expected in a "Laodcean Age." (The "Early Brethren" who coined that expression from Rev 3:14-23 in fact insisted

that the "Open Door of Philadelphia" remained till Christ took us home, and that we should make the fullest possible use of it.)

### The "Charismatic Revival"

This has had a major impact on the Spiritual/Religious/Church scene. It is too soon to judge the overall long term results, but it seems to me that, while it has had a good effect on many churches, it has seriously weakened our Brethren Assemblies- drawing away perhaps 25% of our membership. Some of us concentrated on its negative aspects, to argue that as such things were not of God, the whole thing was a Satanic deception. Others concentrated on its positive aspects and uncritically accepted it at its face value as a great work of the Holy Spirit. Most of these left, judging our fellowships to be too rigid, in their attempts to be biblical. The rest, as I did, rather resented it as "Not Fair" as we plodded along carrying on as much of our witness and work as we could with depleted numbers, feeding that our knowledge of the Scriptures, and our loyalty to our understanding of the Scriptures just might be keeping us from blessing. It was certainly keeping us from the excitement and euphoric illusions, which were producing real trophies of Grace among the ephemeral froth. We saw our role as being to continue serving the Lord and obeying His Word, to thank God for the work He had done through the charismatic movement, pray that their excesses would be repented of, and encourage all we met to build firmly on the Scriptures, rather than supposed prophecies, and teachings put together from an artificial selection of Scriptures.

As with previous Charismatic Revivals (Montanist, Anabaptist, etc.) the tide is now turning, with the Bible-Based converts / Believers moving back towards the "Conservative Evangelical" position, while others follow the more spectacular, flamboyant leaders who offer them power, fulfilment, and material blessings. Such leaders, in assuring their hearers they can enjoy what the world offers, and feel happy about themselves, tend to ignore the part played by the world and the flesh in sinning and blame it all on the occult and the Devil, which become an obsession for many.

In retrospect it's easy to see that the "Early Brethren," and we, later, could have foreseen that a Charismatic Revival would play its part in the "End Times." As God in NT times used the Messianic, Pharisee, and Temple Worship movements to call out those who within them sincerely sought God, and left the rest for Judgment, so in our generation He is using the Charismatic movement to reap a harvest of good "Wheat." But also a wide public is now more ready to accept sensational claims to miracles, and spiritual experiences detached from a framework of Biblical doctrine,

and so ready to be swept into Anti-Christ's movement by the false miracles he will provide, if the early Brethren were correct in their understanding of Scripture<sup>3</sup>.

As we read the books on Prophecy written 150yrs ago we find that what the "Early Brethren" wrote from their study of Scripture corresponds closely to what has happened so far -in contrast to alternative interpretations. Further evidence that they were listening to God in their study is the positive use of their findings in energetic evangelising. Inevitably at times what they saw as they read the Scriptures was in fact etched on the spectacles provided by their personal and social background, the mind-set of their age, or, simply a result of their being human. Their failures are no excuse for us to fail to take as seriously as they did OUR responsibility in our generation, to make eager, constant, prayerful search of Scripture to come to know our Lord and Lover better, so that we can live ever more closely in fellowship with Him, to increase that mutual joy at His Coming.

AN Groves on the WISE virgins. "The number of those who theoretically believe in the coming of our blessed Lord is daily increasing, the number of those who really are hastening unto the "Glorious Day" with a confident and repairing faith, is very small." (L375)

ANG "The two great objects of the Church in the latter days, apart from growing up into the stature and fullness of Christ seem to me to be the publication of the testimony of Jesus in all lands, and the calling out of the sheep of Christ who may be imprisoned in all the Babylonish (religious) systems that are in the world. In both of these, may the Lord of His infinite mercy grant success" (L381)

The Political and Religious scene is constantly changing. It may seem so near to what we expect, from reading the Bible, to mark the time of the Lord's return. Then we're confused by the crisis receding (Eg Russia turning from Communism.) So in spite of all the signs predicted, from Scripture, by the "Early Brethren" that have been fulfilled, or could feasibly be fulfilled out of the present situation, the World at large has become bored with or amused at warnings of "THE Coming" as foretold, 2 Pet 3:2-4. And we are left with no certainty as to when Christ will come, and therefore need His warning (which is more directly associated with His coming in power and glory) "Don't throw your weight around Don't settle down to self-indulgence, Mt 24:25-1; Lk 12:42-48 Keep busy with the work I've given you to do, so that You and I will meet with mutual joy," Mt 25:14-23 Lk 19:11-27.

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<sup>3</sup> If the anti-christ had come in the 1940s it's hard to see how such miracles would have been accepted in the rationalistic world of the time. In God's sovereign grace the form of the charismatic message gained a hearing for the Gospel in a world where Rationalism had discredited the Bible, only to find itself disillusioned with Science and rationalism and moving on towards superstition. No doubt also, some Anti-Charismatic reactions arose from the rationalism that had penetrated the thinking of many Christians.

## Appendix III : An Alternative Assessment of the Current Situation

Since completing this booklet my attention has been drawn to a relevant 1986 book "Brethren Roots & Renewal" by Nathan deLynn Smith. I read this with profit. The warnings against spiritual pride; indifference to declining numbers and Gospel impact; blind adherence to the status quo living by fear rather than faith; and the reluctance of older members to question the assumptions of their generation, are valid, and salutary. Of course younger members also need to question the assumptions of THEIR generation, as all assumptions need to be tested by God's Word.

My conviction that direct reliance on God and His Word is the key to everything can become an excuse for inaction. Smith may risk insufficiently Biblical action by following Coad's view of our history, and his pre-occupation with "Why I left the Brethren." (A pre-occupation that choked off my interest in Coad's "Harvester" magazine years ago.)

Perhaps as an ex-school teacher my experience of naively confident Education theory from the USA unduly prejudices me against self-evaluating, multi-choice questionnaires, goal setting, etc, of the type advocated by Smith. So, instead of comment, I'll supply a questionnaire of my own:

1. 1st Corinthians is so full of questions that it can be viewed as a questionnaire Paul sent to the church there, requiring them to evaluate where they were at in relation to the Gospel of Christ crucified. How does it compare with modern questionnaires? Do they direct attention to God and His revealed will? OR to what we think and want?
2. God gives His evaluation of seven churches in Rev 2 and 3 and the self-evaluation one church gave of itself. What do we learn from these?
3. Organisation was God's answer to the problem in Acts 6:1-7, but Paul didn't suggest it for the problems at Corinth. Why?
4. Does God (in Scripture) equate success in His work with our succeeding in attracting increasing numbers of people by adapting our programme and style to meet their desires and felt needs? If not, how much better indicator of "Success for God" is it than the obvious decline in congregational numbers and enthusiasm that results from ignoring human needs?
5. What examples of collective Goal-setting and Planning do we find in the NT apart from Acts 15:36-40? What do we learn from that? (Rom 16:21-33 and Phil 3:7-14 are examples at the PERSONAL GOAL level. Acts 15:1-29 and 21:20-25 are collective decisions, but concerned with conflict resolution.) Jas 4:13-17; Lk 12:16-48 warn against God-ignoring planning but are no excuse for the lazy inaction of the unprofitable servant type.

6. Would any "procedure for selecting, evaluating, and dismissing Elders" be a cure for lack of Biblical Godliness and humility? OR be needed where they existed?
7. Do we regard the author's brief statements "genuine renewal comes only from God" and is "based on God's Word" as being central to our changing? OR as merely a polite "nod to God" before we settle down to re-organise ourselves on the "Market-driven" assumption that in God's church "the customer is always right"?
8. How valid is our use of WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH? Here it is in the KJV/Niv. "WHERE THERE IS NO VISION/Revelation (Chazon - Revelation of God and His will received as in Isa 1:1->; Dan 8:1->, etc.) THE PEOPLE PERISH/Cast off restraint (Para - Loosened, free to please themselves, as in Ex 3:23-5- "Naked" KJV) BUT HE THAT KEEPETH/Who keeps (Shamar - Listens to, studies, honours and obeys) THE LAW (Torah - the written revealed will of God For us, see Jn 15:1-17, etc.) HAPPY /Blessed IS HE." May God grant us all the grace to say "Amen" for that

My attention has also been drawn to the fact that by focussing on the situation in the EARLIEST stages of the movement, I have ignored the efforts of Godly men who continued to search Scriptures for, and establish the practice of NT Church life. This is true. But research takes time. Booklet space is limited, as is my ability to evaluate the biblicality and practicality of the doctrines and situations involved. This convinced me that I should limit my "attempt" as I did. For the period which I have largely ignored I have had recommended to me "New Testament Church Principles" by A. Clarke, and pass on that recommendation although I've not yet had the chance to read it. Others have pointed out that they found Roy Coad's book useful as it also was more up-to-date. I have to confess that it's some years since I read it. It must be emphasised that the record of the early days must never be considered as depicting a situation to which we can, or should return. But it can be useful as a challenge for us to also evaluate where we are at, relevant to the revealed will of God

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