

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbrfj.php

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

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

JOHN SOMERVILLE-MEIKLE

WHY I LEFT THE BRETHREN

(1) Harry Young

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(2) K. N. S. Counter

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) David G. Lillie

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(4) J. S. Short

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(5) Robert G. Cochran

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

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

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

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

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

(6) Anonymous

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

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

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

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

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

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

(7) Leonard E. Greene

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(8) Anonymous

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

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

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

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

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

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

(9) Miss Jean Morris

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

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

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

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

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

(10) Anonymous

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. *The common practice in selecting Overseers*

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

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

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

4. *Ministry at the Breaking of Bread*

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

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

5. *The position of Women in the assemblies*

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

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

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

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

(11) Andrew R. Anderson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(12) Shorter Extracts

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

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

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

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

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