

**IN THE FIRST-TIER TRIBUNAL (CHARITY)
GENERAL REGULATORY CHAMBER**

Appeal No.: CA/2012/0003

BETWEEN:

**(1) MICHAEL SIMON BELSEY
(2) LAURENCE EDWARD BUCKLEY
(3) MICHAEL GEORGE SCOTT
(4) ANTHONY DAVID WALLIS
(5) JOHN DUDLEY WALLIS**

First Appellants

**(6) LEE ARMSTRONG
(7) NEIL CHRISTIE
(8) JONATHAN NIGEL EDWARDS
(9) ROY HARDING
(10) JAMES BRIAN SOULSBY**

Second Appellants

and

THE CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Respondent

WITNESS STATEMENT OF EILEEN BARKER

**I, Eileen Barker of 29A Crawford Avenue, Wembley, HA0 2HY, England WILL SAY
AS FOLLOWS:**

Introductory comments

1. I am professor emeritus of sociology with special reference to the study of religion at the London School of Economics, and the founder, chair and honorary director of Inform (Information Network on Religious Movements), a charity providing information about new religious movements (NRMs), non-conventional religions, alternative religions, spiritual or esoteric movements and/or self-religions. My qualifications, experience and knowledge of the Brethren are set out in Annex 1 attached. I have throughout my statement referred to various sources which are detailed in the bibliography at Annex 2.
2. This account of the Exclusive Brethren should be read as one written by a sociologist of religion who does not share the Brethren's faith but has acquired some knowledge of their beliefs and practices through contacts with members, former members, scholars and a variety of publications. I have no expertise that permits me to pass theological or legal judgements. I have, however, a familiarity with a wide range of religious movements and find the late Bryan Wilson's classification of the Exclusive Brethren as an **'introversionist' sect** useful in locating it within a family of religions that withdraw from the rest of society. Identifying how some, though by no means all, of the characteristics that they exhibit are shared by others that can be similarly classified, can help us to recognise something of the 'socio-logic' of their beliefs and

practices. It is also helpful in raising an awareness of ways in which the Brethren are similar to and differ from other people and other religions.

3. The name 'Exclusive Brethren' was not one chosen by the members, but given to them by outsiders. The movement has commonly referred to itself as simply the Brethren or, more recently, as the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church.¹ However, exclusivity can be seen as one of the defining characteristics of their fellowship. It is the extent to which separation is seen as an integral part of the belief system that contributes to the distinction between the Exclusive Brethren and not only other Christians but also some of the other Brethren, of which there have been numerous schisms (Introvigne and Maselli 2008).
4. Confusingly, both the 'Open' and the 'Closed/Exclusive' Brethren have been referred to as the Plymouth Brethren, the Christian Brethren or, simply, as the Brethren, both singly and together. It is, however, important to recognise that although the various divisions of the Brethren share a 'family likeness', they also differ quite significantly from one another. For the sake of simplicity, in what follows, unless it is obvious from the context, the term 'the Brethren' should be taken to refer to the religion that now refers to itself as the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, but has been called the 'Exclusive Brethren' or by a variety of other names, including the Darbyites, the Darbisten, the Connexional Brethren, the Raven-Taylor-Hales Brethren, Taylorites, the Jimmies, or Brethren IV.
5. The founding leader of this 'lineage', John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), was succeeded by James Butler Stoney (1814-1897), Frederick Edward Raven (1837-1903), James Taylor Sr. (1870-1953), then by the latter's son James Taylor Jr. (1899-1970), who was succeeded by James Harvey Symington (1913-1987), John Stephen Hales (1922-2002) and then by Hales' youngest son, Bruce David Hales, the present leader who resides in Australia. These leaders have been known by such names as the 'Elect Vessel', the 'Man of God' or, more recently, the 'Minister of the Lord in the Recovery'. The 'Recovery' refers to the process whereby the truth that was revealed at the time of the New Testament, but then lost until it was 'recovered' by Darby, is continuing to be recovered by the Brethren.

I have been asked by the Charity Commission to address the following questions:

1. **What are the doctrines and practices of the Exclusive Brethren, in particular explain the nature and consequences of the doctrine of separation?**
6. Just as Christianity has been subject to many interpretations throughout the past two millennia, so have the beliefs and practices of the Brethren been interpreted in a variety of ways, resulting in a score or more of schismatic movements. There were, however, two splits that are most pertinent for present purposes.² The first of these, between what became known as the Open and the Closed Brethren occurred around 1848; the second took place in 1970 as a split between 'the Taylor Brethren', who were to remain loyal to the then leader, James Taylor Jr., and those who broke away to form a number of further small splinter groups.

¹ At the end of the 2012 version of the booklet *Living Our Beliefs* it is stated that the copyright is held by the Plymouth Brethren (Exclusive Brethren) Christian Church Ltd.

http://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Our_beliefs_UK_v7.2_PR1.pdf.

² There were also some significant splits that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century – see Introvigne and Maselli (2008); Embley (1967); Shuff (1997); and Wilson (1967) for further details.

7. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a lawyer, had been ordained into the Anglican Church of Ireland before joining, in 1827, with a group of evangelical intelligentsia in Dublin who were disaffected with the institutionalised Christian churches. This led to the formation of what was to become known as the Brethren church. The movement spread, and assemblies (congregations or 'meetings') were established in various parts of the UK.
8. In 1847 Darby visited the Plymouth assembly, which was led by a former Church of England clergyman, Benjamin Wills Newton (1807-1899). When Darby discovered that Newton was teaching that Jesus had, like everyone else, been born under the curse of God until he was baptised, Darby expressed strong opposition to this doctrine (which Newton himself was to repudiate) and declared that those who had listened to Newton were tainted and should be excluded from the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion). There were, however, leaders who refused to be exclusive, but insisted on keeping the communion table open to all who shared the historical Christian faith. Darby responded by maintaining that to associate with evil was to open the door to 'the infection of the abominable evil'.³ It was largely as a result of this disagreement that a basic division was established between the **Open Brethren**, associated with the Bristol philanthropist George Müller (1805–1898), and the **Closed or Exclusive Brethren**, associated with Darby.⁴
9. The Open Brethren grew rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, reaching perhaps 2.5 million members worldwide. Although, like most Christian churches, its numbers have declined somewhat in recent years, it can still claim around 50,000 members in the UK.
10. The Exclusive Brethren also grew, but less rapidly, partly due to their very 'separateness' and strict practices (see below). Furthermore, they underwent a number of divisions due to doctrinal and disciplinary issues and their membership had a relatively high turnover, with people leaving, often to join the Open Brethren or alternative Evangelical churches.
11. The most notable departure from the main strand of the Exclusive Brethren was in 1970 when, following the so-called **Aberdeen incident**, an estimated 8-10,000 (roughly a third of the movement) left.⁵ Some of the hotly disputed versions of 'the incident' can be found in Adams (1972) and Bachelard (2008). In brief, it was widely reported that the allegedly alcoholic leader, James Taylor Junior ('Mr Jim', 'JT Junior', 'Big Jim'), had been discovered in bed with the naked wife of one of the Brethren. One explanation was that the incident had been a test of loyalty in which Taylor had put himself in a position 'to demonstrate purity and to expose every kind of impurity'.⁶
12. According to the Brethren's own **statistics**, they currently have over 46,000 members worldwide, with about 16,000 in the UK. The majority of members are to be found in Australia, but they can also be found in New Zealand, various countries in Western (not Eastern) Europe, North America, Latin America and the West Indies. Evidently there are no longer Brethren in India.

³ Kelly n.d.164-7, quoted in Shuff (1997): 11.

⁴ Details of the 'controversial relationship' between Darby and Newton can be found in Burnham (2004).

⁵ Those who departed split into a number of further sub-divisions, sometimes referred to collectively as Brethren X (Introvigne and Maselli 2008).

⁶ Letter from Magnus Dawson to George Scott 21 August 1970, quoted in Bachelard (2008): 15.

13. It would seem that there has been a steady though not spectacular growth in the movement over the past few years. But although conversion certainly occurs, and there is some street preaching and distribution of literature,⁷ including free Bibles, the Brethren is not a strongly proselytising religion when compared to other, more obviously enthusiastic missionising groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons or some of the new religious movements that arose in the West in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸ What growth the Brethren have had has been due largely to a **high birth-rate**,⁹ and their ability to **retain** a sufficient percentage of their children to replace those who die or leave.¹⁰
14. In **appearance**, Brethren men are clean-shaven with neatly cut short hair. They normally wear white open-neck shirts. They are more likely to wear a cardigan than a jacket, and would not be seen in jeans. Men can't wear jewellery – even wedding rings. Women have long hair, which they cover, commonly with a kerchief, when in public or at meetings. They wear skirts that are usually long or mid-calf, though sometimes young women wear shorter skirts, but not trousers.
15. Apart from their head covering, which nowadays may be reduced to little more than an Alice band, the Brethren's manner of dress is not so marked that one would necessarily pick them out in public, though one would recognise that certain people were *unlikely* to be Brethren. Another potentially distinguishing characteristic might be that, like most religious communities, they have a vocabulary that differs slightly in its usage from that of non-members.¹¹ It is, however, unlikely that this would be noticeable to anyone engaged in every-day conversation with Brethren.
16. Practice such as not wearing a tie is not considered scriptural. Indeed I have seen Brethren wearing one on occasion (in the Houses of Parliament and at Inform Seminars). But it can be argued that how members of a religion present themselves will in some way reflect their beliefs (Barker 2001). The Brethren will explain that how they present themselves is their own personal responsibility, but they will also be aware of the importance of the group and of a certain degree of group agreement on behaviour in clothing, hair style, being clean shaven, and traditional gender roles (such as married women staying in the home).

⁷ See the Booklet *Public Benefit* (Plymouth Brethren 2012a: 14-15), and a video, '*About The Plymouth Brethren Christian Church*', that is to be found on the Brethren's website <http://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/>, which shows Brethren street witnessing. Another document published by the Brethren describes the 'Open Air Preaching' in Luton and, in particular the proselytising efforts of a Mr Graham Hayman in the 1950s (Newton 2012). I have been given a leaflet that invited members of the public to 'Enjoy a FREE hot lunch and receive your own FREE Bible' on 14 July 2012 at Brightwell Gospel Hall (where, it stated, other Gospel literature was available).

⁸ When I borrowed a book containing photographs and names of Brethren in the Croydon and Reigate area in 2004, an analysis of the contents indicated that only about 4 per cent of the 529 individuals were not born into the movement. Although it was only a very small sample, Bryan Wilson (1967: 341-2) found that, of the score or so male members of two English assemblies in the mid-1950s, there were twice as many who had been born into the Brethren as had converted to it.

⁹ Further analysis of the book mentioned in the previous footnote showed that the average number of children born to the 141 householders in Croydon and Reigate was 3.25 compared with 1.9 children born to the average woman according to BBC News health 9 December 2010 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-11960183>). Bouma (2006) found that the birth-rate of the Brethren in Australia was twice that of the national average.

¹⁰ It is claimed that 95.8 per cent of children born into Brethren families remain in fellowship (Bouma 2006).

¹¹ Examples include theological terms such as the Lord's Supper, disciplinary concepts such as 'shutting up' and classifications such as 'worldlies'.

17. So far as **doctrine** is concerned, the Brethren, like members of other Evangelical religions, take the **Bible** very seriously and believe that it is the word of God. They share many of the doctrines of evangelical Christians, only a few of which are likely to be of relevance to this enquiry. Among the more disputed doctrines within Christianity is **Dispensationalism**,¹² of which Darby is frequently credited as the founder, but it is unlikely that this need concern us here.
18. Again, like many other religions, Brethren have **millennial expectations**. They await the coming of Christ, “who is about to judge living and dead”¹³ and rapture those who have been saved through His blood to be with Him eternally.¹⁴ Just as the early Christians expected Jesus to return in their life time, and just as Darby held a strong belief in the imminent end of the world, current members of the Brethren share that hope. One member of the Brethren told me that he had expected the Rapture before 2000, and although it is not official teaching, most now expect it within their lifetime.¹⁵
19. The early founders of Brethrenism believed in **Living by Faith** – the belief that ‘God will provide’ and that Christians should give away all their possessions and depend on the Lord only for help in the future (Larsen 1998). Today, however, Brethren live modestly but comfortably as middle-class families with steady incomes in pleasant, though by no means luxurious surroundings. Their houses are pleasantly furnished and those I have visited have small, well-kept gardens.
20. Possibly of more relevance is the fact that Darby was strongly against a religion having an ordained **clergy**. All Brethren are seen as equal, but, as is common in most sectarian movements that profess the priesthood of all believers, some, in certain respects, turn out to be more equal than others.¹⁶ The ‘leading brothers’ or elders in assemblies (always men) clearly carry more weight in decision-making than others, especially younger men, and then there is the worldwide leader who has been known as the Elect Vessel or Man of God and is held in respect as the most authoritative moral and spiritual guide.
21. Perhaps paradoxically, given the importance of the doctrine of separation to which the Brethren have held fast (see below), from its earliest days the movement has been **anti-denominationalist**. The idea behind anti-denominationalism is that God does not desire there to be man-made divisions separating different Christians rather than the body of Christ being one. For this reason, the Brethren did not want to call themselves by a name that distinguished them from other Christians; the name ‘Brethren’ was the result of their desire to consider all Christians as simply ‘Brethren

¹² According to one definition: “Dispensationalism is a theological system that teaches biblical history is best understood in light of a number of successive administrations of God’s dealings with mankind, which it calls “dispensations.” It maintains fundamental distinctions between God’s plans for national Israel and for the New Testament Church, and emphasizes prophecy of the end-times and a pre-tribulation rapture of the church prior to Christ’s Second Coming.” <http://www.theopedia.com/Dispensationalism>

¹³ 2 Timothy 4: 1. All biblical quotations are taken from John Nelson Darby’s translation of the Bible, which differs only slightly from the King James’ version.

¹⁴ “and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then then *we*, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in [the] clouds, to meet the Lord in [the] air; and thus we shall be always with [the] Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

¹⁵ This informant said that it was taught that it would occur during the Lord’s Supper, but added with a wry smile that it wasn’t known to which time zone that might apply.

¹⁶ “And God has set certain in the assembly: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; then miraculous powers; then gifts of healings; helps; governments; kinds of tongues. [Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all [in possession of] miraculous powers? have all gifts of healings? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” [1 Corinthians 12: 28-30]

in the Lord' (Larsen 1998: 85).¹⁷ Brethren currently refer to themselves an 'un-denominational' religion.

22. Another doctrine that is of significance is that of **Progressive Revelation** – the belief that the truth is being progressively 'opened up'. One way in which the truth may be opened up is through the medium of the **Holy Spirit**. To quote John Taylor Sr., "Well, no doubt, we are being recovered, but I would not make it entirely what is recovered, because there are fresh things coming out, the Lord has been reserving things to bring them out in view of the end."¹⁸ This will be discussed further below.
23. The **Doctrine of Separation** would seem to be the most controversial of the doctrines instigated by Darby. All Christian religions will select certain passages in the Bible that will be used to 'trump' other passages that might appear to conflict with the selected passages, and what distinguishes one religion from another often lies in the particular passages that each selects. Amongst the passages that carry special weight for the Exclusive Brethren are the following:
- a. *But now I have written to you, if any one called brother be fornicator, or avaricious, or idolater, or abusive, or a drunkard, or rapacious, not to mix with [him]; with such a one not even to eat. (1 Corinthians 5:11)*
 - b. *Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers; for what participation [is there] between righteousness and lawlessness? or what fellowship of light with darkness? and what consent of Christ with Beliar, or what part for a believer along with an unbeliever and what agreement of God's temple with idols? for ye are [the] living God's temple; according as God has said, I will dwell among them, and walk among [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be to me a people. Wherefore come out from the midst of them, and be separated, saith [the] Lord, and touch not [what is] unclean, and I will receive you and I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters, saith [the] Lord Almighty. [2 Corinthians 6:14-18]*
 - c. *Let no one deceive you with vain words, for on account of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Be not ye therefore fellow-partakers with them; for ye were once darkness, but now light in [the] Lord; walk as children of light, (for the fruit of the light [is] in all goodness and righteousness and truth,) proving what is agreeable to the Lord; and do not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather also reprove [them], for the things that are done by them in secret it is shameful even to say. [Ephesians 5: 6-12]*
 - d. *[The] Lord knows those that are his; and, Let everyone who names the name of [the] Lord withdraw from iniquity. (2 Timothy 2:19)*
24. Over the years, the Brethren have gone well beyond the initial injunction not to break bread with those holding to doctrines that differ from their own, to build up a community of believers who separate themselves off in many other ways from non-members or 'worldlies'. It is not only the bread that is broken at the Lord's Supper that they will not share, they will not eat at the same table as those who are not in fellowship; they will not live in houses that share a common wall with outsiders; they will not vote; they will not allow their children to attend university and their members

¹⁷ As in many other religious organisations, members refer to each other as 'brother' or 'sister'.

¹⁸ James Taylor, April 1949. Vol. 179: 82; N.S. 68: 82. Quoted at <http://www.mybrethren.org/history/framagb.htm>

cannot belong to any secular, vocational (or ecumenical) organisation, and are, thus, unable to be doctors, lawyers or trade unionists; and they have cut themselves off from socialising with non-members, including their own families.

25. At the same time, although **socially separated** from non-believers in such ways, the community is **not isolated** in the way that some other communities have been (such as the People's Temple in Guyana or the cloistered Second Orders of Carmelite nuns). The Brethren interact with outsiders on various fronts – non-Brethren work in Brethren businesses, teach Brethren children in Brethren schools, and can, albeit rarely, be invited into Brethren homes and to Brethren religious services on occasion (as has been my experience).
26. The doctrine of separation can apply not only to the relationship of the Brethren to non-Brethren, it can also play a role in the way Brethren treat their own members when those who have been deemed to have committed sufficiently serious offences are either 'shut up' or 'put out' (see below).
27. With most sectarian religions, **former members** are likely to be seen as potentially more dangerous and polluting than those who have never been members. When I asked why they would invite me into their home, but would not even speak to a close relative who had left the Brethren, I was told "*the difference lies between those who have broken bread with us and those who have not*". It was a bit like Judas because, unlike the scribes and Pharisees, he had known Jesus. My informant's wife then added that "Judas had repented, her son had not".
28. To quote Bryan Wilson (1967: 328): "*Separation is most pronounced from those who have been associated with the fellowship, and have apostacised since they represent a betrayal of the fellowship and represent all that is evil in 'system' (the world outside).*" But that was written forty years ago, and while the general principle still holds, there are some significant changes that have taken place since then, both increasing and then to some extent relaxing the degrees of separation (see below).
29. When Brethren '**shut up**' / 'confine' / 'shrink from' one of their number, that person is still considered a member, but one that is 'out of fellowship' and can only see special Brethren until it is believed that God has forgiven him or her. The shutting up is designed "to give time for clarification as to the full facts and implications and to give time for repentance" (Barter et al 2008). Those who are shut up will live by themselves. They will be brought food and reading material but have no social contact with others; although they might go to work or attend school, they cannot attend any services or meetings. They will, however, be visited regularly by elders to discuss their situation. In such circumstances a family might live in separate houses, with, perhaps, the spouse and the children staying with other Brethren. If both parents are shut up their children can stay with other Brethren, possibly grandparents. Children under 12 would not be subject to being shut up, but once they reach that age they are deemed responsible for their own behaviour.
30. Being '**put out**' or '**withdrawn from**' involves a total expulsion or excommunication from the Brethren. There are those who have been withdrawn from who have found themselves ejected from their homes, completely cut off from their family and friends, having nowhere to go and no one to whom they felt they could turn.
31. The most obvious reasons for being withdrawn from are those related to sexual impropriety. Any kind of sexual relationship outside marriage is strictly forbidden.

There is, however, a wide variety of further actions that can lead to disciplining, including smoking, socialising with non-Brethren, dressing immodestly, reading books, listening to or watching programmes not approved of, or accessing the Internet for non-sanctioned purposes.

32. The Brethren practice **endogamy** and anyone marrying outside the church is almost bound to leave it (unless the spouse converts into the church). And if one of a couple leaves the church while the other wishes to remain, this almost inevitably results in **divorce**. This has given rise to difficult problems of **custody** so far as any children are concerned. Although not unknown, divorce between couples within the church is very rare.¹⁹
33. If **children** were living with a parent who had left or been withdrawn from, the Brethren maintain that they would normally not be withdrawn from. If they were, through an order of the Court, living with a 'confined' parent, they would normally be at liberty to attend Brethren meetings (Barter et al 2008).
34. It might be noted that the Brethren are not the only religious group that excommunicates members and then cuts them off from not only sacraments but also their families and the social life of the community. There are, for example, similar practices to be found among other introversionist sects and ultra-Orthodox Jews (Ben-Yehuda 2010; Gabel 2012; Wilson 1970), and there are several countries in which apostasy can be punished by death.
35. Nonetheless, it is relatively rare for a religion to insist on their members refusing to have anything to do with family members who are deemed to have sinned and/or have professed themselves to be non-believers to the extent that the Brethren have done. (For more on shutting up and putting out, see also the section on discipline, and elsewhere.)

2. Are the doctrines and practices subject to change, and if so, in what way have they changed and over what time scale?

36. No religion is ever static, despite the fact that there are those that claim not to have changed over several centuries but to have continued to adhere to an original revelation and/or interpretation of Truth, which has usually given to them by their religion's founder. This is particularly the case among many of the more sectarian religions.
37. Where change does occur this may be justified in a number of ways. It may, for example, be due to fresh revelations, to reinterpretations of Scripture, to disillusionment with the leadership, to outside pressure, or to responding to the changing circumstances in which the movement finds itself; there is nothing about

¹⁹ In their booklet, *Public Benefit*, the Brethren state that in the period 2008-10 there were "2 divorces out of 3615 married couple in the UK Brethren community", which, they write, represents 0.59 per thousand couples compared to a UK national average of 31.5 per thousand (Plymouth Brethren 2012a: 17). According to a survey conducted in Australia "The percentage of Exclusive Brethren who are divorced or separated [0.8 per cent] is miniscule when compared with other groups and the national average." (Bouma 2006). The Brethren do not accept 'incompatibility' as a basis for husband and wife to separate; they hold that adultery is the only scriptural ground for divorce (Matthew 19:3-12). However, they say that they 'would not expect a spouse to divorce the other partner, if the defaulting spouse repented and forsook the sin' (Barter et al 2008).

Internet in the Scriptures – or in Darby’s ministry. Instances of all these examples can be found in the history of the Brethren.

38. An openness to change is, indeed, an integral part of Brethren religion, built into its very core through the concept of progressive revelation. Describing Brethren theology, Bryan Wilson (1967: 320) has written:

The Scriptures are the test of truth and error, and the Holy Spirit is the teacher, who may use the Scriptures directly or through ministers. The truth which men minister is tested by the Scriptures. This permits an extensive freedom to evolve new doctrines, and this is further facilitated by an allegorical use of texts and by elaborate typologies.

39. Darby himself changed his beliefs on several occasions. For example, before ‘the big schism’, he had been far from exclusive. He is quoted as having said in 1836 that he would welcome “fellowship with all believers, irrespective of their Church connection”; and in an 1839 letter he wrote “As our table is the Lord’s and not ours, we receive all that the Lord has received” (Wilson 1967: 288-9). Furthermore, even in the late 1870s it was evidently not unknown for the (Exclusive) Brethren to break bread with persons from the Open Brethren if they were unaware of the dispute that had led up to the 1848 split (Shuff 1997:12).
40. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Brethren were of the opinion that: *there had been ‘a continual accession of spiritual light’ from God through ministry which had ‘brought out [H]is mind with increasing clearness and fullness’ throughout the movement’s history.*²⁰ *This cumulative process, on-going through the agency of Taylor [Sr.]’s agency, meant that ‘what the spirit is saying today’ took precedence over the writings of Darby and others who had gone before.*²¹ (ibid.: 19)
41. Marriage to a partner ‘not in the tribe’ was among the prohibitions that Taylor Sr. introduced, using, Shuff (1997: 19) reports, the Old Testament in a highly allegorical manner. It was also made clear that “*the Brethren’s new principle of fellowship required separation from all former religious associations as ‘vessels of dishonour’ before reception to communion*” (ibid. 21). In the 1930s and 1940s there was an increasing emphasis on the active role of the Holy Spirit in the community (ibid.19), with the Brethren expecting the Spirit to reveal yet higher levels of truth through authoritative teaching, primarily that of Taylor himself (ibid: 20).
42. Even **more extreme isolationism** was introduced under the leadership of James Taylor Jr. and his successor, James Symington. Brethren could no longer eat with non-Brethren. In 1960, Taylor declared that Brethren could not eat anything with non-members, nor could they eat in restaurants or hotels; they would, furthermore, be ‘unclean’ if they ate or slept with their non-Brethren spouse.
43. Numerous stories are told of occasions when Brethren were withdrawn from: there was, for example, the woman who had tea with her elderly non-Brethren grandparents; the blind spinster who was put out because she lived with her non-Brethren sister; there was the blind man who refused to get rid of his blind dog (all pets were forbidden); and there was the 12-year-old boy who was made to eat meals in his own room while the rest of the family ate downstairs because he had played

²⁰ C. A. Coates (n.d: 237)

²¹ [Taylor] *Ministry*, 42: 211.

soccer with his friends (Adams 1972: 60, 62, 71). The Brethren were being taught that it is an inestimable privilege to be a member and it is a denial of that privilege to associate in any conceivable way with non-Brethren.

44. Not only was contact with individuals restricted, attending universities and contact with 'unholy associations' became forbidden. The main justification for not allowing Brethren to go to university is that they need to be protected from illicit sex, drugs and various forms of secularism. However, it is not unlikely that another fear is that they would have alternative ideas presented to them and be forced to think and argue in ways that are definitely not encouraged by the Brethren. I know of several, now elderly former Brethren who left the movement after 'having the scales drop from their eyes' while attending university before it was proscribed.²²
45. In the late 1970s, Symington set forth in his ministry the need for Brethren to ensure that their homes and business premises did not share a party wall with non-Brethren, not only to reaffirm the principle of separation from evil, but also to avoid potential legal disputes (Wilson 2000: 7).
46. The changes that the Brethren have undergone are by no means purely those brought about by tightening up practices that came to be seen as too lax. They have also had to face new situations that have been presented to them by the changing society. One such change has been the phenomenal growth of electronic media. These have been seen as threatening to the community and not only radios and televisions, but CDs, mobile telephones, fax machines and computers were banned.²³
47. However, yet further changes have been introduced, this time permitting **more liberal** practices. Several of the actions which had led to erstwhile Brethren being withdrawn from are now permitted by the movement, and the current employment of computers is but one of the more obvious examples of a change that might have seemed inconceivable a few years ago.
48. Computers and television can now be used for educational purposes. Video links can be used to enable communication between schools; it was arranged that Bryan Wilson could give evidence by a video link on behalf of the Brethren in an Australian court case.
49. With the arrival of the Internet, businesses and religions were quick to set up websites. This presented the Brethren with a problem as they could not use computers. However, they arranged for a non-member to set up a website with the url <http://www.theexclusivebrethren.com>. The Home Page declared that it was "The Only Site Endorsed by the Exclusive Brethren".²⁴ I was told by one of the Brethren that someone downloaded the website so they could then check it – indeed, I was told by another informant that they had supplied the material in first place.²⁵ Now, however, the Brethren openly operate their own website at

²² I have heard that the Brethren themselves do now provide some tertiary education in practical subjects such as business management.

²³ Brethren could not own fax machines, but were allowed to receive and send faxes from other locations, such as a nearby shop, for business purposes.

²⁴ Accessed 9 April 2008, but now defunct.

²⁵ As Bryan Wilson's literary executrix, I was asked to give written permission to allow his paper on the Brethren (Wilson 2000) to be downloaded onto the site.

<http://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/>, to which anyone attempting to access the previous site is referred.

50. While in the past, owning a cell phone was an excommunicable offence, today almost every Brethren I meet offers me a card with their mobile number. The mobiles are, however, likely to have filters installed in them to prevent them from accessing unsuitable material. The widespread use by Brethren of the mobile began around 2007 when it transpired that cell phones were permissible for business purposes. Now it would seem the vast majority can use them for other purposes – though not for purposes that the movement disapproves of. Brethren have had to buy expensively modified cell phones from a Brethren concern, Universal Business Team (UBT),²⁶ which restricts what the phone can do (e.g. removing texting and digital cameras when these were not allowed). UBT also sells other electronic devices such as computers at mark-up prices,²⁷ and produces software that is used to act as a filter to restrict access to unsuitable sites on computers. This is a facility that is also adopted by an increasing number of non-Brethren parents who are concerned about what their children might otherwise access on their mobiles or computers.²⁸
51. In 2003 Bruce Hales introduced what is known as his ‘**Review**’. Brethren now readily admit that in the past they had made mistakes and acted too hastily, harshly and unfairly in disciplining people. People who had left, either voluntarily or by being withdrawn from, were approached by Brethren **apologising** for the treatment they had received and exploring the possibility that they might return to fellowship.
52. As a result of the approaches they received following the Review, several former members have returned to fellowship, although others, indignant and bitter, have rejected the Brethren’s overtures, calling it harassment. In 2004 and 2005 it is claimed that a total of 14 members (0.17%) were excommunicated, while in the same period 20 were ‘restored’ (Bouma 2006). A report of a survey conducted by British Brethren shows that the number of those who had been withdrawn from between January 2001 and July 2011 was 178 (roughly 1% of the Brethren in England). The number that had been ‘restored’ during the same period was 96.²⁹ A graph showed a dramatic peak in both ‘withdrawing’ and ‘restoring’ in 2005, and a significant rise in the percentage of Brethren being restored after being withdrawn from following this.
53. At a personal level, I have become aware of several unexpected changes in Brethren beliefs and practices since I first met them in 2005. For example, Brethren have told me that they have visited restaurants – though they explained that they were not eating *with* non-believers, merely sitting in the same environment. Some have, very recently, drunk coffee with me in my house – something they would not do when they first visited me. Another change that took me by surprise was that while in 2008 I was told that no Brethren would be prepared to talk at an Inform Seminar; in 2012 they told me they would be willing to do so.

²⁶ The Universal Business Team (UBT) <http://www.universalbusinessteam.com/about.php> has a presence throughout the world wherever Brethren are to be found. It also offers services concerned with electronic devices to a wide range of non-Brethren customers.

²⁷ A critical report on UBT, “The Exclusive Brethren and their computers”, can be seen on the Australian television programme *Today Tonight*, 24 Feb 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1bfx5POilY>

²⁸ Other religions have constructed special filters as well – see, for example, “With JNet, there is no need to compromise either your Jewish values or your productivity when using the Internet”. <http://www.thejnet.com/>

²⁹ Those who were restored had been withdrawn from for an average of seven months (ranging from one week to two years).

54. Even more unexpected was the fact that I had got to know someone who had left the Brethren over 50 years ago and had been unable to contact his family since then. I had met some of his Brethren family in a Brethren home and they had been adamant that they did not want to have anything to do with him, not least because he had publicly spoken out against them and written a critical article in a widely circulated publication. The Brethren were aware that I thought this was an unhappy and needless situation, and after some considerable discussion on the subject over roughly three years, it was agreed that they would meet in my house – which they did. The negotiations were quite challenging, but the meeting was friendly and a follow-up meeting was arranged without my presence. Of course, this was not the first time that estranged families had met and some former members are able to continue working in Brethren businesses. It was, however, an indication that there can be a very dramatic change in the attitude of Brethren to those whom they have unambiguously spurned in the past.
55. When unpopular religions engage in charitable activity or change their practices so that they are more in line with those accepted by mainstream society, it is frequently claimed that they are doing this only as a public relations exercise to get some benefit for themselves. This may be partly or even mostly true, but, in accord with what the psychologist Leon Festinger (1957) referred to as cognitive dissonance theory,³⁰ the change in behaviour can lead to the change being justified and subsequently reinforced by doctrine. The deed having been accepted, the belief follows: an appropriate verse may be found in Scripture; the Holy Spirit or the spiritual leader may reveal a new interpretation; the deliberations of believers may conclude that the change is the will of God.
56. I do not want to argue that the changes that the Brethren have undergone in recent times, or the meeting that I was able to facilitate, have been motivated solely for pragmatic reasons. That would be to reduce many complex processes to a ridiculously simplistic level. I do, however, think it worth recognising that, while what has happened in the past and its consequences cannot be ignored, it would be a mistake to dismiss as being of no consequence the very real changes that the Brethren have undergone, and to which they have committed themselves in their recent publications – whatever might be suspected to have been the motive behind their willingness to break down some of the barriers that have been erected by their doctrine of separation.

3. What is the impact of the doctrines and practices on the public?

57. It is possible to argue that the doctrines and practices of the Brethren have relatively little impact on the public. Unless they have had some personal connection with the movement, most people will know very little about its doctrines and practices and are unlikely to be aware of or directly affected by them one way or another.
58. One might also argue, however, that the public could be affected **indirectly** in so far as (although they do not vote) Brethren doctrines and practices have led to some

³⁰ Cognitive dissonance theory has been summarised thus: “When someone is forced to do (publicly) something they (privately) really don't want to do, dissonance is created between their cognition (I didn't want to do this) and their behavior (I did it). Forced compliance occurs when an individual performs an action that is inconsistent with his or her beliefs. The behavior can't be changed, since it is already in the past, so dissonance will need to be reduced by re-evaluating their attitude to what they have done.” (McLeod 2008)

lobbying; this has been more obviously the case in Australia and New Zealand than the UK. However, this is unlikely to have much more or less impact on the general public than the lobbying of another religious group in the UK. An example of the kind of issue about which the Brethren could lobby are moral issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage, a subject that causes Brethren considerable concern.³¹ Other, less moral but more political and/or legal examples might be over the criteria government departments use to allocate money to faith schools, and the outcome of this Tribunal concerning the legal understanding of public benefit.

a. Are the nature of the doctrines and practices such as to be of benefit to the public, and if so, what are those benefits? It would be helpful to focus on those benefits which are particular to religion and not other benefits which derive from charitable work generally.

59. I find it difficult to answer this question. As a sociologist I am not qualified to judge 'benefits that are particular to religion' as opposed to those 'which derive from charitable work generally'. There is a sense in which the benefits of the religion could be said to be little different from those bestowed by any other religion – the Brethren offer their members a world view and interpretation of the Scripture, and a community of like-minded believers with whom the members can practice their religion. I find it difficult to see how *any* religion is offering the public (non-members) benefits that are particular to a religion that they do not share.
60. Perhaps it could be argued, however, that it is likely that what charitable work they do is motivated by their religion. It might also be added that the Brethren's religion exhorts them to follow the law and to be good citizens, and that this is of benefit to the public. To take an example concerning a particular individual, I heard testimony of man who said he had been an alcoholic and stolen from his employer, then he worked for a Brethren business and started going to 'Preachings'. When he confessed to Brethren about his past, he was asked confess to his former employer, who forgave him and said he wouldn't go to the police, and eventually the Brethren were persuaded that he had genuinely changed his ways and accepted him into fellowship.
61. More generally, it could be claimed that the Brethren are respectable employers of several thousands of persons – both Brethren and non-Brethren – and, their businesses, which they claim have a turnover of up to £2 billion, make a considerable contribution to the economy (Plymouth Brethren 2012a). They pay taxes and do not claim benefits. I have been told that they spend an annual sum of £30 million out of their taxed income to run their schools. Furthermore, they can claim that they teach their children and other members to be good citizens, supporting the government, obeying the law of the land, and not indulging in anti-social (as opposed to non-social) behaviour.
62. There have, of course, been Brethren who have indulged in both criminal and anti-social behaviour, but it would be difficult to demonstrate that these acts were the direct result of the doctrines and practices of the movement itself, and I know of no statistics that would suggest the rate of such behaviour is greater than that to be found in the population as a whole. Indeed, it would seem that it is considerably lower

³¹ Sex outside marriage is seen as one of the most serious of sins – homosexuality in particular is seen as an abomination and Brethren disapprove strongly of public figures (politicians and clergy) supporting gay rights. They do not, however, become involved in anything like the demonstrations staged by the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas.

than it would be in several other sectors of society. The Brethren themselves have claimed that, during the period 2008-10, custodial sentences among the Brethren were non-existent, compared to a national average of 6.5 per thousand (Plymouth Brethren 2012a: 17).

b. How open in practice are the Exclusive Brethren to the public? In particular, having regard to the accessibility of their services and the extent to which its members engage and interact with the public.

63. **Secular and charitable services:** Most Brethren are engaged in small businesses and the services these offer are certainly open to the public. Although I have not personally witnessed such activities and do not know the extent to which they are carried out, I have been told by both members and former members that the Brethren also provide donations and public services through charitable work such as providing food for the needy and for emergency workers at times of disaster. According to the Brethren's *Public Benefit* booklet, these outside charities have ranged from £33,276.45 for Air Ambulances to £20 for the Severn Hospice (Plymouth Brethren 2012a: 30-31). Other charities among the 120 or so listed include some more hospices and hospitals, several medical research organisations, the RNIB, RSPCA and UNICEF. Roughly half received £1000 or over.
64. **Religious services:** I myself have attended services at two of their meeting halls, including a wedding. I have also spoken to an Australian sociologist who has attended services and been told by the Brethren that other members of the public have done so.
65. In an article in the *Telegraph* dated 14 September 1982, Bryan Wilson reported that Broxtowe Borough Council (in Nottinghamshire) sent two officials incognito to attend Brethren meetings and that they had been admitted. The reason was evidently that the Brethren had removed the boards that had once stood outside their meeting rooms. However, the article continued,
"..if members of the public turn up for a Brethren meeting – and this was the attested experience of the two local government officers of Broxtowe Borough Council – they are unquestioningly admitted to any service (except to the breaking of bread service at 6 a.m. on Sundays and to business meetings)."
66. It would, nonetheless, seem unlikely that members of the public would drift into a service, let alone pop into a meeting hall to sit and pray by themselves, although there are now notices outside their halls inviting 'all well-disposed persons' to attend.
67. There have been reports in the media of instances when non-members have been refused admission to meeting halls. INFORM received an anonymous call in July 2002 from someone complaining that the Brethren were using a public place of worship in Manchester which belonged to the Council. Evidently there was an announcement near the door stating that the place was open to all, but the public couldn't get in, and when our informer telephoned the number advertised near the door he was 'put through an aggressive interrogation'.
68. When asked about not being open to the public, Brethren have responded that they do not want people who merely want to cause trouble to disrupt their meetings. If someone approaches them in a friendly manner out of genuine interest (and is appropriately dressed) they may attend the meetings.

69. As with other religions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, non-members are not invited to participate in the breaking of the bread at the 'Lord's Supper' (the Brethren's name for Eucharist/communion), and I gather it is very rare, though not unknown, for non-members to attend the service. However, although I have been invited to attend, I am afraid that I have not as yet felt inclined to get myself up on a Sunday morning in time to attend the 6am service at their nearest place of worship.
70. Style of worship could be termed sober. The Brethren do not indulge in revivalist-type enthusiasms. They do, however, sing hymns. The meeting halls tend not to have windows that could result in participants in the service being distracted. There are no pictures, icons or other indications that it is a place of worship. The seats form a series of circles round the centre of the hall. The men sit in the seats nearest the centre, with women and children in the rows behind them. Visitors sit at the back (the Brethren who had invited me sat beside me so I was not alone). There were about 50 participants at the services I have attended, but more at the wedding. After the service, people moved into the large entrance hall and engaged in animated conversation before departing to their own or another family's home for a meal.
71. It is important to recognise that, unlike the situation in the majority of Christian churches where members of a congregation gather on Sundays for an hour or so, possibly have coffee and a biscuit together before departing and 'doing their own thing' for the rest of the week, the Brethren regularly go to each other's houses – a rota is worked out every week – and will meet up with other assemblies on a regular basis. Every day the members gather for different kinds of meetings, which include Bible study, worship and the discussion of community issues, including disciplinary matters and, I have been told, the distribution of money for helping members and outside charities – I do not know how much money is involved in these exercises.³²
72. In other words, the meetings are not just worship services but a way of socialising – an integral part of life. The members belong to a large family where everyone knows everyone else from birth. Strangers may attend a service, but they will not have the experience of the shared meals and the other meetings throughout the week. Brethren don't share knowledge of what is happening in *The Archers* or *Coronation Street*, and (most) Brethren won't know who is top of the Charts or what the Test-match score happens to be. Such things are part of a different world that require a different language. But they do have experience of the shared Brethren life.
73. Non-Brethren will not be part of that world and will not speak that language. They will be treated politely, but they will be different. This is not to say that non-members may not *become* members, but that by becoming members they will have to become part of far more than a casual Sunday congregation.³³
74. Like several other Christian religions, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Brethren do not celebrate Christmas.

³² One former member described a typical week as follows: Lord's Day: 6am Lord's Supper; lunch; 3pm Bible Reading at meeting Hall; high tea; 6-7 Preaching of the Gospel. Monday: evening Prayer Meeting, meeting in a small group – around 50. Tuesday: evening Meeting for Prophetic Ministry in bigger church. Wednesday: Bible Reading. Thursday: another meeting, but sometimes free. Friday: evening meeting. Saturday: Fellowship Meeting; travel; afternoon, led through the Scriptures.

³³ The sociologist can attend services, but will never be able to fade into the unnoticed background in the ways she can do when studying many other religions. It is doubtless for this reason that there has been so little in the way of in-depth research on the Brethren from a sociological perspective.

c. To what extent is the religious practice of the Brethren inwardly or outwardly focused?

75. Brethren are clearly **inwardly** focussed in that their primary identities are tied intimately to their nuclear and extended families (in so far as these consist of members of the community) and both to their local assemblies and to the fellowship as a whole. They are, nonetheless aware of what is going on in the outside world in so far as they work in businesses where there can be daily interaction with non-members, and they are aware of political and other happenings. In other words, their personal lives revolve round their church and fellow members, but are not confined to these.
76. As described above, the Brethren way of life involves a very full timetable, associating with other Brethren and leaving very little time for focussing on outside interests apart from work or school. And although Brethren children used to attend state schools, they were not meant to socialise, and certainly could not eat with non-Brethren students. Nowadays, most of them attend one of the network of special Brethren schools throughout the country. This development to some extent coincides with the perceived (and, no doubt, actual) growth of permissiveness in the state schools, with an escalating access to drugs, increasing frequency of under-age sex, and blasphemous language, as well as explicit teaching about sex and the use of books with what are considered unsuitable content. Although the teachers in Brethren schools are trained non-Brethren, the Brethren children rarely have an opportunity to mix with other children and may be bussed to and from the school and their home.³⁴
77. Brethren families are located in clusters in particular areas around the country. The houses are rarely in the same street as another family, but it would be unusual for a Brethren household not to be within easy walking distance of several other Brethren houses.³⁵
78. Children live with their parents until they get married (usually in their early or mid-twenties), when they are likely to move to a home nearby. Brethren very rarely live alone. As they grow old, they are likely to move somewhere near their children or close relatives, sometimes living in 'Granny homes' built by their children as extensions or in the garden of their own houses. For Brethren who have no immediate family, the local congregation will arrange a rota to provide the elderly with meals and to take them to and from worship services. Even former members may sometimes be materially looked after by members from whom they are 'cut-off' and with whom they cannot eat (Barker 2013).
79. Although Brethren do not normally socialise with non-Brethren, they certainly can go into non-Brethren houses and are willing to help their neighbours on occasion. One of my Brethren hosts told me how he had helped his neighbour to unplug a drain that morning, and on being asked, Brethren have been able to give me further examples

³⁴ When visiting Sefton Park school, I was told that Brethren schools are open to non-members taking exams there, but that there would be problems about having non-members as students.

³⁵ By examining a Brethren map of the Harrow area (printed in November 2007), I found that there were 55 Brethren households, only ten of which did not have another household under the same name in the area; half of these ten were in the name of a woman (presumably a widow), whereas nearly all the other households were in the name of a man. However, two of these female households lived at the same address and another one of them lived in an annex to one of the other addresses, possibly that of her son.

of how they had entered neighbours' houses or neighbours had entered theirs for some practical purpose. In other words, Brethren will occasionally speak to and assist non-Brethren neighbours, but this is not a very common practice.

80. More general examples of how Brethren religious practice could be seen as **outwardly** focussed is Brethren practice in time of **war**. While Brethren have said that they are not pacifists, many of them have served as members of the non-combatant corps. In their booklet *Experiences of War*, they stress that they recognise that the authority of a Government is God given, that a Government may have to go to war, and that even when Brethren members "took conscientious ground" during World Wars I and II, they still supported the Government in every way possible – short of taking life (Plymouth Brethren 2012b: 3). In her study of Tasmanian Brethren's responses to World War I, Elisabeth Wilson (2009: 115) calculated that:
- "[A]s many as half of Brethren men involved in the war joined as noncombatants. Those who abstained [from active involvement] did so from separatist reasons, combined with a conscience about taking life. Over 40% of those who enlisted balanced these concerns with obedience to the government by opting for non-combatant service, and the rest responded to patriotic or community pressure to obey the powers that be. There was some correlation between the 'openness' of a fellowship and the likelihood of undertaking combatant service, but this was by no means a firm distinction."*

4. Do the doctrines and practices, in particular the practice of shutting up and withdrawal and other particular practices, have any detrimental or harmful impact particularly on family life, and if so, what are those detrimental or harmful effects?

81. There can be no doubt that there are those who have left the Brethren, either voluntarily or involuntarily, who have suffered severe emotional trauma through their not being able to retain any kind of contact with their family and friends within the religion. Letters have been returned or ignored, telephones have been cut off, streets have been crossed to avoid meetings, and doors have been unopened or shut in the faces of those trying to renew contact. Furthermore, it is clear that Brethren themselves have suffered from the breaks in family life, even though they are prepared to endure this for what they believe to be the will of God.
82. This can be difficult for non-members to understand when the Brethren lay such stress on the importance, even sacredness of family life. Like other religions such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons), the family is seen as the most basic unit of society; and as with the teaching of mainstream religions such as Catholicism, family life is of fundamental importance.
83. Yet, from a Brethren perspective, it has been argued that it is *because* the family is so important that it must be protected from what is perceived to be evil.
84. And, indeed, according to a number of criteria, Brethren family life is preserved in a way that many might envy and that the Brethren themselves consider to be infinitely better – more godly, clean-living, healthy, moral, loving and caring – than families that are to be found in the rest of contemporary society.
85. On the other hand, there are those who have found life in the Brethren unbearable and have left, despite the hardships that might face them. Feminists have found the conservative family values that place the role of the woman firmly as wife and mother in the home, with little opportunity for contributing to the decision making of the

assembly, frustrating in contemporary society. Children have felt restricted. There have been a number of tragic suicides associated with the movement,³⁶ though I do not know how the suicide rate compares with that in the general population.

86. There have been reports of child abuse of various kinds. Not surprisingly for a strongly Biblically-based community with strict moral beliefs, children will be disciplined. Although thrashing Brethren children has occurred in the past (Hazell 1990), as indeed was not uncommon in non-Brethren schools and families throughout Britain, I do not know if it continues today. More seriously, there have been reports, mainly in Australia and New Zealand, of children being sexually molested by individual Brethren. Such practices certainly do not form any part of Brethren teachings, which are unequivocally against such behaviour. It has, however, been claimed that in the past Brethren have tried to cover up sexual child abuse, not reporting it to the appropriate authorities in Australia, although obliged to do so by law (Bachelard 2008: 78, 145, 151ff). Since then, however, the Brethren say that they have adopted a firm policy to deal with such behaviour in accordance with the law (ibid.: 79). Unfortunately, sexual child abuse would seem to have occurred in almost all religions, with extensive publicity having been given recently to the widespread practice of the Roman Catholic Church in covering up child abuse by its clergy.
87. As mentioned earlier, the Brethren are strongly against homosexuality. A well-publicised case in Australia involved a Brethren doctor, Dr Mark Craddock, who was convicted of prescribing Cyprostat (an anti-androgen drug that blocks the actions of male sex hormones and has been known to have undesirable side-effects) to a teenager who had confessed to being homosexual and was at the time in the Brethren but was later excommunicated (Professional Standards Committee 2012).

5. "the teachings of Christ and His Apostles contained in the Holy Scriptures as expounded by His servants, the ministers of the Lord in the Recovery" (taken from the trust deed of the Preston Down Trust). In particular how and the manner in which these are expounded, and the extent to which changes in the ministers of the Lord of Recovery may lead to a change in the teachings and practices.

88. There has already been some discussion of how Brethren doctrine and practices have changed and some of the theological justifications for these changes. What is sometimes more difficult to establish are the processes by which these come about through human agency. In the words of Bryan Wilson (2000: 6-7):
- "Leadership among the Brethren is entirely informal, in the sense that there are no specified offices or roles. 'Leading Brethren' emerge in local assemblies, and for the world-wide fellowship there is, at any one time, one recognized, especially beloved Brother whose word is deemed to embody the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and who, in periodic expositions of scripture – 'ministry' – reveals measures appropriate to the maintenance of the standards of sanctification and purity embodied in the Brethren tradition."*
89. In the words of Brethren informants:
- a. *"There is no authoritative answer to how decisions are made as we don't have a book of rules. We use scriptural authority and if we can find no clear scriptural injunction we rely on the Holy Spirit and mutual consultation. Also*

³⁶ Adams (1972: 78-80) documents some of these; see also Bachelard (2008: 145) and other instances that have been reported on <http://www.peebs.net>.

although the Bible is the unalterable word of God, we need to interpret the detailed meaning of the Bible and how to respond to changing circumstance – such as the introduction of the Internet.” (personal communication 2008)

- b. “The Brethren do not go by rules. We follow scriptural principles and seek to judge righteous and fair judgement according to those principles and the facts of every matter. Pastors in each locality can draw upon the wisdom of spiritual leaders outside the locality. In serious cases the matter can be placed before the assembly (local) for guidance and judgement.” (Barter et al 2008)*

- 90. As mentioned earlier, the Brethren have a large collection of volumes of the thoughts or teachings of their leaders, referred to as the ‘ministry’.³⁷ For the Brethren, these represent the accumulated wisdom or understanding of God’s will and their constantly growing wisdom is regularly referred to.
- 91. There are, thus, a number of resources drawn upon for decision making within the Brethren. These can be in tension with each other and, at the same time, the interplay between them can lead to change. The resources are (a) Holy Scripture, (b) the Holy Spirit, (c) the Man of God/leader, (d) the elder Brethren of the local assemblies, and (e) the network of ‘responsible elders worldwide’ (see below).
- 92. One way of trying to understand the ways in which decisions are reached is to consider the disciplinary procedure within the movement. The Brethren have produced a short leaflet entitled *Pastoral and Disciplinary Principles and Practice* (June 2010) that lays out Scriptural justification for their practice of separation, and guidelines for the processes that are involved. Stress is laid on the importance of counselling, establishing the correct facts and observing the rights of the individual. It also becomes clear that the Brethren have a strong desire to have consistency throughout the movement at an international level. It is, perhaps, worth quoting from this document at some length as it illuminates the Brethren’s approach to decision making:
 - a. There is a constant, on-going process of discussion and interaction amongst responsible Brethren elders worldwide to seek this consistency in the policies followed in each particular congregation with respect to cases of suspension and excommunication, which are rare.*
 - b. Records are published (and received by every Brethren household in every congregation worldwide) of Bible readings and discussions which are currently held and which include a review of assembly administration procedures (including disciplinary matters) and a re-statement of principles.*
 - c. In addition to their own pastoral experience and knowledge of the Scriptures, elders and overseers are to have recourse to volumes of publications of earlier Bible readings, discussion and guidance promulgated by past spiritual leaders to guide them in their deliberations. These publications are based on the Scriptures and contain much by way of detailed directions and advice. They also help in the achieving of consistency.*

³⁷ I understand that although the earlier volumes are publicly available, the later ones are not, due to parts of them having been taken out of context and misinterpreted by non-Brethren.

- d. *A decision to excommunicate is only taken by the whole local congregation duly convened. A decision to suspend fellowship privileges may be taken by two or three elders but requires ratification by the local congregation.*
- e. *Any disciplinary decision is open to inspection and review by the worldwide fellowship (particularly by nearby assemblies), effectively providing a right of appeal. Any one (including the person under review) is entitled to raise a question as to any disciplinary action that causes serious concern as to its rightness, even if the action has taken place in another congregation than their own local congregation. Any such action thus called in question will be fairly investigated.*
- f. *When church action is taken after extensive consideration, due provision must be made for the welfare of the church member who is under review. This should cover emotional, health, family and financial needs.*
- g. *It is to be borne in mind that each disciplinary action has in view that the person disciplined repents, settles the outstanding issues and fully and freely resumes fellowship privileges. (Brethren 2010: 2)*

- 93. In practice, disciplining can involve a number of stages. Initially the offending member is admonished privately by two 'leading brothers' in the local assembly. If the misdemeanour or sin continues and/or is considered infectious, the matter can become known to the rest of the assembly and the member may be 'shut up' – that is, no one in the assembly will socialise with him/her until the matter is resolved to the satisfaction of the elders.
- 94. Usually this is done on a purely local level, but it is possible that other assemblies may become informed and may disagree with the way the local assembly has dealt with the matter. In this case, they are likely to justify their reservations by referring to Scripture or to past 'ministry', which can serve as a kind of precedent. Today, the use of electronic media can mean that there is likely to be more consensus, with fewer local assemblies straying from a general unanimity, and a greater possibility for the Man of God (currently Bruce Hales in Australia) to be involved in important decision making.
- 95. If miscreants show no sign of mending their ways, then they can be 'put out' or excommunicated from the movement. Nowadays it is sometimes possible for them to continue working in a Brethren business, but they will not be able to interact at a social level with any Brethren, including close family members, who may risk being themselves disciplined if they ignore this ruling.
- 96. As already explained, being withdrawn from is not necessarily for ever. If the person can convince the elders that s/he has truly repented and will no longer sin, then s/he may be reinstated or 'restored' to fellowship. It is now also possible, as was evidenced in the case I described above, for contact between members of a family who had been bitterly opposed to one another to be able to renew contact, even when the non-Brethren remained strongly opposed to the movement as a whole.
- 97. While it was made clear to me that the final decision rested with the immediate family, it was also clear when I had first met them, some two and a half years earlier, that they were adamant that such a meeting was not possible. I raised the issue on several occasions with a number of elders (both in the UK and elsewhere) who would

usually listen politely and then say that they would consider the matter before getting back to me. Gradually over the months, it seemed to become more of a possibility that a meeting might be arranged. The possibility was clearly being discussed with others, presumably at various different 'levels', ranging from the members of the immediate family, the local 'leading brethren', 'responsible Brethren elders worldwide', and possibly even with the Man of God himself. I was, however, never privy to exactly who was involved in the decision making or how much weight the different actors wielded.

Any other issue which you feel is relevant to this matter.

98. Despite the fact that the Brethren strive to get agreement, harmony and consistency within the movement, and despite the fact that they are remarkably successful in achieving this goal, it would be a mistake to assume that Brethren are all **brainwashed** robots, as is sometimes suggested. I have found them to be intelligent individuals who have come to accept a particular version of Christianity and an associated worldview that most of us do not share. Furthermore, by no means all of those who are born into or convert to the Brethren *do* agree with all its official doctrines and/or practices.
99. Apart from the many schisms and defections throughout its history, one can still find mini-rebellions throughout the present-day Brethren. Among the many examples that I have come across: Brother A. wears a body warmer rather than the cardigan as a statement of his 'independence'; B. used to buy newspapers on his way back from school, stuff these down his jumper and smuggle them up to his room to read at night; C. bought forbidden CD players, replacing them and the disks he got from non-Brethren school friends each time they were discovered and confiscated; D.'s skirts were several inches above the regulation length; E. chatted to her friends on Facebook; F. and some of his mutinous Brethren friends would regularly smoke and get drunk while still under age;³⁸ G. had a secret girlfriend whom he used to visit and with whom he had a sexual relationship; F. defied Brethren convention and openly declared himself to be homosexual. Perhaps not surprisingly, several, though not all of these rebels have left the Brethren, either because they were eventually withdrawn from or because they themselves made the decision to leave. In other words, although they are undoubtedly under pressure to conform to the doctrines and restrictive practices of their religion, Brethren can and do exhibit that they have minds of their own.

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed

Dated

³⁸ The Brethren have no prohibition on drinking alcohol in moderation, and I have noticed well-stocked drinks cupboards in Brethren homes.

Annex 1 - **Qualifications and experience:**

1. I became a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, LSE immediately after completing my BSc (Hons First class) in 1970, and remained on the faculty there, being appointed Professor of Sociology with Special Reference to the Study of Religion in 1992. My PhD, was published as the award-winning *The Making of a Moonie: Brainwashing or Choice?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). The University of Copenhagen presented me with an honorary doctorate in 2000. In 1998 I was elected to Fellowship of the British Academy, and in 2000 I received an OBE in the New Year's Honours list for 'services to INFORM' (see below). That same year I was the recipient of the American Academy of Religion's Martin Marty Award for Service in the Public Understanding of Religion. I have been elected to numerous offices in professional organisations and am the only non-American to have been elected President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Since retiring in 2003, I have been a Professor Emeritus. I was elected to an Honorary Fellowship of the London School of Economics in 2011.

2. Since the early 1970s my research has been almost entirely concerned with the sociological aspects of religion, specialising in minority religions and spiritual communities and the reactions to which these give rise in the wider society. The groups with which I am most familiar are among those that became visible in the second half of the twentieth century. I have, however, some acquaintance with the nineteenth-century sects such as the Brethren (the term 'sect' is used in the sociological sense without the pejorative implications associated with it in common parlance).

3. I have over 350 publications (translated into 27 different languages), which include 11 sole-authored and edited books on various aspects of minority religions. I travel frequently and widely around the world, having given lectures in over 50 countries and conducting research on all five continents.

4. In 1988 I founded INFORM (www.inform.ac, Information Network Focus on Religious Movements), an educational charity funded by the British government and mainstream Churches that has the objective of helping enquirers through providing reliable information about minority religions. As well as being the Chair of Inform's Board of Governors, I am its Honorary Director and am responsible for ensuring that the information it disseminates is as objective, balanced and up-to-date as possible. I am a frequent advisor to governments, other official bodies and law-enforcement agencies around the world.

5. Inform's database contains information on over 4,000 different religious organisations. We have also files on numerous issues and topics concerned with religions (such as the law, children, violence, sexual activities, suicide, terrorism, diet, etc.). All seven staff working in the INFORM office have at least a Masters degree in the sociology of religion, and two of them have PhDs in the subject. As well as collecting and assessing information (and responding to enquiries), we produce literature – my *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (HMSO 1989) has been reprinted in several languages – and organise Seminars on particular subjects every six months. We have also organised international conferences at the LSE with over 300 religion specialists from nearly 40 countries.

Sources of knowledge concerning the Exclusive Brethren

6. Although I have a wide knowledge of the subject of minority religions and could be considered a specialist in several of them, especially those that have emerged since the Second World War, I do not consider myself a specialist on the subject of the Exclusive Brethren. But unfortunately, apart from the late Bryan Wilson, I know of no specialist who has studied the sect from a sociological perspective (although there are some theologians and historians of religion who have studied the doctrines and history of the wide variety of types of Brethren; and there are journalists and former members who have written about the movement, mainly from a critical perspective).

7. I did, however, have the privilege of knowing Dr Wilson well, and over the thirty or so years that we were colleagues I had a number of discussions with him about the Brethren and I am familiar with his writings (he appointed me to be his literary executor). I have also talked about the Brethren with scholars such as Professor Gary Bouma, Dr Massimo Introvigne, Dr Steven Mutch, Dr Bernard Docherty and the Reverend Dr Roy Long (a retired Inspector of Schools, familiar with Exclusive Brethren schools).

8. Apart from such scholarly exchanges, I have had lengthy discussions with several current and former Brethren (one of the first being an early governor INFORM, the Venerable Frederick Hazell, then Archdeacon of Croydon), and attended conferences when former members have discussed the movement.

9. Since 2005, I have been received as a guest in several Brethren homes, and a dozen or so members of the Brethren have visited me in my own home. On such occasions we have discussed their beliefs and practices (including the doctrine of separation), and their relationships with the wider society.

10. In March 2008 I was invited to attend a Sunday afternoon 'Preaching' at the Harrow Meeting Room, at the end of which I talked to several of those present, including a number of children who were politely curious about my short hair. I was then asked to join some of the families for a social evening in a nearby home. Here, after some animated talk with several generations of Brethren I was given a meal in a separate room before re-joining them for further discussion. Two of the young men played the piano while we chatted and I was shown photographs of my hosts' extended family and their recent visit to Australia.

11. In May 2008, I attended the wedding of a Brethren couple. Again, I was invited to a Brethren home after the service.

12. On perhaps a dozen occasions, members of the Brethren have visited me in my home when we have discussed various aspects about the religion, its beliefs and its practices.

13. I have twice visited Sefton Park School at Stoke Poges (in March 2006 and December 2008), sitting in on classes and talking to both staff and students.

14. I have also met Brethren at the INFORM office and when they have attended both an INFORM conference and a number of Seminars. Further exchanges have taken place by email and by telephone with both members and non-members.

15. In 2008, I gave a testimony for the court as an expert witness in a child custody case when both parents were Brethren.

Annex 2 - Bibliography

- Adams, Norman. 1972. *Goodbye, Beloved Brethren*. Aberdeen: Impulse Books.
- Bachelard, Michael. 2008. *Behind the Exclusive Brethren*. Melbourne: Scribe Publications.
- Barker, Eileen. 2013. "Ageing in New Religions: The Varieties of Later Experience." Pp. 227-260 in *Altern in den Religionen*, edited by Karl Baier and Franz Winter. Also available on *Diskus: The Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions* 12.
<http://www.basr.ac.uk/diskus/diskus12/index.html>
- Barker, Eileen. 2001. "A Comparative Exploration of Dress and the Presentation of Self as Implicit Religion." Pp. 51-67 in *Dressed to Impress: Looking the Part*, edited by William J. F. Keenan. Oxford: Berg.
- Barter, Tim, Graham Reiner, and Laurie Buckley. 2008. "The Brethren's Position as to Family Separation: Note for the Information of Professor Eileen Barker, 24 April 2008."
- Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. 2010. *Theocratic Democracy: The Social Destruction of Religious and Secular Extremism*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bouma, Gary D. 2006. "The Brethren: An Investigation into Marriage and Family Relations Among the Exclusive Brethren in Australia" (unpublished MS)
- Brethren, Exclusive. 2010, June. *Pastoral and Disciplinary Principles and Practice*. Chessington: Exclusive Brethren.
- Burnham, J. D. 2004. *A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.
- Coates, Charles Andrew. n.d. *An Outline of Mark's Gospel and Other Ministry*. Lancing: Kingston Bible Trust.
- Embley, Peter L. 1967. "The Exclusive Development of the Plymouth Brethren." in *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements*, edited by Bryan R. Wilson. London: Heinemann.
- Festinger, Leon. 1957. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gabel, Pearl. 2012. "Heretic Hasidim." *Narratively*, December.
<http://narrative.ly/2012/12/heretic-hasidim>.
- Hazell, Frederick. 1990. "Authority and Dependence in the Exclusive Brethren" [Transcript of Talk given at Inform Seminar, LSE, November.]
- Introvigne, Massimo, and Domenico Masselli. 2008. *The Brethren: From Plymouth to the Present. A Protest Critique of Modernity*. Turin: CESNUR.
- Kelly, William (Ed.). n.d. *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*. Kingston-on-Thames.
- Larsen, Timothy. 1998. "'Living by Faith': A Short History of Brethren Practice." *BAHNR (Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Review)* 1:67-102.
- McLeod, S. A. 2008. "Cognitive Dissonance Theory."
<http://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html>.
- Newton, Jake. 2012. "Evidence regarding charitable activities of the Brethren: Luton 1957." Letter sent to Luton householders.

- Plymouth Brethren Christian Church. 2012a. *Public Benefit: A Submission to the Charity Commission*. Chessington, Surrey, UK: Plymouth Brethren Christian Church.
- Plymouth Brethren Christian Church. 2012b. *Experiences of War*
- Professional Standards Committee. 2012. *Inquiry constituted pursuant to parts of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (NSW) No 86a to hold an inquiry into a complaint in relation to Dr Mark Christopher James Craddock*. Date of Inquiry: Tuesday, 5 June 2012.
- Shuff, Roger N. 1997. "Open to Closed: The Growth of Exclusivism among Brethren in Britain 1848-1953." *BAHNR (Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Review)*: 10-23.
- Wilson, Bryan R. 1967. "The Exclusive Brethren: A Case Study in the Evolution of a Sectarian Ideology." Pages 287-342 in Bryan R. Wilson (ed.) *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements*, London: Heinemann.
- Wilson, Bryan R. 1970. *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.
- Wilson, Bryan R. 2000 (2nd revised edition.) *"The Brethren": A Current Sociological Appraisal*. Oxford: Oxonian Rewley Press.
- Wilson, Elisabeth. 2009. "'The irregularity of killing people': Tasmanian Brethren responses to World War I." *Brethren Historical Review* 5:106-18.

Numerous newspaper articles, many of which are available 'on line' have also been consulted, various websites have been visited, and use has been made of the NFORM files, which have accumulated information from a variety of sources on the Exclusive Brethren, about which Inform receives an average of three enquiries each year, although there have been considerably more in the past two years, due largely to Charity Commission's decision not to grant charitable status to the Preston Down Trust and the ensuing the media interest.

**IN THE FIRST-TIER TRIBUNAL (CHARITY)
GENERAL REGULATORY CHAMBER**

Appeal No.: CA/2012/0003

BETWEEN:

(1) MICHAEL SIMON BELSEY
(2) LAURENCE EDWARD BUCKLEY
(3) MICHAEL GEORGE SCOTT
(4) ANTHONY DAVID WALLIS
(5) JOHN DUDLEY WALLIS
First Appellants

(6) LEE ARMSTRONG
(7) NEIL CHRISTIE
(8) JONATHAN NIGEL EDWARDS
(9) ROY HARDING
(10) JAMES BRIAN SOULSBY
Second Appellants
and

**THE CHARITY COMMISSION FOR
ENGLAND AND WALES**

Respondent

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF EILEEN
BARKER**

Charity Commission
PO Box 1227
Liverpool L69 3UG
0845 300 0218