

📣 Free 3-month trial for new multiple copy subscribers! Click to [Sign up today](#) for a risk-free trial to share the ET newspaper with your friends. 📺 Free online Premium membership included! ✕

Belief and morals among the Taylorites



Peter Caws

01 September, 2000 • 6 min read

If the Taylorite Exclusive Brethren (‘the Exclusives’) were just a harmless Evangelical sect, seeking to be faithful to the gospel, they would deserve our respect and might be left to work out their own salvation. But this description will not fit.

Subscribe

First, they have no consistent evangelical mission but are resolutely private, admitting no outsiders to any service, even though they benefit from laws governing places of public worship. Second, their gospel is not simply the Christian gospel but is weighed down by the edicts of a series of absolute leaders. These edicts are often erratic or based on arbitrary interpretations of Scripture.

Third, they have done irreparable harm to many people, by breaking up families, and preventing their children from acquiring education, developing talents, or thinking for themselves.

It is for the sake of the ‘captive generations’, deprived of their freedom of choice and action by the Exclusives, that I am moved to write about them. I do so humbly, but under the compulsion of what they would call ‘an exercise’.

Self-justification?

I am myself a former Exclusive. The sociologist Bryan Wilson argues that the testimony of those who leave such groups is suspect. ‘The disaffected and the apostate’, he says, ‘are ... informants whose evidence has to be used with circumspection. The apostate is generally in need of self-justification ... Not uncommonly [he] learns to rehearse an “atrocious story” to explain how ... he was induced to join or to remain within an organisation that he now forswears and condemns’.

Even if some people meet this description, such a rhetorical generalisation is irresponsible for a scholar of Wilson’s standing. If things were ‘generally’ as he says, no regime (for example Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia) could be effectively criticised by those who left it.

I am not interested in self-justification but, to meet Wilson’s condition of circumspection, I will have to say more about my relations to the sect. I have no ‘atrocious story’ of my own to tell, and leave it to the reader to decide if some of the facts I adduce amount to atrocities.

What follows will sometimes be quite personal, but that is appropriate. At issue is not an abstract body of doctrine but a group of individuals whose beliefs and behaviour affect the lives and welfare of others. It is a moral issue.

Trending



Why are evangelicals listening to Douglas Wilson?



US: New York photographer wins religious freedom case



Landmark case will challenge Civil Service gay pride support

Control

The Exclusives deny that they are a sect, claim universal status for their leaders, and assert that their young people remain with them freely. Their actual practices belie this last assertion.

These include the practice of ‘shutting up’ (a form of house arrest); the minute control of everyday behaviour (such as restrictions on travel and the prohibition of domestic pets); the dependence of sect members on one another for employment and financial security; the prohibition of contact with those who have left; and the insistence that marriage, child-rearing, and (where possible) education should be within the sect.

While it was hard to leave before 1960 it is nearly impossible now. I myself left in 1953-4. I had been to University — something now forbidden to the children of the Exclusives, an outrageous restriction on freedom of intellectual development — and had learned standards of evidence and argument.

I became convinced that the beliefs of the Exclusives could be maintained only by wilful ignorance, and they ceased to have any authority for me long before I escaped. Even then, the move was fraught with tension, any suggestion of independent thought or action being greeted with sorrowful reproach.

Escape to USA

I managed it by leaving England for the United States. It was possible at that time to maintain warm, if strained, relations with my family, and even to stay at home when I visited England, but all this was soon to change.

I got wind of the change in the early sixties, when an aunt in Jamaica wrote to me in great distress about a letter she had received from my father. He had been in the habit of writing to her every year for her birthday, but now said that he would no longer be able to do so, because she was not walking in the truth and he was obliged to keep himself from further association with her.

She was a lonely spinster who cherished these rare contacts with England, and his rebuff hurt her deeply. Her letter, the last she wrote to me before her death, was full of bewilderment about it: what sort of Christianity was that?

What sort indeed? Who could imagine a Lord who would take pleasure in such petty cruelty? I remember being struck by the selfishness of my father's act. In order to satisfy his own righteousness he was willing to wound a defenceless relative.

Lacking courage

This has been a pattern among the Exclusives. He would not himself have thought of cutting off my aunt, but like so many other Exclusives he lacked the courage to stand against the then current ministry of James Taylor Jr.

In 1962, on my last visit to their house, my parents told me (their hands resting on books of ministry, a talisman against my own 'uncleanness') that I would no longer be welcome there. They maintained this position for the rest of their lives.

I never saw my mother again. When she died in 1980, nobody told me for weeks. I was allowed to see my father, twice, towards the end of his life, although never alone. These were distressingly brief meetings, like supervised visits to a relative in prison.

And I was later told that, in reporting the visits to the local 'care meeting', it was insisted, pathetically, that I had not been made welcome. It was important not to be seen by the other brethren as yielding in the matter of family affection.

Doctrine of separation

There are many stories of Exclusives who would have been happy to have contact with lapsed family members but lived in fear that, if they did so, they would be found out. This is no doubt still the case.

As the doctrine of separation hardened, other effects were felt. One of my uncles saw through the corruption of James Taylor Jr earlier than many of his contemporaries and (being more independent and more courageous than my father) left in the middle 1960s.

In 1970 his wife, my aunt, contracted leukaemia, and since she had a twin sister her doctors suggested a bone-marrow transplant, which might have given her a few more years of life.

But the twin was still in fellowship, and the brethren in her local meeting denied this appeal, because my aunt had been 'withdrawn from'. Within two weeks of their refusal she died.

My uncle wrote to me with justified anger, stressing that the local judgement had been communicated, as the brethren put it, 'in all tenderness'. In all tenderness they let her die, to safeguard their own purity. He thought it amounted to murder.

Doctrinal claims

Many more examples could be cited (there is a 'cloud of witnesses') of the extraordinary insensitivity to normal human decency and morality manifested by the Exclusives in defence of their doctrines.

I turn now to the provenance of these doctrines. The Exclusives claim to rest their beliefs on Scripture, and in a perverse way this is true. There is always a verse to

justify whatever decision is being passed down, although the reading of the verse is often idiosyncratic, ignores the context, and overlooks other verses that might cast a different light on the matter.

Sometimes the interpretation contradicts an earlier reading ‘passed down’ by the leadership. At any moment there is an authoritative interpretation, sanctioned by the most recent utterances of the current Elect Vessel (their equivalent of the ‘chosen vessel’ in Acts 9:15).

The virtually papal status of the Elect Vessel, or Man of God, is at the heart of the problem. The Exclusives claim for him the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit and for themselves the mantle of the saving remnant.

Roots

The roots of this teaching go back to the character and genius of J. N. Darby, whose rejection of the authority of the Church of Ireland, in which he was ordained, led to the founding of the Brethren movement.

Darby’s dominant personality, and his translation of the Scriptures (the New Translation), that for the Exclusives has the status of original holy writ, seem to have put him beyond challenge.

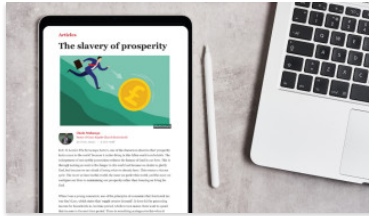
He was a man of great brilliance but also of great (though repressed) vanity. Consider the salutation in the first entry in his Letters: ‘Dearest Brethren and Sisters: Grace and peace be to you, and mercy from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’.

This is not the language of a 19th century Anglo-Irishman; it is apostolic language lifted from Corinthians or Ephesians. Darby was thirty-one when he wrote this epistle to the Brethren in Plymouth, and he was already casting himself in the role of the apostle Paul.

Related



Belief and morals among the Taylorites- A personal reflection (2)

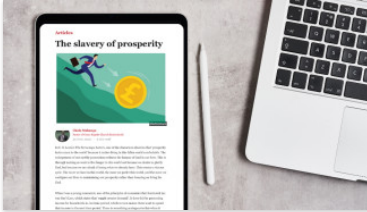


Explore ET with a Free 30-day Premium trial!



Taylorite Exclusive Brethren

Explore Evangelical Times



Explore ET with a Free 30-day Premium trial!



'The time is ripe for an awakening' – Gavin Peacock reflects on church revitalisation



The case for dogmatism

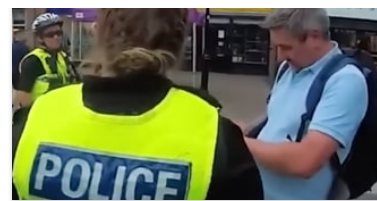
T Times



Stay in the loop subscribe to ET's weekly newsletter



Artificial intelligence: a Christian perspective



Charges are dropped against street preacher in who questioned the teaching of the Qur'an

Share:



Peter Caws

2

ARTICLES

[View All](#)

Articles

Cults and other religions

09 (September 2000)

2000

Brethren

Exclusive

Peter Caws

Taylorite Exclusive Brethren

Join the discussion

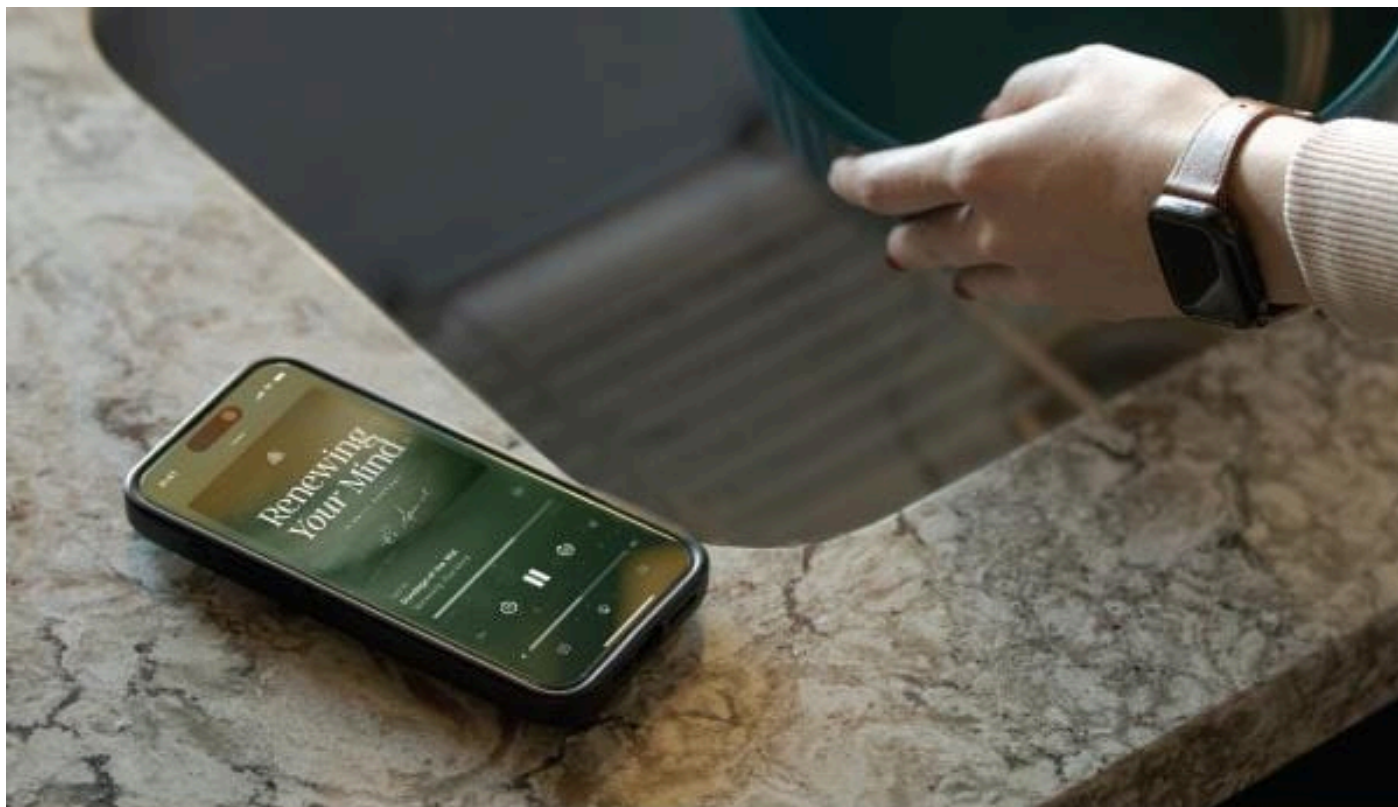
[Read community guidelines](#)



New: the ET podcast!

Watch now

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)



A Daily Podcast *from* Ligonier Ministries

[LISTEN TODAY >](#)





**EUROPEAN
MISSION
FELLOWSHIP**

Ukraine Lead

The role of the Ukraine Lead will be to maintain contact with our Ukrainian missionaries, and communicate their stories to our supporters. The goal is to help EMF continue to support and uphold the work of the gospel there, during this time of war.

The role is part-time (15 hours per week) and temporary (initially for 1 year, subject to review dependent on the need), working from home. Salary in the region of £27,000 pro rata.

For more details, see www.europeanmission.org

Or contact Alison Woodrow alison.woodrow@europeanmission.org

Application Deadline: 31 August 2025

EMF exists to support gospel proclamation across Europe – the world's least Christian continent. We do this by building partnerships with local workers, to plant, strengthen and equip local churches, for God's glory.



PASTOR

Valley Church Witham Essex (a member of the Union of Evangelical Churches) is seeking a full or part-time pastor

- **to preach the truth of the Bible and to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit**
- **to lead, teach, disciple and equip our small church family to use their God-given gifts in God's kingdom**
- **to share our vision to reach out into the local community and the organisations using the church premises with the good news of the love of Jesus**

For further information please contact our Elder
David Howson on: david.howson1@outlook.com
And visit: **www.valleychurch.co.uk**



**EUROPEAN
MISSION
FELLOWSHIP**

Communications Assistant

The role of the Communications Assistant is to work on the Mission's outbound messaging, such as newsletters, our magazine, and social media. They will have a heart for the work of the gospel in Europe and a passion for sharing our story with supporters.

The role is part-time (22.5 hours per week) and permanent, working from home. Salary in the region of £27,000 pro rata.

For more details, see www.europeanmission.org

Or contact Alison Woodrow alison.woodrow@europeanmission.org

Application Deadline: 31 August 2025

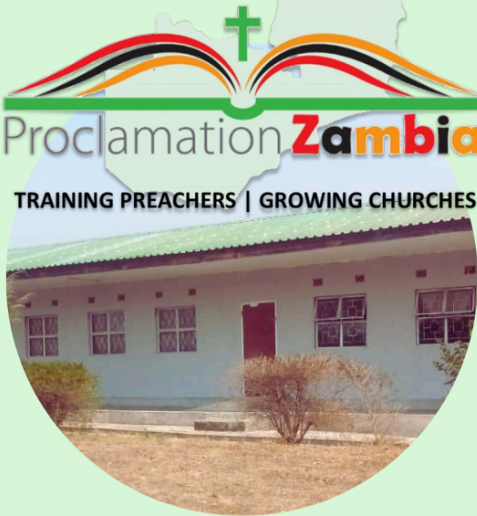
EMF exists to support gospel proclamation across Europe – the world's least Christian continent. We do this by building partnerships with local workers, to plant, strengthen and equip local churches, for God's glory.

Proclamation Institute Zambia

PIZ is a bible college in Kitwe, Zambia. It exists to train preachers and teachers to correctly handle the word of God.



Our mission is to encourage and teach Christian men and women to become more effective Bible teachers, pastors, evangelists and church planters within a Zambian and African context.



Will you partner with PIZ to reach out to the lost in Zambia through expository Bible training?

Tel: 07349 974494
Email: pdm@proclamationzambia.org
Website: www.proclamtionzambia.org



Proclamation Zambia is the UK fundraising arm of PIZ.

For more information, visit our website or call/email Ben, our Partnership Development Manager.



UK Registered Charity No. 1152619

CONTACT US

+44 (01325) 380232

[send email](#)

Evangelical Times
PO Box 104
Gunnislake
PL17 0BE

QUICK LINKS

[Holiday Churches](#)

[Add job listing](#)

[Add church listing](#)

[Submit article](#)

[About](#)

[Contact](#)

[Statement of faith](#)

[Mission statement](#)

[Advertising terms](#)

[Code of conduct](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

FOLLOW US



Sign up for ET newsletter

Subscribe

"Teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence."

© 2025 Evangelical Times.
