

= Behind the Exclusive Brethren =

Behind the Exclusive Brethren : Politics Persuasion and Persecution is a non @-@ fiction book by journalist and author Michael Bachelard about the group Exclusive Brethren , focusing on the sect in Australia . It was published in 2008 by Scribe Publications Pty Ltd . Bachelard first became interested in the organisation while a journalist for The Age , after finding out that prior to the 2007 Australian federal election the Exclusive Brethren organisation in Australia had close access to John Howard . He spent two years researching the group , focusing on its history , influence in Australia , and ties to the Liberal Party of Australia and to Howard . The book gives a historical background of the group 's origins 200 years ago in Ireland under John Nelson Darby . Since 2002 , Bruce Hales served as the international leader and " Elect Vessel " of the organisation , which has 15 @,@ 000 members in Australia and 43 @,@ 000 total globally . The author describes the beliefs and practices and doctrine of the organisation , including some of its more controversial methodology including excommunication of former members from their family still within the group . Daniel Hales , brother of the organisation 's worldwide leader Bruce Hales , described the book as part of a trend of what he said were lies told about his group by critics and disaffected former members .

The book was a best @-@ seller in Australia , and in November 2008 it hit number 8 on a list of top ten best @-@ selling books in the country in political and social science books according to data from Nielsen BookScan . The book received positive reception in books reviews and media coverage . The Sunday Age called it a " sober " and " well @-@ argued " expose . The Sydney Morning Herald , called the book an " exhaustive study of the Exclusive Brethren in Australia " . GayNZ.com characterised Behind the Exclusive Brethren as a " comprehensive reference work on the sect " . Media / Culture Reviews noted , " The expose is written in a calm , clear style and the chapters relating to the broken families are deeply moving and respectful . "

= = Author = =

At the time of the book 's publication , Bachelard was a journalist for The Age newspaper . He began investigating the organisation in his capacity as a newspaper journalist . Bachelard 's first book The Great Land Grab discussed the Wik and Mabo cases , and was first published in 1997 . Bachelard became an investigative journalist with The Age in 2006 , and wrote about conditions in the workplace . In April 2008 , he became a senior reporter for The Sunday Age . Bachelard received Melbourne Press Club Quill Award for Best News Report in 2008 , for his reporting on WorkChoices . After discovering that prior to the 2007 election the Exclusive Brethren organisation in Australia had close access to John Howard , Bachelard became interested in writing a book about the group . He researched the organisation 's history , and focused on the version of the group in Australia ; analysing its ties to the Liberal Party of Australia and to Howard . He spent over two years researching the organisation .

= = Contents = =

Bachelard discusses the Australian branch of the Exclusive Brethren that was formed approximately 200 years ago by John Nelson Darby of Ireland . The introduction emphasises the point that intense investigation should not be seen as vilification of the organisation . He writes that since the organisation 's beginnings in Ireland in 1827 , it has maintained that the world external to the group is evil , and has kept a " doctrine of separation " from non @-@ members . Since 2002 , Bruce Hales served as the international leader and " Elect Vessel " of the organisation , which has 15 @,@ 000 members in Australia and 43 @,@ 000 total globally . The author describes the beliefs and practices and doctrine of the organisation , including its approaches to business and finance , as well as its methodology with respect to charity , Sunday services , and preparing the dead for burial . Bachelard asserts that the group had " elements of cultishness " , but had recently reduced its standards of stringency .

According to the book , wives are deemed second @-@ class citizens within the organisation , and

cannot hold positions higher than administrative jobs at companies owned by the group . The book describes the story of the treatment of Alison Alderton , an 85 @-@ year @-@ old woman who was excommunicated from the organisation . For twenty years , Alderton did not see four of her six children after she had been excommunicated by the organisation . During the 1980s , Alderton and her husband Bob had served within the organisation as senior figures at the group 's location in Bathurst , New South Wales . The author quotes former Family Court chief justice Alastair Nicholson , who had said that methods used by the organisation to excommunicate family members were " abusive ... psychologically it 's very damaging to the child " .

The author publicises a letter in the book that was written by the organisation in 2004 to Brendan Nelson , the former minister for education in Australia . According to the letter , a survey of membership within the organisation found that individuals were in the " middle to upper levels of the socio @-@ economic group " , over the last few decades . Bachelard writes , " Any funding system which delivers poverty @-@ level funding to a group that boasts of its average wealth , needs to be reviewed . " Behind the Exclusive Brethren describes how the organisation paid a private detective in New Zealand to put forth information claiming that the husband of politician Helen Clark was homosexual . The book details methods of social control used by the organisation , including the usage of exclusion from the group as a threat used to police members .

The book reveals that members of the organisation had attempted to donate funds to the 2007 re @-@ election campaign of Prime Minister of Australia John Howard in a way in which information about the financing would not have been available to the general public . Individuals describing themselves as a " private group " had met with a senior figure within the Liberal Party of Australia in a hotel in Sydney , and offered him a significant amount of money by way of an anonymous donation . The book 's source recounted the events : " They said ' We are a private group ' . I asked them if they voted . It was a testing question . They said they didn 't . It was a very short discussion . " The organisation 's members are instructed that government is controlled by God , and they are told not to vote in elections . " We 're in the business of ideas and so are the Exclusive Brethren . I regard many of the party 's views and those of the Exclusive Brethren as inconsistent . What the [Liberal] Party stands for should not be confused in the mind of the electorate by the acceptance of donations from fringe groups . In my view , if you accept this money , you 're arguably accepting some of their opinions , " said the book 's source , explaining that he had turned down the offer of funds from the organisation .

= = Response by organisation = =

Daniel Hales , brother of the organisation 's worldwide leader Bruce Hales , described the book as part of a trend of what he said were lies told about his group by critics and disaffected former members . He said such criticism showed it is " open season to kill us " . " We 're happy to live our lives in anonymity , just quietly in our neighbourhoods in our low @-@ key way . We 're quite happy to have our beliefs questioned , ethically debated , and points of religion looked at . That 's not a problem . We don 't mind being criticised . We don 't even mind being despised because of it . But once it starts to be charged that we 're acting criminally , we 're acting illegally , we 're acting immorally , we 're acting against society , then we felt that we really had to put our point of view . We felt that it wasn 't fair to our members , " said Daniel Hales to The West Australian .

= = Reception = =

In November 2008 , the book hit number 8 on a list compiled by Nielsen BookScan of the top 10 political and social science best @-@ sellers in Australia . The author was a featured presenter on the topic of his book , at the 2009 Sydney Writers ' Festival .

The Daily Telegraph noted that the book investigates , " One of the world 's most mysterious religious sects , little is known of the origins , intentions and beliefs of the Brethren , seen as increasingly powerful in Australian politics . " Writing in The Sunday Age , Lucy Sussex described the book as " one of the most sober and well @-@ argued exposes I have ever read . " Shelley

McInnis reviewed the book for The Age , and commented , " Michael Bachelard is brave to investigate the Exclusive Brethren sect " . McInnis elaborated , " The Exclusive Brethren is a conservative Christian sect with a scrappy , pit @-@ bull attitude towards the outside world , and Michael Bachelard is courageous for investigating it . The award @-@ winning Sunday Age journalist has received a number of legal threats from the sect since he began reporting on it for The Age " . McInnis described the author 's work as that of " a scrupulous reporter " .

Bruce Elder reviewed the book for The Sydney Morning Herald , and described it as an " exhaustive study of the Exclusive Brethren in Australia " . Elder concluded , " This is a very fair assessment of the modus operandi of an influential Christian sect . " Craig Young reviewed the book for GayNZ.com , and called Behind the Exclusive Brethren a " comprehensive reference work on the sect " , and a " most incisive book " . In her review of the book for Media / Culture Reviews , Sandra Hogan wrote , " Bachelard has done his research very thoroughly . He has interviewed both sides of the story : people who left the Exclusive Brethren or were expelled from them and also , as much as possible , the current leaders of the group . He has witnessed Brethren documentation , and has spoken to politicians from major and minor parties as well as to lawyers and judges . The expose is written in a calm , clear style and the chapters relating to the broken families are deeply moving and respectful . "