

THE BRETHREN IN THE FAEROES: SOME CONTEXTS FOR GROWTH¹

Tórður Jóansson

Introduction

The present paper discusses the impact of the Brethren movement in a small, isolated community which was, in the early nineteenth century, a backward, autocratic, static and suppressed Danish colony just emerging from obscurity and into the modern age. The Faeroe Islands, in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, amid Scotland, Iceland and Norway, may be seen as a kind of laboratory where the socio-economic and cultural changes of modernity, such as the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, took place in a small nation which then consisted of less than a dozen thousand people but, on a smaller scale, experienced the same evangelical movements as, for instance, the British Isles.

First a short description of the Faeroes will be given, followed by an account of the historical and political background of that community with special emphasis on the socio-economic changes taking place in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the cultural challenges facing the small community will also be discussed. Next, the paper explains the state of religion in the islands, emphasising the conservative role of the Danish Lutheran State Church, and the need for change and the later introduction of the Danish Home Mission will also be described. The later sections of the paper concentrate on the work of the Scottish Brethren missionary William Gibson Sloan (1838-1914), the progress of the Brethren movement, its mission and, in particular, its consistent position on the Faeroese language question. Finally, the conclusion will discuss the impact of the

1. This paper is based on 'Causes and Developments of Revivalist Movements relating to the Brethren in the Faeroes', a dissertation submitted by the writer in partial fulfilment of the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, 2004.

Brethren in the Faeroese community and make a modest attempt at evaluating the revivalist movements, especially in the Faeroes, their relations to the Established Church and their role in community life and culture.

Historical and cultural background

The Faeroe Islands, the Faeroes or the Faroes (or just Faeroe or Faroe), are an archipelago consisting of twenty-two mountainous islands, of which seventeen are inhabited, flanked by Scotland, Iceland and Norway; the language is Faeroese, one of the five Nordic languages, close to Icelandic and Norwegian although not mutually comprehensible to speakers of those languages. Nowadays the main industry is fishing and fish processing, but previously sheep rearing was very important, and some small industries have also been introduced. Tórshavn is the capital and main port.

The earliest settlers came from Ireland and Scotland in the seventh century, but in the ninth century the islands were invaded by Norwegian Vikings as were other North Atlantic lands and islands. Since 1380 the Faeroes have been a Danish dependency, and since 1948 they have enjoyed a degree of autonomy with a parliament, the *løgting*, and a local government, the *landsstýri*.² According to *The Faeroe Saga*, a collection of passages from the Icelandic sagas dealing with the Faeroes, written two centuries after the events actually took place, Christianity was introduced around 1000.³ The islands became a tax-paying part of the Norwegian Kingdom in 1035 and became an independent bishopric around 1100, a situation which lasted until the Reformation in the middle of the sixteenth century.⁴ One historian describes the Faeroes during the period from the Reformation to the late nineteenth century as ‘a stable peasant society’,⁵ indicating the extremely slow and few changes in the social life of the islands. During the Middle Ages, trade had been

2. John F. West, *Faroe: the emergence of a nation* (London, 1972), pp.185-205.

3. Muriel A.C. Press (trans.), *The Saga of the Faroe Islanders*, (London [1934]).

4. Unfortunately no research has so far been conducted regarding the Reformation in the islands, and it may even be difficult to find appropriate source material.

5. West, *Faroe*, p.11.

insignificant, exports consisting mainly of knitted woollen goods, sheep skins, feathers from sea-birds, oil extracted from blubber and some dried fish, while commodities such as barley, salt, malt, oatmeal, beer and spirits were imported. The Trade Monopoly was granted to various foreigners or companies against an annual payment to the Danish Treasury; but in the period 1709 to 1856 the Royal Monopoly, conducted by the Danish government, was responsible for the regulation of trade.⁶ The interaction with foreigners was quite lively already before 1600.⁷ For instance the obvious loanwords, some of which are felt to be, and accepted as indigenous parts of the Faeroese language, indicate that there has been much more contact with the outside world than previously assumed.⁸

In 1767 a Danish merchant, Niels Ryberg, founded a kind of transit depot in Tórshavn which attracted businessmen from Britain.⁹ The depot station was supplied with goods mainly from the Danish West Indies in Ryberg's ships, but also American, British and Norwegian ones; then the goods were shipped to Scotland and Ireland, and often as many as twelve to fifteen vessels were loading and unloading in Tórshavn at the same time.¹⁰ However, this trade did not last long, for in 1784 the import duty on tea to Britain was considerably reduced, and after the American War of Independence ended in 1783, Britain could exercise diplomatic pressure on Denmark to stop the trade altogether. In 1788 Ryberg's transit depot closed for good.¹¹ Nevertheless, these twenty years were of great importance to the further development of the Faeroese community: not only did it open up towards the outside world, it probably also paved the way for the events of the nineteenth century. These years were probably the first time that foreigners in great numbers became a

6. *Ibid.*, p.34.

7. Louis Zachariasen, *Føroyar sum rættarsamfelag* (Tórshavn, 1961), p.144.

8. Tórður Jóansson, *English Loanwords in Faroese* (Fannir, 1997).

9. Aa. Rasch, *Niels Ryberg 1725-1804. Fra bondedreng til handelsfyrste* (Aarhus, 1964), pp.134f, 170-75.

10. Jens Christian Svabo, *Indberetninger fra en reise udi Færö 1781-72* (Copenhagen, 1959), pp.296-99.

11. West, *Faroe*, p. 47.

common sight in the narrow streets and lanes of Tórshavn; apart from the residential staff, most of them English speakers, there were crews of transatlantic merchant men and smugglers. As a result of this, English was widely understood and spoken in Tórshavn many years after the transit depot had closed. A Faeroese clergyman born and brought up in Tórshavn during this period, J.H. Schrøter (1771-1851), who will be discussed later, wrote that in his childhood the language spoken in the town was a mixture of Faeroese, Danish and English. However, around the turn of the century everything returned to the old ways—or so it seemed for some decades.

In the early nineteenth century Danish society was in difficulties, the country having taken what proved to be the wrong side during the Napoleonic Wars, resulting in the British bombardment of Copenhagen and the subsequent British blockade of Norway and Denmark; so voyages between Denmark and the North Atlantic provinces, the Faeroes, Iceland and Greenland, were almost impossible. Faeroe Islanders who had started as sailors during the period of the Transit Depot became mates and captains and imported much needed grain from Britain; others went abroad for studying and training, for example to study medicine, to be trained as artisans, businessmen and so forth. So the nineteenth century brought about momentous changes in the Faeroes, and hardly any aspect of life was unaffected by the developments that transformed the society from a backward agricultural community to an economy based on fishing and fish processing. The Trade Monopoly became increasingly unpopular, and incompetence in the way in which it was being run paved the way for its abolishment. Progressive islanders also fought against the corrupt autocratic Danish government in the islands.

In the peace treaty signed at Kiel on 14 January 1814 which ended the seven years long war between Denmark and Britain, Denmark lost Norway while the provinces in the North Atlantic remained Danish. In 1816 the Faeroese *løgting*, the local parliament, was dissolved by a Royal Resolution, its powers transferred to the Danish judge, and the Lawman, head of the parliament, was replaced by a Danish Governor who, together with other Danish officials stationed in the islands,

acquired absolute powers. This led to what an early Faroese historian described as:

A kind of patriarchal bureaucracy, leading to a belief in authority so strong that it obstructed any later development towards political freedom considerably.¹²

In Denmark, however, the impact of the July revolution of 1830 in France led to absolutism approaching its end, and a growing number, inspired by the attitudes created by the Enlightenment, demanded the people's participation in the government. Finally in 1850 the Faeroes came under the Danish Constitution of 5 June 1849 as a Danish county with one representative in the Upper House and one in the Lower House of the Danish Parliament. Eventually, after prolonged delays, the Faeroese *løgting* was re-established in 1852 although many did not regard the Faeroes mature or large enough to be represented in a Danish legislative assembly or to have an assembly of its own. And later, on 1 January 1856, the Trade Monopoly was closed down, with the approval of both the *løgting* and the two Houses in the Danish Parliament. Not until then did the time seem ripe for a more consistent economic, social and political development in the islands, and neither can we speak of a national or language movement until after this stage. In the last decades of the nineteenth century things started moving faster and in a more visible direction towards modernity than previously.

It was into the flux of the mid-nineteenth century that the first missionary from the Open Brethren, William Sloan, came from Shetland in 1865. Considerable changes had taken place almost immediately on the abolition of the Trade Monopoly: during the first three years of free trade more than 100 trade licences were granted, and the geographical distribution was almost evenly-spread throughout the various villages in the islands while in Tórshavn no fewer than twenty-one licences were granted over this short period.¹³ The main production, and thus the export, also clearly illustrates that the Faeroese community was changing radically: around 1800

12. Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen, *Danmark og Færøerne* (Copenhagen, 1927), p.12.

13. Johan K. Joensen *et al.*, *Føroyar undir fríum handli í 100 ár* (Tórshavn, 1955), pp.95-102.

agricultural products accounted for ninety per cent of the exported goods, while fish and fish products accounted for only ten per cent. Just before the introduction of free trade, in 1850, the value of agricultural products exported had dropped to sixty-one per cent, while fish products had increased to thirty-nine per cent of the total exports.¹⁴

Thus, by the turn of the century, the Faeroes had changed completely: agriculture was no longer the most important part of the economy; fishing and fish processing had taken over, and several other types of business flourished. The demography also changed: while formerly villages had been established in places where land could be cultivated, now the main criterion for establishing new settlements was a sheltered harbour where fishing vessels could be safe and where facilities for processing fish were at hand. Many villages declined, while other places attracted great numbers of people because workforces were demanded for the new seagoing fishing vessels, most of which were bought from Britain, and for inland labour in, for example, fish processing which was mainly performed by women, the maintenance of ships and gear or other kinds of commercial business.

The population as a whole also increased enormously: from 1801 to 1855 it increased from 5,200 to 8,651; in 1880 it was 11,220, in 1901 15,230, and in 1935 it had increased five-fold to 25,700. Statistics show that the increase was slow but almost the same in most villages up to 1840, but then, and until 1900, some villages grew at an extremely fast rate, while others declined. The workforce, until the end of the nineteenth century, had been concentrated around the farms; but when new opportunities were opened up, most farmhands of both sexes preferred the new way of life that a more profitable and modern production had to offer. This certainly also affected the attitudes towards authorities and, not least, the conservative and stagnant religious life, still based on the old order.

So when modern times gradually came to one of the most remote communities of Europe, the challenges must have been

14. Petur Martin Rasmussen, *Den færøske sprogrensning* (i Hoydølum, 1987), p.41.

overwhelming; but the Faeroe Islanders have undoubtedly been influenced by new ideas and attitudes well before the windows were finally opened to the outside world, first during the latter half of the eighteenth century and, later, when trade became free in the middle of the nineteenth century. Such influences and changes took place by way of the Danish priests and officials, but also through contacts and interaction with foreign fishermen, smugglers, shipwrecks and other less official channels.

The first book published in Faeroese, then written in a phonetic way because there was no written standard until the late nineteenth century, was the ballad, ‘Sigurd the Volsung’, the Scandinavian version of the German *Nibelungenlied*, collected and written down by a Danish clergyman, H.C. Lyngbye, and published in Denmark in 1822;¹⁵ the following year, in 1823, a translation of the Gospel according to Matthew was published, translated by the Faeroese clergyman Johan Hendrick Schrøter. But very few books were published in Faeroese until the twentieth century and the indigenous language was outlawed in Church, education and official matters until 1937, but finally got almost equal status with Danish in 1948. Consequently the national, the political and the language questions were somewhat intertwined from the 1880s onwards,¹⁶ and this made the challenges even more difficult to cope with.

The religious background

By the time of the Reformation, probably taking place at the same period as in Norway, between 1535 and 1540, the Church had accumulated a considerable amount of land in the Faeroes, possessing about forty per cent of the islands. This property was taken over by the Crown and leased to local farmers, so that the king’s bailiff exercised great power of patronage, eventually curtailed by making leases hereditary. There was only one Lutheran bishop, but he left his post after having been plundered by pirates. The see was replaced by

15. William Morris produced a version of the ballad in his epic poem ‘The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs’ (1876).

16. Jóansson, *English Loanwords*, p. 27.

a deanery, first under the bishop of Bergen in Norway and then under the bishopric of Sjaelland in Denmark. The Danish language replaced Latin as the language of the Church, but this was almost as incomprehensible to the islanders whose native tongue was close to Old Norse.¹⁷

After the Reformation there were seven clergymen in the islands serving thirty-nine churches, and most church services were therefore conducted by a deacon, normally a local farmer who read from a Danish book of sermons or homilies. The Faroese clergy was poor until 1632 when they were granted farms of considerable size, as were other royal officials, so with tithes and other income they soon were among the wealthiest of their community and exercised great power. The sons of the clergy were normally granted crown tenancies that became vacant and the daughters often married into the wealthier peasantry. The dean was chosen from among the seven clergymen and he had real ecclesiastical power because the bishopric was far away, so his superior gave him considerable autonomy. It is not difficult to imagine that under such circumstances the clergy was often more interested in worldly affairs than in their religious duties and many of them became involved in all kinds of corruption and conspiracies to promote their own self-interests.

Until the early nineteenth century there were still only seven clergymen in the Faeroes, but with the considerable increase of population, especially after 1870, the authorities were made aware several times of the shortage of clergymen;¹⁸ since 1913, however, many of the parishes have been divided so now there are eighteen clergymen serving sixty churches. Before 1800 clergymen remained in office for a long time, but after that there were frequent changes; most churches had six services a year conducted by a clergyman, other services were conducted by the deacon; both the sermons given by a clergyman and those read by a deacon were not as orthodox and dated as some scholars have claimed because new clergymen often

17. West, *Faroe*, pp.6-9.

18. Petur Martin Rasmussen, *Suðurstreymoyar kirkjubók* (Tórshavn, 1988), p.50.

introduced modern trends in European and Danish church life, and the more modern and varied Danish books of homilies were used.¹⁹

These renewals were most likely exceptions and not always well received by the congregations; so on the whole there was little life in the Church. Going to church was probably more a habit, not to say a requirement, which most people took for granted as a matter of routine. Moreover, the hymns sung, by the seventeenth-century Danish bishop and hymn writer, Thomas Hansen Kingo (1634-1703), remained the same in most places well into the twentieth century and many still regarded them as part of the Faeroese spiritual heritage.

So although going to church regularly, many Faeroese have undoubtedly regarded it as a rather dreary ordeal. Furthermore, the Danish Lutheran State Church was seen as representing the old feudal outlook, trying to preserve the social order that could not prevail towards the end of the nineteenth century and certainly not far into the twentieth. Here it seems as if the Church still represented the interests of their well-off fellow farmers rather than adapting to the enormous social changes and challenges taking place in the period. However, changes emerged within the Church itself, and around the turn of the century there certainly were clergymen realising that things had to change.

One renewal movement of the state Lutheran Church was the Danish Home Mission, or the *Heimamissionin* as it was known in Faeroese. It represented a branch of Pietism which was probably known in the Faeroes before being truly introduced; its messages and attitudes had been presented by way of the Danish books of sermons and homilies used by the local Faeroese lay deacons. In 1892 a Home Mission Sunday School started in the village of Vágur on Suðuroy, the southernmost island, and one in 1894 in Tórshavn. In 1895 a young Danish Home Mission clergyman, Einer Michael Riise (1870-1898), was appointed on Suðuroy and he preached energetically at revivalist meetings in various villages; but due to ill health he left the

19. Ó. Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne 1865-1930', MA dissertation, Aarhus Universitet, 1993, p.16.

Faeroes after nine months. However, in 1896 a parish hall was built in Tórshavn.

That year another clergyman Franz Busch (1869-1959) with Home Mission leanings was appointed in the same village on Suðuroy and on his initiative the first missionaries for the Danish Home Mission, John Rying-Jensen (1878-1948) and Axel Moe (1877-1942), were sent to the Faeroes in 1904. They were very enthusiastic in spreading the Home Mission's message in Faeroese towns and villages, and gradually other Danes joined them for shorter or longer periods. Moe in particular, is regarded as the person who made the movement viable in the islands, and it made some progress. At the first conference in 1910 there were seventy participants and in 1912 around the same from fourteen villages. They also tried other initiatives such as the Temperance organisation Blue Cross as well as YMCA and YWCA, first in Tórshavn and on Vágur on Suðuroy. In the 1920s the Home Mission expanded its work considerably by appointing four missionaries to the four main fishing ports. Around the same time the movement was institutionalised in the Faeroes and a governing body was established in 1922. In the 1920s and 30s the Home Mission gained ground in the population and most parish halls were built in this period.²⁰ From the arrival of the first Danish Home

20. Several other churches were introduced to the Faeroes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Roman Catholic Church as early as in 1857 started a mission in the Faeroes and built a church but in 1870 discontinued it. However, in 1931 they started again, built a church, a nunnery and a big school in Tórshavn; but not many conversions took place. The Seventh Day Adventists started missionary work in the Faeroes in 1910, and in 1919 the first congregation was established; they had some influence upon the Brethren for a while, but never had significant importance in the islands. (Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', p.18). They have a church in Tórshavn and also a school. The Salvation Army was introduced in 1912 and has worked continuously at least since 1924; first under the aegis of the Salvation Army in Denmark, then in Norway. They own a building in Tórshavn where good work is done for destitute persons. The Pentecostal Movement was established in the Faeroes in 1937 but later split and worked in two branches. After World War II various other groups and sects have been established in the Faeroes, such as the Jehovah Witnesses; although they had a mission in 1914, they were not established until 1954 and now have halls in four places (*ibid.*, p.19).

Mission worker in the early twentieth century, a second evangelical movement which paralleled that of the Brethren, and which was to learn from the latter, had started working in the islands.

The Brethren

In the revivalist movements which swept across Britain in 1859 and the following years, the Open Brethren experienced a great expansion. Among others, the Scot William Sloan, who went to the Faeroes as a missionary in 1865, was converted during this period. William Gibson Sloan was born in Dalry in north Ayrshire on 4 September 1838, the son of a weaver Nathaniel Sloan and Elisabeth, née Orr.²¹ As a boy he sang in the church choir and his father taught him to play the violin and he was soon in demand to play at dances. After the death of a brother, he felt called upon religiously and moved to a mining district near Glasgow to work as a shop assistant. When Sloan was 23 he was converted and started as a colporteur for the Edinburgh Religious Tract and Book Society, and this brought him to Shetland where two important things happened to him: he came in contact with the Open Brethren, and heard about the Faeroes from local fishermen.²² In his early years in Shetland he still belonged to the Church of Scotland; but having discussed the attitudes regarding baptism and the breaking of bread, he wrote in his diary on 6 May 1864:

For some time I have been much disturbed concerning the teaching on baptism and now I am decidedly convinced that the baptism of adults, i.e. believers, is the only right baptism and the only one for which there is any foundation in the Bible. I am also of the opinion that the act of immersing the baptised person in the water is the right mode of baptism, which also the word 'baptise' signifies, and is in accordance with what the Bible says about this as well, in its teaching in the New Testament concerning baptism. I wish to make the statement here, that I don't see anything extraordinary in the

21. There is a biography in English: Fred Kelling, *Fisherman of Faroe: William Gibson Sloan* (Göta, 1993).

22. Sigurd Berghamar, *...men Gud gav vökt: um William Sloan og fyrstu samkomurnar* (Afturljóð, 1992), pp. 20-4.

ordinance of baptism itself, but the blessing of God rests on any means used, prescribed by Himself in His Word.²³

Consequently he was baptised as a believer in a Baptist Church in Shetland and then left the Church of Scotland because he did not want to belong to any denomination. Somewhat later in 1864 Sloan started breaking bread in Lerwick with some others, forming Shetland's first Brethren assembly. Before and after this event he visited several towns and villages in the Shetland Isles selling religious literature and distributing tracts, preaching at meetings and organising Sunday Schools, at, in addition to Lerwick, Sandwick, Trondra, Scalloway, Selivoie, Sandness, Brae and other villages on the Mainland; he also visited the islands of Yell and Unst.²⁴

In the spring of 1865 he seems to have made up his mind to go to the Faeroes as a missionary, and after prayer and consideration he made a decision as can be seen in his diary on 28 May 1865:

My thoughts have been much occupied with the conditions in the Faroe Islands. I have learned that approximately 8,000 people live there and about 700 Shetlanders fish there nearly every summer, also French and English fishermen. So about one thousand foreigners call into port every year. Furthermore, I understand that no missionary work is going on in the Islands and that there are only a few Lutheran Priests to minister to all these people... I am led to believe that true religion (in Faroe) must be at a very low ebb. Therefore, I feel constrained and willing to go to work there in the name of God and in His strength, and I am fully persuaded that my work will not be in vain in the Lord. I feel helpless in this important step when I consider myself, but strong in the Lord and the power of His might. If the Lord sends me, then I believe I will not go there to no avail. My motive for, and my desire to go there, and to give up my present work, rests upon what I believe to be the glory of God and the salvation of souls! The Faroe Islands need a missionary who is prepared to declare the whole counsel of God and I wish to be released from all human ties and hindrances in my relation to my faith in God and His truth. May the Lord, by His Spirit, lead me—He who never leads astray. May the grace of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

23. Quoted in Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', p.37.

24. Berghamar, *men Gud gav vökt*, pp.30-45.

be with my spirit in this glorious undertaking. So the Lord helping me, I decide to go to Faroe to preach Jesus, Amen.²⁵

Sloan went to the Faeroes, not on a passenger ship, but on a Shetland fishing smack leaving from Papa Stour.²⁶ Arriving at Tórshavn he first stayed at the Sailors' Home but later got lodgings with H.N. Jacobsen, the bookseller, who knew English and spoke the language.

Sloan's first visit to the Faeroes, in 1865, lasted seven weeks. He was well received and saw both the local sheriff and the Danish governor in the Faeroes. Danish was then the official language in the islands, so Sloan had studied a little of that language and brought with him an English-Danish dictionary. In spite of knowing neither Faeroese nor Danish, he preached his message at an open air meeting in the centre of Tórshavn where he sang hymns and gave a short sermon in Danish. He said that one is Christian not by birth, by baptism or by belonging to a church; but only through rebirth through the Holy Spirit and by faith that Jesus' blood cleanses all sin. People recognised the last statement from the Church, but the claim that neither baptism nor Church was of any importance was something new because these were regarded as fundamental in the preaching of the Church.²⁷

On his return Sloan visited various places in Scotland and the Northern Isles, preaching and visiting relatives and friends; but he became increasingly convinced that his future missionary work would be performed in the Faeroes. He cancelled his arrangement with the Tract and Book Society and after encouragement from the Motherwell assembly, he went back to the Faeroes in the summer of 1866, this time for four months, visiting several villages around the islands. In his diary he wrote the following on the spiritual situation amongst the Faeroese and expressed his hopes:

Their form of worship being ritualistic, the truth is much covered up with forms and ceremonies and traditions and commandments of

25. Quoted in Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', p.37.

26. Berghamer, *men Gud gav vökt*, p.59.

27. Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', p.38. Cf. Sloan's account in *The Primitive Church (or Baptist) magazine advocating the Constitution, Faith and Practice of the Apostolic Churches* xxiv (June 1 1867), pp.137-139.

men... [I hope] the Lord will open a way for His glorious Gospel to spread there in its primitive purity.²⁸

The following years Sloan visited the Faeroes on a regular basis in the summer months and gradually laid the foundations for the Brethren movement in the islands; the rest of the year he travelled as an evangelist in Scotland, Norway, Iceland, Shetland and Orkney. In 1879, however, he settled in the Faeroes for good, and assisted by new Brethren in the islands he started building the first hall in Tórshavn with financial help from Brethren in Scotland.²⁹ In 1881 Sloan and Elsebeth Isaksen, a Faeroese woman who had renounced amateur acting on her evangelical conversion, were married in Glasgow by John Wardrop, a former provost of Wishaw, Lanarkshire, who was the leading individual in the assembly there. They were to have six children, making Sloan's identification with the Faeroese people complete.³⁰

Apart from distributing literature and hold meetings and Sunday Schools in private homes, in schools or in the open air, Sloan's attractive manners, positive attitudes and pleasant behaviour were crucial, and although some people rejected his visits, especially in small villages, he seems to have been generally well liked as a person. As the workload gradually increased, other Brethren missionaries and assistants came from Britain, Norway and Iceland, almost exclusively Scots. After fifteen years of evangelism, in 1880 the first Faeroe Islanders were baptised and this made many people very upset and caused great anger among the clergymen, resulting in the hall being closed for a period.³¹ However, the movement gained supporters and Faeroe Islanders who had been trained in Scotland, for example, in Fraserburgh and Glasgow, and converted there, joined the congregation when they returned home. Some of them were good preachers and, of course, used the Faeroese language at meetings.

28. Quoted in Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', p. 39.

29. Berghamar, *men Gud gav vökt*, pp.105-6.

30. Kelling, *Fisherman of Faroe*, pp.117-123. In time, one of their sons, Andrew W. Sloan (1896-1973), continued his father's work as a fulltime Brethren worker in the Faeroes, but of course as a Faeroeman.

31. Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', pp.123-5.

Although the legal framework for a new social order had been put in place in the 1850s, as mentioned above, this did not have real effect until a few decades later; the first seagoing fishing vessels were bought in Britain in the 1870s and large-scale fish processing did not commence until the 1880s. Only around 1900 did fishing and fish processing overtake agriculture in the islands' economy, so not until the first decades of the twentieth century did the Faeroes become a modern society with a small bourgeoisie of merchants and ship-owners and a working class of fishermen and workers, craftsmen and small businesspeople. The first trade unions were not established until around 1920.

Until quite recently most Faeroese workers were engaged in various employments almost simultaneously and the same man could be a road worker, a fisherman, a carpenter and so on, within the same year. This probably made it difficult to establish trade unions, and also the relatively small number of workers/fishermen in the villages contributed to this deficit. Partly because of this no substantial changes could be expected to take place in the social, cultural and religious fabric of the community, and the real growth of the Brethren movement, as well as the Home Mission, took place in the 1920s and 30s. Most Brethren halls in the villages were built in this period, and this was the period of intensified evangelisation, not least on board the fishing vessels.³² Although, for example, Axel Moe, who eventually became a clergyman on Suðuroy, could be a rather choleric polemicist in the Danish and Faeroese newspapers,³³ he held the Brethren up as a model for evangelistic activities and promoted attendance at their services. Advocacy such as this was doubtless one of the factors which prevented the Brethren movement from becoming an isolationist one within the islands.

At least until the middle of the twentieth century most Brethren came from the working classes, although gradually the movement seems to have been made up of mainly middle-class people, often

32. *Ibid.*, pp.71-74.

33. Gerhard Hansen, *Eindarmentan føroyinga og vekingarørslurnar* (Tórshavn 1987), pp. 246-7, 252ff.

business people. For decades Brethren were barred from professions such as teaching, most school boards being dominated by the local ministers and the Danish State Church, and the legislation governing primary and secondary schools also demanded adherence to the Evangelical Lutheran Faith, that is the State Church. Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, increasing numbers of Brethren have entered the teaching as well as several other professions, for example, by becoming physicians.

The Brethren and the language question

The position of the Faeroese language was a sensitive issue throughout the nineteenth century, and although Matthew's Gospel had been translated into Faeroese and published, as mentioned above, no further progress had been made. Not until the second half of the century the written standard of the Faeroese language was introduced, and gradually the present written language took shape. At the so-called Christmas Meeting of 1888 held in the Parliament Halls, a Faeroese Association was formed which demanded full recognition of the language in schools, the Church and in official matters, together with economic progress and self-government in internal affairs.³⁴ The language question, however, remained unresolved for another half century and Danish was still the language of the Established Church, although parts of some rituals were allowed in Faeroese before that.

Two Faeroese clergymen had tried to translate parts of the New Testament: in 1908 a translation of John's Gospel by the Faeroese clergyman and later the island dean, A.C. Evensen (1874-1917), was published by the Scripture Gift Mission largely through the efforts of a Brethren individual, Arthur Brend (1880-1950) a dentist from London who had settled in the Faeroe Islands.³⁵ From 1931 Dean Jacob Dahl had translated and published some extracts of, for example, Paul's epistles and Revelation; but Dahl's style was very literary and therefore difficult for people to read because they had never learnt to read or write in their own language. On the other hand,

34. Jóansson, *English Loanwords*, p.27.

35. Zacharias Zachariassen, *Biblian á fõroyskum i hálva öld* (Leirkerið, 2000), p.53.

at this stage the Brethren congregations had already used the Faeroese language for fifty years at their meetings although the Scriptures were read in Danish or Norwegian,³⁶ and occasionally Schrøter's Faeroese translation was used.

In 1916, two years after Sloan's death, the extremely industrious and efficient teacher Victor Danielsen (1894-1961) was baptised and became one of the leading evangelists in the Faeroese Brethren movement. In 1931 he translated the Epistle to the Galatians which was well received because it was closer to the spoken language and therefore easily understood. Consequently he was asked to translate the whole New Testament which he did from English, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic and, partly, German; furthermore he used Dahl's translations. In 1937, the New Testament was printed in the Faeroes and the paper was supplied by the National Bible Society of Scotland; the book was printed in 5,000 copies. Some weeks later Dahl's translation of the New Testament was published by the Danish Bible Society.³⁷ Both books were well received although many clergymen criticised Danielsen's translation severely.

Danielsen immediately started translating the Old Testament as well, and in 1939 the whole Bible was due to be printed in Norway, but the German occupation made this impossible. So not until after the war could the work recommence, and then the Faeroese Bible was typeset and printed in the Faeroes and the paper obtained in Scotland and Norway; the binding was done in Edinburgh. The first edition of the Bible was printed in 5,000 copies and published in 1949; reprints and new editions have followed. The reviews of the Bible were very good, but later the translation was severely attacked by a few clergymen and members of the Established Church. On the whole these angry and pathetic outbursts were regrettable and later the persons involved seem to have changed their minds. Already in 1920 the Brethren had published their first collection of hymns and evangelical songs, edited by Danielsen, and new editions and hymnbooks were published frequently in subsequent years; but the

36. *Ibid.*, p.45.

37. *Ibid.*, pp.46-53.

Established Church did not have its own hymnbook or Bible until 1961.

Conclusion

The Brethren movement in the Faeroes gradually became the largest Christian community outside the Established Danish Church with at present around fifteen per cent of the population but with some local concentrations of up to forty per cent,³⁸ probably giving the Faeroes the largest percentage of Brethren per head of population in the world. For many people the most important achievement of the Brethren movement in the islands has been the introduction of the native language in religious contexts, and of course the consistent attitude of the movement regarding the language question has promoted the awareness of the issue. The Brethren demonstrated that Faeroese could be used in Christian worship and they also convinced others that such enormous projects as the publication of hymnbooks and Bible translations were possible in a small language community with only around 30-40,000 speakers. Others emphasise the importance of the religious revival which was started by the Brethren in the second half of the nineteenth century in a backward society in which the Established Church was the church of a colonial power and had become extremely conservative and authoritarian. Maybe the Brethren were right when criticising the Church as an institution of habit, tradition, empty rituals and suppression. It does not seem implausible to suggest that the Brethren movement in the Faeroes filled a spiritual vacuum around the turn of the century and the following three decades, because the old society and its lifestyle and values had broken down and new attitudes and challenges emerged. However, the movement did not encourage changes in the social order; so in political and social questions it has remained neutral as a body although members of various congregations have been involved in all political parties, trade unions and similar institutions, as individuals.

38. Wolles, 'Brödremenighederne på Færøerne', p.20.