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The Secret Life of an Evangelical

Beth Dickson

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Beth Dickson's upbringing, in the 1960s, in a Christian Brethren assembly in Scotland seems remarkably similar to mine, in a Manchester assembly twenty years earlier. Society had moved on and the Brethren message was no longer understood, says Beth, but the entire network of churches experienced an inability to face reality.

Without attempting to criticise, Beth, by bravely sharing her own pilgrimage, challenges her tradition. The girl who made up her own sermon before she was seven had to wait until she was thirty-eight to participate in the central act of Brethren worship. She was not a women's rights campaigner, but a believer whose faith development had been stunted by 'the deep-rooted feelings of inadequacy', which she had been taught to have. Beth's liberation was in a church with Brethren roots; other women found freedom outside the assemblies and some abandoned their faith. Her previous devout assembly community failed to give effective support when the Dickson family grappled with profound problems of ill health, probably exacerbating their difficulties. Most mainstream denominations could have provided expertise and training on such pastoral support.

Perhaps the most profound part of the book tells of Beth's own spiritual journey and encounter with God. The fact that this was catalysed through work within a Roman Catholic school makes it—in Brethren circles—all the more remarkable. Her faith shines brightly through her account of what seems far from an 'utterly ordinary' life. In the words of J.H. Newman, from whose prayers she quotes, God has not created her 'for naught' but

to do him some definite service... I have my mission—I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

Do read this inspiring book by a woman with a fulfilling ministry within the Brethren tradition.

Jean M. Johnson

