

The 1956 Auckland Crisis in the Exclusive Brethren and the Shaping of Taylorism¹

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The last Brethren split in New Zealand before the great crisis of the 1960s and 1970s revolved around the interpretation of Galatians 6:1. The verse, ironically, proposes that brethren who are spiritual should restore a person overtaken in a fault in a spirit of meekness. There is much irony in this story, but none more so than the cause of this split.

The background was a certain degree of independent thinking among the Exclusive Brethren in Auckland over scriptural interpretation. As the city had grown, so had the numbers of Exclusive Brethren, many of whom had moved to the city from the strong rural centres in Dargaville in Northland and in South Auckland. There were probably some 1000 Brethren who met on Sundays at the East Street Hall, and met during the week at the local halls in Islington Street (Herne Bay), the North Shore, Grey Lynn, two halls in Mount Eden Road and in Papatoetoe and Manurewa. There was a particular concentration of Brethren in the Balmoral area.

Auckland was on the international Brethren circuit, so occasionally its conferences were published by Stow Hill Bible Depot. In 1947 the Auckland assembly had hosted a conference restricted to invited Brethren, whereas the usual Exclusive Brethren conference was open to all the Brethren on the subject, which was, it seems, of worship to the Holy Spirit. This conference was attended by W. J. House of Sydney, from whom Australian Brethren had withdrawn for a period, although he had subsequently been restored

1. This paper is based on a very large set of papers provided to me by the son of David Church, including a number of cyclostyled copies. The papers will later be deposited in the Brethren archives in New Zealand.

into fellowship. In Australia Some Aucklanders later believed that Australians were especially critical of New Zealand ministering brethren.² Australian voices were very significant in the international leadership of the Brethren even then, whereas New Zealand Exclusive Brethren were never as influential as their numbers might have suggested.

What happened in 1951 may illustrate this point. W. J. (Jack) Bishop was a retired teacher who had been head of English at Auckland Grammar School, where he was known as 'mousie' and was an advocate of a very formal style of instruction.³ Formal he may have been at school, but as an invited speaker at a conference in Geelong in July 1951, Bishop proposed what should surely have appealed to Exclusive Brethren. He said that if brethren forgive an erring brother, they may also deal with the sin—and suggested (on the grounds of Matthew 16) that spiritual brethren had the authority to remit the sin. At the time a storm of discussion was created by these comments, essentially because Exclusive Brethren males were known as priests, and this suggested a formal priestly power to those who heard it. It seems that this was not an important aspect of Bishop's thinking. He insisted when cross-questioned about his ideas at an interview at a Sydney restaurant a fortnight later that he was not proposing a formal or official power, but such was the state of Exclusive Brethren thinking at the time that they assumed he meant precisely that.⁴ The concern appears to have been that he was undermining the principle that the right to remit sin resided in the assembly as a whole.⁵

In some respects, the teaching of W. J. Bishop was not unlike the values which the Taylors, senior and junior, were developing. The

2. This, I think was the November 1947 conference where worship to the Holy Spirit was discussed but not yet advocated. See: <<http://www.mybrethren.org/history/framagb.htm>>

3. K. A. Trembath, *Ad Augusta: Auckland Grammar School 1869-1969* (Auckland, 1969), 245, 293-4.

4. W. J. Bishop to Grimshaw, 27 August 1951. See also Bishop to Arnold Heath (Auckland), 7 February 1952, cited in Malcolm Schmidt letter, 30 October 1956.

5. R. D. Church to J. Taylor jnr, 9 August 1957.

identification of brethren as priests implied this.⁶ With the growing formalisation of roles and powers this might have been an attractive addition to the panoply of priestly powers, but on the other hand once a sin was remitted, there could be no further investigation. For reasons perhaps of this kind, strong criticisms were made about Bishop's ministry, and it was raised at the Auckland Care Meeting at the East Street Hall in February 1952. What followed showed that the centralized control of the Exclusive Brethren was increasingly paramount over all local decision making. A letter from Geelong cleared Bishop of suspicion and the assembly accepted his repentance from any false teaching. Australian brethren encouraged a further challenge to his heterodoxy at the Auckland Care Meeting in May 1952, and Bishop was accused of dissembling and party spirit.⁷ The result was that on 15 May 1952 formal charges were brought against him and he was 'read out' of the meeting.⁸ The elderly James Taylor senior later condemned this excommunication since Bishop had repented of any wrong in February.⁹ The coercion of W. J. Bishop was later described by none other than James Taylor junior as a 'reign of terror' in Auckland.¹⁰

At the time the leading brother in New Zealand was G. Ron Deck of Wellington, the direct descendent of J. G. Deck, the hymn writer. On 25 November 1952 he visited the Auckland Brethren after returning from three days of meetings in Whangarei in the north, and he required the assembly to confess its wrong behaviour towards Bishop. This step seems to have been brought about with the approval of James Taylor, who in correspondence had suggested that if he stepped away from his error he should be received back into the

6. See R. A. Hayman, P. B. Phillips, Alan G Irvine, H. M. Conyngham, T. Reid, and John Dick (14 Disraeli St, Auckland) to "beloved brother", 20 August 1956.

7. P. L. McKay [n.d.] summary.

8. Implied in the letter of James Taylor jnr to D. J. Martin of Sydney, cited in the footnote to the London meetings of 1959 report. See the footnote on <<http://www.mybrethren.org/mygrc01/frgrc05.htm>>. See also David Church to E. Blampeid, 26 July 1958.

9. See Allan Simmons to Arnold Thomas, 15 September 1956.

10. James Taylor jnr to Dr D.J. Martin, 14 July 1957: <<http://www.mybrethren.org/mygrc01/frgrc05.htm>>.

assembly. He was willing to change his stance and express repentance, and so he was able to be restored.¹¹ Once he had returned it seems as though the supporters of Bishop in Auckland, Dargaville and Totara North felt in the ascendant in assembly life.¹²

Debate continued, however, in the monthly Saturday night Care Meeting. Three years later the tables were turned yet again. On his visit to Auckland in 1953 Stanley McCallum of Detroit may have raised the issue of Bishop's false teaching and at the Care Meeting in December 1955 his opinion gave occasion for those who once again challenged the Auckland brethren about their handling of the issue.¹³ Possibly at this point a local brother, Eric Clist, entered the fray against Bishop. Ron Deck joined in, saying that the care meeting at Auckland had acted unrighteously. The issue loomed large during the first part of 1956. Allan T. Simmons was the leading brother in Auckland, and he was made very aware of grave concerns at the conduct of Eric Clist.¹⁴ Since Eric Clist had led the condemnation of W. J. Bishop, the party supporting Bishop withdrew from Clist. A special meeting was called on 1 July 1956 to make peace between Clist and his critics, on the basis of a statement that had been prepared by A. J. Simmons, which said there was some uncertainty over Clist's faults. That statement troubled Bishop's party, and was roundly condemned by the young Roger Crawshaw. Simmons undertook to bring an agreed statement on the Bishop issue to the care meeting just three days later on Saturday 4 July.¹⁵ However he seems to have checked with wider opinion first, and at this meeting, Australian "evidence" (possibly a cable by a Mr Patton) of Bishop's errors was brought forward including heresy charges under three

11. A member of the Auckland Exclusive Brethren at the time [hereafter designated as 'my source'] says it was a letter to Mrs A M Hayward.

12. Taylor to Martin 14 July 1957.

13. Undoubtedly this is Stanley McCallum from Detroit, Exclusive Brethren preacher, who visited New Zealand and Australia in 1953 and gave ministry on grace in the story of David. <<http://www.mybrethren.org/bios/frambios.htm>>

14. P. L. McKay summary.

15. See Allan T. Simmons reply to Hayman et al, 31 August 1956; S. Schmidt to A Thomas, 19 November 1956; R.D. Church to J Taylor junior, 9 August 1957.

headings, and the accusation were broadened to moral concerns.¹⁶ Eric Blampied seems to have led the charge, to the deep concern of Bishop's supporters. Yet the meeting ended with no-one challenging a statement by Roger Crawshaw that the February 1952 meeting had settled the matter, and that subsequent Australian interference was therefore inappropriate. During the meeting on 4 July notes of the meeting were taken by Mrs S. Schmidt and Mrs Alan Crawshaw, and these formed the key evidence of evil in the Auckland meeting and so the notes were later challenged by the meeting's defenders, including Alan Simmons.¹⁷

At the next Care Meeting one month later on 4 August, it became very apparent that the issues had not in fact been settled on 4 July. The meeting stretched on for four and a half hours into the late evening. David Church was incensed by the line of questioning being raised and put the question: "Am I to believe that Mr Bishop taught the Romish doctrine that the priest could forgive sins, and then embarked on a course of lying and deception?" One of the brothers said, "Yes Mr Church, that is the answer".¹⁸

That answer at such a late hour and the spirit in which it was delivered provoked an emotional upsurge and then a huge walkout of 150 brethren from the Care Meeting. Nor did they attend assembly meetings the next day. They held that there was unjudged evil at East Street, because the Brethren leaders refused to hold a further meeting about it.¹⁹ However majorities in the ten assemblies stayed faithful to the party line.²⁰ On Saturday 11 August at a private meeting those who had left called for the holding of a 'humiliation meeting' in place of the breaking of bread the next day. This was refused and on

16. David Church to E. Blampied, 26 July 1958; David Church to C. S. Knowles, 18 August 1958.

17. S. Schmidt to A. Thomas, 19 November 1956.

18. My source.

19. R. A. Hayman, P. B. Phillips, Alan G Irvine, H M Conyngham, T. Reid and John Dick (14 Disraeli St., Auckland) to "Beloved brother", 20 August 1956.

20. See, *History of the Testimony since J. N. Darby unrevised*. [c.1990] <<http://issuu.com/peebs.net/docs/historyoftestimony-jnd-to-1990>>.

18 August the separatists agreed to begin their own breaking of bread.²¹

This storm in the Auckland assembly reflected the presence in it of both 'liberal' and 'legalistic' parties. The sheer scale of the assembly and the lack of common acknowledgement of the leading brethren plus outside interference all seem to have been factors.²² The senior brethren in New Zealand were outraged at attacks on their actions from younger men. They saw it as an attack on the rights and the glory of the assembly. They accused Crawshaw of engaging in party activity. They were furious at the criticisms of Eric Clist. Ron Deck was able to roll in the big battalions to defend his firm line, including letters and cables from McCallum, J. Patton and James Taylor Junior.²³

In Exclusive Brethren theory, neighbouring assemblies were called upon to follow the example of the tribes of Israel and intervene on the side of truth and justice, since they were most likely to know the details. Thus the response of those in Manurewa, Papatoetoe, and Dargaville was very significant. Senior brethren at East Street were swift to ensure that they would be supported from these quarters, and Papatoetoe immediately declared for East Street. However significant dissent also emerged from these neighbouring localities and some sixty brethren withdrew from their assemblies. A group from Manurewa withdrew over the issue in October 1956 and began breaking bread in the home of Lionel Pennington, among them members of the Bond, Beasley, Green, and McEldowney families.²⁴ It appears that there were also sharp disputes in the assemblies at Dargaville (where Malcolm Schmidt took up Bishop's case), at Whananaki (where six withdrew), at Arepuhoe (where six brethren

21. R. D. Church to J. Taylor jnr, 9 August 1957.

22. McKay summary.

23. Questions sent to G. R. Deck and his reply including citations of C. McCallum to Selwyn Bishop, 18/8/1956; J. Taylor Jnr to Stanley Douglas 21/8/1956 and J. Patton to G. J. Gower, 2/7/1956.

24. Manurewa signatories letter, 5 October 1956; Norman Wills to L J Cottle, 8 February 1957.

withdrew), and Totara North in Northland.²⁵ In Hamilton Norman Wills and A. J. Conyngham took up Bishop's case and separated from the assembly at Clarence Street. They were promptly pronounced self-willed and leprous—Norman Wills was accused of having 'leprosy of the head'.²⁶

At the time both G. R. Cowell and James Taylor junior, rivals for the leadership of the Brethren, were concerned about what they saw as the over-reaction of the leaders of the Brethren in the antipodes. Although a letter and telegram from James Taylor Junior and a letter from Stanley McCallum to Selwyn Bishop had initially pronounced for those who stayed,²⁷ and J. H. S[ymington]. had taken the same view,²⁸ Taylor in July 1957 criticized: 'the harsh, legal, unscriptural approach that was made by the three assemblies (the leaders being responsible) acting the way they did, which was far worse than what W. J. B. said'. He went on to criticize 'the legal element, the worldly element, the extreme element, and the absence of the Spirit of the New Covenant amongst us'.²⁹ Nevertheless Taylor's public position was that there was evil abroad in Auckland, and he made clear his backing for the leaders at East Street. On 9 August David Church wrote to Taylor, in response to his cited letter, seeking to correct his understanding and inviting his intervention to deal with the evil in Auckland. Taylor had a simple and curt reply, returning the letter, accusing him of the sin of schism, and breaking bread independently. 'The Lord did not leave the saints at East Street when you did', wrote Taylor.³⁰

²⁵ <<http://www.mybrethren.org/mygrc01/frgrc05.htm>>, footnoted letter by J. Taylor Jnr to D. J. Martin, 14 July 1957.

²⁶ Norman Wills to L. J. Cottle, 8 February 1957; A. J. Conyngham and Norman Wills to Brethren at Clarence Street, Hamilton, 29 March 1957.

²⁷ See Allan Simmons letter, 31 August 1956 citing these responses in the last paragraph without elaboration.

²⁸ Reference in Peebs net document, JHS, 25: 255; [J. Taylor Jnr] L 1: 350.

²⁹ Cited in letter by Taylor to D J Martin, 14 July 1957.

³⁰ R. D. Church to J. Taylor Jnr, 9 August 1957, and reply, [cyclostyled]. Need to check J Taylor Jnr L 2: 13 (ref in the Peebs net volume).

Less than a year after writing these comments James Taylor junior visited Auckland to minister at a three-day conference in 1958. One might then have expected some restoration of the separated brethren, but their schism was a step too far. On behalf of the schismatics David Church sought an opportunity to meet with Taylor between meetings on the third day to appeal to him to intervene in the situation to restore justice, but received short shrift. He also told others that he smelt the spirits on Taylor's breath and recognized that it would not be possible to reason with him. A few minutes later at the next meeting, an intoxicated Taylor poured scorn on the schismatics.³¹ Thus in his ministry in Auckland Taylor gave directions on 'the established assembly ground'.³²

W. J. Bishop seems to have died of cancer during this period. He had felt the excruciating pain of his exclusion, although he also saw the funny side of it.³³

The group that withdrew began after two weeks to break bread in the Parnell Library (let to them for free by the Library) and in the Burch Street (Masonic) Hall and in some private homes. Among the leaders were R. A. Hayman, P. B. Phillips, H. M. Conyngham, John Dick, T. Reid, and Alan G. Irvine.³⁴ They were outraged at the attitude that the independent outlook of Auckland brethren was the focus of blame, and that W. J. Bishop was to be humiliated, no matter how specifically he repented of his evil. As Alan Irvine wrote, 'there is iniquity at East Street and in Australia, so we withdraw from it.'³⁵

Among the rebels, one of the younger leaders was David Church, who was born on 14 December 1917. Church was an Aucklanders whose father was Robert Henry Church, and the family business was a customs agency. The family came among the Brethren when he was

31. Described by David Church to A. J. E. Welch, 31 March 1971. Confirmed by my source.

32. See David Church to Roseberry, 4 August 1978.

33. My source.

34. R. A. Hayman, P. B. Phillips, Alan G. Irvine, H M Conyngham, T. Reid and John Dick (14 Disraeli St, Auckland) to "beloved brother", 20 August 1956; R. D. Church, letter, n.d.

35. Alan Irvine, MS note, n.d.

aged 12.³⁶ He served as a non-combatant in the army, and was demobbed in c.1944. He then married Helen Suckling who was a daughter of Arthur Suckling, a dentist in Christchurch. In Christchurch the leading Exclusive Brethren were her relations, for her grandfathers were Charles Wycherley, who came to New Zealand in 1885, and John Suckling, who founded the Monarch and Landmark shoe factories and dominated the Christchurch assembly. Helen met David at Brethren meetings in Wellington, but on marriage they lived in Auckland in West End Road in Herne Bay until 1973. The couple were among those who withdrew in August 1956, but it was his subsequent obdurate attitude that made him champion of the rebels.³⁷

Although the dissentients had split from the assembly, so convinced they were that they would gain the support of the majority of the Brethren worldwide that they made a series of attempts to garner support. But the support did not emerge. Instead world leaders of the Brethren closed ranks behind the leaders of the Auckland assembly. A ferocious attack was mounted on Bishop, Crawshaw, J. Dick and Harry Bannister. People in the separatist group, observing the lack of international support, and hurting from the cold shoulder began to drift back, among them Graham Murray, Mr and Mrs John Wylie, Mrs McCallum and Olive McCallum.³⁸

The establishment of a 'separate table' in Auckland was provocative. The leaders at Parnell Library received letters from abroad condemning this step.³⁹ Then a Brethren speaker from Winnipeg, Louis Samuels, on a visit to Auckland, called on the leaders of the schism, and told them that reconciliation was impossible while they continued to break bread independently. He indicated that if they ceased to break bread at Parnell the way would be opened for an enquiry into the controversy. So in January 1958 the breaking of bread ceased, but the promised enquiry did not take

36. See David Church to Henry [Snr], 1 September 1984.

37. See David Church to S. McCallum, 15 December 1956.

38. Allen Simmons to Arnold Thomas, 15 September 1956.

39. Alec and Grace Diplock, Westfield, NJ, to R.D. Church and A. J. McCallum, 11, September 1956.

place. For the next few years matters continued in limbo. Many of the schismatic party confessed and returned to fellowship. Those who did not hung around on the edges and hoped for change. At least one person committed suicide. Others like the Church family sat among the coats at the back of the East Street Hall, and seem to have remained until G. R. Cowell was withdrawn from in 1960.⁴⁰ In 1960 there came a final exchange between G. R. Deck, still the leader of the Exclusives in New Zealand and David Church, but Church's appeal for justice were overridden and he was told that if he wanted peace he would have to reconcile himself with A. T. Simmons.⁴¹

The Exclusive Brethren response to the split had repercussions worldwide, and it became a very significant factor in the rise of James Taylor Junior and the fall of G. R. Cowell. In the 1959 London Meetings which led to the collapse of Cowell, the following exchange took place between Cowell and Taylor (although it was excluded from the original published version):

G. R. C. What one—I suppose I am right in this—was thinking is this, that the greatest numerical losses we have had of late years have been through the Galatian spirit, Mr. H. We have had conflicts for the truth and casualties have been limited, but the Galatian error can be a very disastrous thing. What would you say to that?

C. H. There were other moral questions underneath as well, were there not?

G. R. C. Yes.

J. T. Jr. I did not get that. What did you say, legality was the cause of the great numbers. Is that what you said?

G. R. C. Was that not so?

J. T. Jr. No, I could not accept that. I do not accept that statement. I could not accept it.⁴²

And then a minute later:

40. My source. (Grace Diplock was Mrs Church's elder sister, and Alec McCallum's wife Keitha was her younger sister, both now deceased)

41. David Church to G.R. Deck, 9 July 1960; G.R. Deck to David Church, 16 July 1960; David Church to G.R. Deck, 3 August 1960 with added document: "I desire to set out certain questions".

42. <<http://www.mybrethren.org/mygrc01/frgrc05.htm>>

J. H. Might I ask for a repetition of the statement Mr. T. made?

G. R. C. Mr. T. may have more information than I have as to the losses that have occurred in New Zealand.

J. T.Jr. There have been losses besides New Zealand; there have been losses in many places, but then not on the principle that legality was the cause of them; I could not accept that.⁴³

Then at the close of the reading came a profoundly significant exchange:

G. R. C. Before we go on to that (i.e., the singing of the hymn), I regret if I have said anything wrong about the New Zealand matter, Mr. T. But I thought that was your own judgment of it. I had understood that.⁴⁴

J. T. Jr. I never said that. The losses amongst us are because of the disregard of principles that govern the house of God.

A. P. C. L. When you were saying that, Mr. C., had you specifically in mind the matter of New Zealand, and not general matters?

G. R. C. Well, only because of the extent of the casualties.

A. P. C. L. Well I would like to say that should be made clear, that you were referring to a specific case in which numbers had been lost.

C. H. Was there no vital issue there, at Auckland?

J. T. Jr. Large numbers were lost, and because of the disregard of principles that govern the house of God.

R. W. Is it not the activity of the legal mind that so many have gone out from us?

J. T. Jr. That is what you say, is it? I could not say that.

R.W. That is what I thought.

J.T.Jr. I could not say that.

A. J. G. That would have to be shown, would it not? It was largely a question of underlying moral conditions, and, as had been said, disregard of divine principles.

43. <<http://www.mybrethren.org/mygrc01/frgc05.htm>>

44. A footnote attached to the Internet version cites the letter by James Taylor Jnr to Dr Martin of Sydney (14 July 1957) which shows clearly at that time that Taylor felt that the Auckland and Sydney Brethren had over-reacted to Bishop's supporters.

A. W. G. T. I was just enquiring if it was the general disregard of divine principles, or whether some specific divine principle was at issue?

J.T. Jr. Well, you have to look into your mind to see what the thing is. The principles that were violated were what we would say were principles that govern the house of God. If we ignore them people get out of fellowship. That is what happened.⁴⁵

The exchange shows that the accusation of legality, held initially against the Auckland loyalists was now set aside, for legalism was now in charge, darkly alleging moral issues and breach of divine principles behind every unauthorized voice. It was the outset of a regime of terror.

David Church took the side of Gerald Cowell in London in the events of 1959–60, and that meant that he accepted the measure of revelation (including worship of the Holy Spirit) but not the separation from unbelievers which became the mark of the Exclusive Brethren in the 1960s.

In 1960 the separatists rented the Dunnottar Hall on the corner of Faulder Avenue and Garnet Road in Westmere and they recommenced sharing the Lord's supper together. Ironically at Christmastime in 1960 Eric Clist was excluded from the Auckland assembly and joined the schism, and other members were Eric and Joyce Bradley, and some people from Papatoetoe including Wallace Kennerley and his relations.

There was a split in the ex-Exclusive meeting in 1970 when Eric Clist fell out with David Church. Clist's group became more open in its associations.⁴⁶ Two years later the Garnet Road meeting weakened further when the son and daughter in law of David Church left for the Open Brethren.⁴⁷ Wallace Kennerley noted in 1973 that there were four meetings of ex-Exclusives in Auckland in 1973 (including the meetings in Garnet Road, Burch Street (later St Benedict's Street) and Greenlane) but none would have anything to

45. <<http://www.mybrethren.org/mygrc01/frgrc05.htm>>.

46. David Church in letter to Ernst Popham, 28/7/81.

47. D. Church to Eric [Pope], 10 February 1972.

do with the others.⁴⁸ The Garnet Road group had dwindled to three people by 1980.⁴⁹ Subsequently the David Church and his wife linked up with another ex-Exclusive group associated with Esli Forrest which met in Papatoetoe in South Auckland, calling themselves 'Otarā Christian Brethren'.

Former Exclusive Brethren suffered the problem of continual internal debates. Those who left after 1960 were sometimes on opposite sides of the issues from those who left in the 1956 walkout. There were also growing tensions over Pentecostalism, when Vern Harrison of Palmerston North adopted its values, to the distress of others.⁵⁰ There was a debate with Wallace Kennerley (one of those who left Garnet Road in 1970) over annihilationism in 1976.

'Dear David, I trust that you will soon stop grieving over past history—these things are for our learning and enter more fully into the joy of the Lord' wrote Wallace Kennerley.⁵¹ But David Church carried on fighting these battles to the end of his life. At heart David Church hoped to the end that the Brethren would return to the truth and vindicate his stance. So he wrote in lament in 1978:

You appeal to me, dear brother as if you are in the only righteous position. What have you done about these beloved brethren? There are about today, little companies the world round walking faithfully, holding the truth the Lord is helping them & in sincere brotherly affection I feel led to turn the tables & appeal to you, dear brother, will you not look these matters squarely in the face & see that while you fail to meet your righteous obligation towards these brethren, your position is unrighteous.⁵²

And again to the British leader, John Welch whose failure to speak to him after his mother in law's funeral in 1958 was a source of great grief at the time:

48. Kennerley to David Church, 5 March 1973.

49. Philip Haddad to David Church, 14 July 1980.

50. See D Church to Dave [S], 22 September 1972.

51. Kennerley to D. Church, 11 June 1966.

52. D. Church to Rosenberry, 14 August 1978.

Why is it that brethren who value the same heritage of recovered truth and who desire to walk in a path of separation from the world and fidelity to the Name of the Lord are not together? One reason for it is that those who came out at Aberdeen have completely ignored their brethren who, being convicted of unscriptural and anti-Christian teachings, moved out years before. Others were cast out for resisting such anti-Christian teachings as the 'abandonment' doctrine, enforcing husbands and wives to live in separation, kidnapping of wives and children and much else that has corrupted the temple of God.⁵³

Bob and Gladys [Walker] in Nelson decided to link up with the Reading Brethren, even though they did not have a meeting in Nelson:

One thing we have thought of is that the companies that the Lord is blessing and increasing ... are the ones the Exclusives divided from, and that all those (including ourselves) who left them are fizzling out due to old age & so on. It's a remarkable thing when you think of where the 'core' of the Ex's has got to now, but evidently the Lord allowed them to get away from Bethesda & Reading & Glanton & a few others as part of his foresight as to where they were heading & the other companies despised as they were by the Ex's & perhaps not having the elevated light of the Exs as to the assembly have gone on more simply and yet dependent on the Lord & the scriptures. I don't mean that these other companies haven't gone wrong in some things, but where have the Exs got to? And we who clung to the Ex's for so long have to go a long way back in history to find out where the trouble started. I hope this isn't all too complicated for you to understand how we feel, but the upshot is that we felt it was necessary to find somewhere that the Lord had been helping in spite of the Ex's claim that the Lord had left these people. And it resolved itself into two choices, O. B. & Reading, who, as you will know have been able to make some progress in mutually admitting wrong moved & getting some way into the line of "keeping the unity of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace".⁵⁴

53. David Church to John Welch, 23 October 1978.

54. Bob & Gladys to R. D. Church, 16 October 1981.

In conclusion one might reflect as to whether the theological debate over W. J. Bishop's interpretation of Galatians 6 had any substance to it. Exclusive Brethren debates can be somewhat opaque to those from outside. Brethren become used to a particular allegorical way of reading the Scriptures which can be fostered by determination to extract meaning from the Bible verse by verse, and thus the Brethren had a tendency to recreate the debate over past heresies. The eternal Sonship question was one such issue but many others flowed from it, and the new line on worship directed to the Holy Spirit continued to be debated in the 1950s.

A further complex issue for all Exclusive Brethren was the responsibility of the local assembly over and against the wider group. There was a great deal of inconsistency. The Open Brethren error was often seen as individual assembly judgement, but it was quite impossible for Exclusive Brethren worldwide to understand all local circumstances. Clumsy mechanisms ensured uneven results. The first person to the telephone could control the outcome. The seceders were able to cite the best of precedents from distant and recent Exclusive Brethren history, including events at Newcastle upon Tyne and Teddington, but they failed to see that the man of God principle created church dynamics where the first and only essential was to have the man of God on your side. There was a deep fear of schism, and a caution in judgement until the elect leader spoke. The 1950s was a period of relative freedom as Cowell and James Taylor junior wrestled for control. The Auckland schism became a crucial wedge in the search for authoritative judgement, in which Taylor was sharper in his call than Cowell.

The story did not stop in 1960. On the side of the separatists the result was not attractive, but on the other side an excruciating history was creating ever-deeper anguish. Hopefully we are at last entering an era when we can begin to understand the key issues.