

ON BEING WITH THE BRETHREN

INTRODUCTION

Before the appearance of the articles on *Why I left the Brethren*, the Correspondence Editor would have said that the only subject of apparent interest to members was women (regarded from an ecclesiastical point of view!). He can now add, not Pentecostalism, on which the old lethargy has set in, but the step of leaving the Brethren, as documented in issue no. 8.

This present *Journal* is, in effect, a members' issue. A pleasing number of unsolicited articles have been received, and in addition certain members were invited to contribute either in comment on the previously published material or from their own experience. Despite complete silence from about a quarter of these, I have had an invidious, yet privileged, task selecting from the many well-chosen words that have been submitted. To all who contributed we express our thanks, and trust that the exercise will have been profitable, even if the product remains unpublished.

The personal statements fall into three categories: (1) from those who have always been with Brethren, (2) from those who have joined the Brethren at some stage, and (3) from those who have left the Brethren, but are now at various stages of the return journey. These are followed by the comments on topics raised in the earlier issue, with, in one case, a reply.

One is impressed in the statements by three things at least:

1. **A wariness in generalising about assemblies.** We have a different, and happier, cross-section of experience than that exposed in the earlier issue. Both sets of experience are valid, and neither side can claim to have won. How many of us who are Crusader leaders could have written as Mr. Sanders does (p. 9) of the value of the assembly as a place to which to take our Christian boys? It must be the practices, not the label, of the local church which persuade us of our place there.

2. **A charitable spirit in referring to those in other denominations.** Undoubtedly the fellowship enjoyed by many in such activities as Crusaders and Christian Unions has done much to foster a spirit of understanding towards those whose conclusions about practice in the church differ from our own. It is a fact to be faced up to that Christians whose convictions as to the inspiration of the Bible are as staunch as our own yet

hold very different views about matters of practice. It has been a hard lesson for some of us to realise that they do not come to hold these views by jettisoning their belief in Biblical inspiration.

3. **An acknowledgement of the deficiencies in many assemblies.** This issue will not prove to be a eulogy of Brethrenism.¹ Much of what was written earlier will here be endorsed, and in particular the subject of pastoral work looms large. Mr. Rendell warns us from experience that some of the apparent advantages of entering an ordained ministry may prove unreal. But the combination of an assembly framework and a properly supported, resident pastorate demands our attention. We might well set before us the example of Richard Baxter, who wrote in 1655 of his work in Kidderminster: 'We spend Monday and Tuesday from morning to almost night in the work, taking about fifteen or sixteen families in a week, that we may go through the parish, which hath above eight hundred families, in a year; and I cannot say yet that one family hath refused to come to me, nor but few persons excused and shifted it off'.²

In the later pages of this issue will be found a careful study of current opinion about those passages in the New Testament referring to the place of women, with special emphasis on the views of those outside the Brethren. We welcome this as a reminder that others can and do take these passages seriously, and also as the first of what we trust will prove a fruitful series of contributions from the enterprising group in Cambridge (although Mr. Clines has now left to join the Department of Biblical History and Literature at Sheffield). From their monthly meetings much profitable material is being produced and made available to the Fellowship as a whole.

As we read through this and the other discussions, let us remember that we are never very far away from the practical and urgent problems of evangelism. Let Richard Baxter speak to each one of us: 'What have we our time and strength for, but to lay them out for God? What is a candle made for but to burn? Burned and wasted we must be; and is it not fitter it should be in lighting men to heaven and in working for God than in living to the flesh?'³

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¹ Cp. Alan Cole, *The Body of Christ*, p. 76: "The New Testament knows nothing of 'liking' a church; but it does know of 'love of the brethren' (I John 3: 14)".

² *The Reformed Pastor*, p. 19 in Hugh Martin's edition.

³ *op. cit.* p. 122.