

The Plymouth Brethren

General Overview: [The Plymouth Brethren - Arthur C. Piepkorn](#), 1970.

The following page includes three papers written by the late, Christian author Miles J. Stanford on the subject of the Plymouth Brethren (PBs)—both Open and Closed varieties. The PBs, often known throughout the world by their typically inconspicuous Assembly or Gospel Halls, are an unique group of evangelical Christians with a deep and rich, but subsequently sad history. The PBs should not be confused with any "Brethren" out of the Continental Free Church tradition, (such as the Church of the Brethren, Brethren Church, etc.), nor the Arminian Pentecostal Assemblies of God.

For decades, several Open PB leaders, and a few from the realm of the Closed, reached out with their various needs to Miles by both telephone and letter, despite their pride and denial that help could be gained from someone "outside" their tight-knit Assembly system. However, it of often only an outsider who is in a position to objectively evaluate conditions, rather than whitewash them.

"I don't think I have ever been able to bring myself to face up to the real condition of the assemblies as they are today. I'm mainly in touch with some of the better leaders..."

To their discredit, foremost on the PB mind is whether the NT "pattern" of meeting is being followed. Their entire system is geared to engrain this emphasis to the point of 'denominational' honor and pride. Today, a large majority of Open Brethren Assemblies (Bible Chapels) have embraced religious humanism—Arminianism, while tenuously attempting to maintain the doctrine of eternal security. Since this position is both philosophically and biblically untenable, it's only a matter of time until things unravel and other heresies attack from within—e.g., tongues, demonism, etc.

Even worse, the Raven/Taylor/Symington/Hales factions of the Closed were ensnared in Christological heresies, immorality, devolved to cultic status with a despicable testimony, and have left a trail of congregational and individual wreckage in their path. Thankfully, they have nearly excluded themselves out of existence. Various web sites like [Peebs.net](#) (origin AU & NZ) have been established to provide triage to these religious refugees. Unfortunately, rescue groups like Peebs fail to see the bigger picture due to their insular roots.

Miles' burden was always that the PBs would discover their rich legacy of [Pauline Dispensationalism](#) established by the original founders of the movement. The green titles below are links to specific articles.

More comprehensive histories of the movement have been written by several individuals--e.g., A. Miller, J. G. Bellett, W. B. Neatby, F. R. Coad, H. A. Ironside, E. H. Broadbent, R. A. Huebner, etc. Opinions run strong among the movement's heirs as to what constitutes true and accurate accounts of their history. In our opinion, each seemed to chronicle different aspects of

19th century religious phenomena and the moving of God's Spirit. We leave it to the experts to sort through the differences.

The [John Rylands University Library of Manchester](#), Manchester, England, appears to be the current archive for all things Plymouth Brethren.

[The Plymouth Brethren - A Brief History](#)

[Chronic Brethren Needs](#)

[An Open Letter to Open Brethren](#)

The Plymouth Brethren - A Brief History

by *Miles J. Stanford*

BEGINNINGS -- Early in 1825 in Dublin, Ireland, Dr. Edward Cronin and Edward Wilson began meeting together each Lord's Day morning for the breaking of bread, worship, and study of the Word. Students of the Scriptures, these godly men could not feel at home nor find spiritual food and fellowship in the Anglican Church of Ireland and, since they did not believe in church membership (already being members of the Body of Christ), were not accepted in the relatively few dissenting and independent churches of the day.



They felt that they were heeding the Lord's pronouncement in Matthew 18:20, "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" They were not seeking to start a movement of any kind, they were not in competition with existing churches, nor did they attempt to influence others to do as they were doing. Nevertheless, in 1827 the little flock included H. Hutchinson, Wm. Stokes, Lord Congleton, J.G.

Bellett, and J. N. Darby--the latter being an ex-lawyer, and at the time a cleric in the Irish National Church.

In 1830, J. N. Darby left the Anglican priesthood and devoted himself full-time to forming and feeding similar small gatherings both in Ireland and England. These were days of unrest not only in the National churches but also throughout the various non-conformist bodies. Higher Criticism [1] was beginning to gain ground among the Anglicans, as was the Tractarian movement [2] with its trend toward Rome. At the same time the Irvingite heresy [3] with its charismatic tongues and prophesying began to surface in London.

Out of this unsettled state of the professing body, many true believers were led to form small groups where there was freedom to worship the Lord Jesus in reliance upon the Holy Spirit and according to the Word of God. As a result many hungry-hearted Christians found in Darby a truly pioneering and God-sent leadership.

Then in 1832 B.W. Newton, leader of one of the larger assemblies located in Plymouth, England, invited Darby to come and share the ministry. This he did.

EARLY PROPHETIC CONFERENCE -- It was about this same time that Lady Powerscourt opened her [Irish mansion](#) for a series of Prophetic Truth Conferences, which continued for several years. Before long, Darby became the acknowledged leader of these meetings to which many clergymen were attracted, as well as some of the charismatic Irvingite leaders.



RAPTURE RECOVERY -- During the course of this Conference it was primarily through Darby that Premillennialism was restored to the Church. At the time, it was claimed by some here in America that Darby had received this doctrine from an Irvingite "prophetess." There are those who have renewed the same base charge against him today.

This calumny has been thoroughly refuted. In the first place, the Irvingites soon ceased attending the Conference because the teaching was so at variance with what they held. In the second place, Darby and all of the Brethren leaders regarded with horror the many "prophecies" charismatically delivered, especially by the female followers of Edward Irving.

Finally, in the latter part of his book, *Christ's Coming Again*, [William Kelly](#) vindicated the originality of Darby in regard to his teaching of the pretribulational and premillennial Rapture. If you are interested in obtaining the authentic details of this charge and its refutation, obtain the eighty-page booklet, *The Truth of the PreTribulational Rapture Recovered* [4] -- by R.A. Huebner.

From 1832 to 1845 Darby was in fellowship with and ministered occasionally to the thriving Ebrington Street assembly at Plymouth. Since most of his time was spent elsewhere establishing other gatherings, Newton and J.L. Harris were obligated to carry on the bulk of the ministry in this assembly. It was considered the center of the Brethren movement and grew to number some 1,200 communicants.

THE BRETHREN BEST -- During this first twenty years these groups, known as assemblies, were established worldwide. In their New Testament simplicity they preferred to designate themselves as "brethren," but the influence of the Plymouth center soon caused them to be known as the, "Plymouth Brethren."

Their New Testament manner of gathering in homes and rented halls, their refusal of ordained leadership, their reliance upon the Holy Spirit for the necessary ministerial gifts amongst the

men, and their close-knit fellowship and purity of doctrine, drew many of the finest leaders into this expression of the Body.

However, this first twenty-year period proved to be but a fleeting age of gold in the history of the so-called Plymouth Brethren. This seemingly insignificant era probably constituted the most illustrious and edifying chapter in the history of the Church since the first century--at least in the movement's constituency, and doctrinal wealth.

EARLY LEADERSHIP -- Consider the caliber of leadership that entered these lowly expressions of Body life in England alone. Nearly all ranked high amongst their peers: several were English Lords, one a cousin of Queen Victoria, many of the high nobility of England, others top-ranking Army and Navy officers (generals and admirals); still others were highly educated university men (one a Classic medallist--Darby, at 18). Fine scholars, well versed in the classical languages, and not a few of them equal to the best linguists of their day.

We need mention but a handful of the thousands who rallied to the unity and freedom of this corporate worship of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The following names have been selected because they are today the best known of a little-known movement, and since most of them are "yet speaking" via their deeply spiritual writings that are still in print and continue to be much in demand by discerning believers.

What is known as "the original seven" of this Body life movement were Dr. Edward Cronin, E. Wilson, Francis Hutchinson, William J. Stokes, [J. N. Darby](#), Anthony Norris Groves, and [John G. Bellett](#). Others were B.W. Newton, J.L. Harris, S.P. Tregelles, G.V. Wigram, Sir Edward Denny, [William Kelly](#), [C.H. Mackintosh](#), Chas. Stanley, [J.B. Stoney](#), C.E. Stewart, V.T. Wolston, A. Miller, F.S. Arnot, Dan Crawford, H. Moorehouse, Geo. Goodman, Alex. Marshall, Geo. Cutting, R.C. Chapman, [F.W. Grant](#), Sir Robert Anderson, J.C. Deck, S. Ridout, H. Craik, Geo. Muller, and J. Wright.

Before contemplating the doctrinal and ecclesiastical content of this marvelous movement, we must face up to the amazing fact that the Lord brought much of it to light through Darby.



JOHN NELSON DARBY, Leader's Leader -- During his more than fifty years of leadership among the Brethren, Darby was almost constantly on the move. Although of aristocratic heritage and near-genius mentality, he loved the poor folk and always sought to share their lowly abodes and rough fare.

Darby contended that *"the poor want as much of Christ as they can get to comfort them in their sorrow; the rich want as much of the world as they can enjoy with a good conscience."* He gave away his fortune and would have dispensed with his valuable library but for 2 Timothy 4:13! He

released Lady Powerscourt from their engagement because of his pioneering ministrations which covered not only Great Britain, but included such countries as France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Jamaica, Canada, America, Australia, and New Zealand. He visited these areas as veritable missionary journeys not just once, but a number of times.

And everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances, Darby was writing deep theological material in the form of personal and pastoral letters, published and unpublished papers, tracts, magazine articles, and book manuscripts. His books, most of which were written over one hundred years ago, are all in print today: 44 volumes averaging nearly 400 pages each. A number of hymns were composed by Darby which are still outstanding for their beauty and rich biblical content.

Over and above all this he accomplished scholarly and deeply spiritual work in translating the entire Bible into English, French, German, and the New Testament into Italian. The "Darby Bible" is a favorite of many today, and is still the exclusive choice of the exclusive Brethren.

The Brethren movement was seen by many as a scriptural way of freedom from the error and confusion of the day. The members of this expression of Body life were ministering deeper growth truth, Body truth, dispensational truth and prophetic truth in a period when the Christians of Britain and Europe knew little or nothing even of the primary doctrine of the security of the believer, considering it presumptuous to declare one's assurance of salvation.

AMERICAN FRONTIER REVIVALISM -- It is true that during the first part of the nineteenth century there were strong religious developments throughout the eastern half of America. However, these were limited to the new birth, and revivalism. There was no teaching of the identification truth for spiritual growth, nor the Dispensational, positional, or prophetic truths that were being brought into the open via Darby's mind, heart, and pen. The Calvinistic revivalists in America included such Covenant stalwarts as Nettleton, Beecher, and Edwards. The chief Arminian revivalist at that time was the erratic extremist, Charles Finney.



BRETHREN THEOLOGY - *Salvation* -- In no uncertain terms the Brethren proclaimed the Scriptures to be absolutely inspired by God and the sole authority for faith and practice. It was mainly through Darby's ministry and writings that the sovereignty of God, election, assurance, acceptance, and unconditional eternal security were built into the movement's foundation.

In the face of the charismatic developments among the London-based Irvingites (Scotch Presbyterian Apostolic Church), Darby strongly emphasized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the time of new birth, coupled with the truth that believers are baptized into the one Body, the Church. He taught all of the Fundamentals.

GROWTH -- Darby was the instrument the Lord used to unfold for us the scriptural teaching of our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning these growth truths, those who have received light on the Word through such leaders as Murray, Paxson, Hopkins, Sparks, Maxwell, Huegel, or any others, have the Lord and J.N. Darby to thank!

PROPHECY -- Again, it was chiefly via Darby that the Lord chose to give us systematic clarification of the believer's rapture prior to the Tribulation, as well as the Lord Jesus' glorious

return to earth with His saints to establish the Millennial Kingdom. J.N.D. also did much to develop the dispensational teaching that we have today.



GATHERING -- The original and sustaining motive of the Brethren was to gather and worship in freedom "*according to the New Testament pattern,*" as they understood it. They taught the priesthood of all believers, therefore had no pastor, but depended upon the Holy Spirit for their leadership. Their ministry was shared by those men gifted and trained for that purpose by the Spirit.

The center, or focus, of Brethren assemblies is the Lord's Table. They have always been seated in a square about the table for communion. Each Lord's day they partake of the one loaf, and the one cup, signifying the unity of the Body. "*For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread*" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

BRETHREN ECUMENISM -- Unity of the Body was, and is, the Brethren burden. In positional union with their Head in heaven, their "ground of gathering" is as the Body of Christ on earth (1 Corinthians 12:27). Each local assembly was inter-related to every other one that gathered upon that "ground" throughout the world. None was independent of the other, and none was considered to be the Church of God in itself, but each assembly represented the Church in its particular locality.

The decisions and actions of each gathering were incumbent upon all! It was a matter of the one Body. "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Many of these ecclesiastical developments became a part of the movement through Darby, and soon were to constitute a cloud upon the shining authenticity of its origins!

THE FIRST BRETHREN FISSURE -- Humanly speaking, we are now approaching stark tragedy in the history of the Brethren. It was a development that constituted the beginning of the end of their brief but brilliant unity.

DARBY VERSUS NEWTON -- Although Darby was ministering elsewhere most of the time, early in 1845 it was brought to his attention that all was not well in the Plymouth Ebrington Street assembly. It was evident upon examination that Newton had been attempting to establish the large and influential group as an independent church with himself as pastor--and that with the blessing of co-workers Harris and Tregelles.

To the horrified Brethren, such action was not only schism in the Body, but also sectarianism and the dreaded "clericalism." To further complicate the catastrophe, Newton came out in the open as a postmillennialist, expressing disdain for Darby's dispensationalism and distinction between Israel and the Church.

After many stormy sessions and writing of papers in an effort to heal the breach, Darby and a number of others withdrew from the Plymouth assembly to form a new one. This move did not so much constitute a split as it did the excommunication of Newton and those who chose to remain with him at Ebrington Street. The entire movement was badly shaken by this event, and many felt that Darby had been rash in his action.

HERESY! -- Two years later (1847), however, Harris discovered what was considered heretical error in one of Newton's unpublished manuscripts. It had to do with the Lord Jesus as Man, and as an Israelite on earth. When this was brought to light many of those who had previously questioned Darby's move sided with him. As far as the Plymouth Brethren movement was concerned, Newton and his group were off New Testament ground of gathering, and were considered to be a source of error. A crippling stress-crack had appeared in the body of the Brethren!

GEORGE MULLER -- To step back a few years, in 1832 Henry Craik and George Muller (picture) gave up their Baptist pastorates to become co-workers in gathering and ministering to a Brethren assembly in a rented hall known as Bethesda Chapel, in Bristol, England.



Both of these godly men were strongly influenced toward Body truth by the pioneer missionary to India, Anthony Norris Groves. Muller had married a sister of Groves, and Craik had spent two years in the Groves home as tutor to his children. It was not until 1835 that Muller's world-renowned orphanage work commenced, but that tremendous faith responsibility did not deter him from ministering at Bethesda Chapel for the following thirty-four years.

DARBY VERSUS MULLER -- in 1845 it was Muller who was directly involved in a seemingly insignificant incident that was to irrevocably shatter into fragments the entire Plymouth Brethren movement. Soon after the excommunication of the Plymouth assembly, several left there and applied for fellowship with Craik and Muller's Bethesda gathering up in Bristol. This move immediately aroused a minority in that assembly, who protested their reception on the ground that "*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (Galatians 5:9). Muller and Craik, upon examining the persons in question decided that they were not involved in the Newton errors and therefore received them into the fellowship.

As a result, the protesting group withdrew and appealed to Darby. Upon the basis of the one Body and the ground of gathering, he ruled that unless the ousted Ebrington Street assembly and its leadership were reinstated, those from that meeting could not be accepted in any Brethren gathering. On the other hand Muller and Craik, while acknowledging that Newton and his assembly were in error, did not feel that individuals who were untainted by, or had renounced said errors, had to be kept back until the entire assembly was cleared.

THE GREAT DIVIDE -- A terrible and protracted battle ensued, affecting every Brethren assembly worldwide. Were they not members of the one Body, in union with their Head in heaven? Each assembly in the entire movement had to judge the issue of Muller's Bethesda decision and act accordingly. The agonizing result was a complete separation; some favored the Muller stand, others sided with Darby.

BRETHREN: *Closed and Open* -- From that time to this (150+ years), there have existed two fractured arms of the original Plymouth Brethren movement. The Darbyite are known as the "exclusive," or "closed," Brethren. The Mullerites are known as the "independent," or "open," Brethren. To compound the fracture, each of these two arms has continued to separate all

through the years; the closed because they are too "tight," and the open because they are too "loose."

The pattern rarely varies: one or more are turned out of a gathering for one reason or another, and a new faction is formed. Hence we now have the Darbyites, Newtonites, Mullerites, Grantites, Kellyites, Stuartites, Ravenites, Taylorites, etc., etc. As Dr. Griffith Thomas once wryly observed, "The Brethren are remarkable people for rightly dividing the Word of Truth and wrongly dividing themselves!"

THE EXCLUSIVE BRETHREN -- The Brethren have always insisted that Matthew 18:20 is the New Testament ground of gathering: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" They deem it absolutely essential to gather in His Name, not that of a leader or denomination. Darby held to this so tenaciously, and pushed it so far, that it began to produce division and error. In 1845 he was to write:

United testimony to the truth is the greatest possible blessing from on high. And I think that if anyone, through the flesh, separated from two or three gathering in a godly manner before the Lord in the unity of the whole body of Christ, it would not merely be an act of schism, but he would necessarily deprive himself of the blessing of God's presence.

Such an extreme could only produce far-reaching tragedy. If a tiny assembly in New Zealand made a certain decision concerning discipline in their midst, for instance, every other exclusive assembly from there to London and beyond was obliged to act in accordance with it, or else. Their unity was to be strictly maintained in spite of the sad fact that it meant the continual heartbreak of severed fellowship, friendships, families, and even marriages!

Further, the closed Brethren insist that if all is not strictly observed according to their assembly protocol, the Lord will not favor them with His presence during worship. Such is a powerful means of control, of keeping everyone in line.

The inference is that if all in attendance are within the will of God, Hebrews 2:12 will be a reality for them: "*I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*" The Lord Himself will lead their worship meeting. Such is the Brethren ideal. They insist that those who meet on the "erroneous" church or denominational ground cannot expect the same blessing and privilege, nor can other Brethren assemblies that may be under their discipline.

WINE -- The Brethren still insist upon the use of wine in observance of the Lord's Supper, every week. And this in spite of the temptation and danger it presents, especially to anyone who has ever had, a drinking problem. As a matter of fact and sorrow, some of the exclusives use wine in their homes--a "freedom" that has resulted in instances of actual alcoholism among both leaders and followers.

Because of their extreme strictness, the exclusive Brethren are slowly excluding themselves out of existence. One exception is the Grantites, who are relatively moderate and continue to grow, mainly in the New Jersey area.

SPIRITUAL PATRICIDE -- In moments of honest objectivity, Brethren have been known to refer to themselves as "the Lord's grief, the saint's sorrow, and the devils glee!" Unbelievably, the exclusives actually went so far as to excommunicate one of the original leaders of the movement, the saintly Dr. Edward Cronin!

After sacrificial service on the mission field in Turkey, followed by fifty years of faithful leadership among the London assemblies, he was cast out on the charge of "independency"--at the age of 78. Three years later, in 1882, he went to his reward in Glory with a broken heart. (Never mind, dear brother Cronin: Matt. 25:21!)

IRONSIDE: *Inside and Outside* -- From personal experience Dr. Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951) once wrote:

There is perhaps no greater trial a man can be called upon to face, than to take, through grace, a position he has seen from the Word of God to be scriptural, and then to be rudely awakened to the realization that the people who were in that position before him, are not what he had hoped them to be.

Yea, that they are even less spiritual, less devoted, less zealous for God, than some he has left behind him in systems where quasi-darkness prevailed. Then indeed one needs to be firmly held by the truth, or he is likely to be altogether and completely disheartened.

Dr. Ironside certainly knew whereof he spoke. During his illustrious and fruitful lifetime, he moved from the Salvation Army to the open Brethren to the closed Brethren (Grantites), to an extended ministry as pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, and thence into Glory. He authored a book, titled *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement -- An Account of Its Inception, Progress, Principles and Failures, and Its Lessons for Present-Day Believers* [5].

Sometimes one can judge a book by its cover!



THE OPEN BRETHREN -- This arm of the Plymouth Brethren movement maintains the same doctrinal foundation and Body truth as the exclusives, with the exception of the one doctrine that divides them. The opens consider each of their assemblies to be independent of the others as to its government and actions, while relying upon a spiritual unity with its fellow-assemblies. Each group is responsible for itself in its locality, accepting all who qualify for fellowship by the grace of God on their own spiritual standing.

In spite of the strictness they maintain, the open Brethren have slowly been opening themselves out of their New Testament distinctives. This trend results in larger and fewer assemblies instead of the planting of numerous small gatherings. Many church members are being drawn into the assemblies, and this influx of church-background believers tends to dilute the distinctiveness of the Brethren, causing them to lose more than they gain.

Whether it be for better or for worse, the opens have experienced some changes in recent years. A brief twenty or so years ago (1950's) they were still renting unobtrusive halls in which to gather; or they would purchase a home, remove a few partitions and have a very suitable center for their local Body life assembly.

Today in many areas they have large and impressive-looking buildings. There is even a Brethren organization which provides financial assistance for these projects! They refuse to use the term "Church," preferring to call these structures chapels, or meeting halls. (The next time you are in Wheaton note the huge red brick, white-columned "chapel" on the northwest corner of College Avenue and President Street!)

Some open assemblies have gone so far as to cooperate with the Billy Graham crusades. Not only is such cooperation with denominational churches against everything the Brethren stand for, but as Darby wrote over one hundred years ago (referring to the Moody-Sankey revival meetings held in England), "... *the revival work, and the tone which accompanied it have introduced a mass of persons from whom God alone can deliver us.*" And J.B. Stoney commented, "*It is easier to build on the edge of a knife than on a revival conversion.*"

OPEN BRETHERN MINISTRY -- In former years the Brethren were often charged with turning in upon themselves, thereby lacking a healthy evangelistic and missionary outreach. And this may well have been the spur that has caused them to over-extend themselves.

Admittedly they have always ministered to the saints far more than to the lost. In this they at least conform to the New Testament, practically 80 per cent of which is addressed to the believer. Even so, the opens have been very faithful through the years in evangelistic and personal work at home and abroad.

One reason for their outreach being unnoticed by many is that they minister in depth and without ostentation. The quiet service of the opens has always been far more extensive and effective than their critics have realized. Although it could be higher, a very healthy percentage of their people are on the mission fields of the world--all on a faith basis, without mission boards or ballyhoo of any kind.

Further, the assembly folk have always included avid printers and pamphleteers. Their book publications do not begin to compare with those of the early exclusives, but their tracts are exceptional, to say the least. Alexander Marshall's booklet on salvation has amounted to several million copies, and George Cutting's well-known and valuable tract, *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*, is over the fifty-million mark!

Numerous, assemblies still conduct street meetings, carry on personal work from state and county fair booths, etc. Emmaus, their Bible School, originally located in Oak Park, Illinois but since moved to Dubuque, Iowa, is well known for its extensive correspondence course material, which is of very high spiritual worth.

OPEN CHALLENGE -- Besides adding to their ranks by winning souls (and raising children), the assemblies are ever seeking to draw "outside" believers onto their ground of gathering and

into their corporate worship. When an assembly brother first contacts a church member he will make sure about his relationship to the Lord, but his prime interest will focus on that person's relationship to the members of the Body. He will invariably point out that the Word does not sanction an ordained one-man ministry, and that the churches and their members are not on New Testament ground of gathering, as are the assemblies.

YOUTH EMIGRATION -- In recent years problems concerning the young people in open Brethren circles have become quite acute--not that it is any different in most churches today. But many of the younger generation, the cream of the assemblies, have gone off to college and thereby escaped what they deem to be undue domination. In the process, they are seeking to establish their own assemblies in campus areas.

These young people are more burdened than rebellious. They feel that they cannot go back into their home assemblies, pouring their "new Wine" (not Miller's) into those old wineskins. Thus far their Emphasis is on student evangelism, rather than on the usual over-emphasis on the "ground of gathering."

They are discovering that there is far more involved in maintaining a healthy corporate fellowship than meets the eye. It remains to be seen just what this sincere drive for freedom will amount to. It is hoped that some of these fine young believers will come to realize the worth of going back into the established assemblies to help build upon the good that has always been there, so as to develop their best potential. Many of the older Brethren are responsible for this loss through their tendency toward holding an intolerable leadership grip.

FEMALE SUBJUGATION -- Then there is the plight of the "sistern," the Brethren women. The assemblies have always insisted upon female silence in the meetings, and submission in the home. The possible over-emphasis and overbearing attitude of the men along these lines have in many instances produced a traumatic effect upon the female constituency. Some have claimed that this has brought about a situation whereby the women actually control many present-day assemblies--through their husbands!

Over-emphasis in any realm always has its penalties, no matter how well-intentioned or how biblical. The Brethren still insist that their women wear head coverings as a sign of submission; but a bit of net or cloth doily--or even a full-fledged and flowered bonnet--do not always prove the presence of a submissive spirit, do they?

Although these comments have been hard on the Brethren, they have been written for the benefit of all the Lord's people, both inside and outside of the movement. Their faults cannot be justified for the sake of their excellencies. And the open Brethren do have excellencies; the Lord has been very gracious to them down through the years. Like all of us, they are true "vessels of mercy."

HIGH STANDARDS -- While not unique in this, the Brethren are certainly outstanding today in their concern for the Lord's glory. They stand uncompromisingly for the Lord Jesus who is the living Truth, and for His Word, the written Truth. Their basic burden is to be the New

Testament expression of the Body of Christ, the Church, as they see it and yearn for it to be today.

And the opens care--they care for the Body, and they care for the members in particular. Although they may not always deal with it in the best manner (who of us does?), they will not tolerate error in their midst.

Recently an assembly invited a speaker who ministers to the movement at large. A rarity among the Brethren, this particular brother had been infected by the charismatic plague. Inevitably, his message betrayed the fateful fact. At that moment a ruling brother stood and terminated the meeting with prayer! The very next morning he ordered a quantity of [The Line Drawn](#), to be distributed among the families of the assembly. True, the people should have been prepared long beforehand for any such incident, especially in these days; but at least there was decisive action when the need arose.

The open Brethren have strong conviction concerning the truths that they hold, and as a rule are very hesitant to make any changes or adjustments. Their Object is the Lord Jesus, and their source is the Word of God. Their Body life methods of gathering and functioning include nothing of the psychological, nor the sensitivity training of group therapy. To the best of their light and ability they remain within the realm of the Word, and would not dream of doing otherwise. For that, and much else, we can all be very thankful to the Lord.

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1. A method of interpretation attributed to F. C. Baur (1792-1860) which erroneously applied Hegel's methodologies to Scripture and in turn undermined the Bible's authority. Much of 20th century liberal theology rests on this "Higher Criticism".
 2. The Tractarian movement was a phase of the Oxford Movement. It began as an effort within the Church of England to check the growth of liberalism. Leaders were John Henry Newman, J. Keble, and E.B. Pusey. Subsequently, Newman converted to Catholicism, and became the father of the Anglo-Catholic tradition.
 3. Edward Irving (1792-1834), charismatic leader of the 19th century. Irving was the forerunner of the modern-day "five-fold ministry: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, & teacher" error of the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition.
 4. Available from [Present Truth Publishers](#), Roy A. Huebner, 274 East Veterans Highway, Jackson, NJ 08527 USA
 5. Republished by Loizeaux Brothers in 1985.

Footnotes added by DRS.

[Darby, Kelly, and other early PBs on CD ROM!](#)

Also see: [Plymouth Brethren Emulators](#)

From time-to-time, we are asked whether Miles J. Stanford ever broke bread with the Plymouth Brethren (PB) assemblies. To our knowledge, he visited their meetings in his earlier years, but primarily ministered from "the-outside-in" throughout the majority of his ministry. Based on our prior discussions, he would often engage in letter correspondence and telephone ministry with PB leaders--both Open and Closed. The following paper was typical of his emphasis. DRS

CHRONIC BRETHREN NEEDS

"Many among us [Plymouth Brethren, circa 1875] have more acquaintance with the Word than with the Lord. They should go together. The Word should not be apart from the Person. I feel that many have begun wrongly. To get peace and to break bread seems to be the aim before them, and not to be outside the world because of having found the Lord in glory--their calling being heavenly.

"I believe the real difficulty is that there is a deep-seated reluctance to accept all that the death of Christ includes. It is their unwillingness to part with the old man that really hinders their entering into the new. With most what is sought is not to live with Christ where He is, but to obtain His help where they are." --J.B. Stoney

Mr. Stoney candidly expresses his concern as to a number of serious problems among the early Plymouth Brethren. These same problems are even more predominant among present-day Brethren assemblies, both Open and Closed.

It is true that some of these same problems exist throughout the Church in general; but the Brethren are far more responsible in that they possess the rectifying truths (position and identification), which to a great degree are unknown to the Body in general.

1) "Many among us have more acquaintance with the Word than with the Lord."

It is both natural and necessary, especially in the early years, for the believer to gain overall knowledge of the Word. But it is also necessary for that knowledge to ultimately center in the glorified Lord Jesus Christ as one's Life (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:1-3).

With few exceptions, Brethren ministry is not characterized by centering in, and coming from, the glorified Lord. There is too little of the rightly-divided, Pauline presentation of the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

There are two sides from which we can approach the higher truth of God's Word as to growth and likeness to the Lord Jesus. The one is to desire to know all Scripture truth fully, and to have our system of doctrine complete and correct.

The other is the deep, intense hunger to be free from the power of sin, as free as God can make us in this life. It is only from this side that real access will be given into the heavenly life and fellowship with the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. --Andrew Murray.

2) "To get peace and to break bread seems to be the aim before them, and not to be outside the world because of their having found the Lord in glory-their calling being heavenly."

This may hurt a bit, but we would knowingly harm none. The core of Brethrenism is the assembly, and the heart of the assembly is the weekly breaking of bread. "This do in remembrance of Me ... for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11:24-26).

If you want to bring tears to the eyes of a Brethren, and cause his heart to fill his breast, just let him tell you what the remembrance gathering does for, and means to him. (Actually, he will tell you whether you let him or not!)

The chronic illness, if not the actual death-knell of the Brethren movement as such, is that they have majored in minors. They have emphasized the secondary, to the detriment of the primary. There are two main factors that they have in reverse.

a) The Brethren theory is that spiritual growth is predicated upon correct New Testament (NT) gathering. Whereas the proper NT gathering is predicated upon spiritual growth. The assembly can be no better than the spiritual condition of those assembled.

b) The Brethren's subjective concentration upon the Lord's death constitutes a hindrance, if not an actual block, to the all-essential concentration upon His glorified Person as their Life. Go ye unto all the Body and share the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Life! What the Brethren consider to be their best, that of gathering in remembrance of Him in His death, deters them from God's best, that of centering in the life of His Beloved Son in Glory. Remembrance should be a supplement, not a substitute for knowing Him in glory. Dr. Chafer once remarked in a Seminary class:

The Brethren could have swept the world with the truth committed to them, if only they had gone about it in the right way!

3) "I believe the real difficulty is that there is a deep-seated reluctance to accept all that the death of Christ includes."

The present-day problem among the Brethren is not so much reluctance concerning the death of Christ, but rather ignorance. They, for the most part, remember the justification aspect of His death--Christ died for the remission of our sins (Rom. 2:24-26).

Few are aware of, and count upon, their identification in His death unto sin (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20).

4) "It is their unwillingness to part with the old man that really hinders their entering into the new."

The Brethren ministry to the saints fails to include the believer's death to the self-life. The lack of reckoning themselves to have died unto sin and Adamic self all but eliminates their reckoning themselves to be alive unto God (Rom. 6:11). The lack of the Cross in the life obstructs much of the benefit of being new creations in Christ in Glory.

The great shame and tragedy throughout Brethren history has been, and is being, caused by a lack of the Cross-work in dealing with the inordinate activities of the Adamic self-life. The first Adam often supersedes the manifestation of the Last Adam. The Brethren, dear people as they are, have always been engaged in a civil war of their own making. F.W. Grant's lament was:

Our shame is public. It requires no spirituality to see that exactly in that which we have professedly sought, we have failed most signally. "The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is just most surely what we have not kept.

5) "With most what is sought is not to live with Christ where He is, but to obtain His help where they are."

This is another element of the great Brethren reversal. The majority consider Christ to be in their presence during the gathering in His Name for remembrance and worship. As a whole, the Brethren have not been taught to abide in His presence at the right hand of the Father.

The Brethren are not position-oriented. If they by faith in the positional facts realized that they are in His presence (Eph. 2:6), they would not attempt to depend upon any sense of His being in their presence. It is necessary for them to draw nigh to Him (Heb. 10:19-22) via the Word of truth and the Spirit of truth, instead of by sense trying to know Him to be in their presence. Mr. Kelly insisted upon the same:

What a difference it makes to be set for the glorified Man! If the glorified Man is your heart's Object you cannot make anything of yourself. It is such a wonderful thing to color your whole life, to know that you belong exclusively to the Man at the right hand of the Father. Seeing and fellowshiping with the Lord Jesus Christ in glory takes you out of everything here.

If we consider the Lord to be at our side, the result is to be occupied with ourselves, or to seek to be an object of consideration; whereas if we have been led to His side where He is, His interests and concerns will singularly occupy us.

In a letter received today, a life-long Brethren wrote:

As I have been reading your *Position Papers Anthology*, I am astonished that I never saw the identification truths before. Or I should say, I never saw them as positional and experiential, but merely positional. I believe that is because I was taught so.

I have tried to talk about the reality of the death of the old man at Calvary, and the believer's call to walk in newness of life, "pressing toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." For the most part I am either met with a stare of incomprehension, or else a verbal response that indicates that the person is not following my thought.

Unless the Brethren arise and go to their Father, and abide in His glorified Son as their Life, they will continue to sink into slow but inevitable death.

