

BOOK FORUM

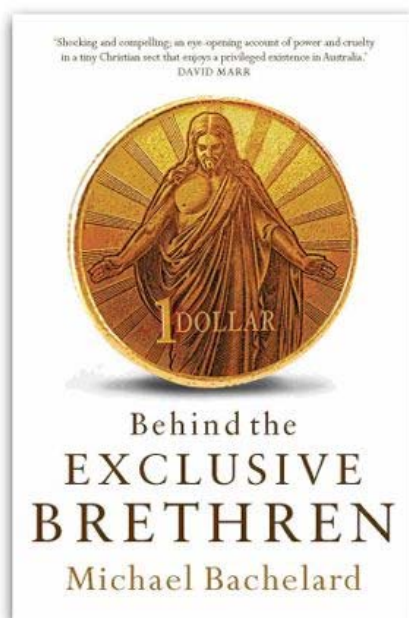
Inside the Brethren lobby horse

JOHN GUNSON | OCTOBER 17, 2008

Bachelard, Michael; *Behind the Exclusive Brethren*. Scribe Publications, Australia, 2008. RRP \$32.95. ISBN: 97819213722585

Australia's 15,000 Exclusive Brethren are easily recognised by their distinctive unworldly dress, especially in the rural areas where they are prominent. Many are involved in small business. One of the nation's structural landmarks, the gigantic metal flagpole astride Parliament House, was produced by a typical Brethren light industrial enterprise.

On the face of it, it seems the Brethren are simply a small business version of the agrarian Amish — reclusive and fundamentalist, but essentially industrious and harmless. But Michael Bachelard paints a different and thoroughly convincing picture in his readable and well researched investigation.



He focuses on Brethren efforts to secure favours from politicians and governments in Australia and New Zealand. Brethren members do not vote, but their lobbying efforts are extensive. Bachelard reminds us of their extraordinary involvement in the 2005 New Zealand election campaign where, in an attempt to establish a close working relationship with former opposition leader Don Brash, they ran anti-government advertisements that led to cries of foul play and eventually Brash's resignation.

The Brethren energetically and successfully cultivated a relationship with John Howard, from the earliest days of Howard's election to parliament. This secured them generous access to him while was prime minister. Kevin Rudd has made it clear he has no time for them, and they have 'gone quiet'. But they are expected to re-emerge when the political climate is more congenial.

There have been other exposes of the Brethren's involvement in politics, on the ABC's *4 Corners* and elsewhere. But Bachelard's is the most thorough examination. It incorporates a history of the sect, a description of Brethren life, an analysis of the sect's involvement in politics, and details of the Brethren approach to education, marriage breakdown and dissent.

At the core of Brethren doctrine is a belief in separation. It pivots on a verse in

Paul's second letter to the Timothy which requires Christians to 'withdraw from iniquity'. Friendships with 'worldlies' are forbidden, and social intercourse is limited to necessary contact such as business negotiations. The sect's current leader Bruce Hales said: 'Unless you come to a hatred of the world, you are likely to be sucked in by it.'

Bachelard details the Brethren response to family breakdown, and their relationship with the Family Law Act. In common with other sects, there is a high degree of tension when a non-sect parent wishes to have contact with their children who remain in the sect.

The Brethren resist scrutiny, and the release of Bachelard's *magnum opus* of investigative journalism will challenge their hierarchy, perhaps to the extent that they will understand why their energetic engagement with the body politic attracts scrutiny consistent with the value society places on transparency.



John Gunson is a legal practitioner in rural NSW who has represented estranged Exclusive Brethren members in court cases against the sect.

SUBMITTED COMMENTS

STEVE | 17-OCT-2008

Small problem here, it appears that John Gunson is not an independent reviewer but instead rather biased. Also I think it only qualifies as investigative journalism if you actually investigate both sides which Bachelard clearly hasn't done.

RAYMOND | 17-OCT-2008

Perhaps there was nothing else to add. If the other side is more of the same. It adds nothing to the truth to include unsubstantiated denials.

STEVE | 19-OCT-2008

No, unsubstantiated denials do not add anything to the truth. However Bachelard's book is not the truth in the first place, just unsubstantiated allegations.

TREVOR | 20-OCT-2008

Raymond is right. There's nothing else to add. The only side the Brethren has is a dark side. They should be put under the same watch we put Islamic extremists.

FRANCES | 20-OCT-2008

Even if only half the facts are true wouldn't you reckon that's half too much? The hierarchy of the Raven Taylor Hayes Exclusive Brethren seems to be reaping the benefits of large tax breaks without being accountable to the tax payers and voters.

A good handbook and insight into arguably a sect or religion.

I hope Michael Bachelard's investigations continue.

STEVE | 21-OCT-2008

What if none of the 'facts' are true? Or 10%? Why demand absolute perfection from one particular religious society when the world as a whole is far from that? There have been very unsavoury happenings amongst the Exclusive Brethren, but journalists like Bachelard focus on those only as reported to them by biased individuals. It is a documented fact that marriage breakdowns and other societal ills are statistically far less among them than society as a whole.

[Home](#) : [About Us](#) : [Work experience at Eureka Street](#) : [Help - Site Map](#) : [Advertise/Contribute](#) : [Contact Us](#)
© 2008 EurekaStreet.com.au