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OttawaWatch: The quiet presence of The Brethren

By Lloyd Mackey

I SEE THEM every day in the galleries of the House of Commons. There are usually two or three of them, middle-aged gentlemen in suits and ties. Serious Christian MPs of various political persuasions know them as 'The Brethren.'

Unlike some of the other Christian groups attempting to bring their perspectives to bear on public policy issues, they avoid publicity. Sooner or later, they may get some and if they do, I hope that they are not given the "gotcha" treatment by journalists.

("Gotcha" is a term popularized in a book written in 1994 by veteran political journalist George Bain. It was a critique of the kind of journalism that involves aggressive and sometimes tricky questioning techniques.)

The Brethren don't deserve gotcha because they are not egoists looking for political power or attention. They just want to do what they believe to be God's work in a manner that they are persuaded to be God's way.

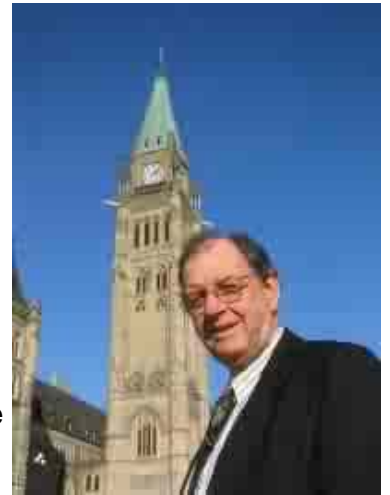
They feel strongly about what they are doing -- praying for, listening to and quietly bending the ears of the politicians who are at the heart of the issues surrounding the bill redefining marriage. They happen not to believe in directly engaging in politics: They would never run for elective office. But they do see [Bill C-38](#) as appropriate for venturing outside their sheltered place for a while.

While respecting that they eschew publicity, I would like to share with OttawaWatch readers, some things about this group that I believe will be helpful to other Christian leaders.

These men are part of what is often called the Christian Brethren or [Plymouth Brethren](#) movement. They come from the branch of the movement sometimes known as the '[Exclusives](#).'

Your humble scribe, until his early 20s, was part of the movement's '[Open](#)' branch. I am grateful for my upbringing and for the biblical grounding given me by the Brethren, in combo with Inter-School Christian Fellowship, a group of transdenominational high school clubs.

The 'Opens' were so known because their weekly communion services were, and are, open to Christians outside the Brethren fold. Some of the key Brethren



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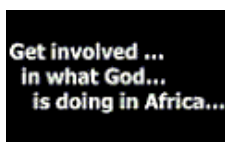
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assemblies in Canada are Westview Chapel in Montreal, Bendale Bible Chapel in Scarborough, Bethany Chapel in Calgary, Granville Chapel Community Church in Vancouver and Oaklands Chapel in Victoria (where I spent most of my youthful Sunday mornings -- and evenings, too).

The signboards identifying 'Exclusive' meeting halls usually read something like: "The Word of God will be proclaimed here Lord's Day evening at 7 p.m., Lord willing." They do not advertise their churches to the public, choosing rather to communicate with those they believe God has sent to them.

The 'Exclusives,' unlike the 'Opens,' practice closed communion. They are a tight-knit group and are careful to keep their formal fellowship among themselves. I say formal because, informally, they are warm and congenial, if a little shy and cautious, with the people they meet and work with, out there in "the world." They don't want to get burned.

And they are devoting much time and effort to being on The Hill, these days, because they really believe that the Christian gospel could be singed around the edges by the passage of Bill C-38.

As the bill has been grinding its way through committee, I have been able to observe skilled and at times, almost precocious, political advocacy and strategizing. I am at present preparing a news story for *ChristianWeek's* next issue, that will be, hopefully, a straightforward account on the highlights of the latest debates on the bill.

The presence of The Brethren will not be part of that story. But, with their earnest simplicity and quiet counsel, it can be said that they arguably have been a benediction to the process.

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