

My life, in and out of the brethren

by Alistair Deayton

Chapter 1: The fifties, a brethren childhood

I was born in May 1950 in Leicester in the English Midlands to an Exclusive Brethren family which went back several generations on both my father's and my mother's side. At the age of two my family moved to Paisley, Scotland when my father got a job in the area. My mother was Scottish, from Galashiels in the borders, and my father came from Parkstone, a suburb of Poole in Dorset. I was an only child as was my mother, but my father was the sixth of seven all alive, and all in the brethren at that stage. Paisley is a town of, at that time, around 95,000 inhabitants situated seven miles to the west of Glasgow.

The meeting in Paisley

My earliest brethren memories are of going to the meeting room in Paisley. This was a converted church halfway down Storie Street next to a piece of waste ground used for car parking and bounded on the other side by a chip shop, the rank odour of waste fat from this pervading the area and giving me a lifelong aversion to chip-shop bought fish and chips.

We went in through the door, past the notice board which stated "The Word of God will be proclaimed on Lords Day at 6:45 p.m. All are Welcome". There was nobody there to welcome us, as in other churches, and we brought our own hymnbooks and bibles from home, the Bibles, Darby's New Translation of course, were bound in black Morocco leather with our initials at the bottom and sometimes with a zip, and the hymn books were "Hymns for the Little Flock". A few hymnbooks and bibles were inside the front door in the forlorn hope that a stranger might come in off the street. If this ever did happen it was a drunk man who would noisily disrupt the meeting and be tactfully ushered out by somebody.

Once inside the door, we would walk past rows of traditional wooden pews and up a couple of steps to the platform. This was an area, formerly containing the pulpit, organ, etc., where two rectangles of Polish bentwood chairs were placed concentrically with around 15-20 in each rectangle. The men (brothers) sat in the front row and the ladies (sisters) in the back row. My earliest recollection is of sitting in the back row with my mother, eating sweets, normally Rowntrees Fruit Gums, to keep me quiet.

At the stroke of eleven o'clock an old white-haired man sitting in the opposite corner, Bill G, would give out the notices. He had lost an arm in the First World War I was later told that he had told the authorities he was a conscientious objector, and had asked to be excused military service, bearing arms. This was denied him, but on his first morning on the Western Front, he was hit by a German shell and his arm was blown off. He would shake the stump as he spoke. The notices were always the same - "If the Lord will, the meetings for this week will be as follows..." followed by a list of meetings including, from time to time, a fellowship meeting to which those from Paisley would be invited on the following Saturday. More on these later. A table in the centre of the room would be covered by a white tablecloth and contained a T-shaped arrangement of a wicker basket with a loaf of bread, next to a large glass cup of wine, and at the other end, another wicker basket for the collection.

A brother would give out a hymn to or about the Lord Jesus. Somebody would start the tune and we would sing it unaccompanied. Musical instruments of all kinds have always been banned in Exclusive Brethren meetings, being deemed "carnal" in spite of the many old testament references to God being worshipped with musical instruments, e.g. in Psalm 150.:3-5 "Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet. Praise Him with the harp and lyre", etc. A brother would then stand up and give thanks for the bread, then break the loaf in two and hand it to a sister. It would then be passed round the sisters, passed forwards, and passed around the brothers, each one tearing a piece of bread from the loaf. He would then give thanks for the cup, and the wine would be passed around in a similar way. I would try and arrange the fruit gums so that I sucked a red one as the wine went around. The wine was Eldorado tawny wine, a fortified wine normally drunk by alcoholics, and I imagine my father must have got strange looks at the off-license as he bought it by the case. There was none of the usual ban on alcoholic wine which I later discovered was the norm in other evangelical circles. Following this the collection basket was passed around. There was no teaching about tithing in the brethren and collections were generally small unless there was a specific need, e.g. for building a new meeting room. The first Sunday of the month was the Special Collection Sunday when the collection had a specific target amount and was earmarked for certain specific purposes - poor people in need, a gift to the brother who was taking the local fellowship

meeting, gifts to other meetings which were holding fellowship meetings or three day meetings, etc. Never to missionaries, we had none and did not believe that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations..." applied to us. Our job was to be the bride of Christ, making ourselves ready for his return by purifying ourselves and getting rid of all the spots and wrinkles. (Eph 5:27)

Following the breaking of bread there was a long succession of hymns and prayers, with occasionally, a word being expounded from the bible. All this would be by the men, women remaining silent throughout, although joining in the singing. The succession of themes was rigid, and woe betide any brother who gave out a hymn at the wrong time. Firstly we worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ as bridegroom o the Lord Jesus as Saviour. These were followed by, and this was normally only one, hymn and prayer to the Holy Spirit. In the early fifties this was reasonably new, having been introduced by J T Sr. in the closing years of his life with a fair amount of opposition and some folks going out of fellowship over it. The hymn book, "Hymns for the Little Flock", had been revised around 1951, mainly to include hymns to the Holy Spirit.

Now the meeting room was across the road from a cattle market, and from time to time the silences between the hymns and prayers were broken by loud bellows and groans from cattle being unloaded to be ready for the Monday market. The meeting concluded with hymns and prayers to God as Father and sometimes to God as the Triune Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I don't think we ever used the word Trinity. The meeting would end with some people starting to cough and move and then the recognition would dawn on all and people would begin to talk for a while and then go home for lunch, returning at 3 p.m. for the reading.

Brethren loved to have jargon words for things and "reading" was one of them. It would otherwise be described as a bible study or bible discussion meeting. It was opened by a hymn and a prayer, and then a chapter of scripture would be read and the brothers contribute to discussion on it, referring back to the ministry that sat on bookshelves n every brethren home, by J.N.D(arby), F.E.R(aven), J T(aylor) Senior, C A C(oates), J B S(tony) , always referred to by their initials and to the monthly white pamphlets "Notes of readings at New York and other Ministry" and "Ministry of the Word" which I think was at that time known as "Words of Grace and Comfort."

At that time it was the practise, unless there was a special visitor, to work through a book of the bible at a time. After an hour or so, the meeting was closed with a hymn and a prayer and we went home for tea, or were occasionally asked out to somebody's house for a traditional Scottish High Tea. At 6:45 we met again for the gospel preaching. Prior to the preaching we sometimes had an open air preaching outside some tenement flats at the bottom of Storie Street. I liked the gospel because the hymns had more go to them and were livelier than those in the morning meeting. Often tunes from Sankey's or Redemption Hymns were used with our hymns, brethren being so far out of mainstream Christianity that the only hymns written by non-brethren in the hymn book were those written before the 1820s, the start of brethrenism, such as those by Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. For the gospel we sat in the pews, and the preacher stood at the edge of the platform, although occasionally in winter we met in a small room behind the platform, originally the church lounge. There were a number of gifted evangelists, but most brothers were tried as preachers at some time or another. None spoke from pre-prepared notes, all speaking extempore, supposedly relying on the Holy Spirit to give them words to say and a message to proclaim, although on reflection it may have been more of the "gift of the gab". Some kept a score of the conversions they made, but these conversions were mainly if not completely children and teenagers from brethren households.

As a child I did not attend midweek meetings, my parents taking it in turns to attend the Monday evening prayer meeting, the Wednesday Bible reading, the monthly Ministry Meeting on a Tuesday night, and the monthly Saturday care meeting, where the business of the church was discussed, such as who to invite to take fellowship meetings, or what to give the Special Collection to. Care meetings could be stormy and I remember hearing of a prominent Glasgow brother, reputed to be something of a troublemaker, dropping dead in one. There seemed to be a breed of carnaptious old men who delighted in making trouble and arguing minor and irrelevant points, something I have often encountered in churches in the West of Scotland since leaving the brethren. Not that I knew anything of that as a child, however.

Fellowship and 3-day meetings

On other Saturdays, there were fellowship meetings, when brethren from neighbouring meetings were invited, and a guest speaker, a "ministering brother", was invited to take a reading, and following a communal tea, an address, which was like a preaching only not gospel-orientated - in other words, a sermon. Ministering brothers I can remember were mainly middle aged or old men from the London area, such as Charlie Hammond, A J G Gardiner, Percy Lyon, who was liked because he had a distinctive style, reminiscent of Winston Churchill, Percy Hardwick, the three Price brothers, Alan, Stuart and Kenneth. the latter two dying early deaths, and the blind Mr Ephgrave. From Birmingham, there as F D Waterfall, from Northern Ireland, the

two Mason brothers, John and Willie, from the North of Scotland Jimmy Lovie, from Detroit Stanley McCallum, an expatriate Scot, and occasionally somebody from Australia where there were very large numbers of brethren. Others who left during the 1959 division were A E Myles and G R Cowell, also Cecil Lawrence from Stornoway in Lewis where there was a small isolated meeting.

Paisley had a fellowship meeting about every 3-4 months, working in a rota with the smaller meetings at Alexandria, Greenock and Barrhead. Glasgow was quarterly and later monthly. Paisley was fortunate in being able to house a fellowship meeting in its own hall, but most meetings in that era hired halls, Glasgow the Methodist Central Halls in Maryhill Road. Here there was a balcony running round three sides of the hall, seats down below facing the front and two rows of leading brothers on a platform facing them. Once, when I was around six, sitting in the front row of the balcony, I accidentally knocked a sweet paper over the edge. Twelve pairs of eyes from the stern old men on the front row of the platform, turned to gaze at me. I was bundled up under my fathers arm, taken out immediately and we went straight home, where I had the humiliation of my bottom being smacked and of being sent to bed.

There were a number of meetings in the industrial towns of Lanarkshire, where Cambuslang, Rutherglen, Airdrie and Coatbridge used their respective town halls for fellowship meetings, while Larkhall used a school hall, as did Kilmarnock in Ayrshire. The highlight for a small boy was the tea, when large urns of tea, sugarless tea, and black tea were brought round - surprisingly in this day and age, never coffee, which was always drunk with hot milk in fifties Britain - along with sandwiches, sausage rolls and trays of cakes. In Coatbridge or Airdrie, your eatables were brought in a carton, and I remember once the brother in charge caused much merriment by asking that all remain seated until the CARTOONS were collected!! I remember a fellowship meeting in Airdrie Town Hall, where scotch pies were served,, with copious amounts of liquid (fat?) from them spilling out on the floor. As we came out, there was a queue of worldly young people waiting outside for a dance. I wondered if they would slip on the mucky floor.

My ambition as a child was to be able to take part in serving the tea, and I achieved this by first carrying round jugs of milk and dishes of sugar, and later heavy urns of tea (ordinary team sugarless tea, and black tea) when I was older. The distribution of the food was normally undertaken by girls as far as I can remember.

One step up from fellowship meetings were three-day meetings. Prior to the war, these had been called conferences but like so many other brethren activities, they got and kept their jargon name. I remember few in my early childhood, these were really adult occasions with personal invitations to those outside the host meeting being issued. I have vague memories of one at Edinburgh in the Church of Scotland Assembly hall, where I may have gone to one of the addresses with my grandmother, and one around 1958 in Newcastle with G R Cowell, where we stayed in a Student Hostel, my father and myself in the men's quarters, and my mother in the women's quarters. Around the same time came one in London at Westminster Central Hall, again Methodist, with Mr Cowell, I think. The London 3-day meetings were an annual affair and the most prominent of all. My parents were there but I was not invited, although I did attend one or two of the meetings, by the expedient of sitting on the steps of the balcony, next to my father on the end seat. In the early sixties, 3-day meetings got larger and larger with Glasgow taking the Kelvin Hall arena with around 5000 seats, and people allocated in every hotel and bed and breakfast in the city as well as in brethren's homes, and Edinburgh the Murrayfield Ice Rink, both, as far as I can recall, with J T Jr.

Visiting other meetings

There were occasional visits to other meetings on Sundays when my father was asked to preach. We would go to the reading, then to somebody's house for tea, with a table groaning with sandwiches, scones and cakes of all shapes and sizes. Occasionally we would be invited to the morning meeting and go out for lunch, usually a roast. I didn't like that so much, as I was not keen on vegetables as a child, and it was embarrassing to ask for a plate without peas or whatever.

Once every few weeks, we would visit my maternal grandmother in Galashiels, in the Scottish borders. My grandfather had died in 1954, and had previously been the principal at the Scottish Woollen Technical College in the town. Galashiels meeting was very small with only one active brother, another who was housebound and a number of sisters who, were, as was their wont, silent. A brother was normally invited from Edinburgh for the whole day, to add to the one local brother taking part in the morning meeting, to take the reading, and to preach. The story is told of a brother visiting an even smaller meeting at Dalbeattie who preached one evening to one elderly and very respectable spinster, preaching from John 4 "Thou hast had five husbands and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." I enjoyed the visits to Galashiels. The large, old house was full of treasures to be explored, boxes of old maps and railway timetables, postcards and letters, all of which I eagerly devoured and which engendered in me a craze for collecting which has lasted to this day.

Our summer holiday was normally taken at my paternal grandparents who lived at Parkstone, a suburb of Poole near Bournemouth along with my two maiden aunts. This was, in the days before motorways, a two-day journey from Paisley, and an overnight stop at a hotel was normally made in places such as Bridgnorth, Shrewsbury, or Chester. I remember a visit to a morning meeting in Chester where a number of young men arrived in military uniform. At that time, national Service was still compulsory for all men of a certain age group and brethren, being conscientious objectors, although not pacifists, were normally allocated to the NCC's (non-combatant Corps, also known unofficially as the Nigerian Camel Corps and Nobby Clark's

Commandos), whose main base was near Chester, where my father himself had served in the late forties before he was married. In an attitude I now find rather difficult to comprehend, they prepared to serve their country, but not to bear arms, presumably taking the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" as meaning all killing, not just murder as most Christians would interpret it, but being quite prepared to do work to allow other servicemen to kill in a time of war. The NCCs were a great mixing pot, with brothers making lifelong friends with brothers from the other end of the country. There were men from many other Christian groups and for many of those conscripted, it was a rare episode when they could rub shoulders with other believers and see that these were not the apostates they were painted by the brethren. A few years ago, I spoke to a former bible college principal and, quite by chance, discovered he had been in the NCCs with my father.

Later as I got older, we varied our holidays, once we went to Jersey, flying from Bournemouth in a rickety old converted Bristol Freighter, and three times to St Ives, which was a great brethren holiday place, and where my parents had met and gone on honeymoon. On the first two occasions, we stayed in a guest house, but by the time of the third, such places were deemed wrong, and we rented a house. Meetings were, of course, attended in all these places when we were there on a Sunday, and differed little, apart from the type of hall, from those at Paisley

School

At the age of five, I started at the primary department of Paisley Grammar School, and spent all my schooldays there, three years in the infants, four in the upper primary and five in the secondary school. At around primary five, it was beginning to be taught that children should not be exposed to other Christian teaching, and thus I had to sit outside in R E classes, and to miss the morning assembly, sometimes taken by the Church of Scotland minister of Paisley Abbey. This marked me out as different, but I never had to give a full explanation, just as well, because I just knew it was WRONG not why it was wrong, or could I justify it from scripture.

Garrison Keillor puts it well in "Lake Wobegon Days", when describing being brought up in what I believe was a branch of the Kelly brethren, as being like having two left feet. "You just kept your socks on and said nothing."

I even missed the annual prize giving in the town hall, because there was a prayer said there. There was never any teaching about witnessing about Jesus to schoolmates and friends, probably one of the reasons why I find this difficult now. This was but the beginning of the decade of change, the sixties, which really began around 1959 with the "eating with unbelievers" question, when a lot of people "went out over eating", a phrase that always brought to mind a group of extremely fat people who went out "overeating". But that really belongs in the next chapter, "The sixties: a decade of change".

Breaking Bread

One further event, around 1963, really closed this brethren childhood. At the age of 12, almost 13, I was not yet "breaking bread", and my father mentioned that if I was not doing so by the time I was 13, I would have to "sit behind" at the morning meeting. I knew of a number of my friends who were breaking bread, some had asked to break bread, others had "confessed the Lord". I thought about this for a week or so and decided I did not want to face the humiliation of sitting in another part of the hall at the morning meeting. I had no idea what was involved in confessing the Lord, a simple preaching on Romans 10:9 (If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved) never having been heard, or if heard, never taken in. So I said I wanted to break bread, my name was brought to the next care meeting and I was able each Sunday to tear a chunk off the loaf and take a slug of the wine. I was no longer a child, although not until I was 20, did I pray in public or give out hymns. I must have been a trial to my parents, and I suppose it was embarrassment and fear of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong type of language that stopped me. The concept of prayer as talking to God as you would to a friend was totally alien to the brethren. Some people postulated that I had a defect, presumably in the manner that the children of Israel were forbidden to offer a sacrifice of a lamb or and animal that had a defect, and I think once an insensitive word was given comparing me to the paralytic who was let down through the roof by his friends. But I could walk normally and had no defect, only shyness.

This then, was my brethren childhood, mild in view of what came later, an era to which many of those who have come out and not made a home in another type of church or assembly yearn to go back to, and yet still pervaded by the "we're better than everybody else" mentality that pervaded Exclusive brethrenism from the 1846 Bethesda division onwards." The next instalment "The sixties: a decade of change", covers that traumatic period from the late fifties with the power struggle that saw J.T.Jr rise to supremacy, the merge mania of the early sixties, the rise of the Hales brothers and commercialism, the slogans of "2 Timothy 2, our charter" and "Separation from evil, God's principle of unity" the craze for public confession, the fall of the Hales's and subsequent teaching against vindictiveness the ever abundant rules and regulations that came flooding in from New York, coupled with the cult-like adulation of the Universal Leader, Mr Jim, Our Beloved, Our Paul.

Chapter 2: The Sixties, a Decade of Change

The sixties saw enormous changes amongst brethren, with a new rule, edict, directive, call it what you will, almost weekly. For a full list the document see elsewhere on this site. A new younger leadership emerged and often were swept out of the way almost instantly by rivals, the adulation of J T Jr. became almost obsessive and the whole organisation became more and more isolationist and cult-like.

Separation

The era started in the late fifties with the prolonged power struggle following the death of J T Sr. in 1954. The exclusive brethren had always been a global organisation since Darby's split with Bethesda in 1846. Such a global structure, while without any official administration, required a leader. Darby, Raven and Taylor Senior became such leaders and notes of their meetings were taken down and published, after editing, by the Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, becoming the brethren's personal library of their particular interpretations of scripture. By around 1958 there was no natural successor to J T Sr., the three main contenders being an expatriate Scot, Stanley McCallum from Detroit, Gerald Cowell from Hornchurch in Essex, and Jim Taylor Junior from New York.

Now brethren had always practised a degree of separation from those outside, with various things being deemed to be "worldly" such as radio, television, record players, Sunday newspapers, cinemas, theatres and holidays where they could not be at the meeting every Sunday. This was probably not too different from your average evangelical of that era in the UK. From the thirties and before, the scripture in 2 Corinthians 6 "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" had been interpreted not merely as "do not marry an unbeliever", the context in which it was written, but, "do not be part of an organisation which has unbelievers in it2, e.g. a trade union. Many brethren had lost their jobs because they had refused to join a trade union, especially where

an employer practised a "closed shop", i.e. compulsory union membership for all employees. Around 1958 this teaching began to be extended to any club or society or professional association. My mother had to write to Edinburgh University seeking exemption from the General Council there, an organisation with membership

automatically extended to all graduates.

My father had a bigger problem. In 1955 he had purchased a chemist's (pharmacy) shop in Giffnock on the South Side of Glasgow. To practise as a pharmacist in the UK, membership of the Pharmaceutical Society is obligatory, a measure intended to eliminate the prescribing of drugs by unqualified people. There was a long and ultimately unsuccessful campaign to get parliament to insert a conscience clause in this legislation, but by around 1962-3 this had failed, and my father was struck off the register of the Pharmaceutical Society and had to hire a locum at considerable expense to do the work that he was qualified to do. Finally in 1965 he sold the business and opened a camera shop in Paisley, a business that survives to this day with myself now running it.

Even membership of a public library was frowned on and I was once pounced on by a couple of boys a year or so older than myself, who had seen me going into Paisley Public Library from a brother's house which overlooked the library and forced more or less to swear under oath that I would never again darken its doors. But then of course brethren didn't swear under oath, they chose to "affirm" any time they had to go to court, a practice that, by disagreeing with those who would swear on the Bible, aligned them with atheists and those who were against Christianity and the Bible

This was all part of a larger campaign of "Separation" which grew to affect every area of daily life. The verse in 2 Timothy 2: 19 "Let him that names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" was emphasised at every opportunity and definitions of "iniquity" were expanded at every turn. These included eating in restaurants, staying in hotels, or going on holiday. If there was a "divided house", i.e. one partner in a marriage was not in fellowship, the one in fellowship was encouraged to live a separate life, not to eat at the same table, or sleep in the same bed as the one out of fellowship. My first wife had two brothers who never came into

fellowship, and they had to eat at a separate table from the age of 13 or so, and she was never allowed any friends to come to the house in her teenage years.

Children over around 15 not breaking bread could not eat at the same table and were encouraged to leave home as soon as possible. There was supposed to be no contact with relatives or friends not in fellowship. We moved to a new house in 1959 and for a while I made friends with schoolmates who lived in the area, going to their houses to watch television and play games, but by 1963 or so, a meeting every night was the norm and there was no time for such friendships, stopped by pressure of time rather than any ideological reason.

This "separation" was extended to anyone not in fellowship, to friends, neighbours, business contacts, workmates. A job such as a rep which entailed a sales conference with a meal afterwards was forbidden. This was contrary to scripture, when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10. "I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave the world". (NIV)

This teaching about separation caused a lot of friction and, in 1959 Gerald Cowell was withdrawn from. He had a number of followers who also left and formed their own group. They were known as the "1959 outs" by us and as the "Ilford brethren" by themselves, as far as I know. This split, although known as "1959", lasted until around 1962-3 in some places.

This led to the rise of Jim Taylor to the position of Universal Leader, able to rule the brethren world-wide from Brooklyn and the meeting room there in Nostrand Avenue. Cowell led the outs and McCallum became a second rank ministering brother and apparent follower of Taylor

Merges

Now brethren in a large city, where there were several meetings, had always practised a city structure, meeting together in a central meeting room for certain meetings, normally the Sunday afternoon and main midweek readings, the care meeting, and a monthly "Ministry M", officially known as the "meeting for prophetic ministry" where two or three brothers, as led by the Holy Spirit (in theory, although often by their own agenda), would stand up and give a word, a mini-sermon, or a meditation on a particular scripture. Later this was extended to a weekly event.

The breaking of bread, gospel, prayer meeting and a local reading took place in the local hall. The main room was known as the "City Hall" and the local one as the sub-division, mirroring an American term.

Around 1961-2 this city structure was extended to adjoining localities, as the meetings or groups of meetings were known, up to a 20 miles radius and joined by some common link. In one case in the South of England, the Golf Links were thought to be the only link! This resulted in some large mega-meetings which often required new city halls to accommodate everybody, so the sixties saw a glut of new meeting rooms, mainly built on a circular plan, with the floor sloping down to a central circle, the largest in the UK being at Bristol, which became the venue for annual 3-day meetings to which representatives from every meeting world-wide were invited. Folding beds were owned by Bristol and circulated amongst other meetings when they had 3-day meetings, becoming known as "Bristol Beds". By this time staying in hotels was forbidden and invitees to 3-day meetings filled every room of each brethren house.

But back to 1961. In our area, Paisley briefly joined with Barrhead, then along with the meetings at Cambuslang, Rutherglen and Uddingston, it was absorbed by Glasgow, which had ten existing meetings. At that time, the numbers were sufficient for the existing Glasgow central meeting room, known as "South Side" in Nithsdale Drive. Then it was decided that the Lanarkshire meetings of Coatbridge-and-Airdrie, with 4 meetings between them, and Hamilton, Motherwell and Larkhall, also with 4 meetings between them, would merge with Glasgow. Later the tiny meetings at Greenock and Alexandria joined, but these were soon closed and the brethren there moved to the city. This was such a notable merge that a song was written about it. It was a parody of the then popular "Song of the Clyde", sung by Kenneth McKellar.

The Glasgow Merge

We'll sing of a merge that's just going to be
The merge that I'll sing of in Glasgow Countree
Of all Scottish merges it's dearest to me
It flows from Larkhall all the way to the sea.
It borders the orchards of Uddingston fair
Meanders through Motherwell with Colville's works there
Through Paisley and Rutherglen and Cambuslang too,
It's really one place when you take the right view
Chorus

Oh the Glasgow merge, the wonderful merge
they cannot agree but they'll soon all converge.
On the Glasgow Fair, I hope to be there
To share all the joys and to cool the hot air

Imagine we've left Cardonald behind
And wind happy clots in the West End we find
At Whiteinch and Newlands and Cathcart we stay
Then Scotland's Madeira that's South Side they say.
Or maybe to Coatbridge or Airdrie we'll go
Or over to Hamilton that thrills people so,
Maybe journey to Larkhall along the green verge
Where the hammer's ding dong is the song of the merge.

There's Willie Wallace and there's Willie Carrick and there's Willie Bruce and
Willie Smart
There's Andrew Steven and there's Roddy Fraser and the others always play
their part.
They argue this way and they argue that way and they try to stress their point
of view.
While all the time it is pretty certain that the merge will come true

With eyes a flashin' it is voted smashin' by the young ones who are very keen
Since they seem to think that they'll have more dates and far less chance of
ever being seen.
There's Alex, Bill and Tom and Jimmy Craig, and there's Edward, High and John
as well
Who are all excited and we're all united, that the merge will be swell.

As the above implies, there was a lot of argument and ill feeling about the merge, particularly by the old men who ran the meetings which were being merged, and had operated them as their own personal fiefdom for generations. But, as the song said, it all came to pass. South Side was too small for this and the Couper

Institute in Cathcart, to the south of the city, was hired. Fellowship meetings had been transferred from the Methodist Central halls to there some years previously as there had been teaching about any form of association with other Christian groups, such as hiring halls from them. Later it was deemed wrong to hire halls from anybody and all fellowship and 3-day meetings were held in the brethren's own meeting rooms. On a temporary basis the Sunday afternoon readings were held in four locations, South Side, West End, an old meeting room in the Garnethill area of the city, Airdrie and Larkhall, and the Couper Institute was used for the Mid-week reading, care, and fellowship meetings. A disused church in Shields Road in the Pollokshields area was purchased and converted by removing all the pews in the central area downstairs and replacing them by chairs, which could be arranged so that there could be around 7 or 8 rows arranged in a circle or oval (around that time it was decreed that we should sit in a circle, not in a square or rectangle, maybe somebody in charge had heard the Country and Western song "Will the circle be unbroken".) The organ was removed and rows stepped up into the cavity where it had been with chairs placed on these, around 4 or 5 rows up, the "front row" would sit when there was a fellowship meeting. Around the central area, 4 or 5 rows of pews were retained, and the balcony had the pews retained. The basement was gutted and rows of gents and ladies toilets and a kitchen installed. In all around 1200 people could be accommodated, the merged meeting having around 1000 members including children. The spire with clock tower remained, and one old brother who had been a watchmaker, had the job of winding it every week and carrying out any necessary repairs.

The times of the meetings also changed, the 11 a.m. breaking of bread had been put back to 10 a.m. around 1958, then later the times of 9, 12, & 3 were deemed sacrosanct, with the breaking of bread at 9 a.m., the reading at 12 noon and the preaching at 3 p.m. Then around 1967 or so, the breaking of bread was moved to 6 a.m., supposedly somebody had suggested this in a meeting in Australia because J T Jr has to catch an early flight back to the USA. It was taken on by Mr Jim, as we referred to him, and spread world-wide in a matter of weeks, the city reading was at 9 a.m., followed immediately by a city preaching and then by a series of

preachings at different times in different sub-divisions right up to 5 p.m. Thus it was possible to keep on the move all day with around 5 or 6 preachings.

The preachings themselves altered. Somebody had noticed that 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and so from then on preachings were by three brothers, the first being by somebody mature, and the last by a young man, the total lasting no more than an hour. Addresses at fellowship meetings were similarly divided between three speakers. The tea meetings had long since ceased, with tea provided but people bringing

their own sandwiches.

Everyday life

The new rules covered every aspect of life. Men were forbidden to have moustaches or beards, one old man in Glasgow being told his moustache was a "relic". Later men were forbidden to wear ties in the meeting room.

In the early part of 1970, women, who had always worn hats, had instead to wear headscarves and later, only in a certain style. Women had always worn their hair up in a bun or french roll, but had to wear it down, even the old women, which looked most unseemly. Women had always been silent in the meetings, but around the same time they were encouraged to give out hymns and to ask questions in the readings, although few took advantage of this latter freedom. Trousers and jeans were always forbidden for women.

Towards the end of the decade, men were encouraged to kiss each other, a rather terrifying idea, when you desperately hoped the person kissing you was not secretly homosexual, but this stopped shortly after Aberdeen when a programme of misinformation amongst the Jims targeted Stanley McCallum, who had ended up on the other side then, as being homosexual.

Where brethren lived was also subject to restriction with flats being forbidden. Sharing a roof and stairway with somebody "unclean" was wrong. This affected many families in the Glasgow area where tenement flats were common. Some large old houses were bought and converted to flats with only brethren living in them. Should any of these brethren be withdrawn from they would, of course, lose their home!

Eating in restaurants or staying on hotels was forbidden, unless you were on a journey and there was nowhere else to stay. At The Hague in Holland, there were only two families and visitors there were often asked to stay in a nearby motel. Holidays were forbidden, although it was OK to go away for a "rest and change" or to see and encourage the brethren in a small meeting. Everybody who went away had to have this announced after the city reading by a brother, and the reason for the trip was also mentioned.

Although radios and record players were forbidden, the advent of the portable cassette tape recorder went unnoticed for a while. While these were initially used for recording people playing the piano in their homes, pre-recorded tapes soon made their appearance. It took a few years before the universal leader realised that these were to all intents and purposes the same as records and they were banned. My introduction to popular music was by these tapes, featuring the Seekers, Jim Reeves, and Johnny Cash, amongst others.

One innovation was whisky drinking. Alcohol had been absent in many brethren homes prior to this time, but J. T. Jr was reported to drink whisky and everybody began to drink it. It got to the stage where if you were not offered a glass of whisky immediately on entering somebody's house, that person was suspect, not keeping up with what was current, as the saying went. There was no teaching about the dangers of alcohol addiction or of losing your license through drink driving, a distinct possibility as some people would innocently pour you what would be the equivalent of a triple measure in a bar.

Our camera shop was not really affected, photography not being banned in that era, although we had to suffer a loss in business when Saturday was deemed to be the Sabbath and brethren forbidden to work or open their business on a Saturday. The year after we opened, in 1966, we visited an international photographic equipment exhibition in Cologne in Germany, staying with brethren there, and developed a friendship with them and others in the German meetings, Düsseldorf, where there were a lot of young families, Meisenheim, where the only family lived in a centuries-old house in a small walled town with the meeting room in the back garden, Bendorf, and Endbach, a tiny village, where the majority of the population were some kind of brethren or other. Life was more relaxed there.

Confessions

Certain sins had always been dealt with in the brethren by a visit by two brothers, known as priests, and, if the matter could not be resolved privately, by the person being brought before an "Assembly Meeting", according to Matthew 18:15-17. This was a specially convened meeting, either after the city reading, or part of the care meeting, where the matter was put to the assembly, and, if deemed serious enough, the person "withdrawn from", or put out of fellowship, thus being "under assembly discipline". The priest read the charge, normally something that could be backed by scripture. He then said "We can no longer walk with Mr X (or Mrs

Y)". Everybody said "Amen" and the person walked out of the meeting, if they had had the courage to go there in the first place, thereupon to be shunned by all the brethren, not even spoken to when met in the street, and forced to separate from his spouse and family if they remained in fellowship. If the sin was not specifically covered by scripture, e.g. smoking, the person was told not to do it and could be let off, only if caught smoking again, they could be withdrawn from for despising the "assembly".

If there was not enough evidence brought to withdraw from the person, they were "shut up", a horrendous procedure where they were to live separately at home from the rest of their family, but could not go out and make new friends outside. Some people were shut up for years in one of the cruellest of brethren practices.

Sometimes additional restriction were placed on the person. The most horrific I remember was when we were still in the Couper Institute, probably around 1962, with a 17-year old girl, who had been brought before the assembly for fornication, i.e. sexual intercourse, with a young man from another meeting. He had done this with a number of girls, and it was decided that if she had been the only one, they would have had to get married. As it was she was told by the assembly meeting that she should never marry anybody!! What a hard-hearted decision. Where was the God of love and the compassion of Jesus here?

A year or two later there was a craze for public confession. Various married couples confessed to the assembly meeting that they had had sex with each other before marriage. An older man who had had an affair with his secretary was exposed and withdrawn from. Two self-appointed priests, AH and AMcB, thought, probably wrongly, that all the young people in their late teens and twenties were all at it with one another. There followed a series of dawn raids on the houses of such people and Gestapo style interrogations. Little was uncovered and it was later decreed that this was wrong, and a sin against the blood of the Lord Jesus. The public confessions continued for a while with the most amazing people confessing sexual misconduct. It should be remembered that this was around the time of the Profumo affair, when Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies came to prominence, the beginning of the "Permissive Society" when, as the poet Philip Larkin put it "sexual intercourse began in 1963". Those younger than 15 were asked to go out of the hall during these evenings of confessions of sexual misdemeanours and I recall I was just old enough to stay in. Problems could arise when somebody confessed to something that may have happened decades before with somebody else in another meeting at the other end of the country. The first the other party would know about it would be either with a visit from the priests in his own locality, or by gossiping tongues who had heard of the first confession.

Some of those who confessed were withdrawn from for a few weeks until they were visited again and judged to be sufficiently repentant to be restored to fellowship. Some never came back.

Later I remember an evening when in what in retrospect seems an outbreak of mass hysteria, there was a spate of confessions of motoring offences. These included dangerous driving, speeding tickets and even parking tickets. It began with somebody who had been convicted of dangerous driving within the previous few days, and continued for an hour or more, with some offences having taken place years previously.

The Hales brothers.

With the rise of Jim Taylor and the emergence of the merged supercities, so other leaders rose in his wake. Mainly younger men, some lasted the pace, others got found guilty of something or other and were kicked out, or gave up and left the brethren. These men exercised their leadership by taking fellowship and 3-day meetings and became known as the "approved", presumably a reference to 1 Corinthians 11:19 ... "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.". Prominent amongst them were J T Jr.'s son in-law Bruce Hales and his brother John, both from Sydney, Australia, with reportedly 3500 brethren the largest city in the world. They worked as efficiency experts, getting business running more efficiently and brought that to the brethren, with a web of brethren businesses starting up. In 1964 Bruce took 3-day meetings in Glasgow and scaffolding was erected to give a seating capacity of around 2000. My father visited him privately at the home of AT, , the then leader in Glasgow and spoke to him about his plans for a camera shop. He approved of them, suggesting we also sell "High Fidelity". We didn't press him on whether it would have been right, however, to sell hi-fi, radios, etc., for the playing of worldly music. The Hales's developed a group of followers, hanging on their every word, a new young generation that took over the fellowship meeting agenda from the older generation. Men like David Clapham from Manchester, who was later ejected after being found in a strip club by a young man who had gone in there, Leslie Turner from Sheffield, Sid Houston from Gillingham, a very hard man, and others who developed the right mixture of hardness and slavish obedience to the global leaders.

The comparison, in hindsight, was to the totalitarian regimes of Stalin's Russia or Mao's China where edicts from the top were enforced harshly and unfeelingly on a subject subdued populace.

Suddenly, around late 1965, it was decreed that "commercialism in the assembly" was wrong, the Hales rothers were withdrawn from, their henchmen went very quiet, and certain things collapsed. In Glasgow, the

merge disintegrated with three smaller "cities" at Glasgow, Hamilton, and Airdrie emerging. The aforementioned

"priests" were disgraced. Fellowship meetings pretty well ceased because there was nobody trusted enough to take them. It was later decided that maybe we were being too vindictive against those who had led us that way and they slowly made their way back into the limelight

Some two or three years later John Hales came back, later to rise to the position on "Universal Leader" but it was decades before Bruce did. He was variously reported as being a taxi driver and an alcoholic by those who met him in these years.

"Our Beloved"

Throughout the sixties, the adulation of Jim Taylor continued unabated. Any meeting he took, fellowship meeting, 3-day meeting, or specially organised mid-week gathering, was packed to the gunwales. We once drove 150 miles for a one-day meeting in Aberdeen in the Music Hall in Union Street, it must have been

around 1964, on a single carriageway road all the way, through all the towns and villages before by-passes were built on that road. His every word was hung upon. He was known as "Our Beloved" and "Our Paul", although not the later excesses of "God's representative on Earth" as Symington was styled, or "The Personification of the Holy Spirit" as John Hales was later styled. His meetings were published in a series of limp-backed green books, and, probably partly due to modern tape recording technology replacing a man taking shorthand, these went from being a condensed report of the meeting to being a verbatim report, jokes, gaffes, and all. Names of those taking part were published in full rather than just initials as previously.

Whenever he was home in New York for the Wednesday reading this was published in "New York Readings". His every word was hung on, and it was believed that he could do or say no wrong, not that he was sinless, only Jesus was sinless, but any sins he had committed were far in the past and, as the "Lords Servant", God would not allow him to sin while he was doing such an important work as purifying the bride of Christ and preparing her for her wedding to the Bridegroom. We never stated that we were the only Christians, but we had been given more light than others, the open brethren had been given the same light, but they had gone back on it and so were the worst of all. We were therefore God's chosen people, and were we PROUD of that. It was said "We are the church", and "If we aren't the church, who is."

And so the scene was set for the explosive ending to this decade of change, for the cataclysmic climax to it all in the back bedroom of a Bungalow just off the road south from Aberdeen Harbour to Stonehaven in July 1970. And more of that in the third part of this series. "Aberdeen and its aftermath; an eyewitness report".

Growing Up

All through this I was making my way through secondary school. I missed few meetings, both because it was right, (and how the brethren loved these words, RIGHT and WRONG,) to attend every meeting, and because I might miss something interesting like somebody being withdrawn from, if I did not go.

I left school in June 1967 with six Highers (Scottish Higher Leaving Certificate) well qualified to go to University to study for a B.Sc. in Physics, my chosen subject because it was my favourite at school. I started at Strathclyde University that autumn. Now universities were frowned on by the brethren, ostensibly because study and graduation there involved one in an unequal yoke but really, I think, because if one went to University one was more likely to learn of, and to get to like, a life outside the brethren ghetto. I managed to escape the "unequal yoke" by meeting with one of the University's administrators and, in a difficult interview, got excused from compulsory membership of the Student Union. A year or two later I realised that it was possible to go into the Union without showing your union membership card and I went in for a coffee between lectures along with my fellow-students. I say the meeting was difficult because I went into it completely unprepared. I had no idea what scripture applied to my case, or the thinking behind our particular interpretation of it. I was stymied when told that other Christians believed in mixing with people so they could spread the gospel. Later, after I had graduated, I had to write to be excused from the Graduates Association, which was standard for all graduates and to have my name removed from the roll of graduates. There were some who looked askance at me going to University, but Strathclyde had recently been upgraded from a technical college and there were, in any case, some 3 or 4 other brethren already there. I recognised that science students were there to study and work hard, and not, like some arts students, to have a carry on and get drunk. I stayed for three years, qualifying with an ordinary degree in the summer of 1970. I was all set to carry on for my fourth honours year but Aberdeen and its aftermath changed all that.

My most abiding memory of University was going to a talk one lunchtime by Richard Wurmbrand, who had been imprisoned in communist Bulgaria for being a Christian and written a book about it. I had read this book and brethren recognised grudgingly that in countries where there were no brethren God might use other

believers, although where there were even a handful of brethren they were the only ones right. I remember Vincent Dhamaraj, the late leading brother in Bombay, being told by Mr Jim that he would rule India in the millennium. (Brethren were premillennialist and pre-tribulationist in their eschatology, premillennialism having been rediscovered by Mr Darby, and his only legacy to the remainder of the Christian World). I remember Richard Wurmbrand's humility and most of all an answer he gave to a question about what he did in prison. "I prayed for you" he replied, "for you, the young people of the West".

A personal footnote.

Where was I spiritually through that momentous decade? At some point, and I cannot tell when, I realised that I was a sinner and needed Jesus to die for me because of my sine. I accepted Him into my life and as my Saviour. I knew that the gospel preachings and words of the gospel songs we sang from Sankeys or Redemption hymns in folk's homes in the Sunday evenings were true and applied to me and were not just abstract theory. I was, as I would later realise, saved and part of the universal body of Christ, the invisible church.

And, my friend, as you read this, remember that that is the most important thing of all, a realisation that you and I are hell-deserving sinners, that if you were the only sinner in the world and had only committed one sin, Jesus would still have had to die for you, and that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is the most important thing in your entire life.

I remained a silent brother right throughout this period, as explained in my previous contributions, occasionally asking a question in the local reading while my contemporaries preached around the city. Children began to be involved in that era, breaking bread as soon as a hand could reach out for it, praying in the prayer meeting, like the small boy we heard of who prayed for "Mr Taylor, Mr Hales and Mr Whippy", Mr Whippy being the ice cream van! Questions in the reading were sometimes bizarre, such as the teenager who

commented during a reading on circumcision, "Circumcision would be something everybody could see, wouldn't it". The meaning of words were obscured because they were so spiritualised.

An analysis with the benefit of hindsight

Looking back I can see three major areas where the brethren went wrong.

They **Disobeyed** the great commission of Matthew 28: 19. They never sent any missionaries, they never heard from any missionaries, they never financially supported any missionaries, they rarely prayed for any missionaries. They thought they were too good to heed the command of the Lord

They **Destroyed** the families of their members, by insisting in separation within the household and withdrawing from people for so many pretty offences. 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 deals with the situation where one partner in the marriage is not a Christian and the unity of John 17::21 where both are believers.

They **Despised** the body of Christ by their demeaning treatment of other Christians and Christian groups. Jesus said "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another, as I have loved you" John 13:35.

Chapter 3: 1970, Aberdeen And Its Aftermath

By the time 1970 dawned, I was feeling quite mature. In the third year of my degree course, I had learned to work and to get on with things on my own. I had my own car, a clapped out rusty old Peugeot 403 estate, bought from my uncle Fred, who had a Citroen and Peugeot garage in London. I accepted the restrictions that came with a life in the brethren while not being fully happy with some of the more extreme manifestations of "our Paul-ism". I was still a silent brother, but that was soon to change. I was working in the shop in University Holidays and would have on Saturdays, had not Saturday working been banned by then. I was in demand for friend's birthday parties, as I had access to a cine projector and silent films such as Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin shorts.

In spring 1970, I went to Canterbury to visit my cousin Eric Huffey for a week or so. From there, I went on to Sheerness for a weekend to visit his friend Willie Cheeseman. I was shocked when, on the Saturday evening, he told me I was preaching on the Sunday. I protested that I did not preach, but he insisted that it was too late to change. At the Sunday morning meeting, I felt "Well, here goes" and stood up to pray. I preached later to an audience of around 20 and it wasn't quite as bad as I had thought. And so my duck was broken (note to North American readers - a cricketing reference there, not one of cruelty to wild creatures) and from then on I regularly took part in the morning meeting and prayer meetings at home and was asked to preach once or twice in Paisley, where the meeting room had moved a few years earlier from the church in Storie Street to a newly built room on the outskirts of town.

Aberdeen, July 1970

At that time, it was getting common for young people to be invited in large numbers to three-day meetings. In early summer 1970, I was invited to Edinburgh, although I forget at this stage who was taking these, and in late July to meetings at Aberdeen with J T Jr. This was a privilege and a much anticipated weekend, with an opportunity of getting to know young people, male and female, from other meetings throughout the UK. I remember some girls from Andover sitting behind me.

I was anticipating something unusual because Mr Jim had been acting rather strangely of late, with a number of personal and rather rude remarks towards certain brothers in public, some of which had been published in a verbatim report of three-day meetings in Preston a week or two previously, which had been rushed into print a matter of days later. On the Thursday afternoon I made my way, along unfamiliar roads, through towns and villages now by-passed, to Laurencekirk, some 30 miles south of Aberdeen, where I had been billeted with a family whose name I now forget, who lived just off the main street of this small farming town. I met all the other people who were staying there. I was sharing a room with another three other young men.

On the Friday we all made our way up the A92 to Aberdeen, the granite city of the North. Aberdeen is a city where all the buildings are made of grey granite, fine when the sun is shining, but rather depressing on a grey rainy day, such as this one. In fact, it poured all weekend, and I remember passing flooded fields on the way back to Laurencekirk on one of the evenings. We were allocated for lunch to a spinster's house nearer the room, and made our way there, having an opportunity for a brief rest afterwards before we went back for the afternoon session. I can remember nothing untoward about the Friday meetings, just routine boring 3-day meeting fare. J T Jr was drinking from a glass with a yellow liquid in it, which we presumed was fairly dilute whisky, or neat whisky of a lightly coloured blend.

We went back to Laurencekirk after the afternoon session for a meal and an early night, and returned to Aberdeen the next morning. The Saturday morning session was quite deep and serious, I recall. We went for lunch and came back for the afternoon session. No Mr Jim. He was very late and we all wondered if he had been taken ill. He finally arrived and there followed the most amazing session I had ever heard. You can read the transcript elsewhere on this site. He spoke directly to certain brothers, with personal remarks, sometimes using bad language and strange gestures such as thumbing his nose at people, unfamiliar at the time and later interpreted by some as being obscene. At several points, all the young people in the gallery fired volleys of paper aeroplanes down on the older folks on the ground floor, accompanied by much stamping of feet and cheering. He was most abusive at times to certain brothers, entirely unjustified and unprovoked. On the Saturday evening, I went to the meeting room at Laurencekirk, where the chairs had been moved out of the way and a dance was in progress. It got to be a rather noisy and rowdy affair.

On Sunday morning, we had an additional breaking of bread in the house where I was staying, as there were too many for the meeting room, and somebody arrived breathless with the incredible news that while he was on the way to this 6 a.m. breaking of bread he had seen Jim Taylor being driven through Laurencekirk at high speed. We pondered what this meant, and thought he must have been taken ill and was being taken to Glasgow Airport for a flight back to New York. Little did we know then the real reason for his flight. The Sunday reading was a lacklustre affair, taken by somebody else, although I forget who, there being no show without Punch, and it was announced that Mr Jim had unexpectedly decided to return home.

The split

I drove home on the Sunday afternoon contemplating the weekend. Over the next few days the phones became red hot as news of the real reason for Mr Jim's retreat was circulated. He had been staying at the home of James-Alex Gardner, the leader in Aberdeen., along with various other leading brothers and their wives. On the Saturday evening, he had disappeared for a long time and, eventually, JAG and some others, including SMcC, went in search of him. They found him practically *in flagrante delecto* with MK, the wife of the leader in one of the outer London meetings. Both appeared to be naked, but there was a sheet between them, hurriedly pulled up?. He claimed at the time that she was massaging him, but was disbelieved. Now he was in his early seventies by then, and she, one presumes, in her late thirties, a sensible married woman with children, not a Monica Lewinsky type by any means. She has never, I believe, uttered a word publicly about her part in the affair.

On the Wednesday, a special meeting to discuss the Aberdeen matter was called in Glasgow. Glasgow, by then, had re-merged with Airdrie and what remained of Hamilton after a major split there two years earlier, and was back to 850 or so. Various people who had been there spoke about the meetings and their opinion of them, although little was said about the bedroom scene, that being still at the time little more than unsubstantiated gossip. Around 80 out of the 850 decided to support him, because, as the Man of God, God

would not allow him to do any wrong. My father initially sided with those who were against him, but after a day or two, became convinced he had made the wrong decision, and cast his lot with the minority who supported Mr Jim. I was still certain he was wrong, but after a weekend when I left home and stayed with a young married couple who lived not too far away, decided that it was not worth losing my family and my livelihood for, and convinced myself that J T Jr was right in the matter.

I was interviewed, made to promise that I would not go back to such a wicked institution as a university, and allowed to join them. Similar divisions rocked every meeting throughout the world, although the further away from Aberdeen, the smaller the impact, so that, in Australia, there were very few who left. In Perth, Western Australia, the only folks who left out of a meeting of some 400 or so, were my present wife, Julia French, her father Sid, her mother, and her sister.

The impact in Scotland was devastating. 80 out of 850 in Glasgow, 2 families apiece in Grangemouth, Edinburgh, Perth and Aberdeen, one family in Peterhead, and nobody from the many meetings in the fishing villages along the Moray Firth coast. Around 30 in Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline, and 30-40 in Kilmarnock, the central meeting for Ayrshire, giving a total of 200 or so out of around 2,500 in Scotland. Lifelong friendships were broken and such was the intensity of the hatred generated that I could walk along the street and walk past somebody I had known well for years without even acknowledging them.

A few days later, every household on the Stow Hill mailing list received a letter from Jim Taylor. He claimed the bedroom scene was an ambush to bring out into the open those who were against him in secret, that he was innocent, and that if he wanted a woman he could have paid for one in Brooklyn without going to the bother of going to the other side of the Atlantic for one. He also referred to one English brother as "the bastard W_____" and for a while we called those on the other side "bastards". But by then most people's minds had been made up and the split had happened.

A week or two later, the anti-Jim lobby mailed everybody a copy of the tape of the Aberdeen meetings and other material but we were told to bin these without reading them. Those who were against him split again a couple of years later, the split starting in Edinburgh between those following Jim Renton, who became known as the Rentons, and believed J T Jr had been ill latterly, hence his behaviour, and those following George Strang, an older man, who rejected J T Jr completely, going back to a similar position as those who had left in 1959 and saying he had always been wrong. They joined with a group in the south of England known as the Frost brethren, probably a development from those who had left in 1959. A more recent division, has divided these into groups unofficially known as the "Soft Frosts" and "Hard Frosts" and some have linked on in some places with others of the 1959 group and with Glanton and Kelly brethren.

Those of us who remained with J T Jr in Glasgow found ourselves with two meeting rooms, one in Airdrie and one in Cathcart, to the south of Glasgow. We were so sure we were right, and we were supporting the "Man of God", who we just knew that God would not allow to fall into sin, especially a serious sin like adultery. For a short while there were some strange things said, like one brother who said Mr Jim was free to go to bed with HIS wife any time he wanted to. Some said that he would need to be blind to sleep with that brother's wife

A few had come out with us because they perceived that they would have an easier time, like the couple that went off to the Spanish Costas on holiday the following week, but they soon left. The whole gamut of rules and regulations were enforced as strictly and ruthlessly as ever. Man no longer kissed men, thankfully, partly because, in a counter attack, one or more of those who were leading the anti-Jim group were targeted as being purportedly homosexual. It was soon realised that Aberdeen had been a one off, for the particular purpose of bringing out the hidden opposition to the "Man of God".

Some 3 weeks or so later, Jim Taylor, worn down and exhausted by the stress from the division he had caused, sat in a chair in his New York home, whispered "I'm coming", and died, thus bringing to an end an unworthy chapter in brethren history. Within weeks the battle for his succession was being raged. There were two main contenders, his son, James Three, a quiet, gentle man, and Jim Symington, a pig farmer from Neche, North Dakota, in the Red River valley a few miles south of the Canadian border. Symington won, to become the next "Man of God". A hard man, it soon got to the stage where every matter in every meeting right round the world was referred to him for an answer.

A personal footnote

Now, I had planned a trip right across America for August 1970, beginning in New York, and ending on the Pacific Coast. I had my flights booked, and had written to various brethren to ask if I could stay with them. This all had to be cancelled in the aftermath of Aberdeen because we didn't know what was going to happen, who was in and who was out. I continued to be asked to three-day meetings, including one at Coventry, taken by a man from Detroit whose name I forget, which was targeted as being particularly for young people, where I

remember a party at a farm one evening, with Norman Aitken getting up on top of a hay cart and singing his usual repertoire of Scottish songs, and one in Harrow with Derek Noakes from South Africa, who left a week or two later.

Links were established between the truncated Glasgow and Belfast, where there was a large meeting little affected by Aberdeen. Having lost my wide circle of friends, I made new friends with a close-knit group of younger folks who were also in the Jim faction. There was a reasonable representation of teens and twenties amongst the handful that remained in Scotland. I gave up the idea of a honours degree and as fourth year at University, accepting the Ordinary Degree that I had already earned, and continued working in the camera shop after the summer holidays. This was fortuitous, as Alec W_____ who had left his job as a train driver to work for my father in 1965 when he opened, was on the other side, and just did not turn up for work the day after my father had sided with the Taylor faction.

So, after almost three decades, what is my personal view of the Aberdeen affair. Well, it certainly brought to a head a lot of hidden grumbling about the Taylor regime. I am willing to believe that Taylor was mentally ill, regarding the bad language and personal attacks in the meetings but I would admit being uncertain about the bedroom incident. If he had been a habitual philanderer like JFK or Bill Clinton, I am sure details or other women would have emerged. This leaves the "they are all out to get me" scenario, where he set it up to bring the opposition to the surface. If he was mentally ill, such paranoia could well have been part of it. On the other hand, he could just have succumbed to temptation. But the damage to brethrenism had been done generations before, probably by Darby in his split with Bethesda and to borrow an old Scots saying, the subsequent

“Here's tae us,
Wha's like us
Gey (very) Few
And they're a' deid (dead)”

type of arrogant mentality that pervaded exclusive brethrenism. Events later in the seventies, which led to my leaving the brethren and eventually finding my home in wider Evangelical Christianity will be covered in the fourth chapter, "1970 till now."

Chapter 4: “Withdrawn from!!!”

The decade following Aberdeen was one filled with traumatic events, starting with the weekend of Aberdeen and the subsequent split. Just over a decade later I found myself having been married, recently divorced, with full custody of small two children and an elder in a Baptist Church.

Post-Aberdeen Brethrenism

The spell following the Aberdeen division and the death of J T Jr was relatively quiet with little in the way of new rules. There were small eruptions of trouble here and there and the majority of the neighbouring meeting at Kilmarnock left, leaving only two families with the Jims. In other places various leaders were kicked out, generally the result of personality clashes with other leaders.

The central meetings at Bristol grew in importance and, as well as an annual 3-day meeting to which the supposed elite (approved) of every locality around the world were invited, there was a monthly Wednesday night meeting, with a free invitation to those who could make it. We would often hire a car and a group of us drive the 400 miles each way, making full use of the car radio, returning overnight after a cup of tea or a glass of whisky in somebody's house in Bristol. It was amazing the way somewhat strict people would have no problems about listening to the radio in a hire car or driving after taking a couple of glasses of whisky probably equivalent to a pub triple. Sometimes instead of driving we would join a bus that had come from Belfast at Gretna, and on one of two occasions a plane was chartered from Belfast with a call at Glasgow to pick up brethren from Scotland.

Bristol was the largest meeting room in the UK, holding around 2000, with a circular are plan and a circular balcony. HM was the leader there, later to fall in a most amazing way. His 6-year old daughter spoke to a single sister saying, "Oh, you've got a ring just like my mummy". The sister confessed that H had been having an adulterous affair with her for a number of years. He was immediately withdrawn from. He had been seen as the world number two to Jim Symington for a while and certainly as the UK leader.

Marriage to a 16-year old

In May 1971 I met a 16-year old girl from Belfast named Joyce. She was over in Glasgow for a fellowship meeting weekend and was staying with BC, one of the then leaders. I was invited there for lunch and after lunch everybody else went to bed, this being the custom then to recover from the early start for the 6 a.m.

breaking of bread. I was left alone in the lounge with Joyce, in hindsight somebody's attempt at matchmaking, and proceeded to chat her up. She and her parents were invited back to my folk's home with a lot of others in the evening and I took her out in the car for a run. We wrote to each other, I visited her, met her family, we got engaged and the following January we were married.

Young men were encouraged to get married, the concept of the single life because of choice being an alien one in the brethren as was waiting for maturity before marriage. Joyce was 16 when I married her, a not unusual course of action at the time. The marriage ceremony itself was unusual, it was held in a room in the basement of the meeting room, with GHP (an older brother) doing the ceremony, and the registrar in the background as an official presence. At that time this practise was starting to be common in the brethren, marriages previously being having been held in a registry office. (My father was the celebrant, or whatever name the brethren chose to give to the person who married people, in Glasgow and, a year or so later, had an enormous fit of the giggles in the middle of the ceremony when marrying a man whose middle name he only then discovered to be Isaiah!) Following the ceremony, we went upstairs for the meeting and I got into enormous trouble by refusing to remove the carnation buttonhole I had put in my jacket for the ceremony. I eventually removed it under duress. One of the words, I remember, was on worldliness in young people. A wedding was always held on a Tuesday evening to tie in with the ministry meeting and there were usually three "words" not always relevant to the happy couple. We went to the bridesmaid's parents' house after the meeting for a party-cum-reception, then left for the overnight ferry to Heysham and a honeymoon spent visiting relatives in the south of England.

We had bought a semi-detached house in Paisley with a loan from the local authority, then Paisley Corporation, as mortgages from building societies were out because of an "unequal yoke". We settled down to the usual brethren lifestyle of early Sunday morning starts and much entertaining, including a three day meeting when we slept in the loft and had around 20 people sleeping in the 3-bedroom house.

My father "put out"

Around a year later, disaster struck. My father was withdrawn from. He, along with another brother, were visiting somebody who had decided to leave and they had a difference of opinion over how to deal with the matter. The other brother got the ear of Symington and my father was ordered to be kicked out. To my lasting shame, I sat silent in the assembly meeting when he was withdrawn from. Certain unsavoury episodes in his history, dating back to the war years and long since repented of and forgotten, were brought up as additional evidence against him. He was never charged with these and the leaders must have got to know about them by means of gossip. I was wondering whether to remind the meeting that such uncovering of old sins had been judged to be a "sin against the blood of Jesus" after similar episodes some years previously, but kept dumb because I felt I was too closely involved, being family. Somebody gave out "When I survey the wondrous cross" and the meeting closed with no dissenting voice.

Afterwards I encouraged my mother to leave my father and come and live with us. This was wrong and one of the worst things I have ever done in my life, to break up my parent's marriage. I was left without a job, as I had been working with my father in the shop and had been made a partner. After a month or two unemployed I started working as a manufacturer's agent, selling photo accessories and binoculars to camera shops throughout Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England. I stayed at this for the next 18 years. This involved staying away from home regularly. Northern Ireland was not a problem because my in-laws were there, but occasional nights at Peterhead and in the Newcastle area involved begging various brethren to put me up.

As I was no longer working in Paisley, I had no further reason to live there and we moved to an old stone-built semi-detached house in Cathcart, near the meeting room, semis still being allowed at that stage. The loan for the purchase of this came from JD, a brother in Leicester who had sold a business for several million and gave benevolent loans at a ridiculously low interest rate to young brethren buying their homes. This house had a large upstairs bedroom that could be used as a bed-sitting room for my mother, who was living with us by that time. There was around this time a major split in Glasgow with BC, his friends and relatives, mainly in Airdrie, leaving. For some reason they never met as a separate meeting, just settling down in what we then knew as "the world".

During 1975 we were "shut up" for a while, my own fault. I had something on my mind I felt I should confess to a senior brother. I did this and we ended up shut up until we were visited again and deemed to be sufficiently repentant and let back. "Shut Up" is one of the most barbaric practices known to man. You were supposed to have no contact with the brethren, did not go to meetings and so met nobody, yet had to adhere to all the brethren rules and regulations, including not making friends with people outside the meeting.

Under Assembly Discipline

In the early days of January 1976 the crunch came. There had been a tension between Joyce and myself for a time, mainly over money. She had gone out and splurged on, as far as I recall, a crocodile skin handbag. I lost my temper with her and slapped her in the face. I know this was wrong of me and in no way would I seek to justify my actions. She ran out of the house and to the home of JC, then the leading brother. I was summoned there, I apologised to her, she forgave me and we went home duly chastened. That evening we were lying in bed when there was a hammering on the door. This was JC and RI with a grim message. "We have phoned Mr. Symington and he says that any brother who violence his wife must be withdrawn from on the spot". Joyce was forced to leave me and the following week I was withdrawn from.

My mother had said that Joyce probably deserved the slap and she was also withdrawn from. She immediately went back to my father. For the next 8 months I had no contact with the brethren apart from a visit when they encouraged me to get a legal separation document from my lawyer. I was told they would come and see me again and judge whether I was repentant enough but the months passed and they never came. I had to learn to cook, being well provided for there as her father had a week or two previously filled the freezer with a side of beef. Not being able to stay with brethren, I had to stay in hotels when away on business. I stuck to most of the brethren rules, however, spending a lot of time reading, developing a taste for Agatha Christie and other paperbacks from the library across the road.

Joyce moved back to Belfast and got a job there for a while. By late summer she was back in Glasgow, working for a brother in Kilmarnock. By then she was desperate to get back with me and on occasion I came home to find her in the house urging me to take her back. Eventually she forced the issue by committing adultery. I took her back and we agreed we had to leave the brethren. It was easy for her to get withdrawn from then.

A week or so later we had a visitor who visibly drew back as Joyce came to the door with her hair cut short and dyed, wearing trousers and with a cigarette in her mouth. The words "We were wondering if you would like to come back" were frozen in his throat at the sight of this horrible "worldly" apparition.

We immediately did all the so-called "worldly" things, obtaining a television and record player, and going out for meals, to the cinema and theatre and on foreign holidays. We made acquaintance of Joyce's married sister in Bristol, who had gone out at Aberdeen, and her two brothers who had never come into fellowship, having had to eat at a separate table in the house at the age of fourteen and forced to leave home a year or later. We had to sell the house as JD wanted his money back, a requirement of his loan being that we remain in fellowship. We bought a new house in Hamilton and in June 1977 our first child, Melanie, was born. Less than two years later, Nigel followed.

From the time of leaving, Joyce seemed to throw away her morals along with the brethren rules. She developed a habit of going to bingo several times a week. Bingo in the west of Scotland was then held in smoke-filled converted cinemas and attracted the sort of people I did not really want to mix with – sorry, that sounds incredibly snobby. She graduated from the bingo halls to pubs and night clubs, spending much of my money on drink.

When we moved to Hamilton we were in a new estate and found it easy to make friends. We went once or twice to Sunday evening services there, and once to a Church of Scotland, where the minister was the father of the current Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. Across the road from us lived an open brethren family, and we went a couple of times to an evening service at their church/meeting. I was still subconsciously affected by the brethren teaching that they were the only ones right and that the OB's were the most wrong off all Christian groups and felt rather uncomfortable in what was an alien environment. Around the same time, Joyce's best friend left the Jims and moved in with us with her Roman Catholic boyfriend. I felt, rightly or wrongly, that I would not be accepted in the OBs with this happening in my house. Later they moved out and later got married, and are still married.

Chapter 5: Church, divorce, remarriage and stability

Into Baptist circles

In 1978 when Joyce was pregnant with Nigel, I noticed a small paragraph in the local paper stating that Hamilton Baptist Church had a new pastor, Alistair Begg. We went along there, initially to the evening services, and then to the morning services, although we went out before communion, thinking wrongly that this was reserved for members only. I was encouraged by the teaching, most of which was very similar to what I had been used to in the brethren, i.e. the basic beliefs, not those overshadowed by the excesses of exclusive brethrenism, and many of the hymns being familiar. To have an organ and a small choir was different, but easy to get used to. At that time, Hamilton Baptist was a growing church, with 4-600 attending Sunday services, and

growth both by conversions and by people moving from other fellowships and churches. Alistair Begg was an outstanding Bible teacher, and later moved to the USA, where he now pastors a church in Cleveland, Ohio and has a national Christian Radio series, named, "Truth for Life", www.truthforlife.com.

In early summer 1979, not long after Nigel was born, Joyce and I were both baptised, she making the decision first and myself later after a talk with one of the deacons and the recognition that baptism in scripture was of believers and that a second baptism after I had been baptised as a baby was not wrong. A month or two later, both children were dedicated. My parents refused to come to either service, deeming it wrong to go to a church service and wrong for me to be baptised a second time. I learnt a number of things from being in a mainstream church:

- I could call God "you" and didn't need to call him "Thou" when praying,
- Prayer was just like talking to God and talking to my heavenly father should be just as easy as talking to my earthly father, in everyday language without flowery religious phrases,
- Darby's New Translation was not the only good translation, that the Bible was inspired by God to be read by everyone, and that a modern version, such as the New International Version made a lot more sense than the convoluted archaic text of Darby,
- Women prayed in public and could take part in a meeting and in Baptist circles had their own midweek meeting, known as the Women's Auxiliary
- A church could be run on a democratic structure with pastor, elders and deacons elected by a vote of the members,
- People who were not members were welcome at church services being known, if regular attendees, as adherents,
- Most of what I had learned in the brethren as the basics of Christianity was accepted by other Christians with one or two exceptions in the basic theology, such as the brethren belief that Jesus suffered for our sins for three days and three nights in what was known as the "abandonment", whereas others believed that the punishment of Jesus by God lasted only for the three hours on Calvary,
- Musical instruments were OK in church, and God loves the worship of his people. Music could be led by a group or a small choir,
- Church services could be a lot more varied than the hymn, prayer, message formula of brethren,
- Communion was taken with the bread cut into tiny squares and the wine in tiny cups, the wine being non-alcoholic to avoid offending any converted alcoholics in the congregation. (I never really bought the line about that one sip of alcohol setting somebody off on an alcoholic binge theory, however.)
- The pastor would officiate at communion, leading it by often reading the relevant passage in 1 Corinthians 11, and that two men, normally deacons, would pray, one for the bread and one for the wine, and then distribute the plates and cups,
- The Bible was the inspired, inerrant word of God, but that every text had to be taken in context, unlike in the brethren where a few words could be used totally out of context to justify any absurd legalistic rule,
- Where the Bible was clear on a matter, it should be obeyed, but that matters not specified in scripture should be dealt with by the general principles found in scripture, e.g., how a church is run,
- There were other groups of believers who differed from us in certain details of their Christian life. These were not necessarily wrong, just different
- Many more minor differences.

One thing which we missed was the hospitality found amongst brethren. Whereas in the brethren it would be very unusual for a Sunday to pass when either we were invited to somebody's home or had people to our own home, this was more likely to be an annual event in the Baptists. This was before the days of house-groups which have helped in that area.

Also, while at Hamilton, I did not do anything or get involved in anything in the church, and did not receive much encouragement to do so, and thus found it difficult to make friends there, not being in the small groups from which friendships often spring, but merely an attender at the Sunday services.

Joyce did not make many close friends and after a while drifted back amongst the friends she had been mixing with before we had started going to church.

Divorce

As time went on the marriage was breaking up. Joyce was coming in about 4am every morning, often drunk. By April 1981 I had had enough. I told Joyce I wanted a divorce, and managed to get Nigel, then just under two years old, and took him to my parents. She took Melanie down to her sister's in Bristol and three weeks later sent her back on the plane from London alone, a bewildered frightened three year old. At that time Joyce had some money, a gift from her father who was still in the Jims and which had been sent to her then because he was not allowed to leave it to her in his will. I moved in with my parents with the children and the legal wheels of divorce proceedings ground on for over a year until settled. She lived on in the house at Hamilton for most of that time with weekend access to the children. The house was sold and she then moved to the London area. She had another child, Jake, and settled down then in the Essex suburbs of London, and then a fourth child Shannon, by a different man.

In July 2004, she died of cirrhosis of the liver, a result of alcohol poisoning. I put some of the blame for that on the brethren, where she was taught to drink, and for the effect on her lifestyle that leaving did. They told her if she left, she would go to hell, and she proceeded to have a good time, by her standards, on the way there

Life after Divorce

Now what has happened to me since that fateful day in April 1981 when I told Joyce I wanted a divorce? Well, at the time, I confided in Alistair Begg, then pastor at Hamilton Baptist Church, and he, on hearing the facts as I presented them to him, confirmed my belief that the only scriptural ground for divorce was adultery by the other partner, but stated that if I had insufficient evidence of adultery for a court hearing, divorce on the grounds of incompatibility would be the right thing to do, if I was convinced in my own mind that adultery had occurred.

At that time I recommitted my life to Christ, started reading my bible and praying more regularly and attending the midweek prayer meeting. I moved back to Paisley to live with my parents, who took over a large part of the bringing up of my children. I found a small Baptist Church in a council housing scheme less than a mile away, and joined that. At the time I formally transferred my membership, I asked them to let me know if there was anything I could do to help. I was astounded when they asked if I would like to become an elder. I duly did, and a year later found myself with the job of church secretary, which I did for 9 years or so. This was a small church of around 30 or so, with plenty to do for somebody committed to help there. There were initially six elders, who combined the jobs of elder and deacon, although this number fell latterly. This spell also saw two periods of vacancy when we had no minister and had to find a possible new one and put his name to the church meeting to voted on to be elected as pastor. I also to arrange for weekly preachers during the vacancy.

Now I felt I should not remain single for the sake of the children and my own loneliness, but after a few years when I was unable to find anybody suitable in the normal course of events. I joined a Christian singles group. This gave me a list of women who were looking for men for marriage or friendship, but practically none were local. I then joined another organisation, CFF (Christian Friendship Fellowship) based in Doncaster (www.c-f-f.co.uk). It had a similar system but a much larger membership. I made contact with a number of young ladies, and met one or two, although nothing came of any of these.

I started going out with Anne, a young lady I met through the list who was going through the struggles of divorce herself. By now it was spring 1986. That year I took the children on holiday, we went for a cruise on the CANBERRA including visits to Jerusalem, Cyprus, Athens and other parts of the Mediterranean. Previously my parents had taken the children on holiday and I went off on my own. On my return from our holiday, I found a letter lying for me from a lady called Julia French, who said she was a nanny to a Jewish family in Newton Mearns, a posh suburb of Glasgow, and that she was ex-brethren. I answered that I was already fixed up more or less, but thanked her for writing.

Now Anne finally decided, after going out with me for around 6 months, that she was not ready for a relationship yet and suggested I find somebody else who was. I re-contacted Julia and found that she was from the same lot of brethren that I had been raised in, but had grown up in Perth, Western Australia, having emigrated there at the age of 8 from Deal in Kent, her family being "ten-pond migrants". She had returned to the UK in 1972 after her family were the only ones to leave the Jims post Aberdeen and then moved to South Africa when her father got a job there, and came back to Scotland in 1979 to work as a nanny. I met her from time to time over the next few months and found out that she had been scanning the lists with a friend who said, "I know him" when my name and details was reached.

The upshot was that by November of that year I had stopped seeing Anne and was going out with Julia. We got engaged at Christmas, were married at the end of May 1987, and have not looked back since. I think the fact that we have both come out of Jimism has helped us to understand each other and where we are both coming from.

Remarriage

At the time of my second marriage Julia's parents returned to the UK from South Africa upon retirement. They were unable to sell their business there and on arrival back in the UK we were able to accommodate them in the Baptist manse, the church then being without a pastor. For a while they came along to the morning service there, always leaving before communion, then they were contacted by people from the Soft Frost meeting in Paisley and started going there. They still go there when they are able, although now living in Alloway, around 30 miles away.

Since then I have been to four brethren funerals, one for my mother-in-law's brother-in-law in Prestwick near Ayr, held in a funeral parlour and organised by a small post-1959 meeting which had kept itself to itself down the years, one for a relative of Julia's in the south of England, and two for former friends in the Paisley Softy Frost meeting. These varied considerably, sometimes photocopies of a page from "Hymns for the Little Flock" were handed out, at some it was the usual brethren thing of people giving words, although at the most recent we were handed an order of service when we went into the room. At the graveside at my wife's uncle's funeral a small group of people were standing in the background. These were his daughter and grandchildren still in the Jims, ready to have a second burial ceremony after the main one. I approached them and invited them to join us but they refused to do so.

In 1991 I moved back into the camera shop to allow my father to retire, and the following year we moved church from Glenburn Baptist to Hopehall, an independent evangelical church and former mission hall within half a mile of home, for several reasons, firstly in the unfulfilled hope that the children would find Christian friends and get involved in the youth fellowship and become Christians, secondly because I was beginning to get the signs of burnout having run the practical organisation of the church virtually single-handed for a number of years. At Hopehall, the church was thriving and growing from 50 to around 100 over a 10 year period. There I have learnt to accept people from the charismatic and Pentecostal end of the Christian spectrum and have become more receptive to their ideas than I was before. Various joint events with other churches have helped to impress on me the Lord Jesus desire for unity amongst believers, expressed in his prayer for all believers in John 17: 20-26 when he prayed to the Father "that they may be one as we are one". Another change has been the virtual abandonment of the hymn book, with almost all singing being led by a worship group with a variety of musical instruments, and sung to modern choruses projected from a PowerPoint data projector

In 1993 I was diagnosed as having a pituitary tumour, and had an very delicate operation to remove it. In 1995 I was appointed a deacon at Hopehall, looking after such matters as the tea rota and the organisation of the annual ceilidh to see in the New Year, as well as welcoming people on a Sunday morning and praying and distributing the elements (brethren jargon = emblems) at communion.

In 1997 I got Internet access and was pointed to Dick Wyman's site by my cousin Eric Huffey in Vancouver, and followed its progress until its demise, then the short-lived "Withdrawn From" site of Dan Little, and www.peebs.net since its inception

Can I close these 5-chapter memoirs with a Psalm that has meant a lot to me, the opening verses of Psalm 103:

Praise the Lord, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise His holy name.
Praise the Lord, O my soul
and forget not all his benefits -
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
May our youth all be renewed like the eagle's.