

The Brethren

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[0 : 0 0] The morning is that your Holy Spirit will be among us to show us something of the glory of Christ among folk who sought his glory.

And give us, we pray, a sound judgment on all the matters calling for judgment that will pass before us as we survey the witness of the brethren.

Grant this, we beg, in our Savior's name. Amen. Thank you.

A bit like that. Most girls would rather be kissed to the strains of Chopin or Liszt, so say it with music.

Somebody knows this. Yes, well, I thought somebody would. I'm going to begin this morning by saying something, if not with music, at least in the language of music.

[1 : 3 0] Last week, those of you who were here heard me talking about the Methodist movement in England in the 18th century.

And in musical terms, that can be expressed by a series of Sforzandos. You know, Sforzando, SF in the score, which means that it's a bang like that, you see.

Usually that the drums are hit hard for a Sforzando. Well, every time George Whitefield preached, and John Wesley and his brother Charles, and half a dozen other outstanding ministers of the gospel, whom God raised up in Britain at that time, it was a Sforzando occasion.

And the Methodist movement moved by the power of the Sforzandos. In other words, the decisive thing that was the ministry of the big guns, and the emphasis that they were able to lay on the transforming truths of justification by faith and new birth.

Well, it's a different story today. And the musical term that fits what I'm going to share with you is legato. Smooth. The story of the brethren is a relatively smooth story.

[3 : 1 0] The style of the brethren is a relatively smooth style. The brethren have always existed and operated in a gentle manner, which means that if you weren't looking for them, you'd hardly notice them.

They are an unobtrusive community. But nonetheless, in the evangelical Christian world of the last century and a half, they have consistently punched well above their weight, and contributed a very great amount, basically a great amount of faithfulness, not necessarily tremendously deep insight into biblical academics, or the analysis of the culture, or any of the headline hitters of that sort.

No, they've lived their gentle, legato-style life very steadily. And their great impact has begun with the fact that they've been a model of steadiness when other evangelical groups were wobbling.

And they still are. Well, that perhaps is enough by way of overtone to what I'm going to tell you.

The time has come to test the meeting. My guess is that when I ask you the question I'm going to ask you, about a third of the hands in the room will go up.

- [4 : 52] The question is, which of you have had living contact with brethren communities in the course of your Christian pilgrimage?
- A third to a half, I think, but something like a third. I would like to continue with my discourse, believing that I was basically right rather than basically wrong on that.
- But, you see, the common story is that wherever you find a group of evangelicals, about a third of them have benefited at some point in their life from fellowship with the brethren.
- And let me come clean, I am one of them. Let me be anecdotal for a minute so that you'll know. When I was being brought up in Gloucester, England, we lived in a fairly unspectacular street.
- At the end of the street lived a fairly unspectacular brethren family. And this was their story. The property that they occupied was a big house, family house, and an apple orchard.
- [6 : 18] Indeed, I think it had been a full-scale market garden behind the house. But the father of the family was crippled by a heart attack in his forties.
- He lingered on for about another 15 years, but he was so fragile that he could never go out of the house, never therefore operate as breadwinner. And so his resourceful wife, and one of the marks of the brethren communities are the number of resourceful wives that they produce.
- His resourceful wife had defined ways and means of keeping the home together, and she did. Never a word of complaint to her, anything like that. She tried various things. She ran a shop.
- She ran various services. Meantime, the apple orchard and the market garden area where I think vegetables were once grown by somebody, all of that went to pot.
- She couldn't manage that. I, at age, what would it be, 10, 11, 12, something like that, used to love visiting their home.
- [7 : 29] They had four kids. David, the second boy, was my age. Paul, the third boy, was a few years younger.
- And then there was a sister younger than that, Shirley. And the elder brother was already working and being something of a breadwinner, you see, to help the home economics along.
- Well, I and the two boys and Shirley, we used to spend hours out in the semi-wilderness that the orchard had become.
- There was a shed full of apparatus for market gardening, all of which had rusted and gone to pot, you know. We used to play with that.
- Well, now, I told you, no complaint from mother. And then Paul, the third boy, Paul began to reveal himself, because that's how these things were done in the 1930s.
- [8 : 37] He began to reveal himself as the kind of kid who one would describe nowadays as challenged. He may have been Down syndrome, I'm not sure. We didn't know much about, don't think we knew anything about Down syndrome back in the 1930s.
- But he couldn't keep up at school. He couldn't make anything of his life. He had to be institutionalized, and that's where he spent his life. And then Shirley, I mentioned Shirley.
- Well, she was always fragile-looking. She got rheumatic fever, died at age 13 or 14, something like that.
- Mother, remarried. They were, as I said, a brethren family, and her second husband was one of the oversight of the local brethren assembly.
- Very nice, gentle man. And cheerful and philosophical, like all the rest of them. I'm telling you this because I want you to get the idea.

[9 : 44] One thing that marks out the brethren is that they've always, in my observation, been strong to take in stride the downs of life as well as the ups.

Christians with a different branch of, a different branch or brand of Christian nurture behind them tend to get very uptight, bewildered, distressed, panicky when things start to go wrong.

They seem to have it, perhaps I'd better say, we seem to have it impressed on our minds and hearts that if we are faithful children of God, there won't be any trouble for us, whatever may happen to the person next door.

I've never spotted anything of that sort among my brethren friends. They're realists, and as I said, they are gentle, they live their unobtrusive lives, but they're lives of absolute steadiness and faithfulness, and I want to celebrate that right at the outset.

David, you may wonder what happened to him. Well, he qualified as an architect, and he married, and was the father of five children within two years.

[11 : 07] Two sets of twins came straight away. And then his wife, lovely lady, got cancer and died, just as his dad had got cancer and died.

But he went on steadily. Brethren do. I'm trying to paint a picture of a Christian ethos that I very much admire.

And one of the things I believe about the brethren, one of the things that I believe will come clear when the books are open, is that just by existing, the brethren, living to God in their way, not expecting anything marvelous, not dramatizing their lives, but coping steadily when the troubles come, they have kept other evangelicals steady to an amazing extent.

And I said it a moment ago, I say it again for emphasis. And, well, that's part of my picture of them. Now, there are three words which are ordinarily bad words in ordinary discourse, but I think they can fairly be used of the brethren to characterize them a little further.

I'm using each of them in a good sense. The first is the word amateurism. Now, that's a bad word in most circles today because the amateur is opposed in people's minds to the professional, and the assumption everywhere is that the professional knows his stuff and the amateur doesn't.

[12 : 55] I've told you already, my memories go back to the 1930s in Britain, and you will know, those of you who know me at all, that like Bill, I'm a lover of cricket, and I remember the status of amateurs in the county and international cricket teams of the 1930s.

They were outstanding people. They were people with a private income who didn't need a salary. They played the game for the love of it. They were in a position to do that. But every county team and every international England side had an amateur as its captain.

Nobody would think of putting a professional into that role. Right, Bill? The amateurs, they were the top people in the game. Well, I've already told you I think of the brethren as top people in the evangelical movement, but amateurism now is the word to describe them.

In the days of my youth, things are a little different today in a lot of brethren assemblies, but this is their historic ethos. Nobody in the chapel, whatever their ministry role, nobody received a salary.

They did it for love, literally. Love of the Lord, love of the Lord's people, love of the Lord's word. If they had gifts, they were encouraged to use them in ministry, at least.

[14 : 37] Well, no, no, that will stand. It was understood, of course, that leadership gifts and teaching gifts were only given to men, apart from the very limited teaching gifts that were given to women who taught the lower classes in Sunday school.

But gifts of hospitality and entertainment were lavishly given to women so that it was expected that the brethren home would be a center of hospitality and mother would be fulfilling a major role there, just as Mrs. Roberts did in the home that I was talking about right at the beginning, the life and soul of the home.

And, well, that's the style of brethren amateurism. As I say, it doesn't imply incompetence.

It implies love. You're doing what you do out of love and goodwill. The Lord has touched your heart. You're an evangelical. You want to live in gratitude and faithful service to him.

And you want to live in love and service of the brethren. You just do. You just do. As we call themselves the brethren, actually. We are brothers, brothers and sisters.

[15 : 56] That's been the ethos right from the start. Another word that goes with amateurism as commonly a bad word in today's usage. Tribalism.

Now, you know tribalism as a bad word implying a cultural narrowness and usually a cultural exclusiveness.

It's we against them. I'm not using the word tribalism to express any of those notions. I'm using it to express this very intense sense of brotherhood reinforced by a common lifestyle.

Now, if you're a pastor of an Anglican congregation or any of the free church congregations for that matter, one of the things you have to cope with is the fact that the people who make up the congregation on Sunday, when they scatter to their homes, they have very different lifestyles.

They have very different standards. And often you get tensions arising from that fact. But with the brethren, historically, it hasn't been that way because the lifestyle has been the same everywhere.

[17 : 14] I spoke of the home as a center of hospitality. And of course, the family, the natural family, was ordinarily the center of the home and its life.

Everything else was built around what the family was doing. Then again, in the home, the Bible was the book. It was read constantly.

They read it together. In family devotions, they read it separately. It was understood that among the brethren, everybody must know their Bible and know it properly.

And I still think myself from my observations that the brethren lead the field among evangelicals for biblical literacy. Everybody knows their Bible and knows it well.

Here in St. John's, the Bible is constantly taught, constantly paraded, Bible stories in the Sunday school, Bible themes in the youth ministry, Bible sermons, expository sermons every Sunday.

[18 : 29] And yet, I'm not telling tales out of school when I tell you that a lot of the people in the St. John's congregation, they don't know their Bibles. They don't recognize that there's any particular obligation on Christians to know their Bibles, to know their Bibles well from cover to cover.

But there's never been any doubt about that among the brethren. Well, I take off my hat to them at that point. This is their, this very decided lifestyle.

And it's really glorious and lovely, very refreshing to run across. I use the word tribalism simply as a label for a decided lifestyle of this kind.

And one other element in the Bibles' lifestyle, at least as it's been historically, although this, I think, again, I go on observation, this, I think, is eroding away at the present time if it hasn't eroded away altogether.

But in the 1930s, there was a very strong insistence in all the brethren circles where I had any contact during those days and a little later, a very strong emphasis on avoiding something called worldliness, which was understood in terms of secular entertainments of different kinds, secular hobbies which took a lot of your time and attention and money.

[20 : 04] worldliness was a matter of living austerely without those things. In some cases, it was a matter of avoiding community life, local politics, for instance.

Keep out of politics, they would say to one another, it's a dirty business. and there are other community things which the brethren usually kept out of, dances and affairs of that kind.

And they kept themselves pretty much to themselves. They were avoiding worldliness. There were occasional goofy touches in this.

In the Roberts home that I was describing to you earlier on, there was no radio, why not? Well, I once asked and I was told. It says in the Bible, Satan is the prince of the power of the air.

We're... Yes, seriously. And from that reference to air in the King James, it was inferred that therefore we must never go on the air with the radio because that's Satan's sphere of dominance.

[21 : 22] It's hard to believe, isn't it? But yes, with this very thorough knowledge of the Bible from cover to cover, you didn't always have an accompanying, what shall I call it, sophistication in Bible study.

And that's only one sample of odd ideas which would circulate in brethren circles. Though even in those days, they were laughed at, actually, outside brethren circles.

Well, all right, I'm not going to pursue that. I'm simply going to say in their passion not to be bogged down in worldliness, the brethren of those days set a stellar example which many of them still do today though I think things have slackened somewhat.

And what's my third bad word used in a good sense? Remnantitis. Have you heard that word? The remnant mentality.

The brethren never have expected to be the majority anywhere in the Christian world. They think of themselves rather quietly but firmly as a community called out by the Lord to stay faithful when others don't and to wait quite specifically for the Lord's return.

[22 : 54] See, I say now what I shall say again in a moment just in the sentence. The brethren movement started with a sense that the Lord's return was very near and that one of the signs of this was terrible degeneration morally and spiritually in all the existing churches.

So the call in those early days in the middle of the 19th century was well we are the Lord's faithful remnant.

If that's the identity which you think you too should have come and join us. The churches are going to pot. The Lord is coming soon.

Join us waiting and meantime serving him as faithfully as we as we're able in the short time that remains.

We're beginning to get the sketch. I think I'm doing it fairly. Those of you the third of you the 40% of you who have brethrenism in your bones somewhere you can correct me if I'm wrong on any of the things that I've said.

[24 : 10] I was going to tell you when here's a further fact it goes back to the tribal lifestyle. When I went up to Oxford in 1944 age 18 that was when the Lord banged his way into my life and things became very different I was for a couple of years very angry with the Church of England the Anglican Church.

Because why? Because I felt rightly or wrongly but this is how I perceived it they'd had me under their care all these years and they never told me the Gospel. Well that meant that on Sundays I didn't want to go to any of the evangelical Anglican churches in Oxford although there were two or three that were very worthy in their way but what I did was to fraternize with the whole of an academic year with the brethren and one of the lovely things there I told you about the home this actually is where I gained a cross-sectional knowledge of a number of Christian homes it was part of the drill at the assembly that on Sunday morning if they saw a stranger there well they would collar the stranger straight after somebody would collar the stranger straight after the service was over and have him to lunch or her to lunch they'd really do it here we are at

St. John's and we know very well that this would be a very fine thing for us all to do and we sort of nod our heads and we don't do it and just saying it that way reminds me of what D.L.

Moody once said to a guy who was criticizing his evangelistic methods and his answer apparently was sir I prefer the way that I do evangelism to the way that you don't do it and the same I think can be said to many of us at St.

John's about this pattern of inviting strangers to lunch straight after the service it isn't that this is all planned out in advance what's planned out in advance is simply that somebody is likely to come to lunch usually it's dad who cast around for strangers to invite to lunch mom would go straight home after the service to make sure that there was plenty of food for whoever did come to lunch lifestyle and a very godly lifestyle too well I've filled in the ethos and spent quite a long time doing it actually the story is not a very complicated story to tell let me first of all say some things about how the brethren in their style of how can I say church life chapel life whichever relate to the way in which other churches and congregations do this they have much in common with

[27 : 20] Baptists and Quakers and Congregation Christianists and Anglicans and in England I'm not sure whether this is as true in Canada as it was in England in England they always felt that the Evangelical Anglican Church out of which many of them had come was closer to them than any of the Evangelical free churches I think frankly that what they felt about the Evangelical free churches was that there was a certain rivalry there and I think there really was because of course the free churches they were gathered congregations just as brethren congregations were gathered a great difference was that the free churches free church congregations had salaried ministers and the brethren assemblies didn't and well jokes used to be made about this not always very friendly jokes have you for instance ever heard of the story that C.H.

Spurgeon a man with a great sense of humor would tell about the man who for the first time went to a brethren assembly for Sunday worship and afterwards a friend asked him how he got on and he said oh it was lovely we none of us knew anything and we all taught each other well that's a wicked story if you think I find it very funny but it is wicked and what it reflects on the part of Spurgeon is a fundamental dislike of the brethren and I think that that was pretty much the free church story until fairly recently but now the brethren differ from all the groups that I've mentioned yes they're like Baptists in that they are believers baptism people but they are unlike the Baptists because they don't have or historically it hasn't been their habit to have professional pastors salaried to look after the flock they are like the

Quakers in the way that they manage ministry in the churches gathering for worship which is always a communion service this again is something that puts them in the same bracket as Anglicans we Anglicans have the Lord's Supper in all our churches somewhere every Sunday the brethren the brethren also have the Lord's Supper at some point every Sunday the difference is that all the church reckons to come to the Lord's Supper every Sunday in brethren circles and the communion service in Anglicanism is a service to which a lot of Anglicans don't come any Sunday well I'll leave it there the Quakers of course didn't have sacraments just as the Salvation Army doesn't have sacraments but yet at a Quaker meeting everybody sits silent and then God moves somebody to start usually with prayer perhaps with a word of meditation a reflection or reading a passage of scripture it varies a little not very much well the brethren breaking of bread service historically has been like that there's been a generally understood set of parameters and they are observed but different people different men women don't historically anyway don't have any share in doing this different men have passed the lead from one to another in prayer in exhortation in reading the scripture whatever it is and of course the

Quakers think of themselves as above and beyond the Bible they don't want to destroy Bibles but the idea in Quakerism has always been that the inner light of God in our hearts takes us beyond where the Bible leaves us and that's at the opposite extreme from the biblicism of the brethren the congregationalists I suppose have a lot in common with the brethren and vice versa because each congregation each brethren congregation is independent but the brethren have at the heart of their church order the oversight which in fact is a group of people who in Presbyterian the Presbyterian system would be called elders indeed I think they are called elders among the brethren and the oversight is the body of elders well congregational churches have had deacons but not historically elders the deacons business has been with the material side of congregational administration sometimes that's led to a certain tension between the minister with his spiritual priorities and the deacons with their economic priorities it's from a

Baptist church I think that this story came of the deacon who prayed Lord you keep him faithful and we'll keep him poor but deacons well that's what deacons are for they're to look after the material side of congregational life and the oversight like Presbyterian eldership is for the spiritual care of the congregation and I've already indicated what brethren have in common with Anglicans Sunday communion yes and a very strong sense of church the significance of the congregation as distinct from the importance of the evangelical individual in interdenominational evangelical circles individualism often runs riot but among the brethren it's always the congregation that's important and the individual believer serves in the congregation and he serves the congregation and even if he's got a leadership role in some form of transdenominational ministry he will still regard his local church as the most important area of service into which he must invest what gifts he has first and foremost so the brethren as I say they overlap with all these other

[34 : 23] Protestant bodies but they walk their own path now let me tell you quickly the story the movement began in the 1820s its background was twofold one was that in existing church Protestant churches Anglican and free church both the spiritual temperature had generally gone down since the great days of the evangelical awakening the evangelical revival of the 18th century and it had gone down to such an extent that it was possible for John Nelson Darby the man without whom there never would have been a brethren movement to stand up and say loud and clear the church is ruined the church is perishing the church is beyond redemption the Lord's faithful people must gather as a remnant separating from these other bodies that's one aspect of the background the other aspect of the background was that as a result of the

Napoleonic wars end of the 18th beginning of the 19th centuries evangelical people of all denominations had become very interested in prophecy biblical prophecy about the future biblical prophecy specifically about the antichrist and the man of sin any number of teachers used to identify the antichrist in those days with Napoleon the beast whose number is 666 they had their own way of making out the identification many other identifications have been offered since but that's what they were saying in the 1810s and 20s they saw Napoleon you see as the man aiming at world conquest and challenging Christian England and all of that well that had moved a group of how do

I say it a group of people in the moneyed bracket some of whom were actually aristocrats by family and some of whom were quite simply wealthy folk they were evangelical people evangelicalism had been making inroads amongst these people ever since the days of Lady Huntington remember Lady Huntington who was backing so much of the work that Whitfield and the Wesleys did in the 18th century these people they particularly were interested in and interested in and they had leisure to explore Bible prophecy and indeed Bible teaching generally so there grew up and by the 1820s there had grown up a large constituency of people of this kind who knew who knew their Bibles extremely well who as I say had a particular interest in prophecy in

Ireland at a great estate named Powers Court there used to be held annual prophecy conferences for these people they're the ones who came and John Nelson Darby whom I've told you I'm going to introduce in a moment John Nelson Darby was an attendee at one or two Powers Court conferences and it's clear that being in these circles gave him to what you might call the eschatological cast of mind very concerned about prophecy and the future and as I said earlier he linked that with his own sense based on experience and observation in Ireland nowhere else but people weren't sociologically sophisticated in those days you observe a little evidence and you think you know what's going on all around the world

Darby was like that and he looked at the churches the Protestant churches in Ireland of course as a man of the 1820s he was quite sure that the Roman Catholic church was beyond redemption that in Ireland of course was the majority church no question about that and but the powers court prophecy conferences contributed a lot to the making of his mind in those early days so those are the two things in the background the decline of spiritual temperature which was a real fact in the churches they were cooling down and the preoccupation with the future with prophecy and with the return of the Lord amongst these leisured people and Darby now at last we introduce him Darby was an

[39 : 51] Anglican clergyman who worked for some years in Ireland in the early 1920s as a missionary to Roman Catholics and to the unchurched he as I said attended the powers court conferences he was a brilliant chap in his own right narrow no question that he was narrow his mind was rigid but within that frame he was brilliant in Bible knowledge he was he had a good education he was actually related distantly to Lord Nelson his education had made him a master not simply of the English language at least for making himself understood but a French and German as well and it had given him also a sense that he was one of the world's natural leaders one of God's natural leaders he had gifts of management organization great personal force he was actually young young young has to say this he was an arrogant man gifted folk with drive very often do end up arrogant and

Derby was one of these when the brethren movement had been thoroughly launched he would like you would expect he would go round the assemblies preaching and teaching and it is recorded that on one occasion when he was doing this someone in the congregation interrupted what he was saying with a question asking him to clarify what he just said and Derby's response was to snap out I am here to provide exposition but I cannot provide brains well a man who's capable of doing that as you can see is an arrogant man an appalling put down really well that's the sort of fellow Derby was how did the brethren movement get started in Dublin in 1825

Derby discontented Anglican minister met up with a man named Groves I can't tell you exactly what Groves background was but Groves had worked for some years as a church missionary society missionary they both of them were discontented Anglicans for different reasons and they began doing something which became the seed out of which the whole movement grew they met in a hall in Dublin on Sunday mornings all Christians invited we break bread here and they did and the leadership was brethren type leadership they waited for God to move one and another and accepted as from God whatever the next person to stand up said they were actually not just Darby and Groves but a number of other people who joined them they were biblically very literate and they undoubtedly enjoyed very rich fellowship and very edifying times together and very soon there was a three figure number of people meeting with them

Sunday by Sunday in Darby's mind now this began to link up with his conviction that the church that is the organized churches were on their last legs the church was ruined and was beyond reclamation so in his mind emerged the concept of the Lord's faithful remnant all around Ireland England everywhere coming out of the existing Protestant churches to fellowship as the brethren meeting and worshipping in the Dublin way and waiting for the Lord's return and that's how it all got going very soon there were large assemblies in Bristol where the famous George Muller became a leader in Plymouth where a man named

Newton became the leader and there were 1200 in his congregation we're told by 1845 and in London there were a number of brethren assemblies the brethren mentality has already been described as best I can describe it and people who shared that mentality they left their churches and they joined the brethren simple as that so there you have the movement it was called the Plymouth brethren because of the size of the Plymouth assembly the biggest of the lot and the teachers the leading teachers in each of these assemblies were these men of the leisure classes who had time to study the Bible very thoroughly and whose education fitted them to preach and teach as lay leaders and this they did and that was the pattern for a long time no not a long time because in the in the 1840s actually the worm got into the bud the devil got into the movement

[45 : 44] Darby worked all his life on the principle that we have left behind the impure churches we must have total purity in our assemblies purity of what not just purity of life but purity of doctrine what's our standard of doctrine why the teaching of John Nelson Darby now this is where the arrogance came out and before very long the Plymouth assembly had been dis-fellowshipped by Darby Darby at this time based on the London fellowships also the Bristol fellowship Bethesda where George Muller was in leadership that too was dis-fellowshipped for frankly I can't remember the exact details it was thought that they were too open and unquestioning in their reception of other Christians into their own fellowship they didn't examine the Darby fellowships yes Mr.

Darby exactly Mr. Darby we're right with you Mr. Darby those fellowships were excluding visitors and members from other sections of the Christian world including the other brethren assemblies who came to be called the open brethren because they would receive folk from other churches without the very rigid conditions of entry doctrinal learning doctrinal examination all that kind of thing which Darby and his assemblies imposed and the open brethren as you would suppose were the people whom God used to extend his kingdom in their own quiet way they practiced evangelism and pastoral care yes the oversight managed pastoral care as a corporate reality they built up their own missionary patterns the basic pattern was that an individual from an assembly would sense a call from God to take the word to another land and another culture the assembly having tested his sense of what he was called to do would undertake to support him it would all be quite informal no central funds but yes the missionary would keep in touch with his assembly and his assembly would see that he didn't starve that was the pattern ordinarily the people who went overseas were married couples and in those days middle of the 19th century as some of you will remember from the case of

Dr. Livingston they didn't appreciate the problems that were involved in having children and nurturing children in foreign lands so they took in stride the fact that yes we're a married couple yes of course we shall have children but God has called us to wherever it is and that's where we're going and in the days when I was a young man in England it was said that the largest missionary society among evangelicals was the fellowship of missionaries whose doings needs triumphs news was reported in a little journal produced by brethren for brethren called echoes of service well again I think of my word amateurism they are doing it their way the ad hoc way in which amateurs do things but they were doing it and that's the great thing to keep before our minds and today well you all of you

I'm sure have had some contact with Granville Chapel just down the road that's a brethren chapel and there are half a dozen others in Vancouver most brethren chapels nowadays have a teacher who is supported by the congregation they don't usually call him a preacher they call him a teacher and he regularly instructs that pattern was beginning to happen in England before I left England individual congregations weren't yet hiring their own teachers but there were teachers in the circle people with a theological education who went round from assembly to assembly teaching and were sustained by the gifts of assemblies they had no regular salary in other words the doctrine taught in open brethren assemblies has increasingly become standard evangelical doctrine where the emphasis on prophecy and events surrounding the Lord's return produced actually from the fertile brain of Darby himself a way of reading the

Bible called dispensationalism I expect you know what that is if you don't you can ask me afterwards and I'll tell you but I'm sure that most of you do know what it is all I need to say about it is that it's a way of reading the Bible which looks forward to the rapture of the church the Lord will take his church that is all the fellowships of all the converted people there are he'll take them away from the world and then the rest of the world and the Jewish people whom God has temporarily abandoned they will be left and from Jewish people who are left will come converts and missionaries and there'll be a much further mission work in the world before the Lord appears publicly for judgment the rest of the system can be left for the moment raises all sorts of problems of its own but suffice it to say dispensational reading of the Bible kept people's minds on the last things and events leading up to the

[52 : 35] Lord's return and when I was a young man brethren still majored in this area in a way that other evangelicals did not I don't think though that today if my experience and observation counts for anything that is the case I think that any brethren chapel that you attend will feed you feed you I mean on biblical truth in the way that you could expect to happen in any evangelical congregation certainly the Lord is coming back but there's a great deal more truth in the Bible beside that we are called to master and live by and testify to so there has been something of a shift at that point so what have you got now in the modern brethren movement this lay ethos in leadership let's start with the lay enterprise in mission work that continues adapt an alertness certainly to the importance of living your life on a day to day basis packed up and ready to go when the

Lord does come back that's still I think an emphasis which the brethren make more strongly than the rest of us do there was and in some circles still is a preference for the Schofield edition of the Bible used to be the King James when it was first published at the turn of the 20th century now the Schofield Bible is published with one of the modern translations the essence of the Schofield Bible is notes which will guide you if you're prepared to be guided into the dispensational way of reading the Bible and all the details of the brethren how can I say the brethren legacy of expectation in relation to the coming of the Lord the rapture is still expected by most brethren and the thought that the Lord is going to resume work among Jews for the blessing of the world after the church has gone in a way that never has been the case yet well not all brethren are interested in the Schofield Bible nowadays but if you ask who it is who buys the Schofield Bible well it's mostly the brethren dispensational schools that is seminaries which were founded in the 1920s and 1930s here in North America not in England but here in North America they have mostly changed the eschatology which they were founded on unobtrusively nobody is supposed to notice but in fact they have moved away from classic dispensationalism and if I may venture my toffee-nosed Anglican professorial opinion a good job too so here you have a movement greatly to be admired doing still a great deal of good and keeping all the rest of us evangelicals honest and I say thank God for the brethren and may the good Lord keep them going until he comes back we need him now friends that's the monologue ended my time gone you will have comments observations and contributions to make

I'm quite sure so let the dialogue what in England we would have called the argy-bargy begin yeah a hand waves please George translated the bible what is your assessment well I've used I've looked at Darby's translation I've never used it it is painfully literal but truly scholarly Darby translated the bible Darby was a one man band I think you must have got that idea from what I said this was one of the what shall I say strings to his bow he found that the King James version wasn't as precise for the teaching he wanted to give as he would like so he did a translation of the bible on his own it never sold well he used it of course and as I say I've seen it looked at it and it appears to be a very scholarly job

I mean he knew his Greek he knew his Hebrew but one thing about Darby and you can verify this in Regent College Library if you wish his works were published by his admirers in 40 volumes and they're there in Regent Library and you don't have to spend more than three minutes with any of those volumes to realize that though Darby was well able to use English in a way that made his meaning pretty clear he was not able to use English gracefully he was not able to write decent sentences and reading Darby is it's a rough experience well okay that was Darby but you asked about his bible I don't know whether it's still in print it might be the exclusive brethren perhaps I should tell you have become more and more exclusive as time has gone on and they have split among themselves there are the Darby brethren and other other groups all named after the individual teacher who said as Darby before them had said now

I am the standard and I deserve to be so you come with me many of us will have heard of the Taylor brethren who were split they were an exclusive group who were split down the middle half a century ago when James Taylor their oracle declared that you may not sit down to the meal table with any members of your family who are not themselves soundly converted well that split families and it meant that a lot of people withdrew from the Taylor brethren and as I said I expect some of you know all about this and I can assure those of you who don't that you don't need to it was a real mess but just one example you see of the exclusive brethren style and as for membership well they just don't recruit these days from the world around them they don't advertise their meetings they meet behind closed doors and whatever place they do meet in there are not too many of them they baptize their brethren their children they're very strong on infant baptism that's a

[59 : 59] Darby touch which the open brethren gave up gave up on and they keep going by families but I say again those of you who don't know anything about the exclusive brethren take my word for it you don't need to as a pattern of Christianity I fear they don't reach out they're not significant in a missionary way they don't relate to any of the rest of the Christian world and when you have to minister to them pastorally it's just very difficult and I know this because when the Taylor brethren split I had quite a lot of ministry to ex-Taylorites who were really like people who lived in cellars all their life and they come out into sunshine and their eyes weren't up to seeing what they were looking at because their eyes had never been exercised in a proper light well let that go

I'm sorry you asked a question Fred and I've rambled I shouldn't have done that sorry sir what do you mean by the experiential way of reading life I mean reading it in terms of the understanding of its history past and future in terms of seven distinct periods in which God dealt with human beings in different ways surely sir that's familiar to you yes well that's that's what I meant I really don't want to go into the details of old-fashioned dispensationalism because even in dispensational centers what once were dispensational centers like for instance places I mentioned places I know Dallas Seminary in Dallas Texas and Columbia Bible College now Columbia

Christian University in South Carolina they have moved away from classic Schofield Bible dispensationalism and they're still in transition in actual fact I can speak of this of the technical import of the changes made and the different attitudes to the Jews on the one hand the church on the other the doctrine of the pre-millennial coming of the Lord Jesus but these are relatively esoteric things friends and I suspect that you don't want you don't want me to launch into technical analyses of these matters suffice it to say that's what's happened yes sir well the one liner is

Regent College was a Brethren Foundation indeed more precisely Regent College was a Granville Chapel Foundation in the Providence of God there were men in Granville Chapel businessmen who had some money at their command who wanted a Bible college some kind here in Vancouver which would train folk for ministry in the assemblies they met up with Dr.

Jim Houston my old friend who allured me to Vancouver in 1979 he had been a fellow of an Oxford college and he had a burden for the founding of an institution for graduate theological education in all the departments of all departments of life for lay Christians of all denominations he and the Granville people met and talked the Granville vision was broadened Dr.

[64 : 30] Houston's vision prevailed the money was forthcoming and Regent College was born I think I think I'm right in saying its first public activity was a summer school I think in 1969 it may have been 1970 and then its first academic year I think was 1970 to 71 the student body numbered four it was to have numbered six but two of the folk who were going to be in the first class were killed in a motor accident while they were actually driving to Vancouver the faculty also numbered four and they were dark days anyone who was part of that scene will tell you that God has done wonderful things through Regent Regent is not predominantly brethren now indeed it never was

Dr. Houston would never let it be the support financially is not primarily brethren either though it was for many years the student body numbers more than four there were more than 700 enrolled in each ordinary semester and the faculty is larger but we don't forget our brethren roots the first faculty of four they were all brethren teachers I mean brethren with academic qualifications of different kinds but brethren that's how Regent has grown was that what you wanted me to tell the world Olaf am I not right in I'm right aren't I in saying that you were already teaching in Vancouver when brethren sorry when Regent started same year if you spotted anything wrong with the story

I told you'd be entitled to pop up and say it okay yes another hand there no it's only ever been a minority view among Anglican evangelicals it has been held there were quite a number of right wing Anglican evangelicals who used the Scofield Bible and taught the dispensational scheme between well about 1900 and about 1950 since that time this school of thought has just about vanished I can't tell you of any Anglican teacher at the moment who believes in a worldwide rapture of the church I confess I do not there are still people around who in North America of course who do and that's how it is that the left behind series series of books sold over 50 million copies and made a mint of money for all sorts of people but not

Anglicans no and again technical reasons why we think that that view is impossible can be given but they're not going to be given now Bill is right you