

- [Make nzherald my homepage](#)
- [Subscribe to the print edition and save](#)

- [Search Business Listings](#)
- [\\$25 will save a child](#)
- [Recent property sales](#)

Think Pink Buy Pink Save Lives

visit www.nzbcf.org.nz

Buy one of the pink ribbon products on our website, and you will help The New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation save lives in New Zealand.



Saturday October 14, 2006

[Home](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Cars](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Contacts](#) | [News via Email](#) [RSS](#) [What's this?](#)

[search4jobs](#)
[search4homes](#)

Home

- [National News](#)
- [World News](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Technology & Science](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Money](#)
- [Motoring](#)
- [Property](#)
- [Employment](#)
- [Weather](#)

Lifestyle & Leisure

- [TV Music & Film](#)
- [Food & Wine](#)
- [Fashion & Beauty](#)
- [Arts & Literature](#)
- [Health & Fitness](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Gaming](#)
- [Sudoku](#)
- [Crosswords](#)
- [Horoscopes](#)
- [Ringtones & txt](#)

Classifieds

HOMES TO SUIT YOUR BUDGET.

For a new home for **\$500,000** or less, see **Affordablehomes** in your **New Zealand Herald** every Friday



Reader Services

- [Subscription Services](#)
- [Back Issues](#)

Patrick Gower



Bruce Hales

Behind the Brotherhood: The Elect Vessel, Bruce Hales

Saturday October 14, 2006
By Patrick Gower

For Vincent Field, it was the highest honour a boy in the Exclusive Brethren could have - the chance to meet the Elect Vessel, the minister of the Lord in the Recovery, essentially God's man on earth.

So when John Hales graced Vincent's Christchurch congregation, the 10-year-old did exactly what he thought a boy in the Brethren should do.

He waited while other children and followers swirled around the Australian accountant whose face he knew from the pictures up in every Exclusive Brethren church and home. And when he came free, Vincent rushed up and gave him a \$20 note.

"He barely even acknowledged me, he just took it and that was that," says Vincent, now 25.

"I still felt real cool though - it was like 'Oh wow, I just gave \$20 to Mr Hales'."

Vincent has since left the Exclusive Brethren. Hales has died, the mantle of Elect Vessel passing to his son Bruce, a Sydney office supplies businessman.

These days, Vincent is nonplussed about the donation he once thought of as "bonus points for God".

"It was all a crock of shit of course," he says. "It is not like the guy needed money. The Hales family are rolling in the stuff and they got my twenty bucks tax free and all."

Other former members spoke to the Weekend Herald about how their congregations were asked to vary the size of their donations to leaders "so they didn't look like wages".

Then there are the "mules", those who spoke of ferrying to Australia envelopes of cash earmarked for the Elect Vessel or other leaders.

Related Subjects

- Organisation**
 - [Exclusive Brethren](#)
- Categories**
 - [Politics](#)
 - [Religion and beliefs](#)
- Topic**
 - [Christianity](#)
- Location**
 - [New Zealand](#)

[RSS](#) [Related News Feed\(s\)](#)

[What is RSS ?](#)

Patrick Gower Headlines

- [Son caught in Exclusive Brethren tug-of-love](#)
- **The Elect Vessel, Bruce Hales**
- [In praise of the Brethren way](#)
- [Former member in despair](#)
- [Those stormwater pipes may be legal](#)
- [Brethren's investigator went berserk at station](#)
- [Fight may end Clint Brown's career](#)
- [Solo mum owes \\$35,260 on \\$9000 car](#)
- ['Refugee' is back ruling Afghan district](#)
- [Clint Brown seriously hurt in bashing](#)
- [Foreman in family row over finances](#)
- [Fallen legal eagle aims to rise again](#)
- [Ashleys want 'vessel of death' off road](#)
- [Judge reassures grief-stricken parents over custody decision for Liam](#)
- [Liam revelled in the pirate's life](#)

[View Subject Index](#)

Serious
about
doing
business



- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Schools & Students](#)
- [Sponsorships](#)
- [Supplements](#)
- [Feedback](#)
- [FAQ / Site Help](#)
- [News via Email](#)
- [News via RSS](#)
- [News to a PDA](#)
- [Book a classified ad](#)
- [Promotions](#)
- [Competitions](#)
- [Photo Sales](#)
- [APN sites](#)
- [Careers at APN](#)
- [Make nzherald.co.nz your Homepage](#)
- [Digital Replica of Paper Reader Panel](#)

Herald on Sunday

Best weekly letter to the Editor wins a Cross pen



Yet the influence of Bruce Hales over his estimated 10,000 followers in New Zealand and 40,000 worldwide extends to much more than these systematic donations, or tithes.

Take their neighbourhood meeting room in Mt Eden's Ruapehu St, one of at least half-a-dozen dotted across Auckland city. Good for a meeting of no more than 50 people, it has no signs whatsoever, its boarded-up windows the only testament to its rarely seen congregation.

Trust deeds obtained by the Weekend Herald shows it to be in the hands of a clutch of male Exclusive Brethren members, all of whom can be removed if they are no longer in fellowship with the minister of the Lord in the Recovery - Hales. Other deeds, such as on their \$2.6 million headquarters in Mangere and its nearby school property, say the same.

Hales therefore has the power to veto the trustees - and some kind of control - over a vast network of properties. Hales' spectre also looms over the 800 Brethren businesses spread across 40 New Zealand towns and cities.

Like the meeting rooms, the businesses are similarly nondescript. They are often to do with machinery, pumps, or office supplies, but their networking is now said to be more entrenched than basic business and beliefs.

A leaked document - signed last year by Hales and leading Wanganui-based Exclusive Brethren member Allan Davis - indicates that all Exclusive Brethren businesses worldwide are expected to give over their bookkeeping to an organisation called National Office Assist.

The document says this will mean they don't have to rely on "worldly" contractors and operate more efficiently without computers. There will be an email service, telemarketing, employment and training for young Exclusive Brethren and income will go back into things like schooling.

It means Home Office Assist - and therefore Hales and the sect's leadership, say former Brethren - will oversee the financial management information of all Brethren businesses.

All this adds up to what the former Exclusive Brethren call the "Hales system", envelopes of tax-free donations taken to Australia by the Brethren mules, businesses exempt from unionism, a network of 15 schools nationwide that get some taxpayer funding, and a swag of properties that don't pay rates because they are places of worship. And that is just the New Zealand end.

Exclusive Brethren members approached for this article did not want to discuss Hales or the way that their belief in him interacts with property and business.

One, prominent Auckland member, Neville Simmons, says he "won't lower" himself to comment on what he thought of the portrayal of Hales by those outside the sect, and simply laughed when asked to explain the role of the Elect Vessel.

"I really have got no comment on it," Simmons says. "It is a big subject that I really could not do justice to."

The Exclusive Brethren are as closed as their churches when it comes to the media these days, stung by the scrutiny of their secretive foray into politics. Emerging from that scrutiny were allegations this week of covering up sexual abuse.

When approached, some are friendly, some are smug and some are clearly shaken by the media interest, such as the two young men who spotted a Herald photographer taking shots of their new Cambridge church and chased her for 23km, sometimes tailgating her.

- [Online spy plan raises fears over privacy](#)
- [Download time stops much movie vice](#)
- [New name but similar fare](#)
- [Shortage leaves B-team on guard](#)
- [Fantasies 'like a Wilbur Smith novel'](#)
- [\\$1m drug fine leaves daughters destitute](#)
- [Debunking rumours about new anti-terrorism unit](#)
- [Police beaten to \\$1m drug stash](#)
- [Pregnancy dilemma for Agent Orange family](#)
- [Porn movie plus tinny for \\$35](#)
- [Get-tough cop's clean-up mission](#)
- [DNA injury confirmed in Vietnam veterans](#)
- [Car market crash puts buyers in driver's seat](#)
- [Plunging used car prices](#)
- [Edwards criminals not related, say families](#)
- [More headlines](#)



All decline to comment, but push hard enough and you might get nodded agreement to the following: that they are normal, law-abiding New Zealanders; that the media don't know them and don't talk to their friends, neighbours and people with whom they do business.

They also indicate that none of the \$1.2 million used for campaigning against Labour and the Greens came from the Exclusive Brethren coffers overseas, that it was an entirely separate initiative by member businessmen here.

In Australia, Green Party senator Christine Milne has made claims about a British-registered company called Ratby Distribution Ltd, that she says has been funnelling money around the world for political donations.

Exclusive Brethren here say no such connection has been drawn, despite the number of times the question has been asked.

Yet the public record does not reflect true detachment, given the range of political activities by Exclusive Brethren members - whether putting up National Party elections hoardings, using a schoolboy to push-poll, or meeting with their man Don Brash.

Members even tried to split New Zealand First to help National get a majority during the coalition negotiations.

About all they haven't done is given up their belief of not voting.

And they haven't given up.

Despite eventually being shunned by National leader Dr Brash as a damaging electoral millstone, their distaste for Prime Minister Helen Clark is such that an Exclusive Brethren member hired a private investigator to spy on her, her husband, and Labour ministers and is said to be sitting on information that is "TNT times five million".

In the past two years the international picture has been the same. In Australia there have been the extremes of sect members abusing Green candidates while disguised by animal masks, and other members meeting Prime Minister John Howard.

In Canada they attacked civil union legislation, using postboxes in 7-Eleven convenience stores; in the United States they covertly funded support for the 2004 re-election of president George Bush.

In Sweden this year they have funded an advertising campaign reported to be worth millions of crowns supporting the centre-right Alliance for Sweden.

Their direct political involvement neatly coincided with the appointment of Bruce Hales as Elect Vessel in 2002.

Their previous public involvement in New Zealand politics consisted mainly of attempts over two decades to get exemptions from labour laws on spiritual grounds - granted by the Labour Party in 2000 but now in danger of being taken away because the concession was made on the grounds that there was no political motivation.

Aside from that, they seem to have gone no further than getting an exemption from the Minister of Education that their children need not take part in jazzercise.

The new push started tamely enough with a document titled Suggested Initiatives for Prosperity in New Zealand. It was sent to politicians, including Helen Clark, in 2003 and constitutes some of the earliest evidence worldwide of their political aims.

It was tame enough, with no mention then of opposition to

same-sex marriages. It just expressed the desire to return New Zealand to its place in the world of the 1950s, through methods such as creating a "positive national mindset regarding immigration and population", that included increasing the refugee quota because "these people are motivated to work hard and assimilate".

It even seemed a little naive. A simplistic diagram showed how their key elements for growth - others included taxation, superannuation and decentralisation - coupled with legislation and strong leadership, could swirl New Zealand back to the heyday of the 1950s.

But a few lines in the section on defence gave a little away about what was to underpin their political drive. They wanted New Zealand to apologise for opposing the Iraq war and having an anti-American attitude and to rebuild the Armed Forces.

The Exclusive Brethren were emerging as a force of the religious right, and they wanted more than just prosperity for New Zealand.

Why did a sect whose beliefs preclude them from fighting want to support a war? And why, if they couldn't vote, were they about to so desperately try to influence elections?

The Exclusive Brethren believe in "The Rapture" - that those who are Christian and alive at a particular time will be swept into the next life. Those who are not pure will be left behind.

Historically, that has meant their theology led them away from politics. Those who have studied the Exclusive Brethren believe there may have been a change in their eschatology, or beliefs about the end of the world.

Peter Lineham, associate professor of history at Massey University, says their leaders have come to believe that the return of Jesus is delayed because George Bush is doing God's will in bringing the Muslims to heel.

"So they have come, in some sense, to believe in a delay of the rapture at this time, and that it is their obligation during this delay to protect the world and their interests," Lineham says.

Marion Maddox, a senior lecturer in religious studies at Victoria University and author of *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, says the recent push to get former members to return to the group - another Hales initiative - also points to a belief that political intervention, while economically advantageous, also has the effect of helping keep the end of the world at bay so that as many as possible can rejoin.

But those outside the Exclusive Brethren have become some of its most vocal opponents.

Take Vincent Field. He isn't against the Exclusive Brethren because of their political viewpoints. In fact, he doesn't know exactly what they are. And he isn't against them because of their secretive attempts to influence elections.

He's against them because he believes they have a sinister side, because they break up families just like they broke up his.

He spent 3 years in a custody dispute between his excommunicated parents and his Exclusive Brethren grandparents and decided to speak publicly about the sect for the first time because of his concerns about their involvement in politics.

"Your average Exclusive is a good person," he says. "It is the leaders that condone [the breaking up of families] and it is the leaders that are getting into all this political stuff. It is

the leaders I have something against."

Many former Exclusive Brethren recite a similar mantra. Still connected to the sect by family members - parents, brothers, sisters, wives, husbands and children - they don't want to hurt the individuals, or even the Exclusive Brethren itself. It is the leadership they don't like.

Vincent sees an organisation driven by money, anchoring people to it through their family, through their financial security, and through their very core beliefs.

"I don't know what these leaders are up to," he says. "But I can't see any good coming from it."

Vincent and many others are pleased for the outside scrutiny the Exclusive Brethren have brought on themselves through their political foray and hope it will bring about some kind of split or change of regime in the organisation, enabling them to at least see their families again.

Although the scrutiny here has driven the Exclusive Brethren away from calling on Don Brash, their push in Sweden - not an Exclusive Brethren stronghold - shows yet again the strength of their resolve.

Members here would not be drawn on whether their foray into New Zealand politics was a failure and whether the subsequent vilification was worth all the bother.

Yet again, by pushing, it was possible to get a nodded response that the negative reaction to their involvement actually justified it more than ever. Nodded agreement that the Exclusive Brethren think they might have lost a battle, not the war.

Exclusive Brethren members in New Zealand would not respond to the Weekend Herald.

Author

- [More by Patrick Gower](#)
- [Email Patrick Gower](#)

Tools

- [Printer Friendly](#)



Email to a Friend

Your Name (required)

Your Email Address (required)

You may enter a personal message here.