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## Secretive sect leader Hales visits Christchurch

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**The leader of the Exclusive Brethren was kept under tight security in Christchurch yesterday.**

The Right-wing religious sect's Elect Vessel, Bruce Hales, was unable to be photographed outside the group's Tuckers Road compound.

Australian-based Hales is notoriously secretive. He has not been snapped by a media photographer in nearly 20 years.

Exclusive Brethren spokesman Tony McCorkell said Hales and his family were in the city to conduct a Bible reading.

Attendance was by invitation only.

However, a former sect member, who declined to be identified, said the real reason for the trip would be fundraising.

McCorkell rejected that, saying Hales, "doesn't do that kind of thing".

"His meetings are purely about ministry and Bible readings. What people give to the church on Sunday in the church plate is their business," he said.

The former member disagreed.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he was doing a tour through New Zealand requesting money for schools and things like that, but it all comes under the guise of the gospel."

Despite Exclusive Brethren believing their global leader was "Jesus Christ walking on the earth", meetings such as yesterday's gathering were rather dull affairs, said the former member.

Anyone who wanted to speak to the Elect Vessel personally had to make a prior arrangement and wait their turn.

The former member said Hales had changed the focus of the sect to be more financially motivated and had introduced "letters of criteria" about what members could wear.

The group hit the headlines in 2005 when it was revealed that it was behind anti-Greens and anti-Labour pamphlets in the run-up to the election.



DAVID ALEXANDER/The Press

**TIGHT SECURITY:** The Exclusive Brethren hold a meeting in Christchurch. Leader Bruce Hales attended the gathering of the controversial sect.

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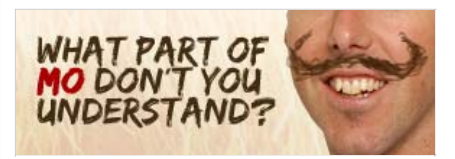
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