

Religious rules

killed

OUR SON

BOY WAS BANNED FROM HIS FAMILY BY 'THE BRETHREN'

By Daily Mail Reporter

A MOTHER who refused to let her 21-year-old son eat with the rest of the family because he did not believe in their religious faith told me last night: "My son committed suicide because he could stand it no longer. It is an evil, wicked faith."

Mrs. Grace Lawson and her husband Reginald were brought up in the faith of the strict Exclusive Brethren sect, an offshoot of the Plymouth Brethren.

She said: "It was a simple faith based on God as our leader, and the Bible. Then, suddenly, the Exclusive Brethren made rigid rules.

"We were told that Martin must not eat with us. Then that we must not have him in the house. We were not to have any social contact with any relative outside the faith. It was too much for us."

Said Mrs. Lawson: "Then my son took his life. He was a sensitive boy and I know from all the mental strain he went through that he died because our religion was casting him out of the family."

Shattered

Mrs. Lawson lives on Hayling Island, Hampshire. Eventually she, her husband and daughter Virginia left the sect.

Mrs. Lawson said: "It was a terrible wrench. After all, we had been brought up to believe in the Brethren faith all our lives. My son's death has shattered us as a family."

Martin Lawson, a racing motorist and car salesman, worked in London and travelled home at weekends.

He said last year that he refused to join the Exclusives because of their rigid rules.

"I am barred from eating with the family; they are not allowed to listen to the radio or watch TV. The whole thing is ridiculous," he said.

Mrs. Lawson says there have been "other tragedies" caused by the rules of the Exclusives. "They are even trying to separate man and wife if one is not a member. I only wish we had left before our son died," she said.

Upset

The Exclusives, founded in 1843 by an Anglican curate, the Rev. J. N. Darby, do not have paid officials. The instructions to members come as a result of Bible studies held in various parts of the country.

Said Mrs. Lawson: "The main centre of the Exclusives is in New York, where a man named Jim Taylor acts as leader. We were always taught as children that there should not be any leaders. We were all brethren."

In New York Mr. Taylor, who has a linen business in Brooklyn, was "not in" to callers yesterday.

The shock introduction of strict rules has upset many of the 100,000 Exclusive Brethren in Britain. About 3,000 are reported to have left because of the rule forbidding them to have social contact with relatives who are not members.

A representative of the orthodox Plymouth Brethren said: "We are not connected with Mr. Taylor in any way. We do not agree with his policies."