

Exclusive Brethren Settle Out of Court

The thinking and actions of some religious groups and their leaders can often be difficult to fathom. The Exclusive Brethren and the dictates and actions of its leadership can be particularly peculiar and hard to follow.

In October 1990 our Director met with two Western Australian leaders who wanted to discuss what they regarded as unfair comments about their movement in an article we had published in TACL of June 1990. They were nice men and polite in their dealings with the director (though later correspondence became more abrupt).

They had itemised our article in writing and provided their corrective comments next to each item they were concerned about. However, as these were discussed one by one, it turned out that almost every time something was declared to be untrue, it was more a matter of splitting hairs over word meanings. It was more a 'word game' than factual corrections of incorrect statements on our part. For example, we had reported that one person had been disciplined for having a dinghy. That was claimed to be untrue. He had been disciplined for disobeying counsel from others who had advised against having a recreational fishing boat – because this was not wise, it would lead to unwise use of God's time (not to be used for pleasure or recreational activities) and would lead to unacceptably playing sport with God's creatures.

We had reported that having a picnic could earn Exclusive members disciplined. This was declared untrue, but it was stated that picnics with one's own immediate family were permitted; having a picnic with other families was definitely discouraged.

It was claimed that they had no leaders, and that all men in the Exclusive Brethren are priests, but it was admitted that a number of them flew to New South Wales to be with world leader, John Hales (at the time), for regular leaders' meetings.

They definitely became quite defensive when the scandalous behaviour of James Taylor Jnr was raised. In 1970 Taylor Jnr, then the world leader of the Exclusive Brethren was caught naked in bed with a woman (not his wife) while staying with friends in Aberdeen. Our director was told that Taylor had not been immoral, and though both were naked under the sheets, he had done nothing improper – it was all a 'test' to see if the 'grumblers' would jump to the wrong conclusion – and they did! Our Director, having seen the documentation provided by those involved in discovering the scandalous conduct of their leader in Aberdeen, was not quite as credulous or gullible as the Exclusive Brethren representatives appeared to be over the issue.

The Exclusive Brethren gained some notoriety in 1997-1998 when children were prevented going home after school to parents who were under discipline or who had left the Exclusives.

One former Exclusive Brethren member, John Wallis, was particularly incensed by what some of the Exclusives were doing to families who dared to question or had pulled out of the group, that he wrote a very strongly worded letter in February 1998, demanding the children be brought back to their families, and an end to the break-up and dividing of families. He criticised the Exclusive leadership, including some local leaders in Dalwallinu. He posted copies of his letter to the leaders, the local police and others – and put a copy of his letter on the public town notice board.

That led to years of legal wrangling. Part of that legal wrangling led to court action being scheduled

for August 2004. Three days before the matter was to be heard in court the Exclusives dropped their action against John Wallis. They opted to settle out of court and demanded he pay them \$50,000 instead. Mr Wallis refused their demands, and instead demanded they pay him! He did not back away from his strong criticism of the movement and its leadership, and in spite of the threats of court action and demands in order to settle out of court, the Exclusives ended up paying John Wallis \$25,000.

Part of the bizarre nature of the settlement was that they refused to meet him face to face; refused to let him sign their papers (his legal representative had to do that); they paid by bank cheque – but made it out to his legal representatives as they did not want to pay him (John Wallis) directly.

A spokesman for the Exclusives acknowledged to Sunday Times reporter, Jim Kelly, that it had been decided it was better to pay John Wallis off, rather than allow him to '**publicly air misleading and damaging claims about the church**' – a fairly clear indication that they did not want the public exposure a Supreme Court hearing would provide – including through the possible testimony of witnesses.

The Exclusive Brethren are NOT the same as the Brethren or Open Brethren with their Assemblies and Gospel Halls – though both groups share a common heritage of coming from J N Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. The Exclusives follow the dictates of their world leader, their 'Elect Vessel' and shun the world and modern communications technology (etc) as evil and undesirable. The list of bans have included everything from banning women from cutting their hair, to banning radios, television, the movies, fax machines, the Internet, recreational fishing dinghies, and even banning pot plants and pets.

John Wallis began his long troubled journey out of the Exclusives when he was shunned for the evil buying a set of encyclopaedias for home and family use.

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