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TV STORY

Fashion victims of religion

19 August 2005

By JANE BOWRON

After watching TV3's Inside New Zealand documentary on the Exclusive Brethren this week, I wanted to get on the phone to Trinny and Susannah (What Not to Wear) and tell them to get on down here.

For there is no worse dresser than the female cult member, and the footage of the women and the girls featured in this reasonably riveting expose must have had every hair and clothes stylist in the country itching to get their cotton-picking hands on these dowdy females.

Long, uncut hair is never a good look but when it is tied up in a pocket-handkerchief headscarf it looks particularly unflattering.

To make matters worse, the women in this cult wear long wrap-around skirts that look like they've come out of a mail-order catalogue from the Woodstock era.

By the way, I see that the peasant skirt is back in this summer, which is rotten news for anyone over 20, for they only look good on the type of prepubescent girls David Hamilton made a living out of photographing.

The great thing about putting the boot into the Exclusive Brethren is that they don't listen to radios, watch television or read newspapers, so you can do so with impunity.

We heard from various simpletons of this faith that the reason they cut themselves off from the world is to minimise

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contact with the Devil.

The Exclusive Brethren have their own schools and are not allowed to attend university in case they become infected by an idea, or take up public office.

This admission only showed how selfish they are, for they take no responsibility for contributing toward society and would probably begrudge paying their taxes.

Continued reference was made to St Paul's letters to Timothy reflecting the patriarchal view of society in vogue at that time.

One woman who had left the clutches of the EBs after allegedly enduring rapes and beatings in her marriage, spoke about how she would have to do the family shopping, bring the goods home and line them up on the counter so her husband could tick them off on the docket.

Imagine trying that trick on in any sane household in the contemporary world – the men's refuges would be chocker within minutes.

The heroes of this documentary were those people who had the spirit to get out and leave the enclosed society, but what a high price they had to pay for their exit.

This loving, caring Christian community put those who veered in any way from their weird norm on the coat and left them out in the cold.

Once you left the Exclusive Brethren that was it.

You would never have contact with family and friends again.

The effect of this estrangement for fence-jumpers was deep depression combined with a terror of having to face the challenges of the real world alone and without assistance.

Looking further afield than the New Zealand branch of this faith, we heard how the American leader, one James Taylor Jr, had blotted his copy book when he was sprung, naked in the sack with someone else's wife.

His explanation – believe it or not – was that the woman was merely washing his feet with her long hair in the manner of Mary Magdalene.

No doubt he took the precaution to remove his pyjamas to avoid contamination from this tearful lubrication.

Even though they tried to cover up the scandal, news of the great one's downfall spread like wildfire throughout the American communities with devastating effects.

What a pity it was hushed up down-under.

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