

TRANSCRIPT of the Daniel Hales Interview
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Host: Phillip Adams

Guest: Daniel Hales

PHILLIP ADAMS:

To start with tonight we are going to return to a story from last week - a conversation I had with Michael Bachelard about his new book 'Inside the Exclusive Brethren'. We talked with some fascination about the Brethren doctrine of separation from the world, Brethren financial donations to the Liberal party despite a Brethren principle that forbids members from voting in elections. And the many stories that have emerged over the years about the harsh treatment of people who have been ex-communicated. And we also talked about the Brethren's use of a prominent PR firm, Jackson-Wells Morris to help rebuild a tarnished public reputation. After I had the chat with Bachelard we got a call from the aforementioned pr firm offering a response on behalf of the brethren and we said yes, because it's rare for a senior member of the sect to speak publicly about their beliefs and their actions. So I welcome, with some astonishment that he's here, Daniel Hales, brother of the Brethren's leader, Bruce Hales. Daniel, you are instructed to withdraw from iniquity - I would have thought I'm almost the embodiment of iniquity.

DANIEL HALES:

Not so, not so ... er ... and good evening Philip. Our withdrawing from iniquity is related to our fellowship and it's simply based on Paul's writings in 2 Timothy and that doesn't stop us having in ... interaction with ... er ... persons in the world and society – we feel ... that's our in ... indeed that's our responsibility.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

So how do you do this double-act which in one sense is a doctrinal suggestion that you do withdraw some degree and yet remain part of the world. How do you do ... how do you juggle this?

DANIEL HALES:

Well, that's a very very good question, Phillip. I think you could sum it up by using the words that we .. ah ... we set ourselves to be in the world but not of the world. In the Catholic faith you have ... ah ... monks and nuns who draw themselves completely away and live a totally separate life. I was reading in The Herald this morning how our Jewish brethren want to put a wire line around St. Ives. They're outgoing things – they're obvious things. We tend to do it with our faith – that we live with men, we live in society but separation is the intrinsic underlying principle whereby we don't have

normal social intercourse ... ah ... normal mutual entertainment ... um .. with those unless we've taken communion, the holy communion with them.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

The rapture is, of course, very important to your beliefs. Have you got a rough approximation of when it will occur?

DANIEL HALES:

Not at all, not at all. Philip. It ... it ... it's known by Acts 1, Luke tells us in the first chapter of Acts: that it's in the Father's ... God the Father's own timing. Many Christians would not believe in the rapture as we believe in it which is just another aspect of our beliefs that ... is that there will be a rapture at some time before Christ comes into reign.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Now, as I understand it you will be swept up before everyone else – this is ... this is one of the advantages of being a member of the Brethren.

DANIEL HALES:

[laughs]

PHILLIP ADAMS:

You've got excellent tickets.

DANIEL HALES:

Not so, not so Philip. Every believer in Jesus, we believe, every believer in Jesus, whatever nation, whatever faith, whatever creed, whatever ... sense of faith, will be caught up at that time with Christ.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

You refuse to vote in elections. What's the doctrinal basis for that?

DANIEL HALES:

I'm very glad you've asked that ... ah ... question, Philip, because that is something that we'd very much like to clear up in the public mind. It is simply this: that it is the basis of all our actions is our conscience - our conscientious beliefs - that we do not enter into mutual ... links. Let me put it into perspective – it's very interesting because that provision has been in federal ... ah ... legislation for a long time. We are about 14 or 15,000 members in Australia so let us say 3,000 ... 4,000 of them vote. I think the figure at the last federal election was something like 50 to 60,000 people took advantage of that conscientious objection of which we would only represent 5%.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

A lot ... a lot of people don't vote out of inertia or out of laziness or they only vote because they'll get fined if they don't, or fear of fine but nonetheless, there is ... this is a doctrinal position and yet it seems so contradictory or contradicted by the fact

that members of the brethren put hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars into ... alright, or made it available to the Liberal party. How do you deal ... how do you deal with this paradox?

DANIEL HALES:

The church enters in no way into politics – either parties or support or financial support ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

So it's just an eerie coincidence was it that suddenly a number of senior members of your ... um ... faith ... started throwing money at the Liberal party?

DANIEL HALES:

I would say that individual members do what motivates them, as they would in any organization, they act independently, they support what they feel they should support - and they do it on their own right and basis as free citizens. Nothing is done by the church and nothing is coordinated.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

The ... um ... is there a doctrinal sort of er ... significance to this? Does the bible in any way say, 'vote Liberal'?

DANIEL HALES:

Certainly not. Certainly not. As some of the greatest support for conscience and independent rights of persons to exercise religion have come from the Labour party.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

I'm glad to hear it. What about the Greens? Do you have ... as a group the brethren don't seem to be all that persuaded by ... um ... the Climate Change hypothesis.

DANIEL HALES:

No, we would be very sensitive to the developing concerns as to Climate Change and what's happening in our world.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Okay, no one is suggesting that political donations are illegal - whether they are from the church or an individual church member or members - but it does still seem hypocritical when the church forbids the Vote but happily allows its members, or as you insist, individual members to get financially involved - in such a big way, both here and in New Zealand.

DANIEL HALES:

I can't speak for New Zealand, obviously ... uh ... Philip, but I would not say we were involved in a big way. I've ... I've never given to a political party personally myself ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

You can't deny Barack ... we could send some money to Barack Obama, for example ...

DANIEL HALES:

[laughs]

PHILLIP ADAMS:

No, you wouldn't support Barack would you?

DANIEL HALES:

[sounds like chuckling]

PHILLIP ADAMS:

The brethren would be going for John McCain.

DANIEL HALES:

Not necessarily. Not necessarily. No, no ... I think ... uh ... we ... we are non partisan – we simply would pray for government and we feel that we have a right to express our conscience to whatever level of government there is, and to persons at large. That's part of our testimony, that's why we say we're not gone from the world – we're not trying to live abstracted from the world – we believe we have a social, moral responsibility ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Is ... is that why you have six registered lobbyists at parliament house in Canberra?

DANIEL HALES:

Well, I'm certainly not a registered lobbyist at parliament house in Canberra, Philip, and I don't know who is ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

I didn't make that an accusation. But there are six registered lobbyists at the time of the last election – why would they be necessary?

DANIEL HALES:

I would suggest they are acting on their own independent ... uh ... basis, their own independent judgment to find a way to put their ... uh ... conscientious beliefs to members of parliament.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

I'd just like to get a feeling of this. Do the Brethren sit around and have very energetic arguments on political issues?

DANIEL HALES:

Our church meetings, Phillip, are entirely bible-based. We read the bible. We discuss the bible. The women are involved... Once again, it's an opportunity for me to debunk a myth, it's worse than a myth – it's a... It's a false and malicious charge that our women are kept at a lower level, or in, somehow ... uh ... hampered in their exercises or their life. Our service, our Holy Communion couldn't proceed until one of our senior women... placed the ... uh... communion, wine and bread on the table.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Well, now you've raised that issue, of course the Catholic Church isn't ... uh ... all that ... uh ... warm about seeing women get into senior [inaudible] places in the Vatican, [laughs] and the local Anglican's are still ... uh ... you know, pretty 'miffed' about the thought. Can a woman become, theoretically, the ... uh ... the head of your organisation?

DANIEL HALES:

We don't have a 'head' as such.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Your brother is... Is the 'Big Cheese'...

DANIEL HALES:

[Laughs] He's... I'd like to put it another way. Every organisation has a leadership. You send twenty ... uh ... school students out on a 'bivouac' and they'll certainly, after a series of pressures and exercise, they'll fall into various [pause] ... levels of ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Accepted. But I've just asked that question, "Is it conceivable that a woman could get to the very top of the pile?"

DANIEL HALES:

The 'divine order', as we would accept it ... see it set out by Saint Paul, would be that [pause] ... that there would be a certain 'respect' for a man to be an elder.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Now here's another paradox. You're sitting here in a radio studio; I understand the TV and radios are not allowed, so that none of the Brethren will be listening to us.

DANIEL HALES:

None of the Brethren will be listening to us Phillip. I've never owned a radio or a TV in my life. I've been a happy household ... all my life. I'm 58 ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Yeah... I just ...

DANIEL HALES:

I've brought up 5 children ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

I just find it charming, in a way, that you've come in to this iniquitous place...[laughs] ...and no one's gonna hear... You could say anything! You could say anything ... and they wouldn't know! Ok. Family break-ups! As you know the incumbent Prime Minister said, and I stress 'before he was PM':

"My position on the Exclusive Brethren is on the record, I believe that this is an extremist cult and sect, and I believe it breaks-up families."

Now, I've been inundated with emails since we had the chat with Bachelard on this. There's a lot of people out there who were in the Brethren; who are very bitter and unhappy about the way they've been treated subsequently.

DANIEL HALES:

Let us start with what ... um ... Mr. Rudd said. I don't blame him at all for saying that. I don't hold that against him whatsoever. He was in the heat of battle – seeking to win an election. We had a lot of scurrilous ... and unfair ... and absolute lies told about us. He knows we didn't vote! He would know we wouldn't vote! So it wasn't ... It was a s... [pause] It was a thing to say, that would be...

I well understand, and I well excuse him for it. Umm. He's shown his fairness, and his justice ...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

But ... but are you denying that this, ah... this deep, emotional wrench occurs, and many people... once excommunicated, find themselves distanced from family members, and heart-broken?

DANIEL HALES:

Phillip, any breakup in families is sad. Across all faiths, across all religions, no faith, no religions – and families break up. Our rate of members leaving the family, and leaving the church is abysmally small – extremely small.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Abysmally small... ? [laugh] You'd like to increase it? [laughs again]

DANIEL HALES:

Extremely small – sorry for that. Anyway... For instance, I just cast my mind back over the... umm... the last 8 or 9 years in Sydney. We have about 6 or 7 hundred members. Two young people have left, that I can think of, since 2000. And one of them returned.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Ok. Well, I don't want to haggle over this...

DANIEL HALES:

But most of the break up... Most of the break...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

We simply don't have time to deal with, say, the case of ... uh ... 85 year-old ... uh ... Alison Alderton which we talked about the other night. Let me look at another conundrum here ... can Brethren children go to university?

DANIEL HALES:

Brethren children, Phillip, would not be encouraged to go to university. They would be encouraged to do 'tertiary studies' – in Accounting, or in their trade, or in...

PHILLIP ADAMS:

But that means that down the track, you can't have qualified Brethren doctors – you can't have Brethren lawyers?

DANIEL HALES:

That's part of the reason why we're very happy, and very concerned to play our part in the world, so that ... we're providing what we can provide and others provide what they can't... [inaudible]

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Why do you think you're the focus of so much hostility?

DANIEL HALES:

Because of ... our... [pause] practice of separation ... [pause] Because we're holding to our basic, fundamental, biblical-based beliefs. And, most of the people that are hostile to us, Phillip... have left a long time ago! And this is what's so unfair that Mr. Bachelard, in his book, speaks to persons who have left... I think all of them have left at least 20 years ago! [pause] 30 years ago – some of them; 40 years ago! And hasn't come to us for our side of the story... or our.... [pause]

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Ok. A final question? You don't go out drumming up business... Well, apart from your businesses. You don't go out saying, 'Come and join the Brethren' – that's pretty hard to do isn't it?

DANIEL HALES:

We would gladly go out – and we do go out, and we preach basic Christianity; hoping that persons will find Christ, for themselves. Forcing no faith on them, forcing no beliefs on them, forcing nothing on them – other than that we hold out that there's salvation in Jesus. If any were so moved as they were to come amongst us – which some do from time to time, but we are not out there proselytizing.

PHILLIP ADAMS:

Well, I'm very pleased that you came into this den of iniquity, and I'd like to send a cheerio to all the members of the Exclusive Brethren ... [pause] ... who can't hear the program. Thanks very much Daniel Hales – a senior member of the Exclusive Brethren in Australia.

This is LNL on ABC Radio National ... and I'd like you all to sing 'Happy Birthday', - 'Happy 60th Birthday' to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.