

News and Features

## SECT IN A WORLD OF ITS OWN

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The **Exclusive Brethren**, a breakaway group formed from the Plymouth Brethren in 1849 after disputes over doctrine and Church government, forbids members to watch TV or listen to the radio.

They cannot eat or drink with people outside their order and the women dress modestly with long hair and no makeup or jewellery. They are encouraged to have large families.

Members are also banned from joining private health funds and cannot take out life insurance policies - they believe that "life can be given but not taken away".

Children at school cannot play competitive sport and although they can mix with others, they cannot take friends home.

The **Exclusive Brethren** and the somewhat more conservative Open Brethren have no organised ministry outside the laity. A communion service is held every Sunday and nearly all groups practise the baptism of believers, although some follow the lead of their founder, John Nelson Darby, and baptise children of members.

There is complete autonomy of the local churches and many have been involved in bitter rows over bizarre edicts.

Many of the problems came in the late 1960s when the international leader, Big Jim Taylor, an American, told women members to do away with the traditional bun and wear their hair long.

Taylor also said they should wear only long, loose dresses and no underwear, including bras.

He said he did not believe in beauty aids and used as the reason a Bible verse which says: "Women should adorn themselves in modest apparel."

Taylor died in September 1970 and his place was taken by a Canadian, Jim Symington. He died about 12 months ago and an Australian, John Hales, took over.

The Brethren has been involved in other controversies. Farming families were instructed to sell their properties and move into settled areas. Once they were told to get rid of any pets they owned.

Local Church elders can "shut off" families if members do something that goes against their beliefs.

The Church abandons them completely and has no contact whatsoever, forbidding other members to talk to or contact them in any way.

Families can also be told to shut off their children and even force them to leave home.

This shut-off period can last forever.

A former member of the Brethren said husbands and wives have been split up and the Church has assisted with court orders to restrain either party from having anything to do with the other.

Details of the group's wage case submission will not be revealed until it is presented by a barrister from a well-known industrial practice law firm in about three weeks.

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