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## The Family Business By Dick Wyman

Have you ever wondered what motivates a person to become the international leader of a group like the EBs? What benefits could there be? What are the risks? How is success measured? Is the old saying true that "uneasy rests the head that wears the crown"? In this analysis I've collected some things I've learned about the current leader, a man I've nicknamed the "e-leaked vessel" because everything I know about him I've learned electronically over the Internet. Most of the information has come from insiders who fear retribution should their identities become known.

## The Commerce System

The late John S. Hales and his brother W. Bruce (still living) had the idea that the brethren could turn their fellowship into a commerce system. I don't have many details on the proposed system, but it apparently involved brethren disclosing their assets, employing brethren in their businesses and choosing brethren business relationships over competing non-brethren alternatives. Disclosure was a central idea and would allow an authority figure to distribute wealth appropriately in a sort of brethren-only social security system. The problem was that there were more powerful men around at the time; James Taylor Junior, for one. Mr. Jim knew the Hales boys well as his daughter married W. Bruce. But Mr. Jim concluded that the commerce system was out of bounds and he had the brethren in Sydney withdraw from the Hales brothers over that system in 1965. The official charge was for "commerce in the assembly". A year or two later, they were re-admitted on orders from Mr. Jim. When Taylor died, John Hales was unable to claim the lead. Instead of power flowing to Sydney, a North Dakota farmer in the right place at the right time became the universal leader. James Symington withdrew from both JSH and WBH, but was persuaded by Bob Thorncroft to allow John Hales back into the fellowship. WBH was not restored until approximately 1988 when John had been universal lead for about a year. There were other men who were closer to JHS than John Hales, notably Jerry Holman and Lloyd Paskewitz, but when Jim Symington died in 1987, no one had the political will or clout to deny the leadership position to John S. Hales and he became the universal leader.

## The Underground Commerce System

Memories of his commerce system were fresh, however, and JSH had to disguise his ambitions. He created a system to handle estates and mandated how brethren could distribute their wealth at death. He was particularly interested in ensuring a substantial donation to "the brethren" and also made sure any out-of-fellowship progeny were given only token bequests if anything at all. He encouraged brethren to seek mortgage money from other brethren rather than from commercial lenders. Some families who have left the fellowship have had their mortgages foreclosed. He also went to work on the titles to meeting rooms. In 1990, many if not all of the Trust Deeds for meeting rooms in England were modified. Ownership is in the hands of a few (usually three) Trustees. Generally, the local congregations have no control over the exercise of The Trustees' powers. However, a few powers, including, in particular, the power to remove or appoint Trustees, are subject to "Prescribed Conditions". The original Deed defined these as follows:- "Where the execution of any trust or power is made subject to "the Prescribed

Conditions” those conditions are that the Trustees shall not execute that trust or power unless:- they have first consulted with the Congregation; and the proposal to execute such trust or power in a particular manner is approved by a unanimous resolution of a meeting of the Congregation.”However, in the amended version, this was changed to:- “Where the execution of any trust or power is made subject to “the Prescribed Conditions” those conditions are that the Trustees shall not execute that trust or power unless:- the proposal to execute such trust or power in a particular manner is approved by a unanimous resolution of a meeting of the Congregation. Mr. J.S. Hales (so long as he lives) and after the death of Mr. John S Hales any other person who for the time being is a successor as a Minister of the Lord in the Recovery has confirmed in writing his approval of the proposal and notification of this fact is given at a meeting of the Congregation.”At the same time, the definition of “unanimous” was changed. Originally, it was:- “For the purposes of this deed a unanimous resolution of a meeting of members of the Congregation is a resolution which no member of the Congregation of twenty years old and upwards present at the meeting votes against.”In the amended version, it became:- “For the purposes of this deed a unanimous resolution of a meeting of the Congregation is a resolution to which no objection is raised at the meeting by any member of the Congregation (disregarding for this purpose any objection which is withdrawn later in the same meeting).”The Congregation can only control the exercise of The Trustees’ powers by removing the Trustees and appointing new ones. Paradoxically, the amended Trust Deed gives them the following powers which they did not have before:- “Trustees may be appointed or discharged by unanimous resolution of a meeting of the Congregation ...”However this power is illusory because, in view of the requirement for and the definition of unanimity, the Trustees can always block the actions of the Congregation simply by raising objection at the meeting. On the other hand, the Trustees can remove one of their number, even in the face of the unanimous opposition of the Congregation, by obtaining the concurrence of Mr. Hales. Mr. Hales does not actually have the power to appoint or remove Trustees but, in practice, the Trustees will remain loyal to him because, as long as they enjoy his support, they can always override the will of the Congregation. If one of the Trustees breaks ranks, he will be removed. Clearly, John Hales wished to guarantee that, should there be an Aberdeen-style break in the fellowship ranks, all meeting room ownership would remain under his control. By allowing only vetted cronies to become Trustees, he could reduce the risks associated with defection. Only if (which is unlikely) two Trustees were to conspire to break ranks, would Mr. Hales have a problem, and even then the damage would be constrained to a single meeting room. So the commerce system became a network of mortgages, wills and trusts, all under the watchful eye of John S. Hales, who was accountable to no one. His son Bruce was one of the few insiders entrusted with the details of the system.

### The E-Leaked Vessel

JSH son Bruce reached for power as soon as his father was buried. He had very little preparation for the role of "Minister of the Lord in the Recovery". I'm told he had taken one fellowship meeting in his life and had never taken a 3-day meeting. On the other hand, his father always regarded him as the most 'spiritual' of his three sons. BDH was involved as a "priest" in the task of bringing his uncle Bruce back into the fellowship after JSH assumed the universal lead. In the September 2002 meetings in Detroit he called on a man from Woodlands to cite a Psalm for him, saying, "Okay, someone will find it pretty quick for us. Psalm--go on, Mr. Russell, you give us a touch about it now. I've always admired your capacity for Scripture finding."Whatever his grasp of scripture, BDH is said to be a smooth and persuasive speaker.

## The Review

BDH turned his attention to the size of the assembly. As business managers the world over know only too well, the best way to increase the dollars is to increase the size of the pie. He ignited a movement called "the Review", which is notable in several respects.

1. Brethren who thought they were doing the right thing in separating from evil are now told they must re-examine the evidence. They are made to contact people who have long since left the fellowship and apologize for their treatment without even understanding what that treatment was.
2. People who have neither admitted wrong-doing nor attempted to make amends for their behavior are accepted back into fellowship.
3. Behavior that would have been cause for assembly discipline is countenanced. Persons guilty of adultery, drunkenness and other vices are welcomed back into the fold.
4. While apologizing for behavior that divided families, they again divide families, by inviting spouse to leave spouse, parent to leave children, or child to leave parents to return to the fellowship. The Review began modestly while John Hales was still alive. Then in May 2002 a Hales relation died suddenly at the age of 50. The man was a brother of John Hales' son-in-law and was well-liked in Sydney. BDH's sister, her husband and their children came to the graveside and spoke with the immediate family. Ex-brethren in Sydney report that visits and social contact became more frequent after that event. By mid 2003 the Review seemed to have run its course. Indications that the rules might be softening ended abruptly when BDH circulated a letter warning young people to get rid of their CD players, cell phones, etc.

## The E-Leaked Agenda

There are other notable characteristics of the BDH tenure.

- All of the men who were regarded as significant leaders when his father died have been withdrawn from or otherwise silenced. This list includes Laurie Marsh, Doug Siderfin, Lloyd Paskewitz, and Bob Thorncroft. Mr. Thorncroft was the man who championed the return of John Hales back into fellowship during Mr. Symington's tenure. David Bill of New Zealand is the only prominent non Hales family member who has retained any stature in the new regime.
- Many if not all of the significant figures in the BDH inner circle have Hales family ties. The circle includes his brother Stephen, his cousin Ross Hales, his father's cousin **Roger Kirkpatrick**, and his father-in-law Athol Greene.
  - o Brother Stephen is said to be a "seer", that is, to have the ability to unerringly detect a fake. Someone with no grasp of history might fail to recognize the return of The Inquisition.
  - o Cousin Ross is said to be a big talker but clever enough to leverage his surname. He is said to think rules are for others and takes his own family and relatives off to restaurants when he pleases.
  - o Dr. **Roger Kirkpatrick** was out of fellowship and separated or divorced from his wife for about two years during the 1970'. His physician's registration is current with the Medical Board of Queensland Australia.
  - o Athol Greene was an IBM salesman in the 1960's. He recently took 3-day meetings in England.
- Brethren schools are a major agenda item. Home schooling is being replaced by small, locally-supported schools. In some areas, Detroit for example, a home is being converted to a school. Meetings are holding fund-raising activities for their schools and are hiring teachers.
- Brethren are being told to move from areas with many brethren to smaller communities. Reports have come from Melbourne in Australia, from Victoria in western Canada, and from Cape May in the USA. This after the closure of meetings in South Africa and India. There is a reported guideline that no community should have

more than 200 brethren in it.

### Re-connecting with the Symingtons

A strange story has been developing in Neche, North Dakota and the Winnipeg area of Manitoba over the past two years. There apparently has been a division in Neche, which involved some leaving the Symington fold, but the people involved have been very reticent, so my account is sketchy. The conflict apparently has never been settled. However I do know that the BBC has been in contact with someone in Neche. There are reports of harrasment of those who left and similar treatment has been reported by other former EBs. In Winnipeg, a few hours to the north, children of families who have left are taunted by EB schoolmates. During the past year, Roy Symington, second son of the late James Symington, has been accepted back into the fellowship. His return coincided with his mother's failure and death. At the September, 2002, meetings in Detroit, Roy Symington appeared on the platform with BDH and was consulted many times. Here is a sample of Roy's thoughts: I just thought of these verses, I know, my son, I know. I suppose a time came when it continued in Joseph, but you think of these verses -- do you think he could have influenced him? Clear that he couldn't have. I know, my son, I know; I don't think he would have ever forgotten it. It's the way the truth has come to us. you think of the conflict in every generation, something laid on these beloved men to deal with before they were taken but to point to -- in view of the thing continuing; it'll never be any different. It's the way the truth is going through, in a certain sense it's how the beloved apostle, you think of how he refers to it, that He will be with us all the days till the completion; I think it's on this principle, and we need to respect it and value it. It's among us, beloved brethren, and it's the only safe way through. You think of what's happened, the devil's gotten in, but God has provided something that's safe because He has made it safe, and if we stay near to that suitably there's safety in it. Just that we might be appealed to to consider how critical the time is, and the challenge to each one of us, the position's going through; hades's gates, we're made to feel what they are, the enemy, great bulwarks against any little position, he'd do everything to overthrow it. But it's going through, and the challenge would be, who will go through with it? There's a way through, and I wondered if it isn't really pointed up in the value of respecting fatherhood. Well, may we see it, and be helped in it, For His name's sake. It appears that Roy and BDH, as sons of former Universal Leaders, are joined by the need to generate respect by reference to their sires. They apparently seek to enhance their fathers' reputations and, by implication, their own.

### Other Agenda Items

Trying to make sense of these developments with so little hard information is a challenge. It seems clear that BDH wants no interference with his ability to govern. He demands unquestioned obedience and has silenced all potential opposition. He is addressing the size of the fellowship by appealing to former members to return. The hallmark of the BDH tenure is loyalty to BDH and then do whatever you like. His steps to re-locate brethren seem more oriented towards reducing the potential political base of an opponent than towards enabling a more effective ministry or growth strategy.

### Corruption

The brethren originated as groups of Christians who gathered to worship without requiring the presence of clergy. Such gatherings began before John Nelson Darby became aware of their existence, and are based on the teachings of Jesus. The idea that any centralized authority will, over time, become corrupt was a defining facet of the movement called "the Recovery". We are witnessing that corruption. It is not unique to

the Exclusive Brethren but its presence is an unfortunate irony. A group that was formed in response to the abuse of ecclesiastic authority has become an example of the abuse of ecclesiastic authority. Corruption is found in groups as various as political parties and organized crime syndicates. Disciples are rewarded and dissidents are punished. Corruption is so closely associated with the accumulation of power that Lord Acton summarized the relationship with the memorable quotation, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." (Letter to Bishop Mandress Creighton, 1887)

Are the brethren still Christian?

Christian believers - meaning people who claim to be emulators of and followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and who believe that Jesus was in fact the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament - are associated with self-sacrificing behavior such as service to the poor, the sick and the less privileged. Public charities in most western nations are open to scrutiny. They disclose their assets, their leaders, their leaders' salaries, and the sources and dispositions of their funds. The Exclusive Brethren display neither the humbleness of believers nor the transparency of charities. They seem to be more an international business or fraternal organization than a religion or sect. In the years prior to James Taylor Junior's rise to power, brethren meetings focused on scripture and meaning. Men who were fluent in Greek or Latin were held in high esteem. Meetings were an opportunity to exchange views. That orientation has changed to one in which all teaching comes from a single leader and it is the leader's thoughts that are discussed. Local "leads" act as interpreters and are both informants and enforcers. The earlier emphasis on "personal exercise" and a confession of faith has evolved into the concept that birth and baptism confer the rights and duties of fellowship. I'm told that current brethren theology does not differentiate between the various parts of the bible. The phrase "every scripture is for profit" is used to support the idea that any verse is equal in weight to any other. The obvious question is why part of the bible is named the New Testament. If the brethren do not understand the difference between the old covenant and the new, perhaps they really aren't Christian.

The Hales Commerce System

I have been unable to detect any system of checks and balances to prevent abuse of authority. Each successive leader is free to define the terms and conditions of fellowship. The only constraints are found in the barely visible network of legal structures crafted by the Hales clan. The only apparent condition for membership is allegiance to the Hales clan. The prominent leaders are all members of the Hales clan. Attendance at three-day meetings is contingent on an invitation from the Hales clan. My conclusion is that the Exclusive Brethren have become the Hales Family Business.