

NO GREY AREAS:
A RURAL FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

An investigation into the operation of a small rural Fundamentalist Christian Fellowship is the subject of the following thesis.

This field research was undertaken through observing the group for three months by attending Sunday Fellowship meetings. At the completion of that period, eight members were interviewed. Informal discussions during that time, involving approximately thirty members, added to the information accumulated.

Through observation it became apparent this group originated because of their dissatisfaction with the local Christian church. This break-away Fellowship sought to form a version of Christianity that was unstructured, flexible, informal and lacking in hierarchy. As previous research had been carried out with this group, information that might otherwise have remained hidden, such as a disfellowshipped couple, became available.

The scope of this thesis will include: the development of the group, observation of a typical Fellowship meeting, investigations into their 'Biblically-based' attitude and how this related to their everyday existence, as well as information concerning a rift within the Fellowship that resulted in the expulsion of two of its members.

This research led to the conclusion that although the Fellowship fulfilled a desired need within the group, its future seemed uncertain, due in part to the very aims it sought to achieve. The spiritual aspect of this Christian Fellowship was willing and strong but the physical composition, the informal hierarchical structure and format, was weak, and so in the final analysis, I consider this and similar Fellowships will have a finite, continually changing existence.

All names and places have been changed, at the request of those involved, to protect the group concerned.

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CHAPTER I

FROM WHENCE THEY CAME

Argyl is a small country area with a population of approximately fifty farming families, situated sixty kilometres from the nearest city. It was within this community that a minority group of Fundamentalist Christians had formed a breakaway Fellowship from the local Anglican and Presbyterian Church. Members of the Fellowship lived within a radius of approximately fifteen kilometres and met together for regular Bible study and Fellowship meetings.

The Fellowship had been in existence for ten years at the time of this research study, and had provided the group with a religious support system of their own choosing, which the district would otherwise not have accommodated. The district was a small farming area, nestled between a range of hills on one side and the east coast on the other. The area was composed of a mixture of established wealthy farms, average-sized farms providing an adequate yearly income, and some Government assisted farms, whose owners were experiencing considerable hardship. The members within the Fellowship fell into the middle to low income group of farmers, with at least 50% of them having experienced some economic hardship.

The reason this group was chosen as a subject for field research was because the area and most of the inhabitants were known to the author. In addition, two previous studies in relation to Fundamentalist Christianity had been carried out with this group.

The basic aim of this investigation was to provide information concerning Fundamentalist Christians who lived in a rural community, and, more particularly, to discover why they chose to separate themselves from the traditional Christian Church within the area, as this effectively isolated them from the rest of the district. Also, to ascertain if their different attitudes and beliefs did in fact cause any dissent within the district. The group's alternative method of worshipping within the home/hall surroundings as well as the knowledge that some members Homeschooled their children, led to the conclusion that this Fundamentalist Christian group was very dissatisfied with much of what modern society has to offer. To provide a greater understanding of how and why this rural Fundamentalist Christian group operated was the basic purpose of this research study.

Initial plan of observation

My initial plan of observing the Argyl Christian Fellowship for research purposes was almost aborted before it began.

After a telephone conversation with the Scriptural¹ leader's wife, Barbara, my study plan was put to the group at a Fellowship prayer meeting. I was told the result the following day. The leader, Jack, had voiced his disapproval of my intentions because he said he did not want to be subjected to an intellectual investigation.

Normally Jack would not have made that decision as Joseph was the group's chosen leader. But because Jack was acknowledged by the group as being the most accomplished interpreter of the Scriptures, he was temporarily standing in for Joseph, as Joseph's wife had recently died. I was told that all members present at the meeting had agreed with Jack's decision.

Knowing from previous research that Fundamentalist Christians have a distrust of secular institutions, I was not surprised at this reaction, although rather alarmed from my own perspective. It appeared that my original plan of observing the group for three months, followed by interviewing some of the members, was not going to be possible. However, the group had no objection to my joining the Fellowship for Sunday meetings. Clutching at this limp straw, I agreed to go to my first meeting on Easter Sunday.

¹Member who had most accomplished knowledge of the Scriptures.

I learnt later that part of the reason for members' reticence in taking part in my research programme was because they were afraid that my paper would be read by some "satanic" person, who would use the information against them. They were also concerned that my tutor, and, or examiner might be part of the New Age Movement and utilise the material for destructive purposes.

In the subsequent conversation with Barbara, the temporary leader's wife, I attempted to reassure her by telling of my personal search for some meaning to life. This was quite genuine and I hoped would make my academic research appear less threatening. I reaffirmed my intention to become part of the group and remain totally nonjudgmental and sympathetic towards their faith.

It was not my aim to sit in judgement, but rather to investigate the workings, strengths and weaknesses of a small Fundamentalist Christian group in a country area.

I explained to Barbara why their group was preferable to a larger group such as the New Life Centre in the city, which she had suggested as an alternative for me because of its similar beliefs. The reason was that I already knew most of the members of the Argyl Fellowship, as I had carried out a previous study programme in the area. This had involved Home Schooling which was being implemented by some families within the group.

Barbara said if I was genuinely "seeking the Lord", they would accept me into their group and give me the assistance I needed. Feeling rather as if I had committed myself to jumping off a cliff, I rationalised my agreement with my honest desire to search for the Truth, however naive and unlikely that might be. If the Truth proved to be their Lord, then so be it. Before the conversation concluded, I asked Barbara how many people made up the Fellowship. She replied that three or four families made up the core of the group, with people like Christina, who was also part of the Church of England faith, "having a foot in both camps".

I decided I would carry on with my original plan of observing the Argyl Fundamentalist Christian Fellowship for approximately three months by attending regular Sunday services. This hopefully would gain their confidence to the point where they could speak openly with me about their faith. Obviously alluding to any academic research would be unwise. The only path to follow was one of participant rather than in their eyes, that of a critical observer. How active my participation proved to be would unfold as my field research continued. I felt a sympathetic approach was an essential component, if this investigation was to succeed.

Formation and Background of Group

After completing my original aim of observing the Argyl Fundamentalist Christian Fellowship for three months, I succeeded in gaining the confidence of members to the extent where some were willing to be interviewed. The following information concerning the formation and background of the group comes from formal and informal interviews, as well as observing and participating in nine Argyl Fellowship meetings and two Fellowship meetings in a nearby town.

Reference to the group from this point will be to the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship because that is the designation they use. As with some other Fundamentalist Christians throughout the world, they do not like the term Fundamentalist, preferring to be known as "Christians". Although not falling into the usual category of traditional Christianity, they choose to believe that because they have committed their lives to Jesus, they are the only true Christians. Others, in the Fellowship's opinion, who call themselves Christians, but have not given their lives to Christ, are judged to be unsaved or non-Christians. In deference to their sincerity and generosity in permitting me to join their Fellowship, I will continue to refer to them as "Christians", but with inverted commas. In this way I hope they will not be confused with other Christians.

Joseph, the elected leader by consensus of the group, spoke quite freely of his involvement within the Fellowship. Although he had been brought up as a Baptist, after marrying and moving to the country, Joseph and his wife initially attended the local Anglican and Presbyterian Church. Both denominations in this rural area were very similar but it was the hierarchy within the Church and the structure and format of the service that displeased them.

When asked what he was looking for, Joseph replied: "Less structure, more informal, also more true Christian teaching...how we felt it should be portrayed".

When asked how he thought Christian teaching should be, Joseph replied: "The mere fact that Jesus is the centre of our faith and often Jesus, God's son was never mentioned in the services".

It was essential for these "Christians" that Jesus became particularized within their belief system. Joseph added that other material used in the service was often irrelevant. He gave the example of listening to a sermon about the "Third" (Second?) Vatican Council, when he felt they were there to learn and worship Jesus.

About this time, Joseph and Mary met another couple in the same situation with similar beliefs. Both couples had small children and the effort of travelling a considerable distance to a country church every Sunday, to a service which dissatisfied them, finally lost its appeal.

So approximately ten years ago, a Bible Study² and Fellowship group originated from these two families. They shared fellowship and prayer by meeting in each other's homes on alternate Sundays.

The other couple, Paul and Elizabeth from Catholic and Anglican backgrounds, spoke with a pastor in the city before making the commitment to "share" with Joseph and Mary. With the pastor's blessing, the two couples commenced their Bible Study and Fellowship in an environment that was more conducive to family needs, less formal, unstructured and devoid of any hierarchy.

Two years later, another family, Jack and Barbara West, who had previously attended an Evangelical Presbyterian Church in another rural area, moved into the district. After joining the local church at Argyl, they too became disenchanted with the minister because according to them, he didn't preach the gospel and may not even have been a "Christian".

²Bible study which included prayer and fellowship for those in need, was held on Wednesday evenings. I was not permitted to attend during field research.

Jack and Barbara had "asked the Lord" where He wanted them to go and soon afterwards they joined the original two families for their Fellowship meetings.

From then until now, families have moved into the Fellowship and left for a variety of reasons. On two occasions, to my knowledge, families left because of a personality clash within the group. But generally, in country areas, where farmers employ married couples and temporary help, a drift to the town or another farm to find employment is quite common.

As I had been told originally by Barbara, the Scriptural Leader's wife, the core of the Fellowship consisted of three - four families. Others, mainly wives, who were regular parishioners at the local church, also attended. During the three months of observing the group, the average attendance on a Sunday was twelve adults and twelve children. This could increase to a total of forty when a guest speaker and visitors swelled the numbers.

As can be seen in the four monthly programme³, although this proved characteristically flexible, the second and fourth Sunday of each month meetings were held in the Argyl Plunket Rooms, first and third Sundays in members' homes and fifth Sunday if there was one, in the Argyl Community Hall.

³ included in the Appendix.

The Youth Group met on a Saturday evening in the Argyl Hall, twice a month. The leader of the Fellowship and two other male members organised games, followed by supper. Sunday School was run by three women in the Fellowship, this involving the younger children. It took place on alternate Sundays and was held in the Argyl Hall. I did not attend a Youth Group or Sunday School meeting partly because Sunday School coincided with a Fellowship meeting and partly because I was not in the district on a Saturday night. I am sure there would have been no objection from the group had I wished to attend.

One observation I will make from the information given was that of the shared responsibility for the supervision of the Youth Group and Sunday School. As the Youth Group would need more controlling than the younger Sunday School children, it seems appropriate that male members including the leader were in charge of this group. However, this distinct division of male/female supervision roles could only reinforce the hierarchical attitude within their belief system.

The children would learn to respect the adult male members for their leadership qualities, while the adult females would be seen and accepted for their supportive, nurturing/caring, subservient role. The childrens' observation of their elders would be influential in their socialisation and could perpetuate the hierarchical ideals of the Fundamentalist Christian. Because in my opinion, it is such a crucial aspect of the group, hierarchy will be discussed throughout the paper.

Interviews

By interviewing some of the core members within the Fellowship, it became clear that it was the structure, rigidity, formality and hierarchy of the mainstream Christian churches, that these "Christians" were trying to escape. Jack said he was quite happy with some individual churches, but not with some of the hierarchical organisation within. "Blanket statements that are made by individuals on behalf of the church, I do not agree with", he said.

He went on to qualify this by quoting some of Bishop Spong's statements in a recent newspaper. Apparently the Bishop had shown sympathy towards practising homosexuals and according to Jack, many "Christians" had been disgusted.

This is the tragedy, deep down inside everybody, people have a basic understanding, I believe, of what's right and wrong, and they're only trying to satisfy their own guilt when they say, the Bible says this or that, when it doesn't at all... This Bishop said, unless the Church radically changed its views on sex and the rest of it, everybody would go out of the Church... I wonder where he's been for the last twenty years, because he should read what's happening in South America, Africa, Asia or North India ... the real Evangelical Church is growing at a phenomenal rate ... there are absolutely unbelievable revivals taking place, thousands and thousands of people coming to the Lord daily.

Jack also mentioned Professor Geering and said that his "no Resurrection" ideas had put "Christians" off joining the Presbyterian church. They did not want to be labelled as followers of Professor Geering.

Gets to be a real struggle because people don't want to be identified with that kind of teaching, that's what comes across from the media ... ordinary people, the non Christians, think that's the Church, so they say what's the use of it.

After explaining why certain aspects of "mainline" churches were unsatisfactory, Jack, in describing the Fellowship said it was:

much less structured and didn't have to follow a particular order of service or form ... we could do what we liked ... fairly flexible ... had no hierarchy ... didn't relate to a higher group.

And Joseph said, "We just don't want to be part of any formal structure ... I think flexibility is definitely part of the Fellowship".

Ruth, who said she was basically Anglican, but had been influenced by Brethren, Baptist and Pentecostal Fellowships, added: "The informality of worship time, eating, socialising from 9.30am - 4.00pm, doesn't happen in the town church situation where everything is more formal".

However, one family within the core group was not totally satisfied with the way the Fellowship developed. Although they agreed it had really good points such as fellowship and closeness, "it lacked teaching and worship" according to Paul. And because the group became like a family, some people were threatened because of the lack of structure. Paul said that it started without aims, structure or leadership and devoid of vision or goals it became frustrating for him and Elizabeth.

When asked what aims or purpose the Fellowship had for him personally and others in the group, Joseph replied:

To enable us to have a closer fellowship with each other and with our Lord through the Fellowship ... we were able to participate a lot more personally and have more involvement.

When Paul was asked if the group had formulated any aims for the Fellowship, he replied, "probably not, and that was the downfall".

The original aim of the group was that it remain flexible, unstructured, informal and lacking in hierarchy. This was a break away from traditional denominational Christianity. The members wanted to prioritise Jesus in their own way, unfettered by the hierarchical church system. What they wanted was something so free and undisciplined, its existence as a functioning group could be considered miraculous.

The one voluntary condition of being part of the Fellowship was that you were or were seriously thinking about committing your life to Jesus. Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit had become personalised Beings more pivotal in their existence than life itself.

Most members within the group who were interviewed, agreed with the advantages they experienced through the formation of their flexible, unstructured, informal Fellowship. However, when asking Ruth who had attended a city "Christian" Fellowship as well, to list the advantages and disadvantages of both Fellowships, she replied:

Not really so much disadvantages and advantages, as just what we thought the Lord wanted us to do. What was more appropriate ... for our group, and we found it more enjoyable.

The main physical difference between worshipping in a city "Christian" Fellowship or the Argyll "Christian" Fellowship, was that the latter was held informally in a home or local hall and the former within the more traditional surroundings of a church or large building. The content of each service also was not identical due to the diverging characteristics of each "Christian" Fellowship. That will be explored later when describing in detail Fellowship meetings at Argyll and two "Christian" gatherings in the city.

Jack pointed out that their Fellowship was a much easier structure to run than a traditional church because of the lack of financial commitments. There was no pastor to be paid, or church building to be maintained. Instead any money could go to assist missions worldwide and this was after all, what Jesus had told them to do. Jack added, "I can't see where Jesus told us that we had to set up big churches as in buildings, and worship there ...".

He went on to say that the early Church did exactly as they were doing, meeting in homes. And that when Peter was writing to different houses he would address them as, "The Church of the House of Peter". "It was obviously just homes they were meeting in, so I believe it is totally Biblical", Jack said.

Another advantage Jack saw in the home/hall Fellowship situation was:

Some people don't feel so threatened, if you're reaching out to new people who aren't used to Church at all, total strangers, they feel comfortable to come into a lounge ... it tends to be neutral ground, with no particular label, eg. Presbyterian.

And also, there was no cut-off point when you left the physical presence of a church building and returned home. The fellowship with Jesus and other members just "flowed naturally on". Jack went on to say:

There's more opportunity to just have fellowship, friendship ... church can go on all day, if you like, it doesn't have to stop when you've had your songs and teaching from the Word ... you're spending time together, sharing and talking about different things. One big advantage of little groups, you get to know everybody personally, as compared to the big church where people need not get involved with others.

This lack of involvement with people on a personal basis in the larger city church Fellowships, concerned Jack and Barbara.

No-one really knows where they're at, whether they're really going on for the Lord, or whether they've got real problems in life. Whereas in a little house group, that just can't happen.

Barbara added that there was room for ministry, sharing and praying for each other in their form of worship. Joseph reiterated Jack and Barbara's sentiments by saying that small groups are more suited to meeting in homes as, "it's a more intimate environment and so therefore I feel it's more beneficial". He listed the advantages of the members as having spent less time travelling, less monetary expenditure on maintenance and stipends and added: "in a small Fellowship everyone gets involved... whereas in a mainline church or bigger Assembly, people come and go and have no input week after week".

Ruth listed the advantages of home/hall churches compared with traditional type churches as not so many formal meetings, not so much travelling, more time spent with family and all official business such as vestry meetings could be reduced. She felt the main advantage was:

There's no division between church and home. That ideally is what "Christianity" is. It's a lifestyle, rather than something separate from everyday living. In the Bible, the Lord speaks about living for Him, loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength, body, everything.

It is easier for Home Fellowships to actually have it touch everything in life, whereas if you go to a formal church in a formal building, it tends to be something separate from your home.

Like Jack, Ruth felt the need to give justification to their particular type of "Christian" Fellowship and said:

We felt comfortable, because in Acts, after Jesus was buried and rose again ... He showed Himself to people, gave them power to do things they hadn't been able to do before ... they continued to meet, sometimes in the Temple and from home to home ... so we felt quite free to do the same, and we met in peoples' lounge rooms.

Ruth went on to say:

There's much more opportunity in a small Home Fellowship to really live out the life the Lord Jesus has asked us to do. Home Fellowship makes it easier for the individual to approach the Biblical way of doing things. It simplifies it and it's more direct.

Earlier in our conversation Ruth had talked of what it meant for her to be a "Biblical Christian". She explained that everything belonged to God. Everything we considered our own, He had given to us and that it was a privilege to have a home. She explained that if you are in a formal church she finds a way of worshipping God but this is difficult because the symbolism within the Church acts as a hindrance to her concentration.

I have to concentrate on the Lord Jesus himself, not the symbols of Him, He's a living Lord Jesus to me, a living God ... I have to learn to cope with Him in that form and anything else is a distraction. So if I have symbols, buildings, pictures ... they limit Him. He's not like that.

Jack acknowledged that symbols within the traditional Christian church were an aid and did assist some people. However, for himself "symbols don't mean a great deal to me as far as worship goes, it's the Lord that counts". Discussing the place of the Cross within Christianity he said:

That's not the reality ... if Christianity isn't real, then as far as I'm concerned it doesn't work. But I know it is real, that the Lord's real, that He can meet you in a prison cell just as easily as in a Cathedral.

The common denominator within the group was their absolute conviction in the reality of God. This "doubtless" faith threw everything pertaining to life into categories of right or wrong. There were no grey areas of doubt or searching for the Truth. Their overwhelming Truth had given them absolute authority in knowing that their interpretation of Christianity was the correct and only possible way of worshipping God. And so it was not surprising listening to Fellowship members' dogmatic yet sincere assertions concerning the functioning of their group, that no disadvantages were mentioned, apart from Paul and Elizabeth's dissatisfaction which struck at the very foundation or lack of foundation within this small Fellowship. But that was a "domestic" issue within the group and in no way diminished their faith.

Having given an explanation of "from whence" the Argyl "Christians" came, this resulting from observation and interviews, discussion will now concentrate on the direction in which they were going, together with the "hows" and "whys" of this journey. Sunday Fellowship Meetings were the central focus of the week, strengthening the common desire to reaffirm and dedicate their lives to God.

CHAPTER II

"WALKING WITH THE LORD"

Sunday Fellowship meetings and how the "teachings" from these meetings could be applied to everyday life, is the subject of this chapter. Members of the Argyl group rely on passages taken from the Bible to guide and direct their actions and attitudes throughout the day. As the home and family are of central importance to this group, many of the "teachings" described, will illustrate how influential and appropriate these lessons are. The meetings themselves are informal, spontaneous occurrences, consisting of prayer, songs, "teaching" and closing prayer. The overall impression was that most of the content was unrehearsed yet essentially determined by Biblical doctrine.

A comparison with two city Fellowship meetings is added as well as information concerning Homeschooling. This was undertaken by some members of the Argyl group and is another practical example of how teachings within the Bible can influence their daily life. Homeschooling ideals paralleled very closely to that of the Home/Hall Fellowship, both being separatist reactions to a distrust of institutions within society today.

A typical Sunday Fellowship meeting was an informal occasion. It was held either in the Argyl Hall or Plunket rooms, or in the relaxed surroundings of a family living-room around an open fire. Four to eight families arrived, with the adult members carrying a Bible. The children came prepared with books and toys for when their parents would excuse them after the songs. There were no traditional church adornments in the room or hall and the leader as well as any elders present were dressed casually like everyone else.

The general format of the meeting began with the leader giving out any notices that might interest or affect the group. He would then invite another male member to say an introductory prayer. This would be, along with much of the rest of the meeting, unrehearsed and spontaneous. Most of the members would participate, with murmurings of "thanks to Jesus". During the research observation, no woman member was asked to take a leading role in the initial part of the meeting. However, occasionally, a woman was invited to choose the six songs that followed, giving an appropriate message before and after each song. Everyone stood with song book in hand, prepared to praise Jesus and joyfully proclaim His Name. Barbara played the piano and led the singing which was undertaken with great enthusiasm and sincerity.

The songs were chosen from three different Scripture in Song booklets, published by David and Dale Garratt. The rhythmic, simple melodies had a resemblance to popular folk music, while the words had been adapted from Biblical Scripture. Some of these songs were obviously favourites, encouraging the members to clap, sway and raise their arms in adulation to Jesus. When a member was asked to explain the raising of hands, she replied that she felt like a child raising her hands or stretching out her arms to her Father. And added, "God likes us to be childlike". It was also a way of humbling yourself before the Father-figure of God, she said.

An example of a popular song was:

Hold me Lord
Hold me Lord (hold me Lord)
In your arms (in your arms)
Fill me Lord (fill me Lord)
With your Spirit

Touch my heart (touch my heart)
With your love (with your love)
Let my life (let my life)
Glorify your name
Singing Alleluia
(this sung four times)

This particular song was sung in two-part harmony. The men sang the first phrase, with the women repeating that phrase in the form of an echo. The subject matter of the songs could be divided up into celebratory type song, giving praise and adoration to God; evangelising themes which emphasised militancy and battle for the Lord and finally the revivalist type song which praised redemption and righteousness. Every song had a message of positive action, whether in praising God, preparing battle against Satan or searching for reassurance of a personal survival. Rather than being explicitly theological, the nature of the songs appeared forceful, evocative and persuasive.

After the six songs, the meeting flowed naturally and informally onto the main body of the service. Any young children who were becoming restless, were told they could be excused from the remainder of the meeting and should read or play outside. Two children who accompanied their mother to the local Anglican service as well as going to Fellowship meetings, said that they preferred the Fellowship Church. This was because they would rather sing songs than hymns and also they enjoyed playing with the other children afterwards.

Main tenets of Argyl "Christians" belief system

Before discussing what constituted the informal "teachings" within the "Christian" meeting, it is important to understand the main tenets that go to make up the Argyl "Christians'" belief system.

Their main beliefs concerning Jesus, are based on the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. This aid is used daily to guide and counsel them throughout life's experiences. As well as their reliance on the Bible, attitudes favouring the Creationism theory, a militant and separatist outlook concerning their faith, plus a firm conviction in the imminent return of Christ, make up the main characteristics of the beliefs of the "Christians" in Argyl. Pivotal to these beliefs is their intolerance towards traditional Christianity and to those they judge as being "non-Christian". The rural Fellowship central to this investigation is extremely fearful of the consequences of "Modernism" seen in the cities. Materialism, corruption and degenerating morals, to them, are associated with a secular, sick society.

"Teachings" or "Sermons"

Having discussed the general characteristics of "Christians" within the Argyl Fellowship, our attention will return to several chosen "teachings" within the Fellowship meetings.

All that was observed during field research, related to how passages within the Bible could be applied as examples for living today. This was communicated from the guest speaker or leader to all members gathered. It was the speakers' interpretation of particular verses taken from a conservative revision of the Bible, such as the New International Version³, that was relied upon.

The speakers' aim within a Fellowship meeting was to redefine and translate a Biblical message into everyday language. This would assist the members in a better understanding of the Scriptures and enable them to apply the new teaching in their daily life. What to a "non-Christian" may have been a difficult task, was for the speaker a privilege and a responsibility. He was acting as God's mouthpiece and as such, his word would be accepted, not questioned.

³ In the general introduction of the New International Version, the publishers state that the original version was "not easily understood by those unfamiliar with the language of that era". They add that the modern translator benefited from further research into the earliest Biblical texts, aiming, "not only for clarity and accuracy", but for the preservation of the traditionally beautiful language.

Kathleen C. Boone suggests in her book, The Bible Tells Them So, that a pastor is not authorised in their own right, but is rather "conduits of the text" (pg 87). This implies that they act as a channel or vehicle through which God's Word is conveyed to the members. Boone goes on to say that because the pastor is "God's man", he has God's authority. Messages from God can also come to committed "Christians" in unexpected ways. The Bible may just happen to fall open at a particular page with a particular passage having pre-eminence over all others. Or, the Lord could speak to them in such a way that the "Christian" overcame any doubts and directed his⁴ thoughts into the path God wished.

The following "sermons" were delivered by different speakers and given over the three month period when the author was an observing participant within the Argyll "Christian" Fellowship. The order of subsequent "teachings" has been changed, so that an overall continuity could be obtained.

A visiting "preacher" from the city focused his talk on the "fall of man". Roger (the preacher concerned), said that "Christians" today are faced with the same choices as Adam and Eve, but once they became "part of Jesus" they would then have the knowledge of good and evil.

⁴masculine terms used throughout paper, follow "Christian" usage and refer to female as well as male.

Like Moses who according to Roger, was a self-willed man, we allow our own self-will to make us refugees from God, instead of facing up to the consequences in life. Roger went on to say that we must stop looking into ourselves and look instead to God.

He also suggested that unless our emotions and self-will are controlled, mental illness could result. This would come about because individuals failed to face up to who they were. The challenge today, Roger said, was to come to know Jesus Christ more personally.

Another plea to get to know Jesus, came from Jack, the Scriptural leader. Jack emphasised the importance and relevance of God's Word. "The Word was Jesus Christ, He was the living Word".

On another occasion Jack said, "we must know the Word, to know God". And if we learn from the Scriptures, God would then walk with us. He went on to say, that we need to have an awesome respect for Jesus because without His control, the whole world would disintegrate. "Is the glorious Light of Jesus shining in your life?" Jack asked. Unless we find Jesus and become "born again",⁵ we will live in utter darkness. It is only when we invite Jesus into our life that He will reveal Himself to us and save us from evil. It is important to read the Word of God and then we will get to know Jesus.

⁵Term used by "Christians" when they commit their lives to God.

Jack went on to say that God will use us to change the environment and quoted John Wesley as having said something like, "when you light a fire in your heart for Jesus, people will watch you burn".

"Christian" teachings for families today

Still concerned with the Word, Jack directed the members attention to the importance of "Christian" families. This particular Fellowship meeting fell on Mothers' Day and so it seemed appropriate to discuss the family. Jack read a quote from Ephesians, 5:15-16 which stated; "Be very careful, then, how you live... not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil". This led Jack to say that we must get wisdom from God, to understand how He wants us to live. We must continue to do good deeds to all men and understand that it is God's Will for us to be in "Christian" families. By being part of a family unit, we will survive better. By living in harmony with other people as well as being filled with the Holy Spirit, there "is less hope evil can get in", Jack advised.

Concerned still with families, Jack said that wives should be subject⁶ to their husbands, although there could be absolute unity within a marriage. Wives were "no less in any way", but according to God, there had to be a final authority. At a later time, the question of husbands having the final authority was brought up for discussion and Jack clarified the point:

⁶meaning to serve their husband.

Somebody has to make decisions and I think it's just a logical part of God's order. I believe He's made man to be the final authority in the family, but [is] not needed often. If we (wife and I) don't agree on what to do, I have to take the responsibility and I say, I believe this is what the kids should do...It's simply obedience in the final analysis to what Jesus said is the way to do things and I can't argue with that.

When Jack was asked to explain Love, he said that the world has misunderstood the true meaning of Love. To him, "love is desiring another person's highest good". Wives should treat husbands with respect and then he added, both should love and respect each other and desire each other's good.

In a later discussion Jack said that in his address he was not speaking about the personal, deeper meaning of love. When asked about our need to control our emotions, he replied that our emotions are God-given and that:

We are an emotional being and God created us that way ... I believe people need an emotional outlet ... it's a physical release that takes place. I believe in God's plan. He intended us to do that in worship to Him and so ideally we can let our emotions go to God too and really get excited about Him. If you do it at the races, you're called a fan and if you do it to the Lord, you're a fanatic!

Jack emphasised that children must honour their parents and then they would live long on this earth. Children would witness their parents' example of love and respect and copy that. Fathers must bring up their children with the knowledge of the Word of the Lord, Jack instructed. God wants families to be stable and strong, and practical examples of doing this can be found in the Bible. Jack showed concern for families who were falling apart today, as seen in the rising divorce rates. He felt this was happening because people did not understand how to love and respect each other. The highest "Christian" ideal, Jack said, was that "we desire others to be blessed as we have been blessed". One way of becoming truly blessed was to become a servant of God.

Instead of a speaker at one Fellowship meeting, the leader arranged for a video to be shown featuring Jaun Carlos Ortiz, an Argentinian "Christian". His topic was focused on servant/master relationships, in particular, mans' relationship with Jesus Christ. Jaun said that after we had sold ourselves to Satan, Jesus had purchased us through His precious blood. "Lord", according to Jaun, meant owner, and because Jesus had redeemed us, we now belonged to Him, and were His property.

It is only when we tried to live for ourselves that we had problems. A slave had no problems because it was his duty to obey his master. By obeying, we would be rewarded with a great prize which was the Kingdom of God.

Jaun went on to say that the Kingdom of Darkness occurred when we live on our own terms. The knowledge that everything belongs to God, possessions, home and family, entitles us to enjoy His Kingdom. And if you know how to administer for the Lord, more would be given to you. Jaun said, there would be, "a bouquet for Jesus when you bring others to Him". The Argentinian speaker then made the comparison between a wife serving her husband dinner and a servant serving the Lord. The relationship between a husband and wife according to Jaun Ortiz's beliefs, was a hierarchical arrangement, with the wife accepting her subservient role. This marital arrangement has the general approval of women within "Christian" groups.

As marriage is advocated throughout the Bible, a present day example will show how Biblical teachings could have influenced a member of the Argyl "Christian" group. Lucy, an active participant within the group, came regularly to meetings, accompanied by her two small children. Apparently she and her partner lived together on a small farm experiencing what is known as "an alternative lifestyle". Initially, as an observer, I wondered at the groups' tolerant attitude towards this situation. It seemed rather ironic that this woman who in their eyes was "living in sin" could be welcomed into the Fellowship while I had been judged a "non-Christian" and although tolerated, instinctively felt as if I was an outsider.

Information from another member told of how the group had accepted Lucy, praying for her and advising her in the ways of Jesus. The Fellowship had followed Jesus's example of not condemning her for "living in sin", and explained that all people at some time in their lives, sin in different ways. Within a few months, Lucy was discussing marriage plans. When asked why after several years she had decided to get married, Lucy replied that the reason was not solely religious, but that she and her partner felt they had been blessed by God. One can only assume that the Fellowship's influence had assisted in revealing God's wishes to Lucy.

From a domestic event within the Fellowship we turn our attention to the last "sermon" observed. This was given by Jack, the Scriptural leader and resulted directly from his attendance at a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) conference.

Jack spoke of the spiritual battle "Christians" in the "front line" are experiencing today. He went on to quote from Matthew 28:19: "therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...". Jack said that many "Christians" make the mistake of bringing individuals to Christ, when it was God's purpose and more important to teach our own society the Biblical world view. Today unfortunately there are many areas within society that have not been presented with a Biblical world view. Jack explained this by saying that Christianity is the only religion based on history, while Hinduism was a pagan view and nonsensical.

This was because according to Jack, Hindus worshipped cows and rats, and vermin destroy 35% of the grain crop every year in India.

Universities are very important in disciplining nations, as 90-95% of all world leaders have attended a University, reported Jack. Unfortunately Universities have been given over to Satanism, Jack said, but thanks to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority it will now be possible to influence the education system in a "Christian" way. The NZQA is made up of thirty people who are responsible for organising different courses from which points will be awarded that could go towards a university degree.

This will be an "open door" for "Christians", giving them influential opportunities. A speaker at the Conference said, "'Christians' shouldn't be at the tail, they should be at the head". Jack added that he had been told of a "Christian" couple living close to where politicians gather, who had opened a Prayer House for their use.

Enthused by his participation at the Conference, Jack went on to tell the Argyl Fellowship that atheists are very religious people. Their religious commitment amounts to a total involvement with themselves, this following the wrong World View. If the World View is not Biblical, it is counterfeit and will lead to bondage. People then lose the freedom only Christ can give them. "Eastern Europe" according to Jack, is a problem area because of Buddhist, Hindu and Moslem influences.

He continued by saying that it was very important and a great opportunity for "Christians" to reach these people with the "Word" as pornography was about to enslave them.

Statistical information followed with Jack giving details of the existence of 100 "Christian" Universities in America, one "Christian" University in Australia and six million Pentecostal "Christians" living at present in Indonesia. By the year 2,000 there would be one billion Moslems in the world, this presenting a great opportunity for "Christian" conversion.

Further information followed with Jack saying that 25-30% of Australian Universities were made up of Asian students while 50-60% of all doctors in America had been Asian students. He related how Mark Guson a "Christian" living in Australia, told of the 40,000 Chinese students at present in Australia. And how Mark had exclaimed, "God has sent Chinese students to us"! He then proceeded to move closer to the Australian National University in Canberra, befriending students and leading them to the Lord. Mark hoped that they would go back to China and spread the Word.

Jack informed the Argyl group that change can come about by praying for leaders and politicians, that everyone must understand the "Christian" Biblical world point of view and that all answers to the world's problems are in the Bible. Jack stressed that a nation can become greater when faith is put in God, because God has the power to change people when the simple truth within the Bible is shared.

Final prayers followed Jack's talk, with the rousing song of: "the battle belongs to the Lord, God is on the move, nothing too hard for Him", concluding the meeting.

As well as song, prayer and "teaching" included in a Fellowship meeting, "laying on of hands" for any needy person was a common occurrence at the completion of a service. Communion was observed only once during the research period and this particular meeting was held in the Scriptural leaders' home.

This departure from the normal format of service reflected the Christian Eucharistic liturgy in so far as they used sliced bread and black currant juice to represent the body and blood of Christ. I was told communion was something they did when they felt the time was right. It may have represented a new beginning because this meeting was the first to be held in Jack's new home after he and his family had left the Argyl district. None of the traditional formal liturgical prayers were used, instead Jack spoke of how Jesus had died for us so that our sins would be forgiven. The prayers that followed told of how God loved every one of us, but because we were all sinners, we would not be saved unless we confessed that Jesus was Lord.

City Fellowships compared with Argyl Fellowship

From the description of "Christian" meetings held at Argyl, two city Fellowships will be briefly discussed and compared with the Argyl "Christian" group.

When comparing the two Fellowship meetings I attended in the city with those at Argyl, it became apparent that each Fellowship had its own characteristics. As expressed by one member of the Argyl group, it all depended on the "gifts"⁷ God had given the elders or leaders within each Fellowship.

The sheer numbers at the New Life Centre, approximately 500 members, added to the overpowering emotive energy and excitement witnessed. The aim of the elders seemed to be to capture and hold the audiences' attention by using "show-biz" techniques which included: rousing songs, total immersion baptism of two fully clothed girls and a "slave" auction, each "slave" being purchased on an hourly basis for charitable causes. These activities may have been provided to increase the receptiveness of the members before the guest speaker took the podium. The whole event was extremely well organised to the point of appearing manipulative. The speaker's austere message that followed, contained fire and brimstone, death and damnation. The choice given to the audience was simple. Be saved and take Jesus into your life or remain with Satan and be damned for all eternity.

⁷individual characteristics.

At a more temperate Fellowship meeting on the outskirts of the city, a very similar service to those witnessed at Argyll took place. The same format of songs, prayer, "teaching" and "laying on of hands" occurred. A greater enthusiasm from approximately 150 members was apparent. Many members volunteered their own celebrations to Jesus, showing no inhibitions over their participation.

During the songs several members seemed to be in a trance-like state, swaying to the music with eyes closed and reaching their arms out to Jesus. The speaker spoke of the individuals' intrinsic worth in the sight of God. Everyone he said, must still be on their guard against Satan though, as He would take every opportunity to overcome them.

To an observer as well as an outsider, the New Life Centre experience seemed to depict an example of extreme Pentecostalism. It may have been organised that way to instil fear into the heart of the "sinner", while the more moderate city Fellowship had a message of hope, giving reassurance and guidance. The oppressive feeling evident at the New Life Centre was not experienced at the smaller city Fellowship.

The much larger attendance at both city Fellowships provided the greatest contrast with the Argyl meeting. Although one would expect less anonymity within the smaller Argyl group and therefore more interaction and participation during the service, this in fact did not occur. There appeared to be an increased freedom and more individual participation within the city Fellowships but perhaps larger numbers breed confidence as well as acting as a catalyst for individual adulation.

A crowd listening to a "charismatic" leader, can produce a form of mass hysteria, so to, to a lesser degree, these larger Fellowships with their loud bands playing rousing music, could generate a greater spontaneity. The smaller city Fellowship compared very favourably with the Argyl group, attitudinally. The sincerity shown toward their faith as well as their religious doctrine and overall friendliness to all fellow members, was constant and uniform.

The Argyl Fellowship seemed to be a duplicate version, format wise, of the latter city Fellowship. It was just on a much smaller scale and had the inhibitions of a "country cousin". There was very little comparison between the New Life Centre and the Argyl group. The former was severe and manipulative in form and content, while the latter had a milder, less extreme approach to basically the same doctrine.

Examples of Fellowship meetings have shown how in a day to day existence the Bible is used like a recipe for successful living, successful from a "Christian" world view perspective. The message throughout the field research was direct and easy to understand. As sinners, we all need to be saved and the only way is by committing our lives to God and inviting Him to take control. Unless we do this, we are in union with Satan and our existence now and in the future is doomed.

There are no "ifs" or "buts", no "perhaps" or "maybes", instructions for a life everlasting as one of God's children is explicit in its simplicity. This black and white, dualistic philosophy of good and evil, leaves nothing to chance.

The Fellowship meetings give a unifying protection and reassurance to all the members, this reinforcing their individual beliefs. Lessons from the Bible provide them with a practical pattern for life that is uncomplicated and relatively easy to implement. The future of these individual "Christians" depends on the survival of the group or similar group, and quite possibly means the isolation or separation from the rest of society.

Separation from traditional Church and School

The formation of the Argyl "Christian" group has grown out of their distrust of institutions within what they consider a secular society. Dissatisfied with the traditional Christian church, they have formed their own "Christian" Fellowship. Similarly, because the Argyl group felt their children were threatened by "secular humanism" and "peer pressure" within the State School system, several members chose to Homeschool their children.

In 1989 an independent investigation into Homeschooling, involving the Argyl "Christian" members, was undertaken (Carr, B. "Homeschooling within New Zealand by Fundamentalist Christians"). The following information resulted from that study.

Five families within the Argyl group were involved with Homeschooling their children, aged between five and fourteen. Teachings from the Bible had convinced these parents that God wanted them to be "responsible for their childrens' education not the State". (Carr, 1989). A quote from Michael Drake, (Principal of Tyndale Park Christian School, Auckland) epitomised the attitude these parents had towards the education of their children.

The truly Christian curriculum structures all knowledge and experience upon the foundation and within the context of a personal knowledge of the Lord God of Heaven and Earth. Every aspect of schooling must be thought through in this context.

(Dominion November 27, 1988)

All the children concerned had been removed from the Argyll State school because of "peer pressure". They had been bullied and ostracized by their peers when not conforming with others in their class and the parents had been dissatisfied with the teachers' inability to resolve the problem. Another area within the State School curriculum that displeased the parents were the subjects taught within Social Studies. They felt subjects such as Feminism, Abortion and Homosexuality taught from Standard I level, could have a corrupting influence on their children and interpreted this as "social manipulation".

The State School system, the parents agreed, was departing from Biblical morality when it instructed the children in sex education. This was seen as "secular humanism" and a threat to their childrens' "Christianity". Other religions and philosophies were openly discussed in the classroom, this adding to the parents' concern. "What we feel is the problem in the schools, is that all sorts of things that are evil are now being taught as right..." (Carr, 1989, p5) and "I believe that in our education system ... there's an actual move against Christianity..." (Carr, 1989, p6)

The characteristics of a Home School was its individuality, flexibility of subjects taught and time spent between mother and child on a one-to-one basis. Maori culture was included with the basic subjects but Taha Maori omitted because it involved spirituality and one mother described that as "demonology".

The main aim was to equip their children better for life, this achieved by protecting or removing their children from evil influences. As argued in the "Homeschooling" paper, although advantages could be seen in the one to one teaching situation, the parents' main reason for removing their children from the State School system was because of the "peer pressure" and "secular humanism" they construed as being part of the Education system.

The issue here, that of "no grey areas", is based on the Argyl "Christians" fundamental reliance on and interpretation of the Bible. Both local church and school had fallen short of their Biblical expectations. The group's consistent attitudinal views towards church and school are evident when comparing their judgmental disapproval of other religions and what they understand as "secular humanism" that was being taught within schools. Parallels can also be drawn between the "peer pressure" the group suggest was apparent within schools and the hierarchy they have experienced within the traditional Christian church.

The point must be made here that the Argyl "Christians" can accurately be called "Biblical Christians". Their lives and how they live them, expectations, values and aims are guided, they claim, solely by the teachings within the Bible. Homeschooling which is undertaken by members of the group was a departure from the traditional accepted education, just as Home/Hall Fellowship meetings are an abandonment of the traditional local church.

This separatist attitude is constant in the already discussed characteristics of a Fundamentalist Christian. They live their faith with sincerity, singlemindedness and dedication. However, an inconsistency seems to appear with the groups' dislike of the hierarchy within the traditional Christian church. This was one of the crucial reasons for the members to separate from the local church. This paradoxical issue of Hierarchy and in particular, leadership within the Argyll "Christian" group, will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

LEADERSHIP AND DISFELLOWSHIP WHEN "SEEKING THE LORD"

The issue of leadership within the Argyl Christian Fellowship appears paradoxical because members of the group profess a dissatisfaction and distrust for the hierarchical system within traditional Christianity. This includes leadership within the Fellowship as well as leadership in the home. These responsibilities are reinforced by the group's total belief in Biblical teachings.

As has been mentioned earlier, in relation to marriage, it is believed that there has to be a "final authority" (see quotation p29 above), this obligation being undertaken by the husband. Although the importance of leadership within the group was diminished by those in authority, after observing meetings for three months, it was obvious that one leader led, ably supported by two elders. When the current leader was interviewed he acknowledged that his responsibilities were to organise the location of meetings, arrange speakers and personally counsel any member in need. No woman in the group since its inception ten years ago has held this position.

Until her death, Mary, the present leader's wife could have been described as an "informal" leader for the women. Her role as a counsellor and advisor was directed solely towards other women in the group. Mary, according to another member in the group, also challenged newcomers to follow God. So although women had never held the position of leader or elder within the Argyl group, their supportive role in advising other women, occasional organisation of songs, as well as catering abilities, was essential to the operation of the group.

Through investigation and interview, it was possible to learn of a "disfellowshipping" that occurred within the Fellowship three years ago. This traumatic event, caused partly through a desire for leadership and partly through conflicting ideologies within the group, led to the departure of two members from the Argyl Fellowship.

Leadership

Leadership seemed to be a straight-forward, uncomplicated matter. The current leader Joseph was chosen at an informal annual Fellowship meeting by a consensus of opinion within the group. Joseph told of how his "gifts" were towards administration, this involving drawing up a programme for the next six months, organising speakers, and arranging the hire of hall and Plunket rooms.

This leader or elder added that other members had special "gifts" too and contributed towards the Fellowship in different areas. Jack had teaching skills, being very accomplished in understanding Scripture, while others enjoyed introducing prayer and leading songs. "So we all participate in different areas", Joseph said.

Jack spoke of Joseph's present role as that of an "administrating elder", which meant "no different in rank but slightly different in function, which I believe is quite Biblical". Jack went on to say that when the group originated, the three male members were basically equal, but as the Fellowship developed, three elders were appointed by mutual agreement. "People prayed and sought the Lord", he said, and then made their decision. Leadership he felt was "basically for other people's benefit and scarcely necessary".

One of the areas in which members benefited from a leader, was when they sought advice and guidance. Joseph said advice was given, "definitely within 'Christian' teaching and we would seek guidance in specific areas from teachings in the Bible, also from prayer".

Before Joseph's wife Mary died, the women members went to her for advice, while Joseph counselled the men. This segregation of the members was advisable because, Joseph said:

A lot of people have got into trouble in the past through counselling or guiding the opposite sex ... (and that he) would give guidance and prayer in a group situation, but never in a one to one situation.

The organisation within the Argyll Fellowship at present, according to Ruth, came from the combined contribution of several members. She added that members who had "gifts" in certain areas, were encouraged to develop these and that this informality within the hierarchical structure of a Home/Hall church was one of the differences between this style of Fellowship and the traditional Christian church. Individuals, by using their natural abilities, Ruth said, could:

Practise these, so that they can "rise up" and take [the] place of people already there, so that people already there can move on...idea that small church can be like a percolator ... so when these people rise and can manage things, others can move aside...It means it's much freer... greater range of people reached and spoken to about the Lord Jesus.

Over the last eight years, numbers had increased to the extent where a leader had been chosen by all members mainly for the purpose of organising meetings and giving advice and guidance to the members. Joseph had been the leader for the last two years with Jack, a present elder, the leader before that. The present hierarchical arrangement within the Fellowship consisted of one leader and two elders, the leader also being called an elder.

These were purely masculine positions, with women members playing useful roles in organising intercessory prayer and song, counselling women, and preparing food for a communal meal held after most meetings.

The members' unanimous decision to avoid the hierarchy experienced within the mainline Christian churches seemed to be at odds with their present situation. Admittedly when comparing the Argyl Fellowship with a similar New Life Fellowship in a nearby village, the hierarchy observed within the research group was much less extreme. The neighbouring Fellowship followed a more traditional Pentecostal service and had appointed a minister or pastor who was answerable to the New Life Organisation. Attendance numbers at the latter were larger and so the building and organisational requirements were more complex, resulting in a greater formality throughout. Ruth suggested that the basic doctrine was the same in both Fellowships with members agreeing that, "Jesus lived, died and rose again in historical events". She added:

He's alive today... that Father God is the one true God and that the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost in power... we have to get our lives in order and invite the Holy Spirit to be in control... we would agree that He's (Jesus) coming again.

It was the ministerial posts within traditional Christian churches and the power associated with these positions, that concerned the Argyl members. The hierarchy within their own group, male leadership and the domestic acceptance of the husband as head of the family, were not considered to resemble traditional church hierarchy.

The Fellowship's example of hierarchy was not questioned and I would suggest this was because the women members as practising "Christians" accepted their subservient situation equating it with a living example of the written Word. Only from an 'outside' perspective could this paradox be discerned.

It was understandable that the group was so adamant about avoiding the hierarchy experienced in mainstream churches. They attempted to justify and legitimise their own style of "Christianity" as being within Biblical teachings (p15). The impression received from interviews concerning the group's main complaint against traditional church hierarchy, was of some clergy's liberal, often misguided interpretations of the Bible and also the stipend they received. The members felt the influence some clergy had over their followers could be misleading. (see quote p11 above). This perhaps was the reason why they played down the importance of one leader, instead preferring a shared responsibility of several elders' combined contribution.

Informal leadership could be questioned by other similar "Christian" groups such as the neighbouring New Life Fellowship. It would seem to be a practical necessity when dealing with larger numbers, that a more formal definitive structure, including a leader, eg. pastor or clergy was implemented. One couple now attending the New Life Fellowship, left the Argyl Fellowship because of disagreements concerning the basic "workings" within the group.

Three years ago this couple, who were foundation members of the Argyl group, found the lack of structure which included hierarchy, and the informality, extremely frustrating. They felt the Fellowship was without any vision or goal and because of that was not achieving or going anywhere. When they voiced their disapproval concerning the lack of organisational structure and offered their own ideas and leadership, a tirade descended upon them. Because of their different vision they were threatening the very existence of the Argyl Fellowship, and so it was not surprising that those in authority at that time reacted they way they did.

Paul and Elizabeth had joined the Fellowship as foundation members and enjoyed the informal surroundings of a home church and the convenience of less travelling time when their children were younger. As the group grew, it became impractical to have up to forty children for Bible study in the home environment and so Sunday School was held in the Argyl Hall.

With the physical structure, that of numbers changing within the Fellowship, this couple felt it was essential for the survival of the group to reassess the format and leadership. Disquieted by the situation they saw developing, Paul and Elizabeth said of this "domestic" issue that it did not really affect their faith because they felt their belief in the Lord Jesus would never change.

Elizabeth said:

We were the only one[s] who had vision for the Church ... the others had visions for their home, their farm, their Christian life... whereas ours actually entailed the Church itself, the Fellowship group...

Another area of concern for Paul and Elizabeth was that the group was becoming "inward looking" and "cliché". Paul felt it had the potential of going "off the rails", this happening to similar small groups who thought they were totally self-sufficient and as a result, became a "little bit funny". He used to tell the group that "we must have things to do with other Christians" and with other churches and it was important to "keep ourselves open... but (the group) weren't very keen to do that". As well as their fears that the group was becoming inward looking, Paul felt that the method by which the Fellowship interpreted "Words of Knowledge"⁸ was suspect. He said he became very uncomfortable when the group met to pray and explained:

People can go overboard in that and they can get into a group and pray and seek the Lord about everything. And every thought they have, they start to think this is the Lord...

⁸Messages from God or gifts of the Spirit.

Paul had misgivings about some of the answers or conclusions the group drew from prayer, and suspected the solutions may not have come from the Lord. "You've got to be very sure that that's the Lord and not yourself", he said. He added, it is necessary to use your commonsense as God is not always going to give you a Word from Heaven, when He had already given you instructions in the Bible. Paul said "the group didn't want to plan things themselves for the Fellowship... they wanted to rely on the Word from God". He added, that he thought God had given us a brain to use and that we were capable of making decisions for ourselves. Elizabeth, in full agreement with what Paul had already said, added: "its very dangerous to start praying in a group where you've got a lot of people having interaction". If decisions are made outside a meeting it would then be very easy in a prayer situation to remember that decision and interpret it as a message from God. "You can't refute it", Elizabeth said, because members would say, "this is God's Word".

People would say the Lord has told me this and you can't argue with that... and we wouldn't always feel right about it, and the Bible says, test the Spirits...

If someone disagrees with the "Words of Knowledge" the group considers they have received, then that person, in the Fellowship's opinion, is in rebellion against God. And it was at this point, I suspect, that the Argyl Fellowship began to consider the disfellowship of Paul and Elizabeth.

Disfellowship

Elizabeth recognised her ability to speak out at Fellowship meetings and acknowledged that she and Paul were ambitious for the group. However, this couple's frustration at being unable to have their ambitions and goals fulfilled was having a bad reaction on other members within the group.

And so when an outside event involving Paul and Elizabeth spilled over into the Fellowship, they, like naughty children, became the subjects of punishment.

Jack, the Fellowship leader at this time had a disagreement with his brother and sister-in-law who were in partnership with him. Paul and Elizabeth showed sympathy towards Jack's relations and gave them support and advice. The outcome was final. The leader's relations left the farm and district and this "truant" couple were accused of interfering. As a result of this upset which would have affected the small community considerably, Jack decided to step down from the leadership. The Fellowship duly appointed Joseph who has remained in that position for the last two years. Paul and Elizabeth had been concerned about the leadership issue for some time and were both ambitious, hoping to direct the Argyll Fellowship in a more structured, formal way.

Paul said:

I always felt I should lead with him (Jack) because we complemented each other... but they didn't agree with it... that was fine I accepted it, but then in the end Jack decided to pull out, not be leader because of problems with (relations)... then they (the group) decided that Joseph should be leader... I accepted that too, but didn't think it was right... the Bible says that young Christians shouldn't be in leadership, that he (the leader) should be able to teach the Word of God. Well, [Joseph] couldn't...

And Paul added, Joseph kept asking him what to do. Elizabeth spoke out at a subsequent Fellowship meeting and told members that Jack had acknowledged he felt he had not done a good job as a leader, and she agreed! It had not been meant as a personal criticism, Elizabeth said, it was the result of frustrating meetings which had become like "dead huddles". As a result of Elizabeth's outburst, a representative group from the Fellowship arrived on the couple's doorstep. Paul told of how,

they accused [Elizabeth] of having a spirit of witchcraft...they said she was manipulating me and everybody else... they accused us of splitting up everybody and accused [Elizabeth] of manipulating that situation... they really had a thing against women.

Elizabeth continued with what they said:

Either [Paul] gets me under control or out, and they should pray for me for deliverance. But I knew too if they prayed for me I was stuck. Whatever else I ever thought or said, I had to be under them, there was no freedom of speech, no freedom of thought, no freedom of spirit and the thing Jesus said, that we are free...

Several years ago while interviewing Elizabeth concerning Homeschooling, she became noticeably upset when speaking of the Fellowship's accusations against her. Three years later with this current research, she explained that the delegation had not reprimanded her correctly because she had had no right of reply. When asked whether Christians should be judgmental towards others, Elizabeth replied, "its judgement when there's no right of reply" and she didn't agree with that. Paul thought the Fellowship had been judging Elizabeth, but they never said that "she had fallen away from God", they condemned her for having a spirit of witchcraft. Elizabeth explained that the group felt:

I just needed deliverance over, that's something external for me, but for me it wasn't, it was the very essence of who I was that was at stake and if I was going to let them deliver me of who I was...

She was not prepared to be judged by people within her own Fellowship in an unorthodox way, especially when she had no right of reply. Elizabeth felt their treatment and accusations were unjust and too severe. She could not consider their alternative which she understood to mean, giving up her freedom. Basically Elizabeth felt it was a "communication block because there was no structure in our group". After taking advice from a neutral pastor, the next day they informed the Argyll Fellowship that they would in future be attending a New Life Fellowship in another area.

Three years later this couple, one of the original members of the Fellowship, have become philosophical about their dismembership. Paul said:

We can see our mistakes, the things we've done wrong... but the Lord is gracious, He's not finished with us and not finished with any of them and He'll take us all on. And when you look through the history of the Church that's happened even in the Bible, Paul and Mark fell out with each other...

Leadership at the time of field research with the Argyl Fellowship consisted of one leader and two elders. When interviewing two of these three men, the overall impression gained of any individual leaders' importance, was minimised. The leader's role within the group was given credence through his organising and counselling capabilities.

He was viewed more as a father-figure advising his family, than as a figurehead. This low-key, informal, relatively unstructured approach to the leadership did conform with their dislike of the hierarchy they had experienced in traditional mainstream Christian churches.

They had openly disapproved of some liberal minded Christian leaders and as well, I suspect, did not want to be confused with a rural Fundamentalist leader recently highlighted by the news media. (Probably a reference to the Community at Cust). They had questioned the spending within conventional Christian churches including the stipends paid to the church clergy.

The role of the women within the group's hierarchy was definitely supportive rather than subservient, and possibly influential in regard to their husbands. Mary had been influential in the home when homeschooling her three children, this including religious instruction. At the time of her death, one member, in listing the positive aspects of this sad occasion, said that now Joseph, her husband would become stronger and take an even greater role within the leadership of the Fellowship as he was no longer in Mary's shadow.

It was also evident when interviewing Elizabeth, that she would not enjoy putting into practice Biblical ideals of subordination toward her husband. Both these women, one through premature death and the other through disfellowship, left the Fellowship. The group's only interpretation of these events, I suggest, would have been that it was God's Will.

Recapitulating on a previous discussion to do with hierarchy in a "Christian" home, the New International Version of the Bible states in Ephesians 5: 22-24:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, of which He is the Saviour. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Through observation and interviews the impressions gained was that the husbands, particularly the elders, believed and approved of the Biblical principles concerning the above teaching. The wives however, were not all cast in the subservient mould and while acquiescing in their husband's wishes, adapted, I suspect, these same principles to suit themselves. Joseph made the comment that wives were often first to join the Fellowship and recommit their lives to God. Husbands were then encouraged by their wives to "seek the Lord", although in cases where a husband was reticent, the wife remained within the traditional Christian church as well as attending the Fellowship.

The fact that this Fellowship attracted women initially rather than men and that female numbers were larger than male, poses a psychological rather than sociological query, which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Leaders were chosen by the group depending on their "gifts", whether in teaching or administration. "Age" of a leader was a Biblical requirement, mentioned by Paul, but this was not a numerical age, rather the maturity of that person as a "Christian". No member in the group, to my knowledge had a University degree. All fell into the middle to low scholastic achievement bracket. Leadership was certainly not dependent on intellectual ability, rather on the consensual decision arrived at by the group after prayer and discussion.

The success of any dynamic group depends on its organisation and leadership. Normally it is the leader who decides what format, structure and organisation is required to maintain that group, suitably supported by elders or committee.

Here was an example of factions within the group who saw the future of the Fellowship in jeopardy because of the lack of direction, structure and communication. The couple concerned offered a new direction, format and leadership that would have changed the character of the group.

The leader at that time, I suspect, saw only the threat implied and chose to influence others in the group and exercise his authoritative right. Had there been a communicative link, Elizabeth suggesting earlier that there was none, a compromise might have been a possibility, but where there is a mentality of "no grey areas" this was most unlikely.

The disfellowshipped couple did not have a future with the group. Once they started questioning the inner "workings" of the Fellowship they were putting themselves outside the accepted guidelines of that group. So tenuous was the organisation within the Fellowship that a "domestic" disagreement demanded a corrective reprimand. Objectively there was no other course of action open to those in authority. In protecting the Fellowship's survival in its present form, the perpetrators had to be controlled, and if not controlled, removed.

But what of the accusation? The accused was judged with no right of reply, and found guilty of a spirit of witchcraft. The next chapter will focus on the "darker side" of "Christianity".

CHAPTER IV

"IF IT'S NOT FOR GOD, IT'S AGAINST GOD"

Christianity, historically, has based its doctrine on the dualism of good and evil. The Argyl "Christian" group with their fundamentalist tendencies embrace God and fear Satan with equal fervour. They see each as entities or beings in their own right, one to worship, the other to fight and overcome. This chapter will concentrate on the reality and power of Evil, how it affects members of the Argyl Fellowship, the significance of free will within the context and acceptance of Evil, as well as information related to psychological assumptions and philosophical theories.

During field research, the urgent message given and received by the Argyl members was that when Jesus' "Light" shines on you, the Devil has to go and "Darkness" can be driven away. The only way to avoid being overcome by Satan is to commit your life to God or become "born again". One elder declared that until a person became a "Christian" their spirit was dead to God, but when "born again" their spirit was alive with the Lord. "Is the glorious Light of Jesus shining in your life"?, seemed to be the most important question asked. This appeared to be the only escape from the opposing Kingdom of Darkness. The fundamental good/evil, black/white dualistic relativity of this belief system demanded a response from its followers.

Satan as a reality

Most people in the world today, Jack said, have no difficulty in believing that the Devil is a reality. If you convert an "Island person" to the Lord, he said, they have no problems in accepting the real presence of Satan, as they have been living with devils, demons and witchdoctors all their lives. Jack reaffirmed the reality of Satan by saying:

The Bible makes it pretty clear ... very definitely a real being and a real entity. The Bible indicates he was a high angel, he was the one to rebel against God and cause sin to enter the Universe ... The only people whoever doubt that there is such a being as the Devil is our very highly sophisticated Western world. But a lot of them are serving him basically without even knowing it ... The Bible says the Devil is mighty but God is all mighty.

When asked why, if God is more powerful than the Devil, can sin not be eradicated, Jack replied, that God had basically destroyed his power by taking away the keys of Death and Hell when Jesus was crucified. Pondering the question as to why Satan was still present in the world today, Jack added:

If God took the Devil away or destroyed him, He would have to along with the Devil, destroy everyone of us as well, to totally get rid of evil, because evil is in man now and man chooses to be evil of his own free will.

Ruth when discussing the two opposing forces, said:

God says in the Bible, it's basically a war between Satan and God. God hasn't picked it, Satan picked the war and therefore he keeps it pumped up ... anyone who chooses to follow Jesus immediately steps into a war zone and they immediately have a lot more troubles than non-Christians.

Most members when questioned as to whether they suffer more as "Christians" agreed that this did occur and as Ruth explained: "it has to be that way ... this life is a training ground for Eternity". She also added that "God's aim for our lives is not happiness, it's character development". Ruth reaffirmed her constancy to God but felt each day was a battle and often thought it was "much harder to be alive than dead". Although Ruth had "drawn the lines and said no, get out" to Satan, his evil could still have an effect on her life.

Not so much the temptation, as things happen to you, you can get physical ailments, no reason why, just suddenly you've got it. You've got to kick it out in Jesus' name because that's Satan having a go at your body. He can have a go at your body, spirit and soul.

The reason for living, Ruth suggested, was that each individual as a "prescription" baby had a specific purpose to achieve during their lifetime. God, according to Ruth, was responsible for the basic plan and then it was up to the individual. She added:

There are only two choices, it's either God or Satan. If they've made a choice towards God and honoured Lord Jesus ... God is ultimately just and He will do what is right in the end. But we have our own choice, He wants us to genuinely make choices.

Free Will

Jack, the scriptural leader, spoke about man's ability and capacity to make choices when exercising his free will, and explained that sin and suffering could be a direct result of these choices.

If God hadn't given us the ability of choice we would not have been made in His image, nor would we have been free beings ... freedom is not the right to do anything you want to do ... freedom is the ability to choose and to do what you know is right. When you know what you want to do is right with the Universe and with God, then you're free and no longer afraid of anything. That's the ideal.

Jack and Ruth were discussing God's wish for all believers to make choices, but if the choice proved incorrect, sin and suffering could result. Freedom, Jack said, was doing what you know God would want you to do, this action freeing you from all fear of being under Satan's influence. "Christians" have already made the initial choice to follow God and His rules, a decision easily made when the choice is between ultimate happiness with God or eternal damnation with Satan.

However, the statement that God gave man free will and freedom appears to be fraught with unresolved problems for any but the committed "Christian". Free will by its very nature must mean the freedom to be able to choose without reliance on a "guide" book such as the Bible. I would suggest it is the extreme (narrow, unquestioning), unmitigated aspect of the "Christian" doctrine that cancels out that freedom of choice.

As a compassionate human being you may have the choice of killing a loved one dying of cancer. Whether this comes about by removing resuscitating drugs or assisting the person in an act of euthanasia, it is an individual act resulting from a freedom of choice facilitated by that person's free will.

That decision if made, could be the "cross" that individual is prepared to carry for the rest of their life. "Christians" do not have that particular choice because their stringent belief system and moral code has laid down the rules clearly. Under no circumstances can another's life be taken. An abortion is not an option even if the mother's life is in danger.

Because we are individuals with different backgrounds and socialisation we mature with different values and expectations. This has come about through the freedom of choosing which thought or action to pursue. If locked into a rigid belief system that makes the decisions or judgement for us, no individual decision is necessary, or I would challenge, forthcoming.

According to members of the Argyl Fellowship, God has given man free will to enable individuals to choose between good and evil. These "Christians" have chosen good or God by committing their lives to Him. I would like to argue that by giving their life to God, through an act of free will, the "Christian" no longer has the freedom to choose what further actions to follow. This is because inclusive with your "life" are individual responsibilities and free choice. Taking responsibility for your own life, includes making your own decision between right and wrong, based on a morality the individual has acquired.

Perhaps once having chosen God there are no more decisions to be made. There may no longer be any necessity for individual freedom. As Jack says, "freedom is not the right to do anything you want to do", instead he suggests a state of freedom exists when you know the Truth, and choose to follow God. The "Christian" might argue free will was God's gift to man, enabling the correct and ultimate choice to be made. The non-"Christian" could have continued use of free will for his personal choices, until good was victorious over evil. The previous supposition was not volunteered by any of the Argyl members but might have been offered if the subject had been pursued.

The following analogy is used to illustrate the "Christian" mode as I see it, regarding free will and the transference of life's responsibilities to God.

A parent when giving a child money to go to the pictures with friends is allowing that child to experience the outside world. Away from the protection of the home, the child can take responsibility for himself. Likewise, God gives beings free will so that they can choose which action to pursue. The action may be good or bad, but it is the individual's right to decide.

If the child is too afraid of venturing beyond the home and refuses the money, they forfeit the opportunity to go to the pictures with friends. Instead they retreat to the safety of parents, and if this example is taken to extremes, the child may never mature to responsible adulthood. Human beings after receiving the gift of free will, realise that they must choose throughout their daily existence between right and wrong. If the individual is apprehensive about making a wrong decision, or more literally of facing the traumas of life, they can instead commit their life to God, effectively discarding their "true" freedom, the freedom of choice. This person is then no longer in the position of making a wrong decision. Instead, whatever action taken, will now be the action God has decided is best for that person. In other words, God is guiding their actions and the individual has become one of God's chosen children. God has taken over responsibility for that individual's life.

This simple analogy gives one possible explanation of why "Christians" hand over responsibility of their life to God. Like a child who has decided to remain within the secure boundaries of parental care, the "believer" has chosen to commit their life to God. In this way they hope to escape the hardships and disappointments of life. Throughout investigations concerning "Christians", it has become evident that a large percentage have dedicated their lives to Jesus after a traumatic experience such as drug addiction or unwanted pregnancy. This adds to the assumption that in many cases after life's experiences have dealt them a severe blow, these "Christians" decide for their own survival to hand over control to God.

Nancy T. Ammerman in her book, Bible Believers, suggests that people "who find themselves adrift in the world that seems untrustworthy and unforgiving" resort to a fundamentalist form of Christianity that provides them with a "coping strategy". She adds that such a support system "provides comfort" and "offers resolution of their own inner conflicts". (p192 and 191). These suppositions could be applied very appropriately to the Argyl Fellowship.

From their resolute stand within "Christianity" the Argyl members interpret much of today's evil through their observation of Satanism and Witchcraft.

Satanism/Witchcraft

Evil was such a real threat and presence to the members, that several discussions involving Witchcraft and Satanism developed without too much encouragement. Joseph, the current leader, when talking about those involved in Witchcraft, said:

they dedicate themselves to Satan, to the furtherance of Satan's rule on earth, through whatever means, corruption, deception, just whatever way they can if it's going to prevent people from becoming "Christians", then they're into it.

And when discussing the presence of Satanism and Witchcraft within a nearby city, Joseph volunteered that the

Illuminati are the people who think they've been given the light, the illumini, and within that you get the big business organisations, the Masons, all those secret societies, the Manchester Unity, the Druids, the Foresters, Buffalo Lodge... and they've manipulated their way up into the hierarchy of society and they are controlling a lot of what goes on and this is just another form of Witchcraft ... it's subtle, it's not a straight out blatant worshipping of Satan but if it's not for God it's against God, there's no grey area in the middle, you're either one way or the other. These people are working away, manipulating society and so much of the world for their own means, it's just not right, they're doing it for their own greed rather than for society as a whole.

When talking about day-to-day existence and the conflict that persists between God and Satan, Ruth said:

Satanism is a real thing ... Satanists are praying actively against marriages ... and particularly against pastors and people in authority. We are soldiers in the Lord's Army and He gives us the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, the name and blood of Jesus ... these all weapons against Satan. We have to know God, and know the Bible, we have to put on our spiritual armour everyday and do a lot of praying.

In mentioning the possible existence of several witches covens in a city nearby, Jack gave the added information that "there are supposed to be more witches in England today than there are registered ministers..." During the discussion on Witchcraft and people possessed by the Devil, Jack told of how he could recognise them by their unpleasant vibes, and he reinforced what Joseph earlier said by acknowledging that he believed certain clubs within New Zealand were associated with Satanism. Even though Jack did not approve of those involved in Satanism, he showed understanding toward such a person by saying that when he

knows there's something very wrong with this person spiritually, that doesn't mean I write them off, they're ordinary people, they've been possessed or in some cases, oppressed by demonic forces and they need the Lord the same as anybody else, so you don't ignore them.

Other areas and organisations the Argyl "Christians" considered showing alarming tendencies towards evil, were the Greenpeace and New Age Movements. These associations appeared to be beneficial but because of their involvement with Satan, according to Fellowship members, all concerned would be led to their death. Peace protesters were labelled Satanists because their symbol for peace was interpreted by the "Christians" as being an upside-down cross, thus denigrating God. In the same way any depiction of a goat's head showed a deliberate attempt by Satanists to insult the symbolism of the Lamb of God. The colour black throughout centuries in Christianity has been linked with the Devil and for the Argyl "Christians" anyone dressed in black was associated with Satanism or thought to be a Devil worshipper. Mention of Masonic Lodge members lying in coffins during a meeting, and consecrated bread stolen with the purpose of mixing with urine, as well as young women becoming pregnant with the sole purpose of aborting the foetus for a Satanic sacrifice, were examples of Witchcraft and Satanistic attempts to defile God's image, members alleged.

To understand more fully why the "Christian" adopts such a certitudinous approach towards good and evil, it may be helpful to consider from a psychological perspective why individuals become involved with a fundamentalist form of Christianity.

Psychology behind "Christian" involvement

During field research, interviews with a psychologist and a hospital chaplain added more background information pertinent to the attitudes and values held by members of the Argyl Fellowship.

The psychologist's comments dealt mainly with his experience of disturbed patients and their involvement with a fundamentalist-type Christianity. This, although interesting, was not very relevant to the group central to this current study. However, both psychologist and chaplain agreed on the type of person attracted to Fundamentalism and the reasons why these individuals felt compelled to become involved. Basically, a prospective "Christian" had a "need" which was not being met by their experience of life generally. This "need" required a personal affirmation and was often associated with a loss of direction or sense of insecurity within the individual. "For people who especially need forgiveness, Fundamentalism may provide a path to personal autonomy and confidence". (Ammerman, p191). Both practitioners agreed that an involvement with a "Christian" group could provide the warmth and friendship the person concerned had previously lacked, as well as a sense of belonging to a group of people who cared about their welfare. Ammerman agreed that such a fellowship, "provides comfort", a place where one can truly belong and "supplies friendships with like-minded people". (p191 and p189). This individual acceptance was often the lifeline or support the person desperately craved.

Aside from the personal involvement with others in the group, was the knowledge and powerful expectation that God could right or correct their previous hardships and disillusionments. Involvement with the religious aspects of a Fundamentalist-type Christian group would appear very appealing. Such a religion promised the security of a salvation, with the only condition that you hand over your life's responsibilities to Jesus. After periods of possible personal confusion and uncertainty the promise of such a "safe harbour" must seem appropriately, a Godsend. Ammerman suggests that a "worshiper can experience reassurance that forgiveness and confidence and independence can be had", and that such a membership "offers resolution of their own inner conflicts". (p191)

One cautionary note from the psychologist suggested that the consequences of such a faith would have a "narrowing" effect on life's attitudes and that there were many different ways other than religion for people to find enjoyment, happiness and fulfilment.

The chaplain understood the implications of a fundamentalist-type commitment to God and stressed the importance of Scriptural passages, and a strong moral behaviour to keep the "darker side of self" under control. He felt the "tighter" or more restrictive the belief system, the deeper any issues or concerns would be suppressed. Because of the rigidity of the faith, other ideas and attitudes were unacceptable.

He was concerned that guilt taken on board was accumulated through the "Christian" experience, this surfacing during times of stress, such as at adolescence.

If sickness was experienced, the "Christian" explanation the chaplain felt, would be that you had sinned in some way and were then under the Devil's control. The only way of avoiding evil was to keep control of your emotions. This, the chaplain considered was dangerous, as harbouring unresolved emotions deep in the psyche could erupt during a traumatic period in the form of a mental breakdown.

How does this psychological information concerning fundamentalist-type Christians relate to members of the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship?

During interviews with members of the Argyl group, it became apparent that most had in fact become involved with a "Christian" fellowship after a traumatic period in their life or in answer to a deep "need" they could not fulfil. When they could no longer cope with life's disappointments they were quite prepared to commit their life to God. The Fellowship provided a support system that was compassionate and companionable, when in the past they may have felt isolated by their own insecurities and inadequacies.

It has been established that free will whether influenced through self motivation or God, plays a major part in the acceptance or denial of good and evil. We will proceed by considering from a "Christian" perspective and perception the notion that followers do have the right and means of exercising this God-given quality. As mentioned earlier, evil in the form of Satan constitutes the "darker side" of the Argyl "Christian" members' faith, and is as real a being to them as God. To provide a better understanding of their dualistic belief, several different theories will be considered relating directly to evil.

Theories on Evil

Carl G. Jung in his book, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, says that "evil has become a determinant reality" in the twentieth century (p360). In acknowledging the existence of evil, Jung goes on to postulate that although recognising the presence of evil, we must not succumb to it. He continues by adding that succumbing to anything, including "good", can be a form of addiction and should be avoided. Jung felt that it was wrong to consider "good and evil as absolute opposites" as "recognition of the reality of evil necessarily relativises the good, and the evil likewise, converting both into halves of a paradoxical whole" (p361).

Jung considered good and evil each represent a judgement and as human judgement so often fails, we can never be sure the judgement will always be correct. Jung states, as if to epitomise the "Christian" approach to morality: "moral evaluation is always founded upon the apparent certitudes of a moral code which pretends to know precisely what is good and what evil" (p361). He goes on to explain that when we learn that an ethical decision is based on a shaky premise, we realise that instead of a moral code we have a "subjective, creative act" (p361). Jung is throwing doubt on the probability of any moral decision being infallible.

Jung's solution to the origin of evil does not materialise from any myth, instead he offers the suggestion that evil is a component of good, being part of a whole and that the myth of Christianity's dualism must be set aside for a more acceptable monistic view.

Another theory on the topic of evil that complements Jungian thought comes from "Eastern" mysticism. "Eastern" philosophy considers "opposites are abstract concepts belonging to the realm of thought, and as such they are relative" (The Tao of Physics p148). By the very process of thinking something is beautiful we acknowledge its opposite, ugliness. Lao Tzu, a Chinese mystic, suggests: "When all in the world understands beauty to be beautiful, then ugliness exists; when we all understand goodness to be good, then evil exists" (p148). Eastern tradition understands the "relativity and polar relationship of all opposites" (p148) and realises that these experiences are "merely two sides of the same reality" (p148).

Opposites such as good and evil can never be separate entities, as each is dependent on the other for identification and meaning. Their existence is entirely reliant on the interplay portrayed in the Chinese yin/yang symbol. "The dynamic interplay between two extremes" (p149) epitomises Eastern thought on opposites such as good and evil, with the aim being to find a balance between the two or visualise each part as a vital segment of a whole. Although dynamically opposed, each is essential in the interpretation of the other. So within Eastern mysticism, evil is not seen as an entity on its own, but rather in conjunction with good, each abstract concept dependent on the other.

From another slightly different perspective but still dealing with the relationship between abstract concepts or as Plato described them, "sensory experiences"⁹, we consider the existence of opposites through the necessity of qualification. Plato used his theory of Forms, the idea that what is known must be true, this needing no qualification, to contrast with "sensory experiences" such as happiness/unhappiness, good/evil, in demonstrating their apparent need of qualification. Qualification or description of an object comes about according to Plato, through the comparison with another sensory object.

⁹"No object of sensory experience can be described as just, beautiful, large, or heavy without qualification. Such things will always be unjust, ugly, small, or light in comparison with something else". (A Dictionary of Philosophy, p252).

To continue with this philosophical thought, "good" when compared with its opposing object "evil", qualifies its existence. If carrying this idea a step further, I would suggest, without recognising one sensory object you would be unable to know the other, or, without one, the others' existence could be denied.

Plato's idea relating to opposites appears to justify "Christian" belief in absolute evil. Their resolute conviction in the existence of God as a separate entity, legitimises their belief in Satan. Satan is as real to them as God, and an entity to be feared and despised. So it would appear by accepting Plato's theory of qualification of sensory objects, or the comparison of opposing objects, Satan can be understood to be as important to "Christians'" belief system as God. Satan worshippers on the other hand, if following Plato's theory must by their worship of Satan believe there is also a God.

Satan worshippers by their stance, authenticate "Christians'" own position of worshipping God. If Devil followers refused to acknowledge God, they would also be denying the existence of Satan, according to my interpretation of Plato's view. So one can assume "Christians" and Satan worshippers both believe in the existence of God and Satan with the only difference being, they are as dynamically opposed as the good and evil they worship.

Jung suggests that good/evil are judgements and as such are not infallible. It would be wrong to consider them as separate entities, this favouring a dualistic view; instead Jung thought a monistic approach was more appropriate. Eastern mysticism agrees with Jung's desire for a monistic view of abstract concepts, regarding good and evil as "two sides of the same reality", reliant on each other for confirmation. Plato purports that good/evil experiences need qualification in order to exist, this verification occurring through recognition of their opposing object. Only through recognition of a good experience can an evil occurrence be acknowledged, and visa versa.

The "Christians" central to this investigation, by focusing on evil and recognising Satan as a separate entity, give qualification to God within their belief system. This follows Plato's dualistic theory, rather than Jung or Eastern mysticism's monistic approach to the problem of evil.

Through exploration into several differing theories on evil, it has been possible to focus more subjectively on the Argyl "Christian's" attitude towards Satan and understand more fully the importance of their unequivocal response to the question of evil. Any less adamant approach to Satan would diminish their meaning of and belief in God. In such a black and white, dualistic faith, extremes are essential and give total credence to their fundamentalist style of Christianity.

Members of the Argyll "Christian" Fellowship agreed that Satan was a very real being in the world today, a negative force that they considered legitimised God as a positive force. It appeared that God had created Satan for the sole purpose of testing man's free will. Without the existence of Satan or evil, man would have no necessity of choice, and would lead a guiltless, happy existence. His life would be free from temptations, "Heaven" would be experienced on earth and there would be no necessity to strive for individual betterment or "character-development". Such an existence did not accommodate the ideals set out in the Argyll "Christians'" New International Version of the Bible.

God and Satan were as intertwined in their belief system as "yin" and "yang" to the mystic. But where mystical thought saw "yin" existing because of "yang", "Christians" did not accept God's existence was in any way dependent on Satan. There was no equal partnership. God had the final authority with Satan's actuality interpreted as part of the ultimate plan God had envisaged for man.

Having completed an investigation into the meaning of Satan/Evil in relation to God and in conjunction with the Argyll members daily existence, the penultimate chapter will focus on the future of this "Christian" Fellowship, briefly discuss their meaning of a Christian Revival and Jesus' "coming again" and probe into why some members have "feet in both camps".

CHAPTER V

"SOLDIERS IN THE LORD'S ARMY"

Is there a future for the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship? Because the continuation of the Fellowship in part depends on maintaining numbers within the group, a more indepth inquiry into reasons why members with "feet in both camps" only make a partial commitment to the Fellowship, will be discussed. It also seems appropriate when surmising the future of the group, to mention the members objective¹⁰ expectations for a Christian Revival and Jesus' "coming again". It did not appear that their individual future as "Christians" was dependent on the continuing existence of the Fellowship. A conclusion was made that once an individual had committed their life to God, a Fellowship acted as a supporting aid rather than an essential life support system. The support or fellowship within the group will be shown to have considerable significance, particularly for the women members.

Future of the Group

With Joseph the group leader, selling his farm and moving into the city and Jack one of the two elders also leaving the area, the future of the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship seems uncertain.

¹⁰ objective, because based on information from Bible, rather than their own assumptions.

The sole remaining elder would be prepared to carry on organising Fellowship meetings but may not have the Scriptural maturity or experience to lead the group. It seemed apparent that, with a diminishing "core", members who also regularly attended Anglican and Presbyterian churches, would carry on doing so and might not have the commitment or motivation to become part of the organisation within the Fellowship.

Two possibilities, however, may occur. As with most small country areas, a shifting population could provide a "Christian" couple who would be prepared to take up the reins of leadership for the group. Or, as hinted at in a previous chapter, the disfellowshipped couple who still live within this rural district and find travelling to another area for their "Christian" worship not altogether satisfactory, may find the present situation appropriate to fulfil their leadership aspirations.

When the departing leader was asked shortly before he left the district if he felt a responsibility to the group, Joseph replied:

at this point in time I'm committed to it but no, I don't feel responsible for it ... If there was a general consensus at a meeting or time of fellowship that the whole thing should be disbanded tomorrow, well, that's not up to me to say. I'd be very disappointed, but I don't feel responsible.

Jack did feel a responsibility and concern for the Fellowship but said that the decision in the end had to be the members and that he and Barbara would continue to pray for and support the group. Concerning their own decision to leave the Argyl district, this couple said:

We certainly feel it was God's Will, there's no doubt about that ... We think the Lord has been preparing us for more than two years ... We felt the Lord was stirring our hearts ... that we were to go back to Youth With A Mission.

When asked how you know that God wants you to change direction, Jack replied:

If you are honestly seeking the Lord and having a personal relationship with God, praying and reading His Word regularly and being as open as you can, doing what He would want you to do to the best of your ability, I believe God puts His desires into your heart so that they become your desires ... When you're walking with the Lord, I believe these desires, 99% of the time are from the Lord.

Jack explained that when making a decision, confirmation comes from God in several different ways: initially from his Word (ie the Bible), then from the counsel of the other "godly" men and women, as well as through prophetic messages, this usually supporting what you already know in your heart. The final test, he said,

is the peace you get in your heart when you do do it, if you take a step in the direction God wants you to. He can make you feel mighty uncomfortable if it's not right and He can give a tremendous peace if it is and the Bible actually says that, let peace be the judge in your heart.

This "godly" couple are part of YWAM again, Jack holding a responsible position involving preaching and teaching young people, informing them as to their "Christian" opportunities within schools and missions around the world. Jack affirmed that, "if God's touching their heart and they want to get into missions, [there are] many opportunities".

Another member, Ruth, had spoken earlier of the characteristics of the Fellowship, mentioning that a small church was like a percolator with new members rising to the top of the group replacing leaders who moved away. She said that due to the flexibility and informality within the Fellowship, a "different expression" of God would happen. "It'll use the Bible, it'll recognise the same principles in the Bible, but it'll be [a] different expression because of the different people involved ...".

With the imminent departure of Joseph and Jack from the community, Ruth felt members would "be discussing and praying, sorting out what people think the Lord wants done and it (the Fellowship), has just as much possibility of closing down as going on". When asked if she considered whether Joseph or Jack felt responsible for the Fellowship, Ruth replied: "ideally they'll have to let it go because the Lord has shifted them on". Enquiring as to whether it was the departing members choice to leave the district, Ruth adamantly replied that "it's not their business, it's God's business", and that, even if she thought it was a mistake, she had to accept the changing situation in the knowledge that God was in control.

Although the future of the Fellowship obviously concerned the remaining members, because of their utter conviction that God was planning another stage in their lives they acknowledged this as part of the ultimate plan He had for each individual. They were prepared to accept the changing situation, even the dissolution of the Fellowship with the reassuring knowledge that whatever happened was God's Will.

It seemed possible if the local Fellowship dissolved, that current members seeking more fellowship than the local Anglican and Presbyterian Church could offer, might travel to another country area to join a similar "Christian" group. When discussing the possibility of several rural Fellowships uniting, Paul and Elizabeth did not think this was likely, as although they all shared the basic tenets of a Christian faith, each individual Fellowship reflected the differing ideas of its members. A small group according to Elizabeth, does not have the conformity of a wider body but is characterised by people seeking a faith with a different expression. Small Fellowships, she considered, generally have,

no clear leadership construction, no clear constitutional principles and if they've come out of other groups that have had clear leadership constructions, often you'll find they've come out because they didn't like the leadership.

Paul added that often people who join small Fellowships, have "gripes" against the Church and that that is "a recipe for disaster".

Paul differentiated between God, Church and family and said that he felt the Church should be separate from the family. He had been taught that there was an order.

God is first in the sense that I belong to Him, then your family come next, your wife and children, then your business ... and then the Church life ... the Lord's in my life, the whole of my life. The Church is just one part of my life.

The Church or Fellowship attendance, although only one part of the believer's life, had become for some of the Argyl Fellowship members, a matter of dissension within the family as well as providing comment and social pressure from non "Christians" in the district.

Social pressure and "feet in both camps"

One area not mentioned in the thesis thus far, but providing an explanation for members with "feet in both camps", was the aspect of social pressure from other members in the community who view the "Christian" Fellowship as something akin to the local "hippie" alternative families. In a small country area, being ignored by one's neighbours socially can provide unnecessary hurt and ill-feeling. If the husband is not a committed "Christian" this may add another burden, making the situation of attending both an orthodox Christian church and "Christian" Fellowship a reasonable option.

Joseph, the leader, said if the husband was opposed to his wife attending a Fellowship meeting, he would suggest her attendance would not warrant the breakup of a marriage, but Joseph hoped the wife would keep her faith. He made the interesting comment that women rather than men tended to be more accepting of the "Christian" teaching and belief:

I think men feel more self-sufficient ... they don't need to commit themselves to anybody else or to God ... women seem to need a bit more fellowship and input and somehow be able to accept Christian teaching. Once the wife becomes a Christian she'll often bring the children along with her ... but it's often the husband [who] will find other things to do on Sunday mornings rather than attending a Fellowship or Christian church. Yet if it happens the other way round and [the] husband becomes a Christian first ... very shortly afterwards the wife also will become a Christian.

It seems apparent that where the husband led, the wife was sure to follow, this seen as part of the hierarchical pattern within a "Christian" marriage. Although in most instances, it was the wife who first became involved with the Fellowship, this did not necessarily necessitate the husband's commitment as well. Joseph suggested that self-sufficiency and pride were the reasons why men were initially disinterested. These country women were in many cases dependent on their husbands. But for various reasons, because their psychological needs were not being fulfilled, the wives had turned to the Fellowship for companionship, as well as guidance and spiritual assistance. Why did they do so?

In a small country area, cliques and a certain narrow-minded attitude do exist between wealthy established farmers and the average to low income farmer. All "Christian" members involved in the Argyll Fellowship were from middle to low income farms, their economic status providing for some, a sociological barrier. This separation automatically led to a psychological need of interaction and fellowship with others in a similar lifestyle. Some members had in fact inherited their farms and so an explanatory generalisation suggesting that the social barrier was because Fellowship members were newcomers to the district, was not appropriate.

The fact that more women than men are members of the Fellowship provokes the image of the "little woman trapped in the home", living out her life in a uninterested, unfulfilled way. Having few of the occupational and cultural interests of the town, these country women formed a companionable bond within the Fellowship that they knew would continue to support and nurture them. The Fellowship became an extended family in an otherwise uncertain socio-economic community.

This psychological explanation is not meant to diminish the members religious involvement but I would suggest, offers one rationale of why the local church did not fulfil their needs. As mentioned by several members, the local church provided a religious service, but not the fellowship and involvement these members craved.

Without diverging too far from the previous comment, it can be suggested that New Zealand rural males are more self-sufficient and independent than the average New Zealand female. This is in part because of the "macho" protective/dominating socialisation of the New Zealand male. The tendency of the country male to socialise at the local hotel does not apply to the "Christian" husband who would instead regard this as supping with temptation.

This may assist in explaining the imbalance between male/female ratio numbers within the Argyl Fellowship. If women are primarily seeking companionship through fellowship, this would help to explain their acquiescent attitude to the fewer male members holding leading positions within the Fellowship. The one ambitious female member interested in leadership, left the Fellowship and is now in her own words an "up-front" person within a much larger and more structured "New Life" church.

Although the future of the group seems uncertain, there was no uncertainty concerning the members' anticipation of a "Christian" Revival and Jesus' "coming again".

"Christian" Revival and Jesus' "coming again"

Whenever during discussion, "Christian" Revival or Jesus' "coming again" was mentioned, the Fellowship members' eyes lit up and a quiet assured smile greeted the inquiry.

Paramount to their "Christian" religious belief was the knowledge of eternal life with God, this the ultimate prize for accepting and committing your life to Jesus. "Revival", according to Elizabeth, meant "to bring back to life" and enabled the Holy Spirit to "touch peoples' hearts". This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by great excitement and enthusiasm from people who "want to know God" and was usually preceded by prayer. At the time when Elizabeth was "touched" by the Holy Spirit, she felt "enveloped, held and cleansed ... all cynicism gone".

Jack interpreted a Revival as happening now, because he felt there was definitely an upsurge of Evangelism with people "coming" to Christ from all parts of the world. He considered that Jesus' "coming again" was definitely getting closer as many of the signs Jesus Himself had given, were being fulfilled, such as wars, earthquakes and famines:

Jesus said ... all these things will happen, but the end is not yet, He gave one last sign which was the ultimate one ... He said, this gospel must be preached to all peoples in all the earth and then shall the end come ... We've been in every country of the world but there's still 12,000 people groups at this moment who have never heard of Jesus Christ and they've got to be reached with the gospel before the end will come.

Jack continued by saying,

I believe as more and more people become "Christians" there's also (...) going to be a tremendous upsurge of evil and man is going to be in two extremes... there'll be millions coming to the Lord but there'll be millions fighting to destroy "Christianity" ... the Jewish nation has yet to come to Christ and that will be one of the final signs just before Jesus returns. I believe hundreds of thousands of Jews will turn to Christ and become "Christians" and that is definitely predicted ... from Exodus through to Revelation.

Jack added that Moslems and Hindus are two of the major groups yet to be reached with the gospel but this could happen very quickly once they are "overcome". The positive assurance that their faith was the one and only, could be discerned in Jack's comment concerning how Jesus would be recognised when He came again:

The Bible indicates when He does come, everybody's going to know ... some will know to their terror and others will know to their joy ... it'll all depend whether we've asked Christ to be our Saviour and accepted what He's done. The uniqueness of humanity is that we have free choice and what we do with Jesus is what's going to determine what's going to happen to us in the future.

An old hymn says "what will you do with Jesus, neutral you cannot be, one day your heart will be asking, what will He do with me", and this is the whole issue. He'll come back as the King of Kings, Lord of Lords and everybody will know Him ... He'll have physical form and be awesome.

The necessity in the Argyl "Christians"' attitude, that all other faiths should be "overcome" and shown the Truth before the "End" and Christ's return, if hope of an eternal life can be realised, gives an insight into their "Christian" awareness and righteousness. The urgency with which "Christians" approach evangelising and the naive fervour they demonstrate by their commitment to a promised future, must lessen their awareness and pleasure in the present.

John Shelby Spong, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Newark, said in a religious debate on New Zealand National radio, August 1991, that "one of the great tragedies I believe of Christian history is that our concepts beyond this life have been used to rob this life of its meaning by postponing living".

In an earlier chapter when discussing the group's decision to leave the mainstream Christian church, Jack, the scriptural leader, had mentioned his disgust at comments made in a local paper by Bishop Spong. These were to do with the Bishop's sympathetic attitude towards practising homosexuals.

In the final chapter, an attempt will be made to place the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship within a Fundamentalist category, a liberal Christian comparison will be considered as well as concluding assumptions and comment.

CHAPTER VI

ASSUMPTIONS AND CONCLUSION

This inquiry has suggested but not assumed, that the Argyl "Christian" group has, because of their dogmatic black/white attitudes and belief system, a strong fundamentalist approach to Christianity. Because of the varying definitions and degrees of Fundamentalist Christianity, it is not possible to conclude anything other than that the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship falls within the Fundamentalist category. It has some, but not all of the characteristics of Fundamentalist Christianity. This group with its essentially Pentecostal "New Life" approach, in many ways conforms to George M. Marsden's description of American Fundamentalism. (Fundamentalism and American Culture: the shaping of twentieth-century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925). James Barr in his book, Fundamentalism, interprets a Fundamentalist Christians' most dominant characteristics as, the literal belief in the Bible, "hostility to modern theology" (p1) and an arrogant attitude towards all others not sharing their viewpoint. These particular features do correlate generally with my own assessment of the Argyl "Christian" group.

Nancy T. Ammerman, in her book Bible Believers, suggests that "modernism" is the main reason why Fundamentalist Christians have decided to "establish alternative institutions within which they can live by the rules they have chosen" (p212), instead of attempting to alter the world.

I find "modernism" too general a term to relate to the Argyl "Christian" members' reason for establishing their own home/hall Fellowship. They were, and remain still, dissatisfied with the local Church for reasons pertaining to structure, formality and hierarchy, although those who had home-schooled their children had done so to avoid "secular humanism" and "peer pressure". The latter terms could be loosely linked with "modernism" but not in a definitive way. As Barr suggests, Fundamentalism "is a constellation of differing positions, disposed around the centrality and inerrancy of the Bible", and fitting into one of these differing positions is the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship.

To better understand their exclusive path to God, it could be informative to compare their conservative approach with a more liberal interpretation of Christianity. Finally I will draw my own assumptions and conclusions on how successful the Argyl "Christian" group has been from an observer's perspective, whether it has fulfilled the individual member's expectations and needs, as well as commenting on crucial material from preceding chapters.

A Liberal Christian View

During an interview, when Bishop Spong was asked the definition of faith, he replied: "the opposite of faith seems to me to cling to yesterday as if there is no tomorrow and to be unwilling to enter the void or to take up the journey".

Later in the discussion, when talking about Protestantism declining into Fundamentalism, Bishop Spong referred to conservative Christianity by saying: "anytime I can threaten your God, your God is so inadequate that your God ought to be threatened". This liberal-minded Bishop was referring to the Fundamentalist Christians' tenacious grasp of the Bible along with their desperate need to believe in its inerrancy. The Fundamentalists' desperation, suggests a naive insecurity that is tenuous, rather than convincing. Bishop Spong's advice that if God can be threatened, He is inadequate and should be questioned, assumes that a faith relevant or in harmony with today can withstand doubt and investigation and will not be threatened.

In his book, Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism, John Spong asserts that "to literalise the biblical narrative in all cases is to distort and ultimately to destroy its truth" (p225). Instead he suggests that "the Bible and the creeds are windows into the truth. They are not themselves the truth" (p233). Bishop Spong's dislike of what he regards as the narrow, bigoted, Fundamentalist interpretation of the Christian experience, leads him to the conclusion that when any human barriers are erected round human experience such as sexism, racism, homophobia etc, the love of God will not survive. When the Scriptures are taken literally, Christians of today are bound within the fearful restrictive attitudes of yesterday. The underlying meaning within the Bible, which is still pertinent today, Spong concludes, is having the courage and honesty to live life as an individual to the completeness of your being, in the knowledge of the love of God.

Spong's polemical attitude contrasts vividly with the afore-mentioned Argyl Fellowship group's religious position. The liberal Christian outlook appears as extreme in its criticism as its opposing "Christian" partner. The Bishop does not denounce the Biblical teachings. All he asserts is the need for an updated interpretation of what lies at the heart of the Scriptural passages. It seems a justifiable request. As we gallop towards the twenty-first century, present scientific knowledge and values, make Biblical inerrancy ridiculous.

Unfortunately, the Fundamentalist Christians by their very exclusive, uncompromising adoption of the Scriptural literalism would never consider reassessing their own immovable views, as this rigidity is their strength.

When any group is convinced that their principles or beliefs are correct and the institutions that make up that organisation are based solely on those assumptions, a radical opposing view will be condemned and denied. It cannot in any way be considered, because in an ideology where there are "no grey areas", an understanding or even display of slight consideration, would be akin to doubt. And doubt is not in the Fundamentalist Christians' vocabulary. Doubt would lead to a chink in the Fundamentalist armour, this inevitably opening the way to evil influences and damnation. This archaic faith breeds on itself. It sustains its followers on a diet of fear and promises. Fearful consequences that in all probability will never occur and promises, at best, uncertain of fulfilment.

Bishop Spong in Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism, may inform and prevent Christian "drifters" from the Fundamentalist path, but any hope of diverting Fundamentalist Christians into a liberal Christian direction, is, in my opinion, a wasted effort. Perhaps the only escape from involvement with a Fundamentalist group is when, as is happening with the Argyl Fellowship, the group disintegrates. But then the "core" or truly dedicated members will find another like-minded Fellowship with whom to reinvest their religious future.

After approximately six months observation of this rural Fellowship I have formed the following conclusions relating to the "workings" of the group. How members needs and expectations have been met, as well as assessing interesting comment and content from previous chapters will be analysed.

Comment and content from previous chapters

From a "teaching" during a Fellowship meeting, an elder cited what he called, the highest "Christian" ideal. This was that, "we desire others to be blessed as we have been blessed". This "Christian" ideal, in my opinion, epitomises the "Christians" arrogant, uncompromising and intolerant attitude to all others not sharing their faith. It defies correction, but not comment.

By acknowledging that the "Christian" has been "blessed", the believer is justifying his own acceptance in God's eyes. And by saying that "Christians" "desire others to be blessed" reinforces their own "holier than thou" position in the life and death struggle of existence or Heaven and Hell stakes for eternity. By believing you and people with like-minded beliefs are blessed and all others are sinners, accentuates the "Christian" sense of rightness. Without any doubts concerning their own faith, the "Christian" acknowledges other religions and judges them as being incorrect, false and open to Satanic influence. Child-like is the attitude of "no grey areas", which leaves no room for doubt or reconsideration.

Fundamentalist Christians exist today because they choose to follow the historical dualistic views within Biblical Christianity. The black/white, good/evil symbolism that perpetuates this archaic faith is as restrictive as the path they follow. A restricted path limits the choices an individual may have to make and to the "Christian", each choice may be a temptation from Satan. The "straight and narrow" path to God, although limited, when comparing it with the choices of the secular world, holds the promise of an eternal life after death. Examples of threats used continually throughout Argyl Fellowship "teachings" express the rigid adherence these "Christians" place on their interpretation of the Bible.

To mention a few; if children honour parents, "they will live long on this earth", without God's control, "the whole world will disintegrate", unless we become "born again", we will live in "utter darkness".

How can people living in the twentieth century be so threatened by something written approximately 2,000 years ago?¹¹ As Bishop Spong suggests, the literal meaning is not appropriate for today, but this does not necessarily mean discarding the Bible along with Christianity.

"Christians" today rely on the inerrant Word as interpreted by a preacher to inform and guide their attitudes, beliefs and actions. Pastors, leaders and all speakers whose scriptural knowledge is respected, are listened to. During the period of research observation, there were no doubting questions arising from a "sermon" although time was made available for discussion. According to Kathleen C. Boone in her book, The Bible Tells them So, believers do not challenge the leader's interpretation because the pastor associates his authority with that of the Bible. If the believer questions the "teaching", the pastor will refer the "Christian" back to the inerrant Word within the Bible.

¹¹ To answer this question adequately would provide material for another thesis.

God's Message has been rediscovered and interpreted many, many times. Over hundreds of years different interpretations of God's Word has been expressed, culminating in the more recent 1970's New International Version. This in turn is interpreted by individual "Christians" in many different ways. How is it possible to determine God's exact message as He originally meant it over 2,000 years ago, by relying on so many different interpretations?

CONCLUSION.

Did the Fellowship fulfil the members expectations and needs?

In my opinion, apart from the couple who left the fold, it did. Their needs were not complex. As mentioned earlier, the members particularly the women, required a greater involvement with others in a similar religious commitment. They had found the local mainstream church unsatisfactory in providing this added involvement. The fellowship they enjoyed every Sunday could occupy most of the day and the social, supportive bond in continual operation, provided a buffer against the secular world. This rural group, I would suggest, had a closer fellowship than any similar Fundamentalist-type community in the town, mainly because of the geographic and sociological factors. The children were happy in each other's company and not pressured by unwanted religious instruction. They came and went with approved informality during the meetings. The network between members was unquestionably beneficial, providing for some women that extra dimension to a life that might otherwise have been lonely and unfulfilled.

The only reservation I would suggest was the effect over time of the narrowed outlook, this providing a limited perspective in the very sheltered, protected environment they had created for themselves.

While remaining in the rural Fellowship this tunnel-visioned attitude would neither be apparent nor provide concern, but when adrift in a humanistic, secular society, problems could arise. Adults, if moving away from the Fellowship would predictably unite with a similar "Christian" group, but the children, uncertain of their religious commitment, might well be buffeted by unknown influences and shipwrecked on the sea of life.

The Fellowship members' Biblical values and ideals, formed the basis of their worship and were also incorporated into the needs of the family. It was an unsophisticated method of worship, one they hoped could easily have emanated from a similar home/hall church during Biblical times. Their attitude towards worship in my opinion, epitomised their religious belief. They were caught up in the past, attempting to relive the Scriptures in their desperate aim of avoiding the hazards of the present.

The original aim of the group, that it remain flexible, unstructured, informal and lacking in hierarchy, could be the reason for the present threatened dissolution. I will briefly reiterate the reasons behind the loose components within this Fellowship. Members were dissatisfied and disillusioned with much they had experienced within mainline Christian churches. They resolved to establish a type of Fellowship that fulfilled their expectations as well as complying with what they understood to be a Biblical interpretation of twentieth century worship. They wanted to relive the sort of worship described in the New Testament.

Central to any decision within their lives was the confirmation they required from God. Once they received acknowledgement from the Lord, members formulated the organisation within the Fellowship. Over the past ten years its numbers have grown and dwindled but the enthusiasm has always been maintained.

The turning point within this "Christian" group, I would suggest, came about three years ago when a "domestic" disagreement threatened its existence. The couple at the heart of the dispute felt that the increase in membership numbers required a reassessment of the "inner workings" of the group. They suggested that if the Fellowship was to survive as a successful functioning group, it should have definite structure and leadership. This proposal was met with an adamant denial and preceded the eventual departure of the purposeful couple. Since then, the Argyl "Christian" group has functioned adequately under the continued informality, loose hierarchy and structure. However, with the departure of the group's leader, and one of the two elders, numbers and interest are diminishing. The survival of the group seems dependent on the intervention of God, as a successor to the departed leader has not been chosen.

At the point when increased numbers necessitated a change of direction, regarding the operation of the Argyl Fellowship, a different solution to the present problem could have been possible. However, the decision at that time to remain true to the group ideals seems quite appropriate and consistent with their religious aims and beliefs.

It was from their dogmatic religious beliefs that they had formulated the minimal structure within the Fellowship and this structure which they understood to represent the strengths of the group, was instead the weakness that finally fragmented the Fellowship.

This was a group of unsophisticated, sincere, rural, Fundamentalist-type Christians who have chosen to step away from the institutionalised Church (and for some, school), so that they could have the choice of how and where to worship. They, apart from those with "feet in both camps", are not prepared to go back to that structured hierarchical church organisation. One member told me that small Fellowships come and go and that now, "a new expression of God will happen".

Footnote:

My own attitude towards the people who make up the Argyl "Christian" Fellowship has altered considerably since commencement of research. The genuine sincerity members showed towards their faith was acknowledged, and their welcoming tolerance and patience towards me as my project developed was greatly appreciated. If my appraisal was critical rather than sympathetic, this was directed towards their rigid, uncompromising religion rather than towards any individual. Any bigoted, narrow belief or attitude, in my opinion, begs questions or opposing views and, as Jung said when discussing Matthew 19: 11f, "Blind acceptance never leads to a solution; at best it leads only to a standstill and is paid for heavily in the next generation:", (Memories, Dreams, Reflections p242).

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APPENDIX

ARGYL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME UNTIL THE END OF JUNE 1991

Note times: When Sunday School and Fellowship are on the same day, 9.30am start

When in the homes and the combined meeting in the hall, 10.30am start

Youth group, 7.30pm

March	3	Smyth's
	9	Youth group (Hall)
	10	Plunket Rooms and Sunday School
	17	Arnold's
	23	Youth group
	24	Plunket Rooms and Sunday School
	31	Combined Meeting (Hall)

April	7	West's
	13	Youth group (Hall)
	14	Plunket Rooms and Sunday School
	21	Hall
	27	Youth group
	28	Plunket Rooms and Sunday School

May	5	Smyth's
	11	Youth group (Hall)
	12	West's
	19	Arnold's
	25	Youth group
	26	Smyth's

June	2	Arnold's
	8	Youth group (Hall)
	9	Plunket Rooms and Sunday School
	16	Arnold's
	22	Youth group
	23	Plunket Rooms and Sunday School
	30	Combined Meeting (Hall)

Any inquiries please ring, Arnold 468
 West 633