CHAPTER VI: PLYMOUTH BRETHRENISM-THE MOVEMENT IN ANDHRA

The Edinburgh Conference\(^1\) and the cooperation among the world churches on both sides of the Atlantic during the World War I led to attempts to explain the rise of Christian fundamentalism as a phenomenon and opened the flood gates for the review of several movements of the earlier century within Britain. This primarily brought to light the character of Brethren movement and its belief in the first century Christianity that shaped to a major extent, the fundamentalist movement of the 20\(^{th}\) century\(^2\). The word ‘fundamentalism’\(^3\) was coined around 1920s. The teachings of early Brethren stalwarts such as John Nelson Darby, Anthony Norris Groves and George Muller of Bristol, re-emerged under the label ‘Christian Fundamentalism’ after nearly a century’s obscurity. The fundamentalism of the movement reflected a radical approach to the Bible and Christian practice. A central concern of Brethren fundamentalism has been its steadfast opposition to theological liberalism and modernism\(^4\). A new intellectual theological approach fashioned by Schleiermacher (see chapter.3) plunged the church into scientific and rationalist quests that it could not carry through\(^5\). The church became an appendage of the state. The clerical duties of visitation, ordination, and confirmation,

---

1 World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in June, 1910.
3 ‘Fundamentalism’ in current Christian terminology means belief in the Bible as the inerrant word of God. It is belief in the factual historical record of the sacred scriptures, the inspiration of its doctrines, submission to which is therefore required by God and the duty of all men, Historically, fundamentalism has been identified with the proclamation of those salvation truths which make up the body of doctrine known as ‘the Gospel’. Michael Brown (Itinerant Gospel worker, Andhra), Fundamentalism, Gospel Tract Publications, U.K., 1990, p.3
5 Bernard Ramm, The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology, Grand Rapids, 2000, p.p.76-79
were done only as political duties allowed\textsuperscript{6}. J.N. Darby who was an Anglican clergyman in Ireland around 1820 grew increasingly dissatisfied with Anglican formality and externalism as well as with the socio-political position of Irish Anglicanism. He published in 1827 the earliest tract on the subject \textquote{The Nature and the Unity of the Church of Christ}\textsuperscript{7}, which expounded the doctrine of the church and future things. This aroused a spirit of inquiry in many places as to the carrying out of the simple principles that the Brethren movement enunciated. A century after, in 1924, the adherents of fundamentalism offered to form any new union of churches and Henry Pickering, the editor of \textit{The Witness}, asserted that fundamentalists had no need to form a new union since Brethren assemblies, which by 1927 he estimated as totalling 3000 in Britain were readily available\textsuperscript{8}. This indicates that Brethrenism was a recognized fundamentalist movement by the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

The Church of England had quite other effects notably in the Oxford movement (1833) also. The leader of this movement, John Henry Newman, disillusioned by the intertwined relations of the church, state and the Anglican liberalism, took himself and his friends in a more Catholic direction. On the contrary Darby began the movement of Brethrenism within Protestantism. However certain similarities can be drawn between these two 19\textsuperscript{th}-century movements. Both spearheaded the protests against interference by the state in the principles of liberal rationalism that was making inroads upon the authority of the scripture and the dogma derived from it. Another relative characteristic was an emphasis on Apostolic historic succession of the contemporary church i.e. adaptation to practices of primitive church. One striking difference was that the

\textsuperscript{7} HY. Pickering, \textit{Chief Men Among the Brethren}, Loizeaux Brothers, New Jersey, 1918, p.p.11-15.
\textsuperscript{8} The Witness Magazine, 54, October 1924, p.404
Tractarians were concerned to establish how the early church fathers had interpreted the Bible (from 2nd century A.D onwards) and they totally disregarded the Reformation, where as the Brethren get back to the scriptures and accordingly to the 1st century church practices. Brethren were not so critical about the Reformation, but they felt that it had not gone far enough. Both the movements laid great emphasis on the importance of the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper, though the manner of worship differed. The Brethren pattern was all simplicity, where as the Tractarians were more ritualistic. The comparisons were more evident from the diverse spiritual pilgrimages represented by the two Newman brothers. John Henry Newman was a typical leader of the Tractarians. His younger brother Francis William Newman went under the influence of the early Brethren J.N. Darby and Groves. For sometime F.W. Newman joined A.N. Groves at Baghdad and served as a Brethren missionary. Later on the Tractarians were side tracked. The movement of the Brethren, though troubled by internal divisions, took a fresh look at their principles and practices. The movement was a grand success with a lot of accumulated traditions through their long history of one hundred and eighty years and still is alive.

A question generally asked - why was Brethrenism known as a 'movement'. The dictionary defines a movement as 'a general tendency or current of thought, opinion, taste or action, whether organized and consciously propagated or a mere drift'. Because the Brethren never formally organized themselves into a denomination or a regulated church body, they remained a 'movement', that is a group of assemblies, which shared the same

10 Division occurred in 1848 as ‘Open Brethrenism’ and Exclusive Brethrenism’. Open Bretheren formerly represented by A.N. Groves is still a large group in the world and India in particular.
tendencies, and currents of thought. They did consciously propagate their opinions through their publications (especially their magazines) and through evangelism. But they refused to give it an institutional form by having a central organization. The Open Brethren (the largest section of the Brethren movement) have continued to give the purest expression to this lack of centralization, though the degree of this varied from country to country. In countries with authoritarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany, Communist Romania or Angola, they were forced to have a central council of some sort or other. But even when they were obliged to register with the government, they tried to observe limits.

José Neto, in an article entitled 'The Brethren Movement in Angola, 1960-2000', explains about the Brethren Secretariat in his country:

The main objectives of the elders and deacons appointed to this Secretariat are to represent Brethren assemblies to the government, to give technical support in literature, evangelism, and mission, and to promote the health of local churches among the Brethren. This body does not interfere in the day to day running of local churches: the autonomy of the local church is the one non-negotiable issue among all Brethren assemblies, and we also have a national conference where we discuss issues of common interest and our work together.

Also internationally the Brethren do not have any agency, which directs the affairs in every country. Thus there is great variety within the Open Brethren, both internationally and within individual countries, as they represent 'a general tendency' rather than prescribing any individual doctrine or practice. Among these general tendencies, which will be found across the movement, are practices such as the weekly commemoration of the Lord's supper, believer's baptism, no ordained clergy and the
autonomy of the local assembly, and a commitment to evangelical theology, principally its biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism and activism. The Brethren movement though mild in initial stages as originated from house meetings, became a very popular one. J.N. Darby, the founder architect deemed by many, was the leading light behind the movement.

The Anglican Church was the home of the upper classes and it was more a social organization than a living organism. Therefore, Darby propounded the theory of ‘The Church in Ruins’, which stated that the established church was beyond redeeming. Hence true believers should leave all organized churches and only those gathered according to the pattern of 1st century was the true church. True Church, as envisioned by Darby, would be practiced by small fellowships, which worshipped God in utter simplicity, with no ordained clergy (an Episcopal authority over the exclusion of laymen), but every lay believer would be a priest for himself, with no fine church buildings. The Brethren disclaimed the deeply rooted Catholic forms of the Church of England due to the radical evangelical background of the young J.N. Darby who propagated the papacy a ‘Satan’s fiction’ in answer to the true church. Nor did Nonconformity as represented by Dissenters fare any better, being embarrassed by the monarchical form of its ministerial office. The exaltation of one man (priest) could become an excuse for inactivity among the members of state church and of Dissenters. The laity marginalized, not emancipated was an error against scripture committed by both the established church and the Dissenters.

---

11 Some of these views were collections from my interaction with Brethren Historians in England.
The clergy and their relations to the laity were acute and became one of the principal causes behind the formation of the movement. Darby, in 1834 proclaimed in an article for the *Christian Witness*, a Brethren magazine founded that year, the lay Christian man’s liberty of preaching and teaching and declared that the notion of a clergyman was dispensationally a sin. The Brethren movement envisaged by the founders was leading towards a theoretically egalitarian church (“the priesthood of all believers”), where social disparities and differences were overcome and even included women in its broader meaning. Brethrenism emancipated the laity. A product of the upper and middle classes in its initial phase, it had developed an ideology, which allowed it to become downwardly mobile. Its spiritual democracy meshed with significant elements within the British working classes. It appealed to the literate, and the autonomous working class individual was a figure of respect. Thus it was in the 1860s that Brethrenism was transmuted, emerging as an almost wholly working class and lower-middle class sect, rooted in industrialized communities of England. The Brethren growth typified the contemporary democratization of Christianity. Brethren stressed, in the words of J.L. Harris, ‘equal nearness, equal liberty of access’ of all believers, that their practice would be democratic. Moreover, the search for Christian primitivism was a primary concern of the early Brethren, which challenged established structures.

In addition, the historical setting of Napoleon’s Europe and the Napoleonic wars, inspired interest in the scriptural readings on prophecy. People began to consider and increasingly desired the Second Advent of Christ or his millennium rule on earth in view

---

of these historical events. Upon this background two basic sources can be underlined from which the Brethren movement sprang in Dublin and Plymouth simultaneously about 1826 in full vigour. First was the growing conviction among a vigorous handful of Evangelicals that none of the established church and Dissenter sects of Christendom truly represented a 1st century Christian community. Second, there was a heightened eschatology on the eve of Napoleonic wars with issues relating to the return of Jesus Christ and the new age that would follow.

Therefore, the Brethren Movement was born from dissatisfaction about the existing conditions in the Church of England and from the study of unfulfilled prophecy in the Bible. The 17th century Quakerism was a reaction against ritualism, formalism and worldliness; the 18th century Moravianism was a reaction against ecclesiastical and social disorders. The third form of religious conviction and profession was the 19th century ‘Brethrenism’, bearing some resemblances to both the former, more especially the first with forethought of eschatology. It assumed no distinctive name, but ‘Brethrenism’, and from an early place of meeting, ‘Plymouth Brethrenism’. The early adherents of this Brethren movement were deeply dissatisfied about the unholy marriage that existed between the Established church and the state, about what they considered unscriptural (rational) ecclesiasticism and dead ritualism, and about the denominationalism denying Christ’s name, taking many other names such as Lutheran, Wesleyan, Anglican, Reformed, Baptists etc., rose upon these practices in swift reaction. They took the self-

---

15 H.A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement*, p.8
17 It was in 1827 that the Archbishop of Dublin, in a charge delivered to the clergy of his Diocese, recommended that a petition should go up to the legislature seeking for increased protection for them in the discharge of their duties as teachers of religion in the land. J.N. Darby who was then a clergy resisted this charge of seeking the security from the state, relieved himself of the duties of clergy and turned one of the founders of the Brethren Movement. B.W.Burton, *A Further Review of Recovery to the Truth and its Maintainance (1827-1997)*, West Sussex, England, 1997, p.9.
designation ‘Brethren’ directly from the sacred scriptures. Other names by which they were known were Christians, Believers, and Saints.

Brethrenism took shape as in 1820, when letters were exchanged between groups of believers in Great Britain. The movement emerged in 1826, when a few gathered in a house in Dublin, Ireland. They were against any single man domination or clericalism in the established circles and for a movement spiritually empowering the people. It is generally agreed that a refusal of the Eucharist to a medical student, Edward Cronin, a native of Cork and a convert from Roman Catholicism, by a congregation of independents, started it. He was joined by another Mr. Edward Wilson, the assistant secretary to the Bible Society. The two cousins of Cronin and a Bookseller called Tims joined them. All these five formed the original nucleus of the Brethren Movement. A house in Fitzwilliam Square was the place of their worship and the first Eucharist took place here in 1827. In fact there were probably two such groups already existing in the city of Dublin before 1829, unknown to each other, when all three came together at Fitzwilliam Square to form a house assembly. The prominent among this founding group was John Nelson Darby, a High Church Anglican Clergy man, and a grand son of most famous Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson who combated Napoleon and died at Trafalgar (1805). The members of the other groups in Dublin, who willingly associated themselves with the founding group, were H. Hutchinson and Lord Congleton, both wealthy landlords, J.G.Bellett, a Barrister, Anthony Norris Groves, a Dentist of Exeter

---

and who pioneered Brethren missionary to Andhra\textsuperscript{22}. Their numbers increased. By 1830, the growing house assembly transferred to a large auction room in Aungier Street, Dublin, where the first meeting in a public place held in utter simplicity.

Among the many meetings, which sprang up all over the country in these early days, the one at Plymouth became the most prominent. J.N. Darby first found his way to Oxford at the instance of Wigram, who was then at Queen’s college. In 1830 Francis Newman, a Tutor in the university, introduced B.W. Newton to J. N. Darby\textsuperscript{23}. Newton asked him to go down to Plymouth, where the Brethren movement was underway at the earnest labours by Wigram and himself. The Plymouth meeting was the first in England to be recognized as a meeting place of Brethren and it had a membership of over a thousand very soon. They were spoken of as ‘Brethren from Plymouth’. This eventually resulted in the inevitable designation, ‘the Plymouth Brethren’ for this new sect in England\textsuperscript{24}. This was a simultaneous movement at several places in England, Ireland and Scotland. Dr. Mackintosh, a Brethren ideologue, writes ‘among those who separated from the various organizations …(to join Brethren) were some men of considerable talent, moral weight, intellectual power and intelligence - clergyman, barristers, solicitors, military and naval officers, physicians, and men of high position and property. Their secession…caused a very considerable stir and drew forth much opposition’\textsuperscript{25}.

Most of the founders of this movement were young men; for example, when the movement started in 1826 Edward Cronin was 25 years old, J.N. Darby 27, A.N. Groves and Wigram below 35. All of them were eminent expositors of ecclesiastical writings.

\textsuperscript{23} Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals, Leicester, 2003, pp.475-6
\textsuperscript{24} Andrew Miller, \textit{The Brethren}, GBV, Germany, Reprint, 1992, p.62
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid p.26
Darby’s Dispensationalism and the eschatological studies, Dr. Tregelles’ textual criticism and voluminous writings of the rest of the Brethren were made popular by the Scofield and Ryrie Concordances. The *Scofield* (1843-1921) *Reference Bible* based on Brethren theology has been a major influence upon Christendom till today. Another young man and a Oxford intellectual, B.W. Newton, was offered a professorship at Bishop’s college at Calcutta, with the promising prospect of becoming principal, and then to a college in Bombay presidency. He could not accept either post as he became involved in the Brethren movement. Wigram, another Oxford scholar and a member of Plymouth Brethren, spent fifty thousand pounds on Biblical research and produced a Bible concordance. Their teaching was extempore and in several places every member was a preacher. Their life style was exemplary as testified in the case of Philip Gosse, a Brethren naturalist and a best friend of the evolutionist Charles Darwin.

Mobilizing the laity and the poorer folk to attend the meetings with less embarrassment in those days of great class distinction was an essential part of this growing movement. The men of upper class, for example, Lord Congleton used to dine with his domestic servants. Wigram, heir to several fortunes, was not untypical when he begged visitors to his house to carry away any item of furniture that was not strictly necessary. Wealthy ladies put their rings and jewellery in the offering box. The city of Bristol, another strong hold of Brethrenism was an abode of activities of philanthropy as well as eclectic faith. Another stalwart of the movement, George Muller, ran orphanages

---

27 Mrs Trotter’s opinion that many of the early Brethren movement were ‘men of brain, men of birth, and of large means, scholars, and students, who would have made their mark at any time and in any walk of life; lawyers of critical judgement, officers of promise in both services, large land-owners, with the cares and responsibilities of property’. Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Review, Issue 2, 2003, p.79
for thousands of street children for many decades\textsuperscript{30}. This in-depth theological teaching and egalitarian Christian practice were exercised by the Brethren\textsuperscript{31}, was new in church history.

The movement commenced in Dublin and Plymouth and spread to the British Isles and in the colonies. In France where a great number of persons were converted; the movement commenced in Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, the United States, in Asia and Africa and elsewhere. J.N. Darby had become the Brethren leader with the greatest influence due to his itinerancy in the United Kingdom and in continental Europe, whereas A.N. Groves became a great veteran of the missionaries to Baghdad. The movement also produced a proportionately large number of missionaries on the principle of ‘Faith’. Harold Rowdon has stated that, in the United Kingdom at least, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that 1 per cent of the entire membership of Brethren served overseas\textsuperscript{32}. It has been calculated that in 1945 Brethren missionaries accounted for more than 5 per cent of all Protestant foreign missionary personnel\textsuperscript{33}. They laboured in the so-called Christian and non-Christian countries without racial distinction. Adherents to Brethren doctrine, a number of other itinerants and many of the converts found the movement congenial as Brethrenism inherited not only the anti-establishment spirit, but also its lay orientation. The lay spirit of the Brethren was an important shaping force on its ethos. The movement utilized the gifts of laypeople and allowed them scope

\textsuperscript{30} Frederick G. Warne, \textit{George Muller: The Modern Apostle of Faith}, Bristol, 1898.

\textsuperscript{31} Ian McDowell, \textit{‘The influence of the ‘Plymouth Brethren’ on Victorian society and religion’}, The Evangelical Quarterly, 55, 1983, p.213.


for exercise of their talents. The innumerable brethren in various places of the world have been assembling themselves in Christian Assemblies, till today. These assemblies, since early 19th century, which still, make the scriptures their guide and pattern, and endeavour to act according to this rule, have been entirely free from clericalism and class divisions, as they have always been away from ritualism. Henceforth the Brethren worked within a pattern of withdrawal and independence from modernism and liberalism that were always in opposition to Christian dogma and headed towards cherishing a more orthodox and fundamentalist Christianity.

It is well known that the founding fathers of the Brethren movement – in particular, Anthony Norris Groves gave birth to an important principle when he argued that, ideally, Christian work should be conducted and, especially, financed on the faith principle. The principle subsequently had a major impact far beyond the Brethren movement, in particular in the faith missions, as charted by Fiedler. If Groves was the original author of the principle in the form pursued by the Brethren and applied it in his own missionary work in the Middle East and India, it was Muller who did most to elaborate the principle in practice and to popularize it widely in Evangelicalism through the work of the Scriptural Knowledge Society for Home and Abroad which he and his collaborator, Henry Craik, founded on 5 March 1834. Amidst unbelief and indifference of the 19th century, George Muller resolutely set himself to the task of providing for the orphaned without any external help. He wrote in July 28th, 1874, in his journal: ‘…two

35 Arthur Carl Piepkorn, Plymouth Brethren (Christian Brethren), Concordia Theological Monthly, No 41, Concordia Theological Seminary, St.Louis, 1970, p.165.
36 Neil Summerton, The opening Lines of the Article on ‘George Muller and the Financing of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution’ read in the Recently held Brethren Archivists and Historians Network (BAHN) Conference held during July 3-6, 2005 in Weidenest, Germany,
thousand and one hundred persons not only daily at the table, but with every thing else to be provided for, and all funds gone; 189 missionaries to be assisted, and nothing whatever left; about one hundred schools, with about nine thousand scholars in them, to be entirely supported, and no means for them in hand’.37 David Bebbington recorded, as was said by Muller himself, that his success in rising funds to feed the so big a crowd of dependents cited above, was due to his ‘unbroken and unclouded communion with Jesus for very many years’.38 He published the first part of his book in 1837, which has exercised an extraordinary influence on the lives of a very great number of people, encouraging them retain faith in God.39 By 1880 the suburbs of London had expanded demographically. In the period 1860 until 1914, Brethren assemblies were enjoying their maximum number of followers, after the revivals of 1859 at the instance of Muller’s Faith Ministry. In gratitude, George Müller has been adopted as a kind of Protestant saint, and model by the Evangelical community.

Plymouth Brethrenism in Andhra: -

The missionaries in the early 19th century were drawn closer to imperial government by its promise of assistance and protection, especially in India. In addition, by 1830 the missionary vocation was reckoned the more promising, and subscriptions to the societies that sent missionaries to India and abroad accumulated every year. Church Missionary Society was ahead of all in the race. London Missionary Society was next.

38 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain., p. 158. It is said of George Muller that ‘a towering like beacon over a stormy sea of religious doubt of thousands of people, pointing the way to them to the harbour of safety’. G. Warne, George Muller,p.2.
Baptist Missionary Society and Wesleyans shared the same strides. All such subscriptions so received were freely dispatched to a designated head at work in the mission field. His acquaintance with the needs of the field decided policies. Edward Irving vigorously attacked this entire system of funding by the societies to the overseas missions. He admonished that the missions required the rediscovery of the nobleness of the missionary character. Most of the traditional missions, for example, Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society, Wesleyan Missionary Society etc. were drawn by ‘Christianity and commerce’ strategy where as the Brethren missionaries were fired by millennialist thought of Christ’s imminent return. Thus evangelism tried to muster a global following. Irving proposed that the missionary zeal should be independent of external help. Thereafter, the terms like the ‘Apostolic faith’ and the ‘faith on primitive Christian lines’ were tremendously popularized since the days of Irving, and missions thus organized soon known as ‘Faith Missions’. The first of this bunch were the Plymouth Brethren as noted by Andrew Porter\textsuperscript{40}. Tatford similarly notes that the Brethren assemblies sent a very large number of missionaries i.e., over 5000 missionaries practically to every area of the world, depending for their support solely upon Providence\textsuperscript{41}. One can observe three phases in the missionary enterprise over the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries 1) Denominational missionary societies such as Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society, Wesleyan

\textsuperscript{40} Andrew Porter, \textit{Religion Versus Empire}, Manchester University Press, 2004, p.p.192-193

Missionary Society etc. 2) The Faith missions 3) Pentecostalism\textsuperscript{42}. The Brethren missionary initiative was very influential during the Faith mission phase.

The West-country (England) Dentist and surgeon Anthony Norris Groves characteristically was the first overseas missionary of the Plymouth Brethren to reach Turkey and Persia, the unconquered and unattached to any imperial power in 1829\textsuperscript{43}. He decided to embark upon missionary service abroad without any arrangement for financial support, but only on faith alone. However he and his family were victimized by the war, the plague, the famine and the floods during their three years stay in Baghdad. In April 1833, Sir Arthur Cotton, the irrigational engineer of Andhra, who built the Dowleshwaram Anicut on the river Godavary, was returning overland to India and to his duties with the royal engineers. Out of devotion to A.N. Groves he diverted his journey to Baghdad and urged him to pay a visit to India\textsuperscript{44}. On his invitation, in 1833 A.N. Groves paid a visit to India traveling extensively south to north and working along with missionaries of various denominations upon the Brethren principles.

Very soon he went to England in search of missionaries, unconnected to missionary societies to work in India. When he sailed back to India in 1836, the famous missionary Dr. Hermann Gundert and two other missionary families Mr. and Mrs. George Beer and Mr. and Mrs. William Bowden accompanied him. The Bowden and the Beers belonged to Barnstaple assembly in England, where Robert Chapman, one of the early Brethren founded a congregation that followed Groves’ principles of inclusive fellowship. Prior to mission work Bowden was a stonemason by trade and Beers a

\textsuperscript{42} During my mail interaction with Neil Summerton, a Brethren Archivist in England, he exposed these views.
\textsuperscript{43} C.M. Agur, \textit{The Church History of Travancore}, SPG Press, Madras, 1903, p.862
shoemaker. Because of the strong emphasis on lay participation in the assembly at Barnstaple, a distinguishing feature of Brethren movement here and elsewhere, both Bowden and Beer developed their gifts of preaching and teaching of scriptures in a remarkable way, and a real surprise to Dr. Hermann Gundert, a reputed linguist of the 19th century. Bowden and Beer positively responded to the call of Groves to work among the Telugu people of India and by faith in God to meet their every need. This company of missionaries reached Madras in the same year. Groves and his family stayed in Madras along with his newly arrived children guided by Lord Congleton from Baghdad in addition to missionaries Gundert and other lady missionaries who were already with him. But the missionary families, the Bowdens and the Beers sailed up to Machilipatnam in Andhra accompanied by Lord Congleton himself. Machilipatnam on the East coast in 1836 had a population of 60,000. Lord Congleton, the most truthful man of Dublin Brethren stayed there for a month and introduced the two missionary families to the resident gentleman at Machilipatnam. While he was spending time in teaching and preaching on the Brethren lines, the Bowdens and the Beers were learning Telugu. A very good number of the Europeans were attracted by the Brethren tenets. He stayed in the house of Col. Minchen and Mrs. Minchen where a worship meeting with a sacrament of Eucharist in the first century Christian pattern was conducted at their residence in all simplicity. Further, Congleton had given a very authoritative voice to scriptures at places like Secunderabad, Cuddapah etc among the Telugus and the Europeans and then settled for a time in Pulicat (in the present district of Nellore). The early Brethren movement in

Andhra around 1836 led by Congleton was feeble. About this time, the Beers and the Bowdens desired to locate themselves among the natives, far from the temptations of the European society. Thus they settled in Narsapur, a coastal Andhra town in the Godavary district in 1837.

Meanwhile, efforts of A.N. Groves to work along with the missionaries of denominational societies received opposition as his influences turned many a European, the missionaries and the officers working for colonial government, to resign their previous vocations and joined the Brethren movement. Those who joined the movement were Groves’ brother-in-law, George Baynes, an young artillery officer serving in India, J.M. Walhouse, a former officer of the Madras European regiment and two other former soldiers, MacCarthy and MacFarlane. The Anglican circles at Madras disliked this, and Groves left Madras and moved to Chittoor in 1837. This became an early center of Brethren activity in the southern part of Andhra i.e. Rayalaseema. Here the missionary party included Groves, his wife Harriet and children, another missionary Hermann Gundert, an ex-army official George Baynes, the Swiss lady missionary Julie Dubois, lady Harnie etc., who lived in the locality they named ‘Happy Valley’. During early missionary journeys of A.N. Groves in South India about 1833, a young native convert of Syrian Christian background, Mr. Arulappan, a strict adherent of Brethrenism, now joined the party and he used to assist Groves in the translations of his messages. Arulappan commenced his evangelical labours on Brethren principle of faith policy and

---

48 Chittoor (Chittur) Town was the head quarters of North Arcot district of Madras Presidency and was a Company military station up to 1874. J.A.S. Burgess (ed), *The Hand Gazetteer of India*, Calcutta School Book Society, Calcutta, 1909, p.87.
served among the Telugus and the Tamils. He stayed with Groves’ company in Chittoor along with three more native converts i.e. Andrew, James the bookbinder, a personal servant of Groves and European colporteur Macarthey and Groves himself. Arulappan, the first native Brethren evangelist and an associate of Groves, soon married a girl named Santhana Mary who converted from a Hindu family of Raju Naidu caste in the Telugu town of Chittoor and both toiled in the various Brethren mission fields in South India.

Boarding schools for boys and girls were soon established, where teaching was in English. Groves, out of concern for poor village children, started a Telugu school also. Julie Dubois proved to be a most reliable and gifted teacher. Missionary Gundert, with other native believers began itinerating the surrounding villages of Chittoor in a bullock cart. Mrs. Groves was busy preaching among the native Hindu women and brought some of them to Christian belief. Soon a number of believers joined them. All brethren, European and the native, used to meet in a room for worship on Sundays with a table in the midst, laying with a cottage loaf and wine, to celebrate the sacrament of Eucharist in all simplicity. Every member, European or Indian could pray and preach extemporarily with a universal and egalitarian perception. The Dublin and the Plymouth mode of movement among the native Christians in Chittoor and surrounding places caused more stir and enquiry among missions as well as the non-believers. The questions, connected with ministry and church government into a perfect scriptural position, raised certain curiosity in the minds of many. Groves was perhaps the first missionary who sowed the seed of indigenous Indian church by involving the natives to be partakers in running the worship on par with the fellow European brethren. Mr. Groves preached the gospel in

---

many villages sleeping in tents and traveled hundreds of miles. The conviction that the ordination of the clergy and regular salaries to the clerics was unscriptural as raised by Groves caused no ordinary stir among the Church Missionary Society missionaries. Under the influence of this teaching of Groves, some Church Missionary Society missionaries left their respective mission and eventually joined this new movement (Appendix IV). Henry, the first son of Groves, by now a fluent speaker in Telugu, had been for some time looking after the assembly ministry at Chittoor while his father was away visiting other assemblies of other towns. Few conversions from different castes took place and a talented young Brahmin was converted and asked for Baptism in Chittoor, but it was foiled by his family. Arulappan, a well-instructed evangelist under Groves in Chittoor who went further south along with his Telugu wife and reported thousands of conversions of his lot and planted innumerable number of Brethren assemblies thither. The next chapter deals with the life and labours of Anthony Norris Groves and his Indian associate Arulappan.

The missionary families of Bowden and Beer were guided by Groves, and had arrived in Godavari delta (coastal Andhra) and were stationed earlier in Narsapur. Narsapur previously called Madapollam, was located on the western branch of river Godavari. Narsapur, was a great shipbuilding center, and one of the earliest cloth trading centers and very famous for its weaving and bleaching yards. The town enjoyed heavy exportations of hand-woven cloth to Europe. This lucrative trade was replaced by machine made textiles of England. The textile industry got paralyzed and shipbuilding

---

51 Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, p.p.239-40
52 Sectarian revival was witnessed following influence of Plymouth Brethren in South India (1861), Papers and Correspondence of Lay secretary, Madras corresponding committee of the CMS (Aug.1858-Sep.1862), 1861-CMS/B/OMS/C 12 098/Acc.248 of the Birmingham University Library Archive, Birmingham; *The Missionary Reporter*, An Early Journal of the Brethren, U.K.,1853, p.p.47-48
was given up. To add to this, the great famine of 1833 devastated the area. Under these severe conditions, Narsapur missionaries occupied a long deserted Dutch house\(^{53}\), void of doors and windows, on the bank of Godavary. The gruesome and unburied skeletal remains of the famine stricken people were seen there. The Godavari district had no mission work previous to this, while one at Vizagapatnam, 170 miles in the northeast, and the other at Madras, 350 miles in the far south, were run by funding societies such as London Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society\(^{54}\). The Brethren missionaries Bowden and Beer never embarked upon any prior arrangement for financial support, but had faith in Providence. Meanwhile in England certain developments had been taking place among the Brethren. Therefore the initial period of eighteen months for the missionaries were months of starvation for there was no communication either from England or from the other mission stations. However, the young missionaries continued their new teaching and evangelism regardless. Mr. Groves too, faced financial hardship at Chittoor but he still invited the Bowdens to Chittoor for a holiday in 1842. Though financially disadvantaged, George Muller at Bristol established ‘Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad’ and sent small amounts to the Groves, the Bowdens and the Beers from 1846 out of the gifts received by his institution.

The missionary Bowden shifted to Palakol, a large town in the Godavary delta, adjacent to Narsapur\(^{55}\). Bowden preached regularly on the streets and weekly market days. Some villagers stayed overnight to hear the Gospel. It was after six years that a first

---

\(^{53}\) Narsapur, a seaport Town of Godavary district in the Madras Presidency. The Dutch had iron foundry here in 1655 and the place was once known for cloth dying. J.A.S. Burgess (ed), The Hand Gazetteer of India, p.267.


\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*
convert was won. There were a few out-caste converts and one high-caste woman convert Atchamma (15 in all). A small house assembly of the Brethren started at Palakol. Meantime Col. Arthur Cotton, who first met A.N. Groves in Bagdad was appointed as engineer to the Rajahmundry division in 1844 to enquire and report as to what could be done to save the district from recurring famines and to improve the irrigational facilities. After the government approval for anicut, Col. Cotton started his great work of throwing an anicut across the river Godavari near Dowleshwaram to irrigate the entire District. A number of coolies were working on the project and Cotton was most anxious that they should be evangelized. On one day he saw Englishman moving among the labourers, speaking freely to them in colloquial Telugu, and it was Bowden. Cotton came to know Bowden’s connections with A.N. Groves and he realized the common ground they shared in the Brethren tenets. On invitation from Col. Cotton, Bowden removed his family from Palakol to Dowleshwaram temporarily to preach Gospel to the working multitudes. The coolies came to work at the Anicut in shift batches of over 6000 at a time with 500 carpenters and 500 smiths. Thus Bowden preached to big crowds of Telugus between the years 1847 and 1850 but never promised material benefits for hiring people to Christianity. He gained 2 native converts in 1848 and two more in 1849. The financial constraints were slightly lessened by newly converted English Brethren, Captain Randall, Major Dobbie and Captain Haig who started a fund. In 1849 the Bowdens were settled again at Palakol. He drew 45 more converts between the years 1850 and 1855 were upper caste converts figured largely this time. They were Vasa Panchakshari of Tirupatipadu,

56 Ibid p.p.92-96
Gadhamchetti Simeon of Pangidi – a Saiva devotee, 3 weavers and a Kapu in Tirugudumetta\textsuperscript{57}.

It was not until 1850 that an assembly of local Brethren was established at Narsapur. The missionary Beer used to visit fairs, car festivals and hook swinging festivals through the year and preach to the people against such evil practices. He relentlessly worked among villages of every taluk in East and West Godavary area preaching the Gospel. It was during one of his several visits to the Reddiséema hill country that he died of sunstroke in 1853 at just 41. At the time of Beer’s death there were 26 baptized believers viz., at Tirugudumetta 6 believers, at Narsapur 8, Kakinada 1, Agartipalem 5, Rangoon 3 and at Tallapudi 3. By 1865 there were 50 native believers in Narsapur assembly\textsuperscript{58}. This number grew to 57 in 1871\textsuperscript{59}. There were hundred children in their lower primary schools being given scriptural education. The Palmira leaves were used with a stylus. A training school for girls was opened at Palakol where needle or lace work was taught. Mrs. Beer started a caste Hindu girls school with an intake of 32 students at Narsapur.

In 1855, Thomas Heelis, a merchant naval officer, came to Palakol, was baptized, and filled the vacuum left by Beer. He gave some 55 years of service among the Brethren assemblies and several villages\textsuperscript{60}. A Muslim convert Ali Sahib and a native, Chadalawada Francis, constantly accompanied Heelis and his party converted around 45 people. Bowden continued until 1874 and died in the same year at 64. Between 1856 and 1874 he added some 48 believers from both upper and lower castes to the Brethren

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Dr. Fredk A. Tatford, \textit{That the World May Know} Vol III,p.p.98-101
\textsuperscript{59} Census of the Madras Presidency 1871-Supplementary Tables Vol. II, 1874, p.299.
\textsuperscript{60} Missionary Echo, A Record of Labour of Missionaries in Many Lands, Bath, London, 1872, p.100.
assemblies, located in different villages around Narsapur. Mrs. Bowden ran a dispensary also. The children of missionaries Bowden and Beer took up the ministry left by their parents. In Narsapur and Palkol at the turn of the century, there were some 35 assemblies and the largest number of colporteurs and missionaries in the Godavari delta. The weavers of sudra community came out and joined the Christian assembly at Narsapur. P.C. Whitehouse started some 13 assemblies in and around Nagaram. Amalapuram was first evangelized by Mr and Mrs. Norman Macrae and the assembly consisted of 325 believers about 1902 and later they were followed by a number of missionaries. There were 14 assemblies in Rajahmundry at the beginning of the 20th century. The missionary family, Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, arrived in 1901 using a house boat, extensively evangelized the villages along the canals and ministered to many of the assemblies in the Godavari area. By 1946 it was estimated that in some 220 villages there were between 7000 and 8000 believers gathered in Brethren meeting rooms or assemblies for worship as well as taking part in Lord’s Supper. (see Appendix III). Till 1971 there were 26 Brethren missionaries in the Godavari area, of whom 11 were in medical work in Narsapur, particularly engaged in maternity and Leprosy Hospitals. Some were engaged in running Boys and Girls High Schools in the area. However, the drawback of institutional work was that it forced many of the missionaries and evangelical workers to become more localized. The Brethren movement in South Andhra led by Bro. Silas Fox, on the

---

63 C.F. Timothy Stunt, Turning the World Upside Down, p.98. See Appendix III for more information on conversions in coastal Andhra.
contrary, had a far wider reach: most regions of Telugu country from the end of Eastern Ghats to Nizam dominions were encompassed.\textsuperscript{64}

However, evangelistic effort in Chittoor weakened after the leading evangelist, A.N. Groves died in 1853. Other Christian groups like Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society etc, began to meet together in small companies in various places scattered over wide areas. In the 1920s, Canadian missionary, Silas Fowler Fox, who preached in the Telugu language met these indigenous groups and won over large number of converts. The Brethren assemblies in South Andhra, now consisted of Kurnool, Kadapa, Anantapur, Chittoor, Nellore and Prakasam.\textsuperscript{65} Fox preached the Gospel regularly in streets, bazaars and villages of the area. Moreover, Brethren from other language areas visited these places and participated in multilingual conferences. These resulted in interstate and intercaste marriages and other combined evangelical efforts. A South Andhra Brethren evangelist, Y.S. Prabhudas Reddy, converted in 1938, moved constantly among the South Andhra assemblies and in the wider areas of Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Kerala and the coastal Andhra to start the Brethren assemblies.\textsuperscript{66} There were over 150 indigenous local assemblies, in Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool, Nellore, Prakasam and Guntur etc., all beyond the Godavari Delta of Bowden and Beers.\textsuperscript{67} Over 30 Brethren were commended from those assemblies of South Andhra as full time evangelists to spread the movement.

Thus in 1956, through the preaching of Silas Fox and K.P. Agrippa, an Indian convert, a revival began in Anantapur and spread as far as Karnataka in the South-West

\textsuperscript{64} Echoes of Service, A Record of Labour of Missionaries in Many Lands, Bath, London, 1931, p.251.
\textsuperscript{65} Dr. Fredk A. Tatford, That the World May Know, Vol III, p.p.130-31
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
and from there to Vetapalam in the Guntur District where 25 assemblies commenced. In the Nellore District 12 more assemblies were founded, and in the Kurnool District another 12. By 1956-57 some 200 assemblies in South Andhra existed. Evangelism in the Godavari area was largely based upon institutions established by the missionaries - the hospitals, schools, orphanages, boarding centers etc.\(^{68}\) (see Appendix III). The assemblies were independent and they had elders. Meetings were several hours long with hymns and singing with male believers sat on the ground, and the sisters on one side. No rank or distinction was observed\(^{69}\). Then a few brothers would open the meditations, and all the believers partook in the Lord’s Supper. Baptisms followed by religious advice on responsibilities and then a collective march in a procession to the nearest water tank or an open well were standard procedures in such meetings. For 25 years Anantapur was Fox’s base. Among many converts some upper caste converts of South Andhra were Paul V. Gupta and Y.S. Prabhudas Reddy.\(^{70}\) These Indian converts helped to establish 900 assemblies in total, with an average membership of 60 in each assembly or a meeting room\(^{71}\).

The Brethren, were men who doubted the legitimacy of the other Churches, and in particular they came to reject the association of Church and state, and as a rule they took no part in politics or local government and the warrant for clerical orders but they had staunch adherence to priesthood of all believers. They reckoned the scripture as a book of rules and a charter to heaven. They called one another saints. Their meetings were carried

\(^{68}\) *Ibid*, p.p.132-37. See Appendix III for more information on conversions in South Andhra.


\(^{70}\) Bro. Y.S. Prabhudas Reddy has been a strict adherant and an ardent communicant of Brethren Movement since 1938 till date and he is an uncle of the former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Sri Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy (elder brother of his father).

\(^{71}\) Directory of Brethren Assemblies & Institutions in India, SAI, Bangalore, 1988.
out as nearly as possible like the first meetings of the Christians of early century having been inspired by the writings of the Apostle Paul. The meetings on Sundays mostly centered on the Lord’s Supper. The large loaf of bread was broken and divided onto four plates and were passed from one to another, each taking a morsel. The wine was poured into four goblets and was passed from one to another. They lived in a sincere and daily expectation of Christ’s second coming. There was never financial difficulty, for the Brethren generally offered 1/10 of their income to their gathering. Besides this, small wooden moneyboxes were strategically placed for public offering. The brethren did not believe in celebrating any special days or festivals and even Christmas day. They were secluded with unbelievers. Many of the Brethren in their private study referred to scriptures in original Greek as well as in original Hebrew.

The Brethren kept away from sports, dancing, seeing movies. About 1920s some even regarded the wireless as a demonic device. Husband and wife were never heard to argue in public. The wife was the helpmate and often very much in the background. Women’s attitude, with their quiet dress and their quiet speech were in accordance with a Christian patriarchy. There is sufficient literary evidence in the form of books, which characterized the evangelical discipline and morality insisted in the Victorian homes and the Brethren alike. A mark of Brethrenism in this century has been the priority, which they have given to evangelism among children and young people, a feature generally uncommon among the Protestant churches in the beginning. Ian Rennie, in his illuminating study of Brethren spirituality, observed the influence of ‘hyper Calvinism’

72 Anne Arnott, The Brethren-An Autobiography of a Plymouth Brethren Childhood, 1970. And in another Novel ‘Esther Waters’, George Moore the novelist had Brethren heroine Esther Waters (1894) to depict how serene they were. One can observe George Moore’s making Plymouth Brethren (in Esther Waters) spokesmen of the moralistic reactions.

among the Brethren. They were the modern pioneers of the theory of Faith Ministry and Faith Missions without any societal support or promising finances. They should not be investing money long term in land; rather it ought to be used immediately for the preaching of the gospel possibly related to pre-millennial eschatological Concerns.

The Brethren movement helped many, to remain in as well as to retain their faith in an age of religious crisis and even influenced the Evangelical ideology of the overseas missions and missionaries.74 Some of the Church Missionary Society missionaries in India reviewed their ideology similar to Brethren pattern and some of them even defected to the Brethren fold.75 The Brethren missionary effort was very substantial in itself and bore comparison with the denominational societies like Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society etc. The fact that today there are churches connected with the Brethren Movement in over 100 countries in the world bears testimony to this. It was very influential in the Faith mission movement, inaugurated by A.N. Groves in India. The movement’s efforts in the early 20th century were very strongly rivaled if not eclipsed by those of the denominational missionary societies (Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society), which had preceded it76.

**Women’s role among the Brethren:** - The practice of allowing women to minister in the church being was expressly forbidden by scripture, and thus throughout the church

75 Bomwetsch, Rev. Christian, Rev. John Charles Barclay, Miss Pennington of Female Education Society and Henry Davies who was to work with Rev. F. Alexander in Ellore as evangelist, all were refuted with alleged tendency towards Plymouth Brethren in India (See Appendix IV).
76 The views of Dr. Neil Summerton, Brethren Archivist and Historian, England, are reproduced here, which he expressed during my interaction through mail.
history women were much more restricted in their liberty to minister. The same was often the case with the 19th century evangelicalism. Protestantism and Evangelicalism thus offered very marginal roles to women in the church, but Brethrenism offered them expanded roles. The denial of a need for an ordained minister (Priest), allowed a lot of opportunity for both men and women to minister to the Lord and to his people.

Theodosia, the Lady Powerscourt, played a significant part in fostering the Brethren movement, holding at her house the prophetic conferences, which were instrumental in its formation. A number of other laywomen were prominent in the early development of the movement, but there were limits as to what they could do. Though women did not achieve the equality in function to men– yet they did in principle have equality of status among the Brethren (as instituted by Scripture itself).

From the past, among the Brethren in Andhra, women members were encouraged to be Sunday school teachers, workers among women, hospital visitors, Bible women, and missionaries – principally, tasks involving evangelism or nurture. There was one way, however, in which women could make their voice heard in church that was usually through hymn writing. A more visible role for women within the Brethren movement arose in the revivalism of the 1860s both in Great Britain and South India. The special feature of the revival in South India during 1860 was an inward work rendered by women to bring their jewellery as an offering to God, which was first exemplified by the daughter of early Indian Brethren evangelist, Arulappan. The Christian and non-Christian women followed this

---

77 In the Novel, ‘Shirley’ by Charlotte Bronte, one character Joe Scott, a man of strict scriptural origin, is talking to two of his lady friends, Shirley and Caroline Helstone about public preaching and the role of women in the Victorian church. This reflects even the Brethren views. Charlotte Bronte, Shirley, Collins, London, 1849, p.p.265-267.

78 This statement was made by the Brethren Historian, Dr. Dann of England during our conversation.

79 A summary of my chatting with the prominent Brethren historian Dr. Neil Dickson.
example. This was indeed a first experience when women gave themselves to preach and women first began to spread the revival fire in entire South India. Santhana Mary, wife of Arulappan was a gifted teacher of the scriptures among women. About seventy Brethren female missionaries spent their early youth in teaching, preaching and serving the people of Andhra (Appendix V). In a 1998 survey in U.K, 13% of Brethren assemblies allowed women to teach, 1% had women elders, 22% had women deacons and 48% had women on assembly committees. Now even among the brethren of Bakht Singh movement in Andhra, which was earlier founded by the grandsons of Arulappan, women are on all its leadership teams. Thus, basically the movement was very influential among all classes of indigenous people who adhered to the movement out of dissatisfaction towards the societal missions.

---

80 Missionary Reporter, August 1853, p.47.