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# Opening of the Closed

The Worldwide Breakup  
of the Kelly-Lowe-Continental  
Brethren at the End of the  
Twentieth Century

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## Opening of the Closed: The Worldwide Breakup of the Kelly-Lowe-Continental Brethren at the End of the Twentieth Century

T. J. Marinello

One of the challenges and sometimes joys of doing research is when the results do not match the initial expectation. When this study on the worldwide breakup of the Kelly-Lowe-Continental Brethren (KLC)<sup>1</sup> in the 1990s was begun, the working hypothesis was that a wrongful case of church discipline in the Netherlands was the immediate cause of the fracturing of the KLC. While this case of church discipline was indeed a part of the overall picture, and perhaps a critical catalyst – certainly at least in the mind of those involved at the two assemblies which dealt with this issue initially – the reason for the rupture proved to be much more complex and multifaceted. A perfect storm of people and events in at least four countries both in Europe and North America coalesced in such a way that the bonds that hitherto had tightly connected KLC assemblies mostly were dissolved, at least for many. Before the breakup, the KLC had achieved their connexional form via a worldwide coming together with the Glanton partition in 1974, and so they also were known as the ‘Reunited Brethren’.<sup>2</sup> This chapter considers the people and events which led up to their rupture as well as the effects this rupture has had on the KLC and Brethren movement as a whole.

This project has been both a difficult task to pursue and a distasteful study as well in many aspects, since the written record does not supply pleasant reading. This was compounded by the fact that this researcher knows a number of the people involved. {428} Additionally, the greatest challenge was that many of those with first-hand knowledge of the people and events categorically refused to participate in this project. In one case, a figure who most likely had crucial information expressed what often is found in the more conservative parts of the Brethren, when he wrote: ‘No, I am not interested and don’t want to be interested in this. I love studying and thinking about the precious Word of God but I am not interested in “religious and theological” questions.’<sup>3</sup> The reader should not

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1. For a quick rehearsal of the formation of the Kelly-Lowe-Continental Brethren at the end of the nineteenth century, see Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of the Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes, 2006), 204–5. For a more complete account from a Continental perspective, see W. J. Ouweneel, *Het Verhaal van de ‘Broeders’: 150 jaar falen en genade*, deel 2 [1890–1978] (*The Story of the ‘Brethren’: 150 years of failure and grace*, part 2 [1890–1978]) (Winschoten, NL, 1978), 236–7. For a somewhat exhaustive presentation – to include the actions and reactions of the Continental Brethren – along with much of the contemporaneous correspondence and literature, see Napoleon Noel, *The History of the Brethren*, 2 vols., ed. William Knapp (Denver, CO, 1936), 2:499–567.
  2. For a good rehearsal of the stages of this reunion, see Roger Shuff, *Searching for the True Church: Brethren and Evangelicals in Mid-Twentieth-Century England* (SEHT: Milton Keynes, 2005), 224–32.
  3. Anonymous, e-mail to the author, 4 Feb. 2019. This reticence of many among the Brethren to engage with anything but the Bible as an openly expressed, stated aim is well traced in Mark R. Stevenson, ‘The

*necessarily* understand hostility in this reply, but more likely a sincerely held belief: Brethren are not a people of their own history but rather those who wait expectantly for the coming of the Lord, especially those of a pretribulational and premillennial conviction.<sup>4</sup> One could do far worse than holding this man's conviction with its focus on the Bible, even if it is tinged with a look askance at formal studies. All this said, the reason for most to shy away from assisting was a genuine desire to leave alone what was in the not-so-distant past. For example, initial contact with some of the principal figures in the events of the 1990s was met with a collegial but definite desire to stay clear of this topic. Thankfully these same men later agreed to help when they understood the nature and purpose of this study.<sup>5</sup> Another man expressed a genuine and somewhat realistic fear that this study could reignite controversies and resurrect hard feelings.<sup>6</sup> In most cases, the written records already had been destroyed by those who were contacted, some destroying them almost in cathartic fashion – one person literally burned the correspondence.<sup>7</sup> Without the inestimable help of Michael Schneider and his encyclopaedic trove of primary source material in four languages,<sup>8</sup> this project undoubtedly would have had to be abandoned.<sup>9</sup> But that might not have been such a terrible result given that this study is challenged both {429} by the recentness of the events<sup>10</sup> and rawness of the not-so-distant events which few wish to revisit for obvious reasons.

These last-mentioned circumstances have caused a needful excising of details which normally would have been included. Anonymous sourcing or vague authorship of primary sources such as correspondence or comments was necessary in places so as not to roil waters which still are calming in some locales or not to make new wounds for people

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Brethren and Systematic Theology: Outspoken Objectors; Unconscious Practitioners', in Franklin S. Jabini, Raju D. Kunjummen, and Mark R. Stevenson (eds.), *Reflections from the Emmaus Road: Essays in Honor of John H. Fish III, David A. Glock, and David J. MacLeod* (Dubuque, IA, 2018), 112–31.

4. Willem Ouweneel notes this futuristic focus generally as opposed to a here-and-now focus. *Idem*, "Christliche Versammlung" – wohin? ("The Assemblies" – Where to?), in D. Kuiper (ed.), *Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands Protestantisme na 1800* [*Yearbook of the History of Dutch Protestantism after 1800*], 4 (1996), 5, [bruederbewegung.de](https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/ouweneelwohin.pdf), <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/ouweneelwohin.pdf>>, accessed 29 June 2019.
5. Willem Ouweneel and Henk Medema, e-mails to the author, 3 Jan. 2019.
6. Anonymous former member of the KLC assembly in Heiloo, conversation with the author, Alkmaar, NL, 27 Jan. 2019.
7. Anonymous former member of the KLC assembly in Heiloo, conversation with the author, Alkmaar, NL, 27 Jan. 2019.
8. While Schneider's collection is vast, he notes that 'one of the largest collections of material concerning the KLC splits since the 1990s is in the possession of Hans-Jochen Timmerbeil of Schwelm (Germany), who was a member of our "Arbeitskreis Geschichte der Brüderbewegung" (German counterpart of BAHN) until last year, when he retired for reasons of age (he's 85). He has promised to bequeath his holdings to the Wiedenest archive.' Michael Schneider, e-mail to the author, 15 Feb. 2019.
9. Additional thanks go to Max Weremchuk in recognition of some key insights and the supply of hard-to-find primary source material that even Schneider did not have.
10. For the challenges related to historical distance, see Mark Bevir, 'Why Historical Distance is not a Problem', *History and Theory: Theme Issue* 50 (Dec. 2011), 24–37, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2011.00601.x>>, accessed 5 Feb. 2019; Jaap den Hollander, 'Contemporary History and the Art of Self-Distancing', *History and Theory: Theme Issue* 50 (Dec. 2011), 51–67, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2011.00603.x>>, accessed 5 Feb. 2019. Producers and consumers of historical writing very likely will find the remainder of the essays in this issue of the journal of interest as well.

scarred by the events. This inexplicit cloaking also helped to elicit straightforward accounts.<sup>11</sup> More than once the author thought that it might have been better to gather materials and first-hand accounts for storage in an archive with a fifty- or one-hundred-year lock.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, an account is recorded below. The goal of this chapter, then, is to trace the worldwide disruption among the Kelly-Lowe-Continental Brethren in the 1990s in four parts followed by some concluding thoughts: first, the gathering storm; second, the rumble of thunder; third, the storm strikes; and finally, the aftermath of the deluge.

### **The gathering storm**

Almost simultaneously, local KLC assemblies in at least Germany, the United States, and France issued letters of excommunication which were accepted neither by all the other assemblies in their own country nor worldwide. Each side had advocates and opponents of these actions.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the storm clouds were gathering for the eventual worldwide divisions among the KLC Brethren.

#### ***Storm clouds in Germany***

Preliminary rumblings of the subsequent 1990s division within the KLC transpired in Germany in the mid-1980s. In September 1985, the German evangelist, Wolfgang Bühne, was disfellowshipped by his home assembly in Meinerzhagen-Worbscheid – or at least a part of that assembly. Bühne was ‘a devoted evangelist who did not shun unorthodox evangelistic methods, bringing street children among the “saints”, holding private meetings in Worbscheid’, and using other similar methods not supported by his local assembly. {430} Among other practices, Bühne facilitated meetings with other believers who were not in fellowship with assemblies in the KLC circles and conducted sports activities with both believers and unbelievers present – activities which included both boys and girls. As a result of the assembly’s exclusion, however, he was not allowed to partake of the Lord’s supper, not greeted when encountered, and ‘treated as an untouchable’; this exclusion was supported by a letter signed by 180 German brothers. Letters continued to go back and forth between various assemblies and individuals concerning the 1985 exclusion of Bühne until at least the early 1990s. During this period, a number of German assemblies and individuals refused to recognize the actions of the assembly in Meinerzhagen-Worbscheid and sent detailed letters as to the reasons for their conclusions. In November 1992, a letter was signed by 154 opponents of the exclusion of Bühne and sent to all the assemblies in Germany.<sup>14</sup>

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11. For a good discussion on guidelines for anonymous sources, see Al Tompkins, ‘Guidelines for Interviewing Confidential Sources: Who, When, and Why?’ The Poynter Institute, <<https://www.poynter.org/archive/2002/guidelines-for-interviewing-confidential-sources-who-when-and-why/>>, accessed 5 Feb. 2019. While this article is not a guideline for scholarly research, the ethical issues are much the same.

12. The present writer is a biblical Christian first and an academic thereafter; no project should knowingly cause fresh division or hurt among those who lived through the events recounted or were affected by these events.

13. Ouweneel, “‘Vergadering van Gelovigen” – waarheen?’, in Kuiper (ed.), *Jaarboek*, 24. Pagination is according to the German-language reprint of this article cited above.

14. Michael Schneider, ‘Kurzer Abriss der aktuellen Spaltungsbewegung unter den “geschlossenen Brüdern”’, 1–2, an 8-page, unpublished, well-documented private account of the present divisions, primarily among the German Exclusive Brethren. NB: Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by the present writer.

Schneider notes that generally in the 1980s, younger men among the KLC Brethren wanted to end their isolation from other evangelical groups. This was the context for Canadian-born, German-resident Max S. Weremchuk's 1989 brochure, *Ihr liefet gut ... Nachgedanken zur Brüderbewegung* (*You ran well ... Thoughts about the Brethren movement*), a brochure which 'condemned the pride, isolationism, and formalism of "the Brethren"',<sup>15</sup> often using very direct language.<sup>16</sup> Noteworthy for the present narrative is that Weremchuk's brochure was published in Dutch at the same time, and that the contents were reviewed before publication and supported in principle by a number of prominent brothers from both Germany and the Netherlands, a number of which would be significant figures in the history of the worldwide breakup of the KLC in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, two of the Dutch figures, Willem Ouweneel<sup>18</sup> and 'Jaap' Fijnvandraat,<sup>19</sup> authored separate reviews of this brochure, one of which was in many ways itself as controversy-making as was {431} Weremchuk's original brochure; due to its tone, Ouweneel's review caused both Ouweneel and the editorial board of *Bode* to issue a written apology:

As *Bode* editors, we have to admit that we did not really judge how this review would hit and what reactions it would trigger. We have not paid enough attention to searching and finding the right tone. The entire editorial staff along with the author regrets this, and we would like to say so publicly. Reading the pamphlet *You ran well* should cause humility. Just for others? We as authors and editors have to be the first example; how else can we tell others about the need for humility? Unfortunately, we cannot say that we are not affected by the things mentioned in the pamphlet.<sup>20</sup>

Joachim Kuhs notes in his 1988 foreword to the German-language edition that Weremchuk's pamphlet and his biography of J. N. Darby<sup>21</sup> were published at the same time. Kuhs thus urged the reader first to read the biography of Darby and then the brochure 'otherwise a danger exists of getting a too negative and one-sided picture' of the Brethren.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Weremchuk's estimation of the KLC Brethren as insular and narrow was

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15. Schneider, 'Kurzer Abriss der aktuellen Spaltungsbewegung unter den "geschlossenen Brüdern"', 1–2.
  16. Maksym S. Weremchuk, *Ihr liefet gut ... Nachgedanken zur Brüderbewegung* (Albsheim, FRG, 1989), as reset at **brueder***bewegung*.<sup>de</sup> <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/weremchukliefert.pdf>>, accessed 25 Mar. 2019. All page numbers are according to the German version online at **brueder***bewegung*.<sup>de</sup>. A 1996 English-language version also is available though it has some additions and revisions. See <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/weremchukran.pdf>>.
  17. 'H. W. Giesekeus (Dortmund, FRG), G. Heide (Ziegenhain, FRG), H. J. Timmerbeil (Schwelm, FRG); J. G. Fijnvandraat (Leeuwarden, NL), J. Ph. Fijnvandraat (Sneek, NL), H. P. Medema (Vaassen, NL), W. J. Ouweneel (De Bilt, NL) and D. Steenhuis (Nijverdal, NL)'. P. Jongenburger, W. van Leeuwen, and M. W. Zwart, 'Vorwort' in Weremchuk, *Ihr liefet gut ... Nachgedanken zur Brüderbewegung*, 6–7.
  18. Willem J. Ouweneel, 'Boekbespreking: *Gij liept goed*' ('Book review: *You Ran Well*'), *Bode van het heil in Christus*, 132.2 (Feb. 1989), 35–40.
  19. J. G. Fijnvandraat, 'Lopen wij goed?' ('Are we running well?'), *Bode van het heil in Christus*, 132.6–7 (juni/juli 1989), 122–8.
  20. 'Van de redactie' ('From the editorial board'), *Bode van het heil in Christus*, 132.6–7 (juni/juli 1989), 121. For a readily accessible, German-language translation of the reviews of Ouweneel and Fijnvandraat as well as the apology by the editors of the *Bode*, see 'Stellungnahmen zu "Ihr liefet gut"' ('Comments on "You ran well"'), <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/bodeliefert.pdf>>, accessed 24 June 2019.
  21. Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby und die Anfänge einer Bewegung* (Bielefeld, FRG, 1988). Subsequently, a revised edition including an edited version of the original German introduction would be published in English, *idem*, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, NJ, 1992).
  22. Joachim Kuhs, 'Vorwort der deutschen Ausgabe', in Weremchuk, *Ihr liefet gut ... Nachgedanken zur Brüderbewegung*, 7.

borne out in practice as will be seen below. Further, assemblies which signed a letter of support for Weremchuk's brochure were disfellowshipped, the first being Karlsruhe.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the storm clouds for the coming breakup of the 1990s were forming.

### *Storm clouds in the United States and Canada*

A few years later, another matter of local-church discipline transpired at the Laurel Avenue Gospel Hall in Chesapeake, VA.<sup>24</sup> Lytton Musselman and his wife were disfellowshipped due to his more generous views on reception as well as his use as the main speaker at the Winter Youth Retreat at Living Waters Bible Camp, WI, 'of a brother in Christ at the Retreat who is not among us', Dr C. Fred Dickson of Moody Bible Institute. Musselman was told in 1992 that he must change his views as well as give up his position on the Winter Youth Retreat Council. While offers were made by various men from outside Laurel Avenue to help resolve the situation – offers welcomed by the Musselmans but rejected by Laurel Avenue – the situation was not resolved. Accordingly, on 18 October 1993, a letter which disfellowshipped the Musselmans was sent to Musselman as well as a number of assemblies, a letter whose wording caused some confusion as to his exact (432) status. Matters were further complicated when Musselman was 'retained on staff' at the Winter Youth Retreat in December of 1993.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the assembly in Dearborn Heights, MI, sent out a letter on 23 January 1994 'asking all assemblies to send letters of protest to the Winter Youth Retreat Council, and describing Lytton [Musselman] as one who had been "excommunicated."'<sup>26</sup>

On 20–21 May 1994, a 'Special Brothers' Conference' was hosted by the Christian Assembly in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and Forest River Bible Chapel in Mt. Prospect, Illinois, to try to sort through the issues related to Musselman. All 'concerned and responsible brethren' were invited 'to meet at Kenosha ... to unitedly humble ourselves before God and pray that "we might receive help from God in resolving our conflicts to His own glory and to the blessing of His people"'.<sup>27</sup> The ensuing report of this conference noted that

In view of the facts available to us, we find no Biblical basis for the disciplinary action regarding Lytton Musselman as being excommunicated or "put out of fellowship" in accordance with 1 Corinthians 5. ...

That the situation at Laurel Ave. underscores a serious problem within our fellowship. The problem is that differences between local assemblies as to the *practice* of reception to the breaking of bread are unacceptable to some brethren and assemblies, even though these differences were recognized and accepted in the 'Summary of a Brothers' Meeting' on February 18, 1974, which led to the reunion in September, 1974. The issue is not who has the right view as to the practice of reception, but rather are we willing to be of one mind to walk together in fellowship and confidence with one another in spite of our differing views and practices?<sup>28</sup>

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23. Joachim Hanbürger, short conversation with the author, Alkmaar, NL, 16 June 2019. Hanbürger was an eyewitness to the events in Germany as a part of the KLC circles there.

24. 'Gospel Hall, Chesapeake, Virginia Schedule of Meetings', <<http://web.archive.org/web/20190603143434/http://gospelhallch.com/>>, accessed 30 June 2019.

25. 'Report of Special Brothers' Conference', Kenosha, WI, 20–21 May 1994, 5–6. This report was signed by nine men from the Christian Assembly in Kenosha, WI, and seventeen men from Forest River Bible Chapel in Mt. Prospect, IL.

26. 'Report of Special Brothers' Conference', Kenosha, WI, 20–21 May 1994, 5.

27. 'Report of Special Brothers' Conference', Kenosha, WI, 20–21 May 1994, 1.

28. 'Report of Special Brothers' Conference', Kenosha, WI, 20–21 May 1994, 8. A copy of the 18 Feb. 1974 'Summary of a Brothers' Meeting' can be found at the online Brethren Archive, <<https://www.brethrenarchive.org/archive/late-exclusivism/kelly-section/booth-grant-glanton-reunion/summary-of-a-brothers->



The answer to the final question above was ‘no’, and a counter report, sharply worded in places, was issued on 14 November 1994 by five men who had attended the May 1994 conference which questioned both the motives of the convenors of the special conference and the official report’s findings. Of special attention was the critique’s conclusion that ‘events mentioned in the report are only symptoms of the real reason for the unrest. It appears there is an earnest attempt on the part of a few to change the principles of the fellowship closer to those of our so-called “open brethren” in particularly matters of reception.’<sup>29</sup> Thus, the situation was not resolved, and the storm clouds continued to gather.

### {433} *Storm clouds in France*

Further rumblings which were more causative for the subsequent division within the KLC transpired in France in the early 1990s – this, too, related to an exclusion, an exclusion which in many ways paralleled the one suffered by Bühne. An itinerant evangelist, Pierre Oddon, was put out of fellowship by his home assembly in Marseille due to his use of non-Brethren material in his evangelistic efforts as well as ‘unacceptable modern methods of Evangelisation’.<sup>30</sup> His ‘unacceptable modern methods’ included the use of guitars and videos, the use of which was publicly condemned by conservative KLC leaders such as Paul Vinet of Brussels and Samuel Terrade (1927–2016) of Strasbourg. As with Bühne’s situation, Oddon was excluded by only part of the assembly in Marseille.<sup>31</sup> This exclusion by only some of the meeting was emphasized in the response letter of 27 June 1993 containing fifty signatories from the assemblies in Aix-en-Provence, Orange, and Toulon who rejected both the process and reasons for the exclusion of Oddon as laid out in Marseille’s letter of 9 February 1991 and confirmed in another letter dated 7 April 1993.<sup>32</sup> The letter with the fifty signatories – those who then comprised almost all of the men in these three meetings<sup>33</sup> – noted both various unsuccessful attempts to heal the breach between the Marseille assembly and Oddon as well as the desire of the signatories to remain in fellowship with all parties in the dispute. Of particular noteworthiness was the point that a decision seemingly taken by only part of an assembly is not binding on the whole body at large.

We are, of course, very committed to submitting to any decision of an assembly, even if by its nature the decision taken seems unjustified. But the moment seems to have come to let the brothers of the assemblies know that the decision made by some brothers in Marseille, according to the testimony given

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meeting-february-18th-1974/>, accessed 3 Feb. 2020.

29. William G. Ford, Robert A. Town, Roger P. Daniel, John Ford, and Jack McClellan Jr., ‘Critique of “Report of Special Brothers’ Conference Held at Kenosha, WI on May 20–21, 1994”’, 1. The critique is dated simply 11–94, but the accompanying cover letter specifies 14 Nov. 1994. Authors’ names are listed in the order that they appeared on the critique; pagination does not include the cover letter.
30. ‘Bericht vom 10. Oktober 1997 aus Frankreich (aus dem Französischem [sic] übersetzt)’ (‘Report of 10 Oct. 1997 from France [translated from French]’), a response to the 28 Mar. 1997 ‘Brief “der Elf”’ (‘Letter of “the Eleven”’).
31. Willem Ouweneel, ‘Scheuring van 1995’, 2, an unpublished account of the KLC division.
32. ‘Les frères qui se réunissent au Nom du Seigneur à Aix-en-Provence, Orange et Toulon’ (‘The brothers who meet in the name of the Lord in Aix-en-Provence, Orange and Toulon’), letter of 27 June 1993. This letter notes in its heading that it first was sent to the assembly in Marseille, and then the assemblies in Alès, Avignon, Cannes, Montelimar, Montpellier, Nice, Nimes, and Valence.
33. ‘Bericht vom 10. Oktober 1997 aus Frankreich’.



above, cannot be considered as a decision taken in the name of the Lord and binding on the whole body.<sup>34</sup>

In March 1994, Ouweneel, Henk Medema, Jr., and Dato Steenhuis wrote a letter to the assemblies in the Netherlands and Flanders as well as to the German assemblies concerning the exclusion of Oddon. In part the letter noted that

In France, some brothers have been very active in the gospel for ten years. Every year they organize large gospel campaigns under the name *Melody* with the cooperation of dozens or even hundreds of young people. ...

{434} Numerous young people who work together with bro. Oddon have been faced with a crisis of conscience. Unfortunately, young and old people ... already have left the assemblies. Fortunately, a few assemblies are encouraging. Oddon still can be admitted to the breaking of bread – after all, there is no question of an assembly decision in Marseille – but the question is how long they will hold fast. This means that the most important evangelization work that existed among us in France, French Belgium, and French Switzerland has been choked off. This is terrible and unacceptable to many brothers.<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, after much back-and-forth between assemblies, in at least France, the Netherlands, Germany, and North America, a general letter from eleven French assemblies dated 28 March 1997 was sent announcing a break in fellowship with those assemblies which would not recognize the 1993 decision by the Marseille assembly to break fellowship with Oddon.<sup>36</sup> In response, a ‘Report from France’ of 10 October 1997 noted that these eleven local churches hardly were able to speak for the assemblies in France given their character: six essentially were ruled by two leading brothers; three were splits from other assemblies; one consisted of three people – a man, his wife, and the sister of the wife; and the final assembly was Marseille itself, the meeting which originally disfellowshipped Oddon and was ‘the source of the questionable decision’.<sup>37</sup>

These accounts of events in Germany, the US, and France begin to address some of the main questions which would be at the heart of the breakup of the KLC circles at the end of the twentieth century and indeed other connexional assemblies throughout the history of the Brethren. Specifically, when is a decision of a local assembly binding on all assemblies, namely, who are the authoritative decision makers in a local church; and what is the process for legitimizing the decision of a local church which is binding on all assemblies, namely, what role, if any, do those outside a local assembly have in the process of legitimizing the actions of a local church? These two questions in addition to the rules for reception were at the heart of the coming storm.

### The rumble of thunder

#### *Thunder in the Netherlands*

Soon after the Marseille assembly’s letter of exclusion of Oddon, another letter of exclusion was issued by the KLC assembly in Den Helder, the Netherlands, on 17 March

34. ‘Les frères qui se réunissent au Nom du Seigneur à Aix-en-Provence, Orange et Toulon’.

35. Mar. 1994, letter Ouweneel, Medema, and Steenhuis.

36. ‘Aux saints qui professent se réunir au Nom du Seigneur’ (‘To the Saints who profess to assemble in the Name of the Lord’), General letter from 11 French assemblies, 28 Mar. 1997. This letter was at least translated into German and perhaps Dutch. See also Samuel Terrade’s letter to Eckhard Bubenzer, 3 June 1997, in which Terrade tries to explain the situation in France for the French-speaking Swiss assemblies.

37. ‘Bericht vom 10. Oktober 1997 aus Frankreich’.

1990<sup>38</sup> to a family in their fellowship, followed by yet another stronger one on 16 April 1990.<sup>39</sup> The run-up to the letters' issuance came as the result of an accusation made against a man and {435} his wife (hereafter, Mr and Mrs A) who had been in fellowship at the Den Helder assembly for more than ten years. At the very end of a men's meeting at about 22.00, a first and public accusation was made that Mr and Mrs A were having impermissible contact with another family (hereafter, B) who previously had been disfellowshipped due to their view of their daughter's divorce. Members of the B family regularly had visited Mr A's mother-in-law during a time of extended illness, an illness which resulted in her death. Accordingly, the B family came to her funeral. Their presence was not viewed approvingly by some of the men of the Den Helder assembly, and thus a public accusation was made as noted above. In subsequent conversations, additional accusations were made that Mr A did not love the brothers and sisters of Den Helder, and that he also had slandered one of the leading brothers.<sup>40</sup> Particularly noteworthy for the letters of exclusion was the speed with which the exclusion took place. Attempts at reconciliation failed; consequently, Mr and Mrs A left the assembly in Den Helder in April 1990 and began to attend the assembly in Heiloo after consultation with the men and women there as noted in their farewell letter to the Den Helder assembly.<sup>41</sup> Of special note here is the humble attitude with which Mr and Mrs A approached the entire situation; this was evident in their correspondence with Den Helder and family members as well as their reflections on the situation decades later. Further, they did not partake of the Lord's supper at Heiloo for their first two years at that assembly, a choice of their own making.<sup>42</sup>

While this matter seemingly had come to an end, this was not to be the case. Letters continued to be sent between Den Helder and the A family up until at least the mid-1990s.<sup>43</sup>

### *Thunder in Austria*

In 1991, thunder from the coming storm was heard in Austria as the German KLC Brethren tried to bring newly-formed assemblies there into their connexional circles, or at least bring out from these local churches individuals who would form new KLC assemblies. The American missionary Fred Colvin had planted about twenty-five new assemblies, none of which were in fellowship with the small assembly in Vienna, the only recognized KLC assembly in Austria. Thus, Arend Remmers (b. 1938) of the Schwelm assembly in Germany and some other German KLC Exclusives attempted to bring these Austrian assemblies in line with the teachings of their circles.<sup>44</sup> The work of the German Exclusives was successful since some of the people from the assembly in Saalfelden broke away and

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38. 'Brief van 17 maart 1990 van "Vergadering des Heeren" te Den Helder te broeder en zuster A'.

39. 'Brief van 16 april 1990 van "Vergadering des Heeren" te Den Helder te broeder en zuster A'.

40. Mr and Mrs [A], 'Verslag van de oorzaken welke hebben geleid tot "uitsluiting" van de fam. [A] door de Vergadering Den Helder' ('Report of the causes that led to "exclusion" of the family [A] by the Den Helder Assembly'), 17 Apr. 1990.

41. Letter from Mr and Mrs A to the Den Helder assembly, 17 Apr. 1990.

42. Mr A, conversation with the author, Alkmaar, 16 June 2019.

43. See: Mr and Mrs A to Den Helder assembly, 11 May 1994; and Den Helder to Mr and Mrs A, 4 June 1994.

44. 'Die "geschlossenen Brüder"', *bruederbewegung*.<sup>de</sup>, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/gruppen/geschlossenen.html>>, accessed 25 June 2019. See also Ouweneel, 'Scheuring van 1995', 4.

formed a new KLC assembly in Lofer. This departure was very discouraging, however, to the mainly new believers who made up the vast majority of the other Austrian assemblies.

While the matters in Germany and France were not addressed very forcefully and only personally by some in the Netherlands since they were matters within just one country, [436] this situation in Austria was addressed quite publicly by five prominent Dutch Brethren workers. They disagreed strongly with what had been done by the German KLC Brethren as well as the fact it had been done across national lines in Austria since the long-standing custom was not to impose one country's teachings on the assemblies in another country. In response to the activities in Austria, Ouweneel released a German-language publication in 1992 entitled, *Sektiererei: Ihre Gefahren für die "Brüderbewegung"* (*Sectarianism: Its Dangers for the 'Brethren Movement'*).<sup>45</sup> In it he critiqued the insular nature of the KLC assemblies with their 'circles of fellowship' – an idea that he said was unknown to Darby and Kelly<sup>46</sup> – and urged a wider vision such as was held by the early Brethren in accordance with the Bible, especially in matters of reception to the assembly. He notes that the early Brethren certainly were not isolationist, but spoke specifically against an approach which divided the body of Christ: 'The question was not if anyone has or had certain aspects of the Christian truth or in which church or religious community someone was a member, but the question solely of whether the person was in communion with God determined whether someone was welcome to fellowship at the Lord's table, which they shared with *one another*.'<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, Ouweneel was careful in this booklet to defend against the accusation that he and others who worked with him were 'Open Brethren'; rather, they merely were those who held to what originally was held by the Brethren.<sup>48</sup> Twenty-two 'leading brothers' from Germany, France, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States responded to Ouweneel's *Sektiererei* as well as to written reports circulated about the three 'Gladbeck discussions' held in 1992–3 with the German Open Brethren at a moated castle in Gladbeck in Germany. In their 21 March 1994 letter to the Dutch assemblies, they recommended that Ouweneel and four other prominent Dutch workers no longer be welcome until they change their views, especially as speakers who would be welcome at conferences.<sup>49</sup> [437] Steenhuis, Ouweneel, and Medema responded with their own lengthy letter

45. Schneider, 'Kurzer Abriss der aktuellen Spaltungsbewegung unter den "geschlossenen Brüdern"', 2. This work also was published nearly simultaneously in French and only later in Dutch. Ulrich Müller und Michael Schneider, "'Keiner kann mir Vorwürfe machen, dass ich mich geändert habe": Interview mit Willem J. Ouweneel', 14, *bruederbewegung*.<sup>de</sup>, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/ouweneel-interview.pdf>>, accessed 30 Jan. 2019.

46. Willem Ouweneel, *Sektiererei: Ihre Gefahren für die "Brüderbewegung"* (*Sectarianism: Its Dangers for the 'Brethren Movement'*), 2nd ed., 18, *bruederbewegung*.<sup>de</sup>, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/ouweneelsektiererei.pdf>>, accessed 29 June 2019.

47. Ouweneel, *Sektiererei: Ihre Gefahren für die "Brüderbewegung"*, 9.

48. Ouweneel, *Sektiererei: Ihre Gefahren für die "Brüderbewegung"*, 19–20. Interestingly, in the historical section of this booklet, Ouweneel recorded that any Brethren group which saw another group as less sectarian than themselves was considered 'Open'. Ouweneel also wrote that 'For many simple brothers and sisters, well-known designations like "open brothers" and "open principles" are completely despicable, although they do not know exactly at all what is meant by it.' *Idem*, 20.

49. 'An die Heiligen und Geliebten des Herrn in den Niederlanden, die bekennen und begehren, auf der Grundlage des einen Leibes Christi und in dem Wunsch zur Bewahrung der Einheit des Geistes im Namen unseres teuren Herrn Jesus zusammenzukommen' ('To the saints and beloved of the Lord in the Netherlands who profess and desire to come together in the name of our precious Lord Jesus on the basis of the one body of Christ and in the desire to preserve the unity of the Spirit'), 21 Mar. 1994;

of 23 March 1994, addressed to at least the Dutch and German assemblies, outlining the aforementioned events of the past few years in France, the United States and Canada, Germany, and Austria as well as the sectarian moves among the KLC Brethren.<sup>50</sup> But the matter did not end there.

Also in reply to *Sektiererei*, the German Exclusive Günter Vogel wrote a lengthy pamphlet in 1994 entitled, *Die Einheit des Geistes bewahren (Keeping the Unity of the Spirit)*.<sup>51</sup> In it, he addressed both the nature and the process of taking the decision to exclude someone from fellowship. In particular, he addressed the independent and yet connexional nature of the KLC Brethren via a historical review. Little of his presentation contained new thoughts among the Brethren, but he again brought to the fore the arguments common among the connexional Brethren of a number of divisions. In the main, though, Vogel's pamphlet was a point-by-point critique of Ouweneel's 1992 publication, *Sektiererei*, and also some of the writings of Medema. Subsequent to 1994, Vogel's pamphlet was translated into at least Dutch and English. The Dutch version contains quite a solemn statement in its Foreword by the prominent Dutch figures, Jan Rouw and Tony Jonathan: 'This brochure has been meant as a prophetic warning. It shows a genuine love from the writer to the Lord and His own. Written carefully and well documented, it gives us directions how we can come together around the Lord and at the same time it warns us about possible deviations.'<sup>52</sup>

Vogel notes that the early Brethren understood that there exists 'only one Church of God, one body of Christ, one house of God consisting of all the believers on the earth ... and the local church which includes all believers in one area.'<sup>53</sup> He further writes that as part of this

{438} 'every meeting acts as an expression of the one body of Christ', as a representation of the complete house of God. For this reason, the local brothers have a responsibility when they exercise discipline – to the local meeting and possibly also to provide brothers from elsewhere who come with questions – to provide a clear and concrete report concerning the fact of the matter, and from the Bible make clear that, for example, an exclusion really was a necessary action of the assembly.<sup>54</sup>

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Schneider, 'Kurzer Abriss der aktuellen Spaltungsbewegung {437} unter den "geschlossenen Brüdern"', 3. The Gladbeck discussions were held to try to overcome the divisions between the 'Freier Brüderkreis' (Free Brothers) and the 'Alte Versammlungen' (Old Assemblies) in Germany, and Ouweneel and Medema came initially as observers. For an overview of these discussions as well as links to the reports of these three meetings see 'Gladbecker Gespräche', *bruederbewegung*.<sup>de</sup>, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/themen/gladbeckergespraech.html>>, accessed 29 June 2019.

50. 'An einige interessierte Brüder in den Niederlanden und Flandern' ('To Several Interested Brethren in the Netherlands and Flanders'), 23 Mar. 1994.
51. I am indebted to Michael Schneider for bringing this important pamphlet to my attention as well as to John Rush, librarian of Emmaus Bible College in Dubuque, IA, for locating a copy for me.
52. J[an] Rouw and T[ony] Jonathan, 'Voorwoord', in Vogel, *De Eenheid van de Geest bewaren*. Interestingly, Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.'s, translator's preface to the English-language version of Vogel's book is less heavy in its presentation; Vedder's preface is characterized both by a certain sadness and desire for healing of the divisions. See Eugene P. Vedder Jr., 'Translator's Preface to the English Edition', in *Keeping the Unity of the Spirit* (Hückeswagen, 1995).
53. Günter Vogel, *Die Einheit des Geistes bewahren (Keeping the Unity of the Spirit)* (Hückeswagen, 1994), section 1.1. The copy used in the present essay is primarily the Dutch translation, *idem*, *De Eenheid van de Geest bewaren*, <[https://uitzicht.net/documenten/samenkomen/2000-01-27\\_Eenheid\\_vd\\_Geest\\_bewaren\\_GV.doc](https://uitzicht.net/documenten/samenkomen/2000-01-27_Eenheid_vd_Geest_bewaren_GV.doc)>, {438} accessed 23 Apr. 2019.
54. Vogel, *Die Einheit des Geistes bewahren*, section 2.

Happily, he does note that he had extensive and cordial correspondence with Ouweneel and Henk Medema concerning his ideas versus theirs, a perspective confirmed by Ouweneel.<sup>55</sup> While Vogel notes he shared the concerns of Ouweneel, Medema, and Steenhuis about the assemblies, he also notes he did not share their proposed solutions.<sup>56</sup>

Vogel would not be the only pamphleteer who criticized Ouweneel's writings as well as those of Medema and Steenhuis. Hilvert Wijnholds of Elburg in the Netherlands wrote *Ernstige gevolgen van verschuiving in opvattingen (Serious Consequences of Shifting Opinions)*, a Dutch KLC document which outlined his criticism of changes in thinking and teaching on reception, unity or independency, defilement, and the Open Brethren.<sup>57</sup> The introductory pages to Wijnholds's work presents a parallel of the then present divisions among the KLC with the divisions of Israel.

The first division of the people of Israel occurred immediately after the blessed reign of king Solomon. It is very important to determine the root of this division: In the life of *king* Solomon God sees conformity to this world (the serving of the idols of other nations) and disobedience to His Word (1 Ki. 11:11; Dt. 17:14–20). However, we conclude from the words the prophet Ahijah spoke to Jeroboam (1 Ki. 11:31–33) that God stressed the worldliness and disobedience *of the entire nation*. Does this portion not contain a very serious lesson for each of us? The bad spiritual condition of God's people often accompanies the bad spiritual condition of her leaders. As a result of this, all experience God's chastening hand: "This thing is from Me" (1 Ki. 12:24).

Dear brothers and sisters, do we see the resemblance between the spiritual condition in our day and in Solomon and Rehoboam's days? Are we willing to acknowledge that we are collectively guilty of the division among us? Are we prepared to ask ourselves to what degree the failure of our leaders has been brought about by our (my) spiritual lukewarmness, through our (my) worldliness and disobedience to God's Word?<sup>58</sup>

A complicating factor in all this is the cultural difference in how the Dutch and Germans generally approach matters of disagreement. In Germany, protest means revolution; in the Netherlands, protest is an exchange of ideas, albeit sometimes sharply. The Dutch are {439} able to hold a tension of multiple views since each one is entitled to his own opinion. In contrast, the German mentality is more like that of an army that marches in step following her leaders, as one man observed. For example, in a conference in Germany, one Dutch brother witnessed an occasion that when a man rose to speak, a leading brother motioned for him to sit back down, and he did. He notes this would never have happened in the Netherlands. The Dutch organize themselves around a 'polder model' in which all have a say, whereas the Germans have more of a hierarchical model in all areas.<sup>59</sup>

Not long after these events, the storm broke over the Netherlands and its effects were felt worldwide.

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55. Vogel, *Die Einheit des Geistes bewahren*, section 1.3. Willem Ouweneel, e-mail to author, 24 Apr. 2019.

56. Vogel, *Die Einheit des Geistes bewahren*, 49.

57. H. Wijnholds, *Serious Consequences of Shifting Opinions* (n.pl., [1995]), 5.

58. Wijnholds, *Serious Consequences*, 3.

59. Müller and Schneider, 'Keiner kann mir Vorwürfe machen, dass ich mich geändert habe', 15. Dutch decision-making, the *polder model*, is a consensus model which has its roots in Dutch history. Since much of the Netherlands consists of land reclaimed from the sea, all the people in a given area, a polder, have had to cooperate in order to build and maintain the dykes which hold back the water. This centuries-old practice has created 'an ingrained habit of co-operation and consultation' in all areas of life. See 'Model makers', *The Economist*, 4 May 2002, <<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2002/05/04/model-makers>>, accessed 18 July 2020.



### The storm strikes

On 26 November 1995, a letter was sent by Den Helder to all the assemblies in the Netherlands and Flanders which in part read:

For years, the recognition of assembly decisions has been handled very lightly in our midst. We name as examples:

a) A couple who were excluded in Den Helder on 15 April 1990 were admitted to Heiloo without any talk of remediation and with the consent of the assemblies in Amsterdam, Beverwijk, and Zaandijk on 17 April 1992. They informed all assemblies in the Netherlands and Flanders on 11 June 1992 of this act of independence. We were therefore obliged to inform you in detail on this matter on 3 October 1992, and also on 4 June 1994 after incorrect reporting of the three aforementioned assemblies on 13 May 1994. We have not yet heard from Heiloo that it regrets this act and has reversed it.

b) Four brothers, independent of their local meetings, recommended ‘the Meiberg’ in Aalten on 30 March 1995 as an assembly testimony, while three surrounding assemblies (at Dieren, Dinxperlo, and Warnsveld) had taken a decision on 20 September 1979 not to recognize them anymore as such.<sup>60</sup>

While the issue of the exclusion of family A. which was mentioned both earlier and above in point a) was significant, the larger issue was joined when Den Helder released its letter of November 1995 in which it publically excluded an assembly in Aalten (the Meiberg), as well as five prominent brothers in the Netherlands along with their local assemblies: J. G. [Jacob Gerrit] ‘Jaap’ Fijnvandraat (1925–2012) at Leeuwarden; his brother J. Ph. [Johannes Philippus] Fijnvandraat (1923–2014) at Sneek; Henk Medema, {440} Jr., at Apeldoorn (1950–2024); Willem Ouweneel (b. 1944) at Utrecht; and Dato Steenhuis at Nijverdal (b. 1937).<sup>61</sup> The summary paragraph of the letter breaking fellowship with the ‘Dutch Five’, as they were to be known, clearly stated:

Brothers and sisters, we look for the Word of God in the face of this. Circumstances are such that we no longer can acknowledge the above-mentioned circles of believers in Heiloo, in Aalten (Meiberg), the five said brothers with the local assemblies behind them, as well as all those who want to stay connected with them in their way, as believers that gather on the basis of Scripture. They have left the principles of gathering, and therefore we can no longer allow them to fellowship at the Lord’s table. Conscious of our weakness, we have the desire to hold fast to God’s unchanging Word; we wish to continue with what we have always learned.<sup>62</sup>

Less than two months later, a letter from a number of Dutch assemblies and one in Belgium to ‘the assemblies abroad’ was sent on 4 January 1996 rejecting Den Helder’s pronouncements as well as rejecting Den Helder’s viewpoint, among others, on the recognition of elders, the role of women, the involvement in politics, and their categorical rejection of theology and philosophy.<sup>63</sup>

Other negative responses to Den Helder’s letter included one from Canada a few months later which stated, ‘I regret that it calls for separation on the basis of practical problems in assemblies which those at a distance cannot judge ... I regret that I have not seen an effort on their part, as I have seen on the part of others, to help the assemblies in

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60. Den Helder ‘Aan de gelovigen die belijden samen de komen tot de Naam van de Heer Jezus in Nederland en Vlaanderen’ (‘To the believers who profess to gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus in the Netherlands and Flanders’), 26 Nov. 1995.

61. Den Helder ‘Aan de gelovigen’, 26 Nov. 1995.

62. Den Helder ‘Aan de gelovigen’, 26 Nov. 1995.

63. ‘An die “Versammlungen” im Ausland’ (‘To the “assemblies” abroad’), 4 Jan. 1996.



Holland to discern the shift in teaching that has led to the practical problems that they refer to.’<sup>64</sup>

Still another negative response came from the KLC assembly in Ajax, Canada, in subsequent years as the controversy continued.

During 1997, Den Helder and some assemblies they had recognized wrote several letters that gave evidence of their extreme exclusiveness. This culminated in a letter written by seven assemblies (Den Helder and six others) on January 24, 1998, to the assemblies in Germany. ... A further exchange of letters between these seven assemblies and five other assemblies they had until then recognized, but which were openly refusing their extreme claims, make it abundantly clear that they regard themselves as being the only ones having the Lord’s table, so that they are the assembly. We, together with many brethren in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, regard this teaching – just as we do that of independency – as a definite hindrance to fellowship with assemblies that would continue to hold it.

While we have been speaking primarily about the Netherlands, these two extremes are having their devastating effects worldwide, affecting also the missionary work. Therefore we are greatly concerned about these developments, ... also in North America. There are leanings towards those opposite extremes which have now become so clearly evident (441) in the Netherlands. On this continent many have already separated for the new way. We ourselves have a growing sense of urgency that we as assemblies in North America, should together confess our collective guilt and make known where we stand with regards to both of *the two evils* reported in this letter (Judg. 20:26–28).<sup>65</sup>

The UK assemblies seemingly took various approaches to the troubles among the KLC. For example, a letter of 15 July 1998 supporting Den Helder’s stance was circulated for any to sign; it noted that ‘since 1988 we have received news about doctrinal and practical developments among the Lord’s people in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe,’<sup>66</sup> news which caused concern. The letter goes on to explain the slowness to respond was the result of language and geographical challenges. For them, these challenges were overcome by English translations of the two previously mentioned works by Wijnholds and Vogel as well as reception of reports in the press of ‘the ongoing “merging activities” between meetings we used to regard as gathered unto the Lord’s Name and Open Brethren assemblies in the Netherlands’.<sup>67</sup> Those who agreed with the letter’s outlook were to return it with their signature of assent to W. R. Dronsfield in Lowestoft. Representatives of the assemblies in Plumstead, Hounslow, and North Kensington in London, and Belfast, Chelmsford, and the retirement centre in Whitley Bay signed the letter, as well as individual signatories from Ipswich, Birmingham, and Lowestoft. The letter also noted that the assemblies in Brighton and Treforest had endorsed the letter though their signatories were not specified.<sup>68</sup>

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64. John van Dijk to ‘Dear Brs.’, letter from the van Dijk home in Ajax, Canada, 8 May 1996, 1. This letter was written in response to a fax which was not available to this author.

65. The assembly in Ajax, Canada, to the Den Helder meeting, 25 Apr. 1998, signed by Luc Favarger, Jake Redekop, John van Dijk, and Eugene P. Vedder Jr.

66. The Meeting Room, 13 Plum Lane, Plumstead Common, London, to the meetings in the Netherlands, 15 July 1998.

67. The Meeting Room, 15 July 1998.

68. The Meeting Room, 15 July 1998. Of interest to note is that Dronsfield’s meeting did not sign as a whole. Additionally, a hand-written note on the copy of this letter used by the present writer observed that Whitley Bay was an ‘old peoples’ home’ (even though the letter’s closing said it came from ‘the assemblies gathered unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ’), and the signatories were characterized as ‘two elderly inmates!’. Another hand-written note says some of the listed signatories did not realize what they had signed or have a copy of the letter.

Other assemblies in the UK seemingly took a more direct approach as they investigated in person what they had heard. In late 1998 or early 1999, representatives were sent to meet with four groups in the Netherlands to try to ascertain all that had transpired and the reasons for what had transpired. The four groups were Ouweneel, Medema and Steenhuis; the brothers Fijnvandraat; a group from various parts of Holland who still were in fellowship with those in the first two groups; and a similar group who had withdrawn from fellowship with the other three groups, though they still were receiving on an individual basis.<sup>69</sup>

The group from the UK also requested a meeting with Den Helder, but ‘the request was not accepted as they felt sufficient information was available.’<sup>70</sup> While the meetings with the various groups helped further to illuminate issues pertaining to all that had happened and {442} was happening, no progress was made in resolving the outstanding issues. The British visitors, however, were very complimentary of those with whom they met, irrespective of in which of the four groups these Dutchmen fell.

We have been deeply impressed by the openness of brethren and many showed their evident sincerity to do what is right before the Lord, according to His Word. We saw also brokenness of spirit and contrition on the part of many as to the current state of affairs, with its consequent dishonour to the Name of the Lord. We do need to support our Dutch brethren in prayer as they seek to deal with these matters.<sup>71</sup>

Because of the connexional nature of the KLC assemblies, Den Helder’s November 1995 letter had a very wide-ranging effect; all assemblies in the KLC circles worldwide were expected to follow the judgement of Den Helder, especially with regard to the exclusion of the Dutch Five and their assemblies. Perhaps the most well-known brother worldwide of the five was Ouweneel since he was recognized commonly as one of the most important figures – certainly the most prolific writer by far – among the Dutch KLC Brethren in the latter part of the twentieth century. One German publication even labelled him as ‘a symbol of the “Closed Brethren”’ and a ‘second Darby’.<sup>72</sup> For many years he was a close associate or disciple of H. L. (Hendrik Leendert) Heijkoop (1906–1995),<sup>73</sup> commonly recognized as the most important figure of the second half of the twentieth century among the Dutch-speaking KLC and quite significant even beyond.<sup>74</sup> But to say that Ouweneel and Heijkoop were significant among only the Dutch-speaking KLC Brethren would be to underplay their prominence among the KLC worldwide. Ouweneel’s preaching and writing had and continues to have a worldwide reach. Thus, Den Helder’s accusations were

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69. ‘To saints gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus’, signed by J. Brett, G. Hughes, M. Johnson, I. Mears, M. Packer, D. Pettman, D. Smith, D. Taylor, UK, 26 Jan. 1999.

70. ‘To saints gathered’, 26 Jan. 1999.

71. ‘To saints gathered’, 26 Jan. 1999.

72. Arndt Schnepfer, ‘Die “geschlossenen Brüder” öffnen sich: Über den Umbruch der darbystischen Kreise in Deutschland’ (‘The “Closed Brothers” are opening up: about the upheaval of Darbyist circles in Germany’), *Christsein Heute*, 1 (2005), 28–9.

73. Looking back, Ouweneel even called himself a ‘Heijkoopianer’. Müller and Schneider, ‘Keiner kann mir Vorwürfe machen, dass ich mich geändert habe’, 9.

74. E.g., ‘Vergadering van Gelovigen’, Wikisage, <[http://nl.wikisage.org/wiki/Vergadering\\_van\\_gelovigen#Geschiedenis\\_in\\_Nederland](http://nl.wikisage.org/wiki/Vergadering_van_gelovigen#Geschiedenis_in_Nederland)>, accessed 3 June 2019. Interestingly, Ouweneel notes that Heijkoop was on the right wing of the KLC assemblies in the Netherlands, but considered on the left by the leading brothers of the German KLC assemblies. Müller and Schneider, ‘Keiner kann mir Vorwürfe machen, dass ich mich geändert habe’, 6.

difficult to ignore, especially as Ouweneel became more and more known as ‘a reformer within’ the KLC Brethren.<sup>75</sup>

Assemblies in the KLC circles worldwide thus were expected to take a side; as had happened in the past among other connexional assemblies, people and assemblies were asked to ‘judge the question’. As examples, a young Dutchman who tried to visit an assembly in Buenos Aires and a German man who tried to celebrate the Lord’s supper at an assembly in India each were asked to take a stand for or against the five brothers, and Ouweneel in particular. While French assemblies still asked visitors their position for or against Odon, to this was added an additional question concerning ‘Vielém Oevenèll’ [443] (Willem Ouweneel). Ouweneel notes that he received letters from around the world which told him he was no longer welcome nor would be the other four brothers or people from the assemblies of the Dutch Five. In a number of cases, these letters were in broken English from assemblies in parts of the world Ouweneel never had visited and had no plans to visit, such as Nepal and Bhutan.<sup>76</sup>

Ouweneel would end up being the focal point of most of the criticism subsequent to Den Helder’s letter of exclusion, doubtlessly because of his voluminous writing and speaking engagements as well as his role as an academic who freely explored many ideas in the public arena. Next in line was Medema, since he was both the publisher of Ouweneel’s books and the principal magazine printed for the Dutch-speaking KLC assemblies; moreover, he was a somewhat prolific writer himself, especially of articles. Nonetheless, all of the Dutch Five received criticism and made attempts to explain their positions. Jaap Fijnvandraat, for example, corresponded with Canadian KLC Brethren and later with an assembly in Breuillet in France, trying to clarify his position after Den Helder’s letter of exclusion of the Dutch Five and their assemblies was sent out.<sup>77</sup>

As time progressed, Ouweneel and others formed more and more ties with a variety of evangelical ministries and churches, a move most unwelcome to the KLC assemblies, and especially to those in Germany. Ouweneel even drew the attention of a sharply worded Dutch-Baptist critic of the ‘drift’ among evangelicals generally who dedicated much of his criticism towards Ouweneel on his website.<sup>78</sup> The record shows, however, that the frequent practice of seeing the Dutch Five as one unit was not a helpful one since they differed among themselves on a number of issues. Further, they took pains to state clearly that they stood individually responsible for their actions before the Lord even as they also noted that much about them that ‘has been circulated was written by brethren who never wrote to us or visited us, whom in many cases some of us have never met’ in their letter responding to the March 1994 letter of the twenty-two.<sup>79</sup> Ouweneel, Medema, and Steen-

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75. Schnepfer, ‘Die “geschlossenen Brüder” öffnen sich: Über den Umbruch der darbystischen Kreise in Deutschland’, 28.

76. Ouweneel, ‘Scheuring van 1995’, 7–8.

77. J. G. Fijnvandraat, ‘Letter to Luc Favarger, Jake Redekop, John van Dijk, Eugene P. Vedder jr. and all those who are interested in the contents of this letter’, 11 Dec. 1996. *Idem*, ‘Aan de gelovigen die zich in Breuillet [*sic*] tot de naam van de Heer vergaderen en anderen die voor dit schrijven mogelijkwijs belangstelling hebben’ (‘To the believers who gather to the name of the Lord in Breuillet and others who may be interested in this writing’), Apr. 1997.

78. A. P. Geelhoed, ‘Dr. W. J. Ouweneel Dossier’, Toets alles, <<http://www.toetsalles.nl/>>, accessed 27 June 2019. For information on Geelhoed, see J. M. D. de Heer, ‘Woord voor woord betrouwbaar’ (‘Reliable word for word’), *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 23 Nov. 2000, <<https://www.rd.nl/oud/kl/001123kl03.html>>, accessed 27 June 2019.

79. Dato Steenhuis, Willem Ouweneel, and Henk Medema, English-language letter, 24 June 1996.

huis were perhaps most alike in their more ‘progressive’ thinking, though even they had their differences,<sup>80</sup> while the Fijnvandraat brothers were somewhat more ‘traditional’ {444} in their outlook; one brother even chaired a meeting which investigated reconstituting a form of a connexional circle of assemblies in the Netherlands.

By the end of the 1990s, then, the ‘Reunited Brethren’ had once again disunited in a significant way, contrary to claims otherwise.<sup>81</sup>

### The aftermath of the deluge

The aftermath of the KLC division of the 1990s generally took two paths. While some sought a middle way, the majority either moved into a more open stance or stayed in ever tightening circles. For example, almost all of the former KLC assemblies in the Netherlands became de facto Open Brethren, though many continued to eschew the label, and the majority of this majority even joined together with the historically Open Brethren assemblies on one Dutch assembly address list. As Ouweneel observed: ‘A whole new concern rose. The question no longer was, “With which African, Australian or Asian meetings are we actually now ‘in fellowship?’” but, “How can we reinforce the links with Bible-believing Christians in our own region?”’<sup>82</sup> Of the approximately eighty former KLC assemblies, all but five broke with the German KLC Brethren. Even then, the later actions of the Den Helder assembly were viewed as so extreme that the German KLC Brethren broke with them.<sup>83</sup> Among the Flemish assemblies, the one in Ninove – the oldest Flemish KLC assembly – eventually joined with the Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen, an association of Open Brethren assemblies planted in the 1970s and 1980s primarily by the MSC-listed Canadian missionaries Richard Haverkamp and Henk Gelling.<sup>84</sup> This left only a few others in Flanders; the Gent assembly was characterized as being part of the ‘right wing’ after the division of the 1990s, and the one in Rekkem remained within KLC circles. A small house-church of a few people in Oostende also exists and is ‘supported by and closely related to Rekkem’.<sup>85</sup>

Those who never had left the Dutch KLC circles and a ‘middle group’ came together at a meeting co-organized by Gijs van Schaik in Zaandijk on 31 January 2009 to try to again form some sort of connexional circles among the Dutch assemblies, something that had been absent for over ten years. A newspaper article of November 2008 noted that many among the Brethren thought the survival of the assemblies was not promising. This article alerted people from the most conservative stream that there were others who held similar views on many matters in the ‘middle group’. While Johan Fijnvandraat did attend

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80. E.g., while Ouweneel had been voting for many years and even had himself posted as the last candidate on the ChristenUnie party’s list for the Dutch lower house of government, the *Tweede kamer*, Medema didn’t vote at all, at least until the time of a 1994 article in the *Nederlands Dagblad*. Editor, Church Life, “‘Vergadering van gelovigen niet gewend aan {444} publiciteit’” (“‘The assemblies of believers are not used to publicity’”), *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 Feb. 1994, 2.

81. Massimo Introvigne claims that this is an exaggeration, but the evidence seems otherwise. See Massimo Introvigne, *The Plymouth Brethren* (New York, 2018), 79.

82. Ouweneel, ‘Scheuring van 1995’, 10.

83. Müller and Schneider, ‘Keiner kann mir Vorwürfe machen, dass ich mich geändert habe’, 21.

84. For a history of the Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen, see Thomas J. Marinello, *New Brethren in Flanders: A History of the Origins and Development of the Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen, 1971–2008* (Eugene, OR, 2013).

85. Jacob Vergouwe, e-mail to the author, 19 Apr. 2019.

and even chair the meeting, other prominent Dutchmen such as Gerard Kramer from the assembly in Brunssum did not attend. Kramer noted,

{445} The organizers are very winsome, and it evokes nostalgia for the past. But it looks like a restoration of a time that has passed and that can no longer be explained to young people. I have the idea that they again want to record exactly from which Assembly people can be admitted to the Holy Supper and from which they cannot. This is a new type of formalization that does not fit with the times.<sup>86</sup>

Other attempts at retightening were somewhat more subtle such as, for example, the production of a new edition of the Dutch-language hymn book used among the more conservative former KLC assemblies. The 2016 Dutch-language assembly hymnbook was entitled *Lofzangen en geestelijke liederen* (*Hymns and Spiritual Songs*).<sup>87</sup> This hymnbook combined the sixteenth edition (1979) of the 236 songs from *Geestelijke Liederen* (*Spiritual Songs*) with some of the songs from *Lichtbundel* (*Light Collection*)<sup>88</sup> as well as some new songs. *Lichtbundel* (1999) originally contained hymns 237–415 as a continuation of *Geestelijke Liederen*. It had been issued by the then publisher of the Dutch-language hymnal, Henk Medema, and drew from a wide selection of hymns and praise songs, mostly translated from English. Medema published the eighteenth edition *Geestelijke Liederen* in 2003, though some assemblies found the inclusion of a 1995 supplement of hymns 237–57, and the deletion and replacement of six hymns, an unwelcome change and kept using the seventeenth edition (1993).<sup>89</sup> One group of musically literate observers who grew up among the KLC did well to note that deletion and replacement of hymns by the new publisher as collected in *Lofzangen en geestelijke liederen* represented ‘very traditional assembly material’ and ‘a much stronger assembly-flavour’ as well as the loss of many praise hymns, those which pertain to the present rule of Jesus and Christians in society.<sup>90</sup>

One of the more noticeable effects in North America in the aftermath of the division among the KLC was a move to closer involvement with ministries of the Open Brethren. For example, Living Waters Bible Camp,<sup>91</sup> a KLC ministry in southwestern Wisconsin, began reaching out to Emmaus Bible College (EBC)<sup>92</sup> in the mid-1990s, asking the school if the camp could advertise there for summer-camp counsellors. Prior to this, Living Waters Bible Camp had had nothing to do with this governmentally accredited flagship school of tertiary education for the Open Brethren.

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86. ‘Vergaderingbroeders ontmoeten elkaar’ (‘The Brethren meet together’), *Nederlands Dagblad*, 20 Jan. 2009.

87. *Lofzangen en geestelijke liederen* (*Hymns and Spiritual Songs*) (Aalten, NL, 2016), <<https://www.uitdrukkingswoorden.nl/webshop/producten/bundel-met-411-lofzangen-en-geestelijke-liederen-hardcover>>, accessed 24 June 2019. This title comes from Col. 3:16 in the NBG51 and HSV.

88. *Lichtbundel* does not translate well into English in a literal rendering. The ‘Light’ in the title is an allusion to light from above – God’s light. I am indebted to Wessel Sløetjes for this helpful interpretation which only could be adjudged rightly by a native Dutchman.

89. ‘*Geestelijke Liederen* (liedboek)’ (‘*Spiritual Songs* [songbook]’), <[https://christipedia.miraheze.org/wiki/Geestelijke\\_Liederen\\_%28liedboek%29](https://christipedia.miraheze.org/wiki/Geestelijke_Liederen_%28liedboek%29)>, accessed 24 June 2019.

90. ‘Brief van de Pijlergroep “Vieren” aan “De Tien”’ (‘Letter from the “worship” committee to “the ten” [oversight committee for the assembly]’), 1 July 2016. This was a requested report evaluating the newly published *Lofzangen en geestelijke liederen*.

91. Living Waters Bible Camp, <<https://www.lwbc.org/>>, accessed 26 June 2019.

92. Emmaus Bible College, <<https://www.emmaus.edu/>>, accessed 26 June 2019.



{446} In 2000, Ian Taylor, one of the conveners and signatories of the subsequent 1999 Lake Geneva Conference Report,<sup>93</sup> went to the first annual Iron Sharpens Iron conference held at EBC.<sup>94</sup> He says, ‘I was so impressed with the ministry that I asked Ken Daughters, the president at that time, if he could send a representative from the College each year with information about the College to the Winter Youth Retreat ... so that the many of the young people who were attending the WYR at that time would get to know about the College.’<sup>95</sup> Taylor, who was on the Board of the Winter Youth Retreat, notes that this resulted in many teens from former KLC assemblies attending EBC, including the son of another Winter Youth Retreat board member, Phil Boom. Taylor would be invited to be a member of the Board of EBC in 2004, and he eventually became a member of the Board of Emmaus International in 2006 and its chairman in 2016. Boom later began working at EBC in 2010 as the Chair of the Business Department and Program Director of the Business Administration, Management and Leadership at EBC and would go on to become president of EBC in 2013.<sup>96</sup>

In contrast to these moves, the onetime missionary to Colombia and Armenia, and present full-time worker in the Netherlands, Philip Nunn, wrote in 2002 of signs of a new tightening among the assemblies which had stayed within the original KLC circles. His comments were written after a twelve-month sabbatical during which he visited ‘7 conferences and about 50 different assemblies spread over England, Germany, France, Holland, Italy, Spain and the US’. In these remarks he observed, among other things, a movement towards central administration in who may participate in Bible conferences such as the formerly open-to-all conference in Dillenburg, Germany; significant financial influence by one committee in Germany which provides ‘a frightfully high proportion of finances supporting national labourers, missionaries, conferences, ministries, etc.’; and the exercise of control on worldwide mission work. In addition, Nunn observed a tightening, indicated by which local churches may be included on assembly address lists and from which assemblies may visitors be received. Cooperation with local churches outside this official list, as well as cooperation with parachurch organizations such as the Gideons or Wycliffe Bible Translators, was viewed {447} as ‘defilement’.<sup>97</sup> Nunn’s initial writing was followed by another in 2003 in which he encouraged the assemblies to re-examine their beliefs and practices and move towards or keep a more open stance of fellowship with other assemblies and evangelical groups. If not, he suggested that

Probably some saints and assemblies will prefer to continue in the recently narrowed path. They wish to pursue the application of the Levitical understanding of defilement on the Church and to accept as

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93. The ‘Lake Geneva Conference Report’ is a sixty-page, typed record of a five-day gathering, beginning 1 March 1999, of 28 men from the KLC assemblies ‘who responded to a general invitation to study the Word of God’ and a time of prayer at Lake Geneva Conference Center, WI. This report was sent out under the signatures of 8 of the participants. ‘We determined to set aside our own opinions and convictions, and to allow the Lord to identify those principles and practices which were in accord with His purposes for His Church.’ ‘Lake Geneva Conference Report’, 1.

94. ‘Iron Sharpens Iron is an annual church leadership development conference for sharpening one another’s vision and skills for building the local church.’ Iron Sharpens Iron, Emmaus Bible College, <<https://www.emmaus.edu/isi>>, accessed 26 June 2019.

95. Ian Taylor, ‘Re: Lake Geneva Conference/Report 1999 #2’, e-mails to author, 26 June 2019.

96. Taylor, ‘Re: Lake Geneva Conference/Report 1999 #2’. Emmaus International formerly was called ECS Ministries and the Emmaus Correspondence School before that.

97. Philip Nunn, ‘Observations of a Concerned Missionary’, 8 Mar. 2002, 1, 8–11, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/nunnobservations.pdf>>, accessed 24 June 2019.



binding all assembly judgments. This is their choice, and we must respect it. But I would heartily urge these dear saints to be historically consistent and join the Tunbridge Wells Brethren group, rather than pressure the rest of the reluctant saints and assemblies down this ever narrowing path.<sup>98</sup>

Ouweneel was just as direct in an early twenty-first century interview when he said,

The Exclusive wing of the Brethren movement now has all the hallmarks of a sect: a strong leadership; pronounced teachings that outsiders neither understand nor accept; isolation and seclusion; it's hard to get into the group, and when you're inside it's very difficult to get out of it. This is all typical of a sect! But there is no other group that is so proud not to be a sect.<sup>99</sup>

Generally, the events and aftermath of the 1990s led to decline in the overall numbers that had been within the KLC assemblies when the storm broke. Many of the younger people left the assemblies altogether including about half of the children of the Dutch Five.<sup>100</sup> Anecdotal reports and estimates from a number of sources report that Germany had about thirty per cent of their assemblies break from the KLC circles, and those in Britain, France, Switzerland, and North America ended with about a fifty-fifty split. KLC assemblies in more economically deprived areas of the world outside of Europe and North America seemingly were more reticent to break away in any substantial numbers if at all. The reason for this reticence which consistently was postulated by Europeans who had left KLC circles was tied to the not insignificant and needed financial support provided by the German Brethren. This reasoning most likely was accurate since Eckhard Bubenzer, the overseer of the millions of German marks annually distributed in the majority world, announced that 'assemblies and missionaries only would continue to receive funds if they separated from the Dutch five'.<sup>101</sup>

#### {448} **Thoughts after the storm**

Perhaps Weremchuk rightly assessed all that had happened and was happening when he wrote his 1998/2004 publication, *Can We Recover the Brethren Legacy?*:

The Brethren legacy can be recovered. It is simply a matter of returning to the openness for the Lord's leading, as in the beginning. The hard thing is keeping it without slipping into the very human habit of wanting to organise, catalogue [*sic*], crystallise things. The more restrictive Brethren have become, the more they have been working against themselves. To survive, and especially to carry on the original idea, they must return to the original openness.

We have to learn to interact with other Christians who really love the Lord and want to follow and obey His Word. Trying to press all of them into a single mould is not possible, nor profitable.

This is what Brethren history has taught us: no one group has the whole truth, and trying to unite all in a single outward form will not work.<sup>102</sup>

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98. Philip Nunn, 'The Re-dividing of the Reunited Brethren: An attempt to diagnose', 14 Mar. 2003, 51, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/nunnredividing.pdf>>, accessed 24 June 2019.

99. Schnepfer, 'Die "geschlossenen Brüder" öffnen sich: Über den Umbruch der darbytischen Kreise in Deutschland', 29.

100. Daniël Gillissen, 'Broederbeweging verbrokkelt' ('The Brethren Movement is Crumbling'), *Nederlands Dagblad*, 15 Nov. 2008, 15.

101. Ouweneel, 'Scheuring van 1995', 8.

102. Max S. Weremchuk, 'Can We Recover the Brethren Legacy?', 15, *bruederbewegung.de*, <<https://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/weremchuklegacy.pdf>>, accessed 15 June 2019.