

Full response to Jesus People Alumni Facebook Posting

Following the airing of “The Cult of the Jesus Army” (episode one: BBC2, July 28th. 2025), the administrator of the “Jesus People Alumni” Facebook Group, Graeme Bird, made a posting which, alas, I reacted to as if it were a red rag to a bull: it seemed to incorporate and encapsulate a whole range of opinions which I not only disagreed with profoundly, but which I also felt shouldn’t go unchallenged – especially as I was named in the posting.

I made an initial posted reply which I kept it as pithy and succinct as possible, with a promise to follow up on it “some place, sometime”. Having now allowed sufficient time to safeguard against anything knee-jerk, I have prepared my response. I remain aware, however, that the JA Alumni group exists primarily to promote positive memories, and so I’m sure that neither the content nor the length of a critique such as this one would be appropriate. I shall therefore make this available by posting it to my “War and Defeat” Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61578282461996>) and also on my website as soon as possible (www.waranddefeat.co.uk)

Firstly, here is the full text of what Graeme wrote:

I thought the BBC ‘documentary’ shoddy really, selected clips from old also negative documentaries, old negative news paper clips. Dark music and dark woods to set a mood which was completely bizarre. A few in a therapy group and a single mum and her two kids to dish the dirt and a couple of ex members interviewed for a day and contributing a few selected half positive seconds; Old clips of Noel saying words with no context whatsoever. Shots of documents that were never actually used or absorbed. No one can build a community like that and have people throw in their lot if they are monsters.

All the reports I’ve read recently confirm that they never knew the man or understood community.

Not to say that JFC couldn’t all have been done better or wiser, or that there weren’t issues, it’s just not an accurate report of what it was. Described by program makers and editors with no belief in the gospel or church or sympathy for communal life just out for notoriety and money and scandal.

They could have mentioned other similar movements; the Amish, Hutterites, Anna Baptists, Bruderhoff, Salvation Army, Methodist movement, monastic life or in fact the early church in Acts.

They could have mentioned the laughter and joy of eating, working, relaxing, meeting, singing, making music, gathering apples, potatoes, hay; having a caring brother or sister, being in a disciple band or a small household group and the complete openness and freedom it brought. The freedom from status and title, the irrelevance of background and past life and complete acceptance of one another. Meetings where anyone could share, speak or sing out or play, or write

songs and poems.

The equality and common ownership of so much; large houses with grounds, lakes and ballrooms, huge cellars, views, farms, and orchards or fruit trees; cattle pigs and chickens, cars, coaches and buses, tractors and Landrovers; building supply shops, jeans shops, healthfood shops, garages and haulage companies. People developed their skills and interests; gardening, sewing, music, building, DIY, mechanics, cooking, driving, speaking, listening, organising, catering, electrics, tent putterupping, car mechanics.

The freedom from mortgages and money worries, from having to succeed and keep up appearances and strive for promotion, titles, status.

No one mentioned the kids loved to bits by a large extended family, the teens taken in tow and given room to find themselves.

Neither were mentioned the damaged, broken people and families who came for support and repair, to kick addictions, to have a home and food, to get out of debt, to get away from abuse. The people who came each week to meetings or travelled from other countries to be a part.

It was strange to see and hear John Everett, my friend, I wonder if he was pleased with the words that were included. I am not sure what has driven him to this - to be an enemy. He came up from Canterbury regularly with three girls for a long time so it wasn't true that he was just taken in by it all. A few years later he interviewed a lot of community people for a thesis or something Noel was keen for him to do, also I recall he objected to some of the farming methods. Many of us early 20s lads, (including Steve the lad found on the rails) struggled with feelings for particular ladies and it was in fact very frustrating to be constrained by the 'structure' at that time as there seemed to be no permitted route for a while. We talked about our obsessions, not sure if it was that that drove him mad.

I was, incidentally, the last person to see the Steve mention in the program, who was found on the rails at the bottom of the farm and I honestly don't know why or how it happened, only that he spent a long time on tractors sometimes till very late at night, got very tired and pressured, that he was very passionate about someone and that he (we assumed jokingly) frequently stated he was clinging on to the edge of the abyss by his finger nails.

In understanding the other deaths one has to consider that all sorts came to us and were accepted by us and some had mental health issues.

I left some thirty five years ago for various reasons and left my siblings and parents there so clearly I had some serious concerns with what it had become, and it was changing all the time. For very many years I was happy and fully expected to die there.

I don't think the boiling of the frog was a good analogy. I think people stay in a situation; community, church, job etc. well aware of some of the issues or negatives until the negatives out-weigh the good – then they take courage and move.

Introduction... Systemic Failings

Note: I will abbreviate Jesus Army/Jesus Fellowship Church to simply JFC. Each of the following sections are “standalone”... no need to read all of them, nor even to read them sequentially.

Graeme Bird's defence of the JFC in response to what he saw as the “shoddy” neglect of the documentary seems to negate much of the rationale for closure of the Fellowship and the establishment of a redress scheme.

When I read the Jesus Fellowship Community Trust's (JFCT's) “closure statement” for the first time, in particular its admission of “systemic failings”, I found it almost unbelievable that this could have been written as an authorized acceptance of culpability on behalf of the JFC. My incredulity was largely based on the detailed account of the systemic failings themselves; shortcomings which I'd been writing and talking about for over forty years and which had always been met with total denial by JFC leaders. It took a long while for the full import of the closure statement to sink in, but a time of great relief came when I finally accepted that...

“This is it! The JFC has come to terms with its past and has accepted the need for closure and the need to make redress for the huge amount of damage caused.”

The statement acknowledged and listed some of the radical and inspirational aims of the JFC, and also the intent of many members to accept them in genuine pursuit of Christian discipleship:

“The Trustees recognise that there is a broad spread of experiences of the JFC, and differing views of its history. The JFC also evolved in its approach, with various forms of teaching, community rules and aims or objectives.

Most members of the Trust wanted to follow a genuine Christian faith within the JFC, which for many included a wholehearted, well-intentioned attempt to live a radical, sharing Christian community life that included and provided support for the marginalised.”

In spite of this acknowledgement, however, the Trustees then turned their attention to the principal objective of the report: an account of the serious nature of the reported abuses, which, they explained, were directly related to the identified systemic problems – listed as follows:

- Leadership Structure and Culture
- Teaching on Forgiveness
- Loyalty and Commitment
- Attitudes to Women

- Wellbeing of Children
- Supervised Relationships and Celibacy
- Suspicion of Education

The statement goes on to identify these failures as ultimately attributable to the teaching and influence of Noel Stanton:

“It is important to make specific reference to Noel Stanton as founder of the JFC. His character and influence directly shaped it in decisive ways, and he was critical to the growth and culture of the church, including its prevailing systemic failings.”

All these were factors which fed into the establishment of the JFCT's Redress Scheme (RS). In recognition that many would have experienced recognizable harm purely on account of having lived within a Community household, the RS issued compensatory payments – Community Adverse Experience payments – to those who were able to satisfactorily confirm their previous residential status. Further to this, individual redress claims were accepted for emotional, physical or sexual abuse. The Trustees approved applications from 217 people – 75% of those who applied.

I was amongst one of the approved applicants. Having refused – rightly or wrongly – to make any kind of claim since leaving in 1982, not even for the return of capital (and therefore stubbornly believing myself **not** to have become beholden to the JFC in any shape or form), I felt it would now be justifiable to submit a claim to the JFCT scheme. As those who have read my book will know, I left the JFC penniless and with no career: for years our family struggled financially. Further still, when it then seemed I had finally settled into a vocational career within the Church of England, I suffered a prolonged psychotic breakdown in consequence of believing that the judgement of God which Noel had invoked on me was indeed taking effect. My career in the church became unsustainable after I'd recovered.

My application to the RS appears to have been rigorously scrutinized, and I was required to provide further supportive evidence. Several months into the application, the medical records for my entire life were requested. This involved a willingness to face questions concerning my teenage LSD experiences, the acute depression I have periodically suffered, and the struggles I have had with drug addiction (Codeine painkillers) and alcoholism. If other claims were subjected to similar scrutiny before being approved, then we can be fairly certain they were definitely genuine ones.

The £9k I received from my claim was very welcome, and some of it has been used to fund publication of my book. Without a shadow of doubt, however, the most meaningful aspect of my redress claim was the written apology I received:

“Dear Mr John Everett,

On behalf of the Jesus Fellowship Community Trust, we are deeply sorry for the experiences you suffered during your time in community and for the distress and harm that these have had on your life; it is matter of profound regret that they were able to happen at all, and in the very place where you should have felt safe from harm.

We recognise that no current actions can compensate for your relationship with others being controlled, and being prevented access to support outside the Community.

We are grateful to you for your courage in ensuring these aspects of the Jesus Fellowship’s past have now been confronted. As you are aware, the Jesus Fellowship Church and Community has now closed down and thus can cause no further hurts.

It is with heartfelt regret that your experience of the Jesus Fellowship was not as it should have been and we genuinely hope that the future holds better things for you.”

This reinforced the generalized apology issued by the National Leadership Team after the “Apostolic Five” had stood down:

“The NLT (National Leadership Team) and the members of the JFC (Jesus Fellowship Church) recognise that, over a sustained period of time, there have been faults and failures in the Church that have had a profound impact on many people’s lives. We are deeply sorry for, and appalled by the abuse that has taken place within Jesus Fellowship Church and the New Creation Christian Community (NCCC) and offer our heartfelt sympathy and unreserved apology to all those affected. Children and vulnerable people were entitled to expect full protection from harm. We acknowledge the pain many of those people continue to feel. As things have become clearer to us, we are grieved and deeply troubled.”

The apology I received from the Trust wasn’t the one I had hoped for since leaving: a genuine, personal apology from those responsible for the way that I and others had been treated. But it nonetheless cut me to the quick and I had to fight back tears (perhaps I shouldn’t have done). The phrase *the Jesus Fellowship Church and Community has now closed down and thus can cause no further hurts* seemed particularly meaningful and relevant, leading me to feel that final closure wasn’t too far away.

The recent documentary, conceived in response to the establishment of the RS, has been a genuine attempt by its creators to “set the record straight” on behalf of those – the many – whose experience of the JFC has been a damaging one. Statements such as the one Graeme Bird has made – endorsed by quite a few others – come across as a denial of everything which the RS, for all its own faults, has been attempting to address. If not expressed overtly, then between the lines of such statements is the assertion:

“This wasn’t MY experience or abiding memory of the Jesus Army/Jesus Fellowship. I acknowledge that abuse and other “bad” things may have happened, as they regrettably do in many institutions; but I wasn’t aware of them and would thoroughly have condemned them if had been... they were NOT representative of the Fellowship itself.

It sounds a compelling statement, but it fails to recognize that – on account of what the JFCT has openly and honestly admitted to be its systemic failings – abuse (of all kinds) and coercion were written into the very fabric of the Fellowship. This acknowledgement is there for all to read in the JFCT’s closure statement: <https://jesus.org.uk/about-jfct/jesus-fellowship-closure/>

All of us who were members of the Fellowship must shoulder a degree of responsibility, myself included. As an elder, in particular, I took part in coercive and emotionally abusive behaviour. I have made a full apology – whenever this has been possible – to those whom I’m aware of having potentially hurt. Graeme himself endorsed what, for me, was the personal devastation of being declared *“cast out and to be treated as a heathen”* when he refused to have anything further to do with me. He has never apologized. In relation to how I was treated, I have included the following passage in my book:

*“Following receipt of my letter, my excommunication was ratified and the flock was instructed to have nothing more to do with me; neither to talk with me on the phone nor write to me, even in response to letters which former friends might receive from me. I was to be regarded as one under the judgement of God. Even dear old Betty, who had been something of a mother to me within the Community, became subject to these dictates. She *did* come to the phone when I rang and asked to speak with her, but then she briefly explained how she couldn’t disobey the instructions she’d been given and wouldn’t be able to speak with me again. Her tears were quite plain as she asked me sincerely for forgiveness. This, together with some much blunter rejections from those who’d been my closest friends, was painful; but I knew I couldn’t allow myself to dwell on what had happened or I would never be able to truly start again. The saddest aspect of all this, I think, was the statement it made about the love and friendship by which, five years previously, I’d been so overwhelmed. *What kind of friendship is it that’s based not on your loyalty to one another but to a “system”? What kind of friendship is it when your friend will “lay down their life for you” one day but then, the next, will scorn and reject you because they’ve discovered your allegiance to the corporate entity isn’t pure?**

Those within the Community were only doing as instructed, of course, and

the pressure to comply was enormous – nigh on irresistible. But no one can hide themselves behind the cloak of corporate responsibility for ever. All corporate action comprises the aggregated action of individuals, and somehow, sometime, everyone must answer for themselves.”

What the exonerative, placatory statements which some have been making suggest is that they weren't abusers themselves, and nor were they aware – let alone approving – of the abuse which DID occur. As such, no responsibility is accepted for what went wrong. *And yet we each played our own part in it all, however small. All of us who failed to acknowledge the systemic failings of the Fellowship by failing to make a stand against Noel Stanton's dictatorial control were complicit; and we continue to be complicit unless we apologize for and distance ourselves from these systemic failings.*

Middle class, materialistic lifestyles.

I have no criticism whatsoever of the lifestyle Graeme now leads, especially as it falls within the broad spectrum of the ones many of us have chosen since leaving the JFC. *Please be sure to keep this in mind for what follows.*

Graeme and his wife, Carole, live an apparently comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Their four-bedroom home is in a comparatively leafy suburb of Milton Keynes. Since leaving the JFC, Graeme has been able to follow his aeronautical passion to train as a qualified pilot, and he is now the registered owner of a single engine aircraft. Now retired, his successful professional career consisted principally of senior/managerial positions within the broad ambit of electronic engineering and design. He has also been a director of his own now-defunct company, Gdbmk Ltd.

Before her own retirement, Carole worked as a health visitor. One would assume that she and Graeme are able to enjoy the secure retirement that their substantial pensions afford them – and which they unquestionably deserve. All of us – I assume – would hope that their comfortable lifestyle has rewarded them with happiness. It is evident, from comments Graeme has made, that he and Carole retain an active, gospel-based Christian faith and church involvement.

I would like to repeat, once again, that none of the above contains a single element of criticism. Were it to do so, it would be a classic case of hypocrisy, of the pot calling the kettle black. Jeanne and I have slowly but surely reached a position of financial security in our retirement. We, too, live in a four-bedroomed house, and we have a small “day boat” on our drive (albeit that if you were to peer under the tarpaulin you would quickly identify it as in need of substantial renovation).

You cannot serve God and Mammon

Noel Stanton, and therefore all those within the JFC who remained faithful to his teaching, would have denounced and attacked Graeme and Carole's current lifestyle – and mine – as being at best *“wishy-washy and compromised”*, and at worse as being totally unworthy of anyone wishing to identify themselves as a disciple of Christ. They would have been judged, without any question whatsoever, as being the kind of Christians who won't allow God to be *“the God of their pockets”* and therefore not truly Christian at all. They would most certainly have been amongst those who, in an animated state of spiritual anger, Noel would have repudiated as those who were unfit to call themselves Christians because they have spurned discipleship; spurned Christ's call to renounce everything in order to follow him.

Let's be clear about this! Noel never ever renounced his expectation that such a commitment should characterize the community lifestyle which was to be the Zion at the very heart of the JFC. Simon Cooper has acknowledged this in his book, *“Fire in our Hearts”*:

“Our community households needed cleansing and reviving. The spirit of radical pioneering had been our genius over the years. This had to be recaptured. If residential community was to be a minority portion in the church, it must be the white hot centre, unadulterated and undiluted. Retaking the central ground was first priority.

We took a special pledge of sacrifice, inspired by the example of a dynamic Christian biker club. This was ours:

‘We are the forgiven, the unstoppable. We are commissioned adventurers, self-deniers, cross-bearers. We pledge ourselves to the Kingdom cause. We have crossed the line. We will not give up, let up or slow up. We are pioneers. We cannot be bribed, compromised or side-tracked. We will not bargain with doublemindedness, but be pure. We are authorised to conquer Satan, move mountains, release captives. We will be compassionate. We will take healing to the lost. We will fulfil our destiny. ‘

Stern stuff — the Pioneers Pledge.”

From the time when the Jesus Army became the visible outward-looking face of the JFC, when “growth” became key to demonstrating the validity of Noel Stanton's vision, there were many who participated far more loosely within the church structure and didn't ever, perhaps, get close enough to the “white-hot centre” to be burnt by its ferocious heat. But the Zion core of the JFC remained intact and was at its very heart. Noel did everything within his power to ensure that all committed Community members complied with those central lifestyle precepts which he saw as essential for “true discipleship”.

How would Graeme react, I wonder, if he were to somehow find himself transported back as a visitor to a packed Bugbrooke chapel with Noel thundering reproach against his affluent lifestyle; if the chapel deacons had sat him just a few feet from Noel, who was tub-thumping away, pounding his Bible, stamping his feet and bellowing:

“You cannot serve God and Mammon! These are the words of Jesus! So, come on; be real and burn you Bible if you no longer like what’s written in it. Renounce the world with all its evil ways and take your place in the kingdom of God.”

Some willingly gave up what they owned, especially those who had relatively little in the first place. Others were coerced and bullied into doing so by repeatedly being told that they had to make a choice between the world and the kingdom, between following Christ or following the Devil. I don’t believe that Graeme can have it both ways, that he can both have his cake and eat it. If he genuinely believes that his present lifestyle is acceptable in the eyes of God (which I hope he does), then he must also acknowledge that an enormous amount of destruction and damage must have resulted from Noel’s so-called prophetic demands to renounce everything and join the JFC; destruction and damage which, for many, has left indelible scars.

Graeme and Carole were amongst the “lucky” ones insofar as they left with well-established careers to support themselves... and one another of course. There were many, however, who – having given up everything: careers, partners, possessions, the lot – had nothing to fall back on were they to leave. For them, this was a huge obstacle they needed to overcome should they have followed their hearts and left; which, nonetheless, increasing numbers eventually found the courage to do. For some, however, the obstacle was just too daunting to overcome.

In much of what Graeme has written, he has treated the fallout from Noel’s prophetic ministry as the regrettable but unavoidable collateral damage caused when a tyranny is attacked and overthrown: in this case when the Prince of Darkness’s tyranny is attacked and its subjects – entrapped within the kingdom of the world – are liberated. The end result of overthrowing this tyranny is a noble one: the establishment of God’s kingdom where the captives are set free to enjoy all the wonderful benefits of a community lifestyle. No matter, then, that some of the means used to create this kingdom have been aggressive, repressive ones that have caused lifelong damage for many. To which I say an emphatic NO. If the means are wrong, then the end is almost certainly wrong. There are very few instances in social history where harmful, destructive means can be considered justified in consequence of their end result.

You cannot – or should not – talk so affectionately about the JFC from the comfort of your middle-class home and lifestyle, Graeme, when so much damage has been caused to so many people by the surrender of such homes and lifestyle – the direct consequence of the attacks which Noel Stanton made on them.

Hobbies and interests.

Graeme would never never never have been allowed to pursue his “hobby” of flying whilst a JFC member. I assume he sees nothing wrong with such an interest, or even aeroplane ownership. I can just imagine Graeme behind the controls of an aircraft; and apart from the pleasure he derives from flying, it no doubt feels to him like “his” thing to do. Those who remained within the JFC were denied the ability to fulfil their dreams in the way Graeme has been able to, not even by the pursuit of far less expensive and elitist hobbies such as bird watching, stamp collecting, photography or reading in general: no murder mysteries, spy thrillers, travelogues, nor even serious – but secular – biographical and historical literature. Children weren’t allowed to take part in scouting/guiding pursuits... nor anything similar.

To quote from the JFC precepts:

“All cameras are kept under central household or Church control and not used personally.”

“We do not have hobbies or amusements; we develop skills only as recommended by the Church.”

All of the “skills and interests” which Graeme lists as having been pursued by community members are, without exception I believe, ones which were JFC-related. It’s true that I myself developed mechanical skills for which I shall always be thankful. But no one tinkered around with cars because it was their hobby or because of a particular interest in mechanics. In fact, an overtly enthusiastic – “unhealthy” – interest in something may well have led to a prohibition against someone being allowed to work in that field... for the good of their soul. Yes, no doubt there were those who, for example, became skilled wood crafters; but only because the products of their skill were offered for sale in the JFC’s retail outlets. Sisters developed sewing and knitting skills for very functional reasons. And so on and so on. Even the development of musical skill was only acceptable insofar as it related to the performance of a musical “ministry” within the church.

And what about all these “lucky” teenagers who were able to compensate for the deprivation of sport, music, literature or travel by the reward of being “*taken in tow*” (by an older brother/sister or brothers/sisters I assume) and allowed to “*find themselves*”? Please will all those teenagers who experienced community-living in such a beneficial and rewarding way now come forward to declare themselves.

I don’t believe I’ve come anywhere near to being the best of fathers, and yet I believe it remains true that I’ve certainly *done* my best. And one of the areas where I think I’ve not done too badly is trying very hard to identify my children’s aptitudes and interests and then encourage them. And guess what my eldest, Rebekah, wanted to do from the tender age of three? Become a ballerina of course! As the years passed by, and as we wearily took her to yet more ballet lessons and competitions, it did indeed seem that, for Rebekah, this was more than just a childhood fantasy. She even managed to persuade her career advisor at secondary school – who’d “heard it all before” of course – this was the right thing to do. We ended up supporting her

through three years of ballet school in Manchester; years in which she showed her true mettle by traipsing across Manchester after her lessons so she could also study for A-levels at Chetham's School of Music. In the end she didn't make the cut to become a member of a professional ballet corps, but she none the less danced professionally for about four or five years and travelled all around the world – literally. We would never have been able to encourage her ambition had we, as a family, been members of the JFC, and a huge part of “who Rebekah is” would never have been able to flourish... unless, that is, she subsequently left the JFC and pursued her dream as an adult; just as Graeme has pursued his dream of becoming a pilot.

Dishing the dirt.

One of the documentary's shortcomings which Graeme has selected to illustrate its "shoddiness" is what he feels to be the inadequacy of its content. This includes:

"A few in a therapy group and a single mum and her two kids to dish the dirt"

Maybe he has revised his opinion after seeing episode 2. If so, it would be good for him to acknowledge this. But assuming he hasn't revised it...

Shame on you, Graeme! Your comment is laden with derisory implications and *deserves* to be criticized. Why refer to the mother concerned as being *a single mum*? Even if unintended, it sounds like a label which diminishes the value of her contribution. The whole point is that having been a single parent mother at Sheepfold Grange, every other adult in the household – so it seemed to her – felt entitled to point out her children's failings and suggest they should be punished by "rodding". She wasn't the only one, I ought to add. I've had first hand testimony from a mother who was immensely self-confident (as was her husband), but who nonetheless admits capitulating to the demands made on her from others within the household to rod her children.

And what about *"the two kids to dish the dirt"*? These "kids" are, in fact, mature adults still trying to find closure on the memory of adverse experiences they had as children growing up at Sheepfold Grange. How dare anyone deprecate their testimony as being "dirt"! Believe me, there are dozens of others with similar stories who could have been included in the film: Magsy and Jane, to give them names rather than referring to them as *"two kids"*, were merely chosen as representative of all these others.

As for *"the dirt"*. What exactly was the dirt they dished? Please remind me! I only recall both of them speaking about what it was like growing up as children in the Community and being frequently rodded... nearly every day, I think. Is it being suggested, possibly, that they were lying or exaggerating? If not, then what was dirty about what they told us? Or was it the very fact that they dared to speak about their experiences?

And, finally, those *"few in a therapy group"*... I don't intend to dignify such a casual dismissal of their story by writing too much, save to say that I think they were entitled to therapy and benefited from it enormously. I personally am one amongst many who have had to live with the scars of JFC-related damage throughout the whole of my adult life since leaving, but without recourse to any cult-related therapy that I suspect would have been enormously helpful.

Becoming an enemy

It was strange to see and hear John Everett, my friend, I wonder if he was pleased with the words that were included. I am not sure what has driven him to this - to be an enemy. He came up from Canterbury regularly with three girls for a long time so it wasn't true that he was just taken in by it all. A few years later he interviewed a lot of community people for a thesis or something Noel was keen for him to do, also I recall he objected to some of the farming methods. Many of us early 20s lads, (including Steve the lad found on the rails) struggled with feelings for particular ladies and it was in fact very frustrating to be constrained by the 'structure' at that time as there seemed to be no permitted route for a while. We talked about our obsessions, not sure if it was that that drove him mad.

I've already made a response on the JA Alumni Facebook page to some of the issues that Graeme has raised above, so I'll repeat them here – (1) and (2) below – and then make some additional comments...

(1) *"He came up from Canterbury regularly with three girls for a long time so it wasn't true that he was just taken in by it all."*

Why have you written this, Graeme? I visited the Fellowship twice in the summer term of 1977 when I was at the university of Kent. I was then invited to the Ashburnham retreat during the summer vacation and it was there that I made the decision to join. I moved into New Creation Farm a few weeks later and was baptised into membership before returning to university in the Autumn. Thereafter I travelled up every weekend to my new home at the farm. From first visit to full membership, aged 20, was about 3 months.

(2) *"We talked about our obsessions, not sure if it was that that drove him mad."*

This relates to what Graeme has described as the struggle we had with our feelings for particular ladies (sisters). I was no more "obsessed" with the one attachment I had than Graeme was with his sole attachment to Carole, a lovely sister whom he loved and went on to marry. I too was in love: a love which was publicly and humiliatingly rebuffed by Noel in a chapel meeting at Bugbrooke... he had me marked down as a celibate.

Graeme refers to me as his friend. In recent weeks I've several times asked him to engage in an open discussion with me, via email, so that we could attempt to salvage what appears to be the train wreck of our friendship. These requests have simply gone unanswered.

Like everyone else in the JFC, Graeme was instructed to have nothing more to do with me after my formal excommunication. I did, however, invite him and Carole to our wedding in October 1982. I received a very cursory note in reply, simply stating "I cannot support your wedding". It was only a month after this that Noel rang me – sounding all friendly and father-like as if nothing had

happened – to say that now I was married he felt it appropriate to rescind my excommunication. What difference had my (our) marriage made to all those sins I'd been accused of in the letter Noel had written to me? How had my slate been wiped clean? There was a sly, ulterior motive, of course, to Noel's phone call which I've written about in my book. But, IF our wedding had made such a fundamental difference to my spiritual status, then why had Graeme been unable to support it? Or why didn't he write to wish me well after Noel had rescinded my status as an outcast? Thankfully, even without the JFC's blessing, I am still very happily married to my lovely Jeanne after 43 years.

Graeme accuses me of "*becoming an enemy*" and wonders why this has happened. If ever there were a revelatory comment, then surely this is one of them. All those of us who speak critically about the JFC are lumped together as its enemies. It's us or them: you're either with us or against us. If someone is labelled as being an enemy, of course, then there is no need to take any account of their criticisms. I hate to say this, but it's a classic way (a classic *cultish* way) of diffusing any negative comments.

Shame on *all* of you who have endorsed such attitudes .

Noel Stanton

Graeme has suggested that Noel couldn't possibly have been a monster, and nor could those who contributed to the documentary have known him properly. Well, I certainly did! There were some brothers who were emotionally closer to him, and more intensely favoured; but I came as close as many did, and possibly closest of all by virtue of being chosen by him to prepare an academic exoneration of the JFC and the consequent disclosures he made to me.

I don't recall – though others might – anyone in the documentary describing him as having been a monster: a bully, yes; and dictatorial, certainly. At times his behaviour was both rude and disgusting. But of course there were many times when he was seemingly very charming, warm and kindly – a father-like figure for some. He was an enigma: I honestly and truly don't claim to understand what made him tick, but I believe the absolute power he exerted over us – which we shamefully allowed – ultimately took possession of him. He was controlling and manipulative; and I also believe he became obsessed with retaining supreme control over all significant JFC matters. In fact, he often lost his temper if he felt anyone had betrayed him or threatened his authority: behaviour which is typical of all those with dictatorial authority. Consider this episode which I have written about in my book. In it, I have named Ed Hunt. So if anyone should doubt the authenticity of what I've written, then let them appeal to Ed himself.

“Not many weeks after the constitution had been formally accepted by the church membership (more about this presently), I happened to be sitting alone in one of farm's rooms getting on with my studies when I heard a brother called Ed Hunt beginning a conversation with Noel in the farm's entrance hall. Ed was sometimes jokingly referred to as the Fellowship's archdeacon – the leading deacon. Appreciated by many as a long-standing senior elder, he also had an important administrative role – the senior event organizer if you like. I peered through the gap in the open door and saw that Noel was ensconced in his usual armchair close to the front door and Ed was actually crouched on his haunches in front of him.

‘I've been talking with a couple of other elders,’ Ed began courageously, *‘and I've been delegated to come and talk with you, bro, about a rather delicate matter.’*

‘Oh dear, bro, I don't very much like the sound of this,’ said Noel – or words very much to that effect.

*‘It's just that we were talking about how to organize the annual examinations for the elders when we realized, of course, that the constitution requires **everyone** to be examined – which includes yourself, bro.’* He paused for a moment before saying what he must have much rather not had to.

*'So we were wondering who will examine **you**?'*

It would have been oh-so-simple for Noel to nominate his right-hand man, Kelly: most of us would have felt he was the natural choice. Instead, however, Noel launched into an angry, petulant tirade about the pettiness of Ed's suggestion. With his voice still raised, as if he were preaching in chapel, he said the issue was just the kind of thing he'd feared with respect to the constitution, that there were those who would use certain of its articles for their own "selfish" and "manipulative" purposes.

'Of course I don't need to be examined myself!' he thundered.

Ed was then dismissed, very much with a flea in his ear. The incident was actually of huge significance, giving the lie as it did to the Fellowship's claim of mutual accountability amongst the leadership – a principle that had supposedly been enshrined in the constitution. Noel held himself and his prophetic position with severe protective jealousy, never fully able to subjugate his authority – or even his whims – to any challenge from other leaders."

Noel Stanton was absolutely determined during his lifetime to retain complete control over all aspects of JFC and how it functioned. As the JFCT closure statement admits, this resulted in his critical contribution to the Fellowship's systemic failings and the abuse/damage which resulted from them.

It remains my contention that, as previously written, all of us who failed to acknowledge the systemic failings of the Fellowship by failing to make a stand against Noel Stanton's dictatorial control were complicit; and we continue to be complicit unless we apologize for and distance ourselves from these systemic failings.