

A FAITHFUL WORD

SERIES FOUR

“Who Concerning the Truth Have Misaimed”

**AUTHORITY
IN THE
BODY OF CHRIST
AND IN THE
LOCAL
CHURCHES**

**Book
2**

DEFENSE & CONFIRMATION PROJECT

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DCP is a project to defend and confirm the New Testament ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and the practice of the local churches.

Phil. 1:7 – Even as it is right for me to think this concerning you all because you have me in your heart, since both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you are all fellow partakers with me of grace.

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Unless otherwise indicated, the articles in this book are co-authored by Bill Buntain with Dan Sady and Dan Towle.

Boldface type has been used for emphasis in quoted passages and is not in the original quoted material unless otherwise noted.

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PREFACE

2 Tim. 2:18a – Who concerning the truth have misaimed...

A few dissenting brothers have published criticisms of the teachings of the ministry in the Lord's recovery on crucial matters related to the preservation of the proper oneness in the Body of Christ. This series of books contains extensive responses from the Bible and the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee to the issues raised in those criticisms. The dissenting ones have misaimed concerning the truth (2 Tim. 2:18a), as the divisive fruit of their misaimings increasingly manifests. We commit these articles to the saints' prayerful consideration before the Lord in the hope that they can instruct, heal and inoculate them and equip them to inoculate others (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:1-3, 14-15, 23-26; 3:16-17).

The books in this series address the following issues:

1. The practicality of the Body.
2. Authority in the Body of Christ and in the local churches.
3. The local church life for the Body of Christ.
4. The direction and leadership of the Lord's recovery.
5. Regions of the work and companies of workers.
6. Using worldly means to gain increase.
7. Properly discerning spiritual authority to rightly follow the Lord.

This book about *Authority in the Body of Christ and in the Local Churches* includes the following three articles:

- "On Holding the Head and Interpretational Differences" shows that Ron Kangas' speaking in the 2004 Summer Training was a repetition of sound fellowship given by Watchman Nee. The article also looks at Brother Lee's practice of not speaking differently from the ministry of Watchman Nee as a pattern for us today.
- "Who Represents the Head and the Body?" evaluates the unbiblical claim by Titus Chu and Nigel Tomes that only the elders in a local church can represent the churches. It considers the subject of authority in the Body generally and the authority of the apostles particularly.

- “The Devastating Consequences of Replacing God’s Governmental Arrangement In The Church With A Secular System Of Control” examines recent efforts by some followers of Titus Chu to alter church by-laws to entrench their control over churches in the area of his work.
- 1 Tim. 1:3-4 – [3] Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things [4] nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.
 - 1 Tim. 6:3-4 – [3] If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness, [4] he is blinded with pride, understanding nothing, but is diseased with questionings and contentions of words, out of which come envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions.
 - 2 Tim. 2:1-3 – [1] You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus; [2] and the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also. [3] Suffer evil with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
 - 2 Tim. 2:14-15 – [14] Remind them of these things, solemnly charging them before God not to have contentions of words, which is useful for nothing, to the ruin of those who hear. [15] Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.
 - 2 Tim. 2:23-26 – [23] But foolish questionings and those arising from an untrained mind refuse, knowing that they beget contentions. [24] But a slave of the Lord ought not to contend but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with wrong; [25] in meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth, [26] and they may return to soberness out of the snare of the devil, having been caught alive by him, unto His will.
 - 2 Tim. 3:16-17 – [16] All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.

ON HOLDING THE HEAD AND INTERPRETATIONAL DIFFERENCES

One dissenting brother stridently attacks Brother Ron Kangas' speaking in the 2004 Summer Training on the Crystallization-study of Colossians in which Ron said:

When Christ is the Head practically in our experience, it is impossible for there to be different interpretations of the Scriptures. The Head is very clear. Interpretational differences prove that some members have problems with the Head and are not under the Head.... (*The Ministry Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 7, p. 183)

What this dissenting brother is opposing in Ron's speaking is actually a respaking of Brother Nee's fellowship in *The Mystery of Christ*:

If we hold the Head, we cannot have different interpretations of Scripture. Differences arise when someone is not holding the Head, because He cannot possibly say one thing to one member and something else to another.... (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 44, pp. 812-813)

Ron's speaking is also firmly based on the word of Paul in Ephesians 4 concerning winds of teaching and holding the Head:

Eph. 4:13-16 – [13] Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] that we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every ³wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error, [15] but ¹holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the ⁴Head, Christ, [16] Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

fn. 4:14³ – Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries believers away from God’s central purpose.

fn. 4:15¹ – Or, truthing it. This is in contrast to the sleight and the error in v. 14. To be carried away by the winds of teaching in the sleight of men unto a system of error is to not hold to truth. *Truth* here means things that are true. According to the context, it must refer to Christ and His Body: both are true things. We should hold in love to these true things that we may grow up into Christ.

fn. 4:15⁴ – *Head* here indicates that our growth in life by the increase of Christ should be the growth of the members in the Body under the Head.

If the ones ministering among the churches present different interpretations of Scripture, these unavoidably become winds of teaching which distract the saints from Christ as the centrality and universality in God’s economy and the one unique Body of Christ for His corporate expression and representation. The clear context of Ron’s speaking is that as members of the Lord’s Body we should submit to the headship of Christ in an absolute way. The section headings under which this word was spoken are (from major to minor):

Christ Being the Head of the Body, the Church

It Being Crucial for Us to Realize That Christ Is the Head and That We Are the Members of His Body.

The First Principle of Living in the Body of Christ Being to Obey the Authority of the Head

Our Relationship to the Head Determining Our Relationship to the Other Members of the Body

Because we submit to Christ as the Head, we care for His interest, which is the building up of His Body. In order to maintain a proper relationship with the other members of His Body and in order to maintain the oneness and the one accord in His Body, we should not strive for different interpretations of Scripture. We should not become factors by which winds of teaching could blow the immature ones away from Christ, the Head. For this reason Ron said:

...Our way is not to fight or argue. There is no point in even discussing differences because this and other things like it are a matter of headship. (Ron Kangas, "The Body of Christ," *The Ministry Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 7, p. 183)

This again is an echo of Brother Nee's word in *The Mystery of Christ*:

...If differences arise, we must not try to straighten them out by discussion; rather, we should just recognize Christ as the Head. In the church we all must hold the Head, whether it involves the understanding of the truth, the handling of business, or any other matter. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 44, p. 813)

This also matches Paul's word that the way to deal with the winds of teaching is to hold the Head, Christ, as the source out from whom all the growth of the Body issues unto the building up of itself in love. A similar thought is found in Colossians 2:19:

Col. 2:19 – And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.

In both Ephesians 4 and Colossians 2, holding the Head is related to the growth of the Body. If we genuinely care for the Lord's interest, we would not speak anything that frustrates the growth of the Body. We would not stir up strifes and questionings by promoting teachings that differ from the general ministry in the Lord's recovery. Such things distract the young ones among us and carry them away from Christ and His Body.

...We should not be blown about by the winds of teaching; furthermore, we should not preach or teach different opinions in the church. We have no dissension; we simply work according to God's New Testament economy and avoid speaking about anything else. (*The Church Life in the Lord's Recovery Today*, p. 56)

Ephesians 4:14 says, "That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a

system of error.” Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind of teaching that carries believers away from God’s central purpose. The only way to escape the waves that are stirred up by the winds of teaching is to grow in life, and the safe way to grow in life is to stay in the proper church life with Christ and the church as the safeguard. (*The Practice of the Church Life according to the God-ordained Way*, p. 48)¹

The dissenting one attempts to controvert Ron’s respeaking of Brother Nee’s ministry by pointing to the difference in understanding between Brother Nee and Brother Lee concerning the identity of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. His challenge is misplaced. When Brother Lee spoke to the elders concerning this matter, it was to present himself as a pattern of not teaching differently from the leadership in the Lord’s ministry. He stressed, as he always did when discussing this point, that although he held a different understanding of the identity of the two witnesses, he would never say anything publicly to contradict Brother Nee’s ministry:

Actually, there is nearly nothing different between my understanding and Brother Nee’s except for one thing. I never told anyone what this was, not even my wife or family, until I came to this country and Brother Nee went to be with the Lord. The doctrinal item which I felt different from Brother Nee was regarding the two witnesses in the book of Revelation (11:3-12). This was the only difference between my understanding and Brother Nee’s. My intention is to show you that I was not altogether the same in everything with Brother Nee. In this one thing I was not the same and I am still not the same. **My point is this—in spite of this difference, I never uttered anything in my ministry that Brother Nee did not**

¹ Other significant portions from Brother Lee’s ministry on the subject of “winds of teaching” include:

How to Administrate the Church, pp. 49-88.

The Centrality and Universality of Christ, pp. 10-11.

The Experience and Growth in Life, pp. 180-182.

Life-study of Ephesians, pp. 382-383, 585, 712.

preach, and I did not teach anything that he had not touched. (*Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, p. 83)

The point is that Brother Lee held the Head and cared for the Head's interest, the Body, by not making an issue over a different interpretation of a minor point. Rather than proving the dissenter's point, this example is an illustration of exactly what Ron was talking about. Had Brother Lee contended with Brother Nee or merely spoken differently in his teaching among the churches, he would have damaged the Body, which would be the strongest evidence that he was out from under the headship of Christ.

In contrast, the dissenters feel they have a right to teach whatever they like and publish whatever they like without regard for its effect on the Lord's recovery as a whole. By their attacks against the ones taking the lead in the ministry, they undermine the authority of the Lord in His Body. In their disregard for the effect of their winds of teaching on the Body as a whole, they surely are exposed as ones who are not holding the Head.

WHO REPRESENTS THE HEAD AND THE BODY?

A dissenting worker rationalizes his unwillingness to carry out his work in a coordinated fellowship with the co-workers in the principle of the Body as follows:

Therefore we must be very careful when we use the term “the feeling of the Body”. I have heard it said, “Why don’t you fellowship with the Body?” Be careful, for this can only be applied locally, because who can practically be recognized as representing “the Body” once you go beyond the level of the locality?...

Thus I am troubled when I hear some brothers say, “Why don’t you fellowship with the Body?” If some claim to represent the Body, they replace Christ! The Body has one Head and one person—the exalted, pneumatic Christ. (Titus Chu, “What a Prophet Must See,” *Fellowship Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 27)

On the surface such words may seem convincing and even spiritual. In fact, this dissenting brother grievously misrepresents both the Bible and the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee.

Another brother who is closely associated with this dissenting worker posted an article criticizing brothers for “representing the local churches,” a role that this dissenting brother claims is reserved exclusively for local elders:

The question, “Who represents the local churches?” seems simple enough, easily answered. The obvious answer is, “The elders.” Both brothers Nee and Lee taught that the elders administrate the affairs of a local church. The local church is not the sphere of the workers (apostles). (“Who Represents the Local Churches?”)

This brother’s use of the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee is highly selective to the point of gross error. He does not present their teaching in a full or balanced fashion. Even in his opening statement, he switches the subject from representing the churches to administrating a local church. The two are not the same. There is no doubt that the administration

of the affairs of a local church is in the hands of the elders, and in that administration the elders represent the authority of Christ. However, it is wrong to say that the elders are the sole or ultimate authority in the church, just as it is wrong to say that there is no authority in the Body or among the local churches or that there is no representation of Christ as the Head of the Body beyond the boundaries of a locality.

Therefore this article will present the following points from both the New Testament record and the writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee:

1. All authority derives from Christ, the Head.
2. Four categories of people who represent the Body.
3. Oneness with the general church brings in authority.
4. The apostles represent both the Head, Christ, and the Body, the church.
5. The apostles' role in representing the Body in the laying on of hands.
6. The apostles' authority among all the churches.
7. The apostles' exercise of authority among the churches.
8. The apostles' authority in dealing with the elders.

This article will also examine some errors in the dissenters' analysis of particular passages from the New Testament record and give a balanced word from the ministry of Brother Lee regarding the representation of Christ through the deputy authority in the Body. It will also present some enlightening speaking from the ministry of Watchman Nee regarding the need to submit to Christ's deputy authority in the Body of Christ.

1. All Authority Derives from Christ, the Head

In the Body of Christ, the unique source of authority is Christ as the Head. Therefore, although there are deputy authorities, all of their authority rests not in themselves, but derives from Christ the Head and from the Holy Spirit within the church, the Body.

Matt. 28:18 – And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Acts 2:36 – Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified.

Col. 1:18 – And He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things.

Eph. 1:22 – And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church.

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, a book on the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord Jesus presents Himself as **the One given all authority in heaven and on earth** (Matt. 28:18-20). Matthew 28:18 says, “Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” In His divinity as the only begotten Son of God, the Lord had authority over all. However, in His humanity as the Son of Man to be the King of the heavenly kingdom, all authority in heaven and on earth had to be given to Him after His resurrection. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament, Messages* 265-275, p. 2819)

A deputy authority must remember that all authorities come from God. God is the One who has established all authorities. **If there is any authority in a man at all, that authority comes from God. There is no inherent authority in a person, and no one can appoint himself to be an authority.... All deputy authorities must remember that they are merely God’s representative authorities; they have no authority in themselves.** (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 47, p. 209)

I would say a word to the elders concerning their authority: We have to have the basic understanding that there is no authority within ourselves. The authority in the Body of Christ is Christ, the Head. It is the Holy Spirit who is operating in the Body. Therefore, only the Holy Spirit is the authority. The Holy Spirit is the authority of Christ in His Body. From where do the responsible brothers derive their authority? Do not think that as long as a person is an elder he has authority. We have to know and understand

authority. Only those who understand authority have authority. If the elders do not understand authority, they are not qualified to be elders, and they are not fit to be an authority. We do not have any authority in ourselves. The only difference between us and the brothers and sisters is that we know the authority of the Holy Spirit a little more clearly, and we are able to communicate the thought of the Spirit to them. **The elders do not have any authority in themselves.** (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 61, p. 215)

In the church there is no human authority; there is only the authority of the Holy Spirit. The church has been here on earth for a long time, but God has never entrusted its service to any human individuals. **In the church not even the elders are the authority. You are not the authority.** Any move in the church service should be the result of the direction of the Holy Spirit. Anyone acting or deliberating apart from the direction of the Holy Spirit is being rebellious and seditious. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 62, p. 285)

2. Four Categories of People Who Represent the Body

Contrary to the dissenting brother's claim that only the elders can represent the church, in the New Testament there are four categories of people who can represent the Body.

1 Cor. 1:11 – For it has been made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you.

1 Tim. 5:17 – Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching.

Acts 9:17 – And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Matt. 18:18–20 [18] Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven. [19] Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in

harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens. [20] For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst.

There are four kinds of people in the church who can represent the Body: (1) apostles, (2) elders, (3) individual believers who are commissioned by the Lord, such as Ananias who was commissioned by the Lord to speak to Paul, and (4) the two or three believers who have denied themselves and gathered into the Lord's name. These four groups of people represent the Body. If you are wrong, the Lord will send an individual believer to come and speak to you. If you do not take the word of the individual believer, he will tell two or three other believers. If you do not take the word of the two or three believers, the elders should come to help you. You cannot act individualistically. **Many unsolvable problems require the apostles to come. They are the ones the Lord has chosen particularly to represent the Body.** We should inform the elders and the apostles of all important matters, lest there be any ambiguity. We should do this in order to receive their help. **We cannot neglect the Body and cannot neglect the representatives of the Body. If we neglect the representatives of the Body, we will not be able to practice the Body life.** May God grant us not only the revelation of the Body but also the testimony of the Body, and may He cause us to submit to the representatives of the Body. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 38, pp. 497-498; a very similar passage can be found in vol. 44, pp. 834-835)

...If you see the Body and see the authority of the Head, you will see that there are always one or more persons who are ahead of you in the Body, to whom you should submit yourself. **Not only must you see the Head, you must also see those who represent the Head and realize that going against them is going against God.** (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 37, p. 249)

3. Oneness with the General Church Brings in Authority

In a section subtitled "Oneness with the General Church Bringing in Authority" Watchman Nee shows how the crucial

factor in representing God and exercising authority is oneness with the general church.

Matt. 18:16 – But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Matt. 18:19 – Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens.

Since you are the church, you have the authority. God's authority is with the church. Do not think that an individual believer does not have any authority. **As long as an individual believer is one with the general church, he can have authority also, and he can even be the authority.** Suppose Brother Lee has offended me. While I am alone with him, I point out his mistake, and the matter is taken care of. While I am taking care of the matter, the church is brought in; the reality of the church is brought in. Of course, in terms of the actual procedure, the church is not involved. **In the Bible not only can an individual represent the church; the principle of two or three can also be a principle of the church.** When two or three are one, that oneness makes them the church. When these two or three deal with anything, it will be the church dealing with the matter. The only difference between that and the church actually dealing with the matter is that the church has not said anything directly. In actuality, these two or three are one with the church, but the church is not directly involved. However, what they say becomes what the church says. Hence, the two or three become the church. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 57, pp. 308-309)

4. The Apostles Represent Both the Head, Christ, and the Body, the Church

In particular, the apostles represent the authority of the Head in the Body of Christ.

1 Cor. 12:28a – And God has placed some in the church: first apostles...

The apostles are the first gift that God has appointed in the Body of Christ. They are sent by God to represent the

authority of the Head and to execute God's will on earth. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 44, p. 823)

The apostles represent not only the church but also Christ. God has placed the apostles in the church first. Being first means having authority. In other words, **the apostles are the representative authority....** (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 48, p. 105)

The apostles could represent the Body because they themselves were fully identified with the Body in their living and work and were sent forth by representative members of the Body who laid hands on them and thereby declared the oneness of the Body with the apostles:

Acts 13:1-3 – [1] Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [2] And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. [3] Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

As we have seen, the laying on of hands speaks of oneness (Lev. 1:4), and the only oneness known among the children of God is the oneness of the Body of Christ; therefore, in laying hands upon the apostles, **the prophets and teachers definitely stood on the ground of the Body, acting as its representative members. Their action identified the whole church with the apostles, and identified the apostles with the whole church.** These prophets and teachers did not stand on individual ground to send the apostles forth as their personal representatives, nor did they stand on the ground of any select company to send them out as representatives of that particular company; but they stood on the ground of the Body, as its ministering members, and set these two apart for the work of the gospel. In their turn **the two**, being thus separated, **went forth**, not to represent any particular individuals or any special organization, but **to represent the Body of Christ**, and the Body of Christ alone.... (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 30, p. 29)

5. The Apostles' Role in Representing the Body in the Laying on of Hands

The apostles' role in representing the Body is seen in the laying on of hands:

Acts 8:17 – Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:6a – And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them...

The apostles are the representatives of God. They are also representative members in the Body of Christ. When Peter and John laid their hands on the believers in Samaria, their act brought those upon whom they laid hands under the authority of the Head and into the fellowship of the Body. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 44, p. 830)

Today in the church **the apostles are the representative members in the Body of Christ; they represent the authority of Christ.** For the apostles to lay hands on the Samaritan believers meant that they acknowledged them as part of the Body. Once they were in the Body, the Spirit descended upon them. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 38, p. 490)

6. The Apostles' Authority among All the Churches

As the representatives of the Head, Christ, the apostles' have authority among all the churches.

1 Cor. 9:1 – Am I not free? Am I not an ³apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

fn. 9:1³ – As he presented himself a pattern to the believers, the apostle came to the matter of his apostleship, which gave him authority to deal with all the problems covered in this book, serious problems concerning the church life and its fellowship. His handling of these problems was based not only on his teaching but also on the authority inherent in his apostleship. To deal with the situation, he had to take this standing and make this matter clear to the Corinthian believers. They had questioned his apostleship and were in a chaotic situation, mainly

because of the foolishness of their worldly wisdom, self-confidence, and pride.

1 Cor. 1:1 – Paul, a ¹called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother.

fn. 1:1¹ – An apostle is a sent one. Paul was such a one, not self-appointed but called by the Lord. His apostleship was authentic (9:1-5; 2 Cor. 12:11-12; cf. 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2), having the authority of God’s New Testament administration (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). Based on this position with this authority the apostle wrote this Epistle, not only to nourish and build up the saints in Corinth but also to regulate and adjust the church there.

1 Tim. 5:19 – Against an elder do not ¹receive an accusation, except based upon two or three witnesses.

fn. 5:19¹ – Timothy was charged by the apostle Paul to receive an accusation against an elder. This indicates that after they have appointed men as elders, the apostles still have the authority to deal with the elders.

1 Cor. 7:6 – But this I say by way of concession, not by way of ¹command.

fn. 7:6¹ – This implies that the apostle in his teaching had authority to give commands to the believers.

How should authority in the church be assigned? God has appointed the elders and apostles to be the authority in the church. In each respective church, God establishes elders; **among all the churches, God establishes apostles. The authority of apostles is for overseeing all the churches,** while the authority of elders is for overseeing each respective local church. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 22, p. 19)

7. The Apostles’ Exercise of Authority among the Churches

The apostles exercise authority among all the churches in their ministry mainly through teaching:

2 Cor. 13:10 – Therefore I write these things while being absent in order that when present I would not have to use severity, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for overthrowing.

God's delegated authority in the leading ones in the ministry was for building up and not for overthrowing (2 Cor. 13:10). Paul had authority, not to destroy or overthrow, but for building up. **God's delegated authority was in the teaching of the leading ones** (1 Cor. 4:17b-21; 7:17b; 16:1; 11:2; 2 Thes. 3:6, 9, 12, 14). **Paul exercised his authority in his teaching.** He taught the same thing everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:17b), and the churches followed his speaking. This was the demonstration of Paul's delegated authority. Authority always follows the proper speaking. A teacher's speaking in a school is with authority. When the teacher speaks, all the students are under his authority. (*Leadership in the New Testament*, p. 49)

Those who say that the apostles have no authority to deal with matters involving a local church are in error. Most of the epistles of Paul are written to directly deal with problems in churches or to instruct his co-workers how to do so. In those epistles Paul not only taught, but also exhorted and even commanded:

1 Cor. 1:1 – Paul, a ¹called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother.

fn. 1:1¹ – An apostle is a sent one. Paul was such a one, not self-appointed but called by the Lord. His apostleship was authentic (9:1-5; 2 Cor. 12:11-12; cf. 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2), having the authority of God's New Testament administration (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). Based on this position with this authority the apostle wrote this Epistle, not only to nourish and build up the saints in Corinth but also to regulate and adjust the church there.

1 Cor. 7:6 – But this I say by way of ¹concession, not by way of ¹command.

fn. 7:6¹ – This implies that the apostle in his teaching had authority to give commands to the believers.

Titus 2:15 – These things speak, and exhort and convict with all ³authority. Let no one despise you.

fn. 2:15³ – Lit., command. With all authority modifies both exhort and convict. To exhort and convict with all authority is to advise and convict imperatively in every

way with words of authority, as if one were giving commands.

After the apostles appoint the elders and commit the church into the hands of the elders, what shall the apostles do in the future? Some say that the apostles have nothing to do with the church anymore. According to their feeling, the appointment of the elders by the apostles was the termination of the relationship of the apostles with the churches. They say this by using Brother Nee's fellowship in *The Normal Christian Church Life* as a basis. On page 44 of this book, Brother Nee says, "Once a church was established, all responsibility was handed over to the local elders, and from that day the apostles exercised no control whatever in its affairs." In this quote from Brother Nee's book, we should notice the phrase in its affairs. Some quote Brother Nee's words without realizing the significance of this phrase. (Brother Nee in his book entitled *Church Affairs*, pp. 143, 8-14, corrected this misuse of his word.) **The apostles were to keep their hands off of the administration of the local church in its business affairs, not in its need of the apostles' teaching, instruction, and charge.**

We saw that Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth charging them to remove a certain sinful man from the fellowship of the church. The apostle commanded the church to do this—"Remove the evil man from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13). Does this mean that the apostle took the church back under his administration? No, not at all. If this had been the case, he would not have needed to tell others to remove the sinful one. He would have done it directly by himself. **In this sense, Paul as an apostle kept his hands off of the church administration but not from teaching, instructing, and charging the church.** (*Leadership in the New Testament*, pp. 33-34)

8. The Apostles' Authority in Dealing with the Elders

Furthermore, the apostles have the authority to deal with elders who sin or who deviate from the apostles' teaching:

1 Tim. 5:19-20 – [19] Against an elder do not ¹receive an accusation, except based upon two or three witnesses.

[20] The ones who sin ¹reprove before all that the rest also may have fear.

fn. 5:19¹ – Timothy was charged by the apostle Paul to receive an accusation against an elder. This indicates that after they have appointed men as elders, the apostles still have the authority to deal with the elders.

fn. 5:20¹ – This too indicates the apostles' authority over the elders.

After the meeting in Hangkow, some brothers misunderstood. They thought that though the elders are appointed by the apostles, they did not have to listen to the apostles. This is impossible. When there were brothers who did not respect the elders and problems occurred, the letter of accusation by two or three was sent to Timothy. In other words, **the authority for the appointment of the elders is with the apostles, and the authority for the removal of the elders is also with the apostles.** A local church cannot expel an elder; rather, **the apostles need to bear the responsibility of removing elders.** This is the reason why the letter of accusation by two or three was sent to Timothy. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 51, p. 143)

There is another aspect to the apostles' relationship with a local church, which Brother Nee talked to us about, in 1 Timothy 5. First Timothy 5:19-20 says, "Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except based upon the mouth of two or three witnesses. The ones who sin reprove before all that the rest also may have fear." Timothy was charged by the apostle Paul to receive an accusation against an elder. **This indicates that the apostles have authority to deal with the elders even after they have been appointed by the apostles to be elders.** If there is a problem among the elders, this case should go to the apostles, and the apostles have to judge. The apostles have the authority to rebuke a sinful elder in front of others. The apostles' hands should be off of the church in its administration, but this does not mean that the apostles have absolutely nothing to do with a local church after its elders have been established. (*Leadership in the New Testament*, p. 34)

Some have had the concept from reading Brother Nee's book *The Normal Christian Church Life* that once apostles have appointed elders in a particular local church, the apostles do

not under any circumstances have the right to interfere with the affairs of that church. This, however, is a misunderstanding of Brother Nee's word. In another book, *Church Affairs*, Brother Nee points out that **after the elders have been appointed by the apostles, they should take the lead in the church according to the apostles' teaching. If the elders lead others astray or if they are wrong in some way, accusation against them can be made by the saints to the apostles.** (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, pp. 84-85)

Errors in the Dissenting Brother's Analysis of the New Testament Record

The dissenting brother's article errantly asserts:

In our realization, the New Testament gives no example of a few brothers acting as representatives of all the local churches. In Acts 11 Barnabas and Saul were "delegates" of the church in Antioch, bringing their material gifts to Jerusalem. In this case, Barnabas and Saul represented their own local church, the church in Antioch, in taking the gift. The Jerusalem elders received the gift as representatives of the church in Jerusalem. Along similar lines, a few brothers from Corinth and the surrounding churches, serving as "apostles of the churches," (2 Cor. 8:23) brought material gifts to Judea. Finally, the Jerusalem elders participated in the Acts 15 conference as representatives of the church in Jerusalem. Brother Lee makes it abundantly clear the elders represented only the church in Jerusalem, not other churches. We find no case in the New Testament of brothers representing all the local churches. Neither a prescriptive teaching nor a descriptive example of this practice appears in the Bible. ("Who Represents the Local Churches?")

This account errs concerning the truth on at least two counts. First, it neglects the fact that Acts 15 records that the apostles participated in this conference. It is odd that in the dissenters' account of the conference in Acts 15 he only mentions the elders in the church in Jerusalem and not the apostles. The biblical record shows that there were two categories of people bearing responsibility in the Body of Christ that gathered

together in Jerusalem: the local elders and the apostles responsible for the leadership of the Lord's work in both the Jewish and Gentile regions.

Acts 15:6 – And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.

The dissenter's omission of "the apostles" is telling because the apostles represented the universal church composed of all the local churches. Concerning Acts 15 Brother Lee stated:

The elders represent the local church, and **the apostles represent the churches in various localities**. The elders represent one locality, and the apostles represent various localities. Just as the elders clearly understand the situation in a locality, so **the apostles clearly understand the situations in various localities....** (*Being Apt to Teach and Holding the Mystery of the Faith*, p. 16)

There is no record of elders from the Gentile churches participating in this conference. Paul and Barnabas were not there as elders but as the leading workers in the Gentile world, yet the decision made at this conference was applicable to the Gentile churches. Furthermore, there is no record of any elders outside of Jerusalem participating, yet the decision made applied to all of the Jewish churches, not just the church in Jerusalem.

...That decision eventually became an epistle written by the apostles and elders. This epistle was not designated as being written by the Gentile and Jewish apostles and by the Gentile and Jewish elders. Acts 15 says that it was written simply by the apostles and the elders (v. 23), including the apostles and elders of both the Jewish and Gentile churches. They were considered as one. We have to see this. (*Further Consideration of the Eldership, the Region of Work, and the Care for the Body of Christ*, p. 17)

The decision in Acts 15 was not made merely by the Jewish region or merely by the Gentile region. Actually, it was a decision made above the regions and beyond the regions. The decision made covered all the churches, whether Jewish or Gentile.... (*Elders' Training, Book 4: Other Crucial Matters Concerning the Practice of the Lord's Recovery*, p. 29)

Second, the dissenter's account of 2 Corinthians 8:23 also misses the mark. He omits any mention of Titus, who was sent to Jerusalem to represent Paul, as the leading worker in the Gentile region and all of the Gentile churches that had contributed to the relief of the believers in Judea. He also fails to distinguish why it is acceptable that a group of brothers could be identified as "apostles of the churches," representing an unspecified group of churches, and it is not acceptable for brothers serving as co-workers among us to be identified as representing the local churches. The expressions are the same. Thus, the blending co-workers are not deviating from the pattern of the New Testament.

This dissenting brother has accused the co-workers in the Lord's recovery of transmuted the organic Body of Christ into a worldwide organization. Actually, this brother's own words expose his own concept of the exercise of authority in the Body of Christ as being not organic, but rather organizational. His article attempts to establish the sole authority of the elders to administrate and represent the local churches by carefully selecting portions of the truth from the New Testament and the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and applying them as legalities. In other words, it is he who evidences a desire to neatly dissect and systematize the Body of Christ with fixed boundaries. In doing so, he demonstrates no comprehension of the organic oneness of the Body of Christ, of the organic oneness of the members with the Head, of the organic exercise of authority of the members joined to the Head, etc. Furthermore, his words also expose an unwillingness to accept any exercise of authority among the local churches that does not fit his own concept or agenda.

A Balanced Word

In response to errors promoted by a few brothers among the churches in the late 1980s, Brother Lee gave some balanced words concerning the exercise of authority in the Body.

- Eph. 5:23-24 – [23] For a husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the Body. [24] But as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything.
- 1 Tim. 5:17 – Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching.
- 1 Cor. 3:10a – According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation...
- Heb. 13:17 – Obey the ones leading you and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who will render an account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning; for this would be unprofitable to you.
- 1 Tim. 3:5 – (But if one does not know how to manage his own house, how will he care for the church of God?).
- 2 Cor. 10:8 – For even if I should boast somewhat more abundantly concerning our authority, which the Lord has given for building you up and not for overthrowing you, I will not be put to shame.
- 2 Cor. 13:10 – Therefore I write these things while being absent in order that when present I would not have to use severity, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for overthrowing.
- 1 Cor. 4:21 – What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?
- 2 Cor. 2:9 – For to this end also I wrote, that I might know your approvedness, whether you are obedient in all things.
- 2 Cor. 7:15 – And his affections are abundantly toward you, he remembering the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.
- 2 Cor. 10:6 – And we are ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

In the matter of the authority in the Body, first and foremost is the need for the authority of the Head flowing throughout the whole Body (Eph. 5:23-24). In addition, there is deputy authority. In the local churches there are the elders

(1 Tim. 5:17a), and **in the work there are the leading co-workers** (1 Cor. 3:10a). All these are deputy authorities, carrying out the authority of the Head. Hence, in the Body of Christ there is also order in authority. On the one hand, all the members submit directly to the Head (Eph. 5:24a). On the other hand, they submit to the deputies of the Head (Heb. 13:17). When we feel that we are submitting directly to the Head, we must also care for the Body. **It is impossible for us to say that we are submitting to the authority of the Head without caring for the Body.** We have to take care of both aspects. We should submit to Christ, and we should also submit to the church. Only then is the submission proper. **If we would only submit to Christ, without submitting to the Body, that kind of submission will cause problems. If no one cares for the Body, but everyone considers that he is submitting to the Head directly, division will result in the Body.** Only by our submitting to the Head on the one hand and to the Body on the other hand can the Head be pleased and the Body preserved. (*The Oneness and the One Accord according to the Lord's Aspiration and the Body Life and Service according to His Pleasure*, p. 40)

According to the divine revelation in the holy Word, there is deputy authority in God's economy, both in the Old Testament, such as with Moses and the priests who taught the people the divine oracle, and in the New Testament, such as with the elders, who take care of the church (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17; Heb. 13:17), and the apostles, who establish the churches and teach the saints (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 1 Cor. 4:21). A local church is under the authority of Christ as the Head, represented by the elders. Hence, the saints in a local church should obey the elders (Heb. 13:17). **The churches as the Body of Christ are under their Head, Christ, represented by the apostles. Hence, the churches should obey the apostles** (2 Cor. 2:9; 7:15; 10:6). To obey the elders in a local church and to obey the apostles among the churches does not mean that the obeying one does not need to obey the Lord directly. When he is seeking the leading directly from the Lord, he should also take care of the elders in the local church, because he is living and working in the church as a part of the Body. **When the churches are seeking the leading directly from the Lord, they should also take care of the apostles,**

because they are all living and working with the apostles in the churches as the Body of Christ. Whether in a local church or among all the churches, we should be Body-conscious, taking care not only of the Head but also of His Body. Since we are living and working in the Body, we have the Body with the Head. We cannot have the Head without the Body; neither can we have the Body without the Head. We should seek to obey the Head with a relationship to the Body, and we should also seek to obey the Body with a relationship to the Head. We all need to realize that in our natural life we are very independent. So, to take care of obeying both the Lord and the elders or the apostles at the same time is not an easy thing for us. Hence, we may unconsciously feel that the teaching concerning the obeying of God's deputy authority is overly stressed or even unscriptural. In any case, to say that there is no deputy authority of the Lord is surely unscriptural. (*Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way* (2), pp. 106-107)

The Need to Submit to Christ's Deputy Authority in the Body of Christ

Brother Nee consistently taught the necessity of submission to deputy authorities.

I have never seen a man who knows the Head yet does not submit to Christ's deputy authority. A person who knows the Lord will never be selective in the matter of submission. For example, Brother Witness's children cannot be selective in their submission to their father. If a brother or a sister has not learned to submit to every deputy authority assigned by the Lord, he is under the greatest deception.

The Bible says that there is no authority except from God (Rom. 13:1). There are very few places in the Bible that speak of direct submission to God. Most of the time the Bible speaks of submission to man. Wherever you go, you have to submit, not criticize freely with your lips. If others give you some special authority, that is up to them. Nevertheless, you have to learn to submit. Many people have never learned the lesson. Wherever they go, they tear down the authorities, and they do not bridle their tongues. This kind of person is rebellious. May

the Lord be merciful to us so that we will not be wild Christians. Not only should we not be selective in our submission, but we should actively seek after the ones we should submit to. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 57, p. 254)

In the church those who have the gift of teaching should give themselves to coordination in the Body. If a person functions as a teacher independently, it is easy for him to develop a spirit of rebellion. If we take care of the matter of coordination, things will turn out well even if there are few gifts among us. If we do not take care of coordination, however, a great gift will become a source of trouble and even a tool for rebellion. Among the elders there are always some who are more senior and more respected than others. They are the ones who should take the lead. There are also apostles who are appointed by God. But even among the apostles, there are great ones and small ones, renowned ones and not so renowned ones. Even among the twelve apostles there were differences in rank; some were leaders to the others. There is an explicit injunction in the Bible to submit to elders and apostles. However, nothing is legal among us. We cannot say that we cannot find our deputy authority because God has not explicitly pointed him out to us. If we have not met or found our deputy authority, it simply means that we are, in Peter's words, animals without reason. No remark can be stronger than this one. If someone wants to offend authority, let him offend; but as for us, we choose to submit absolutely. The Lord rebukes the antagonizers. They either fall down or slide back. If they remain in the church, we can ignore them, mark them out, and refuse to communicate with them. God will eventually prevail, and the brothers and sisters will eventually take this way. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 59, pp. 237-238)

THE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES OF REPLACING GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL ARRANGEMENT IN THE CHURCH WITH A SECULAR SYSTEM OF CONTROL

This article addresses recent attempts by certain dissenting brothers to alter the God-ordained government in the local churches under their care. By so doing, they are running a great risk of transforming those congregations from local churches into local sects. By manipulating the by-laws that are in place as part of a local church's legal status as a non-profit corporation, the dissenting brothers are seeking to increase their powers as directors of the corporation to include the authority to command the affairs of the church. In Toronto, Canada, this agenda has been carried out successfully already. We offer this booklet with the hope that churches under this dissenting influence will be preserved to enjoy peace in the divine government under Christ the Head and His proper representative authorities.

Introduction

Through the ministry of Brothers Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, the Lord fully recovered the proper understanding of both the universal and local aspects of the church. In its universal aspect, the church is one and is a living Body for the full expression of Christ the Head (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23). In its local aspect, the church exists in many localities as local churches to be the practical expressions of the universal Body of Christ on earth (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 12:27; Rev. 1:11). In this twofold status, the church has both an organic, essential aspect for its existence as the Body of Christ and an organizational, administrative aspect for the maintaining of its proper order in the divine government.

Sadly, the administrative order in some local churches today is in danger of being corrupted by certain dissenting brothers who claim to need more clearly-defined authority to guard their churches from outside influence. In actuality, they are

consolidating their power in the churches. To achieve their ends, the dissenting brothers are turning to the by-laws that are in place as part of a church's legal status as a non-profit corporation. By manipulating these by-laws, the dissenting brothers are aggressively maneuvering to increase their powers as directors of the corporation to create a new and unscriptural class of director-elders who are above the other elders in their churches. If successfully implemented, these changes will alter the heavenly nature and divine government of the affected churches, making them divisive sects under the direction of a manmade hierarchy. Regrettably, this has already happened in Toronto, Canada.

From Local Church to Local Sect: The Effect of Forsaking the God-ordained Government

The government in a local church is carried out by Christ the Head through the elders, who are appointed by the apostles according to their maturity in life (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The elders function as overseers to teach and shepherd the flock of God and to handle the financial affairs of the church (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Acts 11:29-30; 1 Tim. 3:3). Brother Lee writes:

The New Testament revelation shows us that the government of the church is very simple and practical: All the government of a church is entrusted to the elders. The elders are the government of the church. According to their spiritual stature, the elders are those who are mature and older. According to the affairs they handle, they are the overseers, which speaks of government and administration. (*The Elders' Management of the Church*, p. 17)

To alter this God-ordained administrative arrangement in a local church will inevitably devastate the divine government in that church, transmute that local church into a local sect, and offend the headship of Christ in that church. Brother Watchman Nee saw the inherent danger in adopting extra-biblical institutions and decrees in a local church and warned against it:

The Bible has decreed all institutions of the church in a clear way already. We must never have any decrees, whether

they are creeds, constitutions, rules, charters, or ordinances outside the Bible, no matter how scriptural they may appear. Otherwise, we will become a sect right away. We may be more scriptural and more knowledgeable than other sects but still be a sect. We should only have one open Bible now for men to follow. If we institute anything outside the Bible, no matter how scriptural it may appear, we are causing others to despise the Bible and turning their attention to the instituted ordinances. In this way, those who are "of our group" must abide by the teachings of these ordinances before they can meet together. Of course, if anyone sees any ordinance that is contrary to the Scriptures, he should reject it. Of course, we should teach others the teachings of the Bible. But if anyone follows these teachings, they are following the Lord's word, not any kind of authority in our word. If we institute anything, our institution will become the standard of our faith. This means that we will be setting up another standard of faith besides the Bible, no matter how scriptural such a standard may appear. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 7, pp. 1116-1117)

The dissenting ones are making a concerted effort to change the proper administration in their churches by enlarging the scope of what is allowed in the New Testament. By seeking to elevate the secular office of director of the corporation above the scriptural office of elder of the church, the dissenting ones are proposing exactly the type of extra-biblical institution that alarmed Brother Nee. If the saints in those churches vote to approve the proposed amendments to the by-laws that would make this change possible, then what will be produced is an unscriptural, hierarchical organization that nullifies the headship of Christ and destroys the proper standing of that local church.

An Unscriptural Hierarchy: Merging the Heavenly Government of the Local Church with the Secular Administration of the Non-profit Corporation

The church is a heavenly entity existing in the sphere of the divine government, but it also exists on earth as local churches that are subject to the laws of the states or provinces in which

they reside. Consequently, the members of a local church may form a corporation in order to have a proper legal standing before the secular government under which they live. The non-profit corporation is not the church per se but exists to satisfy the requirements of the secular law to protect the financial assets of the church on behalf of all the members. To intermix the secular corporation with the heavenly church adulterates the church itself and causes it to forfeit the headship of the ascended Christ to become a common human organization administered according to worldly principles of management. This is to trade theocracy (rule by God) for human government and to endanger the uniqueness of the local church as the testimony of Jesus. In effect, it is tantamount to ancient Israel's rejection of the rule of Jehovah in favor of a secular king (1 Sam. 8:4-7). In the churches where such confusion is reigning today, the dissenting brothers are endeavoring to consolidate their power by using the secular corporation and its by-laws to gain influence in the church. This is a dreadful mistake.

In order for a corporation to have the proper legal standing with the acting government of its state or province, directors must be elected to serve as trustees of the corporation. In their function as trustees, the directors hold the financial assets (e.g., business accounts, properties, etc.) of the corporation in trust. Their role is one of custodianship, not one of management. According to the view of the secular government, the directors of a non-profit corporation exist to protect the interests of the stakeholders. In a local church, the stakeholders are the saints. The directors of the corporation are, therefore, in place to serve the saints and to satisfy the minimum legal requirements of the secular government in the state or province where the church has residence. The directors do not carry out the spiritual administration of the heavenly church; the responsibility for the administration of the church lies with the elders. Typically in a local church, the elders will serve as directors of the corporation, but the two offices serve two different purposes and should not influence each another. If a brother serves as an elder and as a director, it is incumbent upon him not to use his position as a director of the corporation to exercise influence

over the spiritual affairs of the church. The dissenting brothers have disregarded this distinction and are placing their local churches in positions of immediate peril.

“The Church of the Torontonians”: A Case in Point

The dissenting brothers who have seized control of “The Church of the Torontonians” have successfully entrenched themselves in an unassailable position as newly-defined directors of the corporation. However, their actions in replacing the God-ordained government of the church have transmuted their standing into that of a sect. Their new by-laws, which were ratified after they had surreptitiously cleared away any possible chance of stopping them, effectively codify a system of error (Eph. 4:14) and give the directors unprecedented power to govern the church. These new by-laws endow the directors, who are chosen from among the elders, with far more authority than is actually required by law for the existence of the corporation. These director-elders have now become a controlling faction among the saints and have uplifted themselves above their fellow elders, thereby making them “second-class” elders.

The Directors’ New Powers

Choosing the Church’s Apostle(s)

The Board of Directors of “The Church of the Torontonians” assumes an unscriptural authority to choose the church’s apostle(s) (By-law Number 2007-1, Article 10, Section 10.2). This upsets the balance of authority presented in the New Testament by redefining the office of apostle. The office of apostle is the only office in the universal church (Eph. 4:11-12; Rom. 1:5). The ministry of the apostles is universal for all the churches; it is not for specific local churches to the exclusion of others. The apostles also have the God-given authority to appoint and remove elders in the local churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:19), thus indicating that the elders are under the apostles. By empowering the Board of Directors to choose the church’s apostle(s), this new by-law subjects the apostles to the directors and limits the apostles’ ministry to only those churches that choose to recognize them. This clearly violates the

principles established in the New Testament. Brother Witness Lee writes:

The government of the church is very simple. The apostles go out and preach the gospel to establish the churches. Then they select the more mature believers and appoint them to be elders to shepherd, to take care of, a local church. The elders should take care of the churches according to the apostles' teaching. Because all the churches are established by the apostles, and the elders are selected and appointed in different localities by the apostles, in taking care of the churches all the elders should take the word of the apostles. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, p. 2169)

For a church to choose its own apostle(s) is for that church to establish an exclusive relationship with those apostles. The New Testament forbids such favoritism because it divides the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:12-13).

Subjugating the Elders

Under the newly adopted by-laws, the Board of Directors occupies the top tier in the hierarchy and has the power to ratify (or, by implication, not ratify) decisions made by the elders (Article 5, Section 5.10). The more powerful director-elders also have authority to "suspend" an elder without recourse and for a length of time determined at the sole discretion of the Board (Article 9, Section 9.10). Under this system, the elders are under the Board of Directors, thus negating the witness of Scripture that the elders are subject to the apostles (1 Tim. 5:19-20; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

Controlling the Saints

The Board of Directors of "The Church of the Torontonians" now claims previously unheard-of authority over the saints. Their publicly proclaimed rationale for these changes is that they need new powers to adequately protect the church from outside influence. The following powers have been given to the directors through the ratification of the by-laws:

1. The Board of Directors can suspend a member "without notice" and "without recourse." The duration of the

suspension shall be “for such period as the BOARD in its sole discretion shall determine” (Article 9, Section 9.10).

2. The directors have authority to remove anyone who does not agree with them (Article 4, Section 4.13, Subsections 3-6) and to impose disciplinary measures as a further consequence (Article 13, Section 13.5). A member under discipline agrees to waive all rights for the period of time that the discipline is in effect (Article 13, Section 13.5, Subsection 4).
3. As a qualification for membership, an applicant must satisfy the elders and the Board that he or she has not been contentious or divisive (Article 4, Section 4.1, Subsection 11). What is meant by “contentious” is not defined in the by-laws, but it can fairly be assumed that a “contentious” person is one who is not in agreement with the directors and does not receive their directives.
4. The Board of Directors can change the requirements for voting members “from time to time” as it deems “appropriate” (Article 4, Section 4.1, Subsection 12). This power affords the Board the way to include members favorable to them and to exclude members who may not support their initiatives. The by-laws further allow any members to be excluded from the meetings of “The Church of the Torontonians” (Article 13, Section 13.4, Subsection 8e). This again contradicts the scriptural exhortation to receive all believers (Rom. 15:7). The only ground for refusing a believer into the meetings of the church is if that one is divisive (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10), involved in idol worship (1 John 5:21; 1 Cor. 8:4-7) or gross sin (5:9-11; 6:9-10), or denies the incarnation of Christ (2 John 7-11).
5. To be a voting member, one must agree to submit to the authority and discipline of the directors and elders (Article 13, Sections 4 & 5). Submission to “the authority and disciplinary procedures and principles of the church” is one of the duties of members (Article 4, Section 4.6, Subsection 7, and Section 4.8, Subsection 5).
6. The directors approve applicants for voting membership (Article 4, Section 4.4). Furthermore, in order to increase support for their agendas, the directors can add ten more

votes by granting up to ten other saints an honorary voting member status for up to three years (4.9).

7. The Board monitors the financial contributions of the saints, verifying their donations by “church donation receipts” (Article 4, Section 4.1, Subsection 9; Section 4.6, Subsection 6; Section 4.8, Subsection 3). Unless a person’s donations to the church are verified, he cannot be admitted as a voting member. This violates the Lord’s own word in Matt. 6:1-4. In commenting on verse two of this portion, where the Lord charges the disciples not to sound a trumpet in their giving so as to receive glory from men, Brother Lee states, “For this reason, we in the churches do not keep records of the giving of the saints.” As the kingdom people, “[t]he principle is that we do not give with the intention of making a show or receiving glory from man. Instead, we do everything in secret in the presence of our heavenly Father” (*Life-study of Matthew*, p. 263).
8. The directors determine which services are legitimate for voting membership (Article 4, Section 4.1, Subsection 8). A saints’ hidden service unto the Lord, such as praying, shepherding the saints, preparing meals, etc., appears not to be regarded as sufficient for membership.
9. The directors decide which home and district meetings count as legitimate meetings for membership (Article 4, Section 4.1, Subsection 7). To be approved for voting membership, one is expected to “have attended church-designated gatherings regularly during a period of three most recent and consecutive years or longer (Hebrews 10:25), where ‘attend regularly’ is defined to mean at least one attendance per month at a meeting in the hall or a place deemed equivalent by the BOARD on the Lord’s Day.” Apparently, a meeting held in a place that the Board does not deem equivalent to the hall is not considered a genuine meeting, yet the Lord Himself regards any gathering of two or three into His name as a meeting where He is present (Matt. 18:20).

Protecting Their Interests

The directors can be removed only by a two-thirds vote of the qualified voting members at “an annual or other general meeting” (Article 5, Section 5.6). A special general meeting,

however, can be called only by the Board of Directors (Article 8, Section 8.2).

Forsaking Theocracy for Democracy

The new by-laws introduce the democratic principle of rule by majority vote and thus disregard the headship of Christ in the theocracy of the church. If the elders are unable to reach a decision by consensus, then the issue of concern is put to a vote (Article 1, Section 1.1, Subsection 12). Voting, however, does not have its source in God. Brother Nee is instructive here:

All the churches should have the same practice toward certain matters. Yet the standard of our conduct is not according to the approval of the majority but according to the decision of the brothers in oneness. Oneness and one accord are the works of the Holy Spirit, while the consent of the majority emerges from man. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 22, p. 67)

Brother Lee also identifies the fallacy of taking the democratic way in the church:

The principle is that in arranging business affairs, you should never bring in the way of democracy where everyone discusses and expresses their opinions, and where eventually the opinion of the majority is taken and the decision is made. This is the worldly way, and it is different from the teaching and example in the Bible. On the other hand, you cannot be autocratic; you cannot take the lead by yourself alone, with everything determined and decided by you and carried out by you. This is equally unscriptural. The principle of administration in the Bible has to do with the Holy Spirit in the Church. (*The Elders' Management of the Church*, pp. 231-232)

The system of voting brings in man's flesh and cuts off the authority of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we can never adopt the system of voting. On the other hand, the Bible does not allow one leading brother to make decisions by himself either. In the Bible there is no autocracy; there is only the meeting together of the experienced, spiritual, and elderly ones. (*The Elders' Management of the Church*, p. 234)

Rejecting the scriptural revelation of proper church administration and disregarding the fellowship given by Brother Nee and Brother Lee according to that revelation, the dissenting brothers in Toronto have formed a sect by using the corporation and its by-laws to produce an unscriptural system of church government. They have traded the rule of God for a kingdom of their own making.

Conclusion

A typical meeting of a local church “corporation” is a peaceful affair. The meetings are generally held once a year, as required by law, and are usually on the Lord’s Day. In order to fulfill the requirements of the state or provincial government, a quorum of voting members must be present to conduct business. The meeting is overseen by the directors. If a director is up for reelection, he may be duly reelected by a vote of the qualified members. Miscellaneous items, such as updating the by-laws, are also put to the members for a vote when necessary. (In these cases the practice of voting is permissible in order to fulfill the corporation’s responsibility before the secular government; the vote here does not affect the administration of the church as a spiritual entity.) A financial report is given by the corporation’s treasurer to conclude the meeting. The minutes recorded by the secretary serve as the official record of the business conducted. The atmosphere is always pleasant, and there is mutual respect between the directors and the members as they function together to faithfully fulfill their responsibilities as constituents of the corporation.

Recent events in Toronto were anything but peaceful. The directors decided to conduct an early business meeting to have their new by-laws passed in the interest of consolidating their power. In an effort to justify the request for an early meeting, a rancorous document entitled “Why Have an Early Business Meeting in Toronto?” was released to the saints. The writer of that document labels the saints who agreed with the quarantine of Titus Chu and certain of his co-workers as “77 saints aligned with LSM,” thus portraying them as outsiders in Toronto. A

large number of the saints and two of the elders protested the early business meeting due to fears that the dissenting elder-directors were attempting to strengthen their hold on the church. The dissenting directors ignored those protests and insisted on moving forward with their agenda. The saints who protested the directors' proposal were forced to seek the intervention of the court to keep the traditional mid-summer date for the business meeting. Their petition was denied because the court deemed the dispute to be religious in nature, and the meeting proceeded on the early date proposed by the directors. In that meeting, the by-laws were ratified by a vote of the saints only after the requirements for voting membership were illegally redefined by the directors in order to pad the voting rolls with their supporters. This action completed the dissenting brothers' takeover of "The Church of the Torontonians." That group is now a divisive sect no longer meeting as a genuine local church in the Lord's recovery.

The saints who refused to stand with the division have now disassociated themselves from the dissenting ones' divisive sect and are meeting as the church in Toronto. Their stand has been affirmed by the Body, and the church in Toronto began to enjoy the Lord's table again in a joyful and peaceful atmosphere with many visiting saints on April 15, 2007. We praise the Lord for His mercy!

It is clear that other genuine local churches in Eastern Canada and the Midwest of the United States are in danger of being similarly abused. We pray that the Lord will strengthen the saints in those churches to stand for the oneness of the Body of Christ and to reject the machinations of any ambitious brothers who would rise up to defraud them of their inheritance in the Lord's recovery.

[Tony Espinosa with Bill Buntain and Dan Sady]

