

## Chapter 15

# **Church Life Beyond the Movement**

*“...Your House is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:38).*

Every church must beware lest it hear the Lord’s dread words, “...Your house is left to you desolate” (Mt. 23:38). Groups that began in church history with the simple reality of “My Father’s House” (John 2:16) have often, with the passage of time, degraded into “*your* house.” When that alternate state sets in, desolation occurs. This does not mean an immediate suspension of activities. After the Lord walked away from the temple that fateful day, the bustling business of Judaism continued for decades—the crowds, the traditions, and yes, sheer ritual excitement.

For a long time, the Local Church Movement has been on the slippery slope of ignoring and even despising any feedback that might suggest the need for it to change. The result has been a slow slide into desolation. Up until this point, I have taken the Movement to task on a number of troubling characteristics, suggesting better attitudes and labor for those wishing to come out.

No book of this type would be complete without forecasts of some sort. Where is the Movement heading? What can we expect? I do not claim prophetic certainty about any predictions. Sweeping transformation can occur overnight on the basis of one event or one game-changing person. I’ll shelve “thus saith the Lord” in the context of this discussion. All things remaining equal, though, the

ship headed for an iceberg will crash into it. We can foresee the collision without the need for supernatural insight. As long as no one turns the captain's wheel or powerful currents do not move the object sitting in front of the ship, something will happen.

As with that example, we can make a number of reasonable predictions concerning the LC Movement. However, because the Movement has become a somewhat more complicated environment than it was just twenty years ago, we will need to divide this chapter into four segments: 1. LSM churches. 2. Non-LSM Local Churches of the Midwest United States. 3. Independent Local Churches. 4. New community churches.

### **Churches of the Living Stream Ministry**

#### *The "Cult" Label Will Most Likely Not Go Away*

For reasons already discussed at length in this volume, the Local Church Movement has a habit of generating suspicion. Wherever the Movement has gone, area Christians quickly use words like "cult" to describe it. Nor has this been confined to North America. China, which claims some 75% of the total LC Movement, has long since formulated opinions about the group both at the governmental and now at academic levels:

"One of the earliest cultic groups to spread rapidly was 'the Shouters,' a heretical offshoot from the 'Little Flock' founded by Watchman Nee. In the early eighties, large quantities of literature produced by Witness Lee, based in California, began to circulate in China. Some of the followers of the 'Shouters' elevated Nee [Lee?] to the position of Christ in their prayers. The aggressive evangelism of the sect combined with

their vociferous, mantra-like shouting of Bible verses led to a head-on clash with the State-controlled 'Three Self church' and the communist authorities. By 1983, the sect had been declared counter-revolutionary and was everywhere vigorously suppressed, and its key leaders imprisoned. However, it continues its activities underground, and the death of Witness Lee in California appears unlikely to curb the group." (Missionary Atlas Project, ASIA, China, p. 58).

A number of books recently published by Chinese scholars in English document the growth of Christianity in China (including its rapid growth in recent decades). One is *Redeemed by Fire* by Lian Xi, Professor of History at Hanover College. Xi reports that "In Henan [province] where the influence of the Shouters remained strong throughout the 1980s, many were baptized in the name of Li Changshou [Witness Lee], who they claimed was the 'victor from the east' prophesied in Isaiah, the 'successor to Jesus' and the one foretold in the Book of Revelation who would open the scroll and its seven seals" (p. 217).<sup>2</sup>

According to Professor Xi, "The Shouters," were branded "an evil cult" by the Chinese government. Therefore, the LSM-Taiwan Gospel Bookroom church associated with them was labeled a "counter-revolutionary organization." In 1983, there was a crackdown on "the Shouters" with up to 2,000 arrests.

Admittedly, the Chinese government is not a spiritual entity and therefore not expected to discern the fine points of spirituality. Unregenerate humanity has always misunderstood "Him who was born according to the Spirit" and spoken against the church everywhere. But detection of errors such as those mentioned above hardly require spirituality,

just a factual understanding of the historic Christian faith.

In addition, indigenous academic writers have begun to record the recent history of Christianity in China and they are not giving any strain of the LC movement [such as “The Shouters” of Witness Lee] a free pass, or a clean bill of health. Much to contrary, they are seriously questioning whether it is indeed a cult.

No doubt, Living Stream spokesmen would disavow extremes of thought by any of its manifestations in any country. But one can clearly see how attitudes and beliefs already highly questionable only need be coaxed a little before morphing into more bizarre ideas. For years in this country, odd myths floated around the LC Movement, claiming that Witness Lee had a “golden finger.” His Bible translation was a “gold bar.” He was called the “Acting God” and to many, at least in sentiment, his writings were on a par with the canonical writings of scripture. The Chinese proselytes who received his literature and visits from LSM representatives were not stupid. They quickly read between the lines, seeing that Lee was something of an elevated issue, and took it all an extra step.

An article on House-Church Networks in China edited by Tony Lambert, an expert on Christian groups in China and author of *China's Christian Millions* (2006), provides information on the Little Flock and the Local Church in China. He notes that in general, older Little Flock leaders on the Mainland have kept to the milder ways laid down by Watchman Nee and denounced Lee's teachings as divisive, even heretical. He also pointed out that “the Shouters have proved a fertile seed-bed for more extreme cults such as the Established King, The Lord God Cult and Eastern Lightning.” Kupfer adds, “Within some branches of the “Shouters” Li [W. Lee]

has been worshipped as the second person of the Trinity, replacing Christ.” (2009).

In North America, of course, an aggressive history exists with Local Churches trying to eliminate the cult complex affixed to them. Most of the efforts, costing millions of dollars, have been legal assaults. In recent times, however, public relations machinery has been turning inside the LC Movement, and since calling down fire on external enemies didn't work, glad-handing and back slapping did--at least in spurts. A new cozy relationship between the Christian Research Institute and the Living Stream Ministry resulted in the recent *Christian Research Journal* cover story, "We Were Wrong." The reasoning behind CRI's favorable reversal toward LSM was far from convincing and it is just as likely that another magazine cover will come out at some point, saying, "We Were Wrong *Again*."

One's orthodoxy cannot be purchased, finessed, or teased out. Neither can it be demonstrated by sleight of hand, where some cards are shown while others are cleverly withheld. Someone will always discover and trumpet the rest of the story.

Simple-minded LC members interpret these new tactical victories as proof of divine vindication for LSM. However, few recognize the irony of seeking support from the religious Babylon they were taught to despise. Why should the harlot's daughters be consulted on spiritual matters? Is "Christ versus Religion" now "Christ *with* Religion?" Should workers in the Lord's Recovery submit their high truth to common seminaries for approval?

These are things that must be answered, but we who are free from Movement influence already understand their meaning. They are maneuvers, mere posturing. And even if they clash with the group's core values, it does not matter, as long as the Lord's Recovery "wins" in the end. Only the public relations image is paramount. Anything goes,

including visits to Christian radio stations where ministry representatives pledge goodwill toward the Christianity they hate and denounce to insiders. These examples illustrate the point that LSM has become adept at being two-faced, presenting one view to outsiders and another to its membership.

Spiritual repentance is needed here—godly sorrow for a long track record of hypocrisy, as well as past offenses against individuals and groups. Otherwise, these lapses of integrity will continue to sit unresolved, a dark barrier between the Movement and the Lord it professes to serve. Leaders should take the initiative. Nothing short of repentance toward God and apologies to people will suffice in order to repair the soiled legacy of the group, which some outsiders now call “the suing church” and some ex-insiders have begun to call a cult.

There is evidence though, that anything but repentance will be forthcoming. The Living Stream Ministry’s Church in Montreal website asks prayer for

“Defense and Confirmation Project: current work on a book that documents some of the history of opposition against the Lord’s recovery in the United States; the Lord would continue to provide the proper persons as staff to carry out the DCP labour; that the mailings and contacts with Christian leaders would find receptive hearts and that our existing friends and contacts would be strengthened.”

This does not reflect a plan for transparency, but historical revisions, marketing, and self-justification. It will attempt to assure insiders of the group’s status as being unfairly persecuted. Perhaps it will also fill a dual role toward outsiders by trying to convince them of the Movement’s normalcy—a move

to make the case that “whatever walks like a duck or quacks like a duck,” is, in fact, *not* a duck.

And as long as Movement officials keep their new tenuous friendships at a safe distance, they may well succeed. Cleverly worded documents will satisfy many who are too busy in their own ministries to check the truth of what they’re being told. The real situation in the LC Movement only comes to light by being in it (as an undetected researcher) and finding out what beliefs and attitudes are actually held there.

Given the Movement’s continued efforts to get attention though, eventually investigators will discover its errors and begin to write about them. They will not merely deal with alleged mistakes in Trinitarian doctrine, but with the appalling arrogance and sectarian spirit that exist inside of LC environs.

Naturally, this will trigger further defensive waves from within the Movement, mandating the continued flow of apologetics for new or shaky recruits, as well as court actions against those who won’t buy it. The trickle down effect essentially guarantees that LC folk will go on living under the albatross of the cult label.

### *Divisions and Quarantines Will Continue*

The context of LC Movement oneness is different than the oneness the Lord prayed for in John 17. Indeed, the group has doggedly sought and demanded unity in an endless parade of externals such as Witness Lee, his ministry, his ministry house, his replacement ministers, publications, conferences, geographical city limits (called “the ground of locality”), and practices. The result has been a general exodus of individuals and a succession of large splintered factions in several countries (Most recently the entire Midwest region of

the United States and much of South America). With the repetitive stress on oneness inside the LC Movement, why has division still occurred? Because over-emphasis on items beyond the oneness of the spirit (Eph. 4:3-6) *always* leads to division. It is incredible that no Movement leaders seem to have discovered this fatal habit. And so the militant misguided quest for oneness goes on, in things that will never be able to provide it.

With each quarantine, Movement workers believe they grow nearer to the idyllic peace of the one new man. They believe that the decimation of churches and individuals who do not align themselves with the Living Stream will increase "the oneness." Perhaps it is thought that once the group's rank and file is shaved down to the narrowest most loyal members, there will be no further controversies. When this idyllic oneness is attained they believe the heavens will be opened bringing unprecedented blessing. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. All that these quarantines do is reduce the group to those who are the most inflexibly loyal. In the absence of more magnanimous souls, sooner or later division must happen again, except uglier. It is simple group dynamics at work.

As long as its definition of oneness does not change, division will continue being a regular cyclical affair in the LC Movement, much the same as with its Brethren progenitors. Like in Babel, oneness cannot be found outside the person of Christ, no matter how many messages are given to promote it.

*No Ministries are Likely to Ever Appear that will Make  
Significant Contributions to the  
Overall Body of Christ*

The line consistently drawn around "the writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee" (an oft-repeated phrase throughout local church websites) serves



notice not just that two ministries have helped some people, but that only these two ministries are allowed as source material. Nee and Lee (mostly Lee)<sup>1</sup>, eclipse all other views, defining everything from biblical interpretation to practices and attitudes. The statement thus made is that the group is "Of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee," a sentiment soundly rebuked by the apostle Paul. Though the group would steadfastly deny such a position, anyone with a modicum of intelligence could see it by visiting member churches, websites, or conferences.

Not only does the group demonstrate a refusal of any ministry outside its walls, but any that might rise up from within. Plenty of growing believers in the local church ranks have discovered that encouragements to "take heed to your ministry and fulfill it" really mean to take heed to Witness Lee's ministry and fulfill it. Departures from this expectation meet smothering resistance, even if it doesn't involve any trespass against the Christian faith itself. This is why the current environment seems largely populated with parrots--people who cannot think or do apart from Lee's interpretations. Unless change occurs, the entire group will excel only at replicating one minister along with all his personal limitations.

Attempts at even the most moderate creative enterprises have often resulted in some type of controversy. Song-writing generated from Long Beach California ended with the authors "apologizing" for their efforts. Certain youth from the Chicago area, captured by the LSM training, "repented" for their involvement in songwriting. Children's service materials authored by Gene Gruhler were tolerated for many years, but never endorsed. Yet all of these attempts were at the most, mildly innovative. More radical creativity was certain to be condemned. The Great Lakes "Mountain Top," with its contemporary Christian music, dramas,

short pragmatic messages, and magnetic appeal provoked a far more public backlash from Movement headquarters. This involved high profile denunciations of “golden calf worship” and similar invective wherever Ministry figures gained an ear. Other censured items have been books written and trainings conducted off of the officially approved radar. The negative attitudes toward these and many other items promise intolerance toward anything but ministry boxed and packaged in Anaheim, California.

We cannot say that these incidents are merely content-based, either. Consider Jonathan Bethke’s viral video “*Why I love Jesus, but hate Religion*” (Now with over twenty million views). The sentiments of that video match Witness Lee’s *Christ vs. Religion*. Living Stream churches should endorse the video whole-heartedly. But once again, this was not a product initiated by Movement headquarters. Nor could it ever have emerged from there. The brother would have been warned into submission about “being soulish or ambitious, exalting the self,” etc. Very likely if the video had gotten just a few thousands hits, Bethke would have been strongly “encouraged” to take it down. Fortunately for him, he’s at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, where there’s room for creativity.

As broad, gifted people wander into and out of the LC Movement, the viability of the group will remain at an extremely low tide. These type of folks represent the creative engine of any enterprise. They are thinkers, innovators, developers. Unfortunately, nothing threatens the LC Movement more than this kind of intelligence. And so gifted people quickly come and go. The official reasons given for their departure usually have to do with their being “natural,” “ambitious,” and other derogatory code words. As in any religious organization, some of them were. However, a great many simply smelled

the domineering LC religious environment and chose not to stick around for twenty-five years before leaving.

Those who did stay have tried to make the most of things, secretly hoping that their God-given gifts will one day find an outlet agreeable to the program at large. For the most part, though, they feel compelled to bury precious talents out of fear of being tempted to pride or service in the flesh.

The LC canvas presents itself as a place of neutral gray, where few gifts are given encouragement. The 'gift' of being able to memorize and recite huge chunks of W. Lee's writings is encouraged; but little else. Members are thus reduced to a dreary sameness. The sum total is a church ill-equipped to produce any servants of the Lord who will become gifts to His body at large.

*No LSM Church is Likely to Ever be A Significant  
Factor in a City*

The idea of a ministry building itself up is not necessarily objectionable. Some amount of self-maintenance must take place in order for it to continue operation. However, when the Living Stream claims to be a ministry whose function is to build up member churches, reality speaks to the contrary. After traveling around the Movement scene for years and witnessing firsthand what was being produced, I had the strong impression that many churches were simply an appendix to the ministry organization itself—places to bide one's time until there was a training of some type, either full-time or middle-age, or retirement age. LC congregations were places to occupy until "the Lord's move" to some other place came along that needed a bookstore, translation work, or radio program promotion. In comparison to the excitement of high profile ministry, the so-called Local Churches are

limp places, shrunken in stature and pledging that they are for the ministry. Most are stale or dying.

The message the LC Movement desires to send obviously, is that it is prevailing. Although trainings and conferences do feature plenty of attendants, histrionics at the microphones, and heady claims to high truth, those activities are not where to find an accurate spiritual pulse. We should not look there. Instead, we should look at the actual “churches” that the Ministry claims to raise up—groups that exist outside the crosshairs of where the action is. This is where the real story is told. And as pointed out, it isn't impressive. Around 2005 LSM reported that “There are nearly 300 local churches across the US, with a combined membership of almost 25,000” [[www.contendingforthefaith.com](http://www.contendingforthefaith.com)]. After more than four decades of the LC movement in the US, these are *not* impressive numbers, at least not for a group alleged to be the Lord's move on the earth. Moreover, a good number of these “Local Churches” are predominantly Asian in constituent, in culture, and often also in language. They hardly match the description of “local.”

Our hope is that down deep inside, the dear Christians who populate these "churches" will at long last weary of membership in a worldwide ministry. They are always being told through infomercials and excited reports that something great is going on somewhere else. Indeed, a large part of the Movement “game” consists of God doing something in other cities, other places, but never in the community where they live. In order to participate, it is thought, they need to migrate.

The game becomes circular at this point. The place so celebrated through the Movement grapevine today will be the barren and forgotten place of tomorrow. I remember one such locale being promoted in every gathering. Appeals for prayer and money were made for it, but beyond the initial

excitement phase, nothing but husks remained. A friend of mine said that he had traveled abroad to see that church and found it all but non-existent, its few members locked in the typical religious pattern of so many other local churches.

A grass roots revolt will perhaps occur when typical saints finally tire of languishing congregations and “church life” lived on airplanes and at hotels. However, a broad united front is an unlikely scenario because most North Americans register discontent simply by disappearing. This is especially true of the younger generation.

*No LSM Church Is Likely to Ever Be the Practical  
Expression of the Church in a City*

With an overwhelming emphasis on the failures of Christianity (now carefully laundered for public consumption), and a powerful self-belief in its own superiority, the LC Movement could not be anything other than an island. In cities where “the ground” has been taken for twenty years, it is not uncommon for LC members to have zero knowledge of anything going on in their own city among other believers (except as fodder for criticism). The leaders themselves may never have met one other Christian leader in town, and in fact, are quite happy to keep it that way.

This attitude of not seeking out fellowship or locally building bridges sounds peculiar, since “the ground of oneness” is the prevailing rationale for their church practice. After all, if the stated stand is oneness, then the Local Church ought to have the largest heart in the city and the most interest in others. Things like denominational boundaries ought not to be a hindrance. And weak apologies such as “we don’t want to hold hands over fences” will be seen as an excuse for the lazy—of church folk

who like the doctrine of “the ground” but don’t care much for the heart and labor that goes with it.

Alas, the Local Church ground has produced none of the anticipated positive effects. It is once again, just the same story of the oneness of those who agree upon a particular idea. At the end of the day, according to Movement practice, the local ground is the oneness of all those who agree with the idea of the local ground. It is nothing more than a franchised approach to replicating the supposed outward form of first century churches. Worse, even that form has been saddled with numerous extras, most notably, Witness Lee’s ministry.

The LC package is intended to be a self-contained world, walled off from the rest of the body of Christ. If it were not, members might end up exposed to other ministries, and gatherings of Christians, and find that all is *not* dead. They might discover needed resources for marriage and child rearing. They might discover that other groups of Christians are growing through prayer and the Word, and not just techniques denounced as worldly means and worldly methods. They may even start to wonder whose definition of “worldly” governs this universe anyway.

Set on such a course, the LC Movement will definitely consummate in something, but it won’t be the New Jerusalem. All separatist Christian groups who say they are not part of Christianity typically share a common fate after many years of self-imposed seclusion. They become extremely strange and un-Christian looking. In the end they get their wish and certainly do not look like anything in Christianity. That is the fate ahead in more increasing fashion unless breakthroughs are made.

*The Reputation for Unspiritual Behavior  
Will Probably Never Be Repaired*

Not one area demonstrates the spiritual sickness of the LC Movement more effectively than how it faces opponents. Boasts of victory about radio broadcasts and new training facilities say virtually nothing about an inward condition. The truest tale is told by what the group has historically done when it is challenged. Lawsuits, threats, bully pulpits (where thinly veiled attacks are made during messages), cover-ups, slander, offers of financial support in exchange for loyalty ("standing with you" they call it), all say loud and clear, that anything goes as long as it's for "the Lord's Recovery." The deeper the conviction, the nastier the tactics become.

During the time of the lawsuits that LSM followers filed against Midwest churches (2007), an Ohio brother looked out the window of his meeting hall and was shocked to see a top LSM figure walking around in the parking lot. This tiny church had never been visited by such a person. Presumably the man had come to scout the property "prize" that he stood to win in the court case. This rascal—no, *scoundrel*—managed a background orchestration that ousted the small local church. He succeeded in obtaining his "prize," with the result that the elderly saints who occupied it were kicked out with no place to go.

It is unlikely that anyone familiar with the "rap sheet" of the LC Movement will ever respect it as a spiritual entity. This would especially include the reporters, lawyers, victims and ex-members who lay in the wake of its tactics.

*“The Ministry” will Continue to Eclipse the God  
It Purports to Serve*

It is no secret that the LC's have their own proprietary language. The real problem with this is the distance it creates between its members and the Bible. When a dozen verses can be summed up in the word “economy” or “life,” then the need is moot to study from where they allegedly came. Why take the time when you can use a one-word shortcut? So, strings of jargon can front a hundred verses and the constant use of them actually creates a growing gap from the Word of God. It is much like mathematicians who know how to punch calculator buttons, but have forgotten how to do the calculations by hand. After a while, it is arguably not math being taught anymore, but the calculating device itself. “We are standing on the shoulders of those who knew math,” they might say.

This habit has led down a trail to strange teachings such as “the four-in-one God,” “baby God,” “the Acting God,” etc., and the trend will no doubt become stranger over time, as workers feel the freedom to invent new concepts, trusting that they will not be challenged by anyone on the inside.

Extreme emphases always have a warping effect upon a group. For instance, ideas such as “the feeling of the Body” and “the proper representatives of the Body” have grown out of a near obsession with the topic of the church. The result is that the corporate aspect of the Christian life falls grossly out of balance with that of the individual members. Personal accountability to Christ gets eclipsed. This is only one example. Other items have been similarly misshapen related to ministry, oneness, the cross, and life. The habit that led up to all of it was the simple cherry picking and overworking of passages until the passages themselves lost their intended equilibrium.



The Bible has multiple writers and genres that bring balanced attention to the themes of purpose, life, mission, and methods. Reintroduced to the people of God, and handled evenly, it levels the religious inclination to overstate or to neglect.

Regrettably, as LSM training centers spring up in various parts of the country, there does not seem to be any evidence of adopting a balanced hermeneutic. Instead, the intention is to corral new crops of young, unsuspecting college youth into “the vision”—a biased overgrown emphasis on a few biblical topics.

In addition to ministry teachings replacing the teachings of the Bible, ministry authority tends to replace the authority of the Bible. The intimidation factor in human religious organizations can easily carry more weight than the Word of God itself. Pulpits, suits, ties, and videos invest a considerable amount toward celebrity image, leaving the common saint in reverential awe. “Brother so-and-so said...” or “The ministry says...” then become intro statements that precede what ought to be done. The LC Movement is certainly no stranger to this. Unfortunately, the frequent attitudes and behavior inspired by its leadership have often taken dark paths. Some of it has been striking in the willful disregard of the Bible’s standards for Christian conduct.

Movement leaders have lent considerable empowerment to failed financial schemes, conspiracies to remove people, reversals of righteous judgments, and the passing of unrighteous judgments. All were largely accomplished by numbing the average small member’s conscience.

A case in point occurred after the long escalation of hostility in Columbus, Ohio. A band of LSM faithful had initially agreed to leave the church there, honoring the wishes of the eldership and the majority of the congregation. They cited their submission to authority, the cross, and general

biblical principles for their departure. It was a parting statement that we respected.

After a short time though, they returned with a large law firm and a legal strategy to "deal" with the church. What had happened? Apparently, after the group decided to honor the cross and biblical principles, it ran into an influence that it revered *more* than the cross and biblical principles—"the Ministry." And so, "encouraged" by these very important persons, the easily manipulated simple-souled believers laid aside the Bible. They chose instead to put their confidence in a ministry influence that assured them they were acting in God's best interests. Nor should this necessarily come as a surprise. The LC Movement is a man-honoring system that creatively tweaks doctrine to fit circumstances. If LC members question the righteousness of certain deeds, they are characteristically told to turn from the Tree of Knowledge and just care for "Life." Conveniently "life" trumps righteousness when it suits the leaders' purpose.

No doubt over time, more outrages will occur like the one mentioned above, and some will finally leak out into full public view—not just in forums and books like this one.

*In Most Places the Organization Will Become  
Increasingly Asian*

Cursory observation will confirm that both world-wide and in major cities of North America, the Local Churches have become predominately Asian. This includes almost all Movement offshoots (such as in the North American Midwest). While race in a congregation should not be an issue restricting Christian fellowship, it can be indicative of whether a church is indeed "local."

Fifty or more years ago, Witness Lee imported a church and ministry model to North America via Taiwan and the Far East. That import has had only limited success in North America, because it simply doesn't fit 21<sup>st</sup> century North American culture. Hence Asian people are vastly over-represented in the LC movement because the model fits them more closely (although even some Asian scholars are beginning to see problems with it). Caucasians and especially Afro-Americans are typically under-represented wherever the Movement sets up a church.

The unanswered question is how a "local church" can claim to be authentically local when its majority membership is made up of a minority group within that city. For years members were told that "the Lord is moving among the Chinese," as though He had no interest in working with the Caucasian and Afro-Americans in the community. Few if any could see the difference between divine work and the elementary limitations of foreign culture.

While this blindness continues, the churches will continue becoming Asian and especially as long as Lee's imported model is sold as being "the pattern of the tabernacle," "the vision," or "the recovery."

It would be very difficult to say how much spiritual desolation has already happened in LSM churches, but it has occurred to the extent that outsiders notice it. On a regular basis I receive emails from individuals and on some occasions, entire ministries. They wonder why LC people fight so hard for mainstream recognition in the media and yet conduct themselves so poorly in actual fellowship. They wonder if this group is a ministry, a church, or a cult.

Many have assayed to define the Local Church of Witness Lee. As an ex-long term member and leader in the group, I will also attempt a final opinion: *The Local Church of Witness Lee is a splinter sect of the Closed Brethren, modified by Asian culture and peculiarly developed because of its isolation from the rest of the Body of Christ.*

Most recently in certain corners, some Local Churches are said to have relaxed questionable attitudes--quietness in relation to Witness Lee or the condemnation of other groups. This is certainly a step in the right direction and hopefully it is not just another public relations tactic calculated to fool other Christians. Perhaps the group will at long last listen to its critics and begin navigating an about-face. If so, books such as this one will become irrelevant, a possibility I would be more than happy to see.

However, given the attitudes and personalities of individuals who occupy the Movement forefront today, it seems unlikely that humility will prevail from the top. Leaders in the Movement who have been guilty of wrongdoing will eventually leave this world, probably taking their unrepentant trespasses against so many others to the judgment seat of Christ. There, righteousness will no longer be delayed and ministry "spin" does not exist--neither diversionary talk about the tree of life, nor "the feeling of the body."

That will leave the job of repentance to others here today. Groups with a long history of poor dealings against members will do better confessing them in a unified and thorough manner rather than silently sweeping it all under a rug. Nor is it sufficient in the case of the Local Churches, to leave everything up to one cryptic apology from Witness Lee, who, toward the end of his life, felt the need to admit wrong attitudes.

One top level ex-Jehovah's Witness lamented how, after the organization reversed its stance against organ transplants, did so without admitting the error of their stand in the past. There were no apologies to families whose loved ones had died, needlessly bound to organizational rules. Nor were people who had gotten the transplants against Watch Tower wishes allowed back into the fellowship even after the decision change. Such behavior, which we would expect from an unregenerate cult, should not be found among those confessing the Christian faith.

Apart from changed attitudes and a spirit of repentance, the LC Movement will continue hardening into the cast of a strange, quasi-Christian sect. Some have argued that this has already happened in full—that the sunset of the group occurred long ago with the introduction of legalism and various mistakes made. Regardless, our hope is not the recovery of a system, but for the many dear and true believers within it, whose sincere commitment, even if misplaced, is admirable. After all, they are our brothers and sisters. The system is not.

### **Non-LSM Churches of the Midwest**

These churches, under the leadership of Titus Chu, have rejected the Living Stream Ministry, and to a certain extent, the extremes associated with the Movement, but substantially keep other beliefs and practices.

If my tone during this part of the critique seems more favorable toward them, I freely admit my bias. For decades I called the Midwest Local Churches home because of the comradeship, training, and familial care that I received as a much younger man. As would be expected in any church, all was not perfect, but it was a level of imperfection I was willing to live with. Indeed, I went on to serve and

fight for the interests of the associated congregations in the Midwest by traveling (both domestically and abroad), teaching, and co-leading them. Although I am no longer officially among them in that capacity (more about this in the epilogue), today my memories of the many brothers there are overwhelmingly positive.

I believe that the greatest hope of reform for the LC Movement lies with the saints in the Great Lakes Region. My assessments are not merely sentimental in nature. In my personal estimation, these Christians have a larger measure of spirituality still intact, a respect for truth, simple love for Christ, and exist in larger numbers than any of the breakaway groups within North America. The most ready source of spiritual energy lies there with them. However, as I will detail, their potential could very well be hindered by a number of issues.

### *The Past will be the Future*

It would seem that since the Midwest Local Churches now have a separate identity from the Living Stream Ministry, their problems would be over. Yet, the one thing that will continue to jeopardize their future is their past. The Midwest LC's have just enough fondness for the tendencies of their Movement background to land them right back in the same boat as the one from which they departed.

The Movement is basically a systematic approach to doing church and ministry that yields the same results in every context. Whether the leader's name is Witness Lee or someone else is beside the point. To the extent that a group holds certain LC beliefs and practices, then it virtually guarantees a repeat experience of the same old undesirable Movement outcomes as before. This includes shunning any whom the leadership has tacitly disapproved (no

actual sin need be involved); power struggles; politics; manipulation of individuals or environments (through intimidation, pressure, or flattery); real estate lust; the bully pulpit (innuendoes in messages meant to “deal” with someone or something), etc.

It isn't enough to eliminate LSM paraphernalia like the Recovery Version or the hymnal. If a local church wants to neutralize the negative baggage associated with past Movement extremes, it requires more than swapping Anaheim celebrities for someone else in the pulpit.

Yes, the flawed LC Movement approach gains considerable steam by the strength of the personalities promoting it. But its true power lies at the DNA level, where people live and function without much penetrating thought and very few questions asked. The Midwest Local Churches preserve enough of these deep strands to effectively provide an LSM rerun, except on a different scale with a different cast of characters.

Have these congregations changed anything fundamental following their departure from LSM's orbit and leadership? After the 2006-07 quarantine and law-suits a website was established—concernedbrothers.com to combat LSM's attacks and misinformation. A second purpose for the site was to re-examine LC teachings and practices. Significantly, very few contributed to the latter purpose. For most Mid-West church leaders it seems the diagnosis was, “blended brothers—bad; Great Lakes brothers—good.”

*Inherited Ideas About Oneness will Inflict  
Further Damage*

The immoderate emphasis on “oneness” that gripped Living Stream churches still lurks in the Midwest. This is not the local congregational

oneness that every church needs to keep its coherence, but the connectional form that links entire churches together across city, county, and state lines. Local assemblies are expected to keep that oneness, which now has a smaller regional form since the break from LSM.

Once again what defines this “oneness” is not so much the Spirit or the Christian faith as the influence of a senior worker, his conferences and trainings, certain devotional practices, and subscription to the doctrine of “the local ground.” While not challenged, these things seem to be non-issues. However, friction is certain to occur where any dedicated church leader strays from them. Immediately messages are trotted out with old familiar mantras such as “Oneness is the greatest thing in the universe.” Ironically, these platitudes were nowhere to be found during the Midwest’s refusal to be “one” with the Living Stream Ministry churches. However, they are convenient tools for discouraging present member churches from breaking rank and choosing to labor in new ways. In fact, one of the greatest fears in the Midwest is the appearance of free groups. These are congregations that realize they can probably do a much better job of reaching mainstream American neighborhoods and building people into fellowship than a vague foreign ministry hybrid.

Some Mid-West leaders have already found out what happens when they ignored regional concerns about their progressive methods of labor or the simple choice to be local. They were quietly branded as “having a different view,” “doing their own thing,” “taking a different way,” “losing the vision of the church,” or any of an assortment of phrases subtly conveying that they were spiritually unhealthy. This produced undercurrents of estrangement and so without public fanfare, or the word “quarantined” or “excommunicated” even being used, those in



question were quietly shown the door. Other leaders were covertly warned against inviting them to minister.

Naturally, this raises the larger concern of who will be next. Which worker or elder will now be in the crosshairs as not sufficiently “one”? Who will be the next to fail the test of the local ground or some other artificially imposed necessity? Leaders who naively trust that they are safe may find themselves victims some ten or fifteen years down the road.

These tactics for penalizing non-cooperation have been borrowed and modified from the Movement mother ship. In the wake of recent activities within the Midwest, the unfortunate message has started to become clear: the “island” that separated from the larger Movement is not some new thing. It is substantially the same old thing in a smaller package.

Santayana said, “Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.” In the context of our discussion, that means the problems generated by Living Stream “oneness” will recycle amidst those who practice it, whoever they are and wherever they are—yes, even when scaled down to regional size.

In order to short circuit the inevitability of these repeat performances, key understandings will need to be changed. For one thing, local churches must truly be local, “*intensely* local!,” as the Midwest used to declare during the LSM split (but now no longer says).

The rule of thumb for oneness in this new environment is that the farther one goes outside the city limits, the more “oneness” is a spiritual matter. The closer to the city limits, then the more progressively practical it becomes. I can hear the cries of protest already, with most of them coming from workers. If oneness were to become more of a local matter, then large conferences and extra local events that draw their attendance from member

churches would dissolve. “The churches would lose their cohesion,” some would say. But the concern is more likely that the *work* would lose its cohesion. The churches would be fine, as they sought greater involvement on the local scene, serious learning, and involvement that helped them in their kingdom mission. Yes, some would evaporate, having only been propped up for years by long distance events, anyway. The rest would be forced into rigorous adaptation and become the better for it.

This is not theory. Sooner or later, the Midwest will face this awesome shift in paradigm which will in turn impose an incredible burden upon everyone. Elders will need to cultivate true pastoral skills on a par with those utilized in successful Christian groups. Saints involved in full-time vocational ministry will need to exercise relevant, powerful, insightful ministry perhaps coveted by other Christian groups as well. It is either that, or those full time ministers will be ignored by the *intensely* local church as these new churches are *intensely* involved in their cities. The learning curve will be steep and it is better to prepare now than be lulled into the false confidence that the present Midwest system will continue forever.

*Unchecked Spiritual Authority will  
Continue Terminating Gifts to the Body*

As in the LSM version of the Movement, a similar spiritual authority complex exists in the Midwest. No one argues against the fact that spiritual authority is real and that mature, healthy believers ought to be respected and heard. But this understanding runs amuck when it attempts to morph into a system of ecclesiastical rule. The “order in the body” or “the lead in the work” can wrongly entitle a so-called authority to hold sway over entire areas of churches and over people whom

he (or, they) have never even personally met, much less labored upon.

This tendency is more nebulous with the Living Stream Ministry, because it comprises a number of men who act as a sort of central committee. The Midwest, though, typically revolves around one worker, who sets the pace and direction for the ministry of the entire region. This was a pattern personally lived out by Witness Lee while he was still alive. Eventually, sub-lieutenants influenced by him each went to various parts of the globe where there were no peers on their same level and thus few serious checks or balances to their teaching, leadership, and direction.

The belief that this arrangement is somehow spiritual unfortunately rolls out a welcome mat for frequent bad behavior. We must all grant our leaders the grace to have bad days. However that does not include bad *patterns*. Patterns develop when behaviors go unchallenged, and they go unchallenged because of teachings that tell us to fear, above all else, the spiritual authority allegedly residing in some man.

Under that erroneous assumption, if said authority uses intimidation, public rebukes, temper tantrums, and mocking, it is acceptable because it is all part of the package. Indeed, I have seen godly, senior men bullied and scolded as though they were children. Meanwhile, others, watching quietly from the sidelines and thankful that they escaped the moment, put their hands in their pockets and with sheepish grins said, “Well, you just have to understand our brother.” One elder summed it all up with an air of resignation, saying, “That’s the way it is.” But such rubber stamping of spiritual authority is a lot like playing Russian roulette. One by one, individuals begin to disappear whom the Lord has spent years raising up—each effectively dispatched by “the order in the body.”

Aside from adjusting the source teaching that overly indulges the idea of spiritual authority, accountability is a key factor here. What would happen if a number of influential elders set a policy for leaders: "You will not be given free pass for rude, abrasive remarks and public shaming. Insults from the podium will no longer be treated as the Lord's Word from an angry prophet. Instead, it will be seen as sinful human weakness and will be met with censure. Outbursts of anger are works of the flesh. It is simply childish to insist on something and then make snide remarks (especially from the pulpit!) when you don't get your way. If you continue to act out in unchristian ways, regardless of your elevated status and past history, you will be asked to step down."

What would happen if such policies were adopted? No doubt, it would be called rebellion. Yet spiritual authority does not offer someone a deferment from virtuous conduct. It certainly does not sanction manhandling ministers and neutralizing them.

As long as questionable authority patterns persist, promising brothers will continue to disappear, after years of training and comradeship and possibly after many years of faithful service in the church. No one is innocent here. Local leaders who passively accept these situations are as complicit in the deed as if they had directly done it themselves.

*Inner Life subterfuge will Frustrate  
the Appearance of New Ministries*

The concept of personal spirituality is still highly regarded in the Midwest but notoriously ill-defined. Words like "revelation" and "vision," "life," and "view," end up taking on a kind of Fu-Manchu aura of mystery. Someone is said to have lost their

“vision” if they experiment with contemporary worship styles or their church becomes community-centered. However, when someone challenges exactly what “vision” means, which some of us did, it only draws blank stares.

If vision is not qualified, it is simply defined according to the most intimidating person in the room. And the tool of choice is usually inner life lingo. This spiritual language pervades, prohibiting some things and magically validating others. In heaping doses, it becomes noise that effectively mutes further discussion.

Recently a group of men were advised not to have a spiritual work. Presumably, the alternative is to “abide in Christ” or “be under the cross” or just be satisfied with “Christ, Christ, Christ.” The words are wonderful, but we must pay attention to the other side of the equation. Where is that recommendation going? It all too often means burying one’s talent, and thus preventing anything fresh or unsanctioned from arising. It is to keep things within the comfortable confines of the status quo. That is how recommending “only Christ,” becomes the utilization of an inner life concept to actually quench inner life.

The natural consequences of continuing under this type of spirituality (if it can be called that), is a desolate future. When saints are sixty or seventy years old, where will their ministry and work be? Will it have all been whisked away by admonitions to superior inner life and so-called vision? There needs to be a reorientation to the Lord of the Harvest that involves the doing of scripture and not just the “being,” “feeling,” “experiencing,” and “enjoying” part of it.

After several years of Cleveland training in church history, inner life, preaching, studies, and service, I felt ready to *do* something. However, I began to notice that some viewed training as being necessary mostly in order to get more training. In

fact, a standing joke in the Midwest was how that we were all becoming “trainaholics.” When training is a cyclical experience, it starts to correspond to Paul’s description of “Always learning and never arriving at the full knowledge of the truth.” So I took my training and did something with it (other than to enjoy it). I put it to work in the area of evangelical teaching, writing, and church planting. Without similar attitudes amongst the believers in Midwest LC’s, the future for them will be a lunar landscape—void of new color and finally, even of life.

### *Eventually Church and Work will Clash*

Another famous Midwest battle cry during the long estrangement process from the Living Stream Ministry was that “The work is for the church and not the church for the work.” Was this merely an example of quote mining, of hunting for ammunition against the west coast, or is it universally true for all? The quickest way to determine the sincerity of the slogan is to *act* as though it were a given.

Imagine this response from a Midwest church to a Midwest conference invitation: “Dear brothers, what is the subject matter of this conference? If you cannot tell us, we are not coming. Our time is limited and so we must choose wisely what will give the church the most help.” Or, “Sorry, brothers, but the last several times we came, there were no applicable points to equip our labor where we live. Worse, some remarks were publicly made that were far too easy for newcomers to misunderstand.” What would happen as the result of these statements? Judging from the counter-response, it will rapidly become clear whether the work is for the church or vice-versa.

While extra-local events exert the indirect influence of the Work, a far more direct line exists. A local worker is often typically installed directly

within a church, sometimes within its very eldership. If the church and the work are allegedly separate, then such an arrangement of cross-pollination creates a conflict of interest. How can the churches pursue what is best for their particular local testimony if their leaders represent the interests of a particular outside ministry? The potential for conflict is magnified if (as in the case in many Midwest churches) the worker is financially supported by regional work rather than directly by the church.

For many years I resisted that reality, even while I myself was both an elder and a Midwest worker. I vigorously denied that such a problem existed or could ever exist. However, as I grew in my leadership, I began to act more like a local leader, emphasizing local concerns and burdens. This resulted in a full-blown confrontation with LSM loyalists of the West coast work, as well as eventual estrangement from the Midwest work. Regardless of the region, at the end of the day the evidence strongly suggested that the saying, "The work is for the church," was just that...a saying.

The egos and ambitions of workers are not the only things that preserve this approach. Local leadership enables it as well. Fear of offending the senior worker, lethargic attitudes toward learning, and a severe inferiority complex (Who am I to think I could train someone?) feed the problem.

Midwest local leaders who see themselves as initiators, learners, and spiritual entrepreneurs, will be the catalyst for change here. These entrepreneurial leaders will embody a new attitude toward their churches and themselves. Their interests will increasingly lie in the feeding and equipping of the local flock—not giving the saints to someone else to do the job (and reinforcing the impression that real help mainly lies outside the church at some distant location). Whether anyone

cares to admit it or not, the days of elders as middle managers have drawn to a close. Leaders with new mindsets will not feel obligated to invite workers who coast on the reputation of someone else. Their key concern will no longer be loyalty, but effectiveness. Rather than asking about a worker's affiliation with this or that other person, the question will be, "What have you, as an individual, done in your own church/context that has borne clear results?"

### *Social Dissonance will Increase*

As society changes and the LC Movement falls increasingly out of step with the North American cultural context, so invariably will the Midwest branch of the Movement. There have been attempts to remedy this through the planting of new churches with more forward thinking leaders. This has been a brave and admirable step. However, remaining congregations still find themselves in a limbo where it is not clear what decade they inhabit (60's, 70's, 80's, 90's?). Others are confused about whether anything different is worldly or somehow treasonous to "the vision." While leaders argue about this amongst themselves, effectively paralyzing forward motion, a slow slide into oblivion will occur with vanishing numbers, and smaller churches closing their doors. As I warned a senior worker, "Eventually most Midwest Local Churches will fit into the living rooms of homes." And if something bad happens to senior level leadership, the effect will be accelerated. Without a work system to uphold it, the Midwest Movement will become an anemic coalition of house churches.

In the final analysis, what is the Midwest Local Church Movement? *It is a relaxed form of the Movement at large without the specific linkage points*



*(books, persons, events, etc.) that connect it to the Living Stream Ministry.*

If the LSM LC movement is highly reminiscent of the “Closed (Exclusive) Brethren,” the Mid-West LC movement is reminiscent of the “Open Brethren.” History shows us that some Open Brethren assemblies have changed and prospered.

The Midwest sub-strain, however, has been frozen slightly beyond the main Movement periphery. The jury is still out concerning whether it will continue that way. Having spent many years in the Midwest myself, I know the saints there, and what fantastic spiritual things that they are capable of doing. In large numbers and with purpose of heart, they could be torch-bearers of the future.

### **Independent Local Churches**

These congregations reject the leadership of the Living Stream Ministry and extremes associated with the Movement, only keeping some strands of past tradition (meeting style, music, etc.). They tend to be more local than their Midwest cousins, having no centralized work authority and a far less formal connective fellowship. Predictably, they are shunned by the LC Movement (at least the Living Stream branch) as not being legitimate. In subdued ways, they have a rope bridge connection with their Movement past, such as having a substantial contingent of ex-members, or Movement values that still faintly reverberate among them.

Few of these places exist in North America; you could probably count them on two hands. No consensus of practice exists among them, but it is still common to find “popcorn” testimonies, teaching ministry shared within a rotation of several men, and conservative forms of music (most avoid contemporary Christian styles that utilize drums or electric instruments).

If this sounds like simple local church 101, it is. But it can also be the best thing for an embattled local church. During the troublesome war between West coast and Midwest some years back, I found several of these places an important refuge. Much to my surprise, not only was I warmly welcomed, but even invited to minister. Independent LC's can be very important that way. For saints freshly outside the Movement, who find the Christian world too shocking to their spiritual sensitivities, these are good places to visit. Visiting ex-members will receive a break from the oppressive religious Movement environment, but not find anything so jarring that they feel they are in a foreign land.

*Without Adjustments, Irrelevance will Occur*

Still, these churches ought to be concerned for their future. It would seem that the key to their continued survival is much the same as with any church—to bring people in from the outside and then give them quality discipleship. However, without updates to their methods of labor, newcomers may find these groups a bit colorless and uninteresting. That would be an easy fix, but unfortunately, conservative voices from within often view with great suspicion attempts to add flair or even enhanced functionality to outreach efforts. No doubt things like advertising, musical experimentation, internet presence, special events, and in-house training are no substitutes for spiritual reality. But they certainly have their place. Without these tools it will become difficult to reach newer and upcoming generations of North Americans. The attitude of keeping things “the way we want it,” comes with a price, which is to end up irrelevant to the surrounding population.

A few independent local churches currently have attendance, demographic mix, and commitment

levels that could translate into vibrant community churches. It would mean, though, relaxing the grip on some favorite things.

### **New Community Churches**

These churches (Of which I am now a part), either used to be in the LC Movement or have leadership that used to be operative there (i.e., Cincinnati Community Church, Grandview Christian Assembly). These congregations appear to be garden variety community churches that retain very little of past Movement DNA, even less than the independent local churches just noted. Neither are they united by any work authority.

There you are liable to encounter worship bands, “pastors,” dedicated preachers, tech tools, ministries, and outreach events. However, you may still hear Sunday morning teachings referred to as “messages” rather than sermons, or encounter references to the divine life, or the church, God’s eternal purpose, or the three-part man (all of course, laundered of the robot-speak and sectarian edge that once earmarked them).

#### *Difficult Labor will Threaten Existence*

These churches have experienced small but encouraging gains. They are, however, treading deep water. Of all the forms of ex-Movement congregations, they are the most fragile. Separated from the supportive network of former churches, they easily find themselves short on resources, landlocked, and without the sheer numbers of people that once provided group morale.

Additionally, building a new church culture from the ground up is as difficult as crossing the Louisiana Purchase before it was logged. Local churches have the considerable advantage of relying

upon assumptions of thought that flow from decades of reinforcement. In new church environments, nothing is assumed. Everything must be built from scratch.

And so, with diminutive numbers, the issue is still in doubt whether these churches will make it from one quarter to the next. There are no guarantees here, and no time to waste in small items that once captured hours upon hours of fellowship—“Are we *the* church in this city, *a* church in this city or *part* of the church in this city?” Those days had been an endless trip around the mulberry bush, chasing our tails, but never arriving at anything practical. We had learned from past experience to be wary of preoccupations with the “right” way to do church. Local Church leaders, at least in our circle of fellowship, had spent enormous amounts of time obsessing about themselves and who they were, their stand, and the orthodoxy of their pattern. While they were preoccupied with such concerns, all forward progress stalled.

And so with all distractions off the table, these new congregations have sought to get beyond navel gazing and have gone forward as plain old community churches. The rationale was to start carrying out what the Lord wanted, since it had become clear that the mission didn’t involve being some type of special sect in town.

The learning curve is incredibly steep in these new community style churches. Nearly everything is an unknown, from learning to fellowship with other groups in the area, to finding affordable meeting places. The victories have been thrilling and sometimes the defeats crushing, yet the risks have so far been more than worthwhile.

## **Light at the End of the Tunnel**

When it comes to the LC Movement, you will pay a price either in leaving or in staying. If you depart, you will lose a complex network of long standing friends, and even relatives. Some will turn on you. Others at the very least will become estranged from you. You will also combat the feeling of suddenly becoming an orphan—losing membership in a group that you may have known for many years. If you stay, you will find yourself excusing the inexcusable (like saying, “the church life is a messy kitchen!”), and sometimes becoming an apologist for things that ought not to be defended. In short, you must look the other way, mostly tolerating things while hoping they do not get worse. As a true disciple of Jesus, many things will be an oppressive weight to you. Either way, this is the reality.

Some of us on the outside of the LC Movement today didn't actually want to leave. We wanted to pioneer something beyond what we had. Unfortunately others judged our selected methods as being incompatible with their church life. Yet the path we chose is by no means radically new. Indeed, if you piece together all the advice given in this book, it will sound like standard community church fare—hardly a ride on the rapids. And yet it was new to us. We decided to develop the good things from the Local Churches—whatever could be salvaged—and carry them forth into new wineskins. We read books, met other Christian leaders, tried things, failed at them, occasionally succeeded, and attempted to learn from anyone who had already fought this fight. It has all been difficult and in the process, we often hoped just to survive one more week.

But every so often there is the sweet sense of triumph as one more sinner prays to Jesus for the first time or as another Christian decides to grow and serve. We feel it as a room fills up with seekers

who have come to catch a life-changing view of scripture. During those moments there is the exhilaration of cresting and for a brief moment we get a look at a better place—of church life *beyond*.

<sup>1</sup>Xi, Lian (2010). *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in China*. Yale University Press.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, Stephen E & Lambert, Tony (ed.) 2006, 'House-Church Networks – An Overview (Part 1)', Cogitations Blog, 26 March  
<http://cogitations.typepad.com/cogitations/2006/03/index.html> – Accessed 7 July 2006 – Attachment 11).

<sup>3</sup>Nee's ministry was inherited by virtue of the fact that Lee credited and promoted it. However, Nee would have certainly condemned the rotten behavior associated with the lawsuits, as well as the Pharisaical spirit that has pervaded the group. The LC Movement ignores certain specifics of Nee's views concerning the church, the work, and Christian living, especially where LSM might be made to look deficient. Though his books are published and sold through the organization, they are window dressing, casual reading but non-authoritative when they seem to challenge Lee or "the blended brothers." Perhaps the Movement itself would have a great deal more hope if they really did pay attention to Nee's ministry.