

## **Attacking G. H. Lang's Autonomy: LSM's Subversion of the Church**

**W. "Nee...received enthusiastic support, particularly from...[G. H.] Lang"—Dr. Woodbridge**

### **LSM's Vilification of G. H. Lang**

The Brethren Bible teacher, George Henry Lang (1874-1958) was unjustly maligned by LSM's 'Local Church' movement. LSM exhibits a schizophrenic attitude towards Lang. On one hand they laud him, saying<sup>o</sup> "G. H. Lang [was] one of the greatest Bible expositors and scholars during the past century and the author of 40 Christian books..." Plus they appeal to Lang's support of their 'ground of locality' doctrine. On the other hand, Lang was a 'whipping boy' during LSM's 1980s campaign against local church autonomy. Among members of LSM's Local Church movement this latter aspect—the vilification of G. H. Lang--dominates their overall impression. LSM publications—books authored by Witness Lee--document over a dozen instances in which G. H. Lang is vociferously berated for teaching the autonomy of the local church. We argue that LSM's maligning of G. H. Lang is undeserved; during his lifetime, Lang was an enthusiastic supporter of the Local Church's 'founding father'—brother Watchman Nee. Christian history scholar, Dr. David O. Woodbridge, asserts that<sup>1</sup> Watchman "Nee...received enthusiastic support, particularly from...[G. H.] Lang." This claim is substantiated by G. H. Lang's personal correspondence with Watchman Nee—a resource LSM totally neglected. Moreover, Lang's teaching on "autonomy" was not significantly different for W. Nee's own teaching. It is hypocritical therefore to denounce G. H. Lang, while claiming to faithfully follow Watchmen Nee. It appears that G. H. Lang was simply a 'scapegoat' during LSM's campaign to undermine a fundamental tenet—the autonomy of each local church. "The Body" was used to trump the local church. Meanwhile LSM's soon-to-be 'blended brothers' began promoting W. Lee under the rubric of being 'one with the ministry.'<sup>2</sup> In retrospect these events marked the start of LSM's subversion of the local churches and began the globalization of Witness Lee's ministry.

### **W. Lee Castigates G. H. Lang**

Witness Lee castigated "the so-called autonomy of a local church as put forth by G.H. Lang in his book *The Churches of God*."<sup>3</sup> Witness Lee attributed to G. H. Lang the "erroneous"<sup>4</sup> & "wrong teaching" of the autonomy of the local church (assembly). He attacked "the wrong teaching of G. H. Lang in his book *The Churches of God*. In this book," W. Lee alleged,<sup>5</sup> G. H. "Lang stressed the autonomy of each local church. This was an old wrong teaching by the Brethren." W. Lee repudiated this teaching saying, "Yes, we do stress the local churches, but we do not stand for the autonomy of the local churches." Ominous warnings were issued against this 'wind of teaching.' "Today there are also teachings that are winds to carry us away from God's central purpose...The teaching concerning the absolute autonomy of a local church has been creeping into the Lord's recovery. A book by G. H. Lang entitled *The Churches of God*...talks about the autonomy of the local church. The teaching of autonomy ruined the Brethren assemblies,"<sup>6</sup> Witness Lee asserted. Allegedly G. H. Lang's 'ruinous teaching' was instrumental in dividing the Brethren; W. Lee asserted that "G. H. Lang...taught that every local assembly should be autonomous. This teaching of autonomy ruined the Brethren, causing division after division."<sup>7</sup> W. Lee used his privileged position at LSM's podium to repeatedly lambast this notion saying "The teaching of the autonomy of the local churches is surely erroneous...It is ridiculous to say that the local churches could be absolutely autonomous."<sup>8</sup> Plus he said, "I must warn the saints not to receive the teaching contained in Lang's book *The Churches of God*. The teaching of autonomy in the absolute sense is a wind of teaching that will distract the saints away from God's eternal purpose."<sup>9</sup> Let's examine the issue of local church autonomy, before looking at G. H. Lang's attitude and interactions with Watchman Nee and the 'Little Flock' Church in China.

**"Each local church is autonomous in its administration"—'Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery,' *Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches, LSM, 1978*<sup>10</sup>**

**"In administration, every lampstand is independent...responsible to the Son of Man alone"—  
Watchman Nee**

It might surprise current LSM-Local Church members that the first statement above appears in LSM's 1978<sup>10</sup> publication, *"Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches,"* authored by "The Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery." It testifies that local church autonomy was a widely-accepted among the Local Churches in the 1970s. This teaching can be traced back to Watchman Nee, the Local Church's 'founding father.' In Revelation, where lampstands symbolize local churches, W. Nee asserted "Every church is governed by Christ alone and is not under the control of any other church. *In administration, every lampstand [church] is independent...Every one of them is responsible to the Son of Man alone, who walks in the midst of the seven lampstands.*"<sup>11</sup>

### **"Administration local, each answering to the Lord"—Hymns, #824**

The notion of local church autonomy is enshrined in Local Church 'liturgy' via LSM's Hymn #824. Stanza 6 of that hymn says: "Administration local/ Each answering to the Lord/ Communion universal / Upheld in one accord." Similar sentiments are reflected in Witness Lee's early writing, which says "The proper practice of the church life: the local administration and the universal fellowship. In the proper church life, *the administration of the church is local*, but the fellowship of the church is universal."<sup>12</sup> These lines encapsulate the notion that a genuine local church is led by a plurality of elders who acknowledge the lordship of Christ and seek His will regarding both the spiritual and practical aspects of that church; they are accountable to the Lord, the Son of Man, who walks among the churches. Their stewardship and accountability is not overridden by "universal communion" or "one accord." "Universal communion" is *not* the "fellowship" of a network of churches united by allegiance to a certain apostle or a particular ministry; rather it is the "fellowship of Christ's universal Body," (2 Cor. 13:14) which includes *all* genuine believers in every time and place (worldwide). This kind of inclusivity is reflected in the *'Beliefs...'* document cited above, which says,<sup>13</sup> "We recognize all the blood-redeemed and Spirit-regenerated believers in Christ as members of the one church in each city."

### **Watchman Nee asserted the local church's autonomy**

Watchman Nee boldly declared<sup>14</sup> "The Bible is our only standard. We are not afraid to preach the pure Word of the Bible, even if men oppose; but if it is not the Word of the Bible, we could never agree even if everyone approved of it." He went on to say, "We believe that God's will is for us to return to the condition and method of the first century apostles. Therefore, concerning...the church, we preach with the New Testament as our goal..." In this aspiration Watchman Nee followed in the footsteps of the Plymouth Brethren a century earlier. W. Nee concluded that the original biblical pattern included the autonomy of the local church administered by local elders plus the extra-local work carried out by apostles. These views were enunciated in his publication, *"Concerning our Missions,"* [LSM's *Normal Christian Church Life*]. Dr. Yi Liu regards this as "the peak of Nee's thinking."<sup>15</sup> Historian David Woodbridge explains the impact of this book,<sup>16</sup> "[It] contained [Watchman] Nee's vision for an organisation of churches based on the New Testament model. He emphasised *the importance of the autonomy of each local church*, but also a super-structure of apostles, responsible for overseeing the expansion...of the movement [i.e. 'the extra-local work']..." One key emphasis here is the 'autonomy of each local church.' We note that W. Nee's view matches that of "the Open [Plymouth] Brethren, who maintained a *principle of the autonomy* of each separate meeting [Brethren assembly]."<sup>17</sup> Dr. Lian Xi contends that in W. Nee's view, "Administratively, *each local assembly would be autonomous* and led by elders...[while] the central mission of establishing [planting] churches...would be led by the 'workers,' or the apostles."<sup>18</sup> Hence the autonomy of the local church was taught by J. N. Darby (1800-1882), G. H. Lang, Watchman Nee & others; it was an accepted principle among the local churches in North America in the 1970s.

### **Watchman Nee—the 'Sheep Stealer'**

Western missionaries in China felt threatened by Watchman Nee's expanding 'Little Flock' Local Church movement for at least two reasons. First, W. Nee maintained that the role of missionaries ('apostles') is to establish churches and then turn over their administration to elders chosen from among the local believers. 'Apostles' (missionaries) ought not to remain long-term to manage the church, rather they should disciple local converts, training them to conduct all the church affairs. Then, after 'working themselves out of a job,' apostles

ought to engage in pioneering gospel & church-planting efforts elsewhere. This view contradicted to standard practice of mission churches led by resident missionaries. Second, W. Nee presented the ‘Little Flock’ Local Church as the only biblical church untainted by denominational ties. Hence he de-legitimized the mission churches produced by western missionaries. Former LSM-star, turned academic, Teresa Zimmerman-Liu, says, Watchman Nee “divested mission Christianity of its hegemonic trappings,” thereby, “removing Chinese Christianity from the fixed structures of Mission Church and clergy,”<sup>19</sup> creating a Chinese indigenous church.

Dr. Woodbridge observes that Watchman Nee’s “Little Flock not only sought to gain converts, but also encouraged Chinese Christians in missionary churches to leave and to join Little Flock assemblies instead. Mission churches, Nee argued, taught a Christianity that had departed from the biblical model that the Little Flock represented. In particular, he claimed that the denominational labels of the missions prevented the unity that was supposed to characterise the local church. However, many missionaries saw this as a poaching of their converts and resentment built up against Nee.”<sup>20</sup> Hence China-scholar, R. G. Tiedemann observes that “Watchman Nee—who decried the evils of divisive denominationalism —was regarded as a ‘sheep-stealer’ by many missionaries in China.”<sup>21</sup> This negative view was shared by those with whom W. Nee was theologically aligned. Even “among [Open Brethren] missionaries...Nee continued to develop a more infamous reputation as someone whose movement was flourishing by drawing away missionary converts,”<sup>22</sup> observes Dr. Woodbridge.

### **Autonomy undermines the role of foreign missionary ‘apostles’**

Our major point is that Watchman Nee’s reading of the biblical pattern undermined the existing role and status of missionaries (‘apostles’) in China because:

[1] it called for autonomous local churches administered by local elders, rather than resident apostles (missionaries) and

[2] it presented W. Nee’s ‘Little Flock’ Local Church as the only true church and de-legitimized all denominational (mission) churches. In the words of former LSM star, Teresa Zimmerman-Liu, W. Nee’s teaching aimed at “removing Chinese Christianity from the fixed structures of Mission Church and clergy.”

Dr. Woodbridge notes that critics objected to W. Nee’s “policy of putting forward his movement as the rightful successor of the work of the missions.”<sup>23</sup> The ‘autonomy’ advocated by Watchman Nee was not limited to the church’s “business affairs;” it was a thorough-going autonomy encompassing *all* church affairs. That is why it threatened to undermine the role assumed by foreign missionaries to China as the modern equivalent of biblical ‘apostles,’ and generated a strong negative response, particularly among western missionaries to China.

The esteemed Church historian, E. H. Broadbent, author of *The Pilgrim Church*, summarized Watchman Nee’s response to missionaries’ objections (based on his personal conversations with W. Nee). In a diary entry, E. H. Broadbent recorded that W. Nee considered

“It was natural that when such a [‘Little Flock’] church was formed in a place where there was already a mission station there would be a tendency for some members of the mission [i.e., Chinese converts] to leave it and go to the [‘Little Flock’] church, finding that more in accordance with what they saw in the Word. This could not but be painful to the missionaries, so that, while some rejoiced in seeing a work of the Spirit among the Chinese, others resented losing some of the fruit of their labours.”<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Woodbridge comments on Watchman Nee’s response, noting that “the combination of adherence to a biblical model and an inner spiritual vitality is emphasised. [Watchman] Nee deflected criticism of the actions of his movement, claiming instead that the success and appeal of the Little Flock was based on its adherence to the Bible. Though he acknowledged that the missionaries [found] this hard to take, [W.] Nee painted their grievances as being secondary to the...‘work of the Spirit among the Chinese’.”<sup>25</sup>

### **What Happens when the West-East Flow is reversed?**

Watchman Nee’s teaching was developed during “China’s Open Century” for foreign missions—1850 to 1950. Based on the New Testament pattern, W. Nee asserted that ‘apostles’ (western missionaries) ought not to

remain long-term to manage the church, rather they should disciple local (Chinese) converts, training them to conduct all the church affairs. Then, after ‘working themselves out of a job,’ apostles (missionaries) ought to engage in pioneering gospel and church-planting efforts elsewhere. The desired result was indigenous local churches which were self-governing, self-financing and self-propagating, independent of western missionary (apostles) and western mission churches. Watchman Nee’s ‘Little Flock’ churches in China are widely regarded as having fulfilled this mandate. Dana Robert describes W. “Nee’s Little Flock [as] one of the most vigorous of the indigenous Chinese-founded churches.”<sup>26</sup>

The 2nd half of the 20th century saw a reversal of this flow. Mainland China was closed to foreign missionaries. Plus ‘apostles’ from the East (e.g. Witness Lee, Titus Chu, Yu-Lan Dong) brought their divine revelation to the West, to the US and beyond. This ‘reverse flow’ raises the obvious question—do the same principles apply? If not, why not? Watchman Nee’s ‘Little Flock’ Churches in the Orient were autonomous, independent of western missionary apostles. Plus W. Nee denied the legitimacy of churches in China which remained within the ‘sphere of influence’ of western missions & their missionary apostles. Witness Lee claimed to bring Watchman Nee’s ministry, including his teaching about the local church (e.g. *Normal Christian Church Life*) to the West. So we ask: Were the local churches raised up in the West ever autonomous & independent of the ‘apostles from the East’ (Witness Lee, etc)? If not, why don’t the same principles apply regardless of the East-West direction?

### **Biblical Blueprint in Inviolable Principles**

Both Watchman Nee and G. H. Lang followed the early Plymouth Brethren in espousing the view that the Bible provided a ‘blueprint’ for the church which applied at all times, and in all places throughout the age of grace. That divinely-ordained blueprint—which characterized the early church in its pristine purity described in the New Testament teaching and practices of the first apostles—was distilled into inviolable principles, adherence to which ensured the Lord’s blessing. These principles included (for example) [1] the Lord’s workers ‘living by faith,’ rather than being hired on a fixed salary [2] local church autonomy--a local church’s administration being in the hands of a plurality of local elders, rather than a resident missionary or domestic ‘apostle.’

### **G. H. Lang adhered to Biblical Principles**

“For the Brethren, it was not simply biblical teaching that needed to be followed, but the techniques & methods [practices recorded in Scripture]...were also normative,”<sup>27</sup> writes Timothy Larsen. G. H. Lang was a strong proponent of this view. “Speaking for the Brethren movement Lang commented, ‘we say that the methods here opposed [i.e. fixed salaries for workers] are a ‘clear departure from Scriptural principles and apostolic practice’, and [depart] *from the former [Scriptural principles] because from the latter [the apostles’ practice]*”<sup>28</sup>...G.H. Lang, driving home his point...remarks, ‘Can we imagine Paul paying Titus a salary?’<sup>29</sup> (The absence of a New Testament precedent was sufficient reason to denounce a practice’)<sup>30</sup> notes Timothy Larson.

G. H. Lang propounded adherence to ‘biblical principles’ based on both Scriptures’ explicit teachings and also its illustrative examples. Moreover Lang was willing to court controversy and risk alienating church-members to see such principles enacted. Recounting the history of the Brethren-affiliated Unity Chapel, Bristol, historian Gerald Higgins recalls that

“G. H. Lang had become the ‘pastor’ in 1900 [a role he retained ‘til 1908], and had introduced 2 new principles into the church, which became the source of controversy and later led to a small group...leaving the church.

These principles were as follows: -

1. The pastor should receive no stated salary, as had been customary from the onset, but should be dependent upon the freewill gifts of the people, for he was not the servant of the church, but the servant of the Lord. This practice had been followed for many years by [George] Miller and [Henry] Craik at Teignmouth, [Devon, UK] and [later] at Gideon & Bethesda Chapels, Bristol [UK].
2. The usual method of settling church business by a majority vote, beside being held to be unscriptural, was impractical in that it led to dissatisfied minorities, and should be replaced by the consent of an

undivided church, i.e., each decision should be a unanimous decision. This, too, was a common practice among the Brethren communities.”<sup>31</sup>

The practice of requiring congregational unanimity before implementing change was employed by the Brethren pioneer, Robert C. Chapman (1803-1902) of Barnstaple, Devon, UK. Our purpose here is not to discuss the validity of these particular principles; it is to document the fact that G. H. Lang sought to implement ‘biblical principles’ which the early Brethren deduced from Scripture and which they considered prerequisites for recovering the church to its original pristine purity and thereby ensuring the Lord’s abundant blessing.

Watchman Nee held the same view as G. H. Lang. He wrote,<sup>32</sup> “We must return to the beginning. Only what God has set forth as our example in the beginning is the eternal will of God. It is the divine standard & our pattern for all time... God has not only directed His people by means of abstract principles and objective regulations, but by concrete examples.” Based on these recovered principles, W. Nee declared “we have the blueprint...concerning the church life.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly the ‘blueprint’ metaphor implies that such principles are not easily abandoned, adjusted or abrogated.<sup>34</sup> G. H. Lang and Watchman Nee both subscribed to this view.

### **G. H. Lang—Supporter, Counselor, Advisor to Watchman Nee**

Witness Lee repeatedly denounced the Brethren expositor, G. H. Lang on the issue of local church autonomy. In contrast Watchman Nee exhibits no such criticism of this brother. G. H. Lang was on the sort-list of “evangelical writers who [W.] Nee particularly admired.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, W. Nee sought G.H. Lang’s counsel when confronting difficulty. In return he received a message of support which must have greatly encouraged him. That ‘difficulty’ stemmed from the actions of the “Exclusive Brethren.”

The incident can be outlined briefly: In 1933, W. Nee visited Britain at the invitation of the Exclusive [‘Closed’] Plymouth Brethren led by James Taylor Sr. (1870-1953).<sup>36</sup> For two months he traveled and ministered among their meetings. Once however, Nee traveled to London on ‘personal business,’ to visit to Honor Oak in SE London where T. Austin-Sparks ministered.<sup>37</sup> That visit, became known to the Exclusive Brethren which caused problems and ultimately led to their excommunication of W. Nee and his ‘Little Flock’ assemblies in China. Witness Lee affirms that “this was a hard situation for Brother Nee to handle.”<sup>38</sup> No doubt this was a traumatic experience and W. Nee sought advice. Researcher, Dr. David Woodbridge tells us:

“In 1935, the Little Flock [church of W. Nee] were informed that their fellowship with the ‘Taylorites’ [James Taylor’s Exclusive Brethren] had been broken off. But Nee’s correspondence with other Brethren figures in Britain continued. In particular, [Watchman] Nee sought the advice of the speaker and writer G.H. Lang. Lang had been a member of the Taylorites, but had left and joined the Open Brethren. [W.] Nee initially sought Lang’s advice over his fallout with the Taylorites. In his reply [G. H.] Lang affirmed [Watchman] Nee in the stance he had taken. He also expressed his admiration for [W.] Nee’s ministry: [G. H. Lang wrote Nee saying:]

‘It is refreshing to find saints so far from this land [UK] as China so enlightened and definite upon these matters; and I cannot but think it significant that Christians in China should, after 100 years, be found setting forth these truths to Christians in this land [Britain] who have largely surrendered them.’ (Letter from G. H. Lang to Watchman Nee, 24 Sept. 1935).”<sup>39</sup>

Four points are worth noting:

[1] Watchman “Nee sought the advice of...G.H. Lang,” a brother whom he admired and whose counsel he evidently valued.

[2] G. H. Lang responded by affirming “Nee in the stance he had taken” rejecting the Exclusive Brethren’s hegemony. This preserved the autonomy of W. Nee’s ‘Little Flock’ churches in China.

[3] G. H. Lang “expressed his admiration for [W.] Nee’s ministry” for “setting forth...truths [which] Christians in [Britain]...have largely surrendered.” Clearly Lang’s reply endorsed W. Nee’s stand and offered enthusiastic support to W. Nee, who no doubt was greatly encouraged by it. There is no note of criticism or rebuke here.

[4] G. H. Lang's support of W. Nee was not merely a reflection of personal affinity, nor an older brother's sympathy for a 'foreign worker,' one generation younger. The key point was that W. Nee was applying the same set of biblical principles that G. H. Lang himself espoused, *including local church autonomy*. On this point G. H. Lang and W. Nee were 'on the same page.' For Witness Lee to endorse Watchman Nee and (simultaneously) malign Lang on the issue of local church autonomy is a flagrant contradiction which ought to be highlighted.

Dr. Woodbridge assesses that G. H. Lang, "saw Watchman Nee as someone who was adhering more closely to the original Brethren vision than the Brethren themselves were."<sup>40</sup> "Disillusioned by those in Britain who had 'largely surrendered' Brethren practices, *Lang projected his desire for a revival of Brethren primitivism on to the emerging Little Flock*. Lang was...somewhat marginalised...But his ideas gained support from a significant minority of Brethren, *some of whom would also become supporters of Nee...*" Lang was a whole-hearted supporter of Watchman Nee. He viewed W. Nee's 'Little Flock' movement as a 'beacon of hope,' reviving the Brethren's first principles. Also Lang's views likely motivated other UK Brethren to support W. Nee. One of W. Nee's other supporters, perhaps motivated by Lang, was the Church historian, E. H. Broadbent (see below).

### **W. "Nee...received enthusiastic support, particularly from...[G. H.] Lang" –Dr. Woodbridge**

In summary Dr. Woodbridge says: "Many rejected [Watchman] Nee's interpretations of [the church's original pattern] as too extreme. But [Watchman] Nee...received enthusiastic support, particularly from those, such as [G. H.] Lang, who were on the fringes of the Brethren...Disillusioned at what they saw as the movement's retreat from its uncompromising, [original practices], *they saw in the Little Flock, as a fresh and true expression of the Brethren vision* and were encouraged in the particular stands they subsequently took."<sup>41</sup>

### **E. H. Broadbent intervenes on W. Nee's behalf**

W. Nee & W. Lee both valued Broadbent's account of Church History—*The Pilgrim Church*. In his biography, W. Lee refers to "The help [W. Nee] received from reading books...The insights of John Foxe, *E.H. Broadbent*, & others were especially helpful in the matter of church history."<sup>42</sup> W. Lee appraised Broadbent's history as the best, exhibiting "the highest discernment;" he says, "A number of people have written books on church history. The best one is by a Brethren scholar by the name of Edmund Hamer Broadbent. His book, *The Pilgrim Church*, is written with keen spiritual insight. It is a church history with the highest discernment."<sup>43</sup> Broadbent was also an ardent supporter of W. Nee, a fact that escaped the attention of his biographer, Witness Lee.

Open Brethren Missionaries in China were among those who reacted to W. Nee's stance *vis-a-vis* their role. *Echoes of Service* was an Open Brethren publishing house and a clearing center for their missions throughout the world.<sup>44</sup> E. H. Broadbent intervened on W. Nee's behalf in an attempt at reconciliation with the leaders at *Echoes of Service*. Dr. Woodbridge recounts that, "During his [W. Nee's] 2nd visit to Britain, from 1938-39, an attempt was made to address what had clearly become a deeply felt distrust between [Watchman] Nee and *Echoes [of Service]*. The attempted reconciliation was orchestrated by E.H. Broadbent (1861- 1945). A close friend of Lang, Broadbent...was an associate editor for *Echoes of Service* from 1919-1928, but left...as a result of a disagreement...However, he maintained good relations with the *Echoes* editors in Bath, and during Nee's visit to England [Broadbent] orchestrated a meeting between them [*Echoes* editors in Bath, UK]. Little remains of Broadbent's correspondence, so it is not clear for how long he had known Nee, but a diary entry for 4th August 1938 relates how [Broadbent] accompanied Nee to [the city of] Bath to meet *the Echoes* editors:

'We hoped that if the brethren there were to hear his report of his experiences in China they might come to welcome the formation and progress of churches among the people there and modify the opposition of those of the *Echoes*' missionaries who think that their 'Mission Stations' are weakened by this movement among the Chinese.' (*Diary of E.H. Broadbent*, entry for 4 August 1938, p.273)<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Woodbridge continues, "*Broadbent clearly hoped to bring an end to the hostility felt towards [W.] Nee*. However, he later concluded: 'The effort in Bath to bring about an understanding and fellowship does not seem likely to lead to the desired result'. (*Diary of E.H. Broadbent*)"<sup>46</sup> Evidently E. H. Broadbent's overtures were

unsuccessful, nevertheless the fact remains that this close associate of G. H. Lang also supported W. Nee and intervened on his behalf.

### **G. H. Lang, T. Austin-Sparks & Watchman Nee**

G. H. Lang also appreciated & supported T. Austin-Sparks' (1888-1971) work at Honour Oak in London, which became Watchman Nee's base of operations during his 2nd visit to Europe. Dr. Woodbridge observes that "G.H. Lang and T. Austin-Sparks [were], two evangelical writers who Nee particularly admired...In the Little Flock [church of W. Nee] they [Lang and Austin-Sparks] saw a fresh and vital expression of Christianity, such as had fallen beyond the grasp of the West."<sup>47</sup> Hence, G. H. Lang was part of a wider network of UK evangelical leaders who afforded advice, encouragement & support to Watchman Nee. That network included T. Austin-Sparks who was a "good friend of Nee in the 1930s" who provided a base for W. Nee's operation and opened doors for his ministry in Europe.<sup>48</sup> Sparks' support for Nee ought not to be eclipsed by relations with W. Lee.

Clearly there was substantial affinity between Watchman Nee (on the one hand) and G. H. Lang & like-minded Christian leaders—e.g. E. H. Broadbent (on the other hand). Against this background it is disturbing to see G. H. Lang attacked and demeaned by those who claim to closely follow Watchman Nee.<sup>49</sup> The biography of Watchman Nee authored by Witness Lee enumerates only four people who "helped" W. Nee; all of them sisters. The chapter titled, "Helped" says, "Watchman Nee...was saved through the preaching of Dora Yu [1873-1931], perfected under Margaret Barber [1866-1929], and sustained by two...co-workers, Ruth Lee [1894-1969] and Peace Wang [1899-1969]."<sup>50</sup> Apparently in W. Lee's view, no other individuals merit inclusion in this category. Witness Lee's biography gives the impression that no brothers (besides W. Lee) and no foreigners (apart from Margaret Barber) offered significant 'help' to Watchman Nee! Yet the research of Dr. Woodbridge suggests that the help afforded by some British Brethren--e.g., G. H. Lang and E. H. Broadbent--ought to be recognized.

### **W. Lee's Pliable Principles**

In Witness Lee's hands the principle of local church autonomy was not inviolable; it was pliable enough to be manipulated. Indeed skeptics might perceive a strategy here; Witness Lee had clothed himself in Watchman Nee's mantle, claiming to be his continuation, so a direct attack on W. Nee's tenet of local church autonomy was unwise. But contradicting the same tenet, as enunciated by G. H. Lang, was another matter. A shrewd strategy would create a "straw man" attributed to G. H. Lang. Lang's version of "autonomy" would serve as a "proxy" for W. Nee's. Attacking and repudiating this "straw man," would eviscerate the principle of local church autonomy, paving the way for a more centralized Local Church movement. Strategic steps might include:

#### **1. Extreme characterization:**

G. H. Lang's position was represented as promoting "*absolute* autonomy." W. Lee asserted that "the teaching of the *absolute autonomy* of the local churches was promoted among us. This teaching was based mainly on the book *The Churches of God* by G. H. Lang."<sup>51</sup> W. Lee then refuted this extreme characterization, saying, "There is *no absolute autonomy* in the administration of any local church."<sup>52</sup> Similarly G. H. Lang was denigrated for advocating that each church should be an "isolated autonomy." Witness Lee alleged that,<sup>53</sup> "Lang proposed that every local church (assembly) should be an *isolated autonomy*." We are not aware of any instance of G. H. Lang using the phrase "absolute autonomy" or "isolated autonomy."

#### **2. Attacking a "Straw Man"**

Having misrepresented G. H. Lang's position, W. Lee then attacked this "straw man" as a "wrong teaching" and "an erroneous teaching," claiming that promoting "autonomy was actually the building up of a monarchy."<sup>54</sup>

#### **3. Subtly redefining original principles**

The original tenet stated in "*Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches*" says "Each local church is autonomous in its administration." W. Lee never directly addressed this document. Instead he asserted that "The *business affairs* of a local church are absolutely local, but all the other matters...should be the same and common among all the local churches."<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere he stated that "each of the local churches is *autonomous in business*

*affairs*...Every local church has its own freedom & jurisdiction to make decisions concerning, for example, *the times of the meetings*.”<sup>56</sup> By inserting the adjectival modifier, “business,” the scope of local church decision-making was severely circumscribed. Rather than the church’s administration (in spiritual & practical affairs) being “local, each answering to the Lord” (Hymns 824), the local church’s administration was limited to mundane affairs like scheduling “the times of the meetings.” Local church elders were reduced to *de facto* caretakers! LSM’s soon-to-be ‘blended brothers’ dutifully adopted this redefinition, “The local churches are *autonomous in business affairs*, but not in the testimony for Christ and in the fellowship of the Spirit.”<sup>57</sup> This is now the accepted tenet among LSM’s Local Churches; the former statement (of 1978) is long-since forgotten.

#### 4. Using “the Body” to trump the local church

For decades local church members had declared “Christ and the local church,” summarizing the distinctive items of the “Lord’s Recovery.” Suddenly all that changed. Witness Lee declared, “The local churches...are *not the goal of God’s economy but the procedure* to reach that goal, which is the unique Body of Christ.”<sup>58</sup> Perhaps anticipating a reaction to his innovation declaring the local churches were merely “a procedure,” he added, “Some of the saints may be disappointed when they hear that the local churches are not God’s goal.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, some were disappointed. The implication was clear: “In our consideration the Body should be first and the local churches should be second”<sup>61</sup> Plus, “We must pay much more attention to the Body of Christ than to the local churches,”<sup>62</sup> W. Lee intoned. Those who objected, citing Watchman Nee on autonomy, were denounced for “their total disregard for the Body of Christ.”<sup>63</sup> Plus W. Lee asserted that “To teach that the local churches are absolutely autonomous is to divide the Body of Christ. All the local churches are and should be one Body universally, doctrinally, and practically.”<sup>64</sup> Thus “the Body” was used to trump “the local church.”

#### 5. “The Body equals the Recovery”

Witness Lee paid lip-service to the universal Body of Christ. He stated that, “All the saved ones in all times and all space added together become the Body of this mysterious Christ.”<sup>65</sup> Yet he also declared, “Actually, the local churches *are* the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ is all the local churches.”<sup>66</sup> Here, the term, “the local churches” is not used in a generic sense; rather it refers to all “genuine local churches” affiliated with Witness Lee & his LSM-ministry. He meant, “the [LSM-affiliated] local churches are the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ is all the [LSM] local churches.” LSM’s “blended brothers” clarify: <sup>67</sup>*“In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the recovery. We know that the mystical Body of Christ includes all the believers, all of the redeemed ones in time and space, but practically for us today, the recovery is the Body.”* For members of LSM’s Local Church movement, “the Body” does not include billions of regenerated believers in *millions* of churches around the globe. Rather it includes only those believers meeting in LSM-affiliated “local churches.” Hence W. Lee says, “This...one Body comprises all the local churches. There may be *thousands of local churches*, but together they constitute one universal church.”<sup>68</sup> Note the limited scope of LSM’s “Body;” it consists of “thousands of [LSM] local churches”—approximately 4,000 in 2014<sup>69</sup>--which account for a tiny fraction of Christ’s universal Body. Thus, while denying the possibility that a single local church could be “the body,” Witness Lee contends that the global network of LSM’s Local Churches—a miniscule subset of all Christ’s believers—authentically represents “the Body”! What unites LSM’s “Body” is the common denominator of Witness Lee’s teaching & fellowship—his distinctive exegesis of Scripture--plus the practices he personally endorsed; the ‘litmus test’ is WWBLD—‘What Would Brother Lee Do?’ As Dr. Yi Liu observes “What [Witness] Lee wanted to build is a global fellowship *with a strong Chinese character*.”<sup>71</sup>

#### 6. Which “Blueprint”?

The net effect of Witness Lee’s recalibration was to create another “blueprint.” W. Nee followed the Brethren in appealing to the New Testament as providing the original Scriptural “blueprint” for the church. Watchman Nee enunciated that “blueprint” in his speaking & writings. In his biography of Watchman Nee, W. Lee recounts<sup>72</sup> that “One day...[in 1940, W. Nee] said to me, ‘We have the blueprint of God’s plan in our hand.’ ...I discovered what he was practicing in Shanghai [China] concerning the practicality of the church life. I took ‘the blueprint’



back...” So Dr. Liu states,<sup>73</sup> “Early in the 1940s, Nee developed a blueprint of church building [planting] in China.” Witness Lee cautioned against changing the “blueprint;” He said “Our senior brother [W. Nee] was the first to receive from the Lord the blueprint for the building up of the church. When we invite someone to help us build, we are not asking him to help us draw the blueprint or to change the blueprint, because the blueprint is already drawn...we are asking him to carry out the building work according to the blueprint...He should not change our blueprint.”<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, Witness Lee’s “recalibration” significantly changed the “blueprint.” Ultimately, evoking the status of the “wise master builder,” Witness Lee appropriated this right.<sup>75</sup> However, the question remains does Witness Lee’s “new (revised) blueprint” match the original set forth in Scripture? Clearly if Watchman Nee’s “blueprint” matched the New Testament, then Witness Lee’s modifications were deviations.

### **The Globalization of Witness Lee’s Ministry—an LSM Success Story**

“On June 9th 1997, after more than 60 years’ service for the ‘Lord’s Recovery,’ Witness Lee (Li Changshou, 1905-1997) went to rest peacefully with God, [having been] Watchman Nee’s most intimate co-worker, ‘a bond-slave of the Lord,’ and a ‘God-man.’” So writes Dr. Yi Liu in a sympathetic essay.<sup>76</sup> As his earthly service drew to a close Witness Lee prepared to “pass the baton” to others. LSM’s “blended brothers” later reported, 11 months prior, “In a meeting with the brothers [responsible] for Living Stream Ministry, Brother Lee said, ‘My burden is for the recovery based on the interpretation of Brother Nee and me. *I am the continuation of Brother Nee; I would like to have a continuation of me, and this needs a corporation...The Living Stream corporation will continue this ministry*’ (unpublished notes of a meeting of Living Stream, July 12, 1996).”<sup>77</sup>

Samuel Johnson observed that the prospect of departure from this life “focuses the mind wonderfully.”<sup>78</sup> It frequently also reveals a person’s deepest motives. Perhaps this notion applies here. What was Witness Lee’s greatest motivation? According to this quote, W. Lee saw himself as the sole continuation of Watchman Nee<sup>79</sup> and worked to secure his own legacy via his LSM-corporation. “*I would like to have a continuation of me, and this needs a corporation...The [LSM] corporation will continue this ministry.*” Neither the local church, nor the Body of Christ is mentioned here; when the facade is removed, W. Lee’s own ministry was *the* priority.

Two decades have elapsed since Witness Lee’s passing; the unfolding record seems to confirm these observations. A recent assessment by Dr. Yi Liu of Shanghai University, China, supports this view. Dr. Liu’s article is entitled “*The Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee’s Ministry.*” The author observes that “Witness Lee’s journey exemplifies a Chinese church becoming globalized.”<sup>81</sup> Globalization of ‘the ministry’ was the goal; “As an heir of Watchman Nee...[W. Lee] pushed the global expansion of the ministry to every main continent, Liu says.”<sup>82</sup> Specifically, “It is in the US that Witness Lee solidified his vision and purpose in building a global ministry.”<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, ‘the ministry’ trumped the local church; an organization--the LSM corporation--trumped Christ’s organic Body. Since W. Lee’s passing a successful program of globalization has been conducted by the LSM-corporation and its Oriental affiliate--the Taiwan Gospel Book Room. “Under the direction of Taiwan Gospel Book Room [TGBR] and Living Stream Ministry,” says Dr. Liu, “this originally Chinese ministry has developed a global network of Local Churches across the five continents. It is a rare example of an Asian Christianity assuming global significance.”<sup>84</sup> Behind the veneer of LSM’s rhetoric about the “organic Body,” Dr. Yi Liu perceives a multi-level hierarchy led by the TGBR & LSM from the apex in Anaheim CA. ‘The Ministry’s’ globalization has occurred “under the direction of TGBR and LSM,” he correctly states, adding “Though it has been claimed that they are not an organization and have no headquarters, the Local Churches undoubtedly have formed a global network with distinctive characteristics that make it look *like a denomination.*”<sup>85</sup> Despite its self-description as “the Lord’s Recovery,” LSM’s Local Church Movement is a *de facto* denomination--“the Chinese Recovery Church of Witness Lee.”<sup>86</sup>

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Toronto, CANADA

January, 2017

**Note:** Thanks to those commenting on earlier drafts. The author alone is responsible for the contents of this piece. The views expressed here are solely the author's and should *not* be attributed to any believers, elders, co-workers or churches he is associated with. While several academic papers are referenced, the authors--Dr. David O. Woodbridge, Dr. Yi Liu & doctoral candidate, Teresa Zimmerman-Liu are *not* responsible for the inferences which this author draws from their work.

### Notes:

- o The LSM-sponsored website [local-church-ground-testimony.org](http://local-church-ground-testimony.org) states: G. H. Lang “had this to say concerning the churches in Scripture. In his treatise called *The Churches of God*, Lang writes: ‘There were “the saints in the whole of” a province (2 Cor. 1:1), “the church in” a city (1 Cor. 1:2), “the churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor. 8:1) and “of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2), that is, situated in those territories, and we read of “the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (Acts 9:31); but there was no church of Galatia or Judea or Macedonia, no combination of churches in a given area into the church of that area, and thus by organization and locality a body corporate, distinct from the church universal, only a part thereof. (G. H. Lang, *Churches of God*, p. 14) Lang, in his chapter entitled *The Administrative Independence of Each Local Church*, then quotes from Dr. F. J. A. Hort’s *The Christian Ecclesia* [Church] on ‘The Early History & Early Conceptions of the Ecclesia [Church],’ as follows: ‘St. Paul’s recognition of the individual responsibility & substantial independence of single city Ecclesiae [church] was brought into harmony with his sense of the unity of the body of Christ as a whole.’ (G. H. Lang, *Churches of God*, pp. 17-18)”
1. The quote in context reads: “Many rejected [Watchman] Nee’s interpretations of primitivism as too extreme. But [Watchman] Nee also **received enthusiastic support, particularly from** those, such as [G. H.] Lang, who were on the fringes of the Brethren, and somewhat at odds with it. Disillusioned at what they saw as the movement’s retreat from its uncompromising, primitivistic origins, they saw in the Little Flock, as fresh and true expression of the Brethren vision and were encouraged in the particular stands they subsequently took.” [David Woodbridge, “*Watchman Nee & the Brethren: Transnational Connections in Christianity between China & Britain*,” International Symposium on Modern China & World Christianity under a Global View, Fujian Normal University, China.(emphasis added)] We discuss Dr. Woodbridge’s work in more detail below.
2. The phrase “one with the ministry” became a mantra among LSM’s local churches in N. America during the 1980s. “The ministry” was identified with Witness Lee’s ministry & his Living Stream Ministry. The phrase can be traced back to W. Lee’s own teaching; e.g. he is on record saying, “...Without the churches with the saints *being one with the ministry*, it would be difficult for the Lord’s recovery to be prevailing...” [W. Lee, *Intrinsic Problem in the Lord’s Recovery Today & Its Scriptural Remedy*, Ch. 4, Sect. 2] W. Lee’s defense of “one with the ministry” around 1986/7 centered on equating his personal ministry with the entire New Testament (Covenant) ministry. W. Lee is on record saying, “when I brought the recovery to the US, I did not carry out a denominational ministry, nor did I raise up denominational churches. What I brought to America was ‘the ministry.’ Through this ministry the Lord brought the work of His recovery to America and has raised up the churches, built up the churches, and nourished and perfected the saints for more than 30 years. The very work that raised up the local churches in America is surely ‘the ministry.’ This being the case, the churches raised up through my ministry are the churches of the ministry & *should be one with the ministry*.” [W. Lee, *The Ministry of the NT & the Teaching & Fellowship of the Apostles*, Ch. 1, Sect. 4] The NT is composed of the writings (ministry) of the apostles Peter, Paul, John, etc. The NT (Covenant) ministry encompasses all of these & it cannot be equated with any one apostle’s ministry (e.g. the Apostle Paul’s ministry); nevertheless Witness Lee claimed to have proprietary rights over what he called ‘the ministry’, the entire NT ministry. In doing so, he presumed to be greater than the apostle Paul (or any other original apostle)! After W. Lee’s passing, LSM’s “blended brothers” have continued to make the same outrageous claims for Witness Lee’s ministry. It’s worth noting here that this controversy (around 1986/7) regarding local church autonomy was played out against the background of allegations of serious misconduct at LSM’s Anaheim HQ involving a member of Witness Lee’s family. Witness Lee’s response included issuing “*The Fermentation of the Present Rebellion*,” a vitriolic attack against brothers he labelled as “conspirators.” This aspect of 1980s events has been adequately dealt with by Steve Isitt in his various writings; See for e.g. <http://localchurchdiscussions.com/vBulletin/forumdisplay.php?f=116>
3. W. Lee, *Further Consideration of the Eldership, Region of Work, & Care for the Body of Christ*, Ch. 2, Sect. 5 reprinted as *Elders’ Training, Book 11: Eldership & the God-Ordained Way (3)*, Ch. 13, Sect. 5
4. W. Lee denounced “this erroneous teaching of autonomy” [W. Lee, *Body of Christ*, Ch. 4, Sect. 3]
5. W. Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, Ch 3, St. 1. Elsewhere W. Lee said “a teaching was promoted which said that all the local churches are autonomous. Immediately I recognized this as *the wrong teaching of G. H. Lang*, a

- teacher who was once among the Brethren.” [W. Lee, *Organic Union in God's Relationship with Man*, Ch. 5, Sect. 2] Elsewhere W. Lee says, “Recently among us there has been a kind of rebellion since 1987. One of the leading ones in this rebellion picked up the wrong teaching of G. H. Lang in his book *The Churches of God*. In this book Lang stressed *the autonomy of each local church*. This was an old wrong teaching by the Brethren. We knew this already. Yes, we do stress the local churches, but *we do not stand for the autonomy of the local churches*.” [Witness Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, Ch. 3, Sect. 1 (emphasis added)]
6. Witness Lee, *Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to be the Organism of the Processed & Dispensing Triune God*, Ch. 5, Sect. 3
  7. W. Lee, *Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ...*, Ch. 4, Sect. 5
  8. W. Lee, *Practice of the Church Life according to the God-ordained Way*, Ch. 2, St. 6. We say, “W. Lee used his privileged position at LSM’s podium” because Witness Lee exercised a monopoly over the LSM podium in trainings & conferences (including elders’ trainings, e.g. the ITERO which began in the 1980s). While W. Lee taught from the podium, alternative views were not afforded this opportunity. A practice continued by LSM’s ‘blended brothers.’
  9. W. Lee, *Further Light Concerning the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, Ch. 2, Sect. 3
  10. In “*Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches*” under “Questions” #3 “Where is your headquarters?” “*Each local church is autonomous in its administration*. Therefore, there is no central headquarters. No particular local church should be regarded as the head church or leading church. On the contrary, all the local churches share the same standing before the Lord.” [‘the Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery,’ *Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches*, © 1978 Living Stream Ministry Reprinted 1979 Printed in the US of America]
  11. W. Nee, *Collected Works, Vol. 22: Assembly Life*, Ch. 7, St. 1
  12. W. Lee, *Vital Factors for the Recovery of the Church Life*, Ch. 4, Sect. 4 & LSM, *Lesson Book, Level 5: The Church—Vision & Building Up of the Church*, Ch. 7, Sect. 5
  13. Item #4 under “Standing” in “*Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches*,” LSM 1978. The quoted statement, “We recognize all the blood-redeemed and Spirit-regenerated believers in Christ as members of the one church in each city,” reflects a “spiritual view” that in God’s eyes all believers are already “members of the one church in each city.” It was balanced by the “practical view” that God desires all believers to meet together, practically, to express the one church in the city, as His testimony.
  14. W. Nee, *Collected Works, Vol. 7, Ch. 32, St. 1*
  15. Dr. Yi Liu writes “It is in this book [*Concerning Our Missions*] that [W.] Nee clearly expressed his idea about the ground of the church, which also represented *the peak of Nee’s thinking*.” [Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of W. Nee & W. Lee’s Ministry*,” *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 100]
  16. David O. Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 125 (emphasis added)
  17. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 109. This tenet was also espoused by J. N. Darby, whose written “affirmation of one united ‘true’ church on the earth...and the theoretical *independence of each local assembly of believers*,” was violated in practice by “his own tyrannical domination of the Brethren.” [Lian, Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 174 (emphasis added)]
  18. Lian, Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 174
  19. We quote for the abstract & title of Zimmerman-Liu’s paper: “*Nee contextualized the message of Western missionaries to China*, using subaltern strategies of returning to scriptural fundamentals & reducing the scale of organization and worship. *He divested mission Christianity of its hegemonic trappings* & created flexible Christian practices, which take place in the ‘divine & mystical realm,’ out of reach from ‘worldly’ power structures.” [Teresa Zimmerman-Liu, “*Divine & Mystical Realm: Removing Chinese Christianity from the Fixed Structures of Mission Church and Clergy*,” *Social Sciences & Missions*, Vol. 27(2-3) (Jan. 2014) p. 239 (emphasis added)] Regarding this scholar’s background we previously wrote: “Teresa Zimmerman-Liu was a shining star of the Local Church in the 1980s. In that era many Local Church members made the pilgrimage to Taiwan to participate in the “great act in church history,” carried out by means of door-knocking and bathtub baptizing, to “gospelize, truthize, and churchize Taiwan.”<sup>1</sup> While participating in Taiwan’s Full-Time Training (FTT), many native English-speakers faced the challenge of operating in a foreign language and culture. It was there that Teresa Zimmerman-Liu emerged as a shining star. Here was a young girl, a Caucasian college-graduate who seemed fully fluent in<sup>2</sup> Mandarin Chinese. Even more striking, she married into a traditional Chinese family. A number of Caucasian brothers returned from Taiwan with Taiwanese wives, but the incidence of Taiwanese brothers marrying a Caucasian wife was much lower. Perhaps she was blissfully ignorant of her

celebrity status, but all this made Teresa Zimmerman-Liu a star in the FTT and the wider Local Church community. In the ensuing decades her linguistic talents proved a valuable asset on both sides of the Pacific; she was employed by Witness Lee and his associates (the soon-to-be “blended brothers”) in Taipei, Taiwan and Anaheim, CA. During that era, Teresa Zimmerman-Liu’s unique abilities, position and celebrity-status gave her privileged access to the upper echelons of the Local Church community, including Witness Lee’s family.”

20. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) pp. 107-108. We note here Watchman Nee’s contention that the “missionaries” of his day were (if properly commissioned by the Holy Spirit) equivalent to the New Testament “apostles.” W. Nee said, “Today those who have been sent out by the Lord to preach the gospel & to establish churches call themselves missionaries, not apostles; but the word “missionary” means the very same thing as “apostle,” that is, “the sent one.” It is the Latin form of the Greek equivalent, *apostolos*. Since the meaning of the two words is exactly the same, I fail to see the reason why the true sent ones of today prefer to call themselves missionaries rather than apostles.” [W. Nee, *Collected Works, Vol. 30: Normal Christian Church Life*, Ch. 4, Sect. 3]
21. Lian, Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 171 reports the stigmatizing of Watchman Nee as a ‘Sheep stealer,’ also cited by R. G. Tiedemann in “Comity Agreements & Sheep Stealers: The Elusive Search for Christian Unity among Protestants in China,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan. 2012) p. 7
22. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 118
23. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 126
24. *Diary of E.H. Broadbent*, pp. 275-276, quoted by Dr. D. Woodbridge, p. 119
25. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 119
26. Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, p. 174. Robert says, “He founded what he believed was true to the New Testament church, a Chinese movement independent of western missionaries, known as the Local Assemblies, or Little Flock...By 1949...Nee’s Little Flock was one of the most vigorous of the indigenous Chinese-founded churches.” (p. 174)
27. Timothy Larsen “*LIVING BY FAITH: A SHORT HISTORY OF BRETHREN PRACTICE*,” BAHNR, p. 70
28. G H Lang, *Anthony Norris Groves (1939)*, p. 332
29. G.H. Lang, *Departure: a Warning & an Appeal*, p.77
30. Timothy Larsen “*LIVING BY FAITH: A SHORT HISTORY OF BRETHREN PRACTICE*,” BAHNR, p. 70
31. GERALD L. HIGGINS, “*UNITY CHAPEL, ST. PHILIP’S, BRISTOL (1850-1946)*,” *EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY*, p. 229. There is a note of irony in the way events unfolded. Lang instituted the principle of unanimity [point 2]—every change required “the consent of an undivided church, i.e., each decision should be a unanimous decision” of the entire congregation. Yet, Higgins tells us, these changes “became the source of controversy and later led to a small group... leaving the church.” Evidently, then, this change was (ultimately) not unanimously endorsed and the new mode of operation did not eliminate “dissatisfied minorities”!
32. W. Nee, *Collected Works, Vol. 30: Normal Christian Church Life*, Ch. 3, Sect. 3. It is also worth noting, perhaps, that G. H. Lang was among the small minority who, along with Watchman Nee, endorsed the eschatological teaching of partial rapture. C. Gribben writes that “G. H. Lang, an idiosyncratic adherent of the English Brethren movement, published the collected prophetic papers of his mentor, G. H. Pember, in *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel, the Gentiles & the Church of God* (1941) arguing for partial rapture.” [C. Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500-2000*, p. 99]
33. W. Lee, *History of the Church & the Local Churches*, Ch. 4, Sect. 10. Dr. Yi Liu concurs, saying, “Early in the 1940s, Nee developed a blueprint of church building [planting] in China.” [Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee’s Ministry*,” *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 100]
34. Regarding the notion of a “blueprint” Witness Lee writes: “Our senior brother [W. Nee] was the first to receive from the Lord the blueprint for the building up of the church. When we invite someone to help us build, we are not asking him to help us draw the blueprint or to change the blueprint, because the blueprint is already drawn. We are carrying out the building work according to the blueprint. When we ask someone to help us, we are asking him to carry out the building work according to the blueprint... He should not change our blueprint.” [W. Lee, *Sufficiency, Pursuit, & Learning of the Lord’s Serving Ones*, Ch. 6, Sect. 5] This underscores the inviolability of the “blueprint.”

35. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 98
36. Taylor's branch of the Exclusive Brethren was later incorporated (2012) as the "*Plymouth Brethren (Exclusive Brethren) Christian Church Limited*" it evolved, following J. N. Darby's death, under the successive leadership of Raven, James Taylor Sr. , James Taylor Jr., & Bruce Hales.
37. Dr. Yi Liu offers the following account of W. Nee's first trip to Europe: "His key connection was with the British [Exclusive] Brethren. Due to Miss Barber's introduction of some English books, Watchman Nee wrote to a London publisher, and corresponded with a Mr. George Ware belonging to the strict Darbyite persuasion of the London Brethren. In 1930, [W.] Nee had fellowship with an English businessman in Shanghai, Charles Barlow, who was associated with the London Brethren. Barlow was impressed with Nee and facilitated a group of six men and the wives of two of them from the Brethren to visit Shanghai in 1932. In response, Nee was invited to visit Britain and America in 1933. In addition to the arranged trip accompanied by Barlow, Nee also visited George Cutting, author of the widely used gospel booklet *Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment*, and tried to contact T. Austin-Sparks, founder of the Christian Fellowship Center." [Yi Liu, "*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry*," *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 99] Dr. Yi Liu does not mention the repercussions of W. Nee's side-trip.
38. W. Lee, *History of the Church and the Local Churches*, Ch. 5, St. 4
39. Papers of G.H. Lang, Correspondence 1930-1954, quoted by David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 116 (emphasis added)
40. The preceding quote is from David Woodbridge, "*Watchman Nee & the Brethren: Transnational Connections in Christianity between China & Britain*," International Symposium on Modern China & World Christianity under a Global View, Fujian Normal Univ., China. <http://www.slideshare.net/LiuSamuel/woodbridge-11242014>. p. 232. The succeeding quote is from David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) pp. 116-117 (emphasis added)
41. David Woodbridge, "*Watchman Nee & the Brethren: Transnational Connections in Christianity between China & Britain*," International Symposium on Modern China & World Christianity under a Global View, Fujian Normal University, China. <http://www.slideshare.net/LiuSamuel/woodbridge-11242014> p. 238
42. Witness Lee, *Watchman Nee—Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age*, Ch. 4, St. 2
43. Witness Lee, *Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 1*, Ch. 7, St. 2
44. More precisely, "*Echoes of Service* is a missionary support agency founded in 1872 based in Bath, England. Their main purpose is to serve missionaries around the world, and those commended from UK Christian (Plymouth) Brethren assemblies/ churches in particular, amongst whom missionary activity is common." Wikipedia
45. Papers of E.H. Broadbent, CBA/3067- 86 Quote: David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 118
46. Diary of E.H. Broadbent pp. 275-276 quoted by David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) p. 119
47. David Woodbridge, *Missionary Primitivism & Chinese Modernity: the Brethren in 20th-Century China*, Univ. of Manchester (2012) pp. 98-99. Dr. Yi Liu mentions that "Austin-Sparks had been a good friend of Nee in the 1930s." (Yi Liu, "*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry*," *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) pp. 101-102)
48. Dr. Yi Liu writes "An episode concerning [W. Lee's] relationship with T. Austin-Sparks must be mentioned. *Austin-Sparks had been a good friend of Nee in the 1930s. Due to this historical friendship, Austin-Sparks was invited to fellowship in 1955 and 1957. While sharing many similar views, these two men disagreed on the 'ground of the church'. It also led to the departure of some young co-workers from Lee.*" [Yi Liu, "*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of W. Nee & W. Lee's Ministry*," *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) pp. 102-3 (emphasis added)]
49. Dr Yi Liu observes that W. "Lee himself claimed that he was continuing Brother Nee's ministry." [Yi Liu, "*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry*," *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 100, note 10] Indeed W. Lee made statements like, Watchman Nee "*made a good, proper, & adequate foundation for this recovery. I am continuing to build up the Lord's recovery and I am doing the same work.*" [W. Lee, *Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity & the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, p. 91 (emphasis add)]
50. Witness Lee, *Watchman Nee: Seer of the Divine Revelation*, p. 101. We note here that other, objective researchers, portray some of these 4 sisters in a different light. For e.g. Dr. Yi Liu states that "Another female co-worker of

- Watchman Nee was *Ruth Lee* (Li Yuan-ru, 1894-1969). She was of great help to Watchman Nee especially in the ministry of the word. Different from Peace Wang and Witness Lee, *she was involved in the turmoil against Watchman Nee in the 1940s*. From 1950 to 1952, she tried her best to publish Watchman Nee's messages during the training in Guling Mountain. She was also put into prison in 1956 and died in the same year as Peace Wang." [Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 101, note #11 (emphasis added)] While Dr. Liu asserts that "Ruth Lee was involved in the turmoil against Watchman Nee in the 1940s," Witness Lee's biography makes no mention of Ruth Lee's participation in these events. We ask: has Witness Lee's biography glossed over some 'unpleasant facts'?
51. W. Lee, *Elders' Training, Bk. 10: The Eldership & the God-Ordained Way (2)*, Ch. 4, Sect. 3
  52. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 10, Sect. 3
  53. Witness Lee, *Timely Trumpeting & the Present Need*, Ch. 3, Sect. 1.
  54. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 10, Sect. 3. The statement in context reads: "6 years ago a teaching came out which said that the local churches are autonomous. Some said that after the apostles establish a church and appoint elders, they should keep their hands off the church, leaving the church as an autonomy. Such a teaching of *autonomy was actually the building up of a monarchy*." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 10, Sect. 3 (emphasis added)] In this context, "*building up a monarchy*" has negative connotations. Prior to the statement quoted in the main text, W. Lee states: "The Lord's recovery today is the kingdom of God. Some have attempted to build up their work and to *establish a monarchy for themselves* within the recovery. Brother Nee strongly stressed this same matter when he said that some so-called co-workers were building up for themselves something separate from the recovery while they remained in the recovery. These co-workers built up their own little empires. Recently, *a monarchy was built up in a certain area* of this country, but the saints there refused to go along with such a monarchy." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 10, Sect. 3 (emphasis added)]. Elsewhere, W. Lee challenged local church elders, saying, "All the elders should pay attention to this. Elders, you are on the proper ground & you may be fundamental, but for what are you laboring? Are you laboring for God's interest or for your own interest? If you are for your interest, you *make the local church a monarchy, your own little empire, not a part of the kingdom of God*." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Ch. 6, Sect. 1 (emphasis added)]
  55. W. Lee, *Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, Ch. 1, St. 21
  56. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 10, St. 3
  57. *1993 Blending Conference Messages concerning the Lord's Recovery...*, Ch. 2, St. 4
  58. W. Lee, *Crucial Contents of God's NT Ministry, Training Outlines*, Ch. 1, St. 10; also *Crystallization-Study Outlines—New Jerusalem*, Ch. 1, Sect. 9
  59. W. Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, Ch. 1, St. 2
  60. [Blank]
  61. W. Lee, *One Body and One Spirit*, Ch. 1, Sect. 10
  62. W. Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, Ch. 3, Sect. 2. The quote, in context, reads: "We must *pay much more attention to the Body of Christ than to the local churches*...The Body of Christ is composed...of the redeemed ones...Built within them are the Spirit, the Lord, & the Father. All three of the Divine Trinity... Man, the Spirit, the Lord, & the Father are built together. This is not just three-in-one. **This is four-in-one**. God became a man that we, His redeemed, might become God [deification!]." [W. Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, Ch. 3, Sect. 2 (emphasis added)] We note that W. Lee relates the "Body" to the (controversial) '**four-in-one**' God, contradicting the orthodox Christian tenet of the 'three-in-one' God—the Trinity.
  63. W. Lee, *High Peak of the Vision & the Reality of the Body of Christ*, Ch. 1, Sect. 2
  64. W. Lee, *One Body and One Spirit*, Ch. 1, Sect. 10
  65. W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—1 Corinthians*, Ch.1, Sect. 8
  66. W. Lee, *Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, Ch. 1, St. 20 (emphasis added)
  67. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, LSM, pp. 196-7 (emphasis added)
  68. W. Lee, *Conclusion of the NT, (Msgs. 189-204)*, Ch. 12, Sect. 5
  69. Addressing the situation in 2003, LSM's President, Benson Philips said: Globally, LSM claims there are "**300,000 saints in over 3,000 churches outside mainland China**. Inside mainland China there are conservatively, 850,000 saints in the Lord's recovery and multitudes of churches." [BP, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91 (emphasis added)] Ten-years later, in 2014 a statement in the US Congress said: There **are more than 4,000 churches and 400,000 believers** meeting on every inhabited continent, including 200 churches and several thousand believers in Russia & the Russian speaking world. [WATCHMAN NEE & WITNESS LEE BY HON.

JOSEPH R. PITTS OF PENNSYLVANIA IN THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Tuesday, April 29, 2014] The latter (2014) numbers do not include the churches & believers in mainland China.

70. [Blank]

71. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 112 (emphasis added)

72. W. Lee, *Watchman Nee: Seer of the Divine Revelation*, pp. 314-315

73. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) pp. 99-100

74. W. Lee, *Sufficiency, Pursuit, & Learning of the Lord's Serving Ones*, Ch. 6, Sect. 5

75. Witness Lee declared to an assembly of church elders & workers, "Not all the apostles are master builders. With a building, there cannot be two master builders. That would bring in confusion. A master builder may have a helper, though. Likewise, in an army there cannot be two commanders in chief. A commander in chief may have someone who is second in command, but he is the one in charge of all the troops. Not all the apostles are wise master builders. Paul said that according to the grace of God given to him, he was a wise master builder (1 Cor. 3:10)." [W. Lee, *Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, Ch. 7, Sect. 2] The implication was clear—Witness Lee was the "one wise master builder"—a status explicitly later affirmed by LSM's "Blended Brothers."

76. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 97

77. The quote in context reads: "... In a meeting with the brothers to whom he committed the responsibility for Living Stream Ministry, Brother Lee said, 'My burden is for the recovery based on the interpretation of Brother Nee and me. *I am the continuation of Brother Nee; I would like to have a continuation of me, and this needs a corporation ...The Living Stream corporation will continue this ministry*' (from unpublished notes of a meeting of Living Stream, July 12, 1996). He placed the direction of this corporation for the continuation and publication of the ministry in the hands of a group of blended brothers, who labor to fulfill this charge before the Lord..." [Emphasis added] This quote might be considered an embarrassment to Witness Lee & LSM's "Blended Brothers." However, LSM's "Blended Brothers" need this statement (or something similar) to establish the validity of their claim to be the legitimate successors of Witness Lee & his ministry.

78. The British author, Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is quoted saying, "Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." [James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791)]

79. The claim is implicit in Witness Lee's assertion that "Watchman Nee "made a good, proper, and adequate foundation for this recovery. *I am continuing* to build up the Lord's recovery and *I am doing the same work*." [W. Lee, *Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity & the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, p. 91 (emphasis added)]

80. [Blank]

81. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 97

82. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity:," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 108

83. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 111

84. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 96

85. Yi Liu, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity," Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 110

86. Dr. Liu emphasizes the Chinese character of LSM's Local Church Movement, saying "A controversial figure both in China and in the Christian world, Witness Lee's journey exemplifies a *Chinese church* becoming globalized...in the latter half of the 20th century." [Yi Liu, *op. cit.* p. 97] "Though Witness Lee did have a global vision & mission since his work in US, *the Chinese prove to be his most solid & potential group...What Lee wanted to build is a global fellowship with a strong Chinese character.*" [Yi Liu, *op. cit.* pp. 111-112]

87.