

Title: 1966 - Members of the Little Flock Church at Shuman Reservoir, Taiwan.

Controversy With: Members of the Little Flock Church at Shuman Reservoir, Taiwan.

Controversy Over: Church property.

What The Local Church Did: Threatened Lawsuit In this rural church, the elders welcomed as Bible teachers persons previously excommunicated by Witness Lee in Taipei. A church split followed, and control of church property became an issue. Followers of Witness Lee from out of town staged a sit-in in the church building and threatened to "take the next step" if the keys to the building were not given to them.

Outcome: Approximately 90 church members reluctantly gave up the church property to approximately 10 of Lee's followers. [Note: Two out of the three persons listed on the title as owners of the building were sympathetic to Witness Lee].

Title: 1971 - Believers in Church Assembly Hall, Hong Kong

Controversy With: Believers in Church Assembly Hall, Hong Kong

Controversy Over: Ownership of church property on Observatory Road in Hong Kong. The church was split over this.

What The Local Church Did: Filed Lawsuit Church members sympathetic to Witness Lee filed a lawsuit against other members.

Outcome: Out of court settlement. Property went to followers of Witness Lee.

Title: 1973 - Christian Literature Crusade. Fort Washington, PA.

Controversy With: Christian Literature Crusade. Fort Washington, PA.

Controversy Over: Alleged inaccuracies in The Ecclesiology of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee by James Mo-oi Cheung.

What The Local Church Did: Threatened Lawsuit Threatened to sue Christian Literature Crusade.

Outcome: CLC recalled books, apologized to Witness Lee, agreed not to publish revised edition.

Additional Information: Cult Awareness Information Center

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=1)

1973 - Christian Literature Crusade

Alleged inaccuracies in The Ecclesiology of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee by James Mo-Oi Cheung resulted in threats of legal action against Christian Literature Crusade by the Local Church. The book alleged that Witness Lee, among other things, taught heresy. Christian Literature Crusade recalled the book, apologized to Witness Lee, and agreed not to publish a revised edition. Interviews with the author and the publisher disclosed that the retraction was issued in the face of threatened legal action by Local Church officials and was not based solely upon the contents of the book. Their retraction, included as an appendix in the book, Understanding Watchman Nee by Dana Roberts (Logos), read as follows:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Following publication of the book THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF WATCHMAN NEE AND WITNESS LEE by James Mo-Oi Cheung, we received personal visits and letters from associates of Witness Lee who asserted that he does not hold or teach some of the views that were attributed to him in the book. Accordingly, C.L.C. [Christian Literature Crusade] as publisher has taken the following actions:

- 1) Eight days after the book was first offered for sale, we removed the appendix in toto and rebound the remaining stock because of material in the appendix that we could not substantiate in light of the new information.
- 2) In mid-February we stopped all further sale of the book when it was brought to our attention that material which we could not substantiate was present in the body of the book as well.
- 3) We wrote a letter of apology to Mr. Witness Lee regarding imputations of heresy, etc., that the book contained.
- 4) We suspended

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publication of a revised and corrected edition of the book. 5) We issued a recall, for full credit, of all copies of the book sold. 6) We agreed that C.L.C. would not publish a revised edition of the book.

We feel that we owe all parties interested in this publication a fuller explanation of the reasons for the actions detailed above. The following statement is intended to be the vehicle by which the author and publisher acknowledge that items in the areas mentioned below should not, for lack of supporting evidence, have appeared in the book. At the same time we do not mean to suggest that all believers would agree to all the teachings of Witness Lee and his associates. Assertions by associates of Witness Lee that the book misrepresents him with respect to doctrine fall in these general areas:

1) Imputations of heresy to Witness Lee specifically in reference to his views on the blood of Jesus and the person and nature of Jesus Christ. 2) The claim that in matters of doctrine Witness Lee differs substantially from the views of Watchman Nee (differences are evidently much narrower than suggested by the book). 3) The inference that Witness Lee resorts to deliberate "twisting of Scripture" or "misuse of the Word." 4) The allegation that Witness Lee holds to a strict "baptismal regeneration" view of baptism.

In addition, the authorship of the book THE GLORIOUS CHURCH was incorrectly attributed to Witness Lee, whereas the author was in fact Watchman Nee. We want it to be known that it is not our policy to disseminate material concerning any person or persons that is known to be inaccurate. We sincerely regret feelings of offense created by the publication of this book, as well as any inconvenience caused by its subsequent recall and termination.

Sincerely in Christ, CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE

A. Donald Fredlund Publications Secretary

James Mo-Oi Cheung Author

April 19, 1973

Title: 1977 - Dr. Walter Martin, Founder and Director, Christian Research Institute.

Controversy With: Dr. Walter Martin, Founder and Director, Christian Research Institute. San Juan Capistrano, CA.

Controversy Over: Criticism of Witness Lee and The Local Church in public lectures.

What The Local Church Did: Lawsuit threatened by The Local Church.

Outcome: Threat ignored. No legal action taken.

Additional Information: Cult Awareness Information Center

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=2)

1977 - Walter Martin

Walter Martin was the founder and director of Christian Research Institute, San Juan Capistrano, California. Martin critiqued Witness Lee and the Local Church in public lectures. The Local Church threatened Martin with legal action. Their threat was ignored. No legal action was taken. No action was taken against him as the result of the publication of his book, The New Cults, which contains an excellent treatment of the Local Church. The Local Church spent an estimated \$40,000 in paid advertising in the Santa Ana Register and other papers to defend their claim to be perfectly orthodox in its beliefs and practices, as the result of Martin's public criticism

Title: 1977 - Maranatha Village. Santa Ana, CA

Controversy With: Maranatha Village. Santa Ana, CA.

Controversy Over: Sale of The Mind Benders, a book critical of The Local Church.

What The Local Church Did: Requests made by men identifying themselves as Local Church members that Maranatha Village refrain from selling the book. Persons placed Local Church tracts in the books racks.

Outcome: Store continued to sell the book. Employees removed Local Church tracts from book racks.

Title: 1978 - Believers in The Church in Denver. Denver, Colorado.

Controversy With: Believers in The Church in Denver. Denver, Colorado.

Controversy Over: Ownership of church property in Denver. The church was split over this.

What The Local Church Did: Filed Lawsuit Church members sympathetic to Witness Lee filed a lawsuit against other members.

Outcome: Out of court settlement. Property went to Witness Lee's followers.

Title: 1978 - Lighthouse Christian Store. Long Beach, CA

Controversy With: Lighthouse Christian Store. Long Beach, CA

Controversy Over: Sale of The Mind Benders in the store.

What The Local Church Did: Local Church members requested that the book be removed from the bookshelves.

Outcome: Bookstore refused to remove the book from bookshelves.

Title: 1979 - Christian Herald Books, publisher. Dr. Ronald Enroth, author.

Controversy With: Christian Herald Books, publisher. Dr. Ronald Enroth, author.

Controversy Over: Mention of The Local Church in The Lure of the Cults by Dr. Ronald Enroth.

What The Local Church Did: Lawsuit threatened by The Local Church.

Outcome: Without consulting the author, the publisher removed all references to The Local Church in a revised edition.

Additional Information: Cult Awareness Information Centre

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=3)

1979 - Ronald Enroth and Christian Herald Books

Enroth, Professor of Sociology at Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California, mentioned the Local Church in The Lure of the Cults. Enroth briefly commented on the Local Church's evangelistic strategy and their practices of pray-reading and calling on the name of the Lord. The Local Church threatened the publisher with legal action. Without consulting Enroth, the publisher removed all references of Witness Lee and the Local Church in the 1980 revised edition of the book. Enroth took his book elsewhere.

Title: 1979 - Nelson Publishers. Nashville, TN; Dr. Jack Sparks, author.

Controversy With: Nelson Publishers. Nashville, TN; Dr. Jack Sparks, author.

Controversy Over: The Mind Benders, a book examining cults which included a chapter on The Local Church.

What The Local Church Did: Filed four separate lawsuits simultaneously in Anaheim, Dallas, Atlanta and Cleveland for \$37 million.

Outcome: Settled out of court with the publisher issuing a retraction and ceasing distribution of the book - the author making no apology or retraction. Media reports that The Local Church received \$150,000 in settlement. Estimates are that over one million dollars was expended in litigation costs before settlement.

Additional Information: 1979 - Jack Sparks and Thomas Nelson Publishers

The book, The Mind Benders, included a chapter on the Local Church movement, classifying it as a cult along with other recognized cultic groups. The Local Church took exception to being labeled a cult. The second

edition of the book published in 1979 included a new chapter on Jim Jones which immediately followed the chapter on the Local Church at the end of the book. Sparks alleged that Witness Lee and the Local Church brainwashes its members and teaches heresy. Local Church officials simultaneously filed four separate lawsuits in Anaheim, Dallas, Atlanta, and Cleveland, totaling \$37 million.⁸ Facing near-exhaustion of liability insurance, Nelson settled out of court. Nelson ceased distribution of the book, recalled all unsold copies of the book, and issued a retraction. The author made no such apology or retraction. Media reports that the Local Church received \$150,000 in the settlement. Costly, lengthy litigation influenced the publisher's decision to settle out of court. The retraction read as follows:

In 1977 *The Mind Benders*, a book authored by Jack Sparks, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc., accused Witness Lee and the Local Churches of being a cult and of being heretical in their beliefs. Both before and after publication of their first edition, Nelson received many letters from the Local Churches and their members protesting the falsity of the chapter concerning them. Notwithstanding these letters, Nelson published an expanded second edition in 1979. In 1980 Local Churches brought suit against Thomas Nelson and the author for libel. The Local Churches should not have been included in either edition of *The Mindbenders*. Nelson has no desire to inflict any damage or harm upon Witness Lee, the Local Churches, or their members by the continued publication of this book. Therefore, Nelson hereby retracts the statements made in *The Mindbenders* about them, and extends its apology to the good Christian members of the Local Churches. Accordingly, Nelson has withdrawn the book from publication and distribution and encourages all book sellers who have any unsold copies to return them for credit.

Title: 1979 - Neil T. Duddy, *Spiritual Counterfeits Project*, and Schwengeler-Verlag

1979 - Neil T. Duddy, *Spiritual Counterfeits Project*, and Schwengeler-Verlag

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=7)

In 1977 SCP published an eighty-page booklet, *The God-Men*, which provided the first major survey of the beliefs and practices of the Local Church. It was later translated into the Chinese language. A revised and expanded edition was published in 1979 in the German language by Swiss publisher Schwengeler-Verlag. It was entitled, *Die Sonder Lehre des Witness Lee Und Seiner Ortsgemeinde* (*The Unusual - or Strange Teaching of Witness Lee and His Place - Church or Location Church*). The Local Church in Stuttgart, West Germany, filed a lawsuit in Swiss court to stop distribution of the book, alleging defamation. The suit was dismissed by the court because improper plaintiff brought suit. That decision was appealed by the Local Church but the dismissal was upheld by a higher court. In December 1980 the Local Church filed another lawsuit, this time, in Oakland, California, also alleging defamation in the German edition of the book. An English version derived from the same manuscript was published in the United States by Intervarsity Press in 1981, under the title, *The God-Men*. No lawsuit was filed against the English edition of the book published by Intervarsity Press. For four and a half years SCP was subjected to a strategy of financial attrition by the Local Church by means of pretrial maneuvering. SCP's lawyer filed a declaration in federal court:

I concluded that the process of protracted discovery at a tremendous expense was more important to the plaintiffs than meaningful settlement negotiations as they had nothing to lose by the expenditure of vast sums of money. I was personally informed in February 1985 by a person who had recently left the Local Church that the litigation was costing the plaintiffs approximately \$80,000 per month. Obviously, SCP could not afford to sustain a defense indefinitely in the absence of insurance given the magnitude of the discovery efforts by plaintiffs: approximately 140 days or half-days of some 44 persons; only 8 persons were deposed by SCP for 17 days or half-days. I have never seen discovery conducted in such minute detail as that conducted by plaintiffs in this case.

SCP's debts mounted with the approach of the trial date of March 4, 1985. Already in debt and facing additional court costs and the probability of the Local Church appealing a defeat, SCP's existence was threatened. On March 4, the day the trial was to begin, SCP filed for Chapter Eleven bankruptcy protection. This action imposed an immediate stay on the Local Church's action against SCP. This action also allowed SCP to continue its ministry without giving into demands made by the Local Church. Demands would require SCP signing a statement that would give the Local Church an unqualified endorsement. Finding SCP inaccessible, the Local Church then pursued Schwengeler- Verlag and Neil Duddy. The publisher had already faced one challenge and declined to get involved in the U.S. litigation. Neil Duddy was now living and working in Denmark, and having already used personal money to defend himself in the U.S., was unable and unwilling to defend himself. He declined to return to the U.S. to appear in court. Having been unsuccessful in having the bankruptcy judge send SCP back to the state court for a full-scale trial, the Local Church called for a default hearing, a one-sided procedure in which the plaintiffs are allowed to make an uncontested presentation to the court. SCP staff were present but were not allowed to participate because of their bankruptcy status. The Local Church presented their side of the case in an uncontested manner. Witnesses and so-called experts freely offered their testimony without the fear of being cross-examined. Based upon the information presented during the default hearing, and without benefit of cross-examination by SCP, the judge issued a strongly-worded opinion in favor of the Local Church that had essentially repeated their original claims against SCP. The Local Church received a \$11.9 million award for general and punitive damages against the author and the publisher. Since SCP was in bankruptcy and therefore out of the lawsuit, the judgment did not apply to them. Witness Lee and the Local Church, however, filed a \$15 million claim against SCP in bankruptcy court, assuming the status of a creditor on the basis of a disputed damage claim that had never been tested in a court trial. The Local Church received \$34,000 as the result of their efforts. Local Church members will appeal to the judge's 32-page opinion as evidence of their vindication against charges of cultic activity as presented in *The God-Men*. States Bill Squires:

The only thing that can be concluded from 4 years of pretrial maneuvering is that there were insufficient funds to litigate a complex case at the level of legal activity and expense that was set by the plaintiffs. Had there been a trial, we believe we would have prevailed....We urge concerned Christians to carefully and prayerfully review the abundant supply of internationally published material which evaluates and comments on the teachings and practices of Witness Lee and the Local Church, including the tapes and publications of the Local Church itself, in order to accurately understand this group and form your own opinion.¹¹

Title: 1979 - Daniel Smith, former missionary with China Inland Mission; pastor; Bible

Controversy With: Daniel Smith, former missionary with China Inland Mission; pastor; Bible teacher. Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Controversy Over: Comments critical of *The Local Church in Pilgrim of the Heavenly Way*, Smith's self-published autobiography.

What The Local Church Did: Half Threat The Local Church sent one of their leaders to Canada asking that the book be retracted - "half threatening me," according to Smith.

Outcome: Author rewrote

Additional Information: 1979 - Daniel Smith

Smith was a former missionary with China Inland Mission, pastor, Bible teacher, and lived in Vancouver, B.C. Canada. The author critically commented on the Local Church in his self-published autobiography, *Pilgrim of the Heavenly Way*. Smith questioned some of Lee's teachings and called him one of the most dangerous men in Christendom today. The Local Church sent a leader to Canada asking that the book be retracted. According to SCP the author rewrote several pages of the book and pasted pages of the new text over the old. According to the publisher the author also pasted a statement of no malice in the front of the remaining books he had in stock.

Title: 1979 - James Bjornstad and Regal Books

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1979 - James Bjornstad and Regal Books

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=5)

Bjornstad mentioned the Local Church in his book, *Counterfeits at Your Door*. Bjornstad stated that the Local Church deliberately presents a theology to the public that differs from what is actually taught to its membership and found throughout its writings. Bjornstad was verbally threatened with a lawsuit by Local Church elders who wanted the book taken off the market. The threat was ignored. No legal action was taken against him. Following commentary on contradictions found in the teachings of the Local Church, Bjornstad comments on practices typical of groups like the Local Church.

This difference between a public presentation and the actual theology taught is a problem for anyone trying to detect religious counterfeits such as the Local Church. Accepting the "Christian" side of their theology leads to being fooled by a counterfeit. Detecting the counterfeit - the other side of their theology - means they will tell you that you are taking the quotes out of context and misrepresenting them. To make things worse, they will even quote the seemingly "Christian" side of their theology as proof against the unorthodox side.

Title: 1980 - Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute, and George Sweeting

1980 - Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute, and George Sweeting

The July/August 1979 issue of *Moody Monthly* briefly critiqued the Local Church in a feature article entitled *A Catalog of Cults* by Gary Wall. The article spelled out the beliefs of cults concerning the deity of Christ. The Local Church did not appreciate being labeled a cult and associated with recognized cultic groups. Witness Lee claimed that Moody mischaracterized his teaching concerning the deity of Christ. The reference to the Local Church read as follows:

The Local Church - Leader: Witness Lee. Lee teaches that Jesus was neither God nor man, but God-man - a mingling of God with humanity. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God mingled Himself with man, according to Lee. The implication is that men can be God-men too. He calls the Trinity three "stages of God" rather than three separate persons (*The God-Men, Spiritual Counterfeits project, Berkeley, CA*).¹²

In all fairness to Witness Lee, it should be stated that throughout most of His books he clearly states that Jesus Christ is both God and man. At times Lee will even state that both His divine and human natures are distinct. When we consider the logical consequence of Lee's teaching of mingling and the illustrations of mingling he employs, we must conclude, however, that the Lord's two natures were indeed joined together and that they are not separate and distinguishable. Witness Lee and the Local Church were determined, however, to challenge Moody Bible Institute. The Local Church filed a \$4.8 million lawsuit in Orange County, California against Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute, and then-president and editor-in-chief, George Sweeting. The lawsuit was settled out of court. Moody Monthly made no retraction but did agree to delete mention of the Local Church in the reprint of the popular article. Four Local Church officials, three of whom who are no longer with the movement, were permitted to respond to the article in the September 1980 issue of the magazine. Former members offered their supportive comments of Moody Monthly's article in the January 1981 issue. According to the Complaint for Defamation filed by the Local Church in June 1980, financial considerations weighed heavily.

By reason of the publication and distribution of the false and defamatory statements contained in the July-August Moody Monthly Magazine, plaintiff CHURCHES have been specially damaged in that many of its members have been shunned, suffered hardships, have been ostracized, have been held up to ridicule and themselves have suffered monetary losses thereby diminishing their contributions to the CHURCHES, and in addition thereto many persons who otherwise would have become members of the Local Church, and would

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have contributed thereto, by reason of the false, defamatory statements as alleged, have become afraid and fearful of doing so, resulting in a sharp decline in the number of new members normally to be expected and some diminution of contributions and anticipated contributions. The plaintiff CHURCHES do not, at this time, know the exact extent of the pecuniary loss resulting from the foregoing, but are informed and believe and therefore allege that said loss is a continuing one and that the amount of said loss will exceed the sum of \$17,000.00 or more for each such CHURCH, and plaintiff CHURCHES pray leave of court of amend and to insert the true amount of said loss when the same becomes known to said plaintiffs and as established by evidence at the time of trial. By reason of the publication and distribution of the false, defamatory and slanderous statements and utterances as heretofore alleged, each of plaintiff CHURCHES, and their membership, which constitute the CHURCHES, have been subjected to humiliation, ridicule, emotional distress, loss of reputation, hatred and contempt, all to the general damages for each of plaintiff CHURCHES in the sum of \$75,000.00 By reason of the foregoing, and the intentional actual malice of defendants as heretofore alleged, each of plaintiff CHURCHES is entitled to exemplary damages against defendants, and each of them, in the sum of \$150,000.00. By reason of the false and defamatory publications as heretofore alleged, plaintiff WITNESS LEE has been specially damaged in that he has suffered pecuniary loss by having to devote time and expense in travel and appearances at various meetings to set forth the true facts of his teachings and to make proof that neither his teachings nor the activities of the Local Churches constitute those of a cult, that he has been distressed and exhausted both mentally and emotionally and in his spirit, and impaired in his ability to devote the usual amount of time and energy in his work, and upon information and belief he alleges that he will sustain like such pecuniary loss in the future, all in an amount in excess of \$25,000.00.... By reason of the false and defamatory statements published by defendants as aforesaid, plaintiff WITNESS LEE has been generally damaged by reason of being exposed to hatred, contempt, ridicule, by being defamed in his teachings and by being derided and shunned, and is therefore entitled to such general damages in the sum of \$100,000.00. The publication of the false and malicious statements as heretofore set forth were made with actual malice by the defendants, and each of them, with the intent to cause mortification, shame and arose hatred and ill-will towards plaintiff WITNESS LEE and to damage and destroy his reputation by reason of which said plaintiff is entitled to exemplary damages, for the sake of example and by way of punishment to defendants, in the amount of \$250,000.00.13

Title: 1980 - Salem Kirban

1980 - Salem Kirban

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=9)

The author included in his book, Satan's Angels Exposed, a brief chapter on the Local Church. Representatives of the Local Church visited Salem Kirban and asked him to omit the offending chapter in subsequent editions of the book. They reminded him that they were suing Thomas Nelson over The Mind Benders. The chapter on the Local Church was omitted from subsequent editions. Nothing further was heard from the Local Church.

Title: 1980 - Ronald Enroth and Eternity Magazine

1980 - Ronald Enroth and Eternity Magazine

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=10)

Enroth mentioned the Local Church in his article, The Power Abusers, which appeared in the October 1979 issue of Eternity magazine. Local Church elders visited Eternity and raised the possibility of legal action if certain demands were not met. As a result of this coercive action the Local Church was allowed to place a

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statement in the October 1980 issue of Eternity explaining their stand. An introductory comment to the October 1980 issue stated:

Veteran subscribers have rallied this year to support ETERNITY, and we gratefully report that the machinery seems to be turning properly. (We have funds for the basics - production of a magazine - but no funds for such luxuries as costly litigation with aggrieved groups. This may help you understand the rather unusual space given to the statement on page 19).

Title: 1983 - Jerram Barrs and InterVarsity Press

1983 - Jerram Barrs and InterVarsity Press

(http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=480&Itemid=8&limit=1&limitstart=11)

In his book, *Shepherds and Sheep*, Barrs made reference to Watchman Nee, Witness Lee, and the Local Church. He questioned areas of authoritarian church leadership and the potential of its abuses. According to SCP, references to Lee and the Local Church were removed from some editions. Comments made by Barrs included these:

For example, people who have been involved in the Local Church testify, on the one hand, to a tremendous emphasis on the liberty of the Spirit and a neglect of the word (because the Word is said to bind people). On the other hand, they describe the oppressive authority of a leader who tells everybody what to do, who so totally controls everyone's life that some members live in fear of making any independent decisions. Lee is the central authority in the local churches: "When I command in my spirit, the Lord commands with me, for I am one spirit with the Lord." He rejects rational understanding of Scripture and demands a personal revelation, not just illumination, in the reading of Scripture. He teaches that Christ is the mingled God-man, and that in regeneration we too become mingled with God, becoming God-men. For Lee the church is Christ, and the believer must belong to its Local Church expression. Everyone must put off Christianity, which for him is every other denomination, "the wilderness," "Babylon," and flee to the Local Church.

Title: 1985 - Bob Larson and Tyndale House Publishers

1985 - Bob Larson and Tyndale House Publishers

The publication, *Larson's Book of Cults*, published in 1982, contained a brief, concise, chapter on the Local Church. Local Church officials approached Tyndale House in 1985 and engaged them in lengthy correspondence concerning mention in the book. Subsequently, the entire chapter on the Local Church and all bibliographical references were omitted from all future editions of the book.

Title: 1991 - Moody Press and Moody Bible Institute

1991 - Moody Press and Moody Bible Institute

The Moody Press publication, *A Concise Guide to Cults and Religions*, edited by William Watson, was to contain references to Witness Lee and the Local Church. The references were pulled from the book prior to its publication to avoid possible litigation against Moody Bible Institute by the Local Church. In correspondence to the author, Moody vice-president Dennis Shere stated:

We did not include the Local Church in "A Concise Dictionary of Cults and Religions," after reviewing the matter with our attorneys as we prepared the material for publication. The Local Church has aggressively pursued and won legal action against other organizations for allegedly mischaracterizing its activities. In the past we have had legal contact ourselves as the result of a previous mention of the Local Church in a magazine

article. For those reasons, primarily, it was decided to exclude the Local Church from this dictionary. We concurred with legal counsel that it would be wise to avoid the potential for a protracted legal dispute in which the outcome was uncertain, left to judgment in an arena that might well be prejudiced against us. The resources that might be expended in a questionable dispute can be put to far better use by the Moody Bible Institute in its world-wide mission efforts.

It is apparent by what we have read in this chapter that the Local Church has taken a considerable amount of action to prevent public evaluation of their movement. Legal action, or the threat thereof, has been successfully used by these people to remove brief references, entire chapters, and even entire books from public circulation. In all probability, legal action threatening loss of time, money, and other resources could spell doom for any Christian ministry in light of today's spiraling legal costs. We have seen that the Local Church has expressed far more faith in the court system of this land than in God to deal with their critics. If God is truly on their side, is their reliance upon the court system of this land, their Caesar, necessary for the furtherance of their movement? We must ask whether Lee and company are more concerned about their standing before God or before men. A look at the number of recent publications on the cults will find that there are few or no references at all of Witness Lee and the Local Church. Here in America we enjoy a number of personal freedoms. These include the right to worship and speak as we please. How is it, then, that Lee and company have, over the years, gone after those who publicly commented about them? Jim Jones, the infamous leader of People's Temple, exercised social, political, and yes, legal clout, to suppress unfavorable information about his evil empire. If someone can be sued for exercising free speech in this country, then there is really no such thing as freedom of speech at all!

Title: 1995 - Jim Moran, Internet Provider MCSNet of Chicago, and CompuServe Information

1995 - Jim Moran, Internet Provider MCSNet of Chicago, and CompuServe Information Service Lawsuit Threat
This author began making available his research material on the Internet via a FTP site set up through his Chicago-area Internet provider, MCSNet. During the third week of August, this site was listed in Stanford University's Yahoo Internet directory. On August 21, MCSNet received a strongly worded e-mail message from Mr. Kerry Robichaux, a Local Church leader and official representing The Living Stream Ministry, the publishing arm of the Local Church. The main body of his message, provided here in public for the first time, [date of original publication unknown--Nell] was a "request" to MCSNet to remove all of my material concerning the Local Church from their site and to prohibit me from uploading any other material about the Local Church through MCSNet's service.

I represent the Living Stream Ministry, which publishes the Christian ministries of Witness Lee and Watchman Nee and provides Christian publications for churches around the globe loosely called "the local churches." We are a Christian publisher with offices in the States of California and Texas, Taipei, Taiwan; London, England; and Moscow, Russia. We have been in business since 1965 and serve a community of over 1200 churches worldwide.

About a month ago one of your uses, Jim Moran, uploaded a series of 16 chapters of a book he is writing concerning Witness Lee and the local churches to his FTP directory. The full URL for the files is:

Many of the things he says about our publications and the churches we serve are false and defamatory. According to Mr. Moran, our publications are heretical and the churches we serve are a cult. These charges are quite serious. Of course, we recognize and respect his right to criticize us as severely as he desires. Unfortunately, however, some of the materials he uses to back up his claims 1) have been shown to be libelous in the courts or 2) have been withdrawn by their publishers with nationwide published apology for being false and unfair.

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We are quite concerned about this matter since it affects the social well-being of the members of the churches we serve, some of which churches are in the Chicago area. We understand the right of all your members to express their opinions about religious authors and groups. We also respect that right. However, we cannot tolerate false and defamatory accusations made against our publications and the churches we serve. When materials shown to be libelous are used to defame us, we simply cannot tolerate it and are compelled to take action. Unfortunately, this is the nature of the materials being circulated through your service. We are including an extract of the decision of the court and copies of the published retractions at the end of this message. Full copies of the court decision can be sent, if you wish to examine it.

At best, we would like to have EVERYTHING that Mr. Moran has uploaded concerning us removed from your service and we would like to have Mr. Moran cease immediately from uploading ANYTHING concerning us, since he demonstrates a careless regard for the decisions of law and for the wishes of the publishers whose materials he uses. Even when he is not directly quoting from these libelous materials, many of his charges are upheld only by reference to them. This could be proved without too much effort, if effort were to be made at all. Because of this, we are leery of anything that he submits through your service.

I hope that this will aid your exploration of this matter. Thank you for your attention. I am eagerly expecting your speedy response.

Kerry Robichaux
Living Stream Ministry
Anaheim, CA (21)

As the result of receiving this message, MCSNet cut off WWW (World Wide Web) access to my FTP site, preventing my evaluation of the Local Church from being accessible to the Internet community through the WWW. Mr. Robichaux, however, had mischaracterized my research methods. For instance, consider Mr. Robichaux's claims that I had used materials "that have been shown to be libelous in the courts" and "have been withdrawn by their publishers with nationwide published apology for being false and unfair." These comments made by Mr. Robichaux require close scrutiny!

In regards to Mr. Robichaux's first comment, "That have been shown...", the only books known to have had its day in court was the German and English editions of the Neil Duddy & SCP book, "The God-Men." As stated previously in this chapter, the authors of this book were not able to continue paying for the cost of pre-trial maneuvering carried out by the Local Church. SCP was forced to file for bankruptcy protection, removing themselves from the case. The Local Church pursued SCP in a default hearing in which SCP was not able to defend its claims about the Local church, could not offer their own evidence, present their own panel of witnesses, and could not cross-examine those witnesses presented by the Local Church. Two quotes cited from this book had been removed from my manuscript in April, prior to having uploading it to my FTP site in June.

In regards to Mr. Robichaux's comment, "have been withdrawn...", is in reference to the Jack Sparks book, "The Mind Benders." This book was in print and circulation for five years and defended by Thomas Nelson Publishers for over two years, before having been withdrawn. Mr. Robichaux failed to mention in his message that Thomas Nelson withdrew the book because they were facing exhaustion of liability insurance. Why else would someone defend the book for several years and then apologize for including a chapter on the Local Church in it. The statement of retraction, offered previously in this chapter and attached by Mr. Robichaux to his message to MCSNet, makes no apology for the specific content of the book.

This brings us to the final matter of discussion, the CompuServe Information Service. During the fourth week in August, this author was informed by Tom Sims, the present systems operator of CompuServe's Religion Forum, that he had removed my Local Files and messages from the forum. Mr. Sims stated that he did not want to put his forum at risk on such a controversial matter that had been the subject of previous litigation.

It is quite apparent by what we have read in this chapter, the Local Church has taken a considerable amount of action to prevent public evaluation of their movement. As was the case of "The God-Men," "The Mind Benders," and other books, financial considerations weighed heavily in decisions to withdraw material about the Local Church. Legal action, or the threat thereof, has been successfully used by these people to remove brief references, entire chapters, and even entire books from public circulation. In all probability, any legal action threatening loss of time, money, and other resources could spell doom for any Christian ministry in light of today's spiraling legal costs. We have seen that the Local Church has expressed far more faith in the court system of this land than in God to deal with their critics. If God is truly on their side, is their reliance upon the court system of this land, their "Caesar," necessary for the furtherance of their movement? We must ask whether Lee and company are more concerned about their standing before God or before men.

In bringing this chapter to a close, one should ask themselves these questions: Is the "God" of the Local Church so small that they require the assistance of a court of law to defend the legitimacy of their movement; Since when does a court of law have the authority and responsibility to determine whose theology is sound or not?; and thirdly, Why has there been such a great amount of criticism of the beliefs and practices of the Local Church movement that has brought about a tremendous amount of public comment?

A look at the number of recent publications on the cults will find that there are few or no references at all of Witness Lee and the Local Church. Here in America we enjoy a number of personal freedoms. These include the right to worship and speak as we please. How is it, then, that Lee and company have, over the years, gone after those who publicly commented about them? Jim Jones, the infamous leader of People's Temple, exercised social, political, and yes, legal clout, to suppress unfavorable information about his evil empire. If someone can be sued for exercising free speech in this country, then there is really no such thing as freedom of speech at all, except for those who can afford the price of a good attorney

Title: 2001 ? Harvest House Publishers, authors John Ankerberg, and John Weldon

2001 ? Harvest House Publishers, authors John Ankerberg, and John Weldon

(http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com/about_cstatementfaq.cfm)

On December 31, 2001, The Local Church, The Local Churches, and Living Stream Ministry filed a \$136 million defamation lawsuit against Harvest House Publishers and authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon. In their suit, The Local Church claimed that the book the Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions was libelous in regard to them. Through the course of the legal proceedings, Harvest House and the authors have firmly stated the language of the book does not at all defame The Local Church. The case has been reviewed by Judge Kent Sullivan of the 80th Judicial District Court of Harris County in Houston, Texas, and on March 9, 2004, Judge Sullivan declined a motion for summary judgment, which is not a ruling against Harvest House and the authors, but simply allows the case to continue forward. (At this level of the legal process, the judge is not required to explain the reasoning behind his ruling.) Consequently, Harvest House Publishers, Ankerberg, and Weldon are taking this ruling to the Texas court of appeals. We have great confidence in the fairness of our legal system, and we truly believe that the appellate court will completely vindicate us.

Title: 2006, July - The Church in Columbus, Ohio

July, 2006 - The Church in Columbus

Letter of Response (<http://thebereans.net/forum/index.php/topic,8295.msg219713.html#msg219713>)

To: Brothers Sam Bremping, David Chao, Mark Chiang, Jack Huang & Eric Lee

From: The Elders of the church in Columbus

Regarding: May 30, 2006 Letter about the Roots Camp in Columbus, Ohio

We are deeply disturbed by the aforementioned letter as it was sent out via email to an unknown number of saints without prior fellowship with us. Since the "Roots Boot Camp" is being held in Columbus, it would have been proper to personally contact us and express your concern prior to disseminating your feelings to the addressees of your email. Instead, we received your email via Louisville, KY. ...

...Because of the way your letter was disseminated, the accusatory tone throughout, and the condemnation of biblical, godly things within it, we feel that your motives in writing are highly questionable. We do not wholeheartedly believe that you wrote and sent the email out of any genuine "concern" for anyone. Nor does it appear that you truly wanted fellowship. Your correspondence seems to exist only to slander the work of those who are trying to serve, albeit differently than you.

Brothers, let us not engage in these tactics, as it creates the very defilement you presume to defend against. We hope that you will take our many frank words to heart and trust that we also serve the living Christ and wish to be used by Him in His economy. By the same token, we will grant you the same grace, believing in the best for the future and going on in peace.

In Christ,

Elders of the Church in Columbus

Title: 2006, November - The Church in Mansfield, Ohio

Ministry Group Harasses Church (Mansfield, OH) Threats

"It was a bizarre Sunday morning for the members of a non-denominational church called "The Church in Mansfield." A group of people, some ex-members of the church and some from out of state, rose up during the service and announced that they were there to take over the church premises. When church leaders told them to leave, they refused to do so, even after the police were called. When the group did leave, it pledged to continue a strategy of harassment until the church was driven off of its property. A member of the invasive group publicly revealed that California-based Living Stream Ministry President Benson Phillips had coached them to fight against the church and take its meeting facility. The Living Stream Ministry formally denies controlling any churches or interfering with their operations. Mansfield church elder David Etzel disagrees, saying, "Of course their claim isn't true. That's just what they tell the public. They're actually pulling a lot of strings behind the scenes and trying to bring churches under their control. This is the fourth incident we've had here in less than two years where people loyal to that ministry disrupted church meetings. We want absolutely nothing to do with them or their organization."

Title: 2006, October - A Warning and a Quarantine

A WARNING TO ALL THE SAINTS AND ALL THE CHURCHES IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY CONCERNING TITUS CHU AND THOSE WHO ...

<http://www.afaithfulword.org/statements/Warning%20Statement%202006-10-01.pdf>

...

"Based on the principles defined in the Scriptures by the apostles and practiced by Brother Lee and the recovery in the past, we must now be faithful to the Lord and the recovery and issue a strong warning to all the saints and all the churches... we solemnly exhort all the saints to join with us to mark Brother Titus Chu and those who disseminate his divisive views and his dissenting speaking, and turn away from them. For the sake of preserving themselves and the rest of the Body, we urge the saints to keep a watchful eye on these contagiously divisive persons and to cease interaction with them.

According to Titus 3:10, a factious man? a heretical, sectarian man who causes divisions by forming parties in the church according to his own opinions? should be refused, rejected, after a first and second admonition. To refuse such a one does not mean that we cut him off. Rather, it means that we take action to quarantine him in order to save both the contagious one and the rest of the Body."

(Note: When believers are "warned" in a statement such as this, consequences are implied. Consequences to whom? Titus was "quarantined," whatever that means. That deed was done. Can we infer that it is the believers who do not "cease interaction" with Titus who bear the weight of this warning and not Titus himself? For this reason, I believe it is a threat.)

Title: The Church in Irving v. D/FW Airport

Church in Irving v. D/FW Airport

Dallas Morning News article

"The article says the problem has led to a bitter dispute over whether the airport is obliged to buy out the 50,000-square-foot church as well as the community housing. Recently church officials accused senior airport executives of dishonesty and trickery. "One of the reasons why they've abused their power of discretion with us is that they think, These people are Christians and won't sue," said John Pester, a church representative. "Well, we intend to fight. We believe we have been wronged."

The report says airport officials have responded with indignation, accusing the 500-member nondenominational church of manipulation and greed. They say they are under no obligation to buy the church, most recently appraised at \$4 million, and that the church's claims are motivated by one thing. "I think this is a case of show me the money," said airport spokesman Joe Dealey Jr., calling the church's threats of unspecified further action "an attempt to extort money from the airport board. This really is a greed issue."