

# Can the Local Church Leadership Say, “We Were Wrong”?

## An Open Letter

To Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, and Dan Towle  
at “A Faithful Word”

And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear *the cases* between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the sojourner with him. You shall not respect persons in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear the face of man; for judgment *is* God's. (Deut. 1:16–17)

Jane Carole Anderson  
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Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, and Dan Towle,

The reason that I am addressing this open letter to you is because you are representatives of “A Faithful Word” (AFW) website, where a heretofore-unanswered public judgment of me, which I will refer to as “AFW Judgment,” has been posted since May of 2009 (Appendix E) (Buntain, “Statement”). Your AFW Judgment gives me opportunity to demonstrate, before others, that when the Local Church (LC<sup>1</sup>) leadership is confronted about their sins, they cannot say they were wrong. Your action against me, which I will be asking you to address, is one among many other unrighteous actions by the LC leadership against God’s children.

## 1. Introduction

In January of this year, after I finished reading a long article about the LC in the *Christian Research Journal*<sup>2</sup> (*Journal*), I found myself looking back and forth between the mountain of sins committed by the LC leadership against God’s children, and the *Journal* in my hand, written by researchers who somehow managed to miss that mountain. Sooner or later, the shameful pile of sins against God’s flock, which have been committed by men who are supposed to be shepherds, must be addressed and removed. Only God knows how many prayers have been sent heavenward for this to happen.

It wasn’t long before I found myself, shovel in hand, doing my part towards the removal of that mountain. The result is this letter. Its length may make it appear that I used an earth-moving front-end loader; but, though that would certainly have been easier, I assure you I composed it carefully, one shovelful at a time (with my husband’s editorial help). In this letter, I carefully set before you the small part of that large mountain which is my evidence against the LC leadership. I ask you to address it biblically, as you should. I also make a number of critiques of the *Journal’s* articles, present some of my firsthand knowledge of the LC and its leadership, spend some time commenting on the impact of LC theology on the conscience, and make some appeals to those who read this letter.

This is an open letter, of necessity, because the LC leadership will not acknowledge or respond to people like me against whom they have sinned. Their unwillingness to hear and their belief that everyone except them is wrong are some of the reasons that the mountain of their sins stands as a testimony against them.

In this letter, I ask questions that relate to the details of my evidence, and I make some requests of those of you responsible for AFW. I do this before a number of Christians who are not part of your closed leadership environment and church culture. The way you<sup>3</sup> respond to this letter should be important to you because the LC leadership is seeking to clear the LC name<sup>4</sup> and wants the Christian community to accept the LC as a valid evangelical church. The recent articles on the LC by Hank Hanegraaff, Elliot Miller, and Gretchen Passantino, published in the *Journal*, are the result of the LC’s efforts toward that end.

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<sup>1</sup> When I refer to the LC, I am referring to the LCs that are aligned with the Living Stream Ministry (LSM). When I refer to the LC leadership, I am referring to members of the LC who function in leadership capacities in the LC, LSM, Defense and Confirmation Project (DCP), and AFW.

<sup>2</sup> The *Journal*, with its picture of a young Witness Lee on the cover, can be seen at <http://journal.equip.org/issues/were-wrong>. It is listed as 2009, vol. 32, no. 06, and a PDF version or hard copy can be purchased on the website.

<sup>3</sup> I am aware that you three brothers will not decide alone how to handle this letter, but that the decision will be made by the LC leadership collective. The “you” here refers to that collective.

<sup>4</sup> The Christian Research Institute (CRI), currently led by Hank Hanegraaff, informed the public that the LC invited them in 2003 to dialogue about their beliefs. CRI, under its former leader, Walter Martin, several decades earlier, had published research findings that were critical of the LC. Walter Martin, with his researchers, Bob and Gretchen Passantino and Cal Beisner, claimed that some LC doctrines and practices were aberrant or cultic.

The audience for this letter includes: the Christian community at large; the 74 scholars and ministry leaders who wrote to the Living Stream Ministry<sup>5</sup> (LSM) and LC leadership in 2007; Christian media and publication organizations; pastors of other churches; former members, former leaders, current members, and current leaders of the LC; members and leaders of non-LSM LCs; and last, but definitely not least, God. The fact that there is such an audience insures me that you will want to read all that I have written. I pray that, for your sake, you will receive many more such open letters from others like me. That would be God's mercy and love to you.

In some ways, I feel sorry for you because I realize the dilemma you will be facing in responding to this letter. It is somewhat like this: "If we answer the way we normally would, this will make us look not only bad, but guilty of the charges being levied at us. If we answer the way those in the Christian community would expect, and the way Jane is asking, then we're faced with having to deal with a whole mountain of similar matters, losing face in the process." As I said, I sympathize with your plight; but, nonetheless, the mountain you are now standing before is one of your own making. Consider the possibility that God might be giving you an opportunity to thoroughly clear the LC name and gain acceptance by the Christian community.

**Note:** Much of the information in this letter is derived from my own personal experience with certain LCs and leaders. It is influenced, as well, by what I have learned from many others about their similar experiences. Oftentimes, I generalize and apply my conclusions to the whole LC and its leadership system. I do not claim such generalizations are perfect, and I acknowledge that there may very well be some LCs, leaders, or members who are exceptions and do not exactly fit the profile I describe. However, it is my firm belief that, overall, the kind of leadership practices I describe in this letter are dominant in the LCs.

Although I address this letter to those of you who are responsible for AFW, in it, I sometimes direct my writing to others. This means, at times, I write about you instead of to you. Regardless of this, be assured that everything I write is *for* you. I am bringing this letter to the attention of the Christian Research Institute (CRI), which published the *Journal*, and also the 74 signers of the 2007 open letter to LC leadership ([Akin](#)). In addition, in order to put this matter in front of the Christian community at large, I am posting this letter on the Internet and notifying other interested parties about the posting.

## What This Letter Is and What It Is Not

It is important to understand from the outset what this letter is and what it is not.

It is:

- Some commentary on the articles about the LC in the *Journal* (vol. 32, no. 06)
- An argument against and condemnation of the systemic bad practices of the LC leadership
- Evidence that supports my argument, mostly firsthand, obtained during 20 years of experience in the LC and 20 years recovering from that experience after leaving the LC
- A criticism of a few specific LC teachings
- A painstakingly prepared document, as one piece of evidence for the record
- A call for Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, Dan Towle, and Benson Phillips to repent publicly and in writing for their sin against me
- A call for Benson Phillips to come together with me and my family before a number of third parties (believers) in order for them to investigate and make a judgment before the

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<sup>5</sup> LSM is the publishing arm of the LC which publishes the works of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee.

Lord, for the record, concerning Benson Phillips having publicly borne false witness against me over a period of three decades (Deut. 19:15)

It is not:

- A complete analysis of the CRI *Journal* article about the LC
- The result of an exhaustive, academic study by an independent party
- An exhaustive analysis and critique of all of Witness Lee's teachings
- An exhaustive analysis of LC practice
- A condemnation of everything about the LCs

## Why This Letter Exists

In January 2010, I saw a copy of the most recent *Journal* published by CRI. In the opening article, "We Were Wrong," Hank Hanegraaff, president of CRI, claims that his ministry is "committed to the maxim, *because Truth matters*" ("We," 5). Because I completely agree with this maxim, it was necessary for me to write this letter.

### ***Truth Matters***

Almost the entire edition of the *Journal* is devoted to exonerating the LC. The *Journal* is 62 pages long, and 48 pages of it are about the LC. In it, there is a 44-page article by Elliot Miller, which is entitled, "Cultic, Aberrant, or (Unconventionally) Orthodox? A Reassessment of the 'Local Church' Movement."

Miller's whole article is a response to an "Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the 'Local Churches'" (Open Letter by the 74), which contains criticisms of the LC made by 74 Christian scholars and ministry leaders. He responds to the following matters brought into question by the open letter: The LC's doctrine of God and doctrine of man (orthodoxy); the LC's views on the legitimacy of other churches; and the LC's history of filing lawsuits against fellow Christians.

I found it impossible to believe that CRI's "exhaustive six-year [2003–2009] analysis of the Local Churches and Living Stream Ministry" (Hanegraaff, "Is") could culminate in a report presentation that was nothing more than an answer to a letter. Some of the conclusions made in the *Journal* greatly concerned me, in particular, conclusions about a topic that the article did not adequately cover: LC practices. Either CRI failed to do their homework on LC practices, or they chose to ignore findings that should have caused them great concern. Because truth matters, I, for one, am not willing to let their flawed conclusions stand unchallenged. One such conclusion by Elliot Miller, author of the main article, follows:

After one devotes sufficient time to studying LC materials in context, dialoguing with its leaders and members, and observing them as they live out their individual Christian lives and collective church life, an irresistible conclusion is reached: this group is not only Christian but it is in many ways an exemplary group of Christians. They are a fellowship of believers with a level of commitment to Christ and discipleship that puts to shame most Western Christian groups. They have been tested by the fires of persecution, have persevered, and, as a result, have been forged into the image of Christ to an inspiring degree. Their love for Jesus is compelling. Their sacrificial living is convicting. (29)

Miller's recommendation, emphasizing that "*this group is not only Christian but it is in many ways an exemplary group of Christians,*" is the specific thing that provoked me to respond. The word *exemplary* means "so good or admirable that others would do well to copy it" (Encarta). A claim that the LC is worthy of being emulated is insupportable. For those who know by experience some of the inner workings of the LC, these assessments immediately call into question the reliability of

the research that led to them. Equally distressing are the following conclusions made by Hank Hanegraaff in the closing word of the *Journal*:

Furthermore, the local churches are not a cult from a sociological perspective....

In sum, along with Christians from a broad range of persuasions, the local churches are dedicated to both proper doctrine (orthodoxy) and proper practice (orthopraxy). ("Are," 62)

Where is evidence supporting a sociological conclusion? Is the reader to accept this just because CRI says so? Does "dedication" to proper practice mean there is proper practice? Where is evidence that bonafide research was done to verify that there was proper practice? How did CRI protect their findings from bias since they were approached by the LC to discuss their beliefs with them (Miller, 7)?

### ***Fruit of Ministry Matters***

Before one can reach a conclusion, as Hanegraaff does, that the LCs are dedicated to proper practice, one must thoroughly examine the LC's orthopraxy (correctness or soundness of action or practice). The *Journal* devotes many pages to LC doctrines but fails to describe or analyze the *practices* that spring from these doctrines. The *Journal* gives no report on the impact that LC practices have on people's lives. According to the Bible (Matt. 7:15-20), the fruit of ministry matters, so this is a glaring omission.

They, however, do report on the emotions they felt when meeting LC members in the Far East and assert that these responses were uttered "after years of painstaking primary research" (Hanegraaff, "We," 4). I suppose that they did provide a little evidence of a few things that might relate to LC practice by giving us a photograph of prison clothes worn by a co-worker of Nee and also a photograph of some LC members "becoming God" in a meeting in mainland China (Miller, 28, 43); however, Miller and Hanegraaff appear to have been mainly interested in reporting on the LC doctrinal tree with all its foliage. They had little to say about the tree's fruit.

I found only one comment that was related to practices in the United States: "the movement was rocked in the 1980s by a couple of internal controversies and splits" (Miller, 12). I found no mention of the split that rocked the movement in 2006, an even larger split than in the 1980s. Since the 2006 split took place during the middle of the CRI research period, it is hard to understand why there is no reference to it in the *Journal*. Maybe CRI was studying a Potemkin village<sup>6</sup>. As a result of the 2006 split, there were a number of LCs in North America that broke their affiliation with the LSM and its leadership. CRI's research should have included these LCs.

A researcher can learn a lot about the practices of a group by carefully examining such conflicts, so at least the 1980s splits that Miller knew about should have been a red flag to these researchers. Instead, Miller dismissed them with a footnote:

Critics cite these controversies as corroboration that the LC is cultic, but in looking into these matters we have found corroboration only for the biblical doctrine of sin's ongoing presence among believers (e.g., James 3:2; 1 John 1:8). In other words, the movement has not been immune to the carnal behaviors that have plagued and divided Christian works throughout church history. Perhaps in some future issue we can address these matters, but they go beyond our scope here, which is focused on the allegations contained in the "open letter" to the LC and LSM.... (13, note 7)

With an oblique reference to two Bible verses, Miller implies that ongoing sin among believers was responsible for these controversies, and that this is to be expected in any Christian work. In this way, he set aside any other significance these controversies might have. After Miller states that these matters are *outside the scope* of this issue of the *Journal*, he and Hanegraaff move ahead to

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<sup>6</sup> "Something that appears elaborate and impressive but in actual fact lacks substance." Refers to "Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin, who had elaborate fake villages constructed for Catherine the Great's tours of the Ukraine and the Crimea." (Dictionary.com)

give glowing conclusions and heartfelt recommendations of the LC. Yet, as their footnote shows, they did this without disclosing any particulars of what they found when they looked into these matters, in whatever way they did. (One might reasonably ask why CRI does not use the “biblical doctrine of sin’s ongoing presence among believers” to dismiss the behavior of those who criticize, question, or label the LC, just as they dismissed these controversies. Then, CRI and the LC could simply drop their whole argument.)

### ***God’s People, His Sheep, Matter***

Miller’s dismissal of the significance of LC splits might be one reason why there is such a sharp contrast between the *Journal’s* view and what I, and many others, know firsthand to be the truth about hurtful LC practices. The truth is that:

- LC practices, primarily of its leadership, have deviated from proper practice to such a degree that people are put at risk of spiritual or psychological harm by becoming members of the LC.
- LC controversies (typically called “rebellions” by the LC leadership) are more in number than “a couple” in the 1980s. They have occurred from the 1960s to the present and span the globe, including North America, South America, the Far East, and Europe.
- LC splits were due to serious problems in LC orthopraxy, specifically in the LC leadership.
- LC doctrines, only one of which the *Journal* majored on, lie at the root of the LC’s improper leadership practices.
- LC leadership has been responsible for stumbling, mistreating, and despising many of God’s sheep.

The truth is that, with the body of evidence that is available to show otherwise, it is irresponsible to endorse the LC as being dedicated to “proper practice,” much less as being *in any way* an “exemplary group of Christians.”

I am only one sheep, but I matter to God, as do each of His children. I have a long history with the bad practices of the LC leadership. My experience began over 30 years ago when I was a member of the LC. My most recent experience is with those of you at AFW (Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, and Dan Towle). In May 2009, you felt free to accuse me publicly of wrongdoing and declare that I “should not be considered to be a credible source by any objective observer.” You did this without ever contacting me or seeking to dialogue with me. Why? You said it was because someone wrote to you about an Internet post that I had written in which I commented on the behavior of one of your co-workers, Benson Phillips.<sup>7</sup>

The public action that you at AFW took against me last year was the fourth such action that LC leadership has taken against me over the past three decades. My husband and I have made several concerted attempts during this time to reconcile matters with the person who took the first three actions, Benson Phillips, the current LSM president. While refusing to give my husband and me even *one* face-to-face audience, Benson has continued to assign slanderous labels to me publicly.

My case of mistreatment by LC leadership is not an isolated one, because many others have experienced similar treatment; however, it is one that is documented in *The Thread of Gold: God’s Purpose, the Cross, and Me*, which contains my Christian testimony (J. Anderson). My husband and I published this book in 2005. A few months after its publication, Benson Phillips publicly slandered me for having written it and proclaimed that what he had done to me in 1977, which was described in chapter one of the book, using pseudonyms for the participants, was the right thing to have done.

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<sup>7</sup> This matter is explained in more detail in section 5 of this letter.

Before I wrote my book, I was aware of many people who had been hurt by the LC; however, I was not at all prepared for the number of letters and emails I received from Christians all over the world who had also been hurt by the LC. In 2006, I began to participate in discussions on a first-of-its-kind, LC-related Internet forum: “Lee, Nee & the Church of Recovery,” often referred to by users as “The Bereans” ([Bereans](#)). This forum remained available for former LC members to use because its owner did not succumb to a threat of litigation made by the LC ([Martyr](#)). It afforded both the opportunity and a place, for the first time, where former LC members could find one another and begin to dialogue about their experiences. It was a safe environment because they could conceal their identities. While participating on that forum, I read personal testimonies from others and learned about more harm done to people by the LC leadership. Such testimonies decry the *Journal’s* recommendations of the LC.

By aiming only at matters concerning LC orthodoxy, CRI has missed the mark of protecting God’s sheep from harmful LC practices. If God’s sheep matter to CRI, they should have researched the orthopraxy of the LC and reported on it in detail before deciding to tell the public that the LC is “in many ways an exemplary group of Christians,” is “not a cult from a sociological perspective,” and is dedicated to “proper practice (orthopraxy)” (Hanegraaff, “Are,” 62). Surely, in six years of research, CRI had time and opportunity to investigate thoroughly the orthopraxy of the LCs in the U.S.

I have no doubt that what CRI has done in this issue of the *Journal* will result in harm to more of God’s children. The LC will use the *Journal* in its recruitment efforts on university campuses throughout the world and especially in the U.S. This means that more unsuspecting young people will be caught in the LC movement and, as happened with my husband and me many years ago, have the course of their young lives forever changed.

### ***Works of Darkness by Shepherds Need to be Exposed***

In their quest to defend what they believe is the truth, the LC leadership has hurt many of God’s sheep. In the name of Christ, they have committed works of darkness. The Bible shows that Christians should defend the truth of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:7, 16) and “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3)<sup>8</sup>. So, what does the LC defend? For what do they contend?

The copyright notice on the AFW website shows that those of you responsible for AFW are associated with the Defense and Confirmation Project (DCP), which is “a project to defend and confirm the New Testament ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and the practice of the local churches.” (It is my understanding that at least two of you to whom I am writing, Bill Buntain and Dan Towle, work, or have worked, for the DCP). What you defend and confirm is completely different from what the Bible says that Christians should defend and confirm. I am calling this fact to your attention, because not only is what you defend and confirm different from what the Bible charges you to do, it is actually in opposition to the Bible.

Defending the ministry of certain men is anti-biblical, as 1 Corinthians chapter 1 shows. What those of you in LC leadership are doing makes those in Corinth look innocent. Some there were saying, among themselves, that they were “of” certain leaders (1 Cor. 1:12). You, however, are announcing boldly and proudly to a large public audience that you are “of” Nee and Lee. You do this to the exclusion of other ministries as you assert that the ministry (singular) of these two men is the “unique ministry in the Lord’s recovery.” Only those who are completely spiritually blind can fail to see that your behavior is sectarian and sinful. On top of this, you take punitive action against any among you who begin to move outside the narrow Nee and Lee ministry boundaries that you have set for them. In this regard, what you have done to God’s children, and continue to do to God’s children, needs to be exposed.

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<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all of the scripture quotations in this letter are from the LSM’s *Holy Bible: Recovery Version*, the Bible translated and authorized by the LC.

The most recent controversy in the LC occurred because of your need to contend for your previously unpublished, yet practiced, sectarian dictate, which has become known as the “one publication policy.” This is now published online as a document entitled, “Publication Work in the Lord’s Recovery” ([Living Stream](#)). In fact, your AFW website came into being in 2006 when the LC leadership began to push this policy. At that time, some LC leaders and members who resisted this policy, found their way to “The Bereans” forum and began to use the Internet to communicate with former members. “The Bereans” provided a means for unprecedented back-and-forth dialogue about that LC controversy as it was developing. Such live, open-to-the-public exchange of information during an LC controversy was a brand new phenomenon for you to handle. The introduction to your website says:

This Web site is necessitated by this very public and sustained opposition to the co-workers’ affirmation of Brother Lee’s teaching and pattern for carrying out the work in the Lord’s recovery in a blended way. Our hope is that this Web site will help to instruct, heal and inoculate those saints who may have been shaken by these questionings and to equip all of the saints to inoculate others against this dissenting speaking (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:1-3, 14-15, 23-26; 3:16-17). ([Buntain, “Introduction”](#))

The matter of the one publication policy, which the LC leadership intended to use for internal solidarity, instead became a destabilizing factor. It brought the topic of strict adherence to one ministry front and center in a clearly stated way that had not happened before. The one publication policy opens with this statement:

Through Brother Lee’s fellowship over the years, we have long realized that there should be one publication among us. The one publication is not only a testimony of our oneness in the Body but also a safeguard for the unique ministry in the Lord’s recovery. Without one publication, there is no way to preserve the integrity of the Lord’s ministry among us, which is crucial to the practical oneness among the local churches ([Living Stream](#)).

At least this is an honest admission of what is true in the LC: You only care to receive and sanction the ministry of Witness Lee and Watchman Nee as published by the LSM. In order to protect this “unique ministry,” you will correct, despise, and even reject, anyone who questions it or who attempts to enhance the Christian lives of members with non-LSM sanctioned materials. You consider publications from other ministries to be a threat to members’ strict adherence to the “unique ministry.” You don’t even allow peripheral materials produced in LCs for local use to be used beyond their respective localities, unless they go through some kind of LSM approval process. Long before there was such a written policy, I remember some being advised by LC authorities not to waste their time reading Christian biographies!

Lee’s own words, which were quoted in the one publication policy under the heading, “Ministry Portions—Being Restricted in One Publication,” may best capture the attitude and thought of those who wrote and published the policy:

It bothers me that some brothers among us still put out publications. According to my truthful observation there is no new light or life supply there. They may contain some biblical doctrines, but any point of life or light has been adopted from the publications of Living Stream Ministry. There is nearly no item of life or light that has not been covered by our publications. Based upon this fact, what is the need for these brothers to put out their publications? Because all the publications are mine, it is hard for me to speak such a word. But I am forced to tell the truth. By putting out your own publication, you waste your time and money. You waste the money given by the saints, and you waste their time in reading what you publish. Where is the food, the life supply, and the real enlightenment in the other publications among us? Be assured that there is definitely at least one major revelation in every Living Stream Ministry publication.

Later, under “Fulfilling the Lord’s Commission to His Recovery,” Lee is quoted again:

Some brothers who are with us do not use these truths when they teach and preach. They teach and preach what they feel is good, yet they do not realize how poor their messages are. Some brothers among us continually put out some publications. I was honest to tell them that there was no light and nothing new in what they put out. The points in our publications are full of life and light, but these brothers would not present them as they are. I could not understand why they have to change the messages we publish to present something in their own style and in their own way. There are no new points of life or light in what they publish. Any life or light in their material is altogether adopted from this ministry. I have been observing this situation among us for years. I would like to see whether some younger brothers among us would be raised up by the Lord to speak something. If I could see this, I would praise the Lord. On the other hand, I have seen some who like to build up something around themselves.

Because of your stance that there is one unique ministry in the Lord's recovery, things like the following long-forgotten statements by Watchman Nee are being re-discovered. These statements show that Lee forsook some of the foundational basics that Nee had taught:

The church is not controlled by one ministry but served by all the ministries. If any company of God's people are open to receive one truth only, then they are a sect....

We dare to exercise our ministry faithfully, but having done so, we dare to leave the church open to other ministry. This should be the attitude of all God's workmen. (Nee, *Collected*, 115)

The Bible does not support the idea of defending "one publication"; and neither does Watchman Nee, one of those whom you defend! Nee would have, no doubt, rejected your one publication policy outright and would have called you a sect. In fact, according to this quote, he already has. Because you consider Nee and Lee to be one and the same in ministry, and because it is part of your job to defend the ministry of Nee and Lee, how do you answer this question: "When Lee and Nee differ, which one's ministry do you faithfully defend as the unique ministry in the Lord's recovery?"

There can be no question that the sectarian mindset of LC leadership is responsible for much harm to God's children. Your sectarian works are clearly unfruitful works of darkness that need to be exposed.

## 2. Are the Local Churches a Cult?

CRI, by devoting almost the entire issue of their *Journal* to defending the LC, has made it plain that their primary focus concerning the LC is to clear them of having been considered to be aberrant or cultic. There may be an unexpected and unwanted consequence of the *Journal's* article: It may serve to bring the LC into the spotlight for closer examination. The *Journal* has raised anew the issue of whether the LC should be recognized as a fundamental, evangelical, Christian organization or should be categorized as cultic. Further examination may result in more people coming forward to present written evidence against the LC and expose more "skeletons in the closet."

The closing message of the *Journal* was that those at CRI, now headed by Hank Hanegraaff, were wrong to have ever considered the Local Churches as aberrant or cultic. Hanegraaff said the research done by Bob and Gretchen Passantino and Cal Beisner in the 1970s became a "fountainhead of misinformation" ("We," 4). I have reviewed material about the LC that was the result of this research, which is found in Walter Martin's book, *The New Cults* (379–408), published in 1980. The material on the LC was presented as an appendix to the book and not as a regular chapter. I found the information, according to my firsthand knowledge, to be surprisingly accurate for the time at which it was written. It was interesting to learn that some on the outside of the LC had such insight into what was happening in the LCs at that time.

CRI now claims that the result of their “primary research is encapsulated in the following three words: ‘We were wrong!’” (Hanegraaff, “We,” 4). Six years of research concludes with “we were wrong,” but the average reader is left with a lot of theological verbiage, rather than a clear retraction of the actual statements that were published in *The New Cults* which CRI now considers to be wrong. In my view, the basic insights about LC practice in that book were not wrong. *The New Cults* covered LC practices, whereas the *Journal* did not. Perhaps, it would have been fairer to all the previous researchers, including Cal Beisner, who is one of the signers of the Open Letter by the 74, to have quoted exactly what portions of the *The New Cults* appendix were wrong and what portions remain true. In the *Journal*, Miller states that in their past publications they took a “strictly theological approach to the LC” (Miller, 42). This statement has a footnote (note 7) that references their former publication, *The New Cults*. Contrary to Miller’s claim, however, the information about the LC in *The New Cults* is not strictly theological. The last half of its appendix, which is found under the heading, “Doctrines,” is theological; but, the first half is not. It includes information under these headings: “History,” “Church Structure,” “Authoritarian Rule,” “Local Church Members,” and “The Local Church and the Mind.” The information found under these headings is about practices.

The authors of *The New Cults* concluded, “Witness Lee is *not* a sound Bible teacher, and the Local Church is cultic in many ways, both doctrinally and in structure, even though many of its members are Christians” (Martin, 405). They did not call the LC a cult, and they expressed genuine care for the Christians in the LCs, whom they felt were being led astray into cultic and aberrant practices. They wrote:

It should be mentioned at the outset that the Local Church and its leader, Witness Lee, are different from the other groups we are dealing with in this book in that by and large the Local Church is composed of Christians who have been confused about major areas of doctrine and Christian practice. We must be sure to distinguish between the *doctrines and practices* of this group, which are not in harmony with the Bible, and the *members* of the Local Church, who are confused Christians. Technically speaking, the Local Church of Witness Lee cannot be called a non-Christian cult, but it has strong elements of cultism in some of its theology and practices. (Martin, 379)

## My Position

The word *cult* is a loaded word and conveys different things to different people, but its connotation in general is a bad one to those in the Christian community. Today, this label is applied to both Christian and non-Christian groups; but, at first blush, it is associated with the ilk of Charles Manson or David Koresh. If a group is labeled as a “*Christian cult*,” which some call the LC, this is also problematic, because it is not clear to the average person what this means.

In general, it seems to me that most Christian scholars and apologists make their “cult” determination mainly by evaluating the orthodoxy of a group’s teachings, especially their teachings about the Trinity. I believe this is a necessary evaluation; but, all the big theological words required to explain orthodoxy leave average people scratching their heads. Some apologists look into a group’s practices when making their determination; but, again, the average person cannot articulate what kinds of practices in a Christian group would be considered cultic. The whole topic is foggy and controversial because of such definition difficulties.

So, back to the question, “Are the Local Churches a cult?” As to whether or not they are a Christian cult—I have struggled with the right way to handle this question in a public venue. For now, I have decided that I will not take a public position on this question. When a clear definition of a Christian cult is provided and if the case is clearly established in writing, with witnesses and evidence, that the LC fits that definition, I will reconsider. For now, I have decided that to call them a Christian cult in a loose way would be like throwing a spear into a foggy forest filled with people that I know and love in hopes of killing the one hiding among them who is the real enemy. I have

been given labels without witnesses or evidence (due process) and realize the harm this can cause, so I don't want to do so in the case of the LC.

I do not want to harm the well-meaning Christians in the LCs (which most of them are); but, at the same time, I also want to take care of other people who may become objects of LC recruitment methods. In particular, I am concerned for young people, whom the LC actively recruits on university campuses via university-recognized student organizations, using names like "Christian Students" or "Christians on Campus" or "Bibles for America." Students, who are LC members, form these student organizations under various names and do not declare the group's affiliation with the LC or LSM. This revelation comes later to a student prospect after the student has been drawn into the LC-net by the care given to them by those in the undercover LC campus organization. At the time when a recruit is far enough along to be introduced to the LC, he or she may also discover that some consider the LC to be a cult. At this point, the recruiters will use the "We Were Wrong" issue of the *Journal* to alleviate their fears.

The LC also pursues new recruits by using an RV to travel the country and give out free Recovery Versions. They contact denominational churches and offer free Bibles. These two activities have the appearance of passing out God's Word; but, because of the extensive footnotes by Lee, they are really passing out what they call the "interpreted word" with the intent to follow up with Witness Lee books and recruit new members. Unsuspecting people could have their lives damaged by this group, as mine and my family's were. I do believe there is an enemy hiding in all of this, and there is a battle to be fought for truth. This is not a battle, however, with flesh and blood but with the enemy of God—a battle which can be won by the truth of God's Word bringing light that dispels darkness.

I hope and pray for the following: (1) The Christian public will be well-informed so people can make a good decision about whether or not they would want to be a part of the LC and whether they would recommend it to others. (2) Current LC members will learn enough factual truth about unrighteous matters the leadership has concealed from them, so that they can feel free to think for themselves again. (3) Former members will gain a level of understanding about what happened to them, so they can find real healing. (4) LC leaders will wake up to the cries of the sheep they have wounded, consider their ways, and repent to all those they have hurt. (5) LC leaders will find the humility needed to re-evaluate their beliefs and practices in the light of the Word of God and to say to their membership and to the Christian community, as necessary, "We were wrong." My last two hopes seem impossible; but, with God, nothing is impossible.

Because I can speak as a long-time former member, I think the best thing for me to do is to present my view of the beliefs and practices of the LC based on my own personal experience and realizations about them. I hope such information will contribute to helping people reach correct conclusions.

I will not hide the fact that I have a very strong conviction that the LC, in its current state, is a bad place for believers, because of the damage its leadership has done to many people, and will continue to do, if they do not change their ways. As a result of my experience with the LC, I would never be a part of, or recommend to anyone, a Christian group that has the traits or leadership style found in the LCs.

## **Local Church Group Traits**

In my view, unscriptural and hurtful practices are inevitable when any Christian group becomes convinced of the things in the following list. In the italicized statements below each item, I summarize what those in the LC believe.

1. What the group is doing is God's only meaningful work on the earth.

*LC members believe there is one, unique New Testament Ministry, which was given by God's oracle, Witness Lee, and which is maintained by the "one publication" policy. This*

*unique ministry is in the LCs for the spreading of the LC to the ends of the earth in order to bring Christ back for His bride.*

2. The rest of the Christians are blind outsiders who need to be proselytized or recruited.

*LC members believe that the LCs are the only true expressions of the church and are the only ones rightly positioned before God to become His bride; all who really love God should be in the LCs. They believe their Lord's Table is the only valid table because they meet on the proper ground of the one Body in both practice (one church per city) and spirit. They believe that all in denominations who are taking the Lord's Table (communion) are eating and drinking to their "judgment" (1 Cor. 11:29, note 29<sup>3</sup>).*

3. They have an understanding about the Trinity that others do not have, and only they can explain it.

*LC members believe that they have a full, up-to-date revelation and understanding about the Trinity. They hold forth their unique explanation as being the ultimate one: The Triune God has been processed to become the Life-giving Spirit to be dispensed into the tripartite man for the producing of the New Jerusalem, the mingling of God and man for eternity.*

4. A unique corporate cause is the most important thing. There is no place for the uniqueness of the individual member. The individual must, for the good of the whole, have no opinion.

*LC members believe that the way to carry out the "Lord's recovery" is to follow Witness Lee's teaching to be "one in teaching, practice, thinking, speaking, essence, appearance, and expression" (Lee, Elders' Training: Book 7, 39). They support Lee when he says such things as, "I do not like to see more damage done to the Lord's recovery. I have no time dear saints to fool around with people any longer. Let us go to fight the battle. Who are the 'us'? The ones who are desperate with no opinion" (Lee, Elders' Training: Book 7, 83).*

5. There is only one man with the proper understanding and interpretation of the Bible who knows God's way for the group.

*LC members believe that Witness Lee was "God's man on the earth," "the oracle of God," "the apostle of the age," "the acting God," the "one wise master builder" with the blueprint for God's building. He was an apostle "of the first kind," who was "constituted directly through the Lord's revelation" (Ball). The "Blended Brothers," are carrying on the ministry of Witness Lee.*

6. Their leaders are God's authorities and are part of an authoritarian, top-down hierarchy.

*LC members believe that the Blended Brothers are a collective of top LC leaders commissioned by God through Witness Lee to carry on the vision and ministry of Witness Lee. [They do not officially publish their names because they are "blended," but the members know who they are.]*

7. Their cause is more important than people, and they need to shun, ban, quarantine, or excommunicate any persons they feel are divisive or in some way detrimental to their purpose.

*Those in the LC believe that men such as John Ingalls, Bill Mallon, John So, and Titus Chu, who were top LC leaders for decades, had to be "quarantined" (excommunicated) because they were not one with Witness Lee and his ministry. Quarantining was necessary in such cases, even if whole churches were lost and families were divided. They believe that anyone who leaves and speaks against the LC is worthy of being publicly denounced.*

8. Any members who leave the group are turning away from following God.

*LC members believe that the LC is “God’s best”; therefore, any who leave it become useless to God. It would be better for them to have never taken the way of the LC than to have seen it and left. As Benson Phillips said, “In any case, do not leave the Lord’s recovery. I can assure you that if you go away from the Lord’s recovery, you will have no way for the process of sanctification to go forward within you. Instead, you will just enter into a bankrupt situation” (Phillips, “Ministry”).*

9. Any who leave the group and speak out are bitter and vindictive, and need to be silenced because they spread false information.

*LC members believe that people who leave and who speak poorly about the God-ordained way of the LC have received what they deserved, if as a result, they lose their relationship with relatives who are members.*

10. Those from the outside who use media to question the group’s teachings and practices are persecutors who need to be stopped.

*LC members believe that those in the Christian community, who persist in questioning or disapproving of the LC teachings and practices, considering them to be cultic, are persecutors. They deserve to be threatened with a lawsuit or even sued.*

When a group believes these kinds of things, the environment is ripe for psychological and spiritual abuse of the members. People in the LC truly believe the preceding things are biblical because they can justify them using the interpretive teachings of men (Nee’s and Lee’s) and because their leaders affirm the truth of these things to them. The LC leadership takes whatever action is necessary to maintain, carry out, and enforce the above things; in so doing, they invariably hurt God’s people.

## **Local Church Leadership Traits**

The LC leadership has a long history of unbiblical and unchristian practices that have psychologically and spiritually damaged many people. Fulfilling what they consider to be their “special calling” is more important to them than individuals, marriages, or families. Their mission is to spread the LC and Witness Lee’s ministry throughout the earth in order to bring the Lord back. Their goal seems to justify for them the means they employ in their quest.

### ***One Focus: Witness Lee’s Ministry***

The LC leadership is devoted to Witness Lee and his ministry. They also emulate Witness Lee’s leadership style. Although Lee insisted that he never told anyone what to do, he masterfully and effectively caused the young men under his leadership to understand what he wanted from them with regard to his ministry. He fostered an environment in which he would be recognized as the pre-eminent leader. Over time, by various techniques, he was able to gain the complete loyalty of the LC leaders, to the extent that when he made the following statement to several hundred LC leaders in one of his leadership trainings, it stood unquestioned:

*What is the factor that decides who the leading one is in a certain period of time that all the believers have to follow? According to the Bible there is only one factor—the leading one is the one who leads the Lord’s people according to the teaching of God’s New Testament economy. (Lee, *Elders’ Training: Book 7*, 65)*

Of course, Lee himself had initiated the definition and the teaching of “God’s New Testament Economy,” so his audience had no question about just who that leader might be.

The fact that Witness Lee was able to gain the absolute and unquestioning loyalty of the LC leaders became evident in 1986 when, at an LC leadership training held by him, over 400 leaders signed a letter to Witness Lee pledging their allegiance to his leading and his ministry. They wrote:

We also agree to follow your leading as the one who has brought us God's New Testament economy and has led us into its practice. We agree that this leading is indispensable to our oneness and acknowledge the one trumpet in the Lord's ministry and the one wise master builder among us. (Lee, *Elders' Training: Book 8*, 141)

An example of the technique Lee used to produce such loyalty can be seen in the following quote from Message 88 of the *Life Study of Genesis*:

Let me now tell you the secret to being solidly perfected to be a strong pillar for the Lord's move. Brothers like Benson Phillips and John So have been perfected because they have had no concepts of their own. Recently, Brother Benson declared strongly that he only knows to follow the ministry of Brother Lee. When John So stayed with us in Los Angeles, he knew nothing except to absorb everything of this ministry. Do not think he is not intelligent. No, he is very clear. However, during the same years John So was in Los Angeles, there were others among us who were quite opinionated. They often said, "Brother Lee says such-and-such. Is this right? Is the church right? Just a week ago, I learned about a mistake made by the church." None of these opinionated ones has yet been perfected. But John So and Benson Phillips were not like this. Even when they saw certain mistakes, they forgot about them, having no time to waste discussing them. They only desired to soak in all the positive things. (1138–1139)

One of the men named above as having been "perfected," Benson Phillips, is today the president of the LSM. The other man, John So, has been denounced publicly and labeled as rebellious by Witness Lee (Lee, *Fermentation*, 60). Interestingly, in the most recent LSM version of the same Genesis message, as seen online, the material quoted above has been modified. Not only were Benson Phillips' and John So's names removed, they were replaced with the words, "one brother." "One brother" was then given credit for the things that were said by the two different named brothers in the original quote (Lee, "Life Study," LSM Online). Since John So ended up in "rebellion," it turns out he was not "perfected" after all; thus, it seems that it was unacceptable to have Witness Lee on record as saying that John So had been perfected.

## **No Hearing**

When people try to confront the LC leadership with the hurt they have caused, LC leaders cover their ears and will not acknowledge any culpability. They refuse to discuss accusations brought against them and will not accept responsibility for their actions. The other parties are deemed to be at fault. They minimize allegations made against them by saying such allegations are Satan's attacks and persecution through evil opposers, or "false accusations" and "false rumors" made by the "fallen human mind[s]" of disgruntled, malicious former members who are "under the influence of the father of lies" (Buntain, "Statement"). If cornered, they might say, in a general way, that they have made some mistakes. While they complain of having been falsely accused themselves, they routinely falsely accuse others. They will not discuss their questionable practices or allow their practices to be scrutinized or corrected by objective parties.

## **Two Faces**

The LC leadership shows two faces, as they find it politically necessary. For example, when people tell the truth about problems in the LC, after escaping from an LC prison of silence in which they were chained for decades by LC teachings, LC leaders characterize this as a very bad thing called "self vindication." But, when the LC leadership sues other Christians in order to vindicate the "Lord's recovery," they characterize this as a good thing called "appealing to Caesar."

When the LC leadership wants to stop members from speaking up on their own behalf, they might say, "You know, Watchman Nee never defended himself." Then, they repeat a story about a brother who once went to Nee's front door and asked him if it was true that he had a woman living

there with him. Nee simply answered, "Yes." The brother left believing that Nee was living in sin. In other words, Nee hadn't "vindicated" himself by explaining that the woman was his mother.

However, if researchers who might vindicate the LC are at their door, LC leaders not only, as it were, declare that the woman is their mother, but they invite the researchers into their home. They give them a tour of their best rooms, introduce them to their mother, show them all her possessions, have their mother feed them a home-cooked meal, and tell them about all the impressive people in their family. They proclaim how inclusive, loving, and receiving their family is, conveniently forgetting to mention the large numbers of family members whom they have ostracized because they were not really "one" with the family.

Another example of LC leadership hypocrisy is clearly explained in a recent publication by Nigel Tones, which can be found at <http://www.concernedbrothers.com/Truth/Sanitized.pdf>. The LC leadership presents one face to the Christian public and another face to their membership. Again, this is because it serves their purposes. What they say behind closed doors is what they really believe. What they say to others is what they want others to believe.

### ***Double Speaking***

When it comes to defending their cause or vision, they do not speak in a straight way, but carefully choose their words in order to refute their opponents' charges, yet still maintain their real position. Their ambiguous speaking causes people to second guess themselves and give the LC the benefit of the doubt.

An example of this can be seen in the *Journal* concerning the LC's view on being the only true church. Former members know that those in the LC definitely believe they are the only true church, or, as they would say, the only true expression of the church, and that all other churches, even free groups or home meetings, are part of the great harlot described in Revelation. Yet, those in the LC convinced CRI researchers to the contrary, as seen in Hanegraaff's report. He says that the LC says, "they were 'only the church' as opposed to being 'the only church'" ("We", 4).

Another example would be the way they talk about being inclusive and receiving all believers. Miller reported that throughout their teachings: "an attitude of unity with, humility toward, and acceptance of other Christians is encouraged, and this is the attitude one normally will encounter in the 'local churches'" (34). This is true and misleading at the same time. The edited, printed materials may show this attitude, but the spoken messages often conveyed another arrogant message that came through clearly as Lee pounded on the evils of the Christian system. It was not easy for the hearers to maintain a separation between the people and the organizations Lee vilified. As for the practice of receiving believers, those that the LC receives must come around to the LC way of thinking in a short period of time. If, at some point, anyone begins to behave in a way that is outside the accepted LC "norm," they will end up in the ranks of the un-received. In other words, the way they shape things and reality do not always match.

This kind of equivocation has no place among believers who are commanded to let their "yes" be "yes" and their "no" be "no"; yet, equivocation is masterfully practiced by those in the LC leadership, especially with those who ask them to give account.

### ***Consciences with Offense Toward God and Men***

When the LC comes under scrutiny by the Christian community, those in LC leadership certainly need to have consciences void of offense toward God and men; but do they?

Paul was very concerned about the condition of his conscience. When speaking about serving God according to "the Way, which they call a sect," he said, "because of this I also exercise myself to always have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:14, 16). He admonished those who were working together with the Lord on behalf of others to give "no occasion of stumbling in anything that the ministry may not be faulted" (2 Cor. 6:3). Overseers in the church of

God were to be “without reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and “unreprovable” (Tit. 1:7). They were to “hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9). To the Corinthians, Paul said, “our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience” (2 Cor. 1:12), and he also said, “we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God” (2 Cor. 4:2). Those who desire to teach others were to have “love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith” (1 Tim. 1:5).

All these verses make it plain that Christian leaders must be very careful about the state of their consciences. If those in leadership do not have good consciences, they bring shame to the Lord. They are not trustworthy men, and God’s sheep are not safe in their hands. This doesn’t mean a leader can never make a mistake or have a failure, but he must always be exercised to take care of his conscience by acknowledging his sins and repenting for them.

Today, those in LC leadership clearly do not have consciences void of offense before God and men. There are many open and unresolved offenses of many years duration that testify against them.

### ***No Accountability***

Those in top leadership in the LC, referred to as the Blended Brothers, have unquestioned authority over other LC leaders and over the flock. They stand proudly at the helm of their kingdom bound ship. Their leadership style, which they learned from Witness Lee, has become an unhealthy pattern for all others in LC leadership. They have no checks and balances in place to identify or confront leadership abuse. Their authority structure creates and perpetuates an environment that allows abusive, authoritarian practices, which are done in the name of God, to continue unhindered. They are unwilling to give account to any who might attempt to question them. In their closed environment, they blindly support each other’s unbiblical actions and feel good about doing so. With their eyes set on the goal they have defined for themselves, they stumble and despise other believers and have no fear of consequences.

The LC leadership has been, and continues to be, in serious need of correction. They have become blind and unable to see the trouble they are in before God. My heart and the hearts of many others, who know these leaders personally, mourn for them. An article on the CRI website supports the need to confront sinning leaders:

Christian leaders are accountable to God's people, whom the leaders serve, and should be "above reproach," "respectable," and "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). A Christian leader who is a false teacher or immoral should be rebuked to encourage reform (Titus 1:13), and cannot separate his ministry from his life, expecting God to bless his preaching while privately he sins; he is "disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:15-16).

Telling the truth about false teaching or immorality in the church corresponds with the ethics and truth which are to characterize the church. The church is the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14) only if characterized by truthfulness (Matt. 5:11) and righteousness (Matt. 5:16). The Christian leader has an obligation to "hold firmly the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). No Christian is happy when false teaching or immorality arises, but we cannot neglect responsibility for doctrinal and moral accountability.

Christians sometimes are uncomfortable with criticism within the church because they assume that public criticism, since it is painful, is also destructive. On the contrary, the "pain" of biblically conducted confrontation produces individual growth (1 Tim. 4:16), encourages others to Christian maturity (1 Tim. 5:19-20), promotes church strength (Eph. 4:15), and preserves the church's reputation in the world (1 Pet. 2:12). (Passantino, 1)

### 3. Everyman's Job

Things have reached such a state with the LC leadership that the involvement of many common believers is important. A large number of "Everyman"<sup>9</sup> voices are needed. For purposes of this letter, I consider Everyman to be every believer who is a part of God's family and has some level of familiarity or experience with the LC. This includes current members and leaders of non-LSM LCs; former LC members and leaders; concerned believers in the Christian community; and Christian publishers, media persons, academics, and apologists.

I am an Everyman with my own experience with the LC, so I am voicing my concern by using the evidence I have; however, I realize that my one Everyman voice may not accomplish much. I think the Bible shows that it will take many Everyman voices telling the truth in order to make a difference. I believe that the collective individual voices of Everyman being made public to the Christian community can and will make a difference.

Many years ago, an LC leader sinned against me, and I remained silent about it for 13 years, thinking it was the spiritual thing for me to do. That was my default position, as I was taught by LC leaders; but, I now know that it was not a biblical one. Meanwhile, this leader's harmful behavior continued. He was blind to what he was doing, and I was silent. Another person also witnessed this leader's wrongdoing, and he, too, was silent. The sinning leader was blind, and the witness was silent. Over and over, this scenario was repeated. Then one day, 13 years after the fact, and about three years after we had left the LC, I saw one small Everyman stand up and say, "I won't be silent any longer." I watched my husband write a letter to this sinning leader. The sinning leader was blind, but my husband was *no longer* silent. Months later, I followed my husband to write my own letter. The sinning leader remained blind, but now I was *no longer* silent. Not long after this, we watched another former member, likewise, write a letter to the blind sinning leader. He still remained blind, but she was *no longer* silent.

Did our three voices make a difference at that time? No discernable difference was seen. The voices of every Everyman were needed then and are still needed now. I had wondered for years how God could sit silently by and watch so many of his children being hurt by blind shepherds and do nothing. When I broke my silence, I began to understand. He had been wondering how we could sit by and do nothing when He had told us plainly, even commanded us, that in such situations, we are not to be silent.

When I saw the *Journal*, my first thought was, "I hope the signers of the open letter to the LC leadership will respond. I hope they will see how important it is for people to be informed about the LC. I hope they will not be silent." I had thoughts like, "How could they be silent?" I then remembered that last year, the LC leaders had once again sinned against me by publicly denouncing me, and I had remained silent. Then, I heard a very familiar voice in my heart saying, "And what about you? Will you remain silent as you did in the past when they sinned against you? Are you again waiting for someone else?"

### 4. Moreover, If Your Brother Sins

In the first part of Matthew 18, Jesus addresses what happens to those who sin against His little sheep. When the disciples asked Jesus, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?" (Matt. 18:1), He sat a little child in front of them and told them that the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens is whoever humbles himself like that little child. He then took opportunity to give them some warnings.

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<sup>9</sup> "An ordinary person; the typical or average person" (Dictionary.com)

## Woe to Him

The disciples were concerned about who would be the greatest one, but Jesus was concerned about what men, who become interested in positions in the kingdom, are in danger of doing to God's little children. He warned them that anyone who didn't receive, or who stumbled, such a little one would face very serious consequences. Rather than face God's judgment for this, it would be better for such an offender to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the sea. Next, He warned them to deal severely with themselves if they had hands, feet, or eyes that offended (cut them off or pluck them out). He warned them again not to despise the little ones.

He pressed his point even more by asking them what man who had a 100 sheep wouldn't leave 99 of them and go to find the one that was lost. He was clearly telling them that one of God's little children, His little sheep, mattered that much to God. Those who hurt any of His children would pay dearly (Matt. 18:2–14). At this point, Jesus said, "Moreover," meaning He was about to add an important further piece of information, "if your brother sins against you, go, reprove him..." (Matt. 18:15).

The disciples would have understood the seriousness of these words, because Jesus had just painted a picture in their minds of a sinning brother sinking in the sea with a huge stone around his neck because he had stumbled or despised an innocent little one. They would have understood that anyone who was on the receiving end of a brother's sin, or who even saw a brother sin in this way,<sup>10</sup> had a responsibility to speak up and tell the brother. What Jesus was telling them was this: "If your brother sins against God's children, do not be silent!"

If you see, and you remain silent, you will leave the sinning brother to face an even worse judgment than the millstone and the sea. One leader wrote a book when he left the LC: *Speaking the Truth in Love* (Ingalls). I am also aware that, over the years, other former leaders and members wrote letters about their experiences in the LC; however, in general, these letters were not widely circulated or made available to the public. If such letters were sent to the LC leadership, they were likely ignored like my husband's and mine have been over the years. Another brother has collected and distributed historical documents along with his commentary that reveal LC history which has been hidden. This information has helped to wake more people to the seriousness of the situation. However, the number of these voices is small in comparison to the number of people who have had their lives damaged by their experiences in the LC and have simply left without speaking up. More are speaking out today by dialoguing on the Internet, but many of those still conceal their identity behind pseudonyms.

Because Everyman has been mostly silent, the LC leadership has been able to continue to this day in its blind condition with worse than the millstone and the sea prospect ahead of them. Everyman looks to another person or to another leader or to God, hoping someone will do or say something, but God is looking to Everyman. The LC leaders need to hear from Everyman. If you see your brother sinning and don't tell him, you become accountable for your silence. It's not too late. It's time to tell your brother now. You see, your brother got caught up in being great in the kingdom of heaven; and, on

Because Everyman has been mostly silent, the LC leadership continues today in its blind condition with worse than the millstone and the sea scenario ahead of them.

<sup>10</sup> The NET Bible omits "against you" in Matthew 18:15 and explains with this footnote:

The earliest and best witnesses lack "against you" after "if your brother sins." It is quite possible that the shorter reading in these witnesses (x B, as well as 0281 E<sup>1</sup> 579 pc sa) occurred when scribes either intentionally changed the text (to make it more universal in application) or unintentionally changed the text (owing to the similar sound of the end of the verb ἀμαρτήσῃ [Jamarthsh] and the prepositional phrase εἰς σέ [eis se]). However, if the mss were normally copied by sight rather than by sound, especially in the early centuries of Christianity, such an unintentional change is not as likely for these mss. And since scribes normally added material rather than deleted it for intentional changes, on balance, the shorter reading appears to be original. NA<sup>27</sup> includes the words in brackets, indicating doubts as to their authenticity.

his ascent to greatness, he has stumbled and despised God's little ones. He didn't see those he trampled because he was on his path to "glory." His conscience isn't working properly any more. He needs your help now to see; because, unless he changes his ways, the day is coming that he is going to wish for a millstone around his neck and for someone to throw him into the sea.

## Reprove Him

Jesus said that we must seek to resolve offenses and go the distance to reconcile with one another (Matt. 18:15–17, Matt. 5:23–24). These instructions were not presented as options but as commands. I don't see anywhere in the Bible that there is some kind of statute of limitations on our responsibility to obey them. I learned about a church where the members were taught about these instructions, understood them, and used them routinely. I was told that, the vast majority of the time, step one in Matthew 18 was sufficient to clear up any problem. Unfortunately, not many Christians, at least not those I know, practice these instructions. The sad truth is that if we fail to apply them when we should, down the road, we will find ourselves in front of a mountain with a shovel in hand.

### **One on One**

Matthew 18:15 says:

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go, reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

Here, the Greek word for *sins* means "to miss the mark, to err, to sin." The sister verse to Matthew 18:15 in the Old Testament is Leviticus 19:17, which shows the need to reprove a sinning brother. Some translations indicate that to not do so is to hate your brother. Others indicate you must not hate your brother in your heart when you reprove him. Either way, the need for reproof is clear:

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. (KJV)

So, as a former member or leader, what should you say when you decide to end your silence? You should say now, directly to whomever you saw sin, whatever you should have said then.

### **With Two or Three**

Jesus said that if an offense cannot be resolved just between the two parties involved, then it is necessary to establish every word of the matter with at least two witnesses:

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

Additional support for this concept is found in John: "And in your law also it has been written that the testimony of two men is true" (John 8:17). The sister verse to Matthew 18:16, possibly one to which Jesus was referring, is found in Deuteronomy:

One witness *only* shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity or for any sin which he has committed; at the word of two witnesses or at the word of three witnesses shall a matter be established. (Deut. 19:15)

So, if your brother does not hear you, then you should ask the help of one or two others and try again. Paul believed and practiced this kind of communication process, as seen when he said to the Corinthians:

This third time I am coming to you; at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. (2 Cor. 13:1)

## ***When There is No Hearing***

When a sinning party refuses to hear after being confronted by two or three, then Jesus commanded that the matter must be told to the church. This cannot always mean to tell it to the leaders, as we believed in the LC, or else there is no way to address sinning leaders who are in collusion and will not hear.

And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector. (Matt. 18:17)

Jesus said, "If he refuses to hear the church...." The only way an offending person can *refuse to hear the church* is if he actually hears from the church, that is, if the members of God's family, who have been informed of the offense, speak to him. So, if your brother won't hear you with the help of one or two others, then it's time to tell the church, your larger Christian family. Then, the members of the larger Christian family, who have heard about the sin, have the responsibility as the church to speak to the one who has sinned.

Paul also wrote that an accusation against a leader should be handled similarly, as far as witnesses are concerned, with the additional instruction that a leader should be reprov'd publicly. This seems to imply that public correction of a sinning leader should be done whether or not there is repentance.

## ***Without Showing Partiality***

In addition, Paul included a solemn charge to do nothing related to leaders by way of partiality:

Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except based upon two or three witnesses. The ones who sin reprove before all that the rest also may have fear. I solemnly charge *you* before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels that you keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by way of partiality. (1 Tim. 5:19–21)

Deuteronomy makes the same appeal for impartial judgment for every man:

And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the *cases* between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the sojourner with him. You shall not respect persons in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear the face of man; for judgment is God's. (Deut. 1:16-17)

In summary, Matthew 18:15–17 describes a process of escalated communication to the point of telling it to the church. As other people are involved, the possibility increases that the sinning party might hear. That, after all, is the whole reason for such communication. For example, if you are the sinner, you might be able to ignore one person coming to you alone. You might even be able to ignore that person and one or two others, but it becomes much more difficult for you to ignore many people in your Christian family pointing out your sin to you. In the case of leaders who have gone astray, the family of God must be particularly careful to do their part without partiality.

## **5. Cases Showing Wrong Local Church Leadership Practices**

In this section, I present specific cases against the LC leadership in which I have firsthand experience. These cases exemplify the leadership traits discussed previously. One case, the one with you at AFW, is current and is unresolved. Two other cases are from the past and remain unresolved. Do not forget that these cases are only a few in the mountain of such sins committed by LC leadership.

## The Case Against Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, and Dan Towle

This case involves you at AFW and me. In September 2008, an LC member named Lyndol Butler wrote a letter to you at AFW that called my credibility into question because of an Internet forum post I had written about Benson Phillips and Titus Chu in July of 2008 (Appendix D) (J. Anderson, [Post #49](#)). In May 2009, you posted Lyndol's letter on your AFW website. You put your commentary before and after his letter. Your commentary contained additional accusations against me and a judgment against my credibility. The title of the AFW Judgment was: "A Statement by Lyndol Butler, A False Witness... and One Who Injects Discord Among Brothers"—Proverbs 6:19" (Appendix E) (Buntain, "Statement").

This is the third time LC leadership has denounced me in a public venue: In 1977, Benson Phillips unjustly labeled me as the leader of a sisters' rebellion in Texas (J. Anderson, "[Chapt. 1](#)"). In 2005, Benson wrongly accused me of being a "factious" person—one who had caused division by forming a party in the church, and who was, therefore, a "destroyer of God's divine building" (Phillips, "Message 11"). Now, in the same unrighteous way as Benson, you have labeled me as "a False Witness... and One Who Injects Discord Among Brothers."

A friend brought your AFW Judgment to my attention in June of 2009. My husband, John, and I wrote to Lyndol and requested to talk with him about his letter, but he did not respond. I have now written another letter to him that contains what I wanted to say to him in person. It addresses his comments about my Internet post. I am not going to repeat my responses to him here, but I have enclosed a copy of the letter for your review.

I did not contact you after I saw the AFW Judgment last summer for the following reasons:

- I have repeatedly experienced the utter futility of trying to communicate with the LC leadership.
- The LC leadership opinion of me has come to mean nothing to me.
- The way you wrote about me spoke louder about you, at least to normal people, than anything I would say.
- Other things took precedence at the time.

God has used the *Journal* to change my mind about my silence. So, now I'm telling you that the way you handled Lyndol Butler's accusation against me was wrong. According to the Bible, you violated me; and, in so doing, you violated your conscience:

1. You accepted evidence against me from only one witness (at least, that is all you presented) and then you publicly condemned my credibility (Deut. 19:15).
2. You did not contact me at all or offer me an opportunity to reply, clarify, or correct the matters Lyndol raised in his letter about me, a letter that I had never seen, which was about concerns that I had not even heard about before seeing your post (Matt. 18:15).
3. You did not notify me when you posted Lyndol's letter on the Internet, nor did you inform me about your additional accusations and judgment against me when you posted them on the Internet (Matt. 18:15).
4. You made false accusations about me without presenting facts to back them up; and, in so doing, bore false witness against me (Exo. 20:16).
5. You distorted the information you wrote about me in order to publicly announce to people, who are also my brothers and sisters in Christ, that I was not a credible source of information. What you did, and the way you did it, was to bear false witness and inject

discord among brothers (Prov. 6:19), while claiming that I was the one doing this. You justified yourself by saying it was to “protect” LC members.

Most Christians can see readily that the above way of handling an accusation is unrighteous; but, those of you who routinely practice such things are apparently not able to see this. I suggest this is because taking care of your unique ideology and your common cause has become more important to you than taking care of people, God’s Word, and your consciences.

### ***Making Charges Without Evidence***

I do not know you, Dan Towle, or you, Bill Buntain. I was briefly acquainted with you, Dan Sady, over 30 years ago in Houston. So, I wonder how it is that in good conscience, after receiving one letter from Lyndol Butler about an Internet post I wrote in July of 2008, your next step could be to denounce me publicly as you did. In the AFW Judgment you wrote:

Jane Anderson has harbored personal enmity against the local churches in general and against Benson Phillips in particular for more than 30 years. She has a history of distorting events to fit her own imaginative narrative. In this post, she freely assigns maleficent motives to brothers’ assumed activities even though her portrait of events is fabricated and she obviously has no direct knowledge of the motives of anyone involved. Anderson inveighs that the brothers leading the local churches regularly engage in a global power struggle and that Benson Phillips sent a brother to Cedar Rapids to further his personal interests in this conspiratorial tale. As Lyndol Butler’s testimony demonstrates, nothing could be further from the truth. Jane Anderson should not be considered to be a credible source by any objective observer. (Buntain, “Statement”)

Setting aside for the moment the unrighteous way you handled me, allow me to point out that only one claim that you made has a valid basis in my Internet post and that is: “Benson Phillips sent a brother to Cedar Rapids.” Another claim regarding my assignment of motives has some basis, but it is exaggerated. I did describe Benson Phillips’ political maneuvering related to a church, but I did not say that he had a maleficent motive; and, as my letter to Lyndol shows, Lyndol himself provides support for my main point. I joined into a forum thread discussion that was underway which contained questions about various LC leaders and suppositions about how they came to prominence. Benson’s political rise was brought up and discussed by others. Regarding motives, of course, I had no direct knowledge of them, any more than you do, and neither did I claim to have such. The other items you allege are false and unsupported accusations against me that you presented without evidence.

*Question #1: Upon what do you base your 30-year knowledge of my heart? Is Benson Phillips the source of your information?*

*Question #2: What evidence do you have that I have a “history of distorting events”?*

*Question #3: Where in my post did I say angrily (inveigh) that the brothers leading the local churches regularly engage in a global power struggle?*

In your writing, you made plain your intent to impugn my integrity and undermine my credibility. Such aggression reasonably raises a couple of other questions:

*Question #4: Has my book had such an unwanted impact on your membership that you needed to find some way to cast doubt on my credibility?*

*Question #5: Did Lyndol discover my Internet post by himself? In other words, did someone tell Lyndol Butler about the Internet post and solicit the letter from him, or did he find it and write the letter entirely on his own?*

By the way, I did notice that you never said that Benson was *not* involved in a struggle behind the scenes.

### ***Devaluing Insider Knowledge***

It is a given that former members have insider knowledge; however, you mock this fact in the following, and then you lump many posters together and mischaracterize them with your opinion:

Jane Anderson's account of Lyndol Butler's experience is typical of many Internet posts concerning the local churches, brothers in the churches and Living Stream Ministry. While they claim insider knowledge of much import, they can be charitably characterized as propaganda advancing their authors' varied agendas. In these posts the authors' own subjectivity is often presented as objective fact. (Buntain, "Statement")

Personal testimony is "of much import" to God. The word of our testimony overcomes the devil (Rev. 12:11). The issue should be the truth of whatever a poster claims, not the fact that a claim was made. You can easily become guilty of bearing false witness against people if you lump many Internet posts together to make a generalized accusation as you did. If you believe that Internet posts are "propaganda advancing their authors' agendas," you should refute the propaganda and the authors' alleged agenda in a biblical manner. Your disdain for people's individual rights, such as the right to speak about their experiences without being maligned, comes through strongly in such comments. Some people are speaking publicly against the LC leadership to the church at large because the LC leadership refuses to hear them. This has certainly been my case.

You continued:

In Jane Anderson's account, the "facts" are wrong and the conclusions she draws based on her errant history are more than false. Yet posts like hers pass for truth in certain Internet circles and her allegations are uncritically accepted by like-minded proponents of unfounded and sometimes fanciful conspiracy theories.

I find the above to be both humorous and sad at the same time. After misshaping my words and meaning, you call them my "allegations." Then you say others uncritically accepted them. I hope you can see how foolish this sounds. There were incidental facts in my post that were wrong, but my premise was not. My letter to Lyndol addresses the truthfulness of my original post. In it, I apologize for the incidental factual mistakes I made, but I do not withdraw my main point about Benson Phillips and Titus Chu.

As for Internet posts being "uncritically accepted," little escapes scrutiny on forums about the LC. Posts are typically pulled apart like fresh meat in shark-infested waters. Often, what is left standing intact is the truth. This well may be the reason Lyndol and you brothers were afraid to reply using the forum where my post appeared. Instead, you made your accusations from behind your fortified walls, on your website, which doesn't afford a way for posting public replies. Regardless, in your attempt to condemn my post, you inadvertently provided a good piece of testimonial evidence that serves to support my main premise, as I explain in the letter to Lyndol.

The things you wrote are typical of the way in which LC leadership handles people and facts in order to give false impressions, make accusations, and pronounce condemnations for their own ends, and, thereby, influence and control the minds of LC members.

### ***Stifling Local Church Members***

Concerning using my post as an example, you wrote:

The Lord's word in Matthew 16:18 that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" against the church clearly shows that the church is the ultimate object of Satan's attack (see also Eph. 4:12-16 and notes). This attack is carried out by spreading death through speakings that produce questionings (1 Tim. 1:4). We therefore need to discern whether speakings bring

us into life or into death (see Brother Bill Lawson's contribution entitled "Scriptural Points of Fellowship—Reviewing the Crucial Need to Abstain from Death and Partake of the Tree of Life" on this site). May we all choose life and flee death (Gen. 2:9; 3:1-6; Num. 6:6-12; Deut. 30:19; and notes). ([Buntain, "Statement"](#))

I find your statement about 1 Timothy 1:4 to be a strange, sleight-of-hand interpretation. That verse says not to *give heed to* (hold, regard) "myths and unending genealogies" because they "produce questionings." It does not say to avoid any kind of "speakings" that produce questionings. In your interpretation, I hear you saying, "Flee speakings that might cause you to think!" Believers need to prepare themselves for the enemy's attacks, but it is wrong to apply this idea in a general way in order to dismiss serious criticism.

Lee taught Christians to use their spirits to know "life" (the tree of life) and *not* to use their minds to know good and evil (the tree of knowledge of good and evil). He said they should not talk about or consider right and wrong. Bill Lawson's article, which you asked people to read in order to know how to "choose life," restates Lee's teaching. In it, Lawson says:

Good and evil, right and wrong, legitimate "concerns," logical opinions, eloquent arguments, and the like have no place in the Body of Christ and should be avoided at all costs. If what we read brings us into life, refreshes us, nourishes us, enlightens us, and builds us up, to be sure it is of the tree of life. On the contrary, if it darkens us, confuses us, causes doubts, and tears down the oneness in the Body, it is of the tree of knowledge and can only cause us to die spiritually....

We should not open ourselves to the subtle accusations of the "concerned brothers," but should slam the door on them. We must not let curiosity overcome us; rather, we must continue enjoying the tree of life. Our regenerated spirit deep within acts as an umpire to keep us in a condition of life and peace. May we constantly heed this sense of life. ([Lawson](#))

Please, however, consider what the Bible says:

But solid food is for the full-grown, who because of practice have their faculties exercised for discriminating between both good and evil. (Heb. 5:14)

The Bible attributes spiritual maturity to people who have practiced using their faculties to discern both good and evil, not to people who have slammed the door on questions or accusations. How can you expect believers to mature if you stifle them and discourage them from reading or listening to things that would require them to learn to use their own faculties to make a determination of both good and evil?

### ***Publishing an Unfaithful Word***

In the following, you refer in a general way to Internet posts that are critical of the LC and call them "slanderous," using mine as an example.

It would be both impossible and unprofitable to rebut every slanderous allegation, either on this site or in other forums. What we present here is merely an example to help the saints be enlightened that they should not read or listen to such reports. ([Buntain, "Statement"](#))

If an accusation is true, it is not "slanderous"; so, I would think that actually proving that an accusation is false would be very profitable for you and your organization.

Since so many accusations are appearing on the Internet about the LC, maybe this indicates a deeper problem with LC practice that you should investigate. Even though you claim that it is impossible for you to rebut every accusation that appears on the forums, I would hope that, at a minimum, you are able to address the ones that follow. After all, based on your mission statement, defending the practice of the LC is part of your job. What I would like to see, however, is actual evidence, not mere rhetoric with fallacious reasoning.

I have now explained in some detail the unethical, unscriptural way you handled me in your AFW Judgment. I have also identified the false things that you added to what Lyndol Butler wrote. The AFW Judgment is an unfaithful word posted on a website that purports to present a faithful word. I pray you will do the right thing in response. I am only one little sheep, but I think you would do well to remember the millstone and the sea.

## Two Cases Against Benson Phillips

An objective reading of the following part of the AFW Judgment can reasonably lead one to believe that you at AFW have chosen to defend your co-workers and fellow leaders by closing ranks and simply saying that any questions or unfavorable reports about them are “false accusations” or “false rumors.” You wrote:

Over the past three years, a small group of former members of the local churches have banded together to use the Internet to spread many false rumors against the co-workers serving in the Lord’s recovery. While it saddens us to see those who were once among us mired in such unhealthy speaking, it should not surprise us. The fallen human mind under the influence of the father of lies (John 8:44) has a nearly inexhaustible ability to manufacture false accusations. (Buntain, “Statement”)

A few paragraphs later, you introduce the part of the AFW Judgment that contains the letter from Lyndol in this way:

the following statement from the brother she claims as her source belies her account of accusations, maneuverings, and personal kingdom building on the part of Benson Phillips

You are clearly concerned that Benson has become a target of what you called “false rumors against the co-workers serving in the Lord’s recovery.” When Lyndol Butler wrote a letter to you about my post regarding Benson, you took public action to say that my post was a false rumor and a false accusation without even talking or writing to me. When I compare your treatment of me with the claim in the *Journal* that the LSM and the Local Churches “always first tried to take the way of going to our Christian brothers to reconcile our differences through peaceful fellowship as the Bible instructs” before taking action against them, I find another example of LC leadership hypocrisy (Miller, 45).

The two cases I present next reach from the present far into the past. I am bringing them to your attention because both of them are unresolved. Detailed accounts of our unsuccessful attempts to resolve these cases are now posted on the Internet. These posts contain accusations about serious wrongdoing by Benson Phillips, and they are supported with evidence. I am pointing them out to you, just as Lyndol pointed out my post about Benson to you. Are these posts the kind you would characterize as false rumors and accusations? An objective observer would reasonably expect that you would take the same aggressive, public action to respond to the contents of these posts as you did with my post.

## Covering Up Sin and Lying to the Church

The first case from the past concerns an Internet post written by Don Rutledge. I bring this case to your attention because I was witness to much of the fallout from the unrighteous action by LC leadership that Don reports. In some ways, I am still affected by it today, as are others.

The AFW Judgment refers to believers like Don as “those who were once among us.” As you know, Don was a key leader with Benson Phillips for several decades beginning from the earliest days in Texas, as was Steve Smith,<sup>11</sup> who is a subject in the following post. Don gives account of collusion by several key LC leaders under Benson Phillips’ direction. This event happened

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<sup>11</sup> In this letter, and in the post that I have quoted by Don Rutledge, I have substituted the name, Steve Smith, for the real person’s name. Steve Smith is the pseudonym that I used for this person in *The Thread of Gold*. I do this because this person and situation is not the focus of this letter.

sometime in the early 1980s. (“Hope” is the forum name used by Don Rutledge on the “Local Church Discussion Forum” ([Local](#)) and “The Bereans forum” ([Bereans](#)). When Don posted this account as Hope, he had not yet revealed his identity.) I have included Don’s post in its entirety ([Rutledge](#)):

10-24-07, 05:01	#103
<p><b>Hope</b></p> <p>May we be His disciples</p> <p>Rom 15:13</p> <p>Member of the Body of Christ</p> <p>Posts: 207</p> <p>Member Since: Feb 2007</p>	 <p>Regarding Steve Smith’s immorality, this is the report from a first hand witness: Ray Graver was the first to know. He contacted Benson Phillips who called for an urgent gathering at his home with Ray, Joe Davis of Houston, Don Loooper of Austin and Don Rutledge of Dallas. This occurred the morning after Steve was found out. All the brothers there were furious. Don Rutledge angrily declared that they had all been betrayed. All agreed that Steve should be publicly excommunicated and publicly rebuked that all may fear. All agreed that the Lord could not bless the church in Irving due to Steve’s sin. Steve had confessed to Ray that this sin was not a one time thing but had been going on for some time including when he was in Arlington. Steve also admitted that he knew the Church in Arlington had lagged the other Dallas area churches in blessing due to his sin. At that time, none of these brothers would sympathize with any immorality and especially from an elder or co-worker.</p> <p>While they were meeting, Witness Lee returned Benson’s urgent message. After about a 30 minute conversation, Benson returned to the room where the brothers were waiting, still in a state of shock and outrage. Witness Lee urged them to consider Steve’s family and the harm to them if he was publicly exposed. He urged them not to publicly excommunicate him but simply ask him to move away. That is what Ray and Benson decided to do. The other three had big reservations but deferred to the Irving brothers to take care of the matter.</p> <p>But then the lying started. Many people began to call wanting to know what happened to Steve. Since Witness Lee, Benson and Ray had decided to keep the real situation under wraps, what where these brothers to say. Loooper and Rutledge would say that something must have happened in Irving and they did not know for sure – A LIE. Benson and Ray told various stories, Steve wanted to get away etc and not to worry since he was in fellowship.</p> <p>Witness Lee urged Benson and Ray to spend time with Steve and seek to recover him, but they were too disgusted to seek to contact him.</p> <p>Yes the worldly wisdom from Witness Lee and the unfaithfulness of the five brothers led to more tragedy. All five have an account to give at the judgment seat.</p> <p>Hope</p> <p>In Christ Jesus there is hope for us all.</p>

Is this account by Don something manufactured by a “fallen human mind under the influence of the father of lies,” as you suggested in the AFW Judgment, or is it a confession of the truth? Do you believe his claim that “the unfaithfulness of the five brothers led to more tragedy” is true, or is this just something Don “manufactured?” If he fabricated this account in order to spread “false rumors” and make “false accusations,” as you allege has been done by forum posters, why would he include himself as a participant in this black scene?

Don’s post shows that these leaders knew what the Word required of them concerning Steve Smith. The Bible says that a leader who sins should be reprovved before all so that others may fear (1 Tim. 5:19–20). If Don’s account is true, then there is no question that it was wrong for Benson and Ray to take Witness Lee’s unbiblical advice over God’s command. There is no question that it was wrong for Don Looper, Joe Davis, and Don Rutledge to submit to Benson and Ray’s decision to obey Witness Lee instead of God. There also is no question that it was wrong for all of them to cover up Steve’s sin by lying about it. They not only didn’t tell the churches about it, I have reasons to believe that they didn’t even tell Steve’s wife. My husband and I heard one of the cover-up lies when we were in the Church in Oklahoma City. We later heard another one directly from Steve Smith.

In our earliest years, we were all so committed to the Lord that we believed we would never have even one divorce among us, much less have one of our leaders fall into sexual sin. The first reaction by these leaders to the ongoing immorality of another leader shows how strong our feelings were about this. We also would never have believed that our leaders would cover up immorality as Don reported.

According to Don’s account, someone we all believed at that time to be “God’s man on the earth” recommended this unrighteous path to these brothers who were the leaders in their respective churches. How could this be? I have to wonder now if it was easier for Witness Lee to do this because, a few years prior, as has now come to light, he had similarly covered up the sexual sin of his own son (Ingalls). Some may have natural sympathy with Witness Lee’s approach to both these problems, but the Bible does not sympathize. Church leaders should walk in obedience to the Word of God; and, when they sin, God demands that they be reprovved before all.

### **A Tragedy Resulted**

John and I, along with many others in Texas, became witnesses to the tragedy that resulted, which Don Rutledge referred to in his post. Steve ended up, some years later, while he was still married, seducing the wife of a leader in the Local Church in Fort Worth, Texas, a leader with whom he had formerly served. (I think that you, Bill Buntain, may know about this matter because you were in the church in Ft. Worth not long after that time, possibly as a leader.) Don Looper, under Benson Phillips’ direction, had labeled this leader’s wife as rebellious in 1977. Don Looper did this to her in Austin about the same time that Benson did the same thing to me in Houston. She suffered for years afterward, more than I did, because her husband stood with the LC leadership against her, whereas my husband stood with me. As a consequence of her long-term unhappiness, she was more susceptible to Steve’s seduction years later. Benson Phillips’ unbiblical actions as a Christian leader played a destructive role in both this sister’s family and Steve Smith’s.

For much of the year after she had repented for her adultery, she lived with my husband and me. (John and I were no longer in the LC by this time.) She was trying to regain her spiritual footing, and we were encouraging her to return to her husband. She was willing to do this on the condition that he would move far away from the Local Church and start taking care of their marriage. (He never could bring himself to do this.) We told no one about her sin, because she had repented. At one point, this sister received a letter from someone in the Church in Austin who was trying to find out if it was true that she was going to marry Steve Smith! Upon reading this letter, she broke down and wept. She told me it was evident to her that the LC leadership would never change. To her knowledge, the only other people who knew about her sin were her husband, the other leader in Ft. Worth, and Benson Phillips. She realized one or more of these leaders had not only revealed

her sin to others but also had spread an untrue rumor about her that she was going to marry Steve, and that this rumor had even reached her fellow Christians in Austin. I still have a copy of that letter. That day was the final straw for this sister. She then gave up trying to walk in repentance, moved out of our home, and, not long afterwards, *did* marry Steve Smith. Two families were broken up. This whole sad story is documented in an Internet post ([M. Anderson, Post #322](#)). The post contains links to multiple documents which were written in the early 1990s about this matter, during the time when my husband and I had stopped being silent.

When this sister first told me about her sin, she also told me that her husband and another leader had passed on information to her from Benson Phillips. The information was that Benson and others had known that Steve had previously been involved in sexual sin some years before she had become involved with him. When I heard this, I realized that if this information had been given to the church, when it should have been, Steve might never have contacted her. At the very least, she would have been aware of the danger and would probably not have fallen prey to him.

### **The “Shameful Downfall”**

In the late 1970s in Houston, years before the previously-mentioned cover-up happened, John and I and two other sisters had a time of private fellowship with Steve Smith, Ray Graver, and Joe Davis (the three leaders in the Church in Houston at that time). Due to the situation in the church, we raised the possibility that there might be “sin in the camp” that was affecting the blessing on the church there. Upon hearing this, Steve broke down and began to weep saying something to the effect that the church’s condition was probably his fault.

Steve’s weeping in Houston should have been a red flag for Ray and Joe that something was wrong with him. He obviously needed help, and his fellow leading brothers saw this. A man weeping as he did is an unusual thing. I wonder if Ray or Joe took the time to discover what was troubling Steve, as they clearly should have. Most Christians would find this to be a normal course of action. Shortly after that event, Ray told Benson about it; and, not long after that, Steve was moved to another city, ending his role as the main leader in Houston.

Instead of seeing Steve’s weeping as a sign of a brother in need of help, I have reason to believe that Benson saw it as a shameful downfall, maybe a sign of weakness. In 1977, at the time when Benson was giving me my first label, in a meeting in front of Joe Davis, Ray Graver and some others, he said to me without explanation, “and the shameful downfall that you caused to one of us.” I had no idea what he was talking about, but I later deduced Benson was probably referring to Steve having wept when we were talking to him. I suspected that Benson would have seen this as a shameful downfall because Steve was a leader, a “delegated authority.” Possibly, to Benson’s way of thinking, it had been shameful for Steve to weep like this. In retrospect, it now seems that it was Benson who played a principal role in the *real* shameful downfall of Steve Smith.

### **The “Hot Seat”**

My husband and I both heard Benson ask a very telling question in 1991, when we were trying to help save the two previously-mentioned marriages. Benson, through another leader functioning as an intermediary, initially acted as if he would meet with all of us involved, including the leader who was losing his wife and the wife who had just separated from him. However, Benson backed out several times, and we had to reschedule. As the final date neared, and when it appeared that Benson was going to back out again, John and I made a last, desperate appeal to him by phone. His wife said he was not available; however, after our pleading with her, Benson reluctantly came to the phone. In that very brief conversation, he said to John and me, “So, you want to put me on the hot seat?” Although this was not our intention, he clearly did not want to face what he knew to be fallout from the backroom cover-up for which he was responsible, and he didn’t come. I don’t think that seat has become any cooler with the passage of time.

*Question #6: Is the account in Don’s post a false rumor about Benson Phillips?*

## ***Bearing False Witness Against Jane Anderson***

### **A False Witness**

The second unresolved case is a long-term one. I bring this case to your attention because it is about Benson Phillips' ongoing sins against my family and me. This case consists of several events spanning from 1977 to the present. My son, Matt Anderson, gives a detailed account of these events in two Internet posts. The reason this case is a long-term one is because Benson has been unwilling to talk with us about it for a period of 20 years (1990 to date).

To summarize, one of Matt's posts (Appendix B) ([Post #322](#)) shows:

- (1977) Benson unjustly labeled me as the leader of a sisters' rebellion in Texas and left me under a permanent gag order. This was done in a specially called church meeting and in a meeting afterwards, with a smaller number of selected observers.
- (1990–1991) Benson agreed to meet with a small group in our home to read and discuss a letter (one that his fellow elder asked us to write to him), but he did not come. The letter was about the situation of the sister who was leaving her husband (previously explained) and was also about Benson's involvement in what happened to her and me in 1977. After that meeting, Matt hand-delivered the letter to Benson, but Benson never responded to it. We also sent a copy of it to Witness Lee with a cover letter signed by the sister, my husband, and me. He, also, did not respond.
- (1992) After several months, we shared a condensed version of the letter to Benson with certain others who knew all the involved parties, in an attempt to "tell it to the church." Benson then lied to a gathering of elders at a regional elders' conference, warning them not to read things from John and me because we had "met with some believers in [our] home and read a forty plus page letter which condemned certain brothers and the Lord's recovery in this part of the country." The truth was that the letter was the one that I had written to Benson that his fellow elder had encouraged me to write, and the meeting was the one that he had refused to attend! He misrepresented the whole situation to all these leaders and slandered us publicly (Phillips, Oct. 23).

Matt's other post (Appendix C) ([Post #1](#)) covers the following:

- (2005) Benson unrighteously labeled me as "factious" and as a "destroyer of God's divine building" at the LSM Winter Training in Anaheim not long after we published *The Thread of Gold*. In that meeting, he lied about what happened in 1977. He said, as an example of factious people, there were some sisters in Anaheim that built up a group around themselves in the late 1970s. Then he said Witness Lee had publicly corrected these sisters in a meeting and had referred to them as "you three holy sisters." Then Benson said he followed Witness Lee to deal with a factious sister, who was the leader in Texas. The truth is that Witness Lee had not called the Anaheim sisters "holy sisters" (that was Lee's son's derogatory name for them), and Lee had not publicly exposed them as Benson described. Witness Lee had only warned the three of them during one of his messages not to sit with each other anymore in the meetings. Also, Benson did not see Witness Lee do this and then subsequently do likewise to me, as he claimed he did, because he dealt with me the very same Saturday night in Houston that Witness Lee warned the sisters in Anaheim—Memorial Day weekend, 1977.

For purposes of this letter, I am publicly acknowledging that the person I refer to in my book by the pseudonym, "Dan Williams," is Benson Phillips. Benson uncovered the fact that he was "Dan Williams" when, at the 2005 Winter Training in Anaheim, as I just described, he declared that what he and other LC leaders had done to me in 1977 was the right thing to do (Phillips, "Message 11").

Matt's two posts explain the details about the events bulleted above and provide links to other posts and documents that contain supporting details and evidence. Therefore, I am omitting details about these matters from this letter.

### **Only One Accuser**

As I was writing this letter, I realized something for the first time: What Benson Phillips has done to me over the last three decades, he has done as a *single witness* against me. Others silently watched, but he was the only accuser I heard. The Bible says plainly how to handle one witness who rises up (implying publicly) to testify against someone:

If a malicious witness rises up against a man to testify against him of wrongdoing, the two men who have the dispute shall stand before Jehovah, before the priests and the judges who are *serv*ing in those days. And the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and if indeed the witness is a false witness, if he has testified falsely against his brother, you shall do to him as he intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall utterly remove the evil from your midst. (Deut. 19:16–19)

This clearly was never done in my case, and Benson's judgment against me was carried out in the resultant shunning by those in the LC, which has continued to this day.

The realization that he was a single witness against me has put what happened to me in 1977 into a new light. At that time, when I was 30 years old, Benson, as a single accuser, was responsible for cutting off my fellowship and normal relationships with all the brothers and sisters I had known, loved, and served the Lord with for 10 years prior to that time. The consequence of his action was that my relationships with almost all of them have been broken for over 30 years. His lone word against me stood because he was the top leader in Texas at that time. Some of those who silently watched what Benson did to me are leading co-workers of yours today: Joe Davis and Ray Graver. Joe's wife and the wife of another of your current co-workers, Kerry Robichaux, were also present to observe Benson's action against me. After he passed judgment, I was completely obedient to his demands and silently accepted his punishment for the 10 years afterwards that I remained in the LC. However, he never lifted his demand that I be silent; and, to this day, he has never taken back the label or the punishment he unjustly gave me.

Benson might argue that he gathered information from others before he made his 1977 judgment, but the fact is that I only heard from one accuser—him. He did not specify what the charges against me were that caused him to say that I was the leader of a sisters' rebellion, nor did he tell me who my accusers were. He was also a single witness against me in both 1992, at the regional elders' meeting, and in 2005, at the Winter Training in Anaheim.

Three different times, Benson Phillips has risen up to falsely testify against me as a single witness. He has used his position as a leader not only to speak against me publicly but also to prevent others from associating with me, thereby becoming not only the accuser but also the judge, contrary to what the Bible states.

Benson's actions as an LC leader against me and my family are representative of the LC leadership's unethical and unbiblical ways of protecting their movement from (1) any within it whom they think are not totally submitting to their "vision" and (2) former members who are vocal about their bad experiences. The LC leadership feels no responsibility to establish the truth of matters with facts and witnesses, nor do they have any thought to protect the rights of the person being accused. In high profile cases (of leaders), they may try them in a kangaroo court for the purpose of appearing to the LC faithful to be right in their action. I believe it is easy for most Christians to see that these kinds of behaviors by Christian leaders are unbiblical and unrighteous, and that no circumstances would warrant any Christian leader treating anyone in these ways. Those of you in LC leadership, however, continue unbiblical and unethical practices, as your recent action against me shows. Christians are not safe under such leadership.

## **Shouted from the Rooftops**

It is sad for me to be remembering these past matters again now, but I am not going to sit by silently when you brothers deal with me in the same unrighteous way Benson has. I am not going to wait 13 years before I say something, as I did when I received my first evil label from Benson. I am not going to be quiet when I see you trying to defend him by accusing others of “manufacturing false accusations” against him. The only thing that can defeat lies is truth. I’ve been silent enough times in my life, when I should have said something and didn’t, to know that things only get worse. The cover-up of a leader’s sin has produced more lies that have spread and hurt many people. How many other cover-ups have there been? How many other lies? How many sheep blindly trust Benson Phillips today as a “delegated authority” of God; yet, one day, may find he has lied to them? How many more may find themselves the target of the unrighteous actions of the LC leadership?

Stories about such things surfacing on the Internet now, years after the fact, should not surprise you. I pray there will be many, many more. The Lord Jesus told us that things done in secret would be shouted from the rooftops. Well, today, His words are being fulfilled, as things done in secret years ago, go “from the rooftops” to appear on the Internet for all to see.

To close out this section, here are two more questions for you:

*Question #7: Are the accounts in Matt’s posts false rumors about Benson Phillips? If you think so, clarify exactly what is false.*

*Question #8: Because Benson has continued, for over two decades, to accuse me falsely, as a single witness against me, I am requesting that those of you at AFW come together with some other parties who are not members of the LC, along with Benson Phillips and me, in order to make a thorough investigation and ruling about all of his accusations. Will you do this?*

## **6. The Impact of Local Church Theology on the Conscience**

In this section, I provide some reasons for the unhealthy dynamic that exists in the LC among leaders and members. Teachings about spiritual authority and teachings about the Triune God are two pillars in the LC belief system. Both of these teachings change the way a person thinks about God and about what God expects of them. Over time, both of these teachings produce a gradual retraining of the conscience. The conscience then responds to the mandates of these new beliefs instead of those of the Bible. As a result, a person can do things that are clearly against the plain teaching of the Bible without having any qualm or pang of conscience; they can sin and be oblivious to the fact that they are doing so. This is readily seen in the practices of the LC leadership and in the members that obey them. Christians should have their consciences trained in line with the plain Word of God.

### **The Ham Syndrome (Local Church Beliefs about Authority)**

The LC leadership’s authoritarian practices are primarily a product of beliefs about “spiritual authority.” These beliefs have their roots in the teachings of Watchman Nee. Today, Nee’s teachings on the Christian life are often appreciated in Christian circles. Some of Nee’s writings played an important role in my getting free from the deception I came under through Witness Lee’s teachings. However, Watchman Nee’s teachings on spiritual authority, which are less known, can cause big problems. I do not believe Nee ever intended the outcome from his spiritual authority teachings to be what is seen today in the LC; nevertheless, the application of some of his teachings has produced an authoritarian atmosphere where spiritual and psychological abuse can, and does, easily occur.

LC leaders believe that they are “delegated authorities,” men to whom God has given His own authority. LC members believe that God wants them to submit to these delegated authorities. Delegated authorities believe that they must submit to other delegated authorities who are over them. Here, from Nee’s book, *Spiritual Authority*, are some of the statements that helped produce these kinds of beliefs:

In the past God overlooked our transgressions because we were ignorant, but now we ought to be serious about God’s delegated authorities. What God stresses is not His own direct authority but the indirect authorities which He has established. All who are insubordinate to God’s indirect authorities are not in subjection to God’s direct authority. (72)

Delegated authority is so serious that if one offends it, he is at odds with God. No one can expect to obtain light directly from the Lord if he refuses to have light from delegated authority.... It is absolutely impossible for us to reject delegated authority and yet be subject directly to God; rejecting the first is the same as rejecting the second. (73)

God always maintains the authority which He has delegated. We are therefore left with no choice but to be subject to the governing authorities. (73–74)

The LC flock believes that such statements about delegated authority apply to their relationship with LC leaders. It is not hard to see the fear that these statements could produce in sheep who seriously want to be pleasing to God.

Things are further complicated by Nee’s interpretation of the biblical account of Noah cursing his son, Ham (Nee, *Spiritual*, 28). That account is used to show that people should “cover” the sin of those in authority over them, just as Noah’s two sons covered their father’s nakedness, or they will be cursed like Ham, who looked at his father’s nakedness.

This view holds that if a delegated authority is wrong in some way, then it is up to God to correct the delegated authority. Nee says that if you submit to a delegated authority and anything is amiss with him, the fault will not lie with you, but with your leader:

What a risk God has taken in instituting authorities! What a loss God will incur if the delegated authorities He institutes misrepresent Him! Yet, undaunted, God has set up these authorities. It is much easier for us to fearlessly obey authorities than for God to institute them. Can we not then obey them without apprehension since God Himself has not been afraid to entrust authority to men? Even as God has boldly established authorities, so let us courageously obey them. If anything should be amiss, the fault does not lie with us but with the authorities, for the Lord declares: “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers” (Rom 13:1). (Nee, *Spiritual*, 69–70)

In the LC, members combine the belief about not looking at the sin of a leader with the belief that God will blame the leader and not them if the leader has sinned. This means that they can be aware of a leader’s ongoing sins, remain silent, and not feel wrong about doing so. It is not their problem; it is God’s. Because of this, sin can enter among them and continue unchecked. Their consciences have been retrained by this belief. This retraining is in direct opposition to the plain Word of God which shows that fellow believers may bring an accusation against a leader who sins, and that not only God, but also human beings should correct sinning leaders publicly before all so that all may fear (1 Tim. 5:19–20). This LC belief is also in opposition to the verse that says, “If your brother sin, rebuke him (Luke 17:3).

They believe that submitting to a delegated authority is equivalent to submitting to God. Such submission is not considered to be optional. So, if a delegated authority tells them to do something, even if it is against the plain word of the Bible, they can do it without their consciences objecting because they believe that God is telling them to do something. In fact, their consciences will bother them if they don’t. If, perchance, they do hesitate and dare to ask questions, or they don’t submit as expected, they will experience consequences from the delegated authority. If a

person persists in such behavior, they will soon become labeled or quarantined as rebellious, divisive, leprous, poisonous, etc.

If outsiders or former members question the behavior of LC leaders or ask them to give account for specific behaviors, they will often be answered with silence. The LC leaders can do this and still feel good about themselves because one of Nee's teachings states that "delegated authorities" should not defend themselves:

Vindication or defense or whatever reaction there may be should come from God, not from man. He who vindicates himself does not know God. No one on earth could ever be more authoritative than Christ, yet He never defended Himself. Authority and self-defense are incompatible. The one against whom you defend yourself becomes your judge. He rises higher than you when you begin to answer his criticism. He who speaks for himself is under judgment; therefore he is without authority. Whenever one tries to justify himself, he loses authority.

Paul stood before the Corinthian believers as a delegated authority, yet he said, "I judge not mine own self" (1 Cor. 4:3). Vindication comes from God. The moment you justify yourself before a person, he becomes your judge. As soon as you try to explain, you are fallen before him. (Nee, *Spiritual*, 126)

To gain further insight into the mindset of the leaders and followers in the LC concerning spiritual authority, see the book, *Spiritual Authority*, by Watchman Nee.

Additional insights can be gained from a dissertation by an independent third-party researcher, Morris Fred. His dissertation discusses Lee's behavior, doctrines, and practices when he was in the LC in the Far East before he moved to America. He also discusses how Lee exercised authoritarian control over the churches there. Most of Chapter VII, "Ritual as Ideology," is devoted to this (Fred, 200–214, 226–230, 235–238, 232–233). When I read Fred's description, I was stunned to realize that Lee had done the same thing to others in the past. It was part of his *modus operandi*. Some of the leadership techniques and teachings—the heavy-handed political maneuvering—that gradually became apparent in Lee after he moved to the United States were the same as those described in Fred's research. See Appendix G for some quotes from Fred's work.

Fred's information also shows that the situations that occurred after Lee was in the United States, which Lee called "rebellions," had precedent in Taiwan. He provides information about a church split in 1966 in Taiwan (208, 211) in which Lee treated people who questioned him as ones who were rebellious to his authority. Fred's work also contains a copy of a 1970 letter signed by four men, three of whom were young Americans that were top LC leaders in the newly formed LC in the U.S. (Bill Mallon, John Ingalls, and James Barber) (Appendix F) (Chang). They wrote their letter in order to defend Witness Lee and addressed it to those in Taiwan who were trying to warn people in the United States about Witness Lee's ways (Fred, 218–219). Ironically, 20 years after they wrote this letter, Mallon and Ingalls paid the price for not heeding that warning. When they began to question Lee in the late 1980s, he ultimately labeled them leaders of a "rebellion," as seen in Lee's book, *The Fermentation of the Present Rebellion*.

## **The Processed God Syndrome (Local Church Belief about the Trinity)**

### ***CRI's Incomplete Evaluation***

The *Journal* sought to defend the orthodoxy of Lee's Trinity teaching. Miller explained in great detail how people, in order to understand Lee's Trinity theology properly, must understand the difference between the "essential" Trinity and the "economical" Trinity. He asserted that such understanding was necessary to help resolve problems one might have with Lee's questionable statements about the Trinity (Miller, 16).

What Miller may not realize is that the LC's strong emphasis on explaining the essential and economical aspects of the Trinity is a relatively new phenomenon, considering how long Lee's processed God teaching has been around. My husband and I heard Lee's teaching several times a week for 20 years, and both of us can recall hearing him give such explanations or clarifications only a few times. This usually happened when Lee was upset about criticism of his teachings by outsiders, so he took the opportunity to say something to us about modalism. In no way did we understand, or could we have explained, such concepts as the essential or economical aspects of the Trinity. On the other hand, I could almost recite in my sleep Lee's teaching about the processed Triune God, which he even reduced to slogans for us to learn.

Miller also asserted that Lee's questionable statements about the Trinity were fully balanced elsewhere in his teaching (Miller, 17). To say that Lee's modalistic-sounding statements are fully balanced by other more orthodox statements is like saying an elephant is fully balanced by a pea on the other end of a seesaw. "Balanced" is not a word that fits in the same sentence with the name, Witness Lee, when it comes to just about any New Testament teaching. Yes, he presented us with an essential pea every once in awhile; but, mostly, he paraded his experiential, economical elephant in front of us. In other words, one may find some references to the "threeness" of God sprinkled here and there throughout his *printed* teachings, but he primarily *preached* about, with force and repetition, the oneness of the processed God (the Life-giving Spirit) who was for our experience. Using a food illustration, as Lee often did, one might say that he, on occasion, salted his economical teaching with a dash of the essential Trinity; but, he served the economical, experiential Trinity every day as the main course, and it was usually unsalted. What his followers absorbed from his ministry fare is the importance of keeping their focus on the oneness of the processed Triune God as the Life-giving Spirit and fulfilling their responsibility to practice his prescribed ways to ingest and experience this Spirit.

Miller did have one sentence admitting that the focus of Lee's ministry was *Christian experience*, not theological systematization (Miller, 18). However, since the bulk of Lee's teaching is geared toward a Christian's experience of the Trinity, how is it that, after "careful evaluation of hundreds of books, papers, church documents, and audio and video recordings" (Hanegraff, "We," 4), he wrote only one sentence about Lee's elephant?

The point is that any evaluation of Lee's Trinity teaching is incomplete without an examination of his experiential focus, which was *how to apply and experience his understanding of the Trinity*. This was his steady drumbeat, message after message, for decades. Any evaluation is also

incomplete without an examination of the impact that his constantly repeated teaching had on the people who practiced it. According to the Bible, the fruit produced by a man's speaking determines if it is true or false (Matt. 7:15–20). An examination of the fruit in the lives of Lee's followers reveals a serious problem: In much the same way that Nee's authority teachings result in the retraining of the conscience, Lee's Triune God methodology also has a similar unhealthy impact on the function of the conscience.

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## ***The Life-giving Spirit—A New Thing in the Universe?***

In simplest terms, Lee's elephant was his *processed Triune God teaching*. According to Lee, God has gone through a process to become something brand new in the universe—the Life-giving Spirit. He said:

In His resurrection a life-giving Spirit was produced (1 Cor. 15:45). *Before Christ's resurrection, there was not such a life-giving Spirit in the universe*. John 7:39 says that "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified"; that is, Jesus had not yet entered into resurrection (Luke 24:26). *On the day that He entered into resurrection, the life-giving Spirit was produced*. (Lee, "Chapt. 3") [emphasis added]

He taught, and his followers believe, that this newly produced Life-giving Spirit has an additional element added to it, the uplifted human living of Christ. People now can take this Spirit into them by calling on the name of Jesus and repetitively praying aloud the words of the Bible. In so doing, the whole processed Triune God, which now includes the uplifted humanity of Christ, will be dispensed into them over time and will cause them to be metabolically and organically changed (Lee, *Divine*, 84). Changed into what? Into God.

Lee occasionally qualified his teaching that people are becoming God with the phrase, "in life and nature, *but not in the Godhead*." His followers embrace his every word as revelatory, so none would dare to stop and ask the obvious question, "Just how can God's life and nature exist separate from His Godhead?" I would ask, "Wouldn't it be simpler just to use the words of the Bible and say that we are becoming like Him instead of taking the risk that people would misunderstand when they hear they are 'becoming God'?" When Lee began in the 1990s to regularly use the words "becoming God" to describe his elephant, members were heard referring to themselves as "baby gods."

Lee's defenders seem determined to win the battle to prove his Trinity teachings are orthodox by engaging with outsiders using the theological word-weaponry they have honed out of necessity; meanwhile, people remain captives of Lee's Trinity teachings, having embraced them without question, and applied them as he taught. Such people have fruit in their lives that tells the real story and points to the real battle for truth that needs to be fought to free captives who, by practicing Lee's methodology, have begun to live by a standard other than the plain words of the Bible.

### ***Living by Another Standard***

Lee's followers believe that, by partaking of the processed Triune God, an organic change will occur, and they will automatically begin to live out the life of Christ which does not sin. Gradually, they stop using the actual words of the Bible as the standard to convict their consciences of particular sins or to give them instruction for their lives. They primarily talk about "the ministry" and the divine dispensing of the processed Triune God, which, they believe, over time, will take care of all problems.

They no longer ask, "What does the Bible say?" but, rather, "What does the ministry say?" They learn to trust in another standard, the sense of "life" or "death," that is, a feeling of having peace or no peace, a feeling they believe comes from the processed God of whom they are partaking. Their inner sense often trumps the plain words of the Bible. For example, if someone they have offended tries to talk to them, they may refuse to talk further by saying, "I have no peace to talk to you." In this way, they bypass the Bible's commands to reconcile. Afterwards, they pray a general prayer about needing the blood of Christ to cleanse them and go their way at peace. This is not to say that they never confess sins; but, because their retrained consciences use a different standard than the Bible, in some matters, they may fail to confess things that the Bible calls sin. They may even confess things that are not sin. For example, if they have a thought which questions Lee's ministry, they will feel guilty and confess this; but, if they cut off a brother from fellowship because a leader told them to, their consciences will remain silent.

Understanding this kind of thinking is key to understanding why the LC leadership typically won't face actual bad behavior and simply repent for it. Their consciences have been retrained according to another standard of behavior. Their consciences now respond according to their retraining or according to inner feelings of what they call "life" and "peace" more than the black and white standards of biblical right or wrong. They consider black and white biblical standards to be more in the category of laws that require self-effort. In their view, anything that resembles self-effort is unspiritual. Today, one of the strongest evidences *against* Witness Lee's Trinity teaching is the collective *sinful behavior* of those in LC leadership, behavior that they will not acknowledge and for which they remain unrepentant.

Lee's followers gradually become indoctrinated to believe that they are not capable of understanding the plain words of the Bible by themselves and must have the interpreted Word, which comes from their apostle, Witness Lee, who received his interpretation by revelation. They use the LSM's translation with Witness Lee's footnotes, *Holy Bible: Recovery Version*, which claims in its introductory material that translators should depend not only "on an adequate comprehension of the original language, but also on a *proper understanding of the divine revelation* in the holy Word" [emphasis added].

### **No More a Personal God**

Lee's followers typically don't talk about a personal God, as if they knew Him one-on-One, or as if they heard from Him personally, or as if He cared about their personal lives and problems, or as if He gave them individual personal direction through His Word. Rather, they talk about God as the processed Triune God being dispensed into them for God's high purpose. Lee says the divine dispensing (the practical application of his Trinity teachings) will ultimately produce the New Jerusalem, where there will be a full blending of God with man and man with God. In other words, man will have become God in life and nature (but not in the Godhead).

What I have described is the typical belief, behavior, and expected end-result of those practicing Witness Lee's teaching on the nature of God and nature of humanity. My husband can testify of the futility and frustration of such a walk, because this is the kind of teaching he came under as a young man and new Christian in the late 1960s. It was basically the only teaching he had ever heard as a Christian, and he heard it for 20 years. Upon his exit from the LC, he effectively had to start over learning to talk to God in a real and personal way and develop his own personal walk with Jesus. He had to learn to read a plain Bible (without Lee's footnotes) for himself, believe it was okay to use his mind when he did, and believe that he could receive revelation and understanding without the help of the interpretation of the Bible by "God's oracle." He had to begin to believe that he needed to walk in the light of the standards taught plainly by the Bible, especially regarding relationships with God and man.

The unusual Christian walk of Lee's followers is diametrically opposed to the kind of walk God intends His children to have with Him. God wants each person to have an individual, interactive, personal relationship with Him—a relationship that is maintained by two-way communication with Him using prayer and the Word of God in conjunction with our rational faculties. He wants each one of us to know Him intimately and personally, not to experience Him as some kind of processed product or commodity. He wants us to know Him as One who loves us and wants to be included in every aspect of our lives. We take care of our relationships with Him by loving His words, confessing our sins, and loving others and keeping right relationships with them. He leads each one of us into the good works that He has prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10).

## 7. Appeals

I have presented my evidence that there is something seriously wrong with the LC leadership. I have expressed my educated opinion that the leadership problem in the LCs is systemic. It is my belief that the LC will remain an unsafe place for God's sheep until the LC leaders (1) publicly acknowledge their unbiblical and unethical practices, (2) repent to God and to all those they have hurt, and (3) change their ways.

I know there are current members who will testify that they have not been hurt and have even benefitted from being members. As long as they remain in unquestioning submission to the vision and direction given by their leaders, as long as they support and maintain accepted LC beliefs and practices, and as long as they are willing to cut off, without question, other believers with whom the LC leadership disagrees, they won't be hurt in ways of which they are conscious. However, the fact that some people have positive experiences does not erase the fact that harm has been, and continues to be, perpetrated on others. No matter how good a church appears to be, if only one sheep experiences abuse by its leadership, this cannot be excused or overlooked. It is a very serious matter to God, as the millstone and sea imagery in Matthew 18 shows.

### **For Those Outside of the Local Church**

Former members, others in the Christian community who are aware of the situation in the LC, and those at CRI have a role to play in helping rescue the leaders in the LC who have missed the mark to such an extent that they are harming others.

#### ***Former Members***

Some, who have become curious about the LC, have asked me why more information is not available about the practices of the Local Church. The main reason is that the norm for departing members is *silence*, which is mainly due to indoctrination and to fear in one form or another. I hope that what I and a small number of others have written, and the fact that some are speaking out on the Internet, will encourage more former members to face their fears, find freedom from them, and find their voices.

#### **To Face Their Fears**

The following list describes some of the fears former members may have. I have experienced a number of these myself. It was nothing short of a miracle that my husband and I were able to publish a book and tell our story. If you are a silent former member, you will probably find yourself somewhere in the following:

1. Some former members have immediate or extended family members who are still in the Local Churches, relatives with whom they already have strained relationships because of leaving. They are afraid they will lose these relationships completely if the leadership was to label them as "opposers."
2. Some feel that they are failures who could not make it in "God's best" and that if they say anything, especially anything that sounds negative, or even if they ask questions, they will incur God's anger and judgment.
3. Some, who have managed to make new lives for themselves, are afraid of their new associates finding out about their having ever been part of such a group. They want to leave that part of their lives buried in the past.
4. Some are afraid they might face lawsuits or other forms of harassment.

5. Some have simply shut down and cannot think or talk about it without becoming upset or angry. They don't talk about their experience and may criticize any who do.
6. Some still believe the basic idea and LC vision was good; they think that ambitious leaders ruined it. They seem to want to figure out where the train went off the tracks and get back on and go forward from there. They don't want to be found speaking badly about things they still believe are good.
7. Some have given up on having any kind of meaningful walk with God and are just struggling to survive in a day-to-day existence, not allowing themselves to think about what they were taught to believe would be God's inevitable future judgment on them.
8. Some have given up their Christian walk and returned to their former sins.
9. Some are not sure what they believe about God any longer and consider themselves to be agnostics or atheists.
10. Some are afraid of being publicly maligned by the LC, having seen the LC do this to others.

It is common belief in the LC that when you leave, God's blessing is removed from you. People often go downhill after they leave. Divorces, depression, drug addiction, and other things have happened in the lives of those who depart; sometimes even death. The possibility of these things occurring are used by the LC leadership to warn others against leaving. Such warnings haunt people after they leave. They believe that they have no chance of being "an overcomer" (per Revelation) and will suffer 1000 years of weeping and gnashing of teeth during the millennial kingdom. One of the responses I received from someone who read my book illustrates the LC attitude about those who depart. This response came from someone that you, Bill Buntain, know well. This young brother shared with me an email dialogue between him and an older LC member that took place after this young brother left the LC and was going through a divorce. He gave me his permission to reproduce the dialogue in this letter:

Older brother:

Good grief. You seen the extent of the knowledge exhibited on my website. Do you think that that knowledge is of any value whatsoever in itself when it comes to knowing truth? The world's great thinkers come up empty. You know that it is deeper than that. No, you will never recover a satisfactory humanity while mocking God, and what He has put in you? What do you think caused your marriage problem? [younger brother's name] not trying hard enough? You know what caused the failure, and it wasn't due to anything you did or did not do apart from departing. So there is nothing you can do or not do that will work, apart from receiving. I don't have to tell you the basics, you know them. Sure, they sound like nonsense. Descriptions of colors sound like nonsense to blind people, what do you expect when you choose an environment that is harmful, and in conflict with what the Lord's doing?

Younger brother:

Come on [older brother's name], surely you could have thought of a better reply than that? A guilt trip? Not one reasonable statement? Comparing me to "what the Lord is doing?" It's worse than a Mormon telling me his church is the true church based on the "feeling" he gets from the Holy Spirit. If you are going to continue sending me this type of email, stop. I don't care to spend the time to read it. I have had enough of the Local Church, their guilt trips, and baseless claims.

Older brother:

I have no more time to waste on someone who can't recognize the Lord's hand even in His outward circumstances. There are too many ones out there who have a heart for the Lord

who are not self-deceived. See you in the New Jerusalem. Sorry about the 1,000 years. But of course that is just my religious thought.

The young brother who sent this to me falls under point 3 above and wishes to remain anonymous. Bill, if you are tempted to call this report another “fabrication,” you are welcome to call me. He told me that I could tell you his name. He also told me to tell you that he is greatly disheartened that you are working at the DCP and, thereby, propagating on a global scale the attitude exhibited in the older brother’s email. I believe that more people, like this young brother, need to speak out and tell their experiences. When my husband and I were able to face our fears and decide to stop being silent, we found that God supplied us with the strength to do so.

When there were systemic, long-term problems in Corinth, Paul wrote to everyone, not just the leaders, showing that he expected action from everyone. Actually, part of the problem in Corinth was that the leaders themselves had become issues (“I am of Paul”; “I am of Apollos”). In the case of the sinful brother who was involved with his father’s wife and was allowed to remain among them, Paul rebuked all of them (Everyman) for silently tolerating the sin and not doing the job of judging within the church. After they repented and did the right thing, Paul wrote and praised them:

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. (2 Cor. 7:11, NIV)

Some other translations (Amplified, English Standard, Wuest, Bible in Basic English) show plainly that the believers in Corinth were considered to be guilty of condoning the sin until they acted to correct the brother and, thereby, proved themselves guiltless. By correcting the brother, they made it clear that they were “free from sin in this business” (BBE). In other words, believers can be guilty of sin when they keep quiet in situations that require speaking up. Paul indicated in 1 Corinthians 5:11 that Everyman’s action was also necessary if a brother was a covetous man or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or rapacious.

### **To Take a Proper Stand**

It is also clear by Paul’s letter to the Corinthians that not everyone in the church took a proper stand with him regarding the sinful brother. The Bible says that the correction was done by “the majority” (2 Cor. 2:6, Gk.). In order to be able to say there is a majority, it is necessary to make a count of individuals. This means that the members in Corinth took a stand one way or the other, individually. Obviously, continued silence and inaction was a stand. Regardless, a majority did act, a count was made, and God had the fact that a majority existed recorded in the Bible for our learning.

I have become vocal, not because I need something for myself, but because truth matters, obedience to God matters, other people matter, and I want my one voice to be counted against the practices of the LC leadership. Obedience opens the door for God to work and for truth to prevail. In Corinth, when the majority acted, the sinful brother eventually repented and was restored.

Today in the LCs, we see the result of long-term silence. I hope former members will follow those in Corinth to stand up and be counted as voices of truth. (To see some ideas of what you can do to make your voice heard, see Appendix H.)

### ***The Christian Community***

I am thankful for those in the Christian community to date who have taken an interest in the LC situation and who have voiced their concerns. Some became vocal years ago at great personal cost (Jack Sparks and Neil Duddy), as the Local Church sued them mercilessly. Jim Moran had a website exposing some of the deeds of the Local Church. At his passing, the Local Church bought his website and expunged the material, turning his Internet address into a propaganda site for the

Local Church ([Azuma](#)). Walter Martin, who founded CRI, was vocal many years ago about the deviant beliefs and practices of the LC. (Hanegraaff, now in control of CRI, has reversed Martin's conclusions about the LC, and Martin is not alive to disagree. It appears that they have done this relying primarily on data presented by the LC, I suspect in Potemkin village fashion.) In recent years, Harvest House publishers stood up to the LC leadership and LC bully tactics and prevailed.

Regardless of these voices, the LC leadership today continues to make questionable assertions about the past and about the people who spoke up. For example, the *Journal* contains an explanation by the LC leadership about their reasons for taking legal action against others and the methods they employed to do so. (However, the Harvest House account contradicts these LC claims [[Harvest](#)].) The LC lawsuit against Harvest House brought the most public attention ever to the LC. The Open Letter by the 74 was one result of the increased awareness by the Christian community.

I hope that the voices from the Christian community will not fade but grow stronger. This is not the time for silence. If enough voices speak, truth will prevail for the benefit of many. I hope that some will write to those responsible for AFW and request that they respond properly to the matters I have raised in this letter.

## **CRI**

Those of you at CRI are in a unique place because you are outsiders who have the ear of the LC leadership. In my opinion, you are at a crossroads. You can continue your defense of the LC, or you can investigate the claims of former members like me, who believe that your research has failed to uncover the truth.

### **To Explain the *Journal's* Shortcoming**

Others I know who have read your LC article are asking how an "exhaustive six-year analysis of the Local Churches and the Living Stream Ministry" could have failed to discover that LC leaders habitually behave in ways such as those described in this letter. For me, it is doubly difficult to understand because I know you had in your possession at least one piece of evidence that should have alerted you to the need for further research into leadership practices. In October 2005, three weeks after the publication of my book, I received an email from CRI requesting that a complimentary copy of my book be sent to Elliot Miller for possible review in one of your media ministries. I mailed Mr. Miller a free book, and I never heard another word from CRI. One would think that your exhaustive six-year research, which began in 2003, would surely have required, at least, that a staff researcher would actually read the book that you requested and report on it to Mr. Miller. From my perspective, I find it unconscionable and irresponsible that he could have knowledge of its contents, even if it was only chapter one, and then, apparently without further follow-up, feel free to recommend the LC as an exemplary group of Christians. (It seems that those at DCP also had access to my book at the same time as you; because, approximately 30 minutes after your request for a free copy, I received a book order from a woman that I later learned was a DCP employee.)

You may say my account was isolated, anecdotal, and an exception to the norm. If so, I would like to see your research that supports such a claim; and it should be something other than the word of the LC leaders you were interviewing. Furthermore, even if I was the only one treated in this way, one is enough to provide a serious wake-up call according to Matthew 18:6. An organization that is headed by leaders who treat even one sheep as I was treated should never be described to the Christian community as one that is "in many ways an exemplary group of Christians." How can you represent that LC leaders, those who have a documented history of stumbling and despising God's sheep, are persons who have been "forged into the image of Christ to an inspiring degree"? For the reasons just described, the fact that you had my book in hand like a road sign pointing you to investigate in another direction is somewhat of an indictment of your research and conclusions.

Your blanket recommendation of the LC makes one wonder if you wanted to defend and promote the LC, regardless of facts.

### **To Awaken the Local Church Leadership**

The *Journal's* conclusion describes your prayer for an awakening throughout the counter-cult community to the same issues that you at CRI confronted concerning the LCs (Miller, 47). Since you have the ear of the LC leadership, will you ask them to consider the same questions that you faced, which I repeat below, but to do so concerning those whom they have mistreated?

1. How important is truth to them? Enough to admit that they were wrong?
2. How important is being right with God to them? Enough to ask forgiveness of people they have maligned for many years?
3. How important is the love of Christ to them? Enough to embrace in Christian fellowship people who they once distrusted and resented—despite the fact that many cultural and nonessential theological differences still exist between them?

In light of all I have written in this letter, it is fitting for the LC leadership to evaluate themselves in the light of the questions you asked yourselves. As you said concerning the counter-cult community, I say concerning the LC leadership: This seems like a critical crossroads for the Local Church. When animus drives ministry decisions and actions, everybody loses. Without an emphasis on restoration and reconciliation and a willingness to confess past sin and error, LC ministry is not New Testament ministry.

To date, I have never heard of the current LC leadership saying, “We were wrong,” or admitting their sins and asking forgiveness of those they hurt. I have been told that they have said a time or two in a general way, “We have made mistakes,” but they have not published what those mistakes were, nor have they publicly apologized to parties they have publicly maligned. Such acknowledgment and apology is long overdue. Surely those of you at CRI can understand how distressing your *Journal* issue would be to those of us who know this.

### **To Maintain Credibility**

After this article, I believe you are in a position to have your credibility as a research organization called into question by more people. Of course, maybe your reporting is not finished. After all, you said in reference to the LC splits in the 1980s, “Perhaps in some future issue we can address these matters, but they go beyond our scope here....” (Miller, 13, note 7). If you are not finished, and if truth really matters to you, then please follow through and devote a future special issue to the orthopraxy of the LC and its leadership in North America. This issue should cover more than the controversies in the 1980s. The largest split in the LCs in North America occurred in 2006, in the middle of your research period. As a result, there are now non-LSM LCs in both the United States and Canada (as is the case in other countries around the world).

I would expect that such a future issue would contain findings about LC orthopraxy and its impact on the lives of members. I would also expect that the coverage would be comparable, in cover prominence and quantity of content, as that given to LC orthodoxy in the recent issue. Obviously, this would necessitate research with these non-LSM LCs. It would also require interviewing persons like me, who have been publicly denounced by the LC leadership, and many other former members who have had their lives and families damaged by their experiences in the LC. I would hope that if such research showed that the LC should not be recommended to the public as an exemplary group of Christians, that you would be able to acknowledge once again, “We were wrong.” If you will not do such research and adequately report findings to the public, I pray that some other researchers in the Christian apologetics community will do so.

## **To Be Right with God**

What if you have given a clean bill of health to an organization which has hurt hundreds of God's little sheep? What if you have handed over more people to leaders who feel no compunction about leaving God's sheep scattered, sick, discouraged, and even with their faith shipwrecked? What if you have done something that will cause many more sheep to lose the health of their spiritual and psychological lives? (There are many who would tell you that this is exactly what you have done.) Doesn't the possibility of having to answer to God for this warrant your investigating and publishing a study on the orthopraxy of the LC leadership and the resultant fruit in the lives of the members? Today, you are declaring, "We were wrong," for not more thoroughly researching LC orthodoxy before you published your conclusions about the LC in the 1980s. Do you want to make a similar mistake now by failing to thoroughly research LC orthopraxy?

The doctoral dissertation by Morris Fred, that I mentioned previously, was written 40 years ago. Fred is an independent party who did long-term, primary, on-site research in the 1970s. Wouldn't that unbiased, scholarly dissertation, sponsored by an American university, be a significant piece of research material? Did you see it? That's just one example of the material that should be carefully studied before taking any position on LC practices. According to the book, *The New Cults*, Gretchen Passantino was aware of the split in the Far East that Fred discusses, so splits in the U.S. should be of particular interest to her (Martin, 380).

## **For Those Inside the Local Church**

### ***The Local Church Leadership***

#### **To Repent Individually**

Throughout this letter, I have referred to those of you who are LC leaders as a collective, because you only speak of yourselves as a blended, corporate "we"; however, the Bible does not say that you will be judged by God as a blended collective. Each of you will stand before Him alone to be judged for whatever you did in your body. You, not the brother you followed in "blending," will be accountable to God; hence, you as an individual would be wise to consider your ways and repent for your own unrighteous deeds now, both to God and to others you have hurt.

For God will bring every deed to judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.  
(Ecc. 12:14)

For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10)

#### **To Consider Your Ways**

In the Bible, God has very strong words for leaders who hurt His sheep:

The weak you have not strengthened, and the sick one you have not healed, and the broken one you have not bound up, and the one that was driven away you have not brought back, and the lost one you have not sought; but with strength and rigor you have ruled over them. (Eze. 34:4)

Thus says the Lord Jehovah, Indeed, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My sheep at their hand and stop them from feeding the sheep, and the shepherds will no longer feed themselves; but I will deliver My sheep from their mouth so that they may not be food for them. (Eze. 34:10)

And as for you, O My flock, Thus says the Lord Jehovah, I will judge between one sheep and another, *between* the rams and the male goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture and trample down the rest of your pasture with your feet and drink the clear

water and foul the rest with your feet? Meanwhile My flock must feed on what is trampled by your feet and drink what is fouled by your feet. Therefore thus says the Lord Jehovah to them, It is I who am about to judge between the fat sheep and the thin sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted all the weak with your horns until you scattered them abroad, I will rescue My flock, and they will no longer be prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. (Eze. 34:17–22)

Therefore thus says Jehovah the God of Israel concerning the shepherds who shepherd My people, You have scattered My flock and driven them away and have not visited them; I will visit upon you the evil of your deeds, declares Jehovah. (Jer. 23:2)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you go about the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte; and when he is becomes *one*, you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as yourselves. (Matt. 23:15)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed graves, which outwardly appear beautiful but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matt. 23:27–28)

The New Testament warns leaders not to lord it over God's sheep but to feed them. The pattern for anyone who wants to shepherd God's people is the great Shepherd of the sheep, the One who fed the sheep and served them by laying down His life for them.

I ask those in LC leadership today, "What has happened to you? The sheep trusted you. How could you have done these kinds of things? How could you have cut off people that love Jesus? How could you have pushed, shoved, and bruised other sheep and still believed that you were serving God? How can you continue to do these kinds of things in the name of Christ? Why won't you even attempt mutual repentance and reconciliation?"

There is no question that such repentance and reconciliation (mutual restoration of harmony and fellowship) will happen sooner or later—if not in this life, then in that which is to come. I beg you to consider your ways now.

### **To Listen to Paul and Watchman Nee**

You seem to believe that, regardless of how you have treated God's sheep in this life, you will hear, "Well done," and be invited to sit at table with Christ in His kingdom because you held true to your "vision." You may cling to your belief that others, not you, will be left standing outside the wedding feast in darkness, weeping and gnashing their teeth for a thousand years. You could be right, but please consider the possibility that you could be wrong and that you could be found without a wedding garment. Are you willing to take this risk? Why not be cleansed and reconcile with your brothers and sisters now?

Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousneses of the saints. (Rev. 19:7–8)

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, cleansing *her* by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:25–27)

As believers, we should be cleansed from every defilement. Christ's bride is holy and without blemish, because she has made herself ready, clothed in the righteousness of the saints. I pray

you will make the choice to repent and be cleansed from your sins against so many of the Lord's children.

Since you claim to follow Watchman Nee, let me remind you about another of his teachings on delegated authority:

We are too prone to err. Accordingly, whenever we do err, let us immediately acknowledge that it is our own error. Then we will not misrepresent God and give the evil one any ground, nor will we fall into darkness. If we confess first, then God will not need to defend Himself and we shall be delivered from falling into His governmental hand. (Nee, *Spiritual*, 149)

## **AFW**

### **To Demonstrate Credibility**

I have shown you that Benson Phillips, Ray Graver, and Joe Davis were involved, to varying degrees, in bad leadership practices. Some of the matters related to me and my family covered in this letter are unresolved to date because Benson Phillips has not been willing to address them. Also, I have shown that the way you handled the Lyndol Butler matter is unrighteous; it remains to be seen whether you will make that situation right.

Benson Phillips, Ray Graver, and Joe Davis are still in leadership several decades after the events described in this letter. Their ungodly practices of many years ago naturally cause one to wonder how many more similar things they may have practiced in the years that followed, and how many more they will practice in years to come. I have heard personal testimonies from former members about unrighteous treatment by Benson and Ray. How many other leaders have followed their pattern? Every leader should have a "good conscience, so that in the matter in which [they] are spoken against, those who revile [their] good manner of life in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Pet. 3:15–16).

Clearly, it is incumbent upon you at AFW to address publicly the matters I have brought to your attention, starting with your AFW Judgment. It is also incumbent upon you to publish your findings concerning the truth or falsity of the accusations that I have made against your co-workers. Why? In the words of Hank Hanegraaff, "because Truth matters." If leaders don't obey the Word of God and if they lie, they cannot be trusted. They should be corrected before all. If leaders are willing to disobey the Word of God, and will not repent when confronted, the sheep are not safe. Surely, the reports I have presented about your co-workers rise to a greater level of seriousness than the account that Lyndol Butler gave to you about me.

Since you were willing to condemn publicly my credibility in the way you did, you should be willing to condemn publicly, in the same way, the ungodly behavior of your co-workers and fellow leaders. If you are not willing to do so, this will speak loudly about your own lack of credibility, your hypocrisy, and your ungodly motives. Please know that I do not expect you to act without adequate investigation, even though that would be fair, considering the way you took action against me.

### **To Honestly Investigate**

As for investigating, you can talk to your co-workers, Benson, Ray, and Joe. (It's obviously too late for you to contact Don Looper or Witness Lee, because they are deceased.) Kerry Robichaux is one of your co-workers, so you can easily talk to his wife. You can also contact Don Rutledge. You can also examine the transcript of Benson's words in the 2005 Winter Training. You can study all the documents presented on the Internet that are related to these accounts. You can talk to Lanell Allen, who also witnessed the events in the 1990s and wrote a letter to Benson about them. (By the way, Lanell recently found out from her two nephews in the LC that they have "withdrawn" from her because she told them the truth about the bad behavior of the LC leaders they follow. These young men and their families will no longer associate with her because their standard for truth is

not the Bible alone but loyalty to the ministry of Witness Lee. I'm sure you think that she deserves this because she has been vocal about her LC experiences. If not, please see that this sad occurrence is corrected.) You can talk to me, my husband, and our son, Matt. There are others also. I appeal to you as fellow members of the body of Christ to come together with all involved parties for face-to-face fellowship in the light, along with some other believers as third-party witnesses to help facilitate communication. I and others would be more than willing for this.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who practices evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his works be reproved. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be manifested that they are wrought in God. (John 3:19–21)

The Bible says that we are “not to participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove [uncover, expose] them” (Eph. 5:11). There is no statute of limitations on exposing works of darkness. I hope that you will acknowledge that you still have a responsibility to determine the truth of these matters and, if your co-workers are found guilty, you have an obligation to censure them. They, then, have an obligation to admit publicly that they were wrong. You also have an obligation to address the AFW Judgment.

*Question #9: Will you ascertain for yourselves the truth about these accusations against your co-workers, and then publish your findings on the AFW website?*

*Question #10: In the interest of integrity, will you immediately post on the AFW website, next to the AFW Judgment, both this letter and my letter to Lyndol?*

*Question #11: Will you post a public repentance for the unrighteous way you handled the Lyndol Butler matter and for the false accusations and judgment you made concerning me?*

### **To Respond in a Timely Manner**

Please respond within three weeks, telling me that you intend to address the matters I have raised. Also, please tell me, in brief, how you intend to proceed, as well as in what time frame. If you do not plan to address these matters, please extend me the courtesy of saying so. I will post your response, or a statement that you did not respond, on the Internet, and also inform other interested parties. Because of my previous experience with the LC leadership, I realize that your response may be silence. I am very familiar with your wall of silence, as are many others. It is hard for me to believe you will question or correct your co-workers, because you hold the same leadership beliefs as they do, and because you have taken on the job of defending them. If you will not respond as you should, then I ask this question of you:

*Question #12: Do you have Christian integrity or, against the commands of the Bible, are you practicing prejudice and partiality by treating people (your co-workers and me) differently according to who they are (having respect of persons)? (1 Tim. 5:21; Jas. 2:1)*

Based on history, I am concerned that you will choose the path of silence or some other path rather than a straightforward, honest approach to what I have written. If I am right about this, others will also see further proof of my claims about the LC leadership dynamic. You now are in a position to show before many witnesses whether or not truth really matters to you, whether or not my claims about your leadership practices are true, and whether or not you have the testimony of a good conscience.

If you choose to practice prejudice, partiality, and hypocrisy, how can you expect the Christian community to buy into the claim of the *Journal* that you are “in many ways an exemplary group of Christians” who “have been forged into the image of Christ to an inspiring degree?”

My appeal is that you take the contents of my letter seriously and that you and your co-workers take the steps that are needed to clear your consciences. Appendix A contains a compilation of the specific questions I have asked you in this letter. I, and others, will be waiting to see how you three brothers, Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, and Dan Towle, respond.

A sister in Christ with a faithful word,

Jane Carole Anderson

Enclosure: Open Letter to Lyndol Butler

## Appendixes

### Appendix A: Restatement of Questions Posed to AFW in this Letter

The following questions were presented to you in the text of this letter:

- Question #1: *Upon what do you base your 30-year knowledge of my heart? Is Benson Phillips the source of your information?*
- Question #2: *What evidence do you have that I have a “history of distorting events”?*
- Question #3: *Where in my post did I say angrily (inveigh) that the brothers leading the local churches regularly engage in a global power struggle?*
- Question #4: *Has my book had such an unwanted impact on your membership that you needed to find some way to cast doubt on my credibility?*
- Question #5: *Did Lyndol discover my Internet post by himself? In other words, did someone tell Lyndol Butler about the Internet post and solicit the letter from him, or did he find it and write the letter entirely on his own?*
- Question #6: *Is the account in Don’s post a false rumor about Benson Phillips?*
- Question #7: *Are the accounts in Matt’s posts false rumors about Benson Phillips? If you think so, clarify exactly what is false.*
- Question #8: *Because Benson has continued, for over two decades, to accuse me falsely, as a single witness against me, I am requesting that those of you at AFW come together with some other parties who are not members of the LC, along with Benson Phillips and me, in order to make a thorough investigation and ruling about all of his accusations. Will you do this?*
- Question #9: *Will you ascertain for yourselves the truth about these accusations against your co-workers, and then publish your findings on the AFW website?*
- Question #10: *In the interest of integrity, will you immediately post on the AFW website, next to the AFW Judgment, both this letter and my letter to Lyndol?*
- Question #11: *Will you post a public repentance for the unrighteous way you handled the Lyndol Butler matter and for the false accusations you made concerning me?*
- Question #12: *Do you have Christian integrity or, against the commands of Christ in the Bible, are you practicing hypocrisy and partiality by treating people (your co-workers and me) differently according to who they are (having respect of persons)?*

## Appendix B: Post #322 About Benson Phillips' False Witness 1977–1992 (M. Anderson)

10-24-07, 05:23

**Matt  
Anderson**  
Forum Deacon

#322

Reminder...

Posts: 2,152  
Member Since:  
Dec 2005

I've brought this summary to the top of this thread after Hope's post on the "negative speaking" thread about Steve Smith's problems. As a reminder, I have made links to all of the posts I made in the past that document what happened when two marriages failed (including Steve's). Since Steve's sexual problems were left covered and the wife in another marriage was susceptible to an affair, Steve was able to seduce her and a new marriage resulted after the original marriages fell apart.

This is the fruit because serious sin was covered and not addressed properly

Summary of Events:

*Act 1 - Trying to Address Benson regarding two failing marriages (Covers Post 1 to 12)*

*Act 2 - Trying to Establish Benson's Hearing by involving others (Covers Post 15 to End)*

There are two posts 13 & 14 that are part of an "Intermission" between Act 1 & 2

Summary of Posts:

Post 1 - Introduction

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=212753&postcount=154>

Post 2 - Introduction & Letter - John Anderson to Benson Phillips

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=213264&postcount=161>

<http://laymansfellowship.com/public/Letter1-19901215-JohnA2BensonP.pdf>

Post 3 - Preface to Events of 1990/1991

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=213388&postcount=162>

Post 4 - Context for Events of 1990/1991

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=213869&postcount=163>

Post 5 - Note to Reader

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=213872&postcount=164>

Post 6 - More Context & Summary of Events

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=214745&postcount=184>

Post 7-8 - Letter - Jane Anderson to Benson Phillips - Cover & Section I, II & III

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=215506&postcount=187>

Post 9 - Letter - Benson Phillip's reply to John Anderson

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=215835&postcount=208>

Post 10 - My Partial Analysis of Benson's Letter

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=215837&postcount=209>

Post 11 - Letter - Jane Anderson to Benson Phillips - Attachments

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=215888&postcount=211>

Post 12 - Letter - Benson Phillips to John & Jane Anderson (re: not attending 10/5/1991 gathering)

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=217152&postcount=222>

Post 13 - Intermission 1 - Mock Letter - Matt Anderson to Benson Phillips

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=217355&postcount=226>

Post 14 - Intermission 2 - Matt Anderson's broken arm, surgery and giant-cell tumor

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=218990&postcount=227>

<http://thebereans.net/forum/index.php/topic,8826.msg245603.html#msg245603>

Post 15 - Cover Letter to Witness Lee for Copy of Letter from Jane Anderson to Benson

Phillips

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=221505&postcount=229>

Post 16 - Letter - Jane Anderson to Others from Texas to encourage Benson's Hearing

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=221505&postcount=229>

Post 17 - Cover Letter to Joe Davis & Wife for Copy of Letter from Jane Anderson to Benson Phillips

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=226124&postcount=235>

Post 18 - Cover Letter to Don Looper for Copy of Letter from Jane Anderson to Benson Phillips

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=226125&postcount=236>

Post 19 - Letter 2 - John Anderson to Benson Phillips

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=226126&postcount=237>

*\*\* New - Final Package from Nell to Texas Region Elders*

Post 20 - Cover Letter from Nell

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=239405&postcount=258>

Post 21 - Final Package including letter from Jane Anderson to Benson, Summary of Events, Benson's reply (10/23) to John Anderson's June 4, 1992 letter, John Anderson's reply to Benson's October 23, 1992 letter.

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=239405&postcount=258>

## Appendix C: Post #1 About Benson Phillips' False Witness in 2005 (M. Anderson)

02-25-06, 22:30

#1

Matt Anderson  
Forum Deacon

 The Thread of Gold Chronicles - The Holy Sisters and Benson Phillips

The Thread of Gold Chronicles - The Holy Sisters and Benson Phillips

Posts: 2,152  
Member  
Since: Dec  
2005

[Note: the phrase "Holy Sisters" was a term that Phillip Lee, Witness Lee's son, and director of LSM business at the time, used in the late 1970s to refer to three sisters in Anaheim, who later were labeled as rebellious. In 2005, Benson publicly referred to these sisters as the "Holy Sisters." ]

### PREFACE

Special Note to Local Church members: It can be shown that what Benson said at the 2005 winter training concerning my mother and others is false.

Here is the applicable teaching from the Word on how an accusation against an elder (in this case, against Benson for speaking falsely) should be made:

1 Timothy 5:17-21 - Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of my mother's book, *The Thread of Gold*, ([www.thethreadofgold.com](http://www.thethreadofgold.com)) there has been a significant amount of communication among those who have met (or continue to meet) with the Local Churches of Witness Lee. There have been a number of inquiries about various historical details relating to key events over the past 30-plus years.

Due to the practices of the Local Church leadership, many details about events have been covered over and the facts are not known.

This chronicle addresses matters related to the events that occurred in 1977 to which Benson Phillips recently referred in the 2005 winter training.

### BACKGROUND

1. In Chapter 1 of *The Thread of Gold*, an elder (aka Dan Williams) "dealt" with my mom as part of a "sister's rebellion" in 1977 in Houston, Texas. (The terms, "sister's rebellion" and "sisters' flow" have been used interchangeably over the course of the past 29 years when referring to what happened with some sisters during that period of time.)

2. In the 2005 winter training, Benson Phillips referred to *The Thread of Gold* and the "dealing" that occurred against the author (my mother) in 1977.

3. Benson Phillips bore false witness in the 2005 winter training when he spoke about this matter.

4. Benson Phillips' statements resulted in members of the body of Christ beginning to ask questions. Their questions led to the uncovering of additional facts regarding the events of 1977.

#### CONTENTS OF THIS CHRONICLE

##### POST #1

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152100&postcount=2>

- A. Excerpt from Benson Phillips' Message from the 2005 Winter Training
- B. Questions Resulting from Benson's Message
- C. Answers, Discoveries, and Conclusions Resulting from These Questions

##### POST #2

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152101&postcount=3>

- D. Open Letter to Benson Phillips Regarding Offenses Against the Body of Christ, of Whom I Am a Member

##### POST #3 - #9

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152102&postcount=4>

##### POST #4

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152103&postcount=5>

##### POST #5

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152104&postcount=6>

##### POST #6

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152105&postcount=7>

##### POST #7

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152106&postcount=8>

##### POST #8

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152107&postcount=9>

##### POST #9

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152108&postcount=10>

- E. Supporting Emails and Phone Calls Between Some of Those Involved in the Events of Memorial Day Weekend, 1977

##### POST #10

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/showpost.php?p=152109&postcount=11>

- F. My Questions

## Appendix D: Post #49 About Benson Phillips and Titus Chu (J. Anderson)

07-23-2008, 07:28 PM	#49
<p><b>Thankful Jane</b> Member</p> <p>Join Date: Jul 2008 Location: Plano, Texas Posts: 209</p>	<p></p> <p>Quote:</p> <p>Originally Posted by <b>Ohio</b> </p> <p><i><b>Hope</b>, thanks for confirming <b>Aron's</b> view that the "West Texan" had the patience and strategy to out maneuver TC. It might have taken him 30 years, but he did it. Knowing TC, this is just incredible. Part of his strategy was to make this a confrontation between "one man" and "all the blendeds." As a friend of mine once naively said, "all the brothers are one except that TC."</i></p> <p><i>Btw, I also at one time heard a lot of talk about another "West Texan" who could never make it to the White House. 😊</i></p> <p>It is no accident that there are so many Blendeds who are Texans. Benson built his base out of loyal brothers and took many of them with him to Anaheim. Actually, Texans were placed all over the country through migrations.</p> <p>I still remember being surprised to learn in the late 80s about the struggle between Benson and Titus over the Local Church in Cedar Rapids. Benson placed an elder there from OKC (an LC in his region containing a lot of Texans) and was maneuvering to bring that LC under the control of his region. There were some in Cedar Rapids who were being helped by Titus.</p> <p>The brother who was sent there by Benson later told my husband and me about the struggle he witnessed and the things he heard behind the scenes that were said about Titus. He was totally repulsed by this and by the competition for control over that LC. He left the LC shortly after this.</p> <p>Others might have some awareness of this and know more details. I just heard about this in one conversation many years ago. I was totally stunned that there was this kind of fighting over an LC and that Benson did not think well of TC. I just couldn't imagine there was this kind of struggle among brothers. Who could ever have imagined what was going to grow up from those ugly little seeds? Yes, Benson's maneuvering activities concerning Titus have some pretty deep roots.</p> <p>I once heard that sibling rivalry in a family is usually due to one or more parents showing favoritism. The children compete with one another for the favor of the parent(s). It is plain that the relationship between Lee and all his LC leader children fueled this kind of behavior.</p> <p>Benson was definitely the most patient, and he certainly knew how to position and use other people for achieving his longterm goals.</p> <p>Lee preached oneness, but his ways sowed division.</p> <p>Thankful Jane</p>

## Appendix E: AFW Judgment (Buntain, "Statement")

### A Statement by Lyndol Butler

*"A False Witness... and One Who Injects Discord Among Brothers"—Proverbs 6:19*

Over the past three years, a small group of former members of the local churches have banded together to use the Internet to spread many false rumors against the co-workers serving in the Lord's recovery. While it saddens us to see those who were once among us mired in such unhealthy speaking, it should not surprise us. The fallen human mind under the influence of the father of lies ([John 8:44](#)) has a nearly inexhaustible ability to manufacture false accusations. The Lord's word in [Matthew 16:18](#) that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" against the church clearly shows that the church is the ultimate object of Satan's attack (see also [Eph. 4:12-16](#) and notes). This attack is carried out by spreading death through speakings that produce questionings ([1 Tim. 1:4](#)). We therefore need to discern whether speakings bring us into life or into death (see Brother Bill Lawson's contribution entitled "[Scriptural Points of Fellowship—Reviewing the Crucial Need to Abstain from Death and Partake of the Tree of Life](#)" on this site). May we all choose life and flee death ([Gen. 2:9](#); [3:1-6](#); [Num. 6:6-12](#); [Deut. 30:19](#); and notes).

It would be both impossible and unprofitable to rebut every slanderous allegation, either on this site or in other forums. What we present here is merely an example to help the saints be enlightened that they should not read or listen to such reports. In 2008, Jane Anderson, a sister who left the Lord's recovery thirty years ago, posted a narrative in which she claimed that Titus Chu had been made the subject of "behind the scenes" accusations because Benson Phillips "was maneuvering to bring" a local church "under the control of his region." According to Jane's account, the brother who told her this was so offended that he left the church life. However, the following statement from the brother she claims as her source belies her account of accusations, maneuverings, and personal kingdom building on the part of Benson Phillips:

September 1, 2008

Dear Brothers,

My name is Lyndol Butler. I recently became aware of the following report posted on the Internet by Jane Anderson concerning an event of which I have direct knowledge. In it Jane says:

I still remember being surprised to learn in the late 80s about the struggle between Benson and Titus over the Local Church in Cedar Rapids. Benson placed an elder there from OKC (an LC in his region containing a lot of Texans) and was maneuvering to bring that LC under the control of his region. There were some in Cedar Rapids who were being helped by Titus.

The brother who was sent there by Benson later told my husband and me about the struggle he witnessed and the things he heard behind the scenes that were said about Titus. He was totally repulsed by this and by the competition for control over that LC. He left the LC shortly after this.

I am the brother referred to in the second paragraph of Jane's account. I can say with certainty that her account is factually wrong on nearly every point:

1. There was no group meeting at the church in Cedar Rapids; there were a few saints living in Cedar Rapids who met with the church in Iowa City.
2. I was not sent to Cedar Rapids by Benson Phillips; I moved there for a job.
3. I did not move there from Oklahoma City; I moved there from Kansas City.
4. I never witnessed Benson maneuvering to control Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, or anywhere else.
5. I did not witness any struggle between Benson and Titus; in fact, Benson called me with concerns that Titus had expressed to him about me while I was in Cedar Rapids.
6. I did not leave the church because I was repulsed by things that were said behind the scenes about Titus. I did not hear such things from Benson or others. Rather, I left because of an offense related to the distorted report Titus had given to Benson concerning me.

During my few visits with those associated with Jane Anderson, I witnessed gatherings that were full of profitless, negative talk. It is clear to me that Jane's deep personal bitterness over her perceived mistreatment may have caused her to invent this false "history" and to falsely ascribe ulterior motives to Benson Phillips. Even though she did not directly name me, I do not want my silence to lend any credence to her fabrication.

I have since returned to the church life, for which I am deeply thankful to the Lord. The brothers received me without reservation.

Praise Him,

Lyndol Butler

Jane Anderson's account of Lyndol Butler's experience is typical of many Internet posts concerning the local churches, brothers in the churches and Living Stream Ministry. While they claim insider knowledge of much import, they can be charitably characterized as propaganda advancing their authors' varied agendas. In these posts the authors' own subjectivity is often presented as objective fact. In Jane Anderson's account, the "facts" are wrong and the conclusions she draws based on her errant history are more than false. Yet posts like hers pass for truth in certain Internet circles and her allegations are uncritically accepted by like-minded proponents of unfounded and sometimes fanciful conspiracy theories. The tragic outcome of these posts is the deception of innocent ones. Sadly this can be the result even when brothers who know the truth speak up, as Lyndol has done.

Jane Anderson has harbored personal enmity against the local churches in general and against Benson Phillips in particular for more than 30 years. She has a history of distorting events to fit her own imaginative narrative. In this post, she freely assigns maleficent motives to brothers' assumed activities even though her portrait of events is fabricated and she obviously has no direct knowledge of the motives of anyone involved. Anderson inveighs that the brothers leading the local churches regularly engage in a global power struggle and that Benson Phillips sent a brother to Cedar Rapids to further his personal interests in this conspiratorial tale. As Lyndol Butler's testimony demonstrates, nothing could be further from the truth. Jane Anderson should not be considered to be a credible source by any objective observer.

## **Appendix F: An Open Letter from the Church in Los Angeles to the Brothers and Sisters of the Church in Hong Kong (Chang)**

October 12, 1970

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We have recently seen a translation of a letter written and published by Brother James Chen to the saints of Hong Kong, in which it is alleged that Brother Witness Lee is “establishing his own totalitarianism by means of the structure of his own work to control the meetings in various places, and that there is a “centralized control of both workers and finance”, As the elders of the church in Los Angeles, where Brother Witness Lee has done and continues to do much work, we wish to testify that this is a naked lie and a gross deception. Brother Lee absolutely does not control the meeting here and is not even aware of many matters of the church life. While we greatly value his fellowship and frequently seek his counsel, we can testify before the Lord that from the very beginning of the church here, he has never held or kept anything in his hand. As for finances, there is absolutely no kind of centralized control. It is a fact that Brother Lee knows very little of what transpires in the church here in regard to finances and exercises no control.

We also wish to testify as co-workers together with Brother Lee that there is no kind of structure, organization, or any control in the work. We work and move together in prayer, in fellowship, and by the guidance and presence of the Lord. Sometimes a burden for a move in the work is initiated and voiced not through him, but through us, and he frequently seeks our counsel and fellowship before acting.

We give this testimony with the earnest prayer and desire that innocent children of God will not receive these slanderous reports regarding a servant of the Lord without becoming aware of the facts of the case. The fact is that these reports are absolutely ungrounded and untrue. We are witnesses to this. The Lord will vindicate Himself and His servant.

Yours in the Lord Jesus,

Samuel I-Lung Chang  
William E. Mallon  
John C. Ingalls  
James Barber

## **Appendix G: Quotes from Morris Fred's Research on the LC in the Far East**

The following selected quotes are taken from "Ritual As Ideology in an Indigenous Chinese Christian Church" by Morris Fred:

In general, those who left attacked Lee's manipulation of power within the church as well as other personal behavior. In addition, much attention was paid to what were considered heretical ideas and strange developments in the church ritual after the split. On the other hand, supporters of Lee concentrated on many of the dissidents' desire for personal status that led them to forsake the only true church. (198–199)

Despite the different information supplied by each group, there are certain points of agreement regarding the dispute. All parties noted that it was tragic and upsetting and had an adverse effect, during its duration, on church growth and unity. Many of the individuals who left the church ranked high in the leadership hierarchy of the church. Because of this, there was much confusion among the brethren regarding the reasons for the conflict. (199)

Moreover, while the dispute in Taiwan has been finalized and the situation among the various parties is somewhat stable, its effects still linger in Hong Kong. There it has taken on even more drastic aspects, with groups opposing Witness Lee "occupying" church buildings and forcing Lee to turn to the courts for resolution. Given this world view of the brethren, one can imagine the effect of taking spiritual disagreements to secular courts for resolution. (200)

Witness Lee maintained close scrutiny and control over all the co-workers, viewing the relationship as one similar to that between father and children. Time and again various informants recalled the strictness with which Lee directed them in their early training. (200–201)

In stating the three reasons for his own leaving of the church, one ex-worker in the Local Church was able to summarize the basic points of disagreement between Lee and the dissidents. They were: church ground, preaching, and positional authority. (201)

Nevertheless, several of the co-workers and elders had been impressed with Sparks [T. Austin Sparks] and began meeting together to read the latter's works. The core of this group was at the Third Assembly Hall. When Lee discovered that such meetings were taking place, he was very angry with the culprits. He felt that they had been meeting behind his back and in doing so were challenging his authority as church apostle.

In addition several of the co-workers heeded Sparks' advice to begin preaching among Christians of other denominations. They were either reprimanded or relieved of their positions as co-workers. Moreover, to insure that those sympathetic to Sparks' ideas would not be able to disseminate them among other church brethren, Lee began to demand that all speakers for the church follow an outline distributed by Lee instead of using their own ideas. To many of them this contradicted the notion that preaching should be spontaneous, according to the direction by the spirit. (203)

The first group of arguments which we will examine regard the person of Witness Lee himself. Several instances were noted in which the integrity of Lee was questioned. One dealt with finances with the church; the other with Lee's personal moral standards. It should be noted here that this information comes exclusively from those who left the church and there is little information

regarding this aspect on the other side. Nonetheless, it was reiterated by several sources (without coaching or leading questions by me). (204)

Lee's reputation was not enhanced by his marriage to a sister whose previous simple appearance soon changed to one affected by jewelry, make-up, and a fancy coiffeur. The remarriage within one year of the death of his first wife was considered in bad taste and some members began to complain that Lee, who often expounded on the need to de-emphasize matters of the flesh, had perhaps lost his spirituality. A church sister noted that this opposition had been countered by reference to the consequences of Aaron's and Miriam's criticism of Moses' marriage, the former was stricken with a skin disease. The analogy suggested that like Moses, Lee was only responsible to the Lord and no one had the right to interfere with his personal decision. This argument reflected the view that Lee as modern day apostle of Christ held a position above the rest of the members and was thus responsible only to God for his actions.

In the area of finance, a second problem arose when large sums of money were given to Lee's son for investment purposes in the United States, whether for personal or church gain is disputed. When challenged for using church funds for private gains, Lee allegedly replied that money had been given to him personally by Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and that nothing illegal or immoral had occurred. (205)

Another case mentioned was that of a marriage between two church co-workers. Without seeking Lee's approval these two individuals were married. This apparently angered Lee. Whether he opposed the marriage or was merely angry because they did not first consult him is unclear. The result was that although the two initially remained within the church, their stipend as co-workers was cut in half and this caused them great difficulty. The brother who had introduced the couple was sent to Hwalien (on the east coast of Taiwan) as punishment; later, after helping Lee with a manuscript, he was recalled to Taipei. Here it was noted that one of the methods used by Lee in maintaining the loyalty of his co-workers was his control over their residence and other rewards. His closest followers were given the more prestigious positions in Taipei. Moreover, in the training meetings led by Lee, everyone had a set place according to how well they had performed the previous year. It was noted that Lee would sometimes move someone from the first to last row in one year, causing the individual to lose face in the eyes of his fellow workers. If an individual had done exceedingly well, he would be moved to the editorial room and placed in charge of church publications. (206–207)

One of the prime targets of those who disagreed with Lee was the reality of decision-making within the church. It was repeatedly pointed out that the ideal picture painted was one in which elders of a local church met to discuss problems, prayed together, and reached a consensus on action. However, it was maintained by these individuals that in actuality Lee and several elders and co-workers close to him made the decisions and presented them to a group of elders who were expected to offer their "Amens." The effect was that one could not clearly perceive Lee's direct role in the process of decision-making for the announcements and innovations were made only by his representatives among the elders. In 1960, Lee had gone to the United States where he began establishing churches with the main headquarters in Los Angeles. It was during this period of 1960–1966 that much of the rebellion against his authority was taking place in Taiwan. His means of maintaining control over the development of the church in Taiwan was through close correspondence with top lieutenants who as elders could control the meetings (Shr, 1970, 8). These men also informed Lee regarding activities deemed rebellious. (207–208)

The spheres of responsibility were confused, however, by the fact that several individuals held positions both as co-workers and elders in various local churches. Two cases relate the nature of this contradiction. Once the dispute began among members in the Taipei Church, the church in Tainan was confused and desired to maintain an independence. In letters sent to church headquarters, they requested that no one be sent from Taipei. Nevertheless, one of Lee's

lieutenants was sent to Tainan which led to dissension among the brethren there. This also tended to point out to the elders in Tainan that their independence from control by Lee was merely nominal. A further example involved a brother who before the split was considered by many to be a second in command to Witness Lee. He described the situation in Taiwan and noted that he was bothered by the fact that he no longer felt he could follow Lee. I heard a tape made by this brother in 1970. In it he said that he had a premonition that Lee might kick them out of the church:

In 1965 there was to be a special meeting in Taipei as Lee had returned again from the United States. (We) discussed what we would do if he kicked us out; what about our work and livelihood? Lee returned and pulled us to Taipei. I sat on the second row and felt all right, but Lee attacked me for doing bad things. I felt Lee misunderstood and wanted to talk to him about the problem, feeling that in personal matters we could compromise but not in spiritual matters. When I went to see Lee, he was very cold and didn't let me talk. Lee said I must leave but I didn't understand and thought perhaps he meant for me to leave the room. He can tell me not to be a co-worker but has no authority outside of my sinning for refusing to let me be an elder. But the Lord did not want me to argue. Lee said that as a friend, he thought it would be better for me to go to another church for I did not follow him. For example, he said that I didn't sing the songs he wrote. (I didn't realize that these hymns were doctrine.) I asked Lee to state publicly that I would be leaving and that since the house in back of the church was my own to wait until I found another before forcing me to leave. Then I thanked Lee for past help and said good-bye. The second night of the meetings, he didn't allow me to attend. Later he went south and told everyone so that I felt I could not return there although the brethren there wanted me to remain. At the time other brethren were also kicked out.

All of these events taken together paint a picture in which the ideal of local church autonomy and spiritual control of church life became clouded by the appearance of the absolute authority of Witness Lee in matters pertaining to church organization and doctrine. (209–210)

The effect of the split on church attendance was only initially devastating. Lee began to use his publications to legitimize his position. One of the prime means was the publication of materials regarding his successes in establishing churches in the United States, seen to be a manifestation of the Lord's favor to Lee. (213)

The effects of the split were not felt in Hong Kong until about 1967. By then, the splinter group had a base in Taiwan and the Philippines and members of this group went to Hong Kong for fellowship with brethren in the Local Church there. They were refused communion; there was apparently both physical and verbal altercation between opposing sides and the main assembly hall there was "occupied" (word used by Lee's supporters) by opponents of Lee (1970b). The incorporated name of Lee's group in Hong Kong is Christian Stewards (Lee has been accused of stacking the executive board of this group in his favor; Lu, 1973). (214–215)

## Appendix H: What You Can Do

If you want to get involved, here are some suggestions for you to consider.

Read the *Journal*:

You can buy a hard copy of the magazine at:  
<http://journal.equip.org/issues/we-were-wrong>

Or, you can get a less expensive PDF version of it at:  
<http://www.equipresources.org/site/apps/ka/ec/product.asp?c=mul1LaMNJrE&b=2537845&en=drJJLRPBIeLIJRNGKjIIIZPMJoITJUNxHhLZL4NJLrL5F&ProductID=762607>

Listen to a broadcast by Hank Hanegraaff about the LC:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugLJZA-UT1w>.

Write a letter to Hank Hanegraaff, the CRI president, and Elliot Miller, the Editor-in-Chief, of the Christian Research Journal:

Hank Hanegraaff and Elliot Miller  
Christian Research Institute  
P.O. Box 8500  
Charlotte, NC 28271-8500

Write a letter to Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, and Dan Towle at the Defense and Confirmation Project (DCP):

Bill Buntain, Dan Sady, Dan Towle c/o  
Defense and Confirmation Project  
LSM Campus  
2431 W. La Palma  
Anaheim, CA 92801

Participate in an Internet discussion forum:

<http://www.thebereans.net/forum2/forumdisplay.php?f=342>  
[www.LocalChurchDiscussions.com](http://www.LocalChurchDiscussions.com)

Post copies of any letters you have written to CRI or to LC leaders on these forums and other places available on the Internet, such as Wikipedia.

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