

## AN OPEN LETTER BY ALBERT ZEHR

Jan. 22, 1989

Dear Brothers,

Having participated in the church-life and in elder's fellowships with some of you for over fifteen years, I trust that something has been built up between us, and that this fellowship can be received in love and sincerity.

My concern for the present situation among us has become very heavy. The aspects which I list here as THE TRUTH are some of the factors which won my heart to give the past eighteen years of my life to the recovery. All of them were at some time declared and held among us. My observation is that while we may still be speaking these truths our present practice has sadly drifted. I have visited many churches in four continents during the past two years, and my decision to share these matters has come after more than one year of considering and praying about them. It seems to me that unless the Lord could have much mercy and rescue us, we have very little ground for considering ourselves other than a poor denomination.

I recognize that I owe a great debt to the recovery and have received much light and help from Bro. Lee. I feel I must however, be faithful to express what I see; in the fear of the Lord, but without fear or favor of man.

Please consider these matters soberly and objectively before the Lord.

### THE TRUTH vs OUR PRESENT PRACTICE

1. The WORD is our only supreme authority. All the saints should be encouraged to love it and to feel free to seek life and light from it, and to gain skill in handling and interpreting it.

OUR PRACTICE: The Word should be read in the Recovery Version and can be understood properly only with the use of the foot-notes and life-studies. No one would dare to suggest another view, nor could anyone see light beyond what has been given by "the ministry."

2. The MINISTRY is the dispensing of Christ into His saints for the building up of the church. All who minister life and the revelation of God's New Testament economy are ministers and have a part in this ministry.

OUR PRACTICE: In our present vocabulary and practice the "ministry" is Witness Lee and whatever he has written or says, and the way he says it. Anything written or spoken by another person, especially if he is not in the "recovery" is "old" or taking us backward.

3. SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY is endowed upon a person by the Lord. It will be perceived and realized in the saints and substantiated by the Lord. "We should never say so much as one word on behalf of our own authority; rather let us give people the liberty. The more God entrusts to us, the more liberty we grant people." Spiritual Authority by W. Nee, p. 121

OUR PRACTICE: In nearly every conference or training we observe a declaration of authority. Old Testament cases of disobedience are cited, death and negativism are ascribed to any who do not agree and respond positively. Is this not an insidious form of control?

4. THE CHURCH ground implies that we are open to receive and accept all genuine believers. We should not demand certain practices or separate those who have a different feeling about matters not of the "faith."

OUR PRACTICE: Those who have any reservation about any of our practices are "unclear", "do not see the vision" and remain outsiders. Our ways are "God given" and our practices are, "God ordained." This implicitly condemns all (those in the church or outside of it) who don't fully embrace them. In this way we have thoroughly isolated ourselves from all other Christians.

5. Do not SEPARATE or make a distinction between the saints who may hold a different feeling about matters of form or practice.

OUR PRACTICE: Those who express reservations about the latest way or practice are regarded as "old", "in death", "negative", "not clear", "pouring cold water", "blowing cold winds" and are set aside as far as the "Lord's up-to-date move" is concerned.

6. There should be OPEN fellowship, in an atmosphere which allows all saints to "speak the truth in love."

OUR PRACTICE: Speak about and report only the "positive." Support whatever is being promoted, speak well of it, even inflate the statistics; meanwhile ignore any fact or evidence which shows a weakness or a failure. Of course in this way we never have a failure. Loyalty and blind approval is prized while objectivity and honesty are strongly disapproved. Whoever stays "positive", and confirms everything is "in", and is often elevated, while those who speak their genuine concern are regarded as "negative", and "undermining" and soon privately and perhaps publicly condemned.

7. There should be no effort to ORGANIZE or UNIFY the churches.

OUR PRACTICE: Constant pressure is applied through trainings, videos, and slogans to push churches and saints to conform. Elders are belittled, as being "old", "ambitious", "big-speakers", and "undermining", if they do not bring their churches into conformity. LIFE LESSONS & TRUTH LESSONS are promoted as the only way to properly express the truth and help new believers.

(These are some of the aspects that caused me to leave the denomination years ago.)

8. Do not get involved in "HOW TO", or in the promoting of ways. The natural always wants to know "how to." This will only produce behavior and outward form. It is not the way of life. Life will issue from the abiding and this will produce organic fruit.

OUR PRACTICE: In recent months, messages and books are flooding us with "THE WAY TO..." There is a "way" and a "how to" given for whatever we do or say. The saints are learning now only how to behave but are put in the realm of policing others, especially the elders, so all freedom is lost.

9. The Lord's GOAL IS THE CHURCH. Whatever we do must be for the building up of the church. The ministry exists not to build up itself but the local churches. "If God's people could only see that the object of all ministry is the founding of local churches and not the

grouping of Christians around any particular individual, truth, or experience or under any particular organization, then the forming of sects could be avoided. We who serve the Lord must be willing to let go our hold upon all those to whom we have ministered, and let the fruits of our ministry pass into local churches governed entirely by local men." The Normal Christian Church Life by W. Nee, p 91.

OUR PRACTICE: There is very little time or energy for building up the local church. Time, money, and resources are constantly exhausted in order to defend, protect, supply, build up, and "meet the need" of the ministry by "serving the ministry in the ministry's way." Videos, conferences, trainings, and standing book orders have all become necessary to "keep current with the ministry."

10. We MEET in the name of the Lord. All the saints have the freedom to share as the Spirit gives them utterance.

OUR PRACTICE: Everyone is measured by whether they speak "the ministry." Truth Lessons, Life studies, and foot-notes are proper ways to speak or express anything. The safest way is just to read with little or no comment. Surely this is CONTROL, and must offend the headship of the One in whose name we meet.

In The Normal Christian Church Life, p. 92-93 Bro. Nee warns: "Whenever a special leader, or a specific doctrine, or some experience, or creed, or organization, becomes a center for drawing together the believers of different places, then because the center of such a church federation is other than Christ, it follows that its sphere will be other than local. And whenever the divinely-appointed sphere of locality is displaced by a sphere of human invention, there the divine approval cannot rest. The believers within such a sphere may truly love the Lord, but they have another center apart from Him, and it is only natural that the second center becomes the controlling one. It is contrary to human nature to stress what we have in common with others; we always emphasize what is ours in particular. Christ is the common center of all the churches, but any company of believers that have a leader, a doctrine, an experience, a creed, or an organization as their center of fellowship, will find that that center becomes the center, and it is that center by which they determine who belongs to them and who does not. The center always determines the sphere, and the second center creates a sphere which divides those who attach themselves to it from those who do not."

"Anything that becomes a center to unite believers of different places will create a sphere which includes all believers who attach themselves to that center and excludes all who do not. This dividing line will destroy the God-appointed boundary of locality, and consequently destroy the very nature of the churches of God."

Brothers I beg you, I plead with you, please consider objectively; is this not our case? Is this the reality of the vision that caught us, and is it still clear and pure? Is there a possibility that while we condemn, "poor Christianity", that we are like Laodicea, saying, "I am rich...and do not know that we are...poor and blind...?"

May the Lord find room in our hearts to extend His mercy, that we might repent. Perhaps we might be rescued and restored to His blessing.

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