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## Witness Lee: Oracle, Apostle, **God's Deputy Authority on Earth**

## **Local Church Leadership** A casual glance at the numerous publications on the cults will reveal that they are led by one or more persons who claim to be unique spokesmen (or spokeswomen), for God. Through

subtle, but deliberate means they will set themselves up into positions of unquestioned authority and responsibility. After gaining the trust and confidence of the group they will eventually become the final authority of it. The questioning of the group's leader and teachings are tantamount to actually questioning God. Witness Lee had such oversight of the Local Church movement. Lee claimed to have been directly appointed and commissioned by the Lord, and to have the authority to raise up apostles and appoint elders in every city as a modern-day apostle Paul. Lee also claimed for himself, and was recognized by his followers, to be the apostle of this age, God's deputy authority, and the oracle of God. Within the structure of the movement Witness Lee had no equal. Comparing Watchman Nee with Witness Lee, we should realize that we are dealing with two very different men. Although Nee himself embraced some unfortunate beliefs, he did not intend to take them to the extremes Lee has done. Watchman Nee, like Witness Lee, however, was prone to being authoritarian in character. Carefully consider comments by Watchman Nee

Consider very carefully these words: What a dangerous risk it is for God to set up for Himself authorities! How much He has to suffer if the delegated authorities that He set up have wrongly represented Him! But God is confident in the authority that He establishes. It is much easier for us to be confident in submitting to representative authorities than for God to be confident in setting them up. Since God is confident in handing over authority to man, are we still not confident in submitting to man? We should be confident in submitting to the authority which God is confident in

in the Local Church's edition of his book, Spiritual Authority, re-titled Authority and Submission. Members are expected to render a considerable obedience to God's deputy authorities.

establishing. If there is a mistake, it is not my mistake. It is the mistake of the authority. The Lord says that every person should be subject to the authorities over him. The difficulty is more on God's part than on ours. When God trusts, so can we. When God is confident about His trust, so should we be even the more.<sup>1</sup>

Some may say, "What happens if the authority makes mistakes?" If God dares to trust those entrusted as authorities, then we dare to submit. Whether the authority makes mistakes or not has nothing to do with us. In other words, whether the deputy authority is right or wrong is a matter for which he has to be responsible before the Lord directly. Those that submit to authority need only to submit absolutely. Even if they make a mistake through submission, the Lord will not reckon that as sin. The Lord will hold the deputy authority responsible for that sin. To disobey is to rebel....<sup>2</sup>

God's indirect authorities cannot submit to God's direct authority....<sup>3</sup> ....We cannot despise any deputy authority....The deputy authority is such a serious matter that if you offend him you get into trouble with God. It is impossible for you to reject light from

authority is to reject the Lord Himself. Only the foolish ones will want the deputy authority to fail. He who dislikes God's representative dislikes God Himself. Man's rebellious nature likes to submit to God's direct authority but reject God's appointed deputy authority....<sup>4</sup>

establishment of the deputy authority, and He annuls through the annulling of the deputy authority. God wants to maintain His deputy authority. Therefore we have only one way under the deputy authority, which is the way of submission.<sup>5</sup> ....It is only when the deputy authority obviously defies God's commandment and offends the Lord's person that we can refuse the deputy authority. Hence, this kind of word can only be

spoken under such a circumstance. Other than this, in any other circumstances we have to submit to the deputy authority. We must not fulfill submission by exercising rebellion.<sup>6</sup> Lee rose to a position of leadership within the movement during the forties and distinguished himself as a gifted leader and organizer. Former China missionary Leslie Lyall comments

But it appears that 1948 marked a turning point in Mr. Nee's church practices and the beginning of an hierarchical system of central control which differed little from the organization of denominational churches. There are those who believe that here we are witnessing the growing influence of Witness Lee, who later was to exercise such autocratic control over the churches in Taiwan.<sup>7</sup>

Watchman Nee biographer Angus Kinnear comments on the influence of Lee and the flair of organization that he began within the movement. But Lee was an activist and where Watchman as a profound Bible student, had laid doctrinal foundations Lee's more volatile temperament introduced something of the Shantung

The effect of so much energetic organization, however, meant that something of the earlier freedom in the Spirit began to be lost. A clock-in system was soon to be introduced at meetings which, together with a full index of believers' addresses, employment, family, etc., meant that your failure of attendance could be quickly followed up. The Lord's Table was 'fenced' and you were formally introduced and wore a badge with your name. No longer might you be accepted simply on your own testimony that you were born again and loved the

Christian connections and committal to the Meeting Hall churches was first carefully examined. And Watchman's advice to a brother in 1940: `Don't expect the Holy Spirit to be doing the same thing in Tsingtao as in Shanghai: give Him liberty', was soon to give place to regimentation imposed by a strong authoritarian hand at the centre [center] of the work. Witness Lee was careful of course to disown the concept of `organization', explaining that, like a cup containing drinking water, these arrangements were merely the vessels for communicating

In 1970, Asian church researcher and missionary Allen Swanson offered these brief but enlightning comments concerning Witness Lee and his role in the earlier Local Church movement in China, then known as *The Assembly Hall*.

The universal Church has but one office, that of the apostle. He stands above all churches and is accountable to none. Nor need the local church accept his advice. The original Assembly apostle was Watchman Nee. For the past twenty years Witness Lee has been head apostle and more recently another apostle has been ordained in Taipei. The work of the church at large belongs to the apostle. No other office carries this responsibility. He alone makes the final decisions regarding the ordination of all elders, deacons, and workers. He may exhort an erring church but has no inherent right to force his opinion upon anyone, just as Paul could exhort the Corinthian Church but could not compel them to accept his advice. 10 In intricate fashion, the Assembly Hall thereby interlaces every locality with an effective network of cells, cell leaders and overseers. Each leader is responsible to the one above him. For those who feel led of God to offer themselves for full-time service, the Assembly Hall grants two positions. Both are known only as "co-workers" (t'ung-kung). The highest ranking

co-workers are appointed and ordained directly by Apostle Lee. They may be transferred to other local churches only with Lee's permission. 11 Although individual Christians may and do participate in other Protestant functions, neither church recognizes or supports any other Protestant program, including evangelistic campaigns. Such isolation led to a serious rupture in the Assembly Hall in 1965. Other reasons included disagreement over the meaning of the church and the autocratic control of

Witness Lee. Although individual leaders had left the movement from time to time, this was the first major division, resulting in the exodus of over ten per cent of all the workers. The

Lee rose quickly to a position of leadership within *The Little Flock* movement in China during the forties. During the history of the Local Church, Lee has appointed elders to oversee each of the Local Church fellowships in the U.S. and around the world. These individual fellowships are self-governing, although not completely autonomous from the movement as a whole. Elders, most or all of whom are appointed by Lee, oversee the local church in their own city. These elders have the responsibility to direct the day-to-day affairs of the church, including doctrinal instuction, spiritual guidance, coordination of activities, and maintenance of church facilities. These elders wield tremendous influence over the lives of the membership under their control. Their primary responsibilities are to instruct doctrine and direct the church life in their localities as espoused by Lee.

In his publication, An Affirmation of the Proper Authority in the Body of Christ, Local Church apologist Andrew Yu defends spiritual authority as espoused by Watchman Nee and

Those who manifestly have more ministry, that is, more divine speaking, more divine words, more oracles, also are our spiritual authorities. God's authority is with His speaking, His words, His oracles. When a certain member perfects us, he becomes a spiritual authority over us. In the same principle, if a member manifestly has more ministry than we do, he is an

Witness Lee, based upon one's level of spiritual insight provided by God.

churches and building them up as the Body of Christ (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). 17

some messages, but to expound the biblical truths in a systematic and exhaustive way.<sup>21</sup>

honor and receive His direct leading given through the ministry of the apostles.<sup>27</sup>

directly appointed apostles.<sup>31</sup>

presence.<sup>38</sup>

What can we say?<sup>43</sup>

and rationalization of the Scriptures.

the body of Christ.

17. Ibid., 36. 18. Ibid., 37.

27. Ibid., 52-53.

ministry of Witness Lee is rejection of God! This, however, is exactly what Local Church members are taught and expected to believe!

servant of the Lord and "the ministry" referred to is Brother Lee, God's oracle on the earth today....<sup>33</sup>

biblical terminology takes on deeper, hidden meaning sometimes not available to those outside of the Local Church.

*Interpretation*, assesses the danger of biblical interpretation as espoused by Lee:

pledging their absolute loyalty to Lee. Comments included in that letter reveals the level of influence Lee has over the movement:

brothers will be required to justify this accusation at the judgement seat of Christ.<sup>34</sup>

authority to us. Among the perfecters, the one who perfects the most has the spiritual authority over the others. We are all being perfected unto the work of ministry and unto the function of prophesying. We must recognize those ahead of us in this work and function. We must recognize those with a manifestly greater ministry and submit to them. This maintains the organic order in the Body....We should submit to the one with the greater light and greater speaking. This enables all the ministering ones to share the same light and speak the same thing. Authority and submission here keeps the work in oneness, causes the work to be blessed, and fully releases God's riches with His work. Anything else is a frustration and, if unchecked, gives rise to rivalry and division. This kind of authority and submission saves us from spiritual pride and from all kinds of false speaking put forth to justify what in actuality is the failure or unwillingness to submit to those who manifestly have more ministry. It saves a person from being taken up with his own ministry, in violation of the organic order in the

Yu also presupposes that once a person becomes established as a spiritual authority over others, only God could remove that person from such a position of responsibility and authority. Recognize here that a system of checks and balances is non-existent on a human level.

where authority is corrupted, God is the One who deals with it, since He alone is the One who establishes it. It is not up to those under authority to scheme against it. Saul was

corrupted to the uttermost, but David always and with impeccability recognized Saul as God's anointed authority. In the same principle, the archangel Michael dared not to rebuke

Once a certain member is a spiritual authority to others, the fact can never be overturned. Their is no such thing as the revoking, over-throwing, or expiration of authority. In the case

Satan, but would only ask the Lord to do it (Jude 9). Satan still had his authority, even though he had already fallen. This case shows us the immutability of the spiritual principle that once a person is a spiritual authority over others, according to the divine arrangement and order he should never be overturned by those under him. Once a person is attested and

who are to be elders show themselves as the obvious ones by their growth in life. The eldership is not something forced or artificial. The proper ones manifest themselves as such, and thus have the approval of the saints. But becoming an elder is not merely a matter of having the approval of the saints. The approvedness of an elder must, in the end, be confirmed by the appointment of the apostles (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Thus, the authority of the elders is based on their spiritual maturity, their approvedness among the local saints, and their appointment by the apostles. Each aspect is equally important, and all three are necessary and essential to establish the elders' authority. It should be emphasized that the elders do not derive their authority or power from the members. The Scriptures make it very clear that the eldership is not a matter of being elected, but a matter of apostolic appointment. Elders cannot be voted in or voted out. The elders' approvedness among the saints does not indicate that any kind of vote is involved. Such approvedness is merely an initial manifestation of the saints' recognition of the elders' spiritual maturity. 16

The apostles' authority is, first of all, based on a commission from God. Paul referred to himself as "a called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1). Apostles are those sent by God with a divine commission to set up churches for God. They are ambassadors from God to the world for the carrying out of His purpose (1 Tim. 2:7, note 1). They are not self-appointed but are called by the Lord according to the will of God. According to their commission, they have the authority in God's New Testament government for establishing

The apostles are the leading members of the Lord's universal work to build up the Body of Christ. Their commission gives them the position to direct the work. The commission to establish and build up the churches also is a basis for the continuing relationship with the churches once they are established....They are the begetting father to the churches they establish (1 Cor. 4:15). And they are the chief joints of supply to the churches for their building up and perfecting (Eph. 4:11-12, 16). 19

and power of God, there will be spiritual fruit. The fruit of one's labors validates his commission.<sup>20</sup> The apostles not only have teaching authority, but they also have the authority to define doctrines and open up the truth (1 Tim. 2:7). There are many crucial doctrines in the Bible, such as those concerning the Triune God, the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the Spirit of God, and our human spirit. All of these doctrines need to be defined by the apostles. So, the apostles have the authority to discern and ascertain the truth concerning such doctrines. The apostles also have the responsibility to expound the truth. This does not mean merely to preach

someone is called to be an apostle, it will be manifested in the fruit of his labors. One who has God's commission will have God's authority and power. And when one has the authority

overseeing them, being a pattern to the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3). The elders should be the ones who advance most quickly in the perfecting work of the apostles. They imitate the apostles in person and work, and thus are able to take the lead properly among the local saints. These are the ones who should be confirmed as elders by apostolic appointment.<sup>22</sup>

The apostles have the authority to appoint elders in each locality (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), the local brothers who will take the lead among the local saints, shepherding, teaching, and

authority (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10)....The apostles have the authority to establish the churches an appoint the elders. From the very beginning, the local saints, including the elders, are under the perfecting hand of the apostles. Thus, the elders are not only appointed by the apostles but are also trained and perfected by them. The elders are to be those able to exhort according to the healthy teaching, which is the teaching of the apostles (Titus 1:9). They are not to teach anything that is different from the apostles' teaching (1 Tim. 1:3)....There should be a full spiritual oneness between the local elders and the apostles. The elders owe their appointment to the apostles, and because the apostles have raised them up and perfected them, they owe the apostles their spiritual authority and even their very self (Philem. 19). The apostles are the spiritual authorities of the elders....The apostles' spiritual authority over

the elders is clear. The elders are not independent of the apostles but are intimately connected to them organically in the relationship of authority and submission....Thus, the local

truth of the Scriptures. The apostles and the elders stand in an organic relationship of spiritual authority and submission to carry out God's economy.<sup>24</sup>

elders should submit to the apostles, and then their submission will become a pattern to the local flock. In this way, all the local churches can be built up together, in one accord, to be the full-grown Body of Christ that God desires. To say that once the churches are established, the elders and local saints are independent of the apostles, could not be further from the

Of course, the apostles, who are ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:2), are limited within by the Lord Himself as the Spirit.... As the apostles are one with the Spirit and are led by the Spirit, they are imitators of Christ. Because they are such, we should be imitators of them, since this makes us also imitators of Christ....Since the elders should submit to the apostles, and the local saints are to submit to the elders, the local saints will thus submit to the apostles indirectly. Hence, the apostles' authority over the local saints is indirect, rather than direct.<sup>25</sup> Local Church officials Ron Kangas and Kerry Robichaux, reacting to the defections of former church Local Church leaders in the late eighties, allow for some discretion on the part of each local church to deal with matters unique to their own locale. However, matters such as doctrinal instruction and the defining of truth are the sole responsibility the apostle(s) having oversight of the Local Church. Concerning many things related to its church life, a local church can and should get its leading directly from the Lord. When should the Lord's table meeting be held? What should be the schedule of meetings? What arrangements should there be for children's meeting? How should the financial affairs be managed? What verses should be recommended for morning watch? How should practical service be arranged and the meeting hall and grounds maintained? In these and other similar matters, a local church should get its leading directly from

spoke to the apostle John and then through him to the churches. Revelation makes this crystal clear. The revelation of Jesus Christ was made to John (v. 1), who then wrote "to the seven churches which are in Asia" (v. 4a)....The revelation was not given to the churches directly; it was given directly to John, who then wrote to the churches. Hence, the churches received the revelation indirectly through John. If the churches had not been open to receive John's ministry, especially his writings, they would not and could not have received this revelation from the Lord....Each church received its word, its leading, from the Lord through John. To reject John's writing was to reject the Lord's speaking, for the Lord's word was conveyed through John's writing. In this situation the Lord's leading was given through the apostle's ministry. The principle is the same today concerning certain aspects of the going on of the local churches. Often the Lord will lead the churches indirectly through the teaching and fellowship of the apostles....Paul's teaching and direction laid down certain governing

principles for the churches to follow in their going on according to the Lord's direct leading. Surely the Lord's direct leading of a local church will be in keeping with the principles laid down by His apostles. It is hard to imagine any church that rejected Paul's ministry going on with the Lord in a normal, healthy way. If we want the Lord's direct leading, we need to

These are strong and powerful admonitions to impressionable minds. They are certainly suspect, in light of the doctrinal perspectives espoused by Lee, to suggest that rejection of the

In Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord Jesus spoke a particular word to each of the seven churches. This word may be regarded as the Lord's leading for that church. But how was this word

given? How was it mediated? Did the Lord Jesus manifest Himself to each church directly, separately, and individually and then speak a word directly to that church? No! The Lord first

When we consider Witness Lee, the founder of the Local Church movement here in the United States, we see that he had set himself up as a unique spokesman for God, much in the same way as Jim Jones, David Koresh, and leaders of other groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Roman Catholic Church, have over the years. We ought to be more concerned about Witness Lee when we consider some of what he teaches as being from the Lord. This is why I feel compelled to speak about the beliefs and practices of the Local Church movement which he established in America. Lee himself claims to be a modern-day oracle of God, the deputy authority of God, and an apostle appointed and commissioned directly by the Lord. Lee speaks of his own revelatory role in the Local Church, citing the authority of his writings this way: If you have been listening to God in my speaking, you have been blessed. My speaking of these main, new revelations in the past twenty-five years has been the oracle of God....Thank the Lord for the main, new revelations that we have seen in the past twenty-five years. We received these revelations from God in his oracle through the speaking of His present ministry. Each one of the main, new revelations that we have seen in the past twenty-five years is the Word of God in the new light. If someone does have the oracle of God, he must have the light. Furthermore, whoever speaks for God in His oracle has a certain amount of divine authority. There is the deputy authority of God in His oracle....<sup>28</sup>

brought into a full realization of genuine intercession.<sup>30</sup> In the book entitled *A Timely Trumpeting and the Present Need*, we pointed out the different kinds of apostles. The first kind of apostle includes those like Peter, John, and Paul who were appointed directly by the Lord and constituted directly through the Lord's revelation. Other brothers like Timothy, Titus, and Silas composed another kind of apostle. They were not made apostles by the Lord directly, nor were they constituted by the Lord's revelation directly. They were produced by the Lord's directly appointed apostles. They were produced apostles, produced by Paul. A certain brother was told that there were seven apostles among us in the Lord's recovery. He went to a brother to get the list of these seven apostles.

When I looked at this list and considered the names, I realized that all of the seven were my students. They all learned of me. I am not likening myself to Paul, but the principle is the

In all fairness to Witness Lee, some of what is taught here on the matter of apostles is correct considering that the authors of the New Testament Scriptures wrote to first-century Christians during the infancy of the church. We must seriously question, however, whether there is biblical support to warrant the necessity of apostles today in the same sense that was found in the early days of the church, considering that the foundation of the church had already been laid (Eph. 2:20). Local Church writers fail to consider the historical context of the New

same. There are apostles who have been appointed directly by the Lord and have been constituted directly through the Lord's revelation, and there are apostles produced by the Lord's

All the messages that the Lord has been giving us are for the carrying out of His will. In this Life-Study we do not care for mere Bible teaching. We are concerned for the release of the present word of the Lord for His recovery. After reading this message, a strong echo will resound throughout the Lord's recovery as many of the dear saints respond to His word and are

God's oracle. I admired bro. Nee and I spoke the same thing but more often I spoke the same thing by new light. In history who talked about the sevenfold spirit? Who put a subject on John 15 Organism of the Triune God?.... Who can compose such a title "The Organism of the Triune God"? This is a strong sign that God spoke through me. You cannot deny the fact

that the Lord's oracle has been with me. I claim this at the face of the Lord Jesus. The deputy authority of God is in His oracle. Through all the ages whoever spoke for God had His

deputy authority.... Since 1945 I watched to see if anyone else could speak God's words. I couldn't see any books out of England with some light.<sup>29</sup>

An apostle must be able to define doctrines and open up the truth (1 Tim. 2:7; Eph. 4:11-12). There are many crucial doctrines in the Bible such as those concerning the Triune God, the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the Spirit of God, our human spirit, etc. All these doctrines need to be defined by the apostles. The apostles also have to expound the truth. This does not mean merely to preach some messages, but to expound biblical truths in a systematic and exhaustive way. At the same time, an apostle has to be one who can perfect the saints so as to build up the Body of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Several Local Church officials responded to the eldership of the Rosemead church that broke from Lee, offering their own estimation of Lee and his role in the Local Church: You use the following words concerning... (not Lee): "Seemingly staunch, stalwart and adamant for what you call `the ministry." Is not this kind of statement, which demeans both a

brother in the Lord and God's ministry, unworthy of you, the Lord's servants? Such words are almost mind-boggling when one stops to consider that the brother referred to is also a

As for your charge that brother Lee is a liar (His "ministry...has lately been nothing but...lies."), you brothers will have to bear the burden of this slander. It is a very serious thing to call any man a liar, let alone another brother. And it becomes a very weighty responsibility before God to call the brother, who is God's deputy authority on the earth, a liar. No doubt you

The result of Witness Lee's persuasive manner is quite predictable. At the end of a 1986 elders' conference, four hundred and nineteen leading brothers in the Local Church signed a letter

Dear Brother Lee: After hearing your fellowship in this elders' training, we all agree to have a new start in the Lord's recovery. For this, we all agree to be in one accord and to carry out this new move of the Lord solely through prayer, the Spirit, and the Word. We further agree to practice the recovery one in: teaching, practice, thinking, speaking, essence, appearance, and expression. We repudiate all differences among the churches, and all indifference toward the ministry, the ministry office, and the other churches. We agree that the church in our place be identical with all the local churches throughout the earth. 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

The considerable amount of influence Lee has over his movement is best evidenced by the response of those who follow him. In 1988, *The Church in Rosemead*, California, broke away

According to the epistles to the Corinthians, the signs of an apostle are seen through his labor, his fruit, and his being an oracle of God due to his visions and revelations from the Lord in opening God's New Testament economy (I Cor. 9; II Cor. 10:1-13:10). Through such evidences, we fully believe that one of the apostles today is Brother Witness Lee. We can testify

that after such a rich training...in the book of Leviticus, our brother is still full of God's anointing. Furthermore, many churches are still being raised up worldwide due to his abundant ministering (Where is the labor and the fruit that compares to his?). We all know that the church in Rosemead was formerly the church in Los Angeles (Elden Hall) which was directly

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....<sup>35</sup>

from Lee and the movement. The few who remained loyal to Lee sought fellowship elsewhere. They expressed their estimation of Witness Lee this way to those they left behind:

raised up by Brother Lee....God's ministering of life in the New Testament is clear seen through His speaking to the apostles who minister to all the churches. We can all testify of the rich supply that we have received from the Triune God ministering through Brother Lee. To remain in Rosemead would have caused us to be cut off from this rich source of supply which would deprive us of the Lord's present speaking in His up-to-date move. We still pray that the Lord will grant you much mercy and much light.<sup>36</sup> The late eighties saw a falling-out amongst members of *The Church in Anaheim*, California. Elders of this Local Church fellowship issued a publication seeking to dismiss charges of authoritarianism brought on by former Anaheim leaders who had recently parted company with Witness Lee and the Local Church. They are highly supportive of Lee. The church in Anaheim was raised up by the ministry of Brother Lee. All the elders who ever served in Anaheim were directly appointed by him. Over the years, he has rendered

Consider, for example, the following passages. Taken from the publications, The Economy of God and Spiritual Applications of the Tabernacle, Lee finds special significance in the Old Testament tabernacle. There's no denying that spiritual applications can be drawn from the Tabernacle, but how far do we go to find them? Is there certain criteria to use? States Lee: The typology of the Old Testament temple presents a very clear picture. Christ and God's presence are in the Holiest of all. Today this type of the temple of God is fulfilled in us. We are of three parts: our body corresponds to the outer court, our soul to the holy place, and our human spirit to the holiest of all, which is the very residence of Christ of Christ and God's

On the south side of the tabernacle there were twenty boards [Exodus] (36:23), and on the north side there were twenty more (v. 25). There were two sets of twenty signifying a

testimony. Furthermore, twenty itself is two times ten, signifying the testimony of completeness.... At the rear of the tabernacle there six boards....At the two corners of the west side were another two boards....The six boards plus the two corner boards totaled to eight. Without the corner boards, the other boards would number to six. By itself, six does not have a positive connotation. The number six is the number of the created and unregenerated man, for man was made on the sixth day. With these two corner boards, however, the number comes to eight. Eight signifies resurrection. The strengthening power of the church is the resurrection power. The total of all the boards of the tabernacle was forty-eight. Forty-eight is composed of six times eight. All the created men typified by the boards are now in resurrection. The boards signify men, who were created on the sixth day, but are now in Christ, that

We must be joined with others by the Holy Spirit with the holding power of the divine nature. According to 36:31-34, the bars of acacia wood overlaid with gold were in the golden rings, and the golden rings were joined to the gold overlaying the boards. This typifies the holding strength and the holding power of the divine nature and life of Christ... The strength and the power for joining together was the bars, which represent the Holy Spirit. According to 36:31 and 32, there were five bars on the south side, five bars on the north side, and five bars on the west side. The three groups of bars indicate that this Spirit is the Spirit of the Triune God. We must be impressed with the picture in Exodus 36. There were three groups of bars, and each group consisted of five bars. Five is four plus one. As we have seen, four bars were smaller and one bar, the middle one, was bigger....This is a picture of the mingling of the

Although some reputable Christian theologians have, over the years, arrived at similar conclusions, their conclusions are suspect as well. Author Bernard Ramm in *Protestant Biblical* 

In the beginning of 1968 something really happened in Los Angeles. The burial. It was the time of the New Year Conference, and I had no intention of encouraging people to be buried. But at the closing of one meeting, one said, "I want to be buried." Then others followed until many brothers and sisters in the church were buried. They were all so deeply moved to testify by this act that they were burying all their oldness, and by doing this they became alive. I was really surprised by this move to be buried. I was trying, in fact, to say some word to stop it, but I was checked by the Spirit within. Who was I to stop something of the Holy Spirit? I said not a word until the third day, when I predicted that the Church in Los Angeles would certainly be criticized by the religious people for this act. It was not more than ten days before the criticism came. "There is heresy in Los Angeles," they said. "Believers who are already properly baptized are being baptized again. Where is the scriptural ground for a believer to be baptized again after being properly baptized already?" I do not like to argue, but I wish to

tell you that so many withered "hands" were healed. Not only did this occur in Los Angeles, but following this in many places, many dead ones through this kind of burial came alive.

After reading this passage, we must ask ourselves, what scriptural grounds did the followers of Witness Lee have for being baptized again? On what basis did Lee allow the practice of

baptism, according to the Bible, is a single act carried out after one is saved, as an act of obedience toward God and as a testimony before men of one's faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. No amount of apparent enthusiasm and desire for spiritual growth warrant acting contrary to Scripture. Such dependence upon experientialism leads to misinterpretation

repeated baptism to occur? According to Lee's own words, he cited "the Spirit" within as his authority, neglecting the testimony of God's written revelation to mankind - the Bible. Water

**Objections** The church of Jesus Christ was built upon the foundation of the apostles, prophets, and Jesus Christ Himself (Eph. 2:20; Heb. 1:1-2). Christ built His church in part upon the groundwork already laid by the testimony of the prophets as revealed in the Old Testament. The Lord then instructed His disciples, who He would later send out as apostles to instruct others. The apostle

1. Watchman Nee. *Authority and Submission* (LSM: 1988) 61. This publication by the Local Church's Living Stream publishing operation is an edited edition, based upon Nee's notes from a 1948 training, and quite possibly, Christian Fellowship Publisher's (Richmond, Virginia) publication, **Spiritual Authority**, copyrighted in 1972. The books are remarkably similar, although the Living Stream edition is presented in a shorter, concise form. 2. Ibid., 62. 3. Ibid., 63. 4. Ibid., 64. 5. Ibid., 65. 6. Ibid., 65. 7. Leslie Lyall. *Three of China's Mighty Men* (OMF: 1980) 86. 8. Angus Kinnear. The Story of Watchman Nee: Against the Tide (CLC: 1973) 131. 9. Ibid., 132-133, bracket added. 10. Allen Swanson. Taiwan: Mainline Versus Independent Church Growth (William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA: 1970) 205.

11. Ibid., 207. 12. Ibid., 213. 13. Ibid., 214. 14. Andrew Yu. An Affirmation of the Proper Authority in the Body of Christ (1989) 31. 15. Ibid., 31-32. 16. Ibid., 32-33.

32. Witness Lee. A Timely Trumpeting and the Present Need (LSM: 1988) 12. Compare the similarity of this passage of Lee's text with Andrew Yu's text in endnote #21, taken from page 40 of his book, An Affirmation of the Proper Authority in the Body of Christ. 33. Letter from loyal Local Church officials ousted from Rosemead. They respond to the elders in Rosemead who broke away from Lee and the Local Church. 1 Jan. 1989: 3, parenthetical note added. Letter on file with this ministry. 34. Ibid., 6. 35. Witness Lee. *The Life-Pulse of the Lord's Present Move*, Elders' Training, Book #8 (LSM: 1986) 154.

28. Witness Lee. Further Light Concerning the Building Up of the Body of Christ (LSM: 1988) 63-64.

26. Ron Kangas and Kerry Robichaux. *A Response to Recent Accusations* (1989) 51.

29. Witness Lee. Notes from the November 27, 1988 Elders' Meeting, 1988, 4, 5. 30. Witness Lee. "Message Fifty-One," Life-Study of Genesis. (LSM:1987) 687.

loyal to Lee, n.d., emphasis added. Letter on file with this ministry.

31. Witness Lee. *Further Light...*65, italics added.

Lee as the leader of the movement, would have made a similar claim for himself.

40. Ibid., 62. 41. Ibid., 62-63. 42. Bernard Ramm. Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Baker: 1982) 30-31.

former church leaders who had recently parted company with Witness Lee and the Local Church.

43. Witness Lee. *Christ Versus Religion* (LSM: 1971) 42-43.

....In God's eyes, all those who rejected His servants rejected Him. We cannot hearken to God's word, yet refuse the word of His deputy authority. We have to submit to God's own

authority as well as to His deputy authority....What God looks at is not His own direct authority. What He looks at is His established indirect authorities. All those who do not submit to the deputy authority while hoping to receive light from the Lord....It is impossible for us to reject the deputy authority and to submit to God directly. This is because to reject the deputy

....Since God has handed out His authority, even He Himself would not overstep His deputy authority. Even He Himself is bound by the deputy authority. God establishes through the

upon the growing influence of Lee over the movement:

excitement and fire....Lee is energetic and authoritarian, thriving on large numbers, and has a flair for organizing people.<sup>8</sup> Lord. In the past the Table had always been a place were conscience and the Holy Spirit's conviction were given full play in a man's heart. Now however your detachment from other

spiritual things. But he exhorted everyone in the church to be submissive. 'Do nothing without first asking,' he urged. 'Since the Fall man does as he pleases. Here there is order. Here there is authority. The Church is a place of strict discipline.' 9

resulting traumatic shock caused a pall of grief to settle over both groups. 12 The elders rule with a firm hand in the True Jesus Church, whereas Witness Lee has the most authority in the Assembly Hall. The danger is that some almost take Lee's words excathedra. There is little freedom for challenging the "authorities" and submission to the leaders is stressed as essential for church harmony. 13

Body among God's ministering servants. 14

recognized as a spiritual authority, he is always so. To overthrow such a one, for any reason, constitutes rebellion. 15 Andrew Yu discusses his understanding of the biblical basis of the authority of elders and apostles. The qualification for being an elder is not based on any natural gift, but is based (1) on spiritual maturity, (2) on being approved by others, and (3) on the apostles' appointment....Those

conversion the apostle Paul received from Christ the revelation of Himself as the ascended Lord and the believers as the members of His Body (Acts 9:3-4, note 1). The apostles are men of revelation. They have seen the heavenly vision concerning Christ and the church, His Body, which is to be built up in this age and which is the central matter on God's heart. 18

The evidence of the apostles' authority is the fruit of their labor. Paul refers to the Corinthians as his work in the Lord and the seal of his apostleship in the Lord (1 Cor. 9:1-2). If

The apostles' authority is also based on the fact that they have received the revelation concerning the central point of God's New Testament economy, which is Christ and the church.

Peter received the revelation of Christ from God the Father (Matt. 16:16-17), and then the Lord spoke to him directly concerning the building of the church (Matt. 16:18). At his

....The apostles teach the truth and have the authority to supervise and watch over the churches, to guard them from false teachings that would carry them away from the central lane of God's economy. This authority also includes warning the saints to stay away from divisive ones and factious ones who speak contrary to the apostles' teaching (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:9-11).<sup>23</sup>

The elders' authority is derived from the apostles. The elders are appointed through the apostles, who are mingled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Titus 1:5). Hence, spiritually they should answer to the apostles. In the New Testament the authority of the apostles is mentioned in a clear and specific way. Paul made reference more than once to his apostolic

the Lord. However, this does not apply to a matter such as defining the truth. Truth is defined by the apostles in their teaching, not by the elders in their administration. According to the New Testament, it is not up to each church to define its own doctrine or to determine its own standing.<sup>26</sup> The authors continue, citing the supposed example of the apostle John's revelatory ministry of the Book of Revelation, as evidence that God continues to speak to His people through His apostles today.

I was proud. Concerning the oracle, I have ministered to you a great number of new points which have never been ministered by anyone else before. Go to your professors, do they know what in the ? of the P.t. God? Have you ever read this before I came to this country? Who ever heard of experiencing Christ and enjoying Christ? I invented all these terms. God's oracle must corespond (with) the Bible. No one has ever seen the last Adam became the life giving Spirit. How about the seven-fold spirit? To listen to this is to listen to a man's words? Years ago I called a writers' conference. What came out? Just repeat of my messages or bro. Nee's messages or (something) old, what is new? In February, 1986 I proposed to stop all these and the brothers stopped. Even in England theystopped their Stream. Even today I am waiting who will be raised up by God as His Oracle. Your repeating of my messages is not

Testament leads Witness Lee and his followers to believe that particular contents of the New Testament are normative for today. Thus, Lee can define the teaching role of apostles this way (note similarity here with one of Andrew Yu's statements above - footnote #21):

tremendous spiritual and practical help to the church, the elders, and even the saints individually. He has always ministered to us God's economy for the building up of the Body of Christ. These facts are beyond dispute. It is altogether scriptural for the church in Anaheim to receive the teaching and follow the leading of the one who raised it up (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 4:16-17). It is also a practice according to the New Testament for the church in Anaheim to be one with the servant of God who established it, by participating in the furtherance of his ministry and his work (Phil. 1:3-7; 4:14-16).<sup>37</sup>

**Biblical Interpretation** 

Consequences of a self-appointed apostle imposing first-century apostolic leadership is predictable. Oversight is vested in one person or a handful of persons. Furthermore, the beliefs and practices of the movement are dictated by those exercising oversight. Subsequently, the orthodoxy of the beliefs and practices of the group are dependent upon its leadership. Witness

Witness Lee is also prone to over-emphasizing typology, reading New Testament theology and undue significance into Old Testament text beyond which the Scriptures warrant. For Lee,

Lee relies heavily upon the allegorical method of interpretation. Allegorism must be rejected because it reads into the Scriptures meanings that the authors had not intended to convey.

is, in resurrection. Their number has become eight.<sup>39</sup> The width of the boards of the tabernacle was one and a half cubits (36:21), indicating a half measurement of three cubits. One half always needs the other half. As members of the Body we are just one half. We must remember that we always need another member to make us complete. In creation there is the same principle. A man is not complete unless he has a wife....The couple is the completion....For the building of the church, our need is to be completed. We can never be individuals; we must always be completed by others.<sup>40</sup>

divine nature with the human nature. Four represents the creature, while one represents the Creator. These two added together become five.<sup>41</sup>

Bible treated allegorically becomes putty in the hand of the exegete. Different doctrinal systems could emerge within the framework of allegorical hermeneutics and no way would exist to determine which were the true....The only method of breaking an exegetical stalemate created by the use of the allegorical method is to return to the sober, proper and literal interpretation of the Scriptures. The allegorical method puts a premium on the subjective and the doleful result is the obscuration of the Word of God.<sup>42</sup> Lee has assigned new meanings to common biblical terms and invented new ones to define truths supposedly lost and hidden from Christianity. Lee has also expressed dependance upon personal experience as a means to validate truth. The following passage, taken from Christ Versus Religion, illustrates Lee's inclination to accept personal experience over revealed biblical truth.

The curse of the allegorical method is that it obscures the true meaning of the Word of God and had it not kept the Gospel truth central it would have become cultic and heretical....The

Paul (and others) provided instruction in doctrine, principles for proper church life, and godly living. The apostles also appointed elders in every church in every city (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). These elders had the responsibility to oversee the flocks that God had given to their care (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Later the apostles prepared historical accounts that would one day be recognized as Scripture. By the end of the first century the last book of the Bible had been written. The biblical record was then complete. The foundation had already been laid. In the strict biblical sense there are no prophets and apostles today. Regarding apostles, although some Christians today may perform work similar of the apostles, no one meets the specific criteria set forth in Scripture (Acts 1:21-22).

Christians quite certainly are not to exist as docile sheep willing to do whatever their spiritual shepherds ask of them. Christians and non-Christians alike have been provided by their Creator with the acute ability to discern those thoughts, actions, and deeds that are right from those that are wrong. Each person is directly accountable to God. Nowhere in Scripture are

believers instructed to give blind absolute loyalty to another person. Christian leaders are prone to error just as anyone else and are not beyond accountability to fellow brothers and sisters of

Witness Lee placed himself into a unique position of authority and responsibility in which he is without equal. Claiming authority from God, Lee served as a modern-day Apostle Paul and

claimed to have been directly appointed and commissioned by the Lord to restore the proper church life that supposedly once existed but was lost. Lee alone had established Local Church doctrine and the proper church life. Lee based his authority as a spokesman for God on the amount of "inner" spiritual insight the Lord had given to him. Lee's thesis ran something like this: to the extent that God has given him spiritual insight, to that extent he has obtained and possesses authority; and to the extent that he possesses authority, to that extent he ought to be given the opportunity to exercise this authority. According to Lee, the insight God had given him served as God's stamp of approval on his ministry. It comes as no surprise that no one else in the Local Church movement claims to have received as much light from the Lord as Lee claimed to have received himself. One should question whether Watchman Nee, who it is said, preceded

Local Church regarded Witness Lee and his ministry far too highly! It should be evident that many of the teachings of Witness Lee are not from on high and representative of the real Lord Jesus Christ! **Endnotes** 

Tragically, Local Church publications such as Authority and Submission are made available to Local Church members world-wide. Members have been encouraged by Witness Lee and

their elders to buy them, study them, and to put their contents into practice. Perhaps what is just as unfortunate is that the members of the Local Church, through spiritual gullibility, ignorance,

and immaturity, had allowed Lee to assume too prominent a leadership role within the structure of the movement. It should be clear from the material presented here that members of the

19. Ibid., 37-38. 20. Ibid., 38. 21. Ibid., 40. 22. Ibid., 42. 23. Ibid., 43-44. 24. Ibid., 45-47. 25. Ibid., 48-49.

36. To the Brothers and Sisters Meeting in Rosemead. A Local Church fellowship, The Church in Rosemead, California, broke away from Witness Lee and the Local Church movement in 1988. Letter from former members still

37. Elders of *The Church in Anaheim*. *An Article of Clarification by the Elders of the Church in Anaheim* (Dec. 22, 1989) 13-14. This stern document was issued by the elders to counter charges of authoritarianism leveled by

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38. Witness Lee. *The Economy of God*, 4th ed. (LSM: 1988) 29. 39. Witness Lee. Spiritual Applications of the Tabernacle (LSM: 1987) 53, bracket added.