

LSM's Attack on the Church in Toronto & the Churches' Local Administration of their Business Affairs

A Response to the LSM-DCP Brothers' Extra-Biblical Doctrine about Secular Control

The Living Stream Ministry (LSM) affiliate, DCP continues to attack the Church in Toronto on the Internet and in print. The LSM-DCP¹ brothers recently posted an article entitled,² "The Devastating Consequences of Replacing God's Governmental Arrangement in the Church with a Secular System of Control." The Church in Toronto is the prime example. A barrage of 12 books is also being launched. One volume titled, "Concerning Sectarianism & Abuse of Authority in Toronto," is specifically aimed at us. Clearly LSM is unleashing its considerable resources of people, power and the printing press to drown out other voices. Toronto is a major target of these relentless assaults. Yet, this is also an attack on the foundational principle that a church's administration is local.

The Internet article accuses Toronto's leadership of actions which "devastate the divine government in that church, transmute that local church into a local sect, and offend the headship of Christ..." It alleges that we've formed an "Unscriptural Hierarchy," by "merging the heavenly government of the local church with the secular administration of the non-profit corporation." It accuses Toronto's eldership of substituting "theocracy with democracy," of "replacing God's governmental arrangement with a secular system of control." Is there any substance to these charges or are they merely LSM-propaganda? Moreover, is this an attempt to undermine the central tenet that the churches' administration is local, including their business affairs?

Watchman Nee's Teaching about Extra-Biblical Institutions

The LSM-DCP writers cite the Scriptural pattern of apostles appointing elders to administrate the local church. They assert that "to alter this God-ordained administrative arrangement...will inevitably devastate the divine government in that church, transmute that local church into a local sect, and offend the headship of Christ..." Based on this they denounce Toronto's non-profit corporation. In support of this view they quote W. Nee's warning of the "inherent danger in adopting extra-biblical institutions." Bro. Nee wrote:³

"The Bible has decreed all institutions of the church in a clear way already. We must never have any decrees, whether they are creeds, constitutions, rules, charters, or ordinances outside the Bible, no matter how scriptural they may appear. Otherwise, we will become a sect right away. We may be more scriptural and more knowledgeable than other sects but still be a sect. We should only have one open Bible now for men to follow. If we institute anything outside the Bible, no matter how scriptural it may appear, we are causing others to despise the Bible and turning their attention to the instituted ordinances."

W. Nee's words exhibit his absoluteness—Whatever the Bible does not have, we must reject. Hence, he declares: "We must never have any decrees...creeds, constitutions, rules, charters, or ordinances outside the Bible." In context Bro. Nee was addressing denominational creeds and charters.⁴ He had not yet visited the western world, so it's doubtful that W. Nee was addressing 21st century local church non-profit corporate structures. Hence the DCP-writers are applying W. Nee's words in a foreign context. Nevertheless, they make this extrapolation. Assuming their application is valid, W. Nee's absolute stand implies a total rejection of all charters, constitutions, rules and by-laws related to the churches' corporate status. Bro. Nee makes this clear, saying,⁵ "What we propose is that everything invented by man and not instituted by God should be removed. We should not follow anything other than the Bible." This appears extreme, yet Bro. Nee's "idealistic stand" is consistent with Acts. There were no meeting halls, no corporations, directors, bylaws, bank accounts etc. This situation also described the initial church-life in many N. American cities. The saints simply met from house to house as the church in their city. The organizational adjuncts of non-profit corporations, directors, trustees etc. were added later when the church-life became established.

The LSM-DCP Brothers' Misrepresentation of W. Nee's Teaching

The LSM-DCP brothers extrapolate Bro. Nee's words (quoted above) applying them to church Corporations. They allege "*The dissenting ones are*" trying "*to change the proper administration in their churches by ...seeking to elevate the secular office of director of the corporation above the scriptural office of elder of the church, the dissenting ones are proposing exactly the type of extra-biblical institution that alarmed Brother Nee.*"

But, is this really what Bro. Nee had in mind? Did the young Watchman Nee in China in the 1920's have the foresight to address 21st century N. American non-profit corporations? The LSM-DCP brothers seem to think so! They assert this is "*exactly the type of extra-biblical institution that alarmed Brother Nee.*" Yet, (even assuming its validity) does their application do justice to W. Nee's view? I think not! Bro. Nee was unwilling to accept any human institution not mandated in Scripture. He stated unambiguously "*everything invented by man and not instituted by God should be removed.*" That includes directors, non-profit charitable corporations, bylaws, charters etc. The LSM-DCP brothers blatantly misrepresent W. Nee's word by suggesting he would endorse corporate directors provided they are subject to the elders. They imply W. Nee only opposed actions which "*elevate the secular office of director...above the scriptural office of elder of the church.*" The LSM-DCP writers claim this is "*exactly the type of extra-biblical institution that alarmed Brother Nee.*" Yet, aren't they imposing their own interpretation on W. Nee's words? Contrary to their claims, Bro. Nee's words don't support the DCP brothers' position. These writers accuse Toronto's eldership of "*disregarding the fellowship given by Brother Nee.*" Yet aren't they guilty of ignoring and misrepresenting his word?

The LSM-DCP Brothers Accept what Brother Nee Rejected

Brother Nee opposed all extra-biblical institutions, including corporate directors. The LSM-DCP brothers don't do justice to Brother Nee's word. Watchman Nee would have rejected all corporate organizational entities. In contrast LSM's "blended brothers" accommodate some of them. They accept what Brother Nee rejected. Hence none of LSM's "blended brothers" can claim to unequivocally follow Bro. Nee in this matter. Don't the Churches in Anaheim, Fullerton, Irvine, LA etc. all have non-profit corporations, Boards, directors, trustees and by-laws? Haven't they all adopted "extra-biblical institutions" which Bro. Nee repudiated and which the LSM-DCP brothers' claim potentially "*devastate the divine government in that church, transmute that local church into a local sect, and offend the headship of Christ...*"?

In contrast to W. Nee, the DCP-writers counsel compromise. They say, "*the members of a local church may form a corporation in order to have a proper legal standing before the secular government...*" Moreover, they admit a role for directors, saying "*The directors of the corporation are...in place to serve the saints and to satisfy the minimum legal requirements of the secular government...*" Thus the LSM-DCP brothers sanction the local churches' establishing non-profit corporations with directors, bylaws etc. This reasoning seems logical from a secular view-point. However, this view is NOT based upon Scripture. There are no Bible verses which prescribe establishing a non-profit corporate entity. Since Scripture is silent, how can LSM-DCP dogmatically insist some types of organization are legitimate and others (e.g. Toronto's) illegitimate?

The LSM-DCP Brothers' Personal Opinions

The LSM-DCP brothers try to buttress their argument by quoting Bro. Nee's words. Yet his uncompromising stand was "*everything invented by man and not instituted by God should be removed.*" The LSM-DCP writers sanction what W. Nee vehemently opposed. It is evident that the writers' views (e.g. "*the members of a local church may form a corporation*") are simply these brothers' personal opinions. We ask: In the absence of a clear mandate in Scripture and given W. Nee's view to the contrary, why are the LSM-DCP brothers seeking to impose their personal opinions on all the churches? **It is disingenuous of the LSM-DCP brothers to use Watchman Nee's word's to denigrate certain local churches (e.g. Toronto) while they themselves do not adhere to his teaching and (in fact) teach differently!** Who gave them the right to impose their personal views on the local churches? What qualifies them to judge and condemn local churches based on their organizational structure?

'Grasping at Straws'—the LSM-DCP Brothers' Tenuous Argument

It seems LSM faced a dilemma—How to condemn Toronto without censuring all the local churches which have non-profit corporate status? The solution was to concoct a subtle argument. On one hand, the LSM-DCP writers endorse local church Corporations⁶ *"to satisfy the minimum legal requirements of the secular government."* On the other hand they argue that *incremental changes* to corporate by-laws and directors' powers can *"devastate the divine government in that church, transmute that local church into a local sect, and offend the headship of Christ in that church."* Apparently (in their view) there's a critical point, a "tipping point," at which "devastating consequences" suddenly come into play. Hence, they issue a stark warning: *"If the saints...vote to approve the proposed amendments to the by-laws...what will be produced is an unscriptural, hierarchical organization that nullifies the headship of Christ and destroys the proper standing of that local church."* Yet, what's the basis for asserting an incremental change in bylaws will have such drastic effects? Nothing, just their own imagination! This hypothetical scenario is a "house of cards," the creation of someone's imagination masquerading as spiritual teaching! In our view, this teaching was fabricated for the purpose of denouncing the Church in Toronto and preventing other local churches from following their example. It has no basis in the Bible, nor in the ministries of Bros. Nee and Lee. It seems the LSM-DCP brothers are desperately grasping at straws.

"A little leaven, leavens the whole lump"—The Biblical Principle

A relevant biblical principle is "A little leaven, leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9.) If (as the LSM-DCP brothers assert) there's a serious risk that "merging the heavenly government of the local church with the secular administration of the non-profit corporation" will produce an "unscriptural hierarchy," then no "merging" of any kind should be permitted. Why? Because "a little leaven, leavens the whole lump." The LSM-DCP writers allege that *"to intermix the secular corporation with the heavenly church adulterates the church itself and causes it to forfeit the headship of the ascended Christ to become a common human organization...."* If they're correct, it follows that no *"intermix[ing of] the secular corporation with the heavenly church"* should be tolerated because "a little leaven, leavens the whole lump." If this is the case, every local church should immediately abandon its secular corporate status! Perhaps Bro. Nee would embrace this view. The LSM-DCP brothers are obviously unwilling to take such drastic measures. Yet why are they reluctant to apply the scriptural principle—"A little leaven, leavens the whole lump"? Can they explain why this principle doesn't apply? Could it be their reluctance arises because this wouldn't achieve their goal of denouncing the Church in Toronto, while sanctioning other local churches?

Toronto, Vancouver & Rochester—Cases in Point

Having developed their extra-biblical teaching, the LSM-DCP brothers focus exclusively on the Church in Toronto as "a case in point." They accuse the Toronto leadership of being *"dissenting brothers who have seized control of 'The Church of the Torontonians'...[who] by their actions of replacing the God-ordained government...have transmuted their standing into that of a sect."* The writers conveniently overlook other cases which might reflect unfavorably on LSM's "blended brothers." Vancouver, Canada and Rochester, Minnesota are relevant case studies.

Consider previous incidents where directors "seized control" of a local church. In Vancouver (1992-3) a campaign by the (soon-to-be) "Blended Brothers" aided the elders' overthrow. An LSM-endorsed slate of directors (Robert Lim, Titus Chen, etc) "seized control" of the Church in Vancouver by means of the business meeting. Similarly the church-eldership in Rochester, MN was ousted by LSM-backed directors a few years ago. In each case did LSM's "Blended Brothers" stand with God's divine administration via the elders against the directors' "secular control"? No! Did they denounce these churches for having "transmuted their standing into that of a sect." They did not! Rather LSM welcomed the new leadership with opened arms. Doesn't this indicate that the "blended brothers" will support directors' attempts to overthrow church elders when it suits LSM's purpose? In this instance, "Actions speak louder than words." Evidently this is not an issue of "truth," but rather "the end justifies the means." It seems virtually any tactic is justified if LSM's agenda is advanced.

Misrepresenting the Church in Toronto Case

In presenting the facts concerning Toronto, the LSM-DCP writers are guilty of serious misrepresentation. For the sake of brevity a few examples will suffice:

- **Alleging Toronto's Board of Directors can choose the church's apostle(s).** In fact the Church by-laws specify that the elders (not directors) "recognize" and "confirm" who is an apostle in relation to the church (Articles 10.1 & 10.2). The Lord commended the Ephesian Church for discerning between true and false apostles (Rev. 2:2). The Apostle Paul insisted on his apostleship in relation to the Church in Corinth, not to all the churches (1 Cor. 9:2).
- **Alleging Toronto's directors uplifted themselves above their fellow-elders** making them "second-class" elders. Like many churches, Toronto's directors are a subset of elders. This does not imply the creation of a "two-tier system" in Toronto nor any other church.
- **Alleging Toronto has created a new and unscriptural class of director-elders** In Toronto, as in many other local churches, some elders serve as directors (trustees.) Toronto has not⁷ "create[d] a new and unscriptural class of director-elders" as LSM-DCP falsely allege.
- **Alleging requiring verifiable financial contributions violates the Lord's word** in Matt. 6:1-4. Saints who wish to offer anonymously (according to Matt. 6) are free to do so. However, to claim tax-deductions, the Canada Revenue Agency requires donations to be verified. In this matter the Church submits to government requirements. The same criterion determines voting membership in the Church Corporation.
- **Misrepresenting the Toronto LSM-group's legal case against the Church.** The Toronto LSM-group's (Bros. MacVicar, Wang, Chao & co.) attempt to stop the business meeting vote was NOT "*denied because the court deemed the dispute to be religious*" (as the LSM-DCP writers allege). Rather the Ontario Supreme Court decided the Board and directors had done nothing wrong, but had acted properly and legally under existing by-laws. Hence the LSM-group's request was denied and they were ordered to pay costs.

Conclusion

The LSM-DCP brothers allege that modifying the Church's corporate by-laws creates an "unscriptural hierarchy," by "merging the heavenly government of the local church with the secular administration of the non-profit corporation." According to them, an incremental by-law change will "devastate the divine government in that church, transmute that local church into a local sect, and offend the headship of Christ in that church." In their opinion the Church in Toronto has crossed this threshold. Significantly no Scriptural basis is provided for this tenuous thesis. This teaching rests, not on scripture, but on speculation. Moreover, W. Nee's writings, which the DCP-writers quote, call for an absolute rejection of every man-made institution, including non-profit corporations, directors, bylaws etc. "**Everything invented by man and not instituted by God should be removed,**" said W. Nee. Yet, the LSM-DCP brothers ignore this and misinterpret W. Nee's words to apply to incremental changes in by-laws, such as occurred in Toronto. Stripped of misrepresentations, the LSM-DCP brothers' writing is an extra-biblical teaching founded entirely on their personal opinions. They allege Toronto is substituting "theocracy with democracy," and "replacing God's governmental arrangement with a secular system of control." These accusations are subjective; they lack any solid foundation in Scripture or in Bro. Nee's writings. Logically, these arguments are tenuous, at best.

An Attack on the Church's Local Administration

A central axiom of the Lord's recovery is that the church's administration is local. This encompasses the organizational aspect of the Church, including its business or corporate affairs. These matters should be decided by the local elders. This latest LSM-DCP teaching develops a pseudo-biblical doctrine seemingly designed to dictate the business arrangements and corporate affairs of the local churches. Evidently they want to control the structure of the church's non-profit corporation; they even want to determine the agenda⁸ of the church's business meeting! **This unwarranted interference infringes on the church's local administration and violates a foundational principle of the recovery.** One of Brother Lee's hymns (#824) says: "*Administration local, each (church) answering to the Lord.*" Should this hymn now be changed to--"*Administration global...*"?

An Attack on the Church in Toronto

The LSM-DCP brothers continue attacking the Church in Toronto. Based upon their extra-biblical teaching about secular control, they denounce the Toronto Church as a “division” and a “divisive sect.” On the other hand they vindicate the LSM-supporters (led by Bros. MacVicar & Wang) who forsook the Church in Toronto and formed a new entity called “THE LOCAL CHURCH IN TORONTO,” currently meeting at the Ramada Hotel. The LSM-DCP-writers state: “*The saints ... disassociated themselves from the dissenting ones’ divisive sect and are meeting as the [“LOCAL”] church in Toronto. Their stand has been affirmed by the Body, and the [“LOCAL”] church in Toronto began...on April 15, 2007.*” They assert that the Toronto gatherings of LSM-aligned believers have been “affirmed by the Body.” Again, we ask: What “Body” is this, an “LSM-Body”? The Body of Christ is universal encompassing millions of believers in time and space. Yet, once again, in the hands of the LSM-brothers, this vast entity has been narrowed to a small, exclusive group under their direction. It’s difficult to avoid concluding that, **for them, “the Body” equals LSM’s “blended brothers” and their followers!**

It’s About Control—LSM’s Blended Brothers’ Global Control of the Local Churches

Despite appearances, the fundamental purpose of this LSM-DCP-article is not to defend truth or spiritual principle. Incidents in Vancouver and Rochester, prove that LSM’s “blended brothers” support the directors’ use “secular control” to overthrow the elders’ “divine government” when it suits their purpose. The LSM-DCP brothers’ warn about the “devastating effects of replacing God’s governmental arrangement...with a secular system of control.” To us this seems like a façade; the real issue is control. Indeed, skeptics might suggest this doctrine was developed to buttress the “blended brothers’” continued control of the local churches. Significantly, they say,⁹ “We...hope that churches...will be preserved...in the divine government under Christ the Head and His **proper representative authorities.**” The final phrase is a code-word¹⁰ for the “blended brothers.” Translated, it means they intend that the “**churches...will be preserved...under...the ‘blended brothers’.**” A skeptic would conclude **it’s all about control—preserving the “blended brothers’” global control over the local churches.** Evidently LSM’s “blended brothers” feel threatened by the prospect of more local churches following Toronto’s lead to modify their by-laws in order to safeguard their existence as *bone fide* local churches and throw off the yoke of the “blended brothers’” unscriptural control. This extra-biblical teaching looks like a desperate attempt to thwart that process.

Nigel Tomes

May 2007

NOTES:

1. The “Defense & Confirmation Project” (DCP) is linked to Living Stream Ministry (LSM.) As evidence of their close relationship one simply has to “follow the money trail.” DCP receives significant funding from LSM. IRS Tax records indicate that LSM transferred in excess of \$525,000 to DCP in the 4-year period 2002-5. Financially these two entities—LSM & DCP—are **certainly not independent.** Due to these linkages we refer to the “LSM-DCP brothers” (or writers.) The links between Living Stream Ministry (LSM) and the “Blended Brothers” (or “Blended Co-workers”) have been clearly established. We use the terms “LSM” and “LSM’s blended brothers” as short-forms to denote the “blended brothers” or “blended co-workers” associated with Living Stream Ministry (LSM). The core group of “blended brothers” and LSM’s board of directors are interlocking and overlapping. The vast majority of the “blended brothers” who minister at LSM’s “7 annual feasts” are directors and/or officers on LSM’s Board. A majority of the 21 “blended co-workers” who wrote to Brothers Titus Chu and Yu-Lan Dong in June 2005 are present or past members of LSM’s board. Our use of the term, “LSM’s blended brothers” is justified based on these objective facts. The “blended brothers’” mantra that “LSM is only a book publisher” is contradicted by the facts.
2. The article was posted on the LSM-affiliated website, “AFaithfulWord.org” identified with DCP (May 21, 2007). It’s also available as a booklet. The article’s authors are identified as “Tony Espinosa with Bill Buntain and Dan Sady.” In DCP’s Tax Returns, Daniel Sady is identified as “Assistant Treasurer” on the Board of DCP in 2005. In years prior to 2005, Dan Towle (one of the “Blended Brothers”) was identified as “President” of DCP. Thus the “Blended Brothers” served as a link (along with financial flows) between DCP & LSM. This provides a further basis for using the compound term “LSM-DCP brothers”

3. Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 7, pp. 1116-1117 This writing first appeared in the “Question & Answer Box (9)” in W Nee’s first periodical The Christian in the 1920’s
4. W. Nee was answering a series of written questions submitted by Brother Kuo. Question #1 “Is the Christian & Missionary Alliance the same in nature as the other denominations?” (p. 1115) Question #3 “If there are organizations or systems, how shall we institute them without acting contrary to Scripture and being entangled in human organizations?” (p. 116) Question #4 “If there should not be any organization or system in the Church, how shall the Church be administered?” (Wang, p. 1118) The context relates more to denominational statements of faith, rather than corporate structures relating to property and assets.
5. Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 7, p. 1118
6. Yet, what are the “minimum legal requirements”? In N. America there is no law **requiring** a local church to set up a non-profit corporation, partnership or other organizational entity, in order to operate as a local church. The saints could simply meet from house to house as the church in their city. This corresponds to the record in Acts, where there are no meeting halls, no corporations, directors, by-laws, bank accounts etc. This also describes the beginnings of the church-life in many N. American cities. In this context **the “minimum legal requirements” are zero**—no corporation or any other organizational structure.
7. In context the LSM-DCP statement says: “By manipulating these by-laws, the dissenting brothers are aggressively maneuvering to increase their powers as directors of the corporation to **create a new and unscriptural class of director-elders** who are above the other elders in their churches...Regrettably, **this has already happened in Toronto, Canada.**”
8. In an earlier piece the DCP-brothers sought to dictate whether the Church in Toronto could use a video camera to record church meetings. [See “Corrections to Statements by the Toronto Elders & Nigel Tomes” on AFW.org] In this article the LSM-DCP brothers seek to direct the conduct of the church’s business meeting. For example, they say: “**A financial report is given by the corporation's treasurer to conclude the meeting.**”
9. The statement (in the opening paragraph) reads in context: “We offer this booklet with the hope that churches under this dissenting influence will be preserved to enjoy peace in the divine government under Christ the Head and His proper representative authorities.”
10. Bro. Ron Kangas used a synonymous phrase when he talked about “organically deputized members” whose authority exceeds that of elders. He said: “*The Head possesses all authority and organically He deputizes certain members of His Body to represent Him. An elder’s local authority pales in comparison to the authority of the Head expressed through His representatives in the Body. The elders should be careful in how they conduct themselves.*” [Ron Kangas, The Ministry, vol. 10, No. 4, (July 2006) p. 213] Clearly, in this context, “organically deputized members” do not refer to elders, but some brothers whose authority (according to Bro. Ron) exceeds that of local church elders. Since the context is similar, we take the phrases “proper representative authorities” (used by DCP) and “organically deputized members” (used by Bro. Ron Kangas) as equivalent, both implicitly referring to LSM’s “blended brothers”