

HONESTY in HISTORY - Against Historical Revisionism

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The Lord's recovery rests on the realization that God has moved throughout history. God's move is seen, not only in the Bible, but also in the progressive restoration of divine truth since Martin Luther's time until the present. History provides the backdrop against which God's recovery work is illuminated. An accurate historical record clarifies God's move, while biased accounts distort the picture and obscure God's work. One pitfall to be avoided is "Historical Revisionism," rewriting the record in a manner not supported by the facts. This may arise from a preconceived notion of what history ought to say.

As a possible example of revisionism, let us examine statements from the booklet, "*Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery*" (LSM, June 30, 2005). This document recounts a number of historical facts. Two striking assertions are:

[1] "*Since Brother Nee's day we in the Lord's recovery have been "restricted in one publication"For decades we all have been nourished... by the one publication.*" (p. 7)

[2] "*... the one publication has always been trumpeted by one practical publication endeavor – in Brother Nee's day by his Gospel Room, during Brother Lee's years after he left mainland China by Taiwan Gospel Book Room, and during his years in the United States by Living Stream Ministry.*" (p. 3-4)

How Many Book Rooms?

Statement (2) presents a linear-sequential account of the "practical publication endeavor"; Brother Nee's Shanghai Gospel Book Room was succeeded by Brother Lee's Taiwan Gospel Book Room, then his Living Stream Ministry. But is this historically accurate? Strikingly, no mention is made of the Gospel Book Room in Hong Kong. Yet, elsewhere, Brother Lee recognized the role of the Hong Kong (HK) Book Room. He recounts that, in the 1950's, the practical publication endeavor was conducted "*separately in three places: Shanghai, Taipei and Hong Kong. Brother Nee was responsible for the bookroom in Shanghai, I was responsible for the one in Taipei, and Brother Weigh was responsible for the one on Hong Kong.*" [W. Lee, *Words of Training*, vol. 1, p. 34-5] Of course, one could argue that all three book rooms were "one." Yet we are addressing the "practical publication endeavor." Most of the early English translations of Watchman Nee's writings seem to have issued from the HK Book Room. Why then has its role been omitted from the historical narrative presented in "*Publication Work...*"? Could it be, perhaps, because the HK Gospel Book Room does not fit neatly into the picture being presented? On the contrary, one could argue that **two publishers existed simultaneously** in the recovery, the HK and Taiwan Gospel Book Rooms.

"Since brother Nee's day ... restricted in one publication"

The first statement gives a dogmatic historical view of "one publication" -- "*Since brother Nee's day we in the Lord's recovery have been restricted in one publication.*" It suggests that "*for decades,*" the saints and the local churches have been consciously limited to "one publication." Moreover, this "restriction" is said to have been

in effect since Brother Nee's era. May we ask, what historical facts support this bold assertion? The only evidence presented is Brother Lee's testimony concerning his participation in Brother Nee's publication work. However, that testimony, "*I never published anything by myself. I always mailed my manuscript to the Gospel Room, which was under Brother Nee ...*" relates to brother Lee's personal exercise as a co-worker. It tells us little about the saints and the churches. Perhaps we should ask: In brother Nee's era was there a **teaching of "one publication"**? Were the saints **taught** to confine themselves to materials published by the Shanghai Book Room? I have found no such teaching in *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*. Isn't it more likely the saints focused on brother Nee's materials because they found them beneficial and **not** because they were "restricted to one publication"?

History Silent about "One Publication"

There is no historical evidence of an official policy, or a systematic teaching of "one publication" in Brother Nee's era. If 'one publication' was an important principle in Brother Nee's day, why is it **not mentioned in Brother Lee's biography, *Watchman Nee: A Seer of the Divine Revelation***?

In the interests of historical accuracy, may I inquire, (prior to 1986) were the saints in North America **taught** to confine themselves to one publication, materials published by LSM? If so, why does the document, *The Beliefs & Practices of the Local Churches* (issued in 1978 by the "co-workers in the Lord's Recovery") contain **not even a single reference to "one publication"**? The omission of "one publication" from Brother Lee's biography of Watchman Nee and *The Beliefs & Practices...* is an "argument from silence." However, "silence" in the Bible has strong implications. The omission of Melchisedek's ancestors from the Old Testament qualifies him to be a type of Christ (Hebrews 7:3). Brother Lee says that since "*after [Acts 15] there is no further mention of Barnabus in the divine record ... This indicates that Barnabus was wrong.*" [*Life-study of Acts*, p. 371] The silence of the history of the Lord's recovery concerning "one publication" is significant.

Historical Counter-Examples

Moreover, if the Lord's recovery was "*restricted in one publication*" why, did Brother Lee call a "Writers' Conference" in the early 1980's? Brother Lee recalled later, "*My intention in calling a writers' conference was to encourage you to write something...*" (Witness Lee, *Elders' Training Book #8*, p. 163)

If there was a "one publication" policy, why did Brother Eugene Gruhler oversee the publication of *Journey Through the Bible*, in the 1990's? *Journey Through the Bible* was **not** published by LSM, but produced in Anaheim under the oversight of Eugene Gruhler, Brother Lee's coworker, who at that time played a leading role in both the FTTA and the Church in Anaheim. If a "one publication" policy was in effect, why was *Journey Through the Bible* produced in Anaheim in the 1990's? Even in the 1980's and '90's a "one publication" policy was not uniformly taught or enforced.

These historical facts suggest the document, "*Publication Work...*" is not merely reaffirming a "one publication" teaching and policy which existed "*since Brother Nee's day.*" According to the historical record, **no such teaching or official policy existed** in Brother Nee's era, nor in the early church-life (pre-1986) in North America. To pretend otherwise is to distort the record of history; it is "historical revisionism."

Note: These are my personal views and not necessarily those of the saints, elders and churches with whom I am associated nor of other contributors to this publication.

References:

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