

WATCHMAN NEE'S LEGACY—10.6 MILLION LOCAL CHURCH BELIEVERS

"They rest from their labors and their works follow them"—Rev. 14:13

US Congress Recognizes Watchman Nee

The US Congress recently recognized¹ "the immense spiritual achievement of Watchman Nee," calling him a "great pioneer of Christianity in China." It noted that his "life and work continue to influence millions of Protestant Christians in China," who "consider themselves the spiritual heirs of Watchman Nee." Moreover,² "Millions more are rightly proud of the contribution Watchman Nee made to global Christianity—he was the first Chinese Christian to exercise an influence on Western Christians—and indeed of his contribution to world spiritual culture." But, beyond vague generalities, what exactly was Watchman Nee's "contribution to global Christianity"? In quantifiable terms, what is the present-day legacy of his life's work? What is Brother Nee's current impact in measurable terms, such as numbers of local churches and believers? Turning to specifics, the Congressional Record notes³ "Today more than 3,000 churches outside of China, including several hundred in the United States, look to him as one of their religious and theological leaders." The last figure—"several hundred [churches] in the US"—is imprecise. LSM's report that,⁴ "Today there are nearly 300 local churches across the United States," provides precision regarding this point.

3,000 churches worldwide, 300 in the US—is that all? Why so small?

Thoughtful readers will be disappointed by Watchman Nee's apparent lack of impact, particularly outside China. There are 2.8 Million Christian congregations worldwide (outside China).⁵ Yet only 3,000 —0.1%-- of them regard Brother Nee as their leader. Apparently only 300 out of⁶ 500,000+ US congregations—0.06%—consider W. Nee their spiritual leader. Viewed against this backdrop, these numbers are merely a "drop in the ocean,"⁷ unless the average congregation is huge. Discerning readers ought to ask—is that all? Why are these figures so small? Contrary to the claim W. Nee was "the first Chinese Christian to exercise an influence on Western Christians," these statistics suggest he had virtually **no significant impact** on global Christianity when measured in terms of actual Christian congregations. This conclusion is more striking, given the local church constituting a major plank of W. Nee's teaching. We note that the figure of 3,000 churches worldwide exactly matches Benson Phillips' report that there are⁸ "300,000 saints in over 3,000 churches outside mainland China." This suggests the US Congressional Record relied on LSM's data. However, there are reasons to believe LSM's figures vastly underestimate Watchman Nee's legacy, both inside and outside mainland China. Here we reexamine—based on quantifiable measures produced by reputable scholars—Watchman Nee's contribution to global Christianity.

LSM Underreports Watchman Nee's Legacy

In cities like Hong Kong,⁹ Singapore, Manila and Toronto multiple local churches claim descent from Watchman Nee. They endorse Watchman Nee's biblical teaching, yet they differ in their allegiance to the teaching of Witness Lee and LSM's "blended brothers." This phenomenon of multiple local churches in one city reflects the repeated "parting of ways" between workers in the "Lord's Recovery" over the last 60-years. Besides Witness Lee, other coworkers of W. Nee (e.g. Stephen Kuang¹⁰) also raised up congregations, fellowships and/or local churches in Watchman Nee's line. Moreover in the 1950s there were problems in Taiwan and the Far East within the sphere of Witness Lee's labor which spawned additional congregations. This pattern was repeated on a global scale in the late-1980s and more recently since 2005.¹¹ These turbulent episodes in the Recovery's history produced numerous local churches around the globe which survive and prosper outside LSM's sphere of influence.

LSM's "blended brothers" only recognize local churches under their leadership, who implement their programs and who use materials published by LSM and its affiliates.¹² Other local churches, even though they "stand on the ground of oneness," receive all genuine Christian believers, and teach Watchman Nee's theology, are ignored by LSM; they are considered illegitimate, not part of Christ's Body¹³ and consequently are omitted from LSM's statistics.¹⁴ This causes W. Nee's legacy to be underreported by LSM. Due to these exclusions, the number of localities and believers within LSM's sphere of influence does *not* indicate the totality of Watchman Nee's legacy; these statistics are

downward-biased measures of Watchman Nee's heritage. Such data may reflect the legacy of *Witness Lee's ministry as interpreted by LSM's "blended brothers,"* but that is only one portion of W. Nee's heritage. For example, at least five local church congregations within the city of Toronto, Canada claim spiritual descent from W. Nee. Only one, "The Local Church in Toronto" (registered April 2007) is currently recognized by LSM as a genuine local church. Yet, when evaluating W. Nee's "contribution to global Christianity," surely all five Toronto congregations ought to count as his legacy, since all five "consider themselves the spiritual heirs of Watchman Nee." Objective statistical data produced by reputable scholars are available to address these issues and overcome such biases.

The World Christian Database

Dr. David B. Barrett¹⁵ and his research team have spent the last 40 years quantifying world religions, especially the Christian faith in all its facets. Barrett is aided by over 400 specialists around the globe who feed him data, including Dr. J. Gordon Melton (editor of the *Encyclopedia of American Religions* and LSM's expert witness¹⁶) who is familiar with the Lord's recovery and the local churches. Barrett's¹⁷ *World Christian Encyclopedia* is "the gold standard" in the statistical analysis of global Christianity. *Time* magazine called it¹⁸ "a bench mark in our understanding of the true religious state of the planet." *Time* designated Barrett "the Linnaeus of religious taxonomy," saying his "statistics...are, without doubt, the best available estimates, combined with impressively detailed rundowns on most of Christianity's 20,000 subgroups." The "Local Churches" (also known as W. Nee's "Little Flock" and the "Assembly Hall Churches") which began in China (in 1922) are among the subgroups tracked. Barrett's data is available to scholars online as the World Christian Database (WCD).¹⁹ What do these statistical data tell us about Watchman Nee's legacy? We look first at the US, then worldwide (excluding China). Finally we present data on China, the birthplace of "the Lord's present Recovery."

Watchman Nee's Legacy in the United States

Witness Lee viewed his ministry as a continuation of Watchman Nee's.²⁰ Hence the number of churches and church-members associated with W. Lee ought to count among W. Nee's legacy. Beginning from Los Angeles in 1962, "the number of local churches in the U.S. grew from 7 in 1969 to 27 in 1973, and then to 50 in 1977," according to LSM's reports.²¹ Around 2005 LSM reported that²² "Today there are nearly 300 local churches across the United States, with a combined membership of almost 25,000." However, the list of "Church Addresses"²³ for 2005-6 lists only 240 US cities. Evidently this number has been rounded up to 300. According to the latest reports²⁴ "The local churches claim more than 30,000 U.S. adherents." So, currently LSM claims 300 churches with 30,000 members. How do these numbers compare with other data?

The World Christian database (WCD) indicates that "Assembly Hall Churches" (the "Local Church") had 300 US congregations in 2005; that's 25% more than the 240 listed in LSM's "Church Addresses." The number of US Christians affiliated with the local churches was 36,000. This membership number is 20% larger than LSM's latest figure of 30,000. Yet it is credible, given our expectation that WCD's total includes local churches not recognized by LSM. It's also worth noting that the number of church-members increased from 33,600 in 2000 to 36,000 in 2005—a mere 1.4% p.a.²⁵ rate of increase. For the rest of the world the divergence of WCD's statistics from LSM's figures is more dramatic.

Watchman Nee's Global Legacy outside China

Expanding our view to the globe (apart from China), the WCD identifies local churches in 58 countries. According to this source there are approx. 2,400 churches outside China, with 614,000 members.²⁶

According to LSM,²⁷ "By 1985...worldwide there were 129,000 believers meeting in 605 local churches." By 2002²⁸ "The Local Church now has more than 3,000 congregations worldwide and more than 250,000 members...an LSM spokesman said." In Nov. 2003 LSM's Benson Phillips declared, that there were,²⁹ "300,000 saints in over 3,000 churches outside mainland China."

LSM's figure of 3,000 churches exceeds the WCD's count of 2,400. Possibly this is due to missing data—WCD indicates that no local churches or church-members exist in France, Holland, Israel, Italy, Angola

and Mozambique.³⁰ However, in each of these countries (plus others) there is reason to believe there was, in fact, a local church presence in 2005. However these omitted churches were probably small, so their omission likely has little impact on WCD's global church membership statistics. The latter figure—the total number of adherents to the local church reported by WCD—614,000—is more than twice that reported by LSM. According to the WCD there were **over 600,000 local church members in 2005, more than double the 300,000 figure claimed by LSM.** We believe the main cause of this discrepancy is LSM's narrow definition including only local churches and members under their direct supervision.

W. Nee's Impact outside China is Double LSM's Data

WCD's statistics suggest that globally (outside China) the actual number of local church members is double that reported by LSM—600,000 vs. 300,000. This indicates W. Nee's influence outside China is significantly greater than LSM's figures imply. This also suggests that a majority of the 600,000+ Christian believers, who are spiritual heirs of Watchman Nee, choose to practice their church-life independent of LSM and the "blended coworkers." The combination of these two properties—WCD's statistics indicate larger membership, but a smaller number of churches, compared to LSM's figures—means that WCD's local church congregations average 250 compared to LSM's average size of 100. This indicates that local churches outside LSM's sphere of influence tend to be larger (on average) than the typical LSM local church. Anecdotal reports from places like Hong Kong, Singapore and Toronto are consistent with this observation. The table below presents local church-membership statistics by world region for 2000 and 2005, plus growth rates for the 5-year period, 2000 to 2005

Table: LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERS BY REGION 2000 to 2005

Region	Members 2000	Members 2005	Growth rate
North America (incl. Mex.)	43,600	47,600	1.76%
Central Am. & Caribbean	7,150	8,510	3.48%
South America	58,280	70,630	3.84%
Europe incl. Russia	36,550	38,780	1.18%
Africa	4,250	5,070	3.53%
Australasia	3,440	4,100	3.51%
Asia (excl. China)	382,490	438,894	2.75%
TOTAL (excl. China)	538,760	613,584	2.60%

NOTES: Source—World Christian Database statistics for "Assembly Hall Churches" (The Local Church, 'Little Flock,' begun in China by Watchman Nee 1922,) denoted "I-3nC." Country data aggregated into world regions.

Even excluding mainland China, local church membership is concentrated—over 70%—in Asia. The local church is markedly under-represented in Africa and Europe (excluding Russia). Growth rates differ by region; South America is above, and N. America & Europe below, the average rate of 2.6%. Europe's low growth is due to slow growth in Russia of only 1%.³¹

Lastly we note that WCD's statistics show a decline in the growth rate of local church membership.³² For the 30-year period 1970 to 2000, membership rose at an average rate of 8.3%. In the next 5-years, 2000 to 2005, this rate declined to 2.6%. This phenomenon characterized virtually all countries and regions represented in WCD's data. We believe these declining growth rates occurred in both LSM- and non-LSM affiliated local churches. Moreover we expect LSM's post-2005 campaigns against Bro. Titus Chu in the Great Lakes Area of N. America and Bro. Yu-Lan Dong in S. America will further reduce growth rates, perhaps causing an absolute decrease in local church-membership in these particular areas. The number of congregations could increase as individual local churches split into LSM-affiliated and non-LSM congregations. Yet surely such an increase in the number of congregations is a perverse measure of W. Nee's influence. More importantly the number of local church believers will probably decrease as members become disillusioned and discouraged due to tensions arising from LSM's campaign to establish their uncontested control in the Great Lakes area of N. America and in S. America. This would be detrimental to Watchman Nee's legacy.

Watchman Nee's Legacy in China

Mainland China was the scene of Watchman Nee's labor and the region we would expect to see the greatest impact of his ministry. According to LSM,³³ "By the time of [W. Nee's] arrest [in 1952], approximately four hundred local churches had been raised up in China, as well as over thirty local churches had been raised up in the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia." Other scholars quote a larger figure. One says,³⁴ "By 1949, there were over 700 local churches with a combined membership of 70,000." Dr. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee concurs, saying W. Nee's³⁵ (so-called) "Little Flock experienced a rapid growth of its church membership between 1927 and 1949...It is estimated that by 1949...the Little Flock had as many as 70,000 adherents." In 1949³⁶ "Christians accounted for one percent of China's total population with only three million Catholics and one million Protestants." Taking the 70,000 figure at face value, this implies that, in 1949, local church believers represented a significant percentage of China's 4 million Christians. They constituted 1.75% of all Christians (Catholic & Protestant) and 7% of all Protestants (non-Catholics) in China.

The coming of communism brought Watchman Nee and China's local churches into a "dark night," lasting over 20-years. In 1970, during the "Cultural revolution," Christians represented only 0.13% of China's population. This small remnant suffered severe persecution. Gradually, however, the "day dawned." "It was not until the opening of China to the outside world in 1978 that the Little Flock had begun to resume their activities in public."³⁷ Mostly, this meant "underground meetings" in unregistered "house churches," outside the orbit of the government-sanctioned "Three Self Church." Since the 1970s the "seeds sown" through the suffering and martyrdom of Watchman Nee and other local church believers have borne abundant fruit. From 1970 to 2000 the number of Christians grew from 1 Million to 80 Millions.³⁸ By 2005 the total topped 100 Million. Of these an estimated 14 Million are Catholic (registered & unregistered), 21 Million belong to the government-approved "Three-Self Church." An estimated 68 million Chinese believers belong to the "House Church movement," a loose affiliation of unsanctioned Christian gatherings in homes, schools and work-places.³⁹ This latter group is growing rapidly; WCD statistics show that, for the 30-years 1970 to 2000, the "house-churches" in China grew at the explosive rate of 28% p.a. In the 5-year period 2000 to 2005 they continued to grow at a healthy 6% p.a. In January 2009, *The Times* of London claimed the unregistered evangelical churches in China had attained a total of 100 million members.

10 Million Local Church Believers in China

The World Christian Database includes the "Assembly Hall churches" ("Little Flock" churches of W. Nee) among the "House Church" movement. The table below presents WCD's estimates of congregations and membership for China's major "house church networks" in 2005. Some are identified by location (province or city), others by emphasis (e.g. "Born Again Movement.") The "Little Flock" local churches associated with W. Nee are designated as "Assembly Hall Churches." They are in the center of the table.

CHINA'S HOUSE CHURCH NETWORKS *estimates for 2005*

<i>Name</i>	<i>No. Congregations</i>	<i>No. Members</i>
Born Again Movement	275,000	24.5 Millions
Anhui	120,000	12.0 M.
Fangcheng	120,000	12.0 M.
Assembly Hall Churches	120,000	10.0 M.
Nanyang	65,000	6.0 M.
Tanghe	85,000	4.5 M.
Wenzhou	23,000	2.3 M.
TOTAL All Networks	843,000	68.3 M.

Note: This list enumerates only the largest networks. 300+ smaller networks are included in the total. The sum of the networks exceeds the total because some congregations & members are included in multiple networks. The totals eliminate such double-counting. Source: World Christian Database "Han House Churches" category: I-3cC For 2005 WCD estimated that the local churches in China accounted for 15% of all house church members. This matches observations that⁴⁰ "the 'Little Flock' [is] one of the largest house church 'streams' active in China." According to WCD's statistics, **ten million local church believers were**

affiliated with 120,000 local church congregations across China; they are spiritual heirs of W. Nee. These 10 million local church believers represent 10% of all 100.6 million Chinese Christians of all shades. They represent 12.5% of all non-Catholic believers. Netting out both Catholics and the official "Three Self Church," local church believers are 17% of the rest. These proportions imply that today Watchman Nee's spiritual heirs constitute a greater percentage of Chinese Christians than when he was alive. Based on these measures, Brother Nee's impact on Christianity in China has increased over the last 60 years. Surely this is the Lord's vindication of Watchman Nee's faithful labor and vision of the local church. Under the Lord's rich blessing his ministry has borne abundant fruit among China's succeeding generations.

LSM's Figures Represent Witness Lee's Legacy, not Watchman Nee's
Christianity Today reported that⁴¹ "The local churches claim...over 800,000 [adherents] in China." This concurs with Benson Phillips' declaration⁴² "Inside mainland China there are conservatively, 850,000 saints in the Lord's recovery and multitudes of churches." These two figures are "in the same ballpark," suggesting local church membership in China is significantly less than one million. They are dramatically lower than WCD's estimate of 10 million local church-members. What explains this marked discrepancy?

This divergence reflects the development of two distinct "local church lines" in mainland China. Prior to communism Watchman Nee had a significant impact on Chinese Christianity in the form of the ("Little Flock") local churches. One veteran China-watcher reported that,⁴³ "the Little Flock survived the persecutions of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution. Their focus on the Scriptures, on close fellowship in small group meetings and their freedom from foreign control stood them in good stead. By the late 1970s many house churches in the Little Flock tradition were again flourishing in many cities, and their influence was strong in the countryside areas, too." Later, he writes "It appears that the Little Flock have had a widespread influence." This influence is reflected in the statistics. For example, around Fuzhou, Watchman Nee's hometown,⁴⁴ "In nearby Fuqing County as early as 1981 it was reported there were 70,000 Christians of whom 30,000 [43%] adhered to the Little Flock." While in Northern Zhejiang Province, Xiaoshan County, in 1984 a study found "more than 95 per cent of the 63,000 Christians ...belonged to the Little Flock." Watchman Nee's line of local churches, indigenous to mainland China, flourished from the 1970s, independent of Christian sources overseas.

W. Lee's "Local Church ('Shouters')" cannibalized W. Nee's "Little Flock" Churches
Bro. Witness Lee left China for Taiwan in 1949. He raised up local churches in Taiwan and SE Asia before moving to the US in 1962. From his base in S. California, he was instrumental in establishing local churches around the globe. Witness Lee was never able to return to mainland China. However, China's gradual opening to the outside world allowed W. Lee's publications to be covertly imported into China, beginning in the 1970s. "One observer reports⁴⁵ "In the early eighties, large quantities of literature produced by Witness Lee, based in California, began to circulate in China." This was perceived by China's authorities as foreign interference, which they sought to restrict. Converts embracing W. Lee's teachings "denounced existing Christian churches as 'Babylon.'" The practices of calling-on-the-Lord and pray-reading got them derogatively labeled as "the Shouters." Their aggressive proselytizing provoked a head-on clash with government authorities. In 1983, "the Shouters" were banned, their activities vigorously suppressed, and key leaders imprisoned. "However, it continues its activities underground, and the death of Witness Lee in California...appears unlikely to dampen the ardor of its members."

The introduction of W. Lee's ministry into China produced rifts in numerous local churches. Jason Kindopp reports that⁴⁶ LSM's "Local Church missionaries returned to the mainland after 1978, primarily targeting Little Flock congregations." Where, there was one local church previously, now two were produced—one accepting, and the other rejecting, W. Lee's teachings. W. Nee asserted that⁴⁷ "the church is not for the ministry; rather, the ministry is for the church." W. Lee is on record saying,⁴⁸ "we would sacrifice...everything for the sake of keeping the unique unity. We would never tolerate anything that would cause a separation or a division. We do not care for numbers—we care for unity." Yet, W. Lee's ministry divided existing local churches; new churches emerged which were "for W. Lee's ministry." The "Local church ('Shouters')" cannibalized existing "Little Flock" churches.⁴⁹ Previously the "Little Flock" churches were divided into registered and unregistered churches; now⁵⁰ "The situation is further

complicated by the split between those who follow Witness Lee and those who keep to the original Watchman Nee tradition...[Based on official] statistics published in 2005, about 200,000 believers in 20 provinces were led astray by 'the Shouters'...in the late 1970s and early 1980s...Today the more orthodox Little Flock assemblies flourish throughout China as independent house churches." Importing W. Lee's material produced multiple local churches in many Chinese cities. There may be both registered and unregistered "Little Flock" churches associated with W. Nee. In addition, in the same city, there may also be a ('Shouters') local church aligned with LSM and its Taiwan affiliate. Thus, an observer describes the situation typical of SE China saying,⁵¹ "Fujian has large numbers of house-churches. The movement associated with Watchman Nee...is very strong in the province both in its more conservative and biblical form as the Little Flock and also the more extreme Local Church colloquially dubbed 'Shouters,' which has been banned by the government." Barrett *et. al.* estimated that by 1995 the⁵² "Little Flock" numbered 1.2 million, while the "Local Church (Shouters)" numbered 300,000 adherents—25% of that figure.

Against this complex background it is necessary to evaluate LSM-President, Benson Phillips', declaration that⁵³ "Inside mainland China there are conservatively, 850,000 saints in the Lord's recovery and multitudes of churches." According to Benson Phillips' worldview this means that 850,000 saints in China receive W. Lee's ministry as interpreted by LSM's "blended brothers;" they are the (so-called) "Local Church ('Shouters')." Other believers, even those in the "Little Flock" churches, are not recognized by LSM as part of the Lord's recovery, nor as legitimate members to Christ's Body. They belong to "degraded Christianity." This explains why LSM claims less than one million members in mainland China, while WCD's statistics indicate the "Little Flock" house-churches of Watchman Nee number 10 million members. According to Barrett *et. al.* the "Little Flock" churches grew from 1.2 million adherents in 1995 to 10 million in 2005--a high growth rate of 21.2%, sufficient to double every 40 months. Over a similar period the "Local Church ('Shouters)" grew from 300,000 to 850,000 adherents⁵⁴—a growth rate of 13.1%, enough to double every 66 months. However, that is only two-thirds the growth rate of China's "Little Flock" churches.

Watchman Nee's Legacy—10.6 Million Believers in 360,000 Local Churches Witness Lee's Legacy—1.15 Million Believers in "multitudes of churches"

When *Christianity Today* asked readers & scholars to name the top five influential Christians in the 20th century, "The only non-Western Christian to place significantly was China's Watchman Nee." The magazine justly named him one of the 100 most influential Christians of the 20th century. Recently the United States Congress recognized⁵⁵ "the immense spiritual achievement of Watchman Nee." However, the statistics quoted to substantiate this assertion were less than impressive. The Congressional Record noted "Today more than 3,000 churches outside of China, including several hundred in the United States, look to [W. Nee] as one of their religious and theological leaders." These are essentially LSM's figures which only count adherents to the teachings of W. Nee's coworker, Witness Lee as interpreted by LSM's "blended brothers." Globally, LSM claims there are⁵⁶ "300,000 saints in over 3,000 churches outside mainland China. Inside mainland China there are conservatively, 850,000 saints in the Lord's recovery and multitudes of churches." This yields a grand total of 1.15 million members of LSM-affiliated local churches worldwide as of 2003. That figure represents merely 0.1% of the world's Christian church members.⁵⁷ This is one objective measure of Witness Lee's legacy.

In contrast to this the World Christian Database reports that Watchman Nee's "Little Flock" local churches are a major component of China's dynamic "house church movement" with 10 Million members in 120,000 congregations. Ten percent of all China's Christians associate with Christian gatherings linked to Watchman Nee. In addition, outside mainland China over 600,000 church-members meeting in 2,400 local churches, distributed across 58 countries, are identified as spiritual heirs of Watchman Nee. This gives a grand total of 10.6 million local church members in over 360,000 congregations. We believe that this figure is a more accurate measure of Watchman Nee's impact on global Christianity. This represents 0.8% of the world's Christian church members, 1.2% of the globe's non-Catholics. These figures indicate that Watchman Nee's influence is ten times that of Witness Lee. Put differently, **Witness Lee's impact is only 10% of Watchman Nee's**, using the measures employed here. This means that the "LSM-Witness Lee line" is only one of the many streams which have flowed forth from Watchman Nee's rich spiritual heritage and it is by no means the major stream.

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NOTES:

The author thanks those who commented on earlier drafts of this piece. As usual the author accepts full responsibility for the contents. The views expressed here are solely the author's and should *not* be attributed to any believers, elders, co-workers or churches with whom he is associated.

1. Hon. Christopher H. Smith, US Congressional Record—*Extensions of Remarks, July 31, 2009*, p. E2110. The text of these *Remarks* is reproduced in its entirety on page 12, at the end of this article.
2. Hon. Christopher H. Smith, US Congressional Record—*Extensions of Remarks, July 31, 2009*, p. E2110
3. Hon. Christopher H. Smith, US Congressional Record—*Extensions of Remarks, July 31, 2009*, p. E2110
4. To be precise, this figure is reported on the website of the LSM-affiliate, "Defense & Confirmation Project" (DCP) called ContendingForTheFaith.com under the heading, "Living Stream Ministry & The Local Church: Background Information, Description of The Local Church and Living Stream Ministry" on <http://www.contendingforthefaith.com/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/ministry.html>
5. Barrett *et. al.* estimate there were 3.751 Million "congregations (worship centers)" worldwide in mid-2009 (*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Jan. 2009, p. 32). There were 968,000 congregations in China (World Christian Database 2005).
6. There were 528,617 congregations in the US as of 2005 (data from the World Christian database)
7. "A drop in the ocean" (a British, American & Australian idiom). *Also* "a drop in the bucket," (An American idiom) meaning a very small amount in comparison to the amount that is needed. *Cambridge Idioms Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press 2006.
8. Benson Phillips, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91 Benson Phillips is the current president of Living Stream Ministry (LSM), a non-profit organization based in Anaheim CA, which publishes the writings of brothers Watchman Nee, Witness Lee and the "blended coworkers" (Witness Lee's presumed successors after he passed away in 1997). Note that "300,000 saints in over 3,000 churches" implies an average congregation of 100 saints--not a huge number. These are hardly "mega-churches"!
9. In the case of Hong Kong the first meeting hall was established in the 1940s during the era of Bro. K. H. Weigh at 5 Observatory Road. Subsequently other meeting halls were added. The (non-LSM aligned) "Church in Hong Kong" continues to meet at this original location, plus numerous others throughout Hong Kong. The smaller, LSM-aligned, "Church in Hong Kong" was established later (1980s or 1990s) and meets elsewhere.
10. "Stephen Kaung is a Chinese Christian speaker and writer in Richmond, Virginia. At an early age, Kaung was converted to Christianity and was active in the Methodist Church in China, with whom his father was a minister. He first met Watchman Nee in the early 1930s and joined Nee's indigenous Christian work full-time, working with him until 1949 when he left China and became involved with Christian work in other areas of the Far East." And the USA. [<http://www.learnoutloud.com/Free-Audio-Video/Religion-and-Spirituality/Christian-Living/Stephen-Kuang-Sermons/15607>]
11. In the late-1980s four prominent brothers, the leaders of churches in the USA, Europe and the Far East—Brothers John Ingalls, William (Bill) Mallon, Joseph Fung & John So—were "quarantined" (excommunicated). Churches failing to enforce this disciplinary action—e.g. Charlotte & Durham, NC; Westminster, CA; Scottsdale AZ, plus churches in Germany, Hong Kong & Ghana (led by Bro. Ransford Ackah), Africa—were effectively disowned by W. Lee and LSM. Recently, LSM's "blended brothers," (W. Lee's presumed successors) took similar actions against Bro. Titus Chu in N. America's Great Lakes area and Bro. Yu-Lan Dong in Brazil, S. America. It is not the purpose of this article to give a detailed account of these events, which have been documented elsewhere. The point here is that (due to these and other events) numbers of local churches exist around the globe, beyond the sphere of LSM's influence.
12. "LSM's programs" include their "seven annual feasts" ("blending conferences," "elders' trainings" and "crystallization trainings"), their full-time trainings (FTTA etc) and their disciplinary actions (e.g. the "quarantines" of Bro. Titus Chu & Bro. Yu-Lan Dong). LSM's materials include their "*Holy Word for Morning Revival*" (HWMR) and *The Ministry* magazine. According to LSM's "one publication" policy, there can be no other publications [see "Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery, (30 June 2005)]. LSM's affiliates include the Defense & Confirmation Project (DCP) which handled LSM's lawsuits against other Christian publishers (e.g. Harvest House) and the Taiwan Gospel Bookroom (TGBR, Taipei, Taiwan) which publishes LSM material in Chinese. In this article we don't distinguish between LSM and its affiliates (TGBR, DCP, etc)

13. Consider the following quotations, both published statements made by two of LSM's "blended coworkers": [1] Bro. Minoru Chen is on record saying "I would say that practically speaking, **for us the Body today is just the Lord's recovery**... In Brother Lee's understanding, **the Body equals the recovery**. We know that the mystical Body of Christ includes all the believers, all of the redeemed ones in time and in space, but **practically for us today, the recovery is the Body**." [Minoru Chen., *The Ministry*, v. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 196, emphasis added] [2] LSM President, Benson Phillips is on record saying, "When a brother leaves the church life... He is no longer a part of the Body." In context, the statement reads: "Surely we have seen that **when a brother leaves the church life** his situation tends to worsen. This occurs because he has become an individual again. **He is no longer a part of the Body**." [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3, March 2005, p. 130, emphasis added.] [3] LSM president Benson Phillips is also on record saying, "All the other local churches which comprise the Body of Christ." In context the statement reads: "The Body should be first. **All the other local churches which comprise the Body of Christ** should be number one and your local Church should be second.... Not one local church is the Body; every local church is a part of the Body; there are many local churches but there are never many bodies" [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Feb 2005, p. 113, emphasis added.] It is just a short step from these statements to the view that when a group of brothers (a local church) leaves LSM, it leaves "the Body." In actuality, it leaves, *not* Christ's Body, but "LSM's Body." In fact, according to the Bible, Christ's Body includes all genuine believers, *not* merely those in the "Lord's Recovery;" it includes all genuine believers in Roman Catholicism, Protestant denominations and independent congregations, *not* just those in the "local churches."
14. After the "parting of ways" between Bro. John So and W. Lee around 1990, John So's name no longer appeared in LSM's publications. The original *Life-study of Genesis* makes reference to Benson Phillips and **John So**. In the initial loose-leaf printing, W. Lee was quoted saying "Why Benson Phillips and **John So** could be so solidly perfected and made to be such strong pillars for the Lord's move? You know what? The main secret is that they didn't have any concepts. ...When **John So** stayed in Los Angeles, he knew nothing, but just soak, absorb, pick up, all the things from this ministry. . . . Even they saw some mistakes, 'Forget about it, I don't have the time to talk about it, I like to soak the positive things'." [transcript from the spoken version of the *Life-Study of Genesis, Message 88* & originally printed in loose-leaf format, emphasis added] Note that all of Witness Lee's references to the names of Benson Phillips and John So have been completely removed in the bound copies of the *Life-Study of Genesis*, see pages 1138-1139 in the bound "green volumes," and from the version of the *Life-Study of Genesis* posted in LSM's online publications. Local churches in the Great Lakes area on North America which either opposed or refused to comply with LSM's 2006 directive to quarantine Bro. Titus Chu were subsequently omitted from "*Church Addresses*" for N. America (US, Canada, Mexico, Central America & Caribbean) produced by The Church Address Book Project, Anaheim, CA.
15. Dr. David B. Barrett was recently affiliated with the Department of Missiometrics, Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA.
16. After the conclusion of LSM's lawsuit regarding the book: *The God-Men* (Lee v. Duddy) in 1985, one of the expert witnesses who had testified at that trial, Dr. J. Gordon Melton, the Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion and editor of the definitive work *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, wrote and published "*An Open Letter Concerning the Local Church, Witness Lee and The God-Men Controversy*." In support of the local churches. [See: contendingforthefaith.com] Dr. Melton should be regarded as a sympathetic & knowledgeable observer of the Local Church movement.
17. David B. Barrett *et. al.* *World Christian Encyclopedia*, (1982, 2001, Oxford University Press)
18. Richard N. Ostling & Alistair Matheson, "*Counting Every Soul on Earth*," *Time* magazine, Monday, May, 03, 1982.
19. "The World Christian Database (WCD) includes detailed information on 9,000 Christian denominations and on religions in every country of the world. Extensive data are available on 238 countries and 13,000 ethnolinguistic peoples, as well as on 5,000 cities and 3,000 provinces. The WCD incorporates the core data from the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE) and *World Christian Trends* (WCT). However, statistics in the WCD constitute a significant update of the data published in *WCE/WCT* in 2001. WCD is an initiative of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. " [Source: WCD website] The World Christian Database has been evaluated against other data sets by Becky Hsu, Amy Reynolds, Conrad Hackett, & James Gibbon of Princeton University in an article entitled, "ESTIMATING THE RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION OF ALL NATIONS: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE WORLD CHRISTIAN DATABASE" Forthcoming in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, December 2008. They "find that the WCD religious composition data are highly correlated with other sources that offer cross-national religious composition estimates. For cross-national studies, the WCD may be more useful than other sources of data because of the inclusion of the largest number of countries, different time periods, and information on all, even small, religious groups." (Becky Hsu *et. al.*)

20. Thus Witness Lee says, concerning LSM's Recovery Version study Bible (which contains extensive notes by W. Lee) "The Recovery Version actually is not my version because my understanding of the Bible depends absolutely on Watchman Nee's interpretation." [Witness Lee, *The Ten Critical 'Ones' for the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, Chp. 1] Moreover, LSM's "blended coworkers" elevate W. Nee & W. Lee to the rank of "ministers of the age" and liken them to the OT prophets, Elijah and Elisha. LSM President, Benson Phillips says, "In the case of Elijah and Elisha, one followed the other.... It was the same with Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. Throughout church history, we do not know of a case where one followed the other so definitely, both having the vision of the age. **The Lord raised up our Brother Nee** in approximately the first half of the twentieth century. **The vision of the age was with him. He was the minister of the age.** God stood with him, and **Witness Lee followed him, just like Elisha followed Elijah.** But then... **God set Watchman Nee aside** when he was put into prison. Who did God bring in? **Who continued this? It was Witness Lee.**" (BP, *The Ministry*, vol.7, no. 6, August, 2003, p. 35, emphasis added)
21. Witness Lee, Life & Ministry <http://www.witnesslee.org/life-ministry.html>] This LSM website also says, "By 1980 there were 70 local churches in the U.S." "By 1985 the number of believers meeting in the local churches in the U.S. had grown to 10,200, and there were 98 local churches in the U.S. " [Witness Lee, Life & Ministry <http://www.witnesslee.org/life-ministry.html>] Moreover, when Witness Lee passed away "in 1997 there were over 250 local churches in the United States" [Witness Lee, <http://www.contendingforthefaith.com/links/wl.html>]
22. Living Stream Ministry & The Local Church: Background Information, Description of The Local Church and Living Stream Ministry on <http://www.contendingforthefaith.com/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/ministry.html> But when was "today"? Was it when this website was first created? Was this section added later? Have the numbers been updated to reflect the current situation? This website is Copyright © 2003-2008 The Church in Fullerton. The midpoint of 2003-2008 would be 2005-6 (say 31st Dec. 2005)."
23. "Church Addresses 2005-2006" produced by "The Church Address Book Project", Anaheim, CA. The exact figure is 238 cities (not including 19 cities in Puerto Rico).
24. Collin Hansen "Cult Watchers Reconsider: Former detractors of Nee and Lee now endorse 'local churches'." *Christianity Today, January (Web-only), 2009*, vol. 53, posted 1/26/2009 09:58 AM
25. Here (and elsewhere in this article) growth rates are computed using continuous compounding--e^t.
26. The exact figures are 2,392 congregations with 613,584 members. Note that WCD counts affiliated church members, not church meeting attendance. If 80% of church-members attend meetings of the church each week, then church membership would exceed attendance by 20%
27. Witness Lee, Life & Ministry <http://www.witnesslee.org/life-ministry.html>
28. Billy Bruce, "Local Church' Scrutinized by Critics," *Charisma Magazine* www.charismanow.com Tuesday, 31 December 2002 08:00 PM EST
29. Benson Phillips, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91
30. Since 2000 brothers & sisters from Brazil, associated with Bro. Yu-Lan Dong, have conducted an aggressive work in Africa to spread the "gospel of the kingdom" and propagate the local-church. According to reports by the end of 2006 this labor produced "at least 100 cities in these 21 countries, with approximately 4,000 saints. Just in Angola we have more than 1,700 saints in over 50 cities." ["TRANSLATION OF REPORT ON LABOR IN AFRICA BY THE SAINTS IN BRAZIL" dated 15/01/2007 09:57:32, *Subject: A Brief Report on Africa*] Their labor in both Angola & Mozambique began in Oct. 2000. At least in Angola, Africa it should have produced significant results by 2005, the date of WCD's statistics employed here. None of Bro. Yu-Lan Dong's work outside S. America is counted in LSM's statistics.
31. Netting out Russia, Europe's growth rate rises to 3.02%. Russian local church membership grew at 15.1% p.a. prior to 2000. After 2000 it declined to a mere 1% p.a.. This is consistent with the observation that LSM poured immense resources (of manpower—full-timers from FTTA & FTTT, trainees and money etc) into Russia in the 1990s. After 2000 the resources allocated by LSM to Russia were scaled back dramatically. The other country exhibiting markedly slow growth is Taiwan. Growth of local church membership in Taiwan was only 0.63% p.a. for the 30-year period 1970 to 2000. Since 2000 the already-low growth rate declined further to 0.59% p.a. (2000 to 2005).
32. These conclusions are based upon a country-by-country analysis of growth rates. WCD's statistics report growth rates for "Assembly Hall Churches" (The Local Church, "Little Flock") for the time period 1970 to 2000 for all countries with local church congregations (excluding mainland China). These 30-year growth rates (1970 to 2000) are not reproduced in this article. We simply state our observations based upon our analysis.
33. Watchman Nee, <http://www.contendingforthefaith.com/links/wn.html> dated 2004?
34. Lam, Wing-hung, "Watchman Nee," article which appears in *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*. The same figure is given in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* [By Erwin Fahlbusch, Geoffrey William Bromiley] which says "In 1949 True Jesus Church had over 100,000 members; **Little Flock 70,000 in 700**

- churches; The Jesus Family 6,000 members in 141 'families'." Dennis McCallum claims the number was twice that, saying "the Little Flock movement probably reached a size of 150,000-300,000 active participants by the time of the revolution." [Dennis McCallum, Watchman Nee & the House Church Movement in China, Part 3 www.xenos.org/essays/nee3.htm] In the main text we adopt the intermediate number of 70,000
35. Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei, 'Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China', *Church History*, Vol.74, No.1, 1 March, 2005 29 pp.
 36. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, *JOURNAL OF CHURCH AND STATE*, p. 292
 37. Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei, "Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China," *Church History*, Vol.74, No.1, 1 March 2005, 29pp.
 38. The following figures are based upon WCD's statistics and reports.
 39. Note that these figures aggregate to over 100 million because there is some double-counting. For example some unregistered ("underground") Catholic congregations meet as "house churches."
 40. Quote from: Refugee Review Tribunal, AUSTRALIA, RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE, Research Response Number: CHN31627, Country: China, Date: 19 April 2007. Professor Mark Noll describes a "Little Flock local church" gathering when illustrating the changing face of global Christianity. He says, "Meanwhile, in Shanghai, members of the Local Church, or Little Flock, who are the spiritual descendents of Watchman Nee, also confess their sins to one another...this broad stream represents local Christian appropriation of some elements of the Keswick movement, with its focus on higher spiritual life, which began in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century." [Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity*, IVP Academic, 2009, p. 27]
 41. Collin Hansen "Cult Watchers Reconsider: Former detractors of Nee and Lee now endorse 'local churches'." [Christianity Today, January \(Web-only\), 2009](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/january/web-only/20090126a.html), vol. 53, posted 1/26/2009 09:58 AM
 42. Benson Phillips, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91
 43. Lambert, Tony, 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.64 – Attachment 5, quoted in Refugee Review Tribunal, AUSTRALIA, RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE, Research Response Number: CHN31627, Country: China, Date: 19 April 2007
 44. Lambert, Tony, 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p. 64
 45. Tony Lambert, "Heresies and Cults in China Today" posted on the Internet at <http://www.chinaforjesus.com/heresiesandcults.htm>
 46. Jason Kindopp of Brookings Institution, "Little Flock" in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, ed. Edward L Davis (2005) p. 474. We use the phrase "LSM's 'Local Church missionaries...'" in a general sense to encompass all those (officially delegated/recognized or not) who promoted the materials, teachings and/or practices espoused in publications of LSM & its affiliates (e.g. TGBR).
 47. Watchman Nee, *Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol., 61, p. 36. The quote in context reads: "The church is not for the ministry; rather, the ministry is for the church. A worker should not work with the intention of bringing the church under the control of his ministry. On the contrary, a worker should serve under the church." Consider also the following quote: "No minister is greater than the local church; rather the local church is greater than the ministers (cf. 1 Cor. 3:21-23). If this principle is not upheld, sects will be produced immediately. Once an assembly comes under a minister or a certain commission, it becomes a sect." [W. Nee, *Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 43, p. 576]
 48. W. Lee, *The Spirit & the Body*, chp. 1. This quote in context reads: "The unity about which we are speaking is the universal oneness of the Body. We do not practice unity simply among ourselves, but with all believers. We love all believers in Christ, including those in the Catholic Church and in all the denominations and free groups. Although we love all Christians, we do not care to participate in their divisions. Whether or not they want to be one with us in the unique unity depends on them. But even if they do not desire this, we still love them. We should not do anything that causes division. Rather, **we would sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of keeping the unique unity. We would never tolerate anything that would cause a separation or a division. We do not care for numbers—we care for unity.** We do not want to have a large number, yet be full of divisions. It is better to have just five hundred who continuously keep the unity." [W. Lee, *The Spirit & the Body*, chp. 1, high-lighted section quoted in the main text.]
 49. Cannibalize: "To deprive of ...resources, such as personnel, equipment, or funding, for use elsewhere: 'It becomes necessary to cannibalize unsuccessful projects to fund those which can proceed' (*Daily Report for Executives*)." The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, 2009 by Houghton Mifflin Company.
 50. "House-Church Networks: An Overview (Part 1) Global Chinese Ministries (GCM), March 2006, edited by Tony Lambert, OMF China Researcher. Further evidence of the split between "Little Flock" local churches and W. Lee's "Local Church ('Shouters)'" is provided by David Aikman (*Time's* long-time China Bureau Chief). Aikman talks about "segments of the 'Little Flock' network...now commonly referred to as 'the Shouters'." [David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 2003, p. 89] He also references a 1998 public document issued by leaders of

China's "House Church Movement" which calls on the Chinese government authorities to "release unconditionally all House Church Christians presently serving in Labor reform camps. These include Presbyterians...the Charismatic Church, the Local Church (incorrectly called the 'Shouters' Sect'), the Way of Life Church..., the Little Flock Church, the Pentecostal Church, Lutherans..." [David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 2003, pp. 91, 293] Notice that this statement clearly distinguishes between the "Local Church (incorrectly called the 'Shouters' Sect)" and the "Little Flock Church." These are viewed as two distinct strands within China's "House Church" Movement.

51. Global Chinese Ministries (GCM) China Church Survey by Tony Lambert March 2003
52. David B. Barrett, Todd Johnson, *et al.* *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200*, (2001) Table 6-4, entitled: "Independents: the 313 largest independency movements (Non-White/White led) of 100,000 members each, and the 60 over 1 million each, in AD 1995" pp. 297-9. The other figures given for China in 1995 are [1] For the "Little Flock, Church Assembly Halls": 4,000 churches; 800,000 adults; 1,200,000 affiliated members [2] For the "Local Church ('Shouters')": 2,000 churches; 120,000 adults; 300,000 affiliated members. [David B. Barrett, Todd Johnson, *et al.* *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200*, Table 6-4, pp. 297-9]
53. Benson Phillips, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91
54. David B. Barrett, Todd Johnson, *et al.* *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200*, (2001) Table 6-4, pp. 297-9. Note that here we are using the number of adherents (church members), not the number of adults (quoted above; see note 50). For the last statistic—850,000 for "Local Church ('Shouters')" members—we employ Bro. Benson Phillips' figure quoted above for Nov. 2003. Hence, in this instance, we use an 8-year time span for the latter.
55. Hon. Christopher H. Smith, US Congressional Record—*Extensions of Remarks*, July 31, 2009, p. E2110
56. BP, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91
57. The total number of "Affiliated Christians (church members)" is estimated for the mid-2000s at 1,359 million. [Global Table 5, line 25 in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Jan. 2009, p. 32.]

IN RECOGNITION OF WATCHMAN NEE

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
OF NEW JERSEY
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, July 30, 2009

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey.

Madam Speaker,

I rise today to acknowledge the immense spiritual achievement of Watchman Nee, a great pioneer of Christianity in China.

Christianity Today magazine recently honored Watchman Nee as one of the 100 most influential Christians of the twentieth century. Watchman Nee died over thirty years ago but his life and work continue to influence millions of Protestant Christians in China. Today more than three thousand churches outside of China, including several hundred in the United States, look to him as one of their religious and theological leaders.

Watchman Nee was an astonishingly devoted and energetic man, which I think can be seen from a capsule summary of his life. He became a Christian in 1922. In the 1930s, he traveled to Europe and North America, where he delivered sermons and speeches. Later his sermons were collected and published as books. By the late 1940s, Nee had become the most influential Chinese Christian writer, evangelist, and church builder. In 1952, the Chinese government imprisoned Nee and many other Christian leaders for their faith. Nee was never released, though during the 1960s and 1970s several of his books continued to grow in influence and popularity, particularly in the United States, and his best-known book, *The Normal Christian Life*, sold over one million copies world-wide and became a twentieth-century Christian classic. In 1972 he died at the age of 71 in a labor farm; his few surviving letters confirm that he remained faithful to God until the end.

Madam Speaker, it is estimated that China has more than one hundred million Christians, and millions of them consider themselves the spiritual heirs of Watchman Nee. Millions more are rightly proud of the contribution Watchman Nee made to global Christianity—he was the first Chinese Christian to exercise an influence on Western Christians—and indeed of his contribution to world spiritual culture. It is sad that the works of Watchman Nee are officially banned in China—even as they are being discovered afresh by a new generation of Western Christians. It is my hope that Watchman Nee's collected works can be freely published and distributed within China.

After Watchman Nee's death, when his niece came to collect his few possessions, she was given a scrap of paper that a guard had found by his bed. What was written on that scrap may serve as Watchman Nee's testament:

"Christ is the Son of God Who died for the redemption of sinners and was resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ. Watchman Nee."

Source: US Congressional Record—*Extensions of Remarks, July 31, 2009*, p. E2110