

**“PUBLICATION WORK IN THE LORD’S RECOVERY”**  
**– ANALYSIS & RESPONSE**  
**Nigel Tomes, August 2005.**

Living Stream Ministry recently issued a booklet entitled, “PUBLICATION WORK IN THE LORD’S RECOVERY.” Its main conclusion is that “*All the saints and all the churches everywhere should ...be restricted to one publication in the Lord’s recovery*” (p. 8). In this context “one publication” means items published by Living Stream Ministry and the Taiwan Gospel Book Room.

Prior to its issue, a number of brothers expressed, to the “blended coworkers,” their serious objections to this booklet. My concerns are detailed below. In the Lord’s recovery we all desire to “keep the oneness of the Spirit” and endeavour to be in one accord. Yet circumstances may arise which necessitate our speaking out. One such occasion in our recent history was the “Max Incident” in the 1970’s. Shortly after that affair, Brother Lee charged “*every local church must be a police station and every saint must be a policeman. If during the past four and a half years the churches had been police stations and the saints had been policemen, there would have been no way for the thieves to enter in. Many have been reluctant to act as policemen for fear they might cause trouble...*” (*Truth Messages*, 1979, p. 10). Still today, many are reluctant “*for fear they might cause trouble.*” In responding to the LSM document, I do not wish to be contentious. Rather, I feel that brother Lee’s warning (quoted above) is applicable to our present situation. I commend these comments to the reader’s consideration and conscience.

In the following sections I first analyse the booklet and then detail points of concern which I previously raised with the “blended brothers” and other co-workers. My 12 major points of concern can be expressed in the following queries:

1. **Is the “One Publication” policy Scriptural?** There is no teaching of “one publication” in the Bible, nor is there such a pattern in the composition of the New Testament. The New Testament ministers did not submit their writings (gospels, epistles, etc) to a “Central Review Committee” for approval.
2. **Is “One Publication” an item of “Speciality” or “Generality”?**
3. **If a local church adopts the “one publication” policy is it still a genuine local church? Or has it become a “ministry church”?**
4. **Why has an informal, voluntary, personal practice among workers become a teaching which is now a public policy, mandated upon the saints and the local churches?**
5. **Has the Living Stream Ministry Office been elevated above the “Levitical service” established by brother Lee?**
6. **Isn’t this the practice of Roman Catholicism concerning publication?**
7. **Is this document an example of “Historical Revisionism”?** —an attempt to rewrite the record of history in a manner not supported by the facts?
8. **Did Brother Lee’s call for “One Publication” establish a *General Principle* for all time or was it a *Temporary Expedient*? Put differently, was it a *Situation-specific and Person-specific fellowship*? In 1986, Brother Witness Lee, as the recognized leader -- the “one wise master builder” -- called for an “army” to “evangelize and truthize Taiwan.” For this ‘campaign,’ Brother Lee requested other brothers to stop publishing. Do these same conditions exist among us today? Who is the ‘one wise master builder’ today?**
9. **Doesn’t this policy contradict brother Nee’s teaching concerning the futility of using institutional arrangements to contain the Lord’s blessing**
10. **What about the impact on the saints in the Lord’s recovery?**
11. **What about the impact on the local churches?** The “one publication” policy, while intended to preserve the “*practical oneness among the local churches*” (p. 3) may become a factor of division both within local churches and among them.
12. **Isn’t there the Appearance of a “Conflict of Interest”?**

**NOTE:** These are the author’s personal views and not necessarily those of the saints, workers and churches with whom he is associated

## **Analysis of “Publication Work in the Lord’s Recovery” (June 30, 2005)**

[NOTE: Readers familiar with this document may wish to go directly to the following section.]

**The Chief Point:** *“there should be one publication among us”* (“*Publication Work...*” p. 3)  
*“All the saints and all the churches everywhere should similarly be restricted to one publication in the Lord’s recovery”* (p. 8)

**Rationale:** The Statement says: *One publication is*

- a. *“a testimony of our oneness in **the Body**”* (p. 3)
- b. *“a safeguard for **the unique ministry** in the Lord’s recovery”* (p. 3)
- c. *“[the way] to **preserve the integrity of the Lord’s ministry** among us”* (p. 3)
- d. *“[that integrity] is **crucial to the practical oneness among the local churches**”* (p. 3)

### **Historical Antecedents:**

- Brother Lee’s testimony *“I never published anything by myself. I always mailed my manuscript to the Gospel Book Room which was under Brother Nee...”* (p. 3)
- *“According to the practice established by Brother Nee in China, 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)
- *“Since Brother Nee’s day we in the Lord’s recovery have been ‘restricted in one publication’ and this restriction has resulted in one testimony among us. For decades we all have been nurtured and richly supplied by the one publication.”* (p 7)

### **1. One Publication means “one practical publication endeavor” through LSM & TGBR**

- *“Today we must be diligent to continue this practice of ...one publication in a practical way through the publication service of Living Stream Ministry and Taiwan Gospel Book Room”* (p. 4)

### **2. What “One Publication” Means --- One Publication means the ministry of W. Nee & W. Lee plus the on-going ministry of the “blended co-workers” at the 7 annual “feasts” & weekly ministry meetings, published primarily as outlines of the 7 feasts, *HWMR* & *The Ministry* magazine**

- *“Living Stream Ministry and Taiwan Gospel Book Room, ...continue to publish the Lord’s speaking among us in all the seven annual “feasts” and the weekly ministry meetings”*(p. 4-5)
- *“The up-to-date speaking among us is published primarily in **the outlines** of the messages for the seven “feasts,” **The Holy Word for Morning Revival**, and **The Ministry** magazine by Living Stream Ministry and in corresponding publications by Taiwan Gospel Book Room.”*(p. 6)

### **3. Could other writings possibly be considered for inclusion in the “one publication”?** Writers should

- Bring their proposals to the blended co-workers, LSM & TGBR – *“those who wish to write in this way should bring their proposals to the blended co-workers as well as to Living Stream Ministry and Taiwan Gospel Book Room and have their proposals checked to see whether they should be published or not.”* (p. 7)
- Participation in the one publication work – requires recognition by the churches, and affirmation by the leaders in the ministry & the publication work – *“Anyone who participates in [the one publication] must genuinely have the portion from the Lord to do so, and this portion should be easily recognizable to the churches and affirmed by those who take the lead in the ministry and those who take the lead in the publication work.”* (p. 7)

### **4. Implications for saints & churches:**

*“All the saints and all the churches everywhere should similarly be restricted to one publication in the Lord’s recovery”* (p. 8)

### **5. Publications by Individual Local Churches --**

- Individual churches can produce and distribute materials for local needs

- Problems arise when local publications gain larger geographical status – local publications should remain local matters

## 6. Publications by Individual Saints –

- “Some saints have a desire to write church histories, to produce children’s materials, to record music, and even to give and publish messages” (p. 8)
- “these can be reproduced in a variety of media and distributed widely, especially on the Internet and on CDs and DVDs.” (p. 8)
- “But the fact that these publications can be produced and distributed **should not give them any more credence among the churches than anything else that can be published today, secular or religious.**” (p. 8)
- “They **are not part of the one publication** in the Lord’s recovery, and they are not necessarily beneficial...” (p. 8)
- “The churches, through the elders, should be educated to understand this.... The elders everywhere should have a proper care ...with regard to publications, and they should guard the flock from things that could cause damage...” (p. 8)
- “As long as the churches do not become **platforms for the dissemination of these publications**, these publications should not become matters of issue among us.” (p. 8)

## RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT:

### 1. Is “One Publication” Scriptural?

A striking feature of the LSM document is that it offers **no Scriptural basis** for its main proposition – that there should be only “One Publication.” The only Scripture references cited in the entire 12,800-word document relate to the elders’ shepherding and guarding the flock. A New Testament metaphor is alluded to concerning “*the sounding of the one trumpet in the Lord’s recovery*” (p. 7). However, that verse, “if... the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle.” (1 Cor. 14:8) refers to speaking in tongues without interpretation. When applied to publications, this illustration is being borrowed and applied to a foreign context. That was not Paul’s point! It should be obvious that using a biblical illustration does not impart biblical authority to a non-scriptural teaching. The fact remains that **no Biblical basis is offered**. Rather than appealing to Scripture, brother Lee’s personal testimony is cited as the basis for this practice (p. 3). However, I would ask, since “one publication” is being stressed so much, shouldn’t it be based upon the Bible?

When brother Minoru Chen addressed this issue in the LSM 2004 Winter Training he said: “... **it is not a matter of right or wrong, biblical or non-biblical. It is a matter of whether there is one sound or more than one sound.**” (*The Ministry Magazine*, Vol. 9, issue 1, p. 186) I disagree! With all due respect, **it should matter** whether ‘one publication’ is biblical or not! Consider the following statements of brothers Nee and Lee:

- **The Bible is our only standard**

Watchman Nee’s famous declaration, now prominently displayed at the Lord’s Recovery exhibit in Taipei, Taiwan, says: “*The Bible is our only standard. We are not afraid to preach the pure Word of the Bible, even if men oppose; but if it is not the Word of the Bible, we could never agree even if everyone approved of it.*” (Watchman Nee, *Collected Works*, Vol. #7, p. 1231)

- **Whatever the Bible does not have, the church must reject**

“*Whatever the Bible does not have, the church must by all means reject. Otherwise, all those who follow the Lord faithfully will leave when they see the church having what the Bible has not.*” (Watchman Nee, *Further Talks*, p. 64)

- **Stand on what the Bible has, Reject what the Bible does not have**

“*Whatever the Bible has, we must stand on the positive side. For whatever matter the Bible allows both sides, we must stand on both sides. And whatever the Bible does not have we must reject...With whatever the Bible allows people freedom, we also should allow people freedom...*” (Watchman Nee, *Further Talks*, p. 64)

- **Do everything according to the Bible**

*“The very great, particular characteristic in the Lord’s recovery is to **do everything according to the Bible.**”* (Witness Lee, *Elders’ Training*, Book, #7, p. 107)

### **Is the “One Publication” Policy Scriptural? (continued)**

Perhaps we can pose the question in a different way --- **Was a “one publication” policy in effect when the New Testament was being written? Is there any evidence the New Testament writers submitted their writings to a “Central Review Committee” for approval? In fact there is none!** There is no evidence that the first group of “blended coworkers” (the first apostles) reviewed the writings of others (e.g. Mark, Luke) before they were accepted as part of the ‘one publication’ (which later became the New Testament). Although many others had already written gospel narratives, Luke simply says, *“it seemed good to me also... to write”* (Luke 1:3).

The New Testament writers (Paul, Luke, John etc) wrote as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle John was divinely charged to publish, *“What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches...”* (Rev. 1:11). Other people also wrote gospels and epistles – The “Gospel of Thomas,” the “Epistle of Barnabus” and the “Shepherd of Hermas” etc. Scholars tell us that no central committee reviewed these writings and exercised a *“discerning check”* (p. 7). In the first three centuries, *“There is no evidence of a central and official clearinghouse for inspired writings.”* (Geisler & Nix, p. 101) Apparently at that time the Sovereign Lord saw no need for outward arrangements to safeguard against *“the risk of causing confusion among the saints and of damaging the one accord among the churches.”* (p. 8). Yet the saints and the churches had their inner “taste” for life and they had the Holy Spirit. The saints rejected some writings (the Gnostic gospels etc) as unhelpful and even damaging. Other writings, by Paul, Peter, Matthew, etc., were accepted by the saints and the churches based upon their intrinsic spiritual merit. Consequently, they were copied more, circulated more and published more. Eventually these writings became the New Testament canon. Ultimately “the councils of Hippo (in 393 AD) and Carthage (in 397 AD) ... two local councils ratified the twenty-seven canonical books of the New Testament.” (Geisler & Nix, p. 111) However, that “official recognition” occurred about 300 years after the last New Testament books were written! As Professor Lightfoot says, *“It is necessary to emphasize that **no Church through its councils made the canon of Scripture.** No Church – in particular the Roman Catholic Church – by its decrees gave to or pronounced on the books of the Bible their infallibility. The Bible owes its authority to no individual or group. The Church does not control the canon, but the canon controls the Church.”* (Lightfoot, p. 112) Perhaps I am too simplistic, but shouldn’t this pattern of the early church provide us with some guidance on this issue? If the Lord did not establish a “one publication” policy when the New Testament was being produced, why is one needed today? Do we not have the same Lord? Is our way better than the Lord’s way?

### **Is Issuing a “Policy Statement” Scriptural?**

We may also ask whether issuing a policy statement is Scriptural? The only New Testament example is the “decree” of Acts 15. All the apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to decide the issue of circumcision and, having become of one accord, they issued a decree, a “policy statement” (Acts 15:25, 28; 16:4). Under the heading, “How The Church Makes Decisions,” Watchman Nee says, *“The pattern given to us by [Acts 15] is the pattern accepted by the church for the past two thousand years. We acknowledge this as the highest pattern.”* (*Church Affairs*, p. 145) However, I suggest Acts 15 stands in stark contrast to the present situation. Various gatherings of leading workers have discussed the “one publication” issue; however “one accord” has not been attained. Rather some workers have been labelled as “discordant brothers.” Another, larger group of brothers have now issued a document signed by “the blended coworkers.” Consequently this issue, rather than being resolved among the workers, has been “dropped into the lap” of the saints, elders and churches. Since the Scriptural, “Acts 15” process has not been followed, is it realistic to expect an “Acts 15” result – the saints rejoicing and the churches increasing (Acts 15:31; 16:5)?

## 2. Is “One Publication” an item of “Speciality” or “Generality”?

“One publication is not a matter of the common faith” (p. 9) says the document. How then are local churches expected to view it? The booklet, *The Beliefs and Practices of the Local Churches* (issued by “the Co-workers in the Lord’s Recovery” in 1978) contains no reference to ‘one publication.’ May I ask, in terms of *The Beliefs and Practices*, where does this item belong? To what point (if any) is it an addendum?

*The Beliefs and Practices* categorizes items under “Our Beliefs,” “Our Standing,” “Our Mission,” and “Our Hope.” Since ‘one publication’ is not an item of the faith, it is excluded from “Our Beliefs.” Where then does “one publication” belong --- under “Our Standing,” “Our Mission,” or “Our Hope”? Some may feel that “one publication” does not seem to fit easily into any of these categories. Perhaps this is because this item, **“one publication” does not belong in the sphere of the local church!** Rather, ‘one publication’ belongs to “the work,” the sphere of the workers; this matter should have been decided by all the coworkers in the Lord’s recovery arriving at one accord according to the pattern of Acts 15.

**In terms of the saints and the local churches in the Lord’s recovery is ‘one publication’ an item of “Speciality” or “Generality”? In this context “speciality” means items of “the faith,” which are “non-negotiable,” which we, as believers must insist upon and contend for (Jude 3). Items of “generality,” in contrast, we can be flexible about.**

- Brother Lee charged us to neither add nor subtract from the basic items of the faith. He says “We should not take anything away from this faith or add anything to it. **If we take something away, we will surely be divisive, and if we add something to it, we will also be divisive.** Christians are the same only in this faith. To keep us from being divisive, **we must only hold this faith, nothing more.**” (Witness Lee, *Speciality, Generality & Practicality of the Church-life*)

May I ask, Are we not being asked to “hold something more” – one publication? Benson Phillips in his preface to *Speciality, Generality & Practicality* says: “Concerning the faith we must be very specific and particular (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:12); however, **concerning the other things we must follow Paul’s example and be general, never insisting that others believe as we do (Rom. 14:1-8).** To possess such a spirit of generality is the generality of the church life. **If we are special and insist on anything other than the common faith, the oneness will surely be damaged, and divisions will occur.**” (Benson Phillips, Preface to, *Speciality, Generality & Practicality of the Church-life*) By promoting the “one publication” aren’t the saints, local churches and elders being asked to insist “on something other than the common faith”? If so, then (according to the prophetic word of brother Benson Philips) will not the oneness be damaged and won’t divisions occur?

Along the same lines, Watchman Nee writes, the “seven ones” in Ephesians 4 “*are at once the minimum and the maximum requirements that can be made of any person who professes to be a fellow believer.*” (*The Normal Christian Church Life*, p.78).

## 3. If a local church adopts the “one publication” policy is it still a genuine local church? Or has it become a “ministry church”?

After the LSM Winter training (Jan. 2005) a certain local church declared publicly that: “[The] Church in \_\_\_\_\_ is a church in the recovery, with the recovery, and in line with LSM. We don’t accept any other Ministry... We take only one publication and one speaking in the recovery.”

Yet, Brother Nee warned us against the formation of “ministerial churches.” In *The Normal Christian Church Life*, he wrote: “Let us lay it to heart that our work is for our ministry and our ministry is for the churches. **No church should be under a specific ministry, but all ministries should be under the church.** What havoc has been wrought in the church because so many of her ministers have sought to bring the churches under their ministry, rather than by their ministry serve the churches. **As soon as the churches are brought under any ministry, they cease to be local and become sectarian....the churches will be made to serve the ministry, not the ministry the churches, and the “churches” established will be ministerial “churches,” not local ones.**

*The sphere of a church is not the sphere of any ministry, but the sphere of the locality. **Wherever ministry is made the occasion for the forming of a church, there you have the beginning of a new denomination.** From the study of Church history we can see that almost all new ministries have led to new followings, and new followings have resulted in new organizations. **Thus ministerial “churches” have been established and denominations multiplied.**” (Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 113, emphasis added)*

4. **Why has an informal, voluntary, personal practice among workers (Brother Lee and Brother Nee) become a teaching which is now a public policy, mandated upon the saints and the local churches?**
- Witness Lee’s personal testimony (p. 3), shows that he voluntarily submitted his writing to Watchman Nee’s Gospel Book Room. That was his personal practice. Both brother Nee and brother Lee were workers in the Lord’s work. Moreover, brother Nee has asked for brother Lee’s assistance in the publication work (“*He asked me to help in the publication work.*” p. 3) What began as an **informal practice** between two co-workers is now being proposed as a **formal, publicly-mandated policy** in the Lord’s recovery. May we ask, **was there such an established “policy,” proclaimed in writing and conveyed to all the saints in mainland China?** Where is the historical precedent for this “policy declaration” in Watchman Nee’s work in mainland China or Witness Lee’s work in Taiwan? We know of none! This **publicly-declared policy** is not merely a continuation of Brother Lee’s **practice**. The opportunity to follow Brother Lee’s practice already exists -- ministers and workers could voluntarily submit their writings to LSM, if they felt led by the Lord. What has now been instituted is a **mandatory** submission process for inclusion in the “one publication.” May I ask: **What justifies this drastic change from an informal, voluntary practice to a formal, mandatory public policy for publications in the Lord’s recovery?**
  - Did brother Nee ever **teach** the principle of “one publication”? Was such a “policy,” publicly proclaimed in mainland China? It appears that a **practice** has become a **teaching**, and this teaching is now a **publicly-declared policy** mandating the actions of saints, elders and churches. Did brother Nee ever do this? Did he ever **teach** this? It seems to me that the present policy document is without historical precedent in the Lord’s recovery.
5. **Has the Living Stream Ministry Office has been elevated above the “Levitical service” established by brother Lee?**
- **The Role of the LSM Office --** “*those who wish to write in this way should bring their proposals to the blended coworkers as well as to Living Stream Ministry and Taiwan Gospel Book Room and have their proposals checked to see whether they should be published or not.*” (p. 7)
  - The LSM Office & TGBR are now elevated to a position where they are above the ministers of the Word and can decide whether a minister’s writings should be published as part of the “one publication” or not. It seems that the LSM Office has now been invested with veto power!
  - Compare this point concerning LSM with the 2002 public statement of brother Andrew Yu (then manager of LSM): “*Living Stream does not set policy or dictate how to worship at Local Churches, said [Andrew] Yu, 54, who has worked for the ministry since 1982. “We are completely hands-off,” he said. “We run training sessions here (in Anaheim), which isn’t a church activity. It’s like Microsoft running a course for users of its software at different companies. Microsoft doesn’t control those companies.” [Orange County Register, Oct. 13, 2002]* Contrast the statement above with the LSM document. Is not LSM, and the “blended coworkers,” now setting policy concerning publishing? Is LSM now “**completely hands-off**”?
  - **Contrast this also with Brother Lee’s statement that the Living Stream Office is a Levitical Service:** “*The Living Stream Ministry office is only a business office to serve my ministry for two things: to publish the messages in book form and to distribute these messages*

*in both video and audio tapes. That is all the ministry office should do and nothing else. ...the ministry office has always had this specific function and no other function. This little office is a Levitical service serving my ministry to put out the word of God in print and through video and audio tapes.*" (Witness Lee, *A Timely Word*, 1988, p. 39)

- Brother Lee went on to say, "...by His mercy, we do not have any organization. No one can control the local churches. No one can control anything because we do not have organization among us. I do not control, and the **Living Stream office would not control. Mistakes may have been made in the past.** ...Past mistakes that have been confessed to the Lord are under the cleansing blood. We need to forget the past and go on... No one controls you. **All the local churches have the full freedom to go on. As long as you do not do anything against our New Testament constitution, no one would bother you.**" (Witness Lee, *A Timely Word*, 1988, p. 40)  
COMMENT: Now local churches that use, produce or distribute materials not considered part of the "one publication" can be charged with becoming "platforms for the dissemination of these publications" (p. 9) Contrast this with the last sentence above "...no one would bother you."

6. **Isn't this the Practice of Roman Catholicism concerning publication?**

Literature approved for use by Catholics is given the *Imprimatur*, an official stamp of approval. The following quote explains the Roman Catholic practice: "*Imprimatur* is Latin for "let it be printed." When a Roman Catholic bishop grants his imprimatur to a printed work, he assures the reader that nothing therein is contrary to Catholic faith or morals. This imprimatur is not given lightly; only after a thorough review process....to be sure the text contains only accurate, reliable Catholic teaching."

"One of the obligations of someone publishing a book that deals with Catholic teachings is to request ecclesiastical approval. This was reiterated by the [Roman Catholic] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1975." To put the question rhetorically, has the Living Stream Ministry logo become the *Imprimatur* of the Lord's recovery? In that case, in terms of publications, aren't we following the practice of Roman Catholicism, which we condemn?

7. **Is this document an Example of "Historical Revisionism"?** —an attempt to rewrite the record in a manner not supported by the facts?

*"Since Brother Nee's day we in the Lord's recovery have been "restricted in one publication" (p. 7) Perhaps we should subject this historical statement to a few questions:*

- In brother Nee's era was there a **teaching** of "one publication"?
- In Watchman Nee's time, were the saints and local churches taught to confine themselves to "one publication"? Or did the saints focus on brother Nee's materials because they found them beneficial and **not** because of their being 'restricted' to one publication?
- 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 brother Lee's era in the USA (before 1986) were the saints and local churches **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 by "the Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery" in 1978) contain **not even a single reference to "one publication"**?
- If "we were restricted to one publication" why in the early 1980's did Brother Lee call a "Writers' Conference"? 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)
- The following dialogue is from an interview of Witness Lee by Silas Wu in 1989:  
SILAS WU: "*During that period of time, you did encourage all, maybe it's for the propagation, to publish books. There seems to be such a WRITERS' CONFERENCE.*"  
BROTHER LEE: "I did call this WRITERS' CONFERENCE. I encouraged all. But that is very different from what BILL FREEMAN did. That [meaning the CONFERENCE] is to say, **you in BOSTON, you can write something, publish**

**something. You publish it, we the ministry office will buy from you, this is also OK. ...But for you here (?), you can just publish and we can sell it for you. This is also OK.** [translated from Chinese]

- 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 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?

These historical facts indicate that the present document is not merely reaffirming a teaching and policy of one publication which has existed “*since Brother Nee’s day*.” No such teaching or official policy existed in Brother Nee’s era, nor in the early church-life of the 1970’s in North America. Even in the 1980’s and ‘90’s a “one publication” policy was not uniformly taught or enforced. I suggest that to pretend otherwise is to distort the actual facts of our history.

## 8. Did Brother Lee’s call for “One Publication” – Establish a *General Principle* for all time or was it a *Temporary Expedient*?

The statement on “Publication Work in the Lord’s Recovery” suggests that in 1986 brother Lee established a principle of “One Publication” which applies to all the saints and local churches from that time forward. Hence, according to this document, “*All the saints and all the churches everywhere should similarly be restricted to one publication in the Lord’s recovery*” (p. 8)

An alternative view that it was a “*temporary expedient*,” can be briefly sketched: Brother Lee’s speaking in 1986 addressed a particular situation existing at that time – it was “**situation-specific**.” Moreover, Witness Lee had a particular status in the Lord’s recovery and a special relationship to the local churches. Brother Lee’s word was based upon his unique position – it was “**person-specific**.” Since Brother Lee’s departure, the “blended coworkers” lack both brother Lee’s status and his unique relationship with the saints and churches. In that case, the fact that brother Lee called for one publication does **not necessarily** imply that “One publication” can be mandated by the “blended coworkers” today. Support for this view may be found in the following quotes from **Elders’ Training Book #7**

### Situation:

- “*The island of Taiwan has to be evangelized and truthized within the next four years. For the fulfilling of this purpose, I would not tolerate any kind of dissenting thought.*” (p. 86)
  - “*The intention of this heavenly army is to evangelize and truthize Taiwan first and then the United States.*” (p. 87)
  - “*We need a fighting army and in the fighting army we do not merely need a leader. We need a commander to fight the battle! We do not have time to waste.*” (p. 89)
- Brother Lee – the wise master builder**
- “*...the recovery I brought to the United States...*” (p. 40)
  - “*I have to be faithful to so many saints who gave up their futures and came to this recovery. They came to this recovery at least **ninety percent due to my ministry**.*” (pp. 79-80)
  - “*Through my ministry on this globe, thousands of saints have come into the recovery, so I must be faithful to them.*” (p. 81)
  - “*Paul told them, ‘For though you have 10,000 guides in Christ, yet not many fathers...’ (1 Cor. 4:15)... I would like to say the same thing to all the churches that have been raised up by this ministry – you may have 10,000 guides or teachers, but **not one is your father.***” (p. 97)
  - “*We 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... acknowledge... **the one wise master builder among us.***” (Letter from 419 brothers to Witness Lee, Feb. 21, 1986, **Elders’ Training Book #8**, p. 154)

Putting these elements together, in 1986, Brother Lee was acknowledged as the “one wise master builder,” who brought the recovery to the USA and directly affected thousands of saints. As such

an acknowledged leader, with a unique relationship to the local churches, in 1986, Brother Lee called for an “army” to “evangelize and truthize Taiwan.” For this “experiment in the New Way,” Brother Lee called for “no uncertain sounding of the trumpet,” and requested other brothers to stop publishing. These considerations raise questions –

- Do these same conditions exist among us today?
- What “experiment in the New Way” is being conducted today?
- Which brothers today are qualified to “sound the same trumpet” as Brother Lee?
- What “military campaign” is being currently waged which requires a “heavenly army”?
- Today, who is the “commander-in-chief” (the “one wise master builder”) to lead such a “military campaign”?
- Can the same call for “one publication” be made today?

#### 9. **Doesn't “One Publication” contradict brother Nee's teaching about the futility of institutional arrangements to contain the Lord's blessing?**

Watchman Nee said: *“Once there was the blessing of the Lord, men organized something to contain the blessing. ...When the grace of God comes, men immediately set up an organization to keep it. The organization remains, but the content is lost. However, the cup cannot be broken; there are always those who are zealous to maintain the cup continuously. Here is a matter of principle: The students of Wesley could never be equal to Wesley, nor could the students of Calvin match Calvin. The schools of the prophets seldom produced prophets—all the great prophets were chosen by God from the wilderness. The Spirit of God descends upon whomsoever He will. He is the Head of the church, not we. Men always think the living water is valuable and must be kept by organization, but it gradually declines through the generations until it completely dries up.”* (Watchman Nee, *Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. #47, p. 57)

In view of brother Nee's warning, may I ask, by instituting the policy outlined in **“Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery”** aren't we establishing an organizational structure in order to preserve the Lord's blessing? If so, this appears to contradict Watchman Nee's teaching and (according to his fellowship) is doomed to inevitable failure.

#### 10. **What About the Impact on the saints in the Lord's recovery?**

The Lord's recovery has a whole range of saints, many of them new or young. By raising the issue of ‘one publication’, we risk weakening the saint's conscience. Some saints previously were not troubled when they read “other publications.” Perhaps they were even helped and edified by them. However, the release of this booklet may trouble such saints. Conscience is based upon knowledge and the “knowledge” conveyed by the “one publication” document could cause some to feel condemned when reading “other publications.” Zealous followers of the LSM declaration may also condemn such saints. In this event releasing this document has troubled saints who were previously peaceful in their hearts. In such a case, has this saint been helped or hurt by this action?

Is this policy pronouncement necessary? Where is our trust in the saints' ability to be before the Lord in their reading of spiritual publications? Where is our confidence in their ability to be taught and led by Christ? Wouldn't it be preferable to rely on *“The Anointing which teaches all things.”* (1 John 2:27) The LSM statement says, *“The ongoing ministry ... produces the same taste as has been enjoyed in all the churches since Brother Nee's time.”* (p. 5-6) Perhaps we should ask the obvious question: If the saints' sense of “taste” so strongly testifies for the ministry in the ‘one publication,’ why is a public declaration needed to help them properly discern? If the statement just quoted is correct, why not leave the whole matter to the saint's inner “taste,” their sense of life?

#### 11. **What about the impact on the local churches?**

Some saints and some local churches are enjoying materials produced by respected brothers within the recovery. These writings are now categorized as “other publications.” Some saints may feel that these “other publications” fit the taste of the Lord's recovery and are helpful for their

own going on. Perhaps they cannot, in good conscience, condemn and drop those publications. According to past experience in many churches, other zealous saints will insist on this “one publication” policy and condemn saints, elders, and churches who feel otherwise. Is this not ironic; the very thing intended to preserve the *“practical oneness among the local churches”* (p. 3) could become a factor of division both within local churches and among them? But isn’t this according to Benson Phillips’ prophetic word: **“If we... insist on anything other than the common faith, the oneness will surely be damaged, and divisions will occur.”** (Benson Phillips, Preface to, *Speciality, Generality & Practicality of the Church-life*)

Personally, I fear that this document will create a fissure between saints and local churches. By ‘drawing a line in the sand,’ with this statement, two categories of churches may emerge – ‘churches that wish to be restricted in one publication’ and ‘churches that do not.’ I feel this is not insignificant. Saints and local churches coexisting peacefully within the Lord’s recovery, may soon be separated by the ‘wedge’ formed by the ‘one publication’ issue.

## **12. Isn’t there the Appearance of a “Conflict of Interest”**

*The Living Stream Ministry and the Taiwan Gospel Book Room* were removed as signatures on the final document. [LSM and TGBR appeared as signatories of Draft #8] However, is there not still an “apparent conflict of interest” created by document signed by the “blended coworkers” which declares that LSM is the only “authorized and recognized” source of the “one publication” in the Lord’s recovery?

The uninformed reader may presume that the “blended coworkers,” signatories of this document, are independent from or operate at “arms length” from LSM. In fact, a number of the “blended coworkers” hold positions of responsibility in LSM (president, CEO, manager, directors etc) and/or receive financial compensation from LSM. Thus there is an appearance of a “conflict of interest.” May I ask, applying the principles of the New Jerusalem, shouldn’t these matters be “clear and transparent”? Why aren’t the “blended coworkers” identified by name? Why isn’t their relationship with LSM clearly indicated, whether president, CEO, manager, directors, employee etc?

According to a 2003 statement by Chris Wilde there were 15 directors of the LSM corporation (contendingforthefaith.org). May I ask, who are the directors and officers of LSM and how many are also designated as “blended coworkers”?

Perhaps some will respond, “We should trust the brothers,” and “This is the Body of Christ; Forget about ‘conflict of interest!’” Then, I would humbly respond: “Shouldn’t our righteousness exceed (and be seen to exceed) that of the Scribes and Pharisees?” and “Shouldn’t we avoid even the appearance of evil?”

In addition, according to the “Statement,” LSM and some brothers related to LSM are given the position of judge and arbiter as to which books are “approved” as part of the “One Publication.” Again isn’t there an apparent ‘conflict of interest’ in this arrangement? Even in the world, members of regulating agencies (FAA, FDA, ICC etc) cannot be stakeholders within the realm being regulated.

### **LSM’s Membership in the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) or the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA)?**

Lastly, along the same vein, may I ask if there is any apparent contradiction between the “Statement” and Living Stream Ministry’s membership (since 2002) in the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA), the CBA (since 1981) and similar trade organizations?

**(Christianity Today Feb. 2003, vol. 47 No. 2 p. 24)**

- By becoming a member of organizations such as the ECPA and CBA, hasn’t LSM recognized the right of other Christian booksellers to print, publish, distribute and sell their books? By joining such associations is not LSM presenting itself as **one among many** Christian book-sellers all of which have the right to publish?
- Hasn’t the LSM agreed to a code of ethics of acceptable behavior between booksellers? Does that “code of ethics” allow efforts to exclude other booksellers from certain book

- markets – efforts at “monopolization”? Isn’t the LSM board of directors open to the charge of seeking to “monopolize” the market for books in the Lord’s recovery? Could not the statement, “Publication Work” be viewed in that way by objective outside observers? Moreover are the tactics being employed by LSM legal, ethical and fair under US legislation?
- If another publisher, within the Lord’s recovery, such as *Chicago Bibles and Books* also joins the ECPA and CBA, doesn’t the apparent contradiction become clear? In that case, “externally” as a member of the ECPA, LSM **recognizes** the right of *Chicago Bibles and Books* to publish. “Internally” however, through the “One Publication” policy, LSM **denies** the right of *Chicago Bibles and Books* to publish and distribute to saints and churches in the Lord’s recovery! Does not this contradiction between “external” and “internal” stands, leave LSM open to the charge of being “two-faced,” practicing hypocrisy?

## CONCLUSION

The present writer is **not** against all aspects of the recent LSM document, **“PUBLICATION WORK IN THE LORD’S RECOVERY.”** As this document states, *“What Living Stream Ministry and Taiwan Gospel Book Room do...is “to promote the enlightenment and revelation regarding the Bible as interpreted by the teachings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee.” It was Brother Lee’s express wish that Living Stream Ministry and Taiwan Gospel Book Room would be the sole publishers of his and Brother Nee’s ministry.”* (p. 5) These are commendable goals which will yield inestimable benefits to believers world-wide and facilitate the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose. However, the position taken by the document far transcends that mandate. As such the present writer fears that the “one publication” policy will have a “chilling effect” on the reception of the riches of our brothers Nee and Lee and frustrate the fulfillment of God’s purpose among us.

Nigel Tomes, August, 2005

PS These are the author’s personal views and not necessarily those of the saints, workers, elders and churches with whom I am associated.