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Gentlemen:

This is a letter from an angry Christian. I will pull no punches.

Recently a series of articles published by your institute trumpeted a culpa mea that I have taken exception to and with justification. Stop groveling! You stated that in the past you were wrong about the **Honor Oak** (Local Church) movement led by **Watchman Nee** [1903-72] and afterwards by **Witness Lee** [1905-97]. This series of articles leaves a great deal to be desired. Need I tell you that if you were wrong then and right now, it means that at one point you were careless in your research? I am inclined to believe that you were right then and wrong now. In either case you are leaving an adverse impression on those who are unfamiliar with your organization.

What changed your mind? Is it the fear of being sued by a mutinous band of rabid sectarians who appear to be nothing more than warmed over Donatists? Everywhere this "church" goes it leaves wreckage in its wake and now (after so much evidence can be brought forth to prove that the Local Church movement is spurious) you have given it your endorsement. This is truly unpardonable.

This reminds me of a statement made by Dr. Walter Martin some time ago (*Kingdom of the Cults)* who wrote that the Seventh Day Adventists were after all Christians, and that their fault was only that "they were a little legalistic." I suppose that meant that we should be tolerant of their waywardness. Do I have to tell you that the Corinthian Church came under criticism from the apostle Paul just because it was tolerant? Apparently you have taken it upon yourself to show a great deal of tolerance toward the Local Church (LC) movement. I am sure that if Paul were here now he would lash out at you. Aristotle said, "Tolerance and apathy are the last virtues of a dying society." He might have said that of a dying church or research organization. The author of Galatians was intolerant when it came to doctrinal error.

Where did the teachings of the Local Church movement originate - this material they put out as if they were privy to some special knowledge? When you meet with them you can't help but be reminded of Pythagoras who enveloped his teachings in a cloud of mystery so that what he said could be thought of as heavenly. After a time, those who follow Nee and Lee will take you behind the same mythic curtain and introduced to their neat doctrine of co-crucifixion. This is that teaching which can magically lift you up to life on the highest plane. The assumption is that there are Christians and then there are **CHRISTIANS**, the latter being those who understand the meaning of Romans, Chapter Six which of course LC leaders understand better than the rest of us who belong to various denominations.

Now not everything hoary is trustworthy. If we search deep enough we will eventually turn up the 3rd century heterodox Clement of Alexandria [~150-~215 A.D.]. His SCALE OF

PERFECTION which distinguishes between the sinner, the initiate, and the perfect, never collected dust for very long, but was prettied up for every generation following his own. Finally it made its grand entrance into the Protestant world largely through the writings of John Wesley [1703-91] who after being steeped in Catholic literature was ensnared by the Flemish mystic Antoinette Bourignon [1616-80] calling herself the new Eve.

This anti-Protestant woman, this mystic Arian, left behind a document that convinced Wesley that imputed righteousness was the force behind antinomianism. The Protestant world has never been the same since. We are still reeling from the effects of Bourignon's influence on Wesley who was something of a daytime owl, always fearful that someone somewhere was sinning.

Wesley followed Clement. He distinguished between sinners, initiates, and the perfects. He never did appreciate the difference between gospel righteousness and imparted righteousness. We who are in Christ are perfect already through Jesus Christ. **We are made the righteousness of God in Him.** Yes there is a tension between imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. But the LC church does not know how to ease that tension. I prefer Dr. Frederic Godet [1812-1900] to Watchman Nee. Godet said, "Thou art in Christ" that is thou art perfect, and if so, "become what thou art." That is, strive for the perfection you already possess knowing that in this lifetime you will never be without sin. You will always have to pray in Jesus' name.

On the surface it looks as if Watchman Nee understood that our righteousness comes by way of imputation, but the proud man (who when needing counsel one day believed that he would not be able to find one person of a high spiritual standing in a large city who could provide a man of his stature with counsel) after admitting as much, acted as if we can come to God on the basis of our daily victories. It is as if he were a Wesleyan after all. Legalism can wear a disguise. Those who follow Nee are like that hypochondriac who was always taking his pulse and as a consequence could never enjoy the health he already had.

The doctrine of sanctification as held by the LC movement is nothing more than a watered-down or reinvented version of Wesleyan perfectionism. The conduit for this Wesleyan perfectionism, from what I can see, has been the Plymouth Brethren and the Keswick movement of England. The latter took its inspiration from the specious writings of the American Quaker Hannah Whitall Smith. This is important. When Bishop Handley Moule of Durham joined the Keswick (Higher Life) movement it alarmed Anglican Bishop J. C. Ryle [1816-1900] so much that he set to writing his monumental work *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties and Roots* [1879] which the followers of Nee and Lee would do well to read. It would free them from a doctrine that one British scholar called nefarious because of the way in which it turns Christianity into legalism. What a heavy yoke the LC church places on its people!

Among other things this movement takes its inspiration from self-abnegation, or what Dr. B. B. Warfield called "the miserable sinner syndrome." It is assumed that we are all so wicked that Christ must be called on to replace us, not just on the cross, but in ourselves. It is as if we must use Christ to come to Christ. I declare that this is madness and unless I am mistaken it feeds a neurosis. One of the leaders in the LC church movement told me a long time ago that "Watchman Nee had no self, no self." How strange. Does believing in Jesus mean that I must cease to exist? Doesn't God want the love of my poor heart? Am I and should I not remain a person? Do you see the problem here? The whole thing is utilitarian. I would prefer to place the emphasis on how I can fellowship with Christ.

I really don't know much about your organization but I would assume that you are not inclined toward referencing the men of the Reformation. You don't need these men because you can go right to the Bible, right? If that is the case then I am sure that the fine points of theology which means much to me do not mean a lot to you. Be that as it may, that does not entitle you to place your stamp of approval on a bunch of know-nothing schismatics with a penchant for pantheism, or if you prefer Christo-morphism which has come down to them second-hand from the Middle Ages; from the works of radical Anabaptists who favored such writings as the so-called *German Theology* which John Calvin abhorred.

You know a religious movement by the books it recommends. I would remind you if you do not already know it, any movement that has steeped itself in the writings of quacks such as John Nelson Darby, Theodore Austin-Sparks, Madame Guyon, Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart, and a host of other mystics will more than likely be Enthusiastic. **They will entertain the idea that God has more access to them than to those of us who are run-of-the-mill Christians.** I suggest in respect of this that your staff read *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* [1950] by Ronald Knox. He is not to be overlooked even if he is a Catholic. Better yet, read Warfield's *Perfectionism* [1931].

Finally, the people who lead the Local Church movement are of the opinion that they are superior to others, and that they have somehow plummeted the depths of the doctrine of sanctification. But how can you be holy when you reek of spiritual pride? What I discover in their publications (seemingly ghost-written long after Watchman Nee died) is nothing other than Stoicism commonly referred to as Pelagianism. There real problem is that the LC church does not understand the nature of regeneration, the effect of sin on the will, and the necessity of humility.

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