

## Deputy Authority and the Ground of Oneness

The local churches have long been under the influence of the teaching of deputy authority beginning in China with Watchman Nee. When I first heard the related terms, the oracle of God, the minister of the age, the acting God, the one wise master-builder, the commander-in-chief - terms being applied to Witness Lee in the 1980s – I was in full agreement. I was in one accord with the brothers who were campaigning for the churches to line up with Witness Lee as a universal leader, as men were swept up in full abandon to him and with strict resolve to follow him in “the Lord’s new move”. This “new move”, however, unwittingly established a new ground for meeting.

“Some transmute the basis of the oneness of the believers by the assertion of their own authority to the point where the actual ground of oneness becomes **acceptance of and obedience to** their authority.”  
(*Properly Discerning Spiritual Authority, DCP*)

The collaboration of church members to “hand over” themselves to an apostle figure took place earlier in China under the direction of brother Nee, in full-scale manner, as it was later with Witness Lee in Taipei and the US. The church environments at these times became heavily ministry centered and focus on the leader was to the point that coming under his authority and leadership was indispensable to their oneness.

A book by Lily Hsu, *My Unforgettable Memories of Watchman Nee and the Shanghai Local Church* (2013) is a transparent fellowship concerning brother Nee and his influence in the church, most notably the development of *his* spiritual authority in Shanghai and throughout China. **A review of Watchman Nee’s dramatic rise in supremacy helps in understanding Witness Lee’s similar ascent and the path of the blending brothers since, as global leaders of the “local churches”.** These movements engaged in by brothers Nee, Lee, and We (blending brothers) were assertive to the point where the actual ground of oneness they established was **acceptance of and obedience to** their authority. Standing on this narrow ground forfeited the inclusive ground of oneness in the Body and erected a high wall of division instead.

### Nee

“...in 1948, [Nee] changed his view. One year prior to the political regime change, Nee proposed a radical shift from his major principle. He called for all the relatively independent Local Churches to join a monopoly under the leadership of the apostle (delegated authority) and the leader was Nee himself.” *\_Hsu*

Comparison of the Principles of Antioch and Jerusalem	
Antioch Principle (1924-45)	Jerusalem Principle (1948-52)
Independence of local church	Local churches handed over to apostle(s)
Churches ruled by local elders	Apostle(s) rule over all churches & elders
Emphasis on deep spiritual matters	Work-centered and oriented
Emphasis on the growth of life	Emphasis on evangelism & Handing-Over
Emphasis on relationship with God	Emphasis on the entire Local Churches as one

Witness Lee

## **A Man, A Ministry and *Two Turmoils***

In 1981, Benson Phillips and Ray Graver began a campaign to promote brother Witness Lee and his ministry, with the inciting word that “we owe him”. The campaign intensified in February 1986 when the same two brothers drew up a letter of allegiance to brother Lee that was signed by 400+ elders and co-workers during an international elders’ conference in Southern California. Becoming immersed in such fellowship at that time and in the ensuing years, the leaders in the Lord's recovery were galvanized into the same mindset and embarked upon a new way in the churches that featured oneness with a man, a ministry, and a ministry office. Such a drive brought in confusion, chaos, and division in two turmoils.

Dear Brother Lee,

After hearing your fellowship in this elders’ training, we all agree to have a new start in the Lord’s recovery. For this, we all agree to be in one accord and to carry out this new move of the Lord solely through prayer, the Spirit, and the Word. We further agree to practice the recovery one in: teaching, practice, thinking, speaking, essence, appearance, and expression. **We repudiate all differences among the churches, and all indifference toward the ministry office,** and the other churches. We agree that the church in our place be identical with all the local churches throughout the earth. We also 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 agree that this leading is indispensable to our oneness and** acknowledge the one trumpet in the Lord’s ministry and the one wise master builder among us....

A new mentality of expectation, cooperation, and oneness was being melded into the minds of elderships everywhere, the essence of which was for the elders to drop their reins of leadership in all the churches and hand them over to brother Lee. He would lead the churches. **He and his ministry** were now a center. That center would identify those who were of it, and those who were not. Those who were of it were in “the oneness”. When this “oneness” began to be vigorously promoted, a big turmoil came into the recovery that led to division in the late eighties.

### **Blending Brothers Assume Leadership**

In 2006 the “local churches” were in another major turmoil for the same reason, as this center became officially endorsed by the *blending brothers* through their issuing of the One Publication policy, which promotes the new center and draws a line between those who are of it and those who are not. Only LSM approved publications would be acceptable in the churches “to preserve the integrity of the **Lord’s ministry** among us”, that is, Witness Lee’s ministry, for “a testimony of our oneness in the Body”.

In a Morning Revival reading in 2007, a word was given intended to help the saints understand the disciplinary action taken against Titus Chu, who did not adhere to the **global leadership role assumed by the blending brothers**. Titus now joined, as a quarantined one, the four brothers quarantined after the late 1980s turmoil - John Ingalls, Bill Mallon, John So, Joseph Fung. The reason for each of these quarantines was essentially the same; their not yielding to the pressure of handing over the reins of their leadership to a universal leader in a world-wide movement.

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Ironically, this statement by DCP describes what evolved with Nee, Lee, and “We” themselves in transparent rendering of local church history.

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