

Philip Lee in the Late Eighties

Samuel Chang, early on, warned of a weakness in Brother Lee concerning his sons.

***Don Hardy email (2002):** When I first got acquainted with "the Lord's Recovery" in L.A. in early 1963, Samuel Chang, John Ingalls and Jim Reetzke (with Ted Wen and others), wanted the Church in Los Angeles. To make a long story short, Brother Lee moved there. I came in before Bill Mallon or James Barber. WL and John Ingalls were very burdened to make a hymnal. Anyway, during that time we worked hard; and we would take "tea breaks": Samuel C. took me for a walk one day. He loved me—we ended up working 17 years together, leg tied to leg, and God very richly blessed us with at least 3 churches coming into being. SC was very burdened and started groaning deep within, praying. Then he said: "Don, I want to share something with you for prayer, and you must keep it to yourself. Brother Lee loves the Lord, and is all-out for God and His recovery. But Don, he has a weakness, a big hole in his side, which we have to keep covered much in prayer. You see, his children (7 of them) suffered very much in China, and they are always after him; and he has a burden to help them as much as he can. But WL is very poor right now. So he has tried to help Timothy in business, but....." Then SC did a strange thing, he slapped his mouth with his hand, and told me, "Oh, I should keep quiet. Forgive me brother Don, just pray. Let's go back to the hymnal." Well Steve, I NEVER forgot that conversation...*

Reports to Eldership About LSM Manager

John Ingalls describes his experience of reports coming to him about the LSM manager:

John Ingalls

Upon returning from Atlanta on Sept. 22, 1987, I made an appointment for dinner with Godfred on September 25, Friday evening. We sat together in the restaurant, and after some general conversation, I said to him in a serious tone, "Godfred, I would like to ask you a question. Would you please tell me who Philip Lee is? It seems that he is being promoted and is going altogether too far in his involvement in the spiritual side of the work, greatly overstepping his position as a business manager. Have you noticed this? I myself could never agree with this."

It seemed that my question took him by surprise. We had never discussed these matters before. He hesitated a few moments. Then, in a very grave tone, he replied, "John, the situation is very serious." If he was surprised by my question, I was somewhat taken aback by his answer. Godfred continued, "I have seen and heard many things in the Living Stream Office in recent months. I cannot go into detail, but I can tell you there is much that is very serious and very wrong." Then I began to be more alarmed and concerned. Godfred fully agreed that Philip Lee's involvement in the work was way out of line, but he indicated that there were more serious things than that.

Two days later, on Sept. 27, the Lord's Day, as we met in the Elders' Room before the morning meeting on Ball Road, Godfred had a few moments alone with me, and he said, "John, it is very timely that you opened up to me the other night [about Philip]. Let me tell you that the whole situation is sick and corrupt. I have seen and heard too much." Then I knew that we were really in trouble, though he did not mention any details or any names.

A Shocking Development

September 1987

John Ingalls –

On the following Tuesday, Sept. 29th, Godfred left for a business trip to Europe. On the next day, Wednesday, Sept. 30th, I received a telephone call from a sister who had a prominent position in the Living Stream Ministry Office, asking if she could see me that night. I consented. That evening she sat in my living room and with tears opened her heart to me. She had served sacrificially and faithfully for many years in the LSM office, and now she said she could not tolerate anymore the gross misconduct that was being perpetrated upon some and especially upon her. I had been acquainted with this sister for many years and knew her to be faithful, upright, and trustworthy; therefore, I took her word very seriously. I was amazed that she could put up with such conduct for so long. She stated that she tolerated it only for the sake of Brother Lee and his ministry. She said that she had no other recourse but to resign. I confirmed her intention.

That conversation utterly shocked me. I deeply felt that something must be done to acquaint Brother Lee with the situation and to let him know that we would not tolerate it. I obtained Godfred's telephone number in Europe and called him as soon as the difference in time zones permitted, telling him the things that had come to my ears. Godfred listened and said that he already knew it. I was amazed. That night I considered what could be done. That we had to go to Brother Lee I was certain.

Another Shocking Development

December 19, 1987

...In the morning of December 19, just before Ken [Unger] and I were to leave for Texas that afternoon, the sister from the LSM office who had spoken to me on September 30th called and asked to speak to Godfred and me. We met with her and were utterly amazed at what we heard. She began to relate to us in detail some of the things she suffered while in the service of the LSM office. She wanted us to realize how grave the problem was. We were revulsed to the depths of our being, and when the conversation ended and we parted, we were so full of abhorrent feelings that we were literally in a daze.

Godfred drove me to the airport to meet Ken. We were in a state of shock and utter disgust. All this had taken place in what we called the Lord's recovery! We felt that Benson Phillips and Ray Graver, who were deeply involved in the LSM operation, must surely know something of these matters. Therefore, we resolved to confer with them about this when we got to Irving.

John Ingalls -

The grievous conduct reported by the sister from the LSM office had a precedent that we were well aware of. Ten years previously there had been reports of similar incidents in the LSM office confirmed by several eye-witnesses. This compounded the serious nature of the case. I felt that it was more than a local matter, since the LSM was part of the work of Brother Lee, and the ministry of the office effected churches everywhere. Therefore, I believed it to be reasonable and advisable for a few prominent co-workers who were aware of the history of the case and who were respected by Brother Lee to approach him and inform him of the matter. (Actually, the principle of a group of brothers conferring with Brother Lee about a serious problem, a crisis, in the local churches had already

been practiced on March 30, 1978, when a group of brothers – four from Texas, one from Los Angeles, and Gene Gruhler and I from Anaheim – went to see him in his home.) The next day I called Godfred again in Europe and presented my thoughts to him. He agreed.

During the next few days I telephoned several brothers, co-workers whom I respected and trusted and with whom I had served for many years. They were aware of the incidents ten years previously. I informed them in a general way of the current situation and proposed to them that we go together to Brother Lee in an effort to impress him with the gravity of the case and to clear it up. It was the first week of October 1987. We felt we should pray more and consider further what to do, since at that time Brother Lee was out of the country, in Taiwan. (p.140)

Benson Phillips Had Knowledge

John Ingalls –

On Saturday afternoon, December 19th Ken Unger and I flew to Irving. I did not relate to him what the sister from the LSM office had just told us. On Monday, December 21st, we made an appointment to see Benson Phillips and Ray Graver in the morning. Having been intimate co-workers with them for many years, and knowing that they were aware of many things, we mentioned the concerns that we had presented to Brother Lee on December 12th, excluding the matter of the misconduct in the LSM office. We wanted especially to let them know how strongly we felt regarding the colossal mistake they had made in promoting and exalting the office and Philip Lee, starting in 1981. They said that they did not feel they had erred much. This really surprised and disappointed us. We tried to impress them how serious this matter was. They invited us out for dinner, and we decided to meet again in the afternoon to continue our fellowship.

Upon coming together we attempted amid protests to mention the matter of the misconduct in the LSM office. They steadfastly refused to hear about it, but we proceeded to speak. Ray Graver then quickly rose and exited the room. Benson (in whose home we were meeting) also rose to register his displeasure. We felt that they had knowledge relevant to the matter and wanted to confer with them about it. Benson admitted that the same sister from the LSM office (mentioned previously) had come to him in Taipei to disclose a related event, but he strongly protested our bringing this matter before them. They argued that this affair was exclusively under the jurisdiction of the church in Anaheim, and they had no business being involved. We felt, as we mentioned earlier, that it was more than local, and that since they were leaders in the LSM operation, they could be consulted. Some time later, however, I apologized to Benson and Ray for this, feeling that if they chose not to hear, we should not have forced the issue.

Philip Finally Discharged

After much pressing from the Anaheim elders and saints in the Anaheim area, Brother Lee finally fired Philip in June 1988. Perhaps this was helped by the prospect set forth about that time for a council of brothers to come together from the U.S. and Europe to “deal with the issues”, (which didn’t take place). John Ingalls shares, “This was now the twelfth session that I had with Brother Lee since December 12, 1987, either individually or with others. It was about this time that Brother Lee notified us that he had discharged Philip Lee from the management of the Living Stream Office, stating that it was a very hard step for him to take”.

Three months before his discharge additional news came to Brother Lee about the immoral activity of his son, and still he took no action.

A Very Threatening Incident December 1987 - March 1988

John Ingalls –

In late December a brother in the church in Anaheim who had been severely damaged through the misconduct in the LSM office was so traumatized psychologically that he sought revenge and took definite steps to execute a very grave act. (Thank God it never happened.) This came to the ears of one of the elders in Anaheim, who without any delay met with him to calm and divert him. Some time later two of us met with him. The dear brother was greatly disturbed emotionally, with good cause humanly speaking. But, he was very open to us, and the Lord was merciful to him. Actually, he had already halted in his course – the Lord would not let him proceed – but his feelings were still very raw, and he desperately needed help. We loved him and did our best to comfort him. This incident illustrates the gravity of the situation.

In March 1988 this affair also came to the ears of Dan Towle, who was an elder in Fullerton, and who with great alarm took upon himself to call Brother Lee and divulge all the details to him. He did not know that the brothers in Anaheim were already caring for the brother, since he did not take pains to call them. Brother Lee told him to contact us. So he called, telling us what he had done and asking for fellowship. We got together – Dan, Godfred, and I. Of course, Dan was relieved to hear that the problem was resolved.

1987

“A few months ago, after Bob Ellis returned from the training in Taipei, he gave this admonition to the elders at a meeting of elders from the South: Turn everything over to the office and the ministry; Philip and Brother Lee have big plans for this area; it is imperative for us to give our coordination to Philip and the office, and they need evidences that we will do anything they want; we have to coordinate with Philip, and if Philip beats us to the ground, we have to learn to get up and come back to him, for he has seen Benson and Ray beaten to the ground and they have gotten up and come back”. – Bill Mallon, Atlanta, resignation from the work letter to Witness Lee

“...Benson and Ray, as well as others, promoted Philip Lee, proclaiming everywhere that Philip is Witness Lee's closest co-worker, that Brother Lee has no one with as much wisdom, energy, and insight as Philip Lee, that Philip is Witness Lee's choice regardless of his anger and abuse of the saints, that everyone must submit and contact Philip Lee and/or the office--such audacious promotions are obviously symptoms of a disease”. – Bill Mallon, resignation letter to Brother Lee.

1987

I came away from our talks with one deep impression: Philip Lee was becoming increasingly involved in spiritual things concerning the Lord's work, the churches, the elders, and the co-workers. He was totally unqualified both in position and character to touch spiritual matters related to the work of the Lord and the churches. I became alarmed and began to fear for the Lord's testimony. - John Ingalls' talks with Bill Mallon, *Speaking the Truth In Love*

1989

Dear brother Witness Lee,

It has come to our attention recently through several witnesses that gross immorality and some other sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:11 have been committed by your son Philip Lee (who is identified as your Ministry Office) on more than one occasion over a long period of time. This deeply disturbs us. It grieves us even more that you and some of your close co-workers were aware of the situation and yet not only tolerated it but covered it up. What is worse is that, while this was happening, you and your co-workers were promoting and exalting him to the extent that he was able to intervene in the churches' affairs in recent years. The peak of this promotion was evident at your elders' training in Taipei in June 1987. Some of your co-workers were not only themselves under the influence and control of Philip Lee, but were also openly bringing elders and young people of many local churches to come under the same influence and control in your name and for your sake. The five brothers whom you and your Office sent to Europe in your place in May 1986 were trying to do the same here. Our young people who went to your training in Taipei have also testified of the same.

Before God, before the brothers and sisters in the local churches, before the Christian public, and for the sake of the Lord's testimony, we are compelled by our conscience to fully disassociate ourselves from such sins and behaviour in your work. — John So and elders of nine churches in Europe

1989

On Tuesday, March 14, 1989, Godfred, Al, and I had fellowship and prayer during the morning and then lunch together. It was a memorable time, a decisive time. I expressed strongly to the brothers my feeling concerning the futility and dishonesty of playing the role of elder in Anaheim any longer. It was hypocritical to go on in that status feeling as we did with strong conviction that we were in a system. Moreover, we were totally incapable of changing the course of the church or of practicing a generality with the saints where all were free to follow their own conscience. These considerations dictated that we should resign. - John Ingalls, *Speaking the Truth In Love*

Francis Ball and Philip Lin show by their comments that their integrity must have been quite challenged during the late eighties test in Anaheim.

Reflections On the Truth

1. Francis Ball Comment and more

In a Paul Kerr email

In a leaders meeting held in Rosemead during the Pasadena conference, Brother Lee was complaining about how much the church in Anaheim was mistreating him and his son and how much he and his family were suffering because of the church in Anaheim. At the end they had a question period so I got up to ask a few questions, stating something like, "I just wanted to preface my questions with a remark to clarify this issue publicly before all the brothers here so there is no misunderstanding. In fact, it is not the

church in Anaheim causing suffering to Brother Lee and his family but it is Brother Lee and his son Philip that is causing suffering to the church in Anaheim. Now I have a couple of questions... In the Genesis life-studies you [Brother Lee] claimed that John So was a pillar in the church, and we should follow his example. In the Timothy training you turned to John Ingalls and declared publicly that he was your Timothy. But now that they disagree with you and your son, instead of accepting their fellowship you attempt to discredit them before others and cut them off. How could a pillar and Timothy so easily be cut off? Why would you treat these brothers in such a fashion?" [Brother Lee answered ___ED], then immediately after my questions the so-called "question and answer fellowship" part of the meeting ended, and Francis jumped up to abruptly end the meeting, shamelessly declaring that he was delighted to be an ostrich with his head in the sand. Shortly thereafter he was chosen as a replacement "elder" in Anaheim.

Was I shunned afterwards? Anaheim was in an uproar. It was chaos at almost every meeting. I wasn't thinking about whether I was personally shunned or not. It was not in my consciousness because I was trying to help the faithful elders rescue a situation that was quickly becoming a theater of the absurd. They were being aggressively undermined by a certain segment of the church and I countered this at every given opportunity publicly and privately, not as a matter of "sides" or preferred personalities but as a matter of truth. When Godfred resigned I talked to him after the meeting and tried to encourage him to continue leading in an "unofficial" capacity to help bring the church through the proverbial shark infested waters. He appreciated my efforts but I could tell, and he basically stated, that he had enough. Of course I understood this completely. Some people had even stooped to make racist remarks about him, calling him "Ham" i.e. he wouldn't cover up Lee [Noah] so he is cursed like Africa i.e. the descendents of Ham where, of course, he came from. Can you imagine such drivel being said about such a well-educated dignified brother in Christ? Shameful.

2. Philip Lin Comment

Philip Lin, an Anaheim elder during the late eighties on the Chinese side and in good standing today, spoke honestly during the turmoil:

Paul Kerr shares in an email:

The introduction of truth into any situation is like a spot light and forces those involved to either submit to it or not. In the Lord's work when we find ourselves weaseling around the truth for personal loyalties, financial considerations, politics, etc. we have already compromised ourselves.

Along this line, I recall a leaders meeting before a Sunday morning meeting in Anaheim during the late eighties turmoil. A few of us younger brothers who were learning to serve in the church, helping the elders, etc. were there and had been involved in such meetings for quite some time. I had asked the question: "Why should we let 2 brothers [Brother Lee & his son] who don't even come to the meetings wreak havoc on a church of over 500 people? Let's just ignore them and go on." Just after I asked it, Philip Lin walked in late. He asked, "What did Paul ask?" Godfred replied, "It was a very good question, Paul go ahead and ask it again?" So I did, and this was Philip Lin's almost verbatim response: "I know in my conscience you brothers are right according to the truth, but in my culture I must be loyal to brother Lee." Of course he was not just referring to my question but to the overall situation, the 16 points the faithful elders had previously ministered, etc. Frankly, I appreciated and admired his honesty. It was so striking I still clearly remember it today. He was one of the few who openly admitted that his loyalty was personalized.

LSM Agenda Causing Division

While these three quarantined brothers experienced a lack of response from Brother Lee to their local needs, LSM objectives were fully tended to and broadening onto local grounds. This was certainly the case in the Southeast and in Europe; it was also graphically portrayed in Rosemead (Appendix 12). The LSM went about crashing into their localities, and either *effectively* or *intentionally* displaced elders, and fueled the disaccord Dan Towle refers to in *Fermentation* (p. 102, *FPR*).

The LSM's occupying agenda inspired John So to speak out and explain by analogy the occupation of the church ground by Witness Lee and his ministry. John likened the forceful movement of the LSM into various localities to the Japanese invasion of the Philippines in WWII (p. 73, *FPR*). The concern of LSM was not for the local ground and the keeping of the oneness with the elders and the churches, as they moved into localities to set up shop (See Francis in Rosemead, Appendix 13). Their concern was for their "big plans".

Their interference in the Southeast caused Bill Mallon to remove himself from the work and to ask Brother Lee the question many wanted to know: Was the "one accord" that was being promoted by the office the one accord of *fellowship* or the one accord of lining up with the office?

Upon hearing reports and the questions about LSM's divisive activity, Brother Lee ignored the reports and the questions and defended LSM workers. (Appendices 1, 3) He behaved this way until he was forced to deal with the damage and loss in the churches in a pivotal elders' conference where he smoothed things over (Appendix 4). He later condemned in his *Fermentation* book all the *reporters* of Living Stream's divisive activity, urging church leaders "not to make an issue" of anything. By so doing, the church leaders have kept their kind of "one accord". They have also kept to this day the shroud about them, created during those days of turmoil in the local churches.

Conclusion

The official version of events and concerns of 1985-1989 was given by the leaders in the recovery and presented to the churches in 1990 in *The Fermentation of the Present Rebellion*. Yet, that record is not the truthful story of "rebellion" in the local churches, and thus it misleads the saints. Our leadership should deal with that book and with our sin of bearing false witness against the former leading ones.

LSM's divisive activities in the churches and the sins of its manager, Philip Lee, in the office of Living Stream should be made public; enough so, that the saints can understand that the turmoil was not caused by the "rebellious ones", rather its source was the Living Stream publishing entity, overstepping its bounds morally in the office, and spiritually in the churches. Judgment of the sins of immorality, divisive activity, and bearing false witness is the basis of our oneness and our genuine accord, as Watchman Nee faithfully declares to church elders and co-workers, recorded in the book, *Love One Another*