
PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Leading Evangelical Scholars Call On “Local Churches” to Renounce Doctrines, Legal Attacks

January 9, 2007 — More than 60 evangelical Christian scholars and ministry leaders from seven nations have signed an unprecedented open letter (www.open-letter.org) asking the leadership of the “local churches” and Living Stream Ministry to withdraw unorthodox statements by their founder, Witness Lee. The letter also calls on the movement’s leaders to renounce their decades-long practice of using lawsuits and threatened litigation to respond to criticism and settle disputes with Christian organizations and individuals.

Background

The “local churches” (also known as “The Lord’s Recovery”) form a controversial movement that follows the teachings of the late Witness Lee (1905-1997), a Chinese leader who was a disciple of Watchman Nee. For decades, the “local churches” and their publishing counterpart, Living Stream Ministry (LSM), have drawn criticism from a variety of evangelical scholars, writers, and discernment ministries, who have alleged that Lee’s teachings compromise essential Christian beliefs such as the doctrine of the Trinity.

Since the 1970s, the “local churches” have repeatedly responded to criticisms by filing lawsuits or threatening litigation against Christian writers and publishers (see articles at Wikipedia <http://tinyurl.com/ybqehb> and Apologetics Index <http://tinyurl.com/yf2y4p>).

Most recently, Living Stream Ministry and the “local churches” sued Harvest House Publishers for \$136 million in response to a brief entry in its 1999 book, *The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon. In January 2006, a Texas appellate court ruled in favor of Harvest House and the authors by dismissing the lawsuit in summary judgment. LSM and the “local churches” appealed, but in December 2006 the Texas Supreme Court ruled for Harvest House by refusing to hear the appeal. LSM and “local church” leaders are considering whether they will take the case to the US Supreme Court.

Despite Witness Lee’s harsh characterizations of evangelical Christian denominations as “apostate” and “utilized by Satan to set up his satanic system,” Living Stream Ministry has sought alliances with high-profile evangelical groups. LSM was successful in its 2002 bid to join the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) while at the same time suing Harvest House, one of ECPA’s founding members.

The Open Letter

The letter is a public appeal to the leadership of the “local churches” and Living Stream Ministry to disavow and withdraw controversial statements made by Lee on the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. The letter also asks LSM and the “local churches” to renounce statements made by Lee that denigrate evangelical Christian denominations and organizations. Finally, the letter appeals to the leadership of LSM and the “local churches” to discontinue their use of lawsuits and threatened litigation against Christian individuals and organizations to answer criticisms or resolve disputes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: The letter with a complete list of signers is available at www.open-letter.org.

MEDIA CONTACTS: R. Philip Roberts, Ph.D., President, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, proberts@mbts.edu, 816-414-3701; R. Alan Streett, Ph.D., Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry, Criswell College, AStreett@criswell.edu, 214-818-1343; Kevin Alan Lewis, Th.M., J.D., Assistant Professor of Theology and Law, Talbot School of Theology, kevin.lewis@biola.edu, (562) 903-6000.