

CONCERNING HIERARCHY AND ORGANIZATION

The local churches in the Lord's recovery function according to the principles of the Body of Christ as an organism, not as a hierarchical organization as some have mistakenly claimed. We should not confuse the proper organic order of the Body with worldly hierarchical organizations. To say that the church is an organism does not mean that in the church as the Body there is no order. In any complex organism there must be a corresponding organic order with a differentiation of roles and functions among its component parts. As Paul writes in Romans 12:4-5, "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (see also vv. 6-8; 1 Cor. 12).

A hierarchical organization is a pyramid in which each level is subordinate to one above it, except for the highest level, which is supreme. Orders flow down the pyramid to the level at which they are to be implemented. Most mainline denominations have such a structure, dating back to the Roman Catholic Church with its pope, cardinals, archbishops, etc. In the Lord's Body and among the churches in the Lord's recovery as local expressions of the Body, there is no such thing; instead, there is the organic order of a living Body.

Four Factors Issuing in Order in the Body

In 1956 Brother Witness Lee gave a training on service that has since been published in a three-volume set titled *Three Aspects of the Church*. In the third volume he borrowed the term *organization* to speak about how God has established an order in the Body of Christ by placing in it members with various functions. He explained that the order in the Body is the issue of four factors: life, authority, function, and ministry. By regeneration all the believers receive the divine *life*, which constitutes them members of the Body of Christ, in which Christ is the unique source of *authority* as the Head. This life is mutually supplied among the members through their *functioning* and by the *ministry* of the particular vessels that the Lord has raised up and constituted for that purpose.

All of these aspects are evident in Ephesians 4:15-16: "But holding to truth in love, we may *grow* up into Him in all things, who is *the Head*, Christ, out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through *every joint of the rich supply* and through *the operation in the measure of each one part*, causes the *growth* of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." *Grow* and *growth* imply life, *the Head* implies authority, *the operation in the measure of each one part* refers to the function of every member, and *the joints of the rich supply* are the gifted members given by the Lord to perfect the saints through their ministry so that the saints may also participate in the work of the ministry, the building up of the Body of Christ (vv. 11-12). The building up of the Body of Christ implies the orderliness not of a hierarchical organization but of an organic entity knit together in the mutual supply of life. Concerning this, Brother Lee said, "This order comes from the previous four items: life, authority, function, and ministry. Order is not the result of someone saying that one person is above a second and under a third. This kind of order is useless" (*Three Aspects of the Church, Book 3: The Organization of the Church, 43*).

Leadership in the New Testament

The leadership in the New Testament ministry is not in giving orders as in a hierarchy but in the apostles' teaching, that is, in the teaching of the New Testament. In Titus 1:9 one of the requirements for an elder is "holding the faithful word, which is according to the teaching of the apostles." Such holding enables those who take the lead in a church to "exhort by the healthy teaching and to convict those who oppose," in other words, to maintain a good order in the church (v. 5). Thus, the real authority did not rest in the elders but in the apostles' teaching.

The presence of elders who oversee a local church and co-workers who function as apostles extra-locally is scriptural and does not make the churches an organization. As long as the elders and the co-workers carry

out their service according to the principles of the Body as presented in the apostles' teaching, they are functioning organically and not organizationally. Brother Lee described how the elders should carry out their function through fellowship, not by giving orders:

Each member of the Body has a place and a function (1 Cor. 12:18). Hence, we should remove the concept of rank, which we received from society. An elder should not feel that he is higher than others, nor should a deacon feel that he is lower than others. An elder makes decisions concerning certain matters and asks the deacons to cooperate, but an elder does not ask in the way of a boss giving orders to his subordinate. Those who clean the hall are not subordinates listening to the command of their boss. They are serving the Lord in coordination with the church. (*Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 5: Concerning Various Aspects of Church Service, 119*)

Brother Lee and the brothers who currently take the lead in the ministry to the churches have repeatedly charged those in responsibility not to be today's Nicolaitans who lord it over the flock (Rev. 2:6, 15; 1 Pet. 5:3) but instead to shepherd the saints according to God (v. 2). Any deviation from this pattern is contrary to both the teaching and the common practice in the Lord's present recovery. Our testimony is that the saints in the Lord's recovery with the elders and the co-workers are endeavoring to practice the church life according to these key principles of the Body, taking the way of fellowship, not of hierarchy.

Two False Notions

Some have called Living Stream Ministry (LSM) the headquarters of the local churches. This is wrong. Living Stream Ministry was established by Witness Lee for the publishing and propagation of the ministry he shared with Watchman Nee. In that capacity it functions to publish their ministry in various forms, and it sponsors events such as trainings and conferences to minister to the needs of the churches and the saints. It does not direct the churches, and its officers and employees have no leadership role among the churches based on their LSM service.

The leadership in the Lord's recovery is carried out by a group of co-workers, some of whom serve either as employees or officers of LSM and some of whom do not. The co-workers do not derive any authority among the churches based on their service with LSM. Rather, they are recognized as co-workers based on their faithfulness to the apostles' teaching in the New Testament and their having been given as gifts by the Lord to His Body as joints of the rich supply to perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12, 16). Those who serve in LSM do so because they recognize the great benefit of the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee to the churches and are burdened and equipped by the Lord to function in the publication work of the ministry.

Some have pointed to the registration of the churches as 501c3 corporations as proof that the local churches are an organization. This again is in error. Registration as a 501c3 corporation is required for the saints' financial donations to be tax deductible. Moreover, registration with a state is typically required for banking transactions and for ownership of meeting halls and other properties. The corporation that exists for such matters is distinct from the spiritual entity that is the church. Many churches make this distinction in their corporate by-laws, limiting the functions of the corporation to those that are required by law and excluding the spiritual aspects of what the church is—a local expression of the Body of Christ.

The church, the Body of Christ, is a living entity whose members receive the ministry of the Lord's servants and function according to their measure under the authority of Christ, the Head, for the building up of itself in love (vv. 15-16). Those who do not know the principles of the Body mistake such an organic order for organization.