

Declaration and Clarification

Why We Must Separate and Disassociate Ourselves from the Division formed by Sectarian Leaders in the Church in Toronto

April 1, 2007

The Lord's recovery advanced significantly in the twentieth century with the revelation that the universal church, the Body of Christ, is expressed on the earth as local churches standing on the ground of oneness. We were captured by this vision and have given our lives for it with the firm conviction that our return to the proper ground, receiving all the believers and having fellowship with all the genuine local churches, was a major step in the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer that all His believers "may be one" (John 17:21). This move to accomplish the Lord's desire and God's eternal economy has not gone unchallenged by His enemy, and the Lord's recovery has suffered periodically from internal turmoil and dissent. At times the leaders of such turmoil have forsaken the ground of oneness to form a local sect with those who would follow them. Sadly, this is exactly what some from among the leadership of the church in Toronto have done.

It grieves us very much to come to this conclusion, but in obedience to the truth in the Word of God we cannot accept or be part of the sectarian group formed by those who have transmuted the proper government of the church into an unbiblical hierarchy that is foreign to the nature of the Body of Christ. In faithfulness to the Lord, His Word, and the vision that He has shown us of His recovery, we must disassociate and separate ourselves from those who have formed a divisive party in the church locally and have severed themselves from the general fellowship of all the local churches (Heb. 13:13; 1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Tim. 2:20-21).

This stand does not mean that we separate or disassociate ourselves from our fellow believers, other than those such as Nigel Tomes who have rightfully been quarantined by the Body for divisive activities. In fact, this stand is required in order to maintain our fellowship and oneness with all the members of the Body locally and with all the local churches universally. Nor does this stand mean that we are forsaking our standing as the church in Toronto or as members of the corporation, "The Church of the Torontonians." We do, however, reject as illegitimate the manner in which the March 4, 2007, business meeting was conducted, including its determination of membership and adoption of new by-laws.

Those who have formed a divisive sect and replaced the biblical form of church government with a controlling hierarchy have disqualified themselves as elders in the church in Toronto. The extent of their deviation is attested to by the truth, by history, and by imposing a system of wrongful control over the church in Toronto's corporation, "The Church of the Torontonians," using human manipulation.

The Truth

The sect's leaders have deviated from the truth concerning the proper standing of a local church by teaching and practicing a system of error (Eph. 4:14) which divides them from the Body of Christ:

1. They have cut themselves and those who follow them off from the common fellowship of all the local churches on the earth (Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 1:9; Rev. 1—3).

2. They have asserted an unscriptural autonomy in rejecting and opposing the general ministry, fellowship, and leadership in the Lord's recovery, as well as the common feeling of the Body in the quarantine of Titus Chu (Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 1:15; Titus 1:9).
3. They have made clear their intention to establish a special relationship with Titus Chu through man-made by-laws that allow them to select their own apostle(s) to the exclusion of others, contrary to the clear word of the Bible (1 Cor. 12:28; 1:12-13; 3:4, 22). They have also threatened the saints with discipline if they attend meetings where the co-workers who serve all the churches minister (3 John 9-11). When churches align themselves with particular workers, they become sects.
4. They have exercised unscriptural control over members' participation in the fellowship of the Body of Christ by labelling saints from other local churches as "outsiders" and prohibiting them from contacting local saints (1 Cor. 10:16; Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3; 3 John 5-10).
5. They have formed a fleshly and sectarian party (Gal. 5:20; 1 Cor. 11:18-19; Titus 3:10) by demanding that the saints accept their divisive stand and by publicly disparaging scores of local believers as contentious or "LSM-aligned" because they cannot accept the self-willed "determinations" of certain ones. They have proclaimed that only those who will "go along with" their sectarian "view" are welcome in the church. They have excluded properly appointed elders and genuine shepherds of the flock from their so-called "functional eldership," yet they have claimed to speak for the eldership as a whole. They have threatened discipline or expulsion to any who would point out their errors or receive ministry from the co-workers in the Lord's recovery.
6. They have provided a platform to Nigel Tomes, a brother quarantined for divisive activities (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10), in meetings and on their website, thus participating in the worldwide spread of a contagion of opposing slanders, lies, half-truths, and evil speakings that undermine and attack the ministry in the Lord's recovery and the one accord in the Body of Christ (2 Tim. 2:16-18a; Titus 1:10-13).
7. They have used the meeting for the Lord's supper to enforce their domination over the church. They first denied the bread and the cup to many faithful saints; then they removed the Lord's table meeting from these saints' regular meeting place. In doing this they have made the bread of their table a symbol of their divisive party and not of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:29). Thus, the bread and the cup they partake of are not "the fellowship of the body of Christ" and "the fellowship of the blood of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16).

The sectarian ones have left the genuine ground of oneness, which is the oneness of the universal Body of Christ manifested in a locality, and have formed a divisive sect. Because they have abandoned the common fellowship of the saints and the churches, i.e., the unique fellowship of the Body expressed locally and universally, we are compelled to separate and disassociate ourselves from them.

Our History

The sectarian leaders have sought to sever the church in Toronto from its historic roots—the teaching of the apostles conveyed through the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. The church in Toronto was founded directly through the ministry of Brother Lee, who first visited Toronto to raise up the church in 1968 and who traveled to Toronto for conferences and fellowship numerous times in the early 1970s. Witness Lee initiated the original eldership in the church. His ministry not only established but also sustained the church here. The church in Toronto regularly enjoyed the semiannual trainings, the ministry station meetings, and the publications put out by Living Stream Ministry. Other brothers who were speaking the same thing and co-working with Brother Lee supplied the church through many conferences in and near Toronto.

In recent months the sectarian ones have joined in a relentless attack on Living Stream Ministry and many of the co-workers who are speaking the same thing as Brother Nee and Brother Lee for the continuation of the Lord's ministry in His recovery. These same sectarian “elders” have also resisted the efforts of many brothers to shepherd the saints in Toronto, including the efforts of two of the early elders Brother Lee appointed to lead the church here. This sectarian group has also purged two of the properly appointed current elders, Ron MacVicar and David Wang, from meaningful participation in the eldership of the church in Toronto, while at the same time failing to deal with Nigel Tomes and instead giving him prominence in the church. The sect's leaders have made it clear that they will receive in fellowship only those saints and churches who reject the ministry of the co-workers labouring in coordination and who accept the ministry of Titus Chu, a brother who has been quarantined by the co-workers and churches over the whole earth for his divisive activities. All of these actions are sectarian.

Secular Control

The new by-laws put forth by the sect's leaders seek to implement a blatantly unscriptural system of church administration. These new by-laws transmute the nature of our corporation from serving the church to controlling the church. They impose a hierarchy of control that is without foundation in the Bible and without precedent in the history of the Lord's recovery. These by-laws replace the scriptural pattern of church administration under the headship of Christ and the shepherding care of the elders with a human and secular organization. The new by-laws vest ultimate authority over the spiritual affairs of the church in Toronto in a secular Board of Directors. This Board of Directors sits above the elders in all aspects of the government of the church. It is empowered to indefinitely suspend elders without notice or recourse and to withhold ratification of the elders' decisions. All of this is organizational, unscriptural, hierarchical, and Nicolaitan in principle (cf. Rev. 2:6, 15).

The new by-laws supplant the legitimate government of the church with an unscriptural, secular system. We are well aware of the solemnity of touching the Lord's delegated authorities, and we respect the authority of the Lord in the church. Our disassociation from these sectarian leaders stands against division, since they themselves have instituted and institutionalized an illegitimate government. *“A man can revolt only against a legitimate government; he cannot revolt against a government which is itself not legitimate. It is rebellion to separate oneself from a legitimate government, but it is not rebellion to separate oneself from a government that is not legitimate”* (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 50, p. 824).

The new by-laws replace the genuine ground of oneness with obedience to the controlling Directors as the basis of the oneness of the church. In order to remain in a proper standing before the Lord, we must disassociate ourselves from the division produced by this departure from the genuine ground of oneness. To separate ourselves from a division in the Body is not divisive. Rather, it is our responsibility before the Lord. *“If anyone thinks that he should not be divisive, he should first bear in mind what it means to be divisive. Being divisive means being divided from the Body. The division in 1 Corinthians 12 refers to a division from the Body (v. 25), not a separation from a group which is not according to the Body”* (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 50, p. 820).

Our Stand

Because of the deviation of the sect’s leaders from the truth and from the historic roots and standing of the church in Toronto and because of their implementation of an unscriptural system of control, we have no choice according to the Word of God and our conscience but to separate and disassociate ourselves from these leaders and their party. We realize before the Lord that it is a serious matter to take this step, but to be subject to this aggressively sectarian leadership would indeed compromise and violate the very oneness of the Triune God expressed in the Body of Christ. Our action is to turn from division and to affirm the Scriptural practicality of the genuine ground of oneness. We are not rejecting our fellow believers but are renouncing a system of error (Eph. 4:14).

Our motives and our standing have been maligned and distorted, but we are not discouraged. We only desire to pursue the Lord in the church life in the Lord’s recovery as we have for decades. We realize that our actions will continue to be misconstrued and misrepresented, but the constraints of conscience and the Word of God dictate that we must follow Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13). When leaders in a church deviate and attempt to change the church’s nature to such an extent that they no longer stand on the ground of oneness in fellowship with all the local churches on the earth, they are no longer building up a genuine church but are building up a sect. In response to the present situation, we are bound by devotion to the heart’s desire of our Father God, by the vision of the practical oneness of the Body of Christ, and by the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace to separate and disassociate ourselves from the division formed by the sectarian leaders in Toronto.

We will continue to meet as the church in Toronto to fellowship, pray, break bread, serve, and worship the Lord as believers standing on the genuine ground of oneness in fellowship with all the local churches in the one Body of Christ. We welcome your fellowship and participation in 1) remaining on the proper and genuine ground of the church, the ground of the oneness of the Body of Christ; 2) remaining in the common fellowship with all the local churches in the Lord’s recovery on the earth; 3) maintaining the proper testimony of the bread and the cup of the Lord’s supper, and 4) receiving the shepherding ministry of many co-working brothers who are faithful to the Lord’s unique ministry in His recovery and to the vision of this age.

We invite all our dear brothers and sisters to join with us as we endeavour to practice the church life according to the teaching and fellowship of the apostles.