

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Witness Lee, Watchman Nee, Stephen Kaung, T. Austin-Sparks

Witness Lee, Watchman Nee, Stephen Kaung, T. Austin-Sparks - posted by MichaelLiao (), on: 2019/12/20 0:44

Dear Brethren,

How are you, my brothers and sister? It has been a while since I have posted on here. I pray you are all doing well. The reason I am posting here is that there has been a burden on my heart that has been disturbing me for years, ever since I became born again 9 years ago. I remember being introduced to the "Local Church" or The Lord's Recovery movement. I was actually introduced to it near my last year of high school. It was through one of my friends who was a part of this church that I was introduced to Watchman Nee. Brother Nee's writings revolutionized my Christian life, and still has laid a mark on me to this day.

In terms of Orthodoxy, much of what I have read and encountered in the Lord's Recovery seemed to be pretty solid. It was through this movement that I first learned about "Christ in you", and how it is Christ who lives the Christian life in and through you (Galatians 2:20). We are not to live the Christian life by self-effort (fleshly), but Christ! However, when my high school year ended, I decided to leave because it seemed a bit rigid and it felt like I was being punished for questioning some of the quirks within the movement. In terms of practice, it seemed kind of cultish. Watchman Nee I have no problems with. Some of the things I have read by Witness Lee I don't have a problem with as well, though I have been having questions about Lee for a while. They both talk about the Church/Body being the corporate expression of the Resurrected Life of Christ, which I think many of us here would agree with T. Austin-Sparks, as he had taught this as well. And I think many of us are in awe of the revelation that Sparks had of Christ - it was extremely high! However, where I may disagree with this movement is not the Orthodoxy, but the Orthopraxy - that the ground of the church is Locality. I think I would stand with Brother Sparks and perhaps Brother Stephen Kaung that the ground of the Church is Christ, since Christ is the cornerstone of our Body (Ephesians 2:20). It is to make much of Jesus Christ at the end of the day.

I still read some things from their website - Living Stream Ministry from time to time and I do honestly find some of their spiritual truths refreshing. Particularly Watchman Nee's writings. I still practice what they call "calling on the name of the Lord", which is calling out "O Lord Jesus" in slow repetitions. To this day I do find myself experiencing Christ daily through doing this, as if I'm touching this Resurrected Person. The more I do it, the more I seem to love Christ more, and the world grows strangely dim to me. I'm more satisfied in Christ than before. Sin is not as attractive. It feels like I'm depending more on His Spirit than on my own flesh when I do it. It's like beholding the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:16-18), and my obedience to the Lord flows from growing a deeper love for Christ. I also learned the practice of "pray-reading" from this movement, where one not only reads the Word, but prays it - in order for us to experience/eating Christ in the Word. I have not learned it in a lot of mainstream Protestant Churches. I had learned it from the Lord's Recovery in the beginning (although now I'm older and I realize that many saints have practiced this historically). It's like a form of meditation, and it has been extremely beneficial to my walk with the Lord.

I guess the few observations/questions I have is:

1) Are they true Christians? Personally, I think there are some precious saints in this movement. I have had some enlightening moments that I felt were from the Holy Spirit when the truth "Christ in you" was revealed to me. However, I cannot agree with their orthopraxy of what they believe the church should be. That was the reason I left. One of their footnotes in the Recovery Version of the Bible states that any church that takes on any denominational name (Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, etc.) are committing "spiritual fornication" because they are taking every other name other than the Lord's name. In other words, the Body of Christ at large has committed adultery/apostasy because the Church has chosen to denominate themselves. I guess the irony for me is that for them to allude that they are the ones who have "recovered" the truth of Scripture and how the Church should operate seemed a bit arrogant, but also it feels like they're denominating themselves by separating from the rest of Christendom in the process.

2) Is it right to continue to fellowship with some of the people there that I know? I have a friend who is in the Lord's Recovery, and the many times I have fellowshiped with him (since high school), I've been amazingly encouraged by him spiritually in Christ. It's as if once we were done fellowshiping, we were glorifying Christ. I mean the way that he talks about Christ to me is just phenomenal. I can almost say with clear conscience that he truly loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

3) From my observation, they seem to make much of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, as if these two men are on a pe

dastal. I am not in favour of that at all, for that could border on idolatry. Personally, Watchman Nee is my favourite Christian writer of all time. His books *The Normal Christian Life* and *The Overcoming Life* have really helped reveal Christ in me (Galatians 1:15-16). However, the people in the Lord's Recovery also read Andrew Murray, Charles Spurgeon, Madame Guyon, Count Zinzendorf, D.L. Moody, Martin Luther, Bernard of Clairvaux, George Muller, R.A. Torrey, Hudson Taylor, John Bunyan, M.E. Barber, and A.W. Tozer (solid men and women of God). My guess is I think they're experiencing the genuine Christ in some way through reading these authors. Of course, they don't just read these books apart from the Bible. Am I wrong about this? I learned to rest in Christ through this movement's teachings, and I'm sure some of the other Christians here have as well, right? I am just curious about this.

4) As a follow-up to number 3, is then the Holy Spirit in this movement? Or does the Spirit work in spite of human errors within this movement? Is this movement truly of God? It seems like they do make much of Christ, just like Sparks, Nee, and Kaung, the only difference is the ground of the Church - Christ vs. Locality. I do find the issue of Locality to be sectarian, as I believe when one receives the revelation of Christ, the Body is magnified and much bigger than we ever anticipate on a universal level. When I met Stephen Kaung a few years ago, I tried to ask him about Witness Lee, but he couldn't answer because if I remember correctly, Kaung and his wife couldn't stay for long in the church.

5) If anyone here has been in the Lord's Recovery and had left, what was your experience like? Or if you are still in the Recovery, what do you think about it? I would love to hear all your thoughts.

I have been awfully torn over this, and it's been years thinking about this. I would love to hear your thoughts, my brothers and sisters. My motive is not to slander anyone (in this movement or outside of it), but I have been confused about this. I wish and pray for the best in all of you, that Jesus Christ would be glorified in you all. And all God's people say, "Amen!" I love you all in Christ.

Your Servant in Jesus' Name,

- M. L.

Re: Witness Lee, Watchman Nee, Stephen Kaung, T. Austin-Sparks - posted by narrowpath, on: 2019/12/20 16:20

Hi Michael,

there is an earlier thread on SI about a conversation between TAS and WL, see https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=9074&forum=34

When I lived in Taiwan, where both groups are very numerous, they literally call on the name of the Lord by shouting O Lord Jesus 耶穌! This is why they are also called 耶穌黨

I guess that is because someone translated the term "call on the name of the Lord" with 耶穌黨 whereas the Chinese Union Bible translates 耶穌黨 as 耶穌黨

In Taiwan, both groups count as orthodox, though they have some distinct practices that set them apart from other mainstream denominations. My wife once attended one of their evangelistic campaigns and was baptized right away, though she did not yet have a complete conversion experience.

I always found it a bit strange when groups claim they are the only non-denominational church and accuse other denominations of denominationalism.

Also, it is a known fact that Living Stream Ministries have in the past sued people for libel who disagreed with them, and pointed out their errors. You will find something in Wikipedia.

Re: - posted by MichaelLiao (), on: 2019/12/21 13:03

Hi narrowpath,

Thank you for your response. I really appreciate it. So, you mean to say that in both T. Austin-Sparks and Witness Lee's group they would cry out "O Lord Jesus"? Would you consider it an Orthodox practice? When you were in Taiwan, did you practice that yourself?

Even though I am away from the Lord's Recovery/Local Church Movement, I have still practiced this, and I do find it helpful in my walk with the Lord Jesus.

Re: - posted by narrowpath, on: 2019/12/21 16:58

Dear brother Michael,

I remember back in my early days I had a Chinese teacher in Taiwan who attended one of these groups. I could not tell if it was Living Stream or 本地教會 Local Church. I told her I was a Christian, too, and when we prayed together, she practised this repetitive "Oh Lord Jesus" prayer.

I found it a bit "strange" I just imagine Jesus hearing these prayers. It appears to me a little bit like an old damaged vinyl record that repeats the very same notes all over again, or like a tape loop.

I would not say repeating "oh Lord Jesus" is plain wrong, but the Bible does warn us about vain repetitions in Matthew 6:7

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Would it not be more beneficial to use "Oh Lord Jesus" occasionally as it appears in the Psalms and other recorded prayers in the bible, but then continue in praise, meditation on scripture, adoration, confession, petition, intercession, proclamation, groaning, surrender and whatever other utterance of prayer the Holy Spirit leads you into?

Otherwise, pray in tongues, the wonderful prayer language, where you utter perfect prayer that only God understands and that uplifts your spirit. If you have the gift, you should make use of it, if not, ask for it.

my 2 cents...

Blessings
Philip

Re: - posted by MichaelLiao (), on: 2019/12/21 17:24

Thank you, Brother Philip,

Yes, I have been praying in tongues for years. That gift has definitely edified my spirit in my walk with Lord. I guess for me it has been a combination of calling on the name of the Lord, meditation (pray-reading) in the Scriptures, praying in tongues, etc. The fruit has been similar in all these practices. To me, it is simply accessing the Christ, His Holy Spirit within me - to abide in Him. To me that's all that matters, brother. I guess calling on the Lord's name is simply a way to savour and to enjoy Christ.