

(Appendix IV) Watchman Nee as I Knew Him (Caleb Huang)

Ever since I learned to read, I have loved literature of all kinds—prose, poetry, and fiction alike. However, after experiencing the grace of salvation at the age of fifteen, my interests shifted toward spiritual books and periodicals. The very first spiritual booklet I read was Watchman Nee's *Twelve Baskets*. From the opening chapter, I was instantly captivated; I not only read the text but also took extensive notes, filling thousands of loose-leaf pages. This habit of note-taking proved immensely beneficial to my later work with the *Christian Digest*. At the time, I simply recognized that the author possessed profound spiritual depth and exceptional clarity of thought; his writings were substantive and served as a valuable guide for my own spiritual journey. Regrettably, by the time I was saved, Brother Nee had already been imprisoned for his faith; he eventually passed away in custody—a martyr for the Lord—so we never met in person. Despite this, I held him in the highest esteem, regarding him as an exemplary saint and cherishing his memory with deep admiration.

In the 1980s, complete collections of Watchman Nee's works were published in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Hong Kong edition was organized by topic, while the Taiwan edition was arranged chronologically; each had its own merits. I purchased and read both sets. As my own spiritual life matured, I gained a deeper understanding of Brother Nee's life journey and insights. I was particularly moved by his many personal spiritual experiences and testimonies, and I came to view him as a spiritual forebear whose words and deeds were in perfect harmony—a man who consecrated his entire being to God and whose example is worthy of emulation by future generations. Unexpectedly, towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, several books were published—first in Hong Kong and then elsewhere overseas—accusing Brother Nee of sexual misconduct. I was deeply shocked by this, as the source of the information for these books (referring to the anonymous disseminator of the allegations) had actually approached me when he first immigrated to the United States. He had wanted to provide me with detailed information, but I had flatly refused. To my surprise, he ended up providing the material to several individuals with extreme views instead. I have briefly looked over the books that were published and wish to offer the following response regarding my thoughts:

- (1) The anonymous source harbored intense prejudice against Brother Nee. He possessed no firsthand information himself; instead, he relied on hearsay and heavily adopted accusations made against Brother Nee by atheists. Since Brother Nee was ultimately not convicted or imprisoned for sexual misconduct, the evidence behind those accusations is actually unreliable.
- (2) I am acquainted with the anonymous source's own brothers, none of whom agree with his stance; he is quite isolated within his own family, which suggests that the information he provides should not be widely circulated.
- (3) In situations where the accused is deceased and cannot defend himself, any unilateral slander will inevitably face God's judgment. As outsiders, we ought to adopt a cautious attitude and certainly should not help propagate such claims.
- (4) Even if Brother Nee had perhaps committed some transgression in the past, the biblical principle states: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Such confession is a private matter between God and the individual; how could outsiders know whether he confessed? If he did confess, and we continue to judge him, we commit the sin of judging God's servant (Romans 14:4)—a serious matter indeed.
- (5) The Bible instructs us Christians: "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7). This verse specifically exhorts us to carefully observe the "outcome of the conduct" of our spiritual predecessors. Based on the information available to me, the conclusion of Brother Nee's life brought great glory to God: (1) When the political landscape of mainland China shifted, he was in Hong Kong; he subsequently returned to Shanghai specifically to face the situation, ultimately becoming a martyr for the Lord; (2) He willingly accepted imprisonment, declining offers from overseas Christians to raise funds for his bail; (3) Although he endured prison hardships unimaginable to outsiders, he expressed in letters home that he was able to maintain a sense of "joy"; (4) A non-believing cellmate was so moved by his conduct that, upon release, he repented and converted to the faith. These circumstances demonstrate that the final chapter of his life bore a magnificent testimony—one that few ordinary Christians or preachers could match.

After immigrating to the United States, I discovered that Christian bookstores almost universally featured a "Watchman Nee Corner," with shelves dedicated to his English-language books. Furthermore, the white American pastors I encountered were unanimous in praising his exceptional spiritual insight, regarding him as someone worthy of emulation.

Later, I learned that Brother Nee possessed extraordinary natural gifts—specifically, the ability to

read ten lines at a glance and a photographic memory. It is no wonder he could digest and assimilate the vast array of English spiritual literature he read. It is said that when he was invited to visit churches across the UK and deliver messages in English, the transcripts of those recordings—without further editing—stood as masterpieces of English prose; indeed, the Chinese edition of **The Normal Christian Life** was translated from those original English spoken messages. From this, one can infer that Brother Nee truly possessed the talent of "five talents" (Matthew 25:15–16, 20).

However, I do not idolize Brother Nee blindly. From my objective observation, his personality seemed to lack a certain tactfulness, and perhaps he had some flaws; it is said that the elders of the Shanghai church once nearly expelled him, though the move was ultimately blocked by one of the elders. That elder's objection was based on the principle that one should not rush to judgment based solely on hearsay without first verifying the facts directly with the person involved. I was told this personally by that elder's son. Moreover, Brother Nee's teachings were not beyond criticism. Especially after his ministry began to bear fruit and he was followed and exalted by many saints, some of his arguments seemed to lack balance, moderation, and sobriety, crossing the line to some extent. Regarding the following points, I maintain a cautious reserve and do not fully endorse or adopt them:

- (1) The book **Authority and Submission** fails to strike a proper balance between authority and submission; by overemphasizing so-called "delegated authority," it casts a shadow of fear over ordinary believers—fear of "rebellious" against authority—and provides a pretext for ambitious preachers to use the book to suppress the saints. Among the fellow preachers I have encountered, nine out of ten display an arrogant attitude: they refuse to submit to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit themselves, yet demand that others submit to their own authority.
- (2) The book **Further Talks on the Church Life** (or **Rethinking the Work**) goes beyond his earlier, more cautious stance on the "ground of the church," creating an impression of "we alone are right." It dilutes the spiritual realities of "oneness in the spirit" and "brotherly love"—as well as the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit—by emphasizing outward unity in "local administration." Consequently, it has been exploited by ambitious individuals to exclude other Christian denominations, resulting in a church that is "more sectarian than the denominations themselves."
- (3) The series of messages titled **Handing Over** (or **Surrender**) goes beyond the standard concept of "consecration" and risks misleading people regarding the object of that consecration; it shifts the focus from consecration to God and the Lord Jesus toward "junior co-workers" surrendering to "senior co-workers," and the "church" surrendering to "the work." While this argument may have had its own historical context and necessity when the church faced a crisis

of survival, it was later exploited by ambitious figures in free overseas regions to exalt their personal "ministry," giving rise to the concept of the "unique ministry." What was originally a "ministry" intended to serve the "churches" was transformed into a situation where the "churches" existed to serve the "ministry."

Thus, when we respect and emulate any servant of God, we must strictly avoid going beyond what is written in the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 4:6), lest we unwittingly fall into extremes. —

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