

## *An Introduction to the “Local Church”*

You were told it was to be a Christian meeting. You had agreed to come for two reasons. One, you considered yourself a Christian. Two, the invitation had been extended so persistently. Now that the meeting is over, you wish you hadn't come at all. You've never felt so on-the-spot in your whole life.

The meeting itself was unusual, to say the least. It was a full-scale psychodrama. At least that's how you were describing it in your mind while it was in progress. But then you'd felt guilty about thinking that way about any group of sincere Christians.

You had arrived ten minutes ahead of the announced starting time. But the room was already at least two-thirds full, and the meeting seemed to be in full progress all by itself. It was mostly singing at first. And what singing! You'd never heard any like it in your whole life. Such enthusiasm. The audience of at least two or three hundred swayed back and forth almost as one man in rhythm with the music. Song after song was sung. You knew several of them. They were familiar gospel songs, but the words had been changed freely in places. There were modern pop tunes, too. But all new words had been put to them. You had joined in. You simply couldn't help it. Everyone was really into the singing.

Between songs, various people spoke out spontaneously with a testimony about God in their personal lives. The whole room responded with oddly intoned, but hearty, responses such as “Hallelujah,” “Praise the Lord,” or “O Lord Jesus.” You were impressed and embarrassed for them at the same time.

Then, that rather elderly, but extremely energetic Chinese gentleman appeared. The singing and the vocalized responses crescendoed. Never had you seen or heard anything like it in

your whole life. "They're crazy," you thought. "Just a bunch of 'holy rollers'." But somehow, you knew those descriptions didn't quite fit.

The Chinese gentleman had spoken for more than an hour. His English was heavy with an oriental accent. You could hardly understand him, but the others seemed to clearly understand what he was saying. The message was constantly punctuated with the listeners' vocalized responses. Again, there was that odd intonation. You couldn't put your finger on it.

You begin laughing a bit inside because you had thought the meeting was over when the message was finished. How wrong you had been! After the message, people everywhere stood and enthusiastically repeated bits and pieces of the message with some comment on it. At times the vocalized responses were deafening. The whole group even broke into chanting at times. More songs were sung.

At long, long last the meeting was over. But not for you. About twenty-five people surrounded you and sat down. Then it started.

They began a rhythmic chant, "O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus." They seemed hypnotized. And you were beginning to feel the same way. They pitched and rolled together with the beat. That odd intonation? It was Chinese. You recognize it now. You'd not figured it out before because the majority by far were Caucasian. But that intonation was sure enough Chinese.

"O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus." On it went. It was beginning to become clear to you what they wanted. You were supposed to join in. The friend who had invited you was smiling at you and encouraging you with his hand to join in. The heat was on. It was all of them against you. You could feel the flush of embarrassment coming up your neck and face. How did you ever get yourself into this? "What kind of a heathen am I anyway?" you ask yourself. You better do something. They're not about to give up. It could be a long night.

Finally you venture an "O Lord Jesus," but only with your lips. Smiles and encouragement come from the whole group. They like what you're doing. "That didn't hurt so much," you muse. You vocalize it softly, "O Lord Jesus."

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You're really into it now. You're even enjoying it. You're pulsating back and forth with them. What acceptance! You're a part. You've even got that odd intonation. Your mind is relieved. The pressure is off. Your will has been broken. And it's likely that you have just become the most recent convert to the Local Church.

That's right. The Local Church. That's what it's called. It's not *a* local church. It's THE Local Church. It's the only true church in your whole city of two and a half million people. And you found it tonight. They're the only truly non-sectarians in the whole city. Just ask them, if you've got any doubt about that.

And the older Chinese gentleman? Who's he? That is Witness Lee, the autonomous dictator of this world-wide religious cult.

### HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH\*

The roots of this movement go back several decades to China. Missionary programs from the Western world were in deep waters early in this century. Many Chinese Christians were disenchanted with what they saw. It was true that many of the missionaries did cooperate, but they still represented various Western denominational mission boards, and that didn't sit well with the people. Whether that was good or not is another question. But confidence in the missionary program was shaken.

One result of the loss of awe of the Western missionary was the emergence of the Little Flock movement, a religious sect claiming to be free of all sectarian principles. Its prime mover

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\*In order that a clear understanding of what this cult believes and the errors involved may be firmly grasped, I will alter the procedure somewhat from that which I have followed in considering the other six cults. Rather than devoting a section to a theological analysis and then following with a section for a refutation, I will combine the analysis and refutation together in "A Refutation of the Local Church."

The reason for this procedural change is that the Local Church doctrine has an unusually great number of contradictions and inconsistencies. They must be pinned down point by point.

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was the late Watchman Nee, now widely known in America through his many books which have been translated into English.

Quite small and struggling initially, the Little Flock movement began to gain momentum after the Second World War. China was in great internal turmoil. The Communists were advancing. Western causes were extremely unpopular. Many of the Chinese Christians were looking for a "home grown" church. The Nee movement was promising to many. Nee could arouse interest, but he couldn't seem to get the act together. That's where Witness Lee enters the picture.

Nee and Lee had been associated closely for a number of years. But Lee had not been really prominent in the leadership of the whole movement. In the late forties, the two joined together in a much stronger relationship. Nee was the dynamic teacher; Lee was the gifted organizer.

The complete Communist take-over was becoming fully apparent. Nee recognized the implications of that for the new movement. In 1948 he sent Lee off the mainland of China in order to preserve the movement after the Communist take-over was complete.

Lee made his way to Formosa and took up the Little Flock effort there. The growth was significant. Between 1949 and 1955 it appears that the size of the Little Flock grew from 500 to 23,000 on the island. There was also significant success in the Philippines. In 1968 the Local Church claimed 10,000 adherents in the city of Taipei alone and 6,000 in the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

### *On To America*

Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York were the main points on Lee's first visit to the United States in 1958. Little was done on that trip other than getting the lay of the land. Lee did, however, come into contact with two groups that would be significant to the importation of the movement to the United States.

One was an already-established, all-Chinese, Chinese-speaking Local Church in San Francisco whose roots were established in Taiwan. He discovered the other group in Los Angeles, where a group of Christians were meeting at a place

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called Westmorland Chapel. The San Francisco group was, of course, already committed to Lee's teaching. The Westmorland group had some common ties with Lee through one T. Austin Sparks of England. One offered Lee a starting point in the Bay Area. The other could be used as a springboard in sprawling southern California.

Lee returned to the United States in 1960 and was invited to speak for a number of Christian groups who had become interested in the teaching of the late Watchman Nee. The Navigators, for example, had him at their headquarters in Glen Erie, Colorado. But few people in this country really understood what Lee was after.

The contacts gained through speaking were not particularly profitable for Lee's purposes. But they did give him exposure to many Americans. And one circumstance proved exceedingly profitable. Subsequent to Lee's first visit to the United States, a brother-in-law of Watchman Nee joined with the Westmorland group in Los Angeles, bringing several Chinese families with him. But they never fully merged into the identity of Westmorland Chapel. An issue came up over Witness Lee himself. The Chinese faction sided with Lee, while others from Westmorland opposed this faction. As a result, the group split and in 1962 the divisive element from Westmorland Chapel, under Lee's not-too-well-disguised leadership, "claimed the ground" in Los Angeles. The movement was now fully underway in the United States.

#### *Claiming the Ground*

It is necessary here to explain the expression, "claim the ground." There is no way to understand the workings of the Local Church without a grasp of that concept. (Other Local Church doctrines will be considered under the theological analysis, but this one must be discussed here in order to understand their history.)

The idea is wrapped up in the concept that there can be only one church in a given city. One city, one church. The teaching is based on an appeal to an ideal of the unity of the Church. Los Angeles, California, and Dacula, Georgia, have one thing in common. They can have only one church. Anything besides that one church is considered a division.

Now there are certain requirements a church must meet if it is to be the true church in a city. Foremost among those requirements is that it must have no sectarian doctrines whatsoever. (Of course, the Local Church is the deciding factor as to whether a doctrine is sectarian or not.)

Denominations are automatically excluded from being true churches because, according to the Local Church, they are founded on sectarian principles. A church, they say, can be founded only upon their concept of Christ. Anything else disqualifies it.

As you would expect, then, the Local Church proudly pretends it has no sectarian doctrines. In reality, however, it is one of the most heavily doctrinally-oriented cults in the world. It is absolutely convinced it "feeds only on Christ." That means it has the automatic spiritual territorial rights to a piece of geography called a city. All other Christians must join them. Anyone who does not is wrong, sectarian, and dishonoring to God. All other churches are part of the great harlot, Babylon.

#### ***Proselytizing Procedures***

The Local Church had firmly established itself in America by 1962. Growth over the next five years was slow but steady. Securing converts among people seeking "a New Testament-type church," the Local Church took people away from a number of already-established groups. The pattern was almost always the same.

Contact was made with a group that had some ideas similar to those of the Local Church. There would be a great deal of talk about unity. Slowly the group would lean towards some kind of co-working with the Local Church.

As soon as the Local Church was in a position to take a sizable portion of the other group, some issue would be made. It didn't make any difference what issue. Just an issue. A stand with one side or the other was then demanded by the Local Church. It, of course, could no longer work together with a false church that had now shown its real colors. The ugly head of sectarianism had risen. No way would the Local Church accept that. Division resulted, and the Local Church took its spoils of victory away.

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This is precisely what happened in 1962 and 1963 in the Los Angeles area. The Local Church, a group from the San Fernando Valley, and another group from Whittier began to cooperate. It looked like a fine arrangement until the charismatic question became an issue. The Local Church sided against the charismatics. The other group, seeing the authoritarian manner of the Local Church's operation, backed off. When the smoke cleared, only the Local Church came out whole. The other groups lost numbers to the Local Church.

The growth and scope of the Local Church is best seen by a quick look at its conference and training program held annually in Los Angeles during earlier years. (More will be said about this important phase of its method later.)

Its first conference, held in 1962, drew only 70 people. By 1964, it had 132 people, with several U.S. cities and a few foreign countries represented.<sup>2</sup> In 1969, 462 people came from a much wider range of American cities, and quite a few from foreign countries were on hand. Brazil, Canada, and Denmark were represented.<sup>3</sup> The number grew to 1,300 in 1970, with people from Thailand, Singapore, and Malasia attending.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of this movement coincides quite closely with the other cults described in this book. The late sixties and early seventies were a heyday for such dissident groups. Many of them dug in firmly during that time and established themselves. The Local Church is certainly no exception to this. Its splash is not as great now, but its growth rate is greater.

### *The Overall Size of the Local Church Movement*

The full size of the Local Church movement is difficult to ascertain. Taiwan is still a stronghold, as are the Philippines. It would appear there are some 5,000 or more members in the United States. Their overall number might be in the vicinity of 30,000 around the world.

Witness Lee is no longer a young man; his days are obviously numbered. I personally doubt that his close control can be assumed by anyone else in the ranks. The movement will almost surely splinter into two or three major factions when he dies. But splinter or not, the Local Church will be on the scene

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for some time to come. I predict that in America its influence will outlive the other six groups considered in this book, though its scope will not be as great as some in terms of sheer numbers.

### THE METHOD OF OPERATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The brainwashing, or mindbending, of the Local Church is, I believe, the most powerful and lasting of any cult on the contemporary religious scene.

Centering on the endless barrage against the established Church, the Local Church's deprogramming process is quite similar to that of the Children of God and The Way. Established Christianity, it says, is Babylon, the great whore of the Book of Revelation. There is nothing in her but death. (The Local Church acknowledges there are Christians in the churches, but they need to get out.)

Its means to mind control is as frightening as it is effective. It begins with what I believe to be an involuntary forfeiture of all normal use of the human mind. The Local Church uses two tools to gain this.

#### ***The Local Church "Mantra"***

The first of these mindbending tools is the Local Church *mantra*. They would violently reject any such suggestion that it is a "chant." No doubt they would even condemn that practice as heathen. Nonetheless they have their *mantra*. And it's not all that different from that of the Hare Krishna cult.

Listen to Witness Lee's view of the effectiveness of the *mantra*: "We have seen that to reach the unbelievers, no preaching is necessary. If we help them to say 'O Lord' three times they will be saved. . . . All they have to do is to open their mouths and say, 'O Lord, O Lord.' Even if they have no intention of believing, still they will be caught!"<sup>5</sup>

The Local Church's *mantra* is the phrase "O Lord Jesus." I know that phrase sounds terribly Christian, but from my repeated observation, the phrase becomes a psychological de-



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vice. It is repeated over and over again, day in and day out. Meaning and content of the phrase are immaterial.

We have seen that the leaders say if they can get you to say it just once, they're well on their way to getting you. Witness Lee has said:

In other words, whenever we say "Lord Jesus" in a real way, it means that you are in the Spirit. . . . we all have to learn to say "Lord Jesus" in the meeting, in our home, and a thousand times a day. . . . we must all say this. If we are going to lose our temper, we must say, "O Lord Jesus"! Then our temper will be gone. . . . I tell you, you can become holy just by saying "Lord Jesus." Whenever you say "Lord Jesus," you are in the *Holy Spirit*.<sup>6</sup>

That doesn't sound Christian, does it? There is truth in his statement, however. Even as the TM *mantra*, or "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare" will change your life, so will the repetitious mouthing of the phrase "O Lord Jesus." *It can produce a state of altered consciousness.*

The Local Church rationale behind the use of the phrase is that it is calling upon the Lord. (Oddly enough, that is the same rationale of Hare Krishna!) Such "proof texts" as, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," and "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit," are used as evidence that such employment of the phrase is thoroughly Christian, proper, and necessary.

It becomes evident quickly, however, that this is actually no normal calling on the Lord. It is usually voiced repetitiously to get one "into his spirit," as an expression of approval, or a display of delight or excitement.

Witness Lee explains one is to "breathe in God and exhale the four syllables 'O Lord Jesus.'" The phrase is also used as a powerful chant by a crowd. Imagine 2,000 to 3,000 people rocking from side to side and chanting it in perfect unison for several minutes and you may have some idea of the impact it can have in crowd psychology.

The phrase and its variations are used as a substitute for the rational use of the mind. The mind seems to go out of gear as the mouth shifts into high. "Get out of your mind, brother," is a

constant admonition. And it is not enough to *think*, "O Lord Jesus." It must be vocalized. The effect is far greater. It is not unusual for someone in the Local Church to repeat that phrase fifty to one hundred times a day.

***A New Testament of the Bible—Pray-Reading***

But the Local Church does not stop with a *mantra*. The mindlessness extends into the use of Scriptures, too, through an interesting invention called "pray-reading." This technique was introduced by Witness Lee during the late fifties in Taiwan.

For example, here is a way Witness Lee might suggest you pray-read Gal. 2:20:

I am crucified with Christ. (With your eyes upon the Word and praying from deeply within, you say), Praise the Lord, I am crucified with Christ. Amen! O Lord, I am crucified. Praise the Lord! Crucified! with Christ. Amen! I am crucified with Christ. Hallelujah! Amen! Nevertheless. Amen. Nevertheless. Amen. I live. O Lord, I live! Hallelujah! Amen! Yet not I, but Christ. . . .

You are not to think when you pray-read. You are to respond with whatever enters your "spirit." It makes little or no difference if what you say is right or wrong. This is a matter of the spirit, and you must not seek to think out whether or not it is true. Just keep your mouth going.

Lee explains this is how one actually partakes of Christ. He quotes 2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is God breathed. . . ." Quickly, he turns the phrase to say, "All Scripture is God's breath." Since God is Spirit, God's breath is Spirit. Therefore, we actually partake of God's nature or essence when we pray-read. Says he, "From now on, we must consider the Bible to be the very essence of God instead of the revelation of God."<sup>7</sup> Again, "It is clear from the Scripture that the Word [the Bible] of Christ is nothing less than Christ Himself."<sup>8</sup> Thus, to pray-read is to eat and drink spiritually the essence of Christ. The Bible and Christ become synonymous!

The Scriptures, then, are read with little apparent concern for what they really mean.

Pray-read every word, and you will be filled with the Word which is the Lord Himself. When He is filling you, everything will be taken

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care of. It is not to practice the teaching or obey the Word, but to enjoy Him through the Word.<sup>9</sup>

Further, Witness Lee is constantly teaching the Scriptures against the backdrop of his own private theological system. Lee insists he has received the interpretations by revelation from God. Therefore, anyone operating in his "spirit" and not his "mind" will surely recognize Lee's interpretations are correct. In this way, one man's doctrine easily becomes the foundation of the whole movement.

### *The Suppression of the Individual*

Closely related to the "O Lord Jesus" chant and pray-reading is the suppression of individuality. There is no place whatsoever in the Local Church for anything uniquely individual. Natural talents, attractiveness, and abilities must be negated. No one must stand out.

There is a clear, unwritten, unspoken, heavily adhered to (and always denied) code of conduct and dress. Pressure for conformity to the group is demanded in many subtle ways. Disciples are like so many peas in a pod.

Witness Lee told at one meeting, for example, of trying to buy himself a pair of shoes while traveling from Seattle to Los Angeles. Dramatically he described how he looked and looked for something appropriate. But they were all too stylish. They had the world on them. He just could not bring himself to stand and preach the gospel in such unsuitable shoes. You may be sure that stylish shoes are not a part of the wardrobe of the truly dedicated Local Church disciple!

The conformity in vocabulary and intonation in pronouncing certain words and phrases is likewise amazing. Once you know the sound you can recognize it anywhere in the world. I have never met a group where people speak so much alike, look so much alike, and sound so much alike. The individual is absorbed into a corporate whole.

### *Group Acceptance*

Such individual suppression is compensated by group acceptance. The only identity these individuals have is within that group. That makes group acceptance all-important. The

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maintenance of that acceptance is one of the powerful forces to keep people in the movement. Proper performance is the key to maintaining the group's acceptance. But the welcome can be withdrawn at a moment's notice if performance fails.

One's first impression is that there is a great deal of spontaneity with them. They seem to speak up so freely. It's only a guise. Let someone say something that is not acceptable and the group's displeasure is instantaneous. A particularly intoned groan will go up from all over the room. If the word spoken was extremely unacceptable, it is not uncommon for the crowd to rise to the occasion and simply shout the dissident voice down with the ever-effective "O Lord Jesus."

### ***Propagation***

The propagation process of the Local Church is relatively simple. No one is really considered fully converted until he is into the Local Church. Their meeting is the key to gain that end. If a person buys the meeting, he'll likely take the whole thing. Confidence about their meetings is great. They are not hesitant to bring people in, and they cannot fathom anyone not liking what goes on. Surely, anyone attending will realize this is truly the right way to worship God!

### ***Indoctrination Process***

The blood in the veins of the Local Church movement is their conference and training program. It is here the uniform direction (or "flow" as they call it) is set. The conference is a week-long affair in the summer, and is of popular nature.

The training program immediately follows it. It is a four-week program of concentrated teaching from Witness Lee. He speaks day and night. These messages and teachings provide the base for the teaching everywhere in the movement for the whole year. They are printed up in the Local Church magazine, *The Stream*, and circulated throughout the groups.

The doctrinal unity of the movement is tight. One quick glance at a list of their available publications gives the reason. They are virtually all done by Witness Lee. They offer some of the Watchman Nee books, but in the case of occasional conflicts between the two, Lee is the official interpreter. With only one person doing all the basic teaching and writing for the

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whole movement, it is quite simple to keep things tied together, particularly if no one is really free to think.

### *The Local Church on Parade*

It was August 20, 1968. Two hundred marchers converged on the downtown area of Taipei. Divided into seventeen groups, each led by a drum corp, they paraded through the heart of the city. Huge banners with slogans such as "The World Is Empty," and "You Need Jesus" preceded each group. Shouts of "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord" reverberated through the city streets. The marchers sang in full voice. The Local Church was on parade.<sup>10</sup>

They call them "Gospel Marches." The robed marchers choose a crowded place in a city and march on it with zeal. Lost in the facelessness of their own group, the marchers lose all fear of individual embarrassment. Even the normally timid may shout out slogans at the top of their lungs. The singing is almost deafening, at least to those in the group itself. There is a feeling of power and exhilaration and rightness. For the moment, at least, the Local Church is stage center.

Can you imagine the amazement of Saturday shoppers in downtown Los Angeles when a hoard of 1,200 or 1,300 robed marchers streamed down Broadway in just such a fashion! They've done it and most likely will do it again.

The greatest impact of the Gospel March, however, is not on the viewer. It's on the participant. They've done something bold that no one else has done. They've made an impression. But it took them all. Each one had to cast aside his dignity and reserve. The cohesiveness it provides to the group is inestimable.

### *The Power of Fear*

What keeps these people in the Local Church? The cause? Yes. Excitement? Yes. But beyond that, people who have encountered the group say it seems to be fear that keeps them in. Fear of what might happen if they leave. Individual identity and the adherent's past have been rejected. It is next to impossible to ever go back. The indoctrination has been too thorough. Those weeks, months, and years of daily emphasis on how bad it is where the others live takes its toll. Many find it is

almost psychologically impossible to return to and maintain normalcy.

The fear and guilt that accompany leaving are too much for most people to take. It's not just the humiliation of having to admit you were wrong after you had so openly and boldly committed yourself. In fact, that's trivial compared to the black dread that you may be washed out with God forever. Within the movement, stories are multiplied as to tragedies which have occurred in the lives of those who have left. The most dramatic of these tales are told by people who have left only to come crawling back on their hands and knees telling of the awful judgment of God they experienced on the outside. There are no stories told within the group of those who have successfully left and made it.

Once in the Local Church, the member is likely to stay on for life. This is no movement of kids going through a stage. Sure, there are some young people in it. But all ages are represented.

Fear, it seems to me, is the ultimate weapon in the Local Church. It is a fear few Christians have ever known or even knew existed.

Once in, you must not think about your circumstances. Do not ask if it's right or wrong. Never admit you're trapped. Just go along with it all. It will all be over someday. "O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus."

#### A REFUTATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

"Oh, but you're in your mind, brother; you must learn to turn to your spirit." So goes the typical retort of a Local Church devotee to any questioning of their doctrines. He'll likely go on naively, "We aren't concerned with doctrines; we partake only of Christ, just Christ."

Thus it is that the people of the Local Church have effectively deceived themselves into believing they have somehow left doctrine behind. Indeed, they believe they have advanced to a higher level. In fact, all they've done is to redefine terms, in this case, the term "doctrine." Doctrine, they believe, is teaching which is understood with the *mind*. On the other hand,

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teaching which is taken in through the *spirit* is Christ, not doctrine. The tragedy is that they have so lost touch with reality that they believe they actually understand without their minds. The mind is to be by-passed. The spirit, that aspect of the human being which supposedly can alone experience true spiritual understanding, is to be exercised to "partake of Christ."

### *A Change in Procedure*

In order that a clear understanding of what this cult believes may be grasped and their aberrations plainly demonstrated, I will alter slightly the procedure of analysis. Rather than devoting a section to the theological analysis and then following it with the refutation, I will combine the two in one section. Such a procedural change seems necessary because Local Church doctrine has an unusually great number of contradictions and inconsistencies. It wiggles all over the place. It has to be pinned down point by point, right on the spot. A doctrine presented one way in one place may appear with quite a different or even contradictory twist in some other place. As in the case of the other cults, I will deal here with only their most serious departures from historic Christianity.

### *The Heart of the Problem*

At the very heart and core of Local Church teaching is a monotonously repeated claim: God's great eternal purpose for man is that he become completely and forever mingled with God. Man is to cease being mere man and become totally merged with God. God, in turn, ceases to be only God and has now become totally and completely mingled with man. Everything else hinges on this teaching; it is the crux of their heresy.

### *How It All Supposedly Happened*

Local Church theology starts out innocently enough, but gets quickly off the track. In the beginning, they say, there was God. This God created a creature called man. Man was created with a body in order to experience physical life. He was created with a soul at his very center to express the human personality, the self. He was created with a spirit for contacting, receiving, and containing God.

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This man was not yet the finished product of God's purpose, however. He still had no intimate relationship with God. Man had only created life in him. God's final goal for man was that he should have uncreated life—the very life of God. Lee writes:

God's purpose for us human beings is that we may obtain His uncreated life and be transformed into His image to be like Him, as He is.<sup>11</sup>

God's purpose, according to Lee, was that this man would one day completely mingle with God, and God with man. *The two would ultimately become absolutely as one.* This aim of God's would not just automatically come to pass, however. Man was going to have to cooperate in the process. Lee's words about this mingling are specific:

Man was created neutral to God and Satan. It was God's intention for this neutral, innocent man to take God into himself that God and man, man and God would be mingled together as one.<sup>12</sup>

As we shall see, this mingling process was to occur fundamentally in man's spirit. That is, man was to take God in through his human spirit. If man would operate the way God planned, the purpose of God would be fulfilled.

### **A Fouled-Up Program**

But man fouled up the whole program. He ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and fell away from God. Instead of assimilating, mingling God into himself, he assimilated Satan into himself. Man, according to Lee, became mingled with Satan. Man actually received Satan into his body.

. . . the fall of man was not just a matter of man committing something against God, but of man receiving Satan into his body. Satan, from the time of the fall, dwells in man.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, such circumstances could only lead to further disastrous complications. Lee tells us, you see, that the soul is imprisoned within the body. Thus, the result of Satan's invasion of the *body* is a contamination of the soul as well. The soul indeed becomes Satan.



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. . . the fallen soul, the self, is Satan. . . . Beyond a doubt, it means that Satan is mingled with self! . . . It means that self and Satan are mingled as one.<sup>14</sup>

Before we go any further, let's get clear on what Lee means by this word "mingle." He uses it over and over again, and its meaning is crucial to an understanding of his theology. Whether the mingling is with God or Satan, it turns out that the basic idea is the same.

Mingling is much more than mixing together; it is an intrinsic union.<sup>15</sup>

We see then that he does not use "mingling" to show that two substances or persons merely associate. Rather, they totally blend together as one.

Now, with the term "mingle" defined that way, you can see that Lee does not mean that man simply had some dealings with Satan. Nor does he mean that man willfully followed a satanic suggestion. No, man and Satan mingled. They became one. An intrinsic union. *Blended*.

It is now possible to understand the problem of the human condition as set forth by Lee. God created man whom He intended to mingle with His very nature and essence. Because of the fall, however, that man actually became mingled with the very nature and essence of Satan. The result is that the whole of humanity has now become polluted to the extent that *it is Satan*.

All humanity, permeated by Satan, is just the same as a serpent in the eyes of God. Whatever is in the serpent is in us. Have we ever come to the Lord and confessed, "O Lord, I am as sinful as Satan. Lord, in your eyes I am a serpent also!"<sup>16</sup>

But wait! It was really only the body and the soul which became united with Satan. What happened to the human spirit? Well, according to Lee, it died. Now, he doesn't mean it became non-existent. He just means it ceased to function at all.

So there we are. Humanity is a total wreck. Satan is dwelling in the body, the soul has become Satan, and the spirit is dead. What a predicament!

**Lee and the Local Church Propose a Way Out**

Lee and the Local Church do not, of course, leave humanity without hope. God had a plan. God came in the flesh. That's Jesus Christ. When God came in the person of Christ, it was to solve the problem by mingling Himself with humanity.

Therefore, the incarnation of Christ simply means the mingling of God with humanity. Mingling is much more than mixing together; it is an intrinsic union. . . . The first person who was mingled with God was Jesus. Do you realize why He is so precious to us? Because in Him is the universal mingling of God with humanity.<sup>17</sup>

Lee thus redefines the purpose of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It is to make God's now-mingled-with-man nature available to human beings so the original purpose of God for humanity can proceed on to fulfillment (granted the proper conditions).

The true essence of being a Christian, according to Lee and the Local Church, is expressed in mingling. Christ, who is now spirit, comes into the human spirit, mingles with it, giving life to that dead spirit. That, says Lee, is regeneration.

Regeneration is the mingling of God, Himself, with our spirit.<sup>18</sup>

So, according to this teaching, if you are a Christian, your once-dead spirit has been brought to life by being mingled with Christ's spirit. You have become blended with deity. You are, in a very real sense, divine! You and God are alike. Lee describes the new condition this way:

It is indeed inconceivable to our natural mind that the almighty God would one day mingle Himself with a man. But this was accomplished in Jesus Christ, and this is the very desire of God for you and me—that He be mingled with us.

Do you know what it means to be a real Christian? To be a real Christian simply means to be mingled with God, to be a God-man.<sup>19</sup>

Once you were nothing more than a purely devilish human being. But now, in Christ you are no longer only human, just a

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human being. You are a God-man. You are partly God, mixed in essence! Says Lee:

What He is, we are; and what we are, He is.<sup>20</sup>

Before the incarnation, God was God and man was man, but by the incarnation God was brought into man, and man was brought into God.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear, isn't it? Yet, because this concept is so crucial, I must quote Lee one more time.

He is the God-man and we are the God-men. . . . In number we are different, *but in nature we are exactly the same.*<sup>22</sup> (italics mine)

### ***In a Nutshell***

Make sure you've got this clear. Lee and the Local Church are saying that in Christ, God and man mingle so that a new identity is formed: God-man. That is, God is no longer just God. He is now both God and man mingled as one substance or nature. The Christian also gains a new identity. He is no longer merely a human being. He is also God-man. He possesses the very same nature as the altered God.

### ***Four-Serious Consequences of Such an Idea of Mingling***

It is important to make a strong statement at this point: The Church of Jesus Christ stands against such allegations! She has consistently confessed that deity and humanity *never* mingle. Just exactly why she has done so and how her confession has been expressed, I will shortly set forth. First, it is important to show some disastrous consequences which accompany this idea that God and man both now have a common nature, the God-man nature.

#### 1) The God Who is No More

First, we must understand that if the uncreated nature of God is mingled with the created nature of humanity to form a new nature from the mixture, God no longer exists as truly God. He has lost His unique identity. He is robbed of His God-ness. The plain truth is that in such a case, God ceases to exist. He is replaced by a new substance composed of a mixture

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of the one-time God and corporate ex-humanity. How preposterous!

### 2) The Man Who Is No More

Secondly, the uniqueness and dignity of humanity is also thoroughly destroyed by such an idea. Why, if such an idea were true, it would mean that in eternity, the man God created would be nothing more than a memory of a bad trip back in time. Such a man would have no real value, even before his fall. The man who mingles with God becomes something entirely different from that original man. Being man was only something temporary. In Witness Lee's system, man isn't redeemed, he is replaced!

### 3) Contempt for Mere Humanity

Thirdly, there is an unavoidable attitude of disdain and pity toward those poor souls who are still merely human. The Local Church has apparently forgotten that it was, after all, mere humans whom God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son that they might be redeemed.

### 4) The Unbearable Burden

Fourthly, the burden of being of one nature with God is simply too much for a human being to bear. The demands are too great. God never intended it. The Local Church can talk about being God-men till the cows come home, but they're still as human as the rest of us. Those who believe such tragic doctrine must retreat to an unreal world of shadowy mysticism where they forfeit their normal functions as human beings and become a part of an anesthetized corporate Local Church—oblivious to the true needs and purposes of the human race.

They cease being able to relate normally either amongst themselves or those outside their "church" in the everyday relationships of life, such as husband-wife, parent-child, and employer-employee. Indeed, Lee encourages abnormality in such relationships:

Have you seen God, Christ, the Church, and the Churches? The sisters must forget about their husbands, and the brothers must forget about their wives. We must forget about our preoccupations and see God, Christ, the Church, and the churches. Hallelujah!<sup>23</sup>

Yes, responsibility and reality fade from ordinary human relationships for the members of the Local Church. As the