

### THE "LOCAL CHURCH"

and believe as genuinely sharing in that divinity. Others may be Christians, but they are judged to be bogged down in their souls, not having begun to assimilate God. The Local Church is not something so common as "God's Green Berets." They are the Christian "super-race."

#### *A Case of False Divinity*

Never has the Church of God seen herself as possessing deity. The very thought is blasphemous. The Church is not divine. It is not God. It is not a part of the Godhead.

How, then, does the Local Church come to its conclusion? This heresy is founded on the same basic error that pervades all their teaching: the mingling of deity and humanity. Grant that, and they are correct in exalting the Church to deity. But the foundation is false. We have already shown that error for what it is.

Surely, the historic Church believes the Church is the body of Christ. But that is according to His *unmingled humanity*, not His divine nature. The Church, according to the Scriptures, is "one new *man*," not one new God, or God-man. The Church is human in its corporate nature. It is redeemed humanity, but still humanity.

A Church which sees itself as participating in the nature of deity will scorn humanity and see itself as superior to all.

#### *The Prodigal Church or The Church of the Recovery*

The Local Church claims that for the greater part of fifteen centuries the truth of God was totally obscured by the historic Church. Lee insinuates that even before the end of the first century A.D., the real truth of God for the Church was already submerging. It is clear he is sure the truth virtually disappeared by the end of the second century. Then, until the Reformation in the sixteenth century, there was little light. The true Church was lost.

But not long after the New Testament was completed, the Church began to lose all the important things found in the Bible. Eventually, by the fifteenth century, everything was lost. Very little of God was known.<sup>43</sup>

## THE MINDBENDERS

Such a plight calls for what they call "the recovery" of the true Church. "The recovery" is Lee's term to describe the gaining back of the true Church as it was known, say in 50 A.D., and which he is sure has been lost for these many centuries. You must understand they do not believe the historic Church of those fifteen centuries was the true Church just having some bad days. It wasn't the true Church at all. It was Babylon, the great harlot.

This so-called recovery, Lee tells us, began with Luther and the Protestant Reformation. But the Reformation didn't recover the Church. It was only the *beginning* of stage one of a five-stage process. Lee's stages are named: 1) Fundamentalism; 2) Pentacostalism; 3) Evangelism; 4) The Deeper Life emphasis; 5) the Church. He acknowledges that there was some truth in each of the first four stages, and says he is not against them. But, he says, "We must go on." We are now in stage five, the age in which the true Church is to finally be recovered. That's where the Local Church comes in. *They view themselves as the church of the recovery.* They are the ones who are following God today. When the rest of us wake up, we'll leave where we are and join them.

When we were in the denominations, we were blind. I do not believe that any dear Christians who have really received sight from the Lord could still remain in the denominations. . . . Allow me to say this: If anyone is still in the fold, he is blind. Of course, a blind person requires the fold to keep him. But when he receives sight, he will swiftly leave the fold for the pasture, for the sunshine, for the fresh air.<sup>44</sup>

Now, as stage five progresses, God is finally being properly worshiped after an eighteen-century lag. There will now be a Church who, in all her glory, can finally usher in the kingdom of God in its fullness. That, according to the Local Church, is the next step in the program of God.

And while that day is coming, the people of the Local Church believe the Christian life can be experienced in a way that the saints of yesteryear did not ever know. These "stage fivers" have much more light than those who have gone before. All other Christians miss this "perfect plan of God" which they have so newly discovered.

***The Self-Refuting Cult***

The emphasis of this book has been to show where and how far these various cults have deviated or separated from historic orthodox Christianity and its understanding of the Scriptures. It has been the premise here that any group or teaching that stands outside of that Church, or contrary to it, is in error.

On this basis, the Local Church refutes itself. On the one hand, it claims faithfulness to the Scriptures. But, on the other hand, it proudly admits its interpretation of those Scriptures is different from and superior to that of historic orthodoxy. The Local Church plainly says the latter was wrong.

This has not been a matter of matching my interpretation of the Bible against theirs. It has been the interpretation of the Local Church matched against the mainstream of almost twenty centuries of Christendom. The Local Church, by its own admission, is not in that mainstream. Babylon, it calls her. Judged by the historic Christian Church, Lee and the Local Church have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

By its attacks on the historic Christian Church, the Local Church sets itself apart. The decision as to who is right must be made on the basis of whose interpretation of Scripture to believe: the witness of orthodox Christianity for nineteen centuries or the distinctive teachings of a twentieth-century group that has adapted some age-old heresies to their needs.

***The Exclusive Non-Exclusivists***

The claims of Witness Lee and the Local Church are so bold that most people simply will not believe they could possibly be serious about them. Nevertheless, Lee plainly says he rejects historic Christianity.

We are simply putting off religion, putting off Christianity. In the early days, the church had to put away Judaism. Today we have to put off Christianity.<sup>45</sup>

Now that should be clear enough, shouldn't it? Still, many people hear those words and insist, "But that's not what he means." It is exactly what he means. Lee and the Local Church loathe the historic Church with almost unbridled passion. "Babylon" is their favorite description for it.

What is this great Babylon? It is the mixture of Christianity. The great Babylon is a harlot mother with many harlot daughters. The Roman Catholic Church is the mother, and the denominations are the daughters.<sup>46</sup>

Proudly they shout and sing that they have forever left it. As they see it, only a tiny, tiny fraction of professing Christians have fully experienced true Christianity since the early Church. They, of the Local Church, are of that favored few.

Quite sincerely, they do not see themselves as the only Christians in the world, but they are equally sincerely convinced there is no way to really fully know Christ other than in a local church that operates on exactly the same basis they do. "We must be in the local churches [their kind of local churches] in order to be built up to be disciplined, to learn the lessons, and to grow in life. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! He has shown us the local churches!"<sup>47</sup>

They see churches of historic Christendom as not even vaguely approaching that mark. They pity Christians trapped in Babylon (in the historic Church). It is inconceivable to them that anyone outside their scheme could possibly truly experience the full blessing of Jesus Christ.

Lee and the Local Church plead innocence when accused of sectarianism, but in plain language they are super-exclusivists, ultra-sectarians. Theirs is the only true way. You don't have to be a part of them, but you're wrong if you don't do things their way. All who don't are a lesser class of Christian, and they'll let you know it. They are the ultra-elite, the really favored. Those in historic Christianity may be Christians, but they've missed God's best by ever so far.

What then, of the people of the Local Church? How should the Christian Church view them? Sure, there are Christians in the Local Church. But for the most part they are those who were spiritually arrogant or super-dissident in the true churches they left. It's better for the true Church that they've gone unless, or until, they repent of their spiritual arrogance.

Many will leave the Local Church over the years. Few will ever find rest, peace, or a place where they fit once they do. The emotional and spiritual devastation is too great. Most have become emotionally dependent on the Local Church system.

## THE "LOCAL CHURCH"

Those who remain in the Local Church will fare even worse. They have deliberately removed themselves from the people of God. They must bear the consequences of that action in full. Their minds no longer function normally because of the effect of this mind-manipulation cult, and they will go on being emotionally dependent on the Local Church. It's a sad situation. Most who could have been productive Christians are neutralized for the rest of their lives. It's a great price to pay for religious zeal.

### A BRIEF PROFILE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

#### 1. History

- Roots go back several decades to Watchman Nee's and Witness Lee's association in the Little Flock movement in China.
- In the late 1940s Nee was the dynamic teacher and Lee the gifted organizer of the movement.
- After the Communist take-over was complete in 1948, Lee escaped to Formosa and established the movement there. Between 1949 and 1955 it appears the Little Flock grew from 500 to 23,000 on Formosa.
- Lee came to the United States in 1958 and ultimately established the movement here in 1962.
- Present membership today in the United States is about 5,000 and world-wide about 30,000.

#### 2. Beliefs

- God's purpose is for God's uncreated life and human life to be joined together in an intrinsic union through an alteration process called mingling.
- The human and divine natures of Christ were mingled together; therefore we are to become a God-man too.
- This mingling takes place by by-passing your mind and by turning to your spirit.
- The Lord Jesus Christ is both the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—thus there is only one real person in the Godhead.
- Historic Christendom is Babylon, while the Local Church led by Witness Lee is the true church of the recovery.

## THE MINDBENDERS

### 3. Method Of Operation

- Movement gains a foothold in a city by “claiming the ground.” Initial talk is about unity, but unity around themselves.
- Conferences and training programs held annually in Los Angeles very important to their growth.
- The Local Church has own “mantra” or chant and has a new treatment of the Bible called “pray-reading.”
- Totally suppresses individuality and makes group identity and acceptance all-important. People held by the power of fear.
- Group marches and public displays are also used.

### 4. Refutation

- Four disastrous consequences of the idea of mingling; (1) God is no more; (2) man is no more; (3) one’s humanity is held in contempt; (4) an unbearable burden. This so-called mingling leads to idolatry.
- Historic Church doctrine has always said the Bible teaches that the two natures in Jesus Christ never mingle, but that He has two natures united in one person, the one Son of God.
- The historic Church has always taught that God’s nature is unchangeable and unalterable and therefore cannot be mingled with human nature.
- The historic Church has always consistently rejected the lie that the Lord Jesus Christ is both the Father and the Holy Spirit, but has affirmed that He is the Son of God. Historic Christian doctrine has always believed in one God, consisting of three real persons.
- The Local Church stands outside the historic Christian Church and is therefore no church at all but a cult that stands self-refuted and self-condemned.

## THE LOCAL CHURCH—FOOTNOTES

1. *The Stream*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1968, pp. 27, 29.
2. *The Stream*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Dec. 1, 1974, p. 26.
3. *The Stream*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1969, p. 31.
4. *The Stream*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1970, p. 26.
5. *The Stream*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Feb. 1, 1970, p. 6.
6. Lee, *How To Meet*, p. 84.

### THE "LOCAL CHURCH"

7. The Stream, Vol. 5, No. 3, Aug. 1, 1967, p. 4.
8. The Stream, Vol. 5, No. 3, Aug. 1, 1967, p. 13.
9. The Stream, Vol. 5, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1967.
10. The Stream, Vol. 6, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1968.
11. Lee, *The Knowledge of Life*, (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1973), pp. 24, 25.
12. Lee, *The Economy of God* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1968), p. 106.
13. *Op. cit.*, p. 109.
14. Lee, *The Parts of Man* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, undated), pp. 40-41.
15. Lee, *The Four Major Steps of Christ* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1969), p. 6.
16. *Ibid*, pp. 19-20.
17. *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.
18. Lee, *The Economy of God*, p. 114.
19. Lee, *The Four Major Steps of Christ*, p. 7.
20. Lee, *Christianity Versus Religion* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1971), p. 87.
21. Lee, *The Vision of God's Building* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1972), p. 158.
22. Lee, *The All-Inclusive Spirit of Christ* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1969), p. 103.
23. The Stream, Vol. 7, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1969, p. 11.
24. Lee, *The All-Inclusive Spirit of Christ*, p. 189.
25. Lee, *How to Meet*, p. 42.
26. Lee, *The Economy of God*, pp. 168-169.
27. Lee, *The Knowledge of Life* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1972), p. 89.
28. Lee, *The Economy of God*, p. 11.
29. Lee, *The All-Inclusive Spirit of Christ*, p. 12.
30. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, pp. 676-677.
31. *Ibid*, pp. 383-384.
32. Schaff, *A Select Library*, Volume XIV, pp. 264-265.
33. *Ibid*, p. 265.
34. *Ibid*, p. 265.
35. Lee, *The Clear Scriptural Revelation Concerning the Triune God* (Anaheim, Ca.: Living Stream Ministry, undated), p. 3.
36. Lee, *The Practical Expression of the Church* (Los Angeles: Stream Publishers, 1970), p. 8.
37. *Ibid*, p. 15.
38. Schaff, *A Select Library*, Volume XIV, p. 203.
39. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, pp. 7-8.
40. Lee, *The Practical Expression of the Church*, p. 7.
41. *Ibid*, p. 14.
42. *Ibid*, p. 43.
43. The Stream, Vol. 7, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1969, p. 14.
44. Lee, *Christ Versus Religion*, pp. 109-110.
45. Lee, *The Practical Expression of the Church*, p. 133.
46. The Stream, Vol. 7, No. 4, Nov. 1, 1969, p. 19.
47. *Ibid*, p. 24.

# THE MINDBENDERS: A REPEAT OF THE DARK HI

When our Lord Jesus walked on this earth He was opposed, slandered and attacked not primarily by the worldly leaders but by those leaders of Judaism. Actually Judaism was a religion based on the Scripture and the Jewish leaders knew the Scriptures, the problem was that *they had added something to God's Word according to their concept*. During the time of the New Testament, the Jewish leaders had a fixed religious system based on the Scriptures *plus* their traditions, practices, doctrines and concepts which they used to interpret the Scriptures. When the living God, Jesus Christ, came to earth, these "orthodox" and "fundamental" religious leaders actually used the Scriptures *plus* their traditions, practices, and doctrines *to condemn the very God* who gave them the Scriptures. Unfortunately it is the same today with Jack Sparks and others. They are, like their predecessors the Pharisees, firmly fixed within the confines of traditional religion. They are "orthodox" and "fundamental" in the sense that they are in line with the practices of the "historic Christian church". Jack Sparks, in his book *The Mindbenders*, claims to base everything he says on the Scriptures, as the Pharisees did, yet what he means by the Scriptures are the traditional concepts, doctrines, creeds and councils of the "historic Christian church" (which things are not in the Bible)! In other words — the Word of God *plus*. He does not try to conceal this *shameful fact*, rather he seeks to defend his practice of using the Word of God *plus*. At the end of his chapter called a "Yardstick for Truth" Jack Sparks makes a strong point for what he calls "the orthodox councils of the church". Mr. Sparks considers the councils and creeds of "the historic Christian church" to be a safeguard for Christian truth. The pure Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit are not enough for Jack Sparks. Mr. Sparks believes that today we Christians need the Bible *plus* the church councils (of which the council at Ephesus formally endorsed the worship of Mary and the council at Nicaea was presided over by a pagan emperor and other councils sanctioned such practices as idol worship, prayer to the dead, infant baptism and indulgences). To support his case that today we need something added to the Word of God, Sparks warns that the Scriptures have been used in the past by deviants from the truth.

There can, of course, be no doubt that many heretics of the past (including the devil himself) did base their error upon certain Scriptures. This however, is *absolutely* no justification for adding councils and creeds of men or a so-called "standard of the historic Christian church" to the one unique and genuine yardstick for truth — the Word of God *alone!* We must trust that if we seek Him with a pure heart, the light of God will enlighten us as to the

truth in His Word. And do we not have the promise of our Lord Jesus that He would send the Spirit of Truth in to the world and that "he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13)? And are we not assured by our Lord Jesus that if "any man wills to do His will, he shall know the teaching, whether it is of God (John 7:17)? Are we not also told in John 17:17 that "Thy Word is truth" and in Timothy 3:16-17 that "Every Scripture is inspired of God...that the man of God may be *complete*..."? Mr. Sparks, where does our Lord tell us "every church council is inspired of God" or "Thy traditional church council is Truth"? *Nowhere!* Mr. Sparks, do you really believe that we need something added to God's Word alone as our standard for truth? *What a heresy!* It is a serious offense to add to the Word of God since Revelation 22:18 warns that anyone adding to God's Word would be cursed. To *elevate anything* to the position of being a standard for truth is subtly adding to God's Word, which is every man's Christian's unique standard and yardstick for truth.

In 1521 Martin Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms to be examined by the leaders of the "orthodox" religion of that day, a religion firmly based upon the councils and creeds of men. The examining officer was Archbishop Eck of Trier. After Luther admitted that the books in question were all written by him, he asked the council to show him his error by *God's Word alone*, and not according to their tradition. Luther asked "to be convicted of error from the prophets and the gospels." He went on to say, "If I am shown my error I will be the first to throw my books into the fire. I have been reminded of the dissensions which my teaching engenders. I can answer only in the words of the Lord, 'I came not to bring peace but a sword.'" To this Eck replied:

Your plea to be heard from Scripture is the one always made by heretics. You do nothing but renew the errors of Wycliffe and Hus...You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith...confirmed by the Sacred Councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance, and which now we are forbidden by the pope and the emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate. I ask you, Martin — answer candidly and without horns — do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain? (*Here I Stand*, by Roland Bainton, pp. 184-185)

The words of Archbishop Eck, an "expert" on *cults and heresies of his day*, sound quite similar to those of the modern day "expert". Mr. Sparks has placed himself, in his own words, in concert with the historic Christian church which brought Martin Luther to trial and was used by Satan to fight against the move of God. In the sixteenth century Martin Luther was being attacked as

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# HERESY: A REPEAT OF THE DARK HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

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# OF THE DARK HISTORY OF CHRISTENDOM

Word. And do we not have the promise of Jesus that He would send the Spirit of Truth into all the hearts and that "he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13)? And are we not assured by our Lord Jesus that "any man wills to do His will, he shall know the will of the Father, whether it is of God" (John 7:17)? Are we not assured by our Lord Jesus in John 17:17 that "Thy Word is truth" and in John 16:17 that "Every Scripture is inspired of God" and that "the man of God may be *complete*..."? Mr. Sparks, where does our Lord tell us "every church council is inspired of God" or "Thy traditional church council is inspired of God"? Mr. Sparks, do you really believe that anything added to God's Word alone as our standard of truth? *What a heresy!* It is a serious offense to add to the Word of God since Revelation 22:18 warns that adding to God's Word would be cursed. To add anything to the position of being a standard for truth is to add to God's Word, which is every real and unique standard and yardstick for truth.

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seducer, and a demoniac" by the traditional and corrupted "historic Christian church." Mr. Sparks has well followed Archbishop Eck to say "You have no right to call into question the most holy and orthodox faith...confirmed by the sacred councils, and defined by the church."

In reply to Archbishop Eck's plea that Luther heed the "sacred councils" of the historic church Luther said:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason — I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other — my conscience is captive to the Word of God.

As born-again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are meeting in the local churches, we echo these words of Martin Luther. We do not accept the authority of man's councils — our "conscience is captive to the Word of God."

Why are certain leaders of today's worldly, degraded and divided Christianity attacking the local churches? It is because we reject everything of man's traditional religion to hold *God's Word alone*. It is because by our standing we expose the corrupt system of today's divided Christianity. We expose those "hired prophets" who seek to keep the Lord's sheep confined in a corrupted and evil system. We expose those hirelings who seek to build up their own kingdoms at the expense of God's little ones, and who would lose their jobs if they rejected the traditions of man and followed the Word of God in truth. To call another born-again believer in Jesus Christ a member of a cult is a serious matter, because "we must all stand before the judgement seat of God" (Romans 14:10).

The period of time prior to and in which Martin Luther spoke is called "the Dark Ages". Why was it "the Dark Ages"? Because God's Word, which is Light (Psalm 119:105, 130), was locked up and put aside. It was subtly replaced by the traditions and councils of men. In principle the same is true today, men like Jack Sparks are seeking to set *God's Word aside* to bring in the darkness of man's concepts and traditions. An honest and careful examination of today's Christianity will confirm to any real seeker of the Lord that darkness and confusion are reigning over much of today's Christendom — a Christendom which sets aside those portions of the Word not pleasing to their taste and which has added scores of traditional practices to God's Word. We conclude with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men. And he said unto them, Full well do you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition (Mark 7:7-9).