

EXAMINING LSM'S ESCHATOLOGY—REVELATION'S 7 CHURCHES

A Case Study of LSM's Prophetic-Historical Interpretation of John's Apocalypse

Watchman Nee and Witness Lee were outstanding Bible expositors and Christian leaders in their own spheres. However, they added nothing to the field of biblical eschatology—the study of end time events. In prophetic matters, W. Nee and W. Lee merely adopted the dispensational theology developed by John N. Darby (1800-82) of the Plymouth Brethren plus a few other 19th century commentators.¹ Hence, the Local Church, like the Brethren, espouses a literal millennial kingdom to be inaugurated by Christ's return and the pre-millennial rapture of believers.² They differ from Darby on secondary issues—e.g., their doctrine of multiple raptures³ (early overcoming minority and later majority-raptures) in contrast to Darby's pre-tribulation rapture of all believers—a popular view portrayed in the *Left Behind* series.⁴

Almost two centuries have elapsed since the Brethren's eschatological views were first proposed. Significant world events have transpired causing Bible scholars, including some dispensationalists, to re-evaluate their prophetic teachings.⁵ Within the Local Church, however, Brethren eschatology continues to be reiterated in rote fashion as it has been for decades.⁶ Indeed it now holds the unassailable position of Local Church orthodoxy, having been “canonized as the interpreted word” in LSM's Recovery Version of the Bible.⁷ LSM's prophetic teachings ought to be re-evaluated in the light of world events and recent biblical scholarship. That is a huge task; it encompasses Daniel's prophecy of “70 weeks,” the four beasts, Babylon, the Antichrist etc. Ultimately only after-the-fact can such teachings as single- or multiple raptures be verified or denied. Therefore, instead of addressing the entire field of eschatology, we focus on a single aspect—LSM's prophetic-historical interpretation of Revelation's seven churches (Rev. 2-3).

ARE REVELATION'S SEVEN CHURCHES PROPHETIC?

All Bible expositors agree John's seven brief epistles were addressed to seven churches existing in the late-1st century Roman province of Asia. In each epistle the Lord diagnoses the condition and offers His prescription. Hence scholars seek to understand their meaning at the time of writing. Moreover, expositors extend these lessons to the present era via “devotional” applications to individual believers and congregations.⁸ In addition some expositors argue that the seven epistles ought to be interpreted prophetically, portraying (at the time of writing) the future course of the Church throughout the Age of Grace. From the vantage of later centuries this leads to a historicist interpretation, matching past Church history with Scripture.⁹ Others reject this prophetic-historical interpretation of Revelation 2 and 3, including some Bible teachers who accept the remainder of John's Apocalypse as prophecy.¹⁰ W. Nee and W. Lee adopted the Brethren's prophetic interpretation¹¹ of Revelation's seven churches. These churches are viewed not only as 1st century local churches, but also as foreshadowing the future course of Church history. This prophetic-historical view was embodied in Andrew Miller's *Church History*, (1873)¹² and popularized via *Scofield's Reference Bible* (1909, 1917).¹³ Watchman Nee used this prophetic scheme in his *Orthodoxy of the Church* (1945).¹⁴ W. Lee's *Life-study of Revelation* replicates it; the first page states, “The seven epistles to the seven churches...are prophecies regarding the church on earth until the Lord's coming back.”¹⁵ He elaborates,¹⁶ “the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 match the stages of church history. The history of the church from the first century to the present is clearly divided into seven stages: the initial stage, the suffering stage, the worldly stage, the apostate stage, the stage of Reformation, the stage of the recovered church, and the stage of the degradation of the recovered church.” Note that this interpretation concerns the outward appearance of the Church, including the “apostate Church,” not merely the invisible “true Church,” composed only of genuine believers.¹⁷

These stages are then identified in history. LSM's Recovery Version Bible summarizes the results, saying

“The seven churches also are signs, signifying prophetically the progress of the church in seven stages...Ephesus, provides a picture of the end of the initial church...during the latter part of the first century... Smyrna prefigures the suffering church under the persecution of the Roman Empire, from

the latter part of the first century to the early part of the fourth century, when Constantine... Caesar of the Roman Empire, brought the church into imperial favor...Pergamos pre-symbolizes the worldly church...from the day Constantine accepted Christianity to the time the papal system was established ...Thyatira depicts prophetically the apostate church...the papal system in the latter part of the sixth century to the end of this age... Sardis prefigures the Protestant Church from the Reformation in the early part of the sixteenth century to Christ's coming back....Philadelphia predicts the church of brotherly love, the recovery of the proper church life, from the early part of the nineteenth century, when the brothers were raised up in England to practice the church outside all denominational ...systems, to the second appearing of the Lord. Laodicea foreshadows the degraded church life of the brothers...from the latter part of the nineteenth century until the Lord's return.”¹⁸

In this paradigm, John's Apocalypse predicts “the progress of the church in seven stages”—churches matching those in Revelation 2 and 3 appear successively (in the sequence described) over the course of the Age of Grace, until the Lord's return. Yet, although “seven stages of the church” are identified, only four types of church are predicted to persist until the Lord's return. Hence Witness Lee says,

“The seven churches...symbolize the seven kinds of churches in church history...The initial church had its continuation in the suffering church; the suffering church became the worldly church; and the worldly church became the apostate church. Hence, the first four churches issued eventually in one kind of church...the Roman Catholic Church. Then the reformed church...came into existence as another kind of church, a church not fully recovered. Hence, after this, the recovered church was raised up as a full recovery of the proper church life. This...[is] the third kind of church. Through the degradation of the recovered church, the degraded recovered church came into being. This can be counted as the fourth kind of church. **These four kinds of churches will all remain until the Lord comes back.** Undoubtedly, only the recovered church can fulfill God's eternal purpose...” [W. Lee, Rev. 3:22, RēV., note 1, emphasis added]

These are dogmatic assertions. LSM's interpretation is *not* merely that the Church will pass through seven successive stages, beginning with Ephesus (the loss of the first love) and ending with lukewarm Laodicea. Their paradigm is much more specific. The first three kinds of churches (Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum) are past—“these three are of one group...they have all passed away”¹⁹—they were fulfilled in previous eras of Church history. According to this view, since the Roman Catholic Church first developed, no church on earth has matched the initial church, suffering church or worldly church portrayed in Revelation 2. These three have come and gone. These assertions ought to be checked against history—e.g., did the “suffering church” really cease after A.D. 300? According to this doctrine, only the last four (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia & Laodicea) exist on earth today, and they will continue to the end of the age—“the last four continue their days on the earth together...they end at the same time.”²⁰ Hence W. Lee states,²¹ “In this age God shows us four different churches...There are the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches, the brothers who love one another and the Brethren Assemblies. The fourth one, the Brethren Assemblies, has fallen into the position of Laodicea.” Therefore, he asserts, “There are four different kinds of churches from which we may choose.”²² Beyond these four, no further manifestations of the church are predicted. Apart from the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant-Reformed churches, the recovered church and the degraded recovered [Brethren] church, this view contemplates no fifth or sixth kind of church. This last point is far from innocuous—it is these four and no more! These are unequivocal statements which can be tested against twenty centuries of recorded Christian history. We note that LSM's interpretations are very specific. Sardis does not represent denominations generally, but those mainline Protestant denominations—e.g., Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, and Baptist—which emerged from the sixteenth century Reformation.²³ Laodicea portrays, not the church under a general malaise, but degraded Philadelphia. “Only failing Philadelphia can become Laodicea...Only that which has tasted the goodness of Philadelphia and is now fallen is Laodicea.”²⁴ Hence the latter is specifically identified as the degraded Plymouth Brethren.

NO MORE STAGES, NO NEW DEVELOPMENTS, NO FURTHER PROGRESS

As a prophecy of the church's progress in the 20th and 21st centuries LSM's interpretation of Revelation's seven churches predicts no change—no more stages, no new developments, no further progress—only a perpetuation of the *status quo*. In fact, as of 150 years ago, this prophetic-historical approach had already exhausted its predictive content in terms of new manifestations of the church. Once the last kind of church appeared this view predicts no further progress for the church. According to LSM's exposition, by the 1830s and 1840s, each of the final four manifestations of the church—represented by Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea—were already present on the earth. The Roman Catholic had existed for centuries. The mainline Protestant churches emerged from the 16th century Reformation. Then “in 1825, Philadelphia appeared and the [Plymouth] brothers rose up...Then after 1840, Laodicea appeared. [So] today [W. Nee said in 1945] there are four different kinds of churches...four ways from which we can choose.”²⁵ In fact, a century earlier—by 1850—all four kinds of church already existed. Everything signified “prophetically [concerning] the progress of the church in seven stages”²⁶ had already been fulfilled at that time. No further, “eighth stage of the church” is contemplated in this paradigm; no new expressions of the church are feasible. Every church in the 20th and 21st centuries, no matter how innovative it appears, falls into one of these four categories. There is no possibility of a fifth- or sixth kind appearing, nor is the reappearance of the first three kinds—Ephesus, Smyrna & Pergamum—possible. Evidently, since 1850 churches have either cycled through these options or remained firmly in one type.

Bible scholars note that among the seven churches only two (Smyrna & Philadelphia) escape the Lord's rebuke; only the latter is positively commended. Hence Philadelphia is the best. In the historical-prophetic view, this implies the church's expression reached its apex among the early Brethren, during the era of John N. Darby, George Muller, Anthony Norris Groves etc., in the period 1825-40. Hence, W. Lee declares,²⁷ “In the late 1820s the brothers were raised up in England as the fulfillment of the church in Philadelphia.” He also states,²⁸ “Approximately 150 years ago the recovered church began in England ...it was wonderful. It was a real recovery of the church life.” Since the Brethren already attained the peak, the highest attainment any church can achieve afterwards is to regain Philadelphia's status, to recover the early Brethren's Philadelphian condition. Ironically, this means “the present Recovery” is not the “original recovery” (that status belongs to the Brethren); rather it is a “re-recovery,” a substitute Philadelphia, replacing the Brethren after their fall into Laodicea. Viewed through this prism the “Lord's recovery” did not produce a new kind of church, nor is it a new stage. It is merely a replacement.²⁹

ONLY FOUR KINDS OF CHURCH?

LSM's paradigm predicts only four kinds of Church—“there are four different kinds of churches.” All Christians around the globe belong to one of these four. The possibilities are identified— “there are the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches, the brothers who love one another and the Brethren Assemblies,” W. Nee declared. The third possibility, Philadelphia, “the brothers who love one another,” is not explicitly identified. Yet, doubtless, LSM-adherents view themselves as “the recovered church.”³⁰ The table below³¹ gives global membership statistics according to LSM's paradigm *circa. 2005*.

Type in Rev.	Church Mega-bloc	Members	Percent
Thyatira	Roman Catholic	1,119M	50.1%
Sardis	Protestant & Anglican	456M	20.4%
Philadelphia	LSM's Local Church	1.15M	0.05%
Laodicea	Plymouth Brethren	3.57M	0.16%
TOTAL	Rows 1-4 above	1,580M	70.7%
	Independents	427M	19.1%
	Eastern Orthodox	220M	9.8%

There were 2.2 billion global Christians in 2005. One-half are Roman Catholic (“Thyatira”); another 20% were Protestant (“Sardis”). These two categories account for 70% of global Christians. The next two rows—LSM’s Local Church (“Philadelphia”) and the Brethren (“Laodicea”)—are a tiny fractions of global Christians. LSM’s Local Church constitute one-two thousandth; combined they represent only one-five hundredth of global believers. Taken together LSM’s four categories account for only 70% of Christians. Strikingly, almost 30% of global Christians (about 650M people) don’t fit within LSM’s interpretive scheme. Two major group omissions are the Eastern Orthodox and “Independents.” The first omission reflects the LSM-scheme’s focus on Western Europe; the Eastern Church is ignored. The second reflects the rising number of post-denominational churches which reject historic organized Christianity. Many of these “independent churches” are charismatic and/or indigenous churches in the Third world.

The most serious problem for LSM’s prophetic-historical view is its prediction of no further progress, merely a perpetuation of the *status quo* represented by four kinds of church. The 20th and 21st centuries have seen a significant progression in the global Christian Church. These developments don’t match the “holding pattern” predicted by LSM’s prophetic paradigm. The on-going transformation of the global Church caused one scholar to declare³² “we are at a moment as epochal as the Reformation itself—a Reformation moment...for the entire Christian world.” Consider the following examples of progression.

THE RISE OF THE PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

Regardless of whether its origins are traced back to Azusa Street (1906) or earlier, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement has become a significant force in the Christian faith. Observers refer to three successive waves—the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Neo-charismatic waves. Together they are the most significant 20th century development among Christians. Professor Johnson says,³³ “The [Charismatic] renewal...experienced a meteoric rise in the twentieth century. Renewalists grew at five and a half times the rate of growth of global Christianity as a whole.” The combined number of Pentecostal-Charismatic believers grew from 1 million in 1906 to 600 million in 2006. As a percentage of global Christians they grew from a mere 0.2% to 27.6%. Moreover, by 2025 Charismatic believers are projected to reach 800 million, or 30% of Christians world-wide.³⁴ Professor Anderson asserts they have precipitated³⁵ “a twentieth-century reformation of Christianity.” “By the end of the 20th century, Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity...had expanded into almost every country on earth. It had become an extremely significant movement within global Christianity...It is probably the fastest expanding religious movement in the world ever, certainly the fastest within Christianity.” Such developments cannot be ignored. LSM’s dismissive retort—“we don’t care about numbers”—is undercut by W. Lee’s recorded challenge to a Pentecostal leader, based on relative numbers—“Do you have the power or do I have the power?”³⁶

Yet, despite its obvious importance, there is no place for the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement within LSM’s prophetic framework. There is no room for a “fifth kind of church” at the close of the Age of Grace. The Pentecostal-Charismatic churches are not Sardis—that represents the Protestant churches which issued from the 16th century Reformation. One solution to this dilemma is proposed by the “Midnight Cry,” published by “a brother in Kansas City.” This tract identifies both the Plymouth Brethren and Watchman Nee’s “Little Flock” as the fulfillment of Philadelphia. The prophecy of Laodicea is then (allegedly) fulfilled by³⁷ “The Deception of the Charismatic Renewal (AD 1900-Tribulation)”! Few Christians would endorse this extreme position. Nevertheless the author recognizes the failure of this prophetic scheme to account for the 20th century Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. In their own search for a prophetic identity, Pentecostals found their own identity, not in Revelation 2-3, but in the promised “latter rain” in Joel 2:23 and 28.³⁸ Regardless of our attitude to that claim, the fact remains that the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, despite its manifest importance in 20th century Christianity, finds no place in LSM’s interpretation of John’s Apocalypse chapters 2 and 3. This is a serious omission.

INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

The 20th century saw dramatic growth in the number of believers meeting as independent churches, diverse gatherings “completely independent of historic organized Christianity,” composed of Roman

Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican or Protestant denominations. Barrett calls such independent churches a “huge new Christian mega-bloc” and “a vast movement, contemporary post-denominationalism [he says] is a movement sweeping throughout the churches worldwide,”³⁹ consisting of “423M Independents in 222 countries [who] have no interest in and no use for historic denominationalist Christianity.”⁴⁰

Typical of this category are 68 million believers meeting as house churches in mainland China (2005) of which 10 million claim affiliation with Watchman Nee.⁴¹ Most Chinese Christians gather apart from historic organized Christianity. Given China’s history, this discontinuity is hardly surprising; 60 years ago foreign missionaries were expelled, churches closed and Christian leaders (e.g., W. Nee) imprisoned. The Church in China passed through a “dark night.” What emerged was independent of historic organized Christianity; it was initiated by the Spirit through Chinese believers. They are “Chinese-initiated Churches.” Today a majority of the 100 million believers in China gather apart from the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Brethren churches and also apart from the government-sponsored “Three-self Church.”⁴² Again they don’t fit within LSM’s prophetic paradigm based on historical western Christianity.

Also illustrative of this genre is the “African Independent Church,” [AIC] defined as “a church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans, and primarily for Africans.” They are a form of⁴³ “indigenized Christianity that has consciously rejected Western ecclesiastical models and forms of being Christian;” they view themselves as “a reformation of over-Europeanized Christianity.” Prof. Anderson describes the AICs as⁴⁴ “an indigenous reformation and transformation of Christianity unprecedented in the history of the worldwide church.” These African churches view themselves as the fulfillment, not of Revelation 2-3, but of Psalm 68:31, “Cush will stretch out her hands to God.” Similar “independent post-denominational churches” have proliferated globally. They include the Indigenous Churches of India, assemblies⁴⁵ raised up by Watchman Nee’s contemporary, Bakht Singh in India. The Local Churches declare that⁴⁶ “We stand outside of and apart from historical, organized, institutionalized Christianity.” If we take this declaration seriously, we cannot simply dismiss in cavalier fashion the independent churches’ declaration that they also are “completely independent of historic organized Christianity.” They deserve to be treated as such.

In 1900 there were 8 million believers within “independent churches” worldwide (1.7% of all church members). By 2010 this number had risen to 420 million (20% of global Christians).⁴⁷ This means that one-in-five Christians meet as independent churches, unaffiliated with Roman Catholic, Orthodox or mainline Protestant denominations. Moreover, adherents reject the claim they are merely transplanted versions of western Pentecostalism.⁴⁸ They include members of indigenous churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America, like China’s “house churches.”⁴⁹ Such churches disavow historical descent from the various forms of organized Christianity which arose in Europe since the Middle Ages. Hence, they belong to neither Thyatira, nor Sardis; nor are they affiliated to the Plymouth Brethren, nor “the Recovery.” They don’t fit within the four groups defined by LSM’s prophetic interpretation of Revelation 2 and 3.

On occasion LSM-publications acknowledge the existence of both “Pentecostal churches and independent groups” as distinct from Catholics, Protestants and the Brethren. For example in their critique of Christianity, LSM alleges that⁵⁰ “the Catholic Church, the Protestant denominations, the Brethren Assemblies, the Pentecostal churches and the various independent groups have been held back by their imperfect and unscriptural theology...” These five categories of Christianity are directly contrasted with “the Lord’s recovery.”⁵¹ But notice that, within LSM’s prophetic paradigm, “the Catholic Church, the Protestant denominations, the Brethren Assemblies” are identified with Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea (respectively). The question arises—with what are “the Pentecostal churches and the various independent groups” identified? They don’t fit within LSM’s prophetic scheme of four kinds of churches.

SHIFT TOWARDS THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The twentieth century saw a⁵² “remarkable...demographic shift in the global Christian community,” away from Europe and North America and towards the global South. “In 1910 over 80% of all Christians lived in Europe and Northern America. By 2010 this has fallen to less than 40%, with the majority of

Christians located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”⁵³ This is reflected in “a decisive southern shift...in the statistical center of global Christianity” from SW. Europe to sub-Sahara Africa. Compared to previous centuries, “this 100-year shift is the most dramatic in all of Christian history,”⁵⁴ says scholar Todd Johnson. Professor Andrew F. Walls observes that⁵⁵ “The twentieth [century] has been the most remarkable for the transformation of Christianity...producing the radical shift in the cultural and demographic composition of the Christian church.” Europe, which was for centuries the heartland of Christianity, is rapidly entering the “post-Christian era.” Meanwhile the Christian faith is growing rapidly elsewhere. Christianity is no longer a “white man’s religion”—the percentage of global Christians who are ‘white’ has declined steadily from over 80% in 1900; it is projected to reach 30% by 2025.⁵⁶ Prof. Walls declares that⁵⁷ “The most striking feature of Christianity at the end of the second millennium is that it is predominantly a non-Western religion...the representative Christianity of the 21st century will be that of Africa, Asia, Latin and Caribbean America, and the Pacific.” Professor Robert concurs, saying⁵⁸ “The transformation of world Christianity since the Second World War—[has seen] a massive cultural and geographic shift away from Europeans and their descendants toward peoples of the Southern Hemisphere.” Prof. Jenkins argues a distinct expression of the church—a “Third Church in the Third World”—is emerging in southern continents. He writes⁵⁹ “In the global South (the...Third World) huge and growing Christian populations...now make up what...has [been] called the Third Church, a form of Christianity as distinct as Protestantism or Orthodoxy, and one that is likely to become dominant in the faith.” Given these seismic shifts, it is difficult to accept LSM’s thesis that nothing significant has happened to the global church during the last century! Hasn’t the global Church entered another stage?

LSM’s PROPHETIC-HISTORICAL VIEW IS EURO-CENTRIC

Evaluated from a 21st century perspective, LSM’s prophetic-historical interpretation of the seven churches is distinctly euro-centric. It finds the prophetic fulfillment of Revelation’s seven churches within the context of Christianity *as it unfolded in the history of Europe, specifically Western Europe*. LSM’s exposition never mentions Christianity’s early growth outside the Roman Empire—in Persia, Syria and Ethiopia for example. There is also no recognition of the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity⁶⁰ No reference is made to the rise of Islam and its decimation of Christian churches.⁶¹ Isn’t this also Smyrna?

LSM’s prophetic doctrine of Church history fails to recognize the spread of the Christian faith beyond Europe and North America during the past two centuries. LSM’s narrative runs from Constantine (Caesar of the Roman Empire), through the rise of the Roman Catholic papal system, on via the Protestant Reformation to the growth and degradation of the British Brethren. Every key historical event marking a new stage in the church’s progress occurred in Europe. By 1850 the entire prophecy had been fulfilled, all within the context of European Christian history. Thereafter, according to LSM’s interpretation, Church history has been in a “holding pattern” consisting of four kinds of church, all of which originated in Europe. LSM’s paradigm views post-1850 developments of the Christian faith in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania as insignificant extensions, expendable appendages of European Christianity.

Recent trends call for a revised view of global Church history. Professor Mark Noll says, “The time has come for a new history of Christianity.” The problem with older histories is that⁶² “they locate the center of Christian history in the West—Europe and North America—with the global majority [of Christians] relegated to the periphery. But the field has changed; world Christianity has taken on a new shape.” Another scholar says “We must move beyond...the assumption that what happened in the course of Western Christendom is universally normative for Christian history.”⁶³ Another emphasizes the pitfalls of disregarding the non-Western world. Prof. Dana Robert says,⁶⁴ “Since the Reformation we have become used to the assumption that Christianity exists in three more or less permanent modes: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. These categories, however, reflect events in Western history; in the West they have a significance that they cannot have in the non-Western world.” He rejects this parochial view, asserting⁶⁵ “There is no way in which African and Asian church history can be...treated as appendages to Western church history.” Given the large (and growing) importance of the Church in these areas,⁶⁶ “the

days are gone when the history of Christianity could be taught as the development of Western doctrine and institutions. [We are] in the middle of a large-scale transformation in the nature of Christianity,” Robert declares. A euro-centric focus may have been appropriate at the time of the Reformation, around the year 1500, when, “Europe...was essentially Christian and Christianity was essentially European.”⁶⁷ However, 500-years later, Europe’s role in global Christianity is rapidly declining. Phillip Jenkins observes that⁶⁸ “European levels of church attendance fall far short of American, and the situation is deteriorating fast.” With Europe rapidly becoming a “post-Christian society” and African, Asian and Latin American expressions of the Christian faith growing rapidly, a euro-centric interpretation of Christian history, such as LSM’s, becomes increasingly irrelevant to the present profile of the global Christian Church. In 1850 it appeared that Church history—essentially *European* Christian history—matched the prophetic profile in Revelation 2 and 3. 150-years later that view appears distinctly parochial and euro-centric. We ought to ask—was that correspondence merely a passing coincidence?

CONCLUSION

For centuries Bible students have researched current events for signs of the times matching Daniel’s 70 weeks and 1260 days, plus John’s apocalyptic agenda. Protestant reformers were sure the Pope was the Beast (Antichrist) and the Catholic Church was Babylon. In 1701 Robert Fleming, Jr. (c. 1660-1716)⁶⁹ predicted the French Monarchy’s overthrow “at least before 1794” and, soon after, Revelation’s “5th bowl” would be poured on the seat of the Beast (Rome). The French Revolution occurred “on schedule.” Soon after, Napoleon expelled the Pope from Rome. Strikingly, this latter event occurred in 1798, precisely 1260 years after Rome and the Pope were liberated from the barbarians (A.D 538). The number 1260 was deemed highly significant.⁷⁰ Contemporaries felt Bible prophecies are being fulfilled before their eyes! The end was near! Subsequent events showed the correspondence was coincidental, a fleeting mirage.

When Andrew Miller penned his *Church History (circa. 1873)* it appeared Christian history concurred with Revelation’s seven churches. Events among the Plymouth Brethren provided the final puzzle pieces—Philadelphia and Laodicea had been fulfilled prophetically. History matched prophecy. This became the authoritative Brethren teaching concerning the historical course of the Church. Along with many other interpretations (e.g., OT types) it was adopted by the Local Church. This prophetic doctrine has remained unchanged for 150 years. But time has not stood still; major developments in the world and the Christian Church have left this doctrine stranded by the ebbing tide of events. 65-years ago, when W. Nee wrote, it wasn’t clear; today it is—this interpretation doesn’t fit the data. Close examination raises more questions. For example, LSM’s prophetic interpretation maintains that Smyrna typifies the “suffering church” under the Roman Empire’s persecution until A.D. 300. But is the suffering church restricted to that one era? In fact the twentieth century has seen the greatest number of Christian martyrs. One researcher says,⁷¹ “We estimate that over the entire history of Christianity, 70M Christians have been killed for their faith. Over half of these were in the twentieth century alone.” 60% of all martyrdoms occurred since 1900. More than 40M Christians died for their faith in the 20th century—20 M. in the USSR 1920-80 alone, including 1 million Pentecostals.⁷² The “Soviet Empire” killed far more believers than the Roman Empire.⁷³ Consider also the many martyrs in China (1900, 1950-70), Africa (e.g., Kenya 1950s, Uganda 1970s, Sudan) and the on-going persecution of believers in North Korea and Islamic countries.⁷⁴ Surely believers in these countries also experienced “Smyrna--the suffering church” during those periods! This logic suggests we abandon LSM’s prophetic-historical interpretation⁷⁵ and adopt the more eclectic view that characteristics from each of Revelation’s seven churches may be replicated among believers around the globe in any era.

Scripture contains prophecies concerning the nations (e.g., Daniel) and the Jews (e.g., Matt. 24);⁷⁶ where is its prophecy concerning the church? If Revelation 2-3 is not a prophecy concerning the course of the church during the Age of Grace, where is the Bible’s prophecy concerning the church?⁷⁷ The difficulty with this question is that it assumes the church *must have a prophecy*, just like the nations and Israel. Yet, the church’s nature is heavenly, while the nations and Israel are earthly. Doesn’t Scriptures’ greatest prophecy—“I will build My church...” (Matt. 16:18)—apply to the church? Isn’t that prophecy sufficient?

Nigel Tomes,

Toronto, Canada,

July, 2010.

NOTES

Thanks are extended to those who commented on earlier drafts of this piece. As usual the author alone is responsible for the contents of this piece. The views expressed here are solely the author's and should *not* be attributed to any believers, elders, co-workers or churches with whom/which he is associated. I apologize for inflicting 70+ footnotes upon the reader. However, I have been charged (with reference to previous papers) with taking quotes out of context. The notes & references allow the objective reader to evaluate for him/herself.

1. Witness Lee's biography of Watchman Nee indicates the importance of John Nelson Darby's writings in the development of W. Nee's views of Scripture--"He also collected the writings of the Brethren teachers, such as John Nelson Darby, William Kelly, and C. H. Mackintosh." [W. Lee, "*W. Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation*," p. 25] "Light concerning the church was received from the writings of John Nelson Darby and other Brethren teachers." [W. Lee, "*W. Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation*," p. 27] and "Watchman Nee especially received help in expounding the Bible and on many other truths, in general, from the writings of Darby and the Brethren." [W. Lee, "*W. Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation*," p. 27] Witness Lee, himself testified, "I was led to attend the Brethren Assembly (the Benjamin Newton branch) in [his home town]...From the year I was saved, I continuously attended their meetings for seven years." [W. Lee, "*W. Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation*," p. 284] W. Lee, "*Ten Lines in the Bible*," chapter 8, "The Line of Dispensations" presents the standard Plymouth Brethren interpretation on dispensations as historical eras of God's dealing with mankind. See W. Lee's "*The Prophecy of the Four 'Sevens' in the Bible*," (1990) for his exposition of the "last days"—according to the last 7 years of Daniel's 70 weeks, & the 7 seals, 7 trumpets & 7 bowls of John's Apocalypse--which closely follows standard Plymouth Brethren expositions. In 1985 W. Lee said, "Today there are at least 4 different theologies—secular theology, reformed theology, fundamental theology and Brethren theology. Among these, the Brethren theology is the best." He mentions 6 "good points" about Brethren theology, including "thirdly, they opened up the prophecies." [W. Lee, *Fellowship concerning the Lord's up-to-date Move*, Elders' training Book 5, pp. 104-5] W. Lee also said, "We honor and regard Brethren theology as the top theology...our teaching is based upon and constituted with the Brethren theology." [W. Lee, *Fellowship concerning the Lord's up-to-date Move*, Elders' Training Book 5, p. 106]
2. These views contrast with those who teach there will be no literal millennial kingdom on earth (the amillennial view) and those who teach that Christ's return occurs after the millennial kingdom (post-millennial view). The Brethren espoused a pre-millennial view—that Christ would return prior to the millennium. Darby taught the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church; Benjamin W. Newton taught the post-tribulation rapture.
3. Among the early Brethren a variety of views were held concerning pre- and post-tribulation rapture, plus partial rapture. Robert C. Chapman held that there would be multiple raptures, consistent with the partial rapture of the church. His coworker, Hake held a different view. Roy Coad says concerning George Muller, "We know from an explicit statement of his own in 1879 that Müller did not adopt the Secret Rapture viewpoint." [F. Roy Coad, "*Prophetic Developments with particular reference to the early Brethren Movement*." C.B.R.F. Occasional Paper Number 2 (Pinner, Middlesex, 1966) p. 22.] Multiple raptures—an overcoming minority ("firstfruits") & majority ("harvest")—were taught by D. M. Panton; this writer appears to be a major influence on W. Nee and W. Lee.
4. "*Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*" was a best-selling novel by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins that starts the *Left Behind* series. This book and others in the series give narrative form to a specific eschatological reading of Revelation. It embodies J. N. Darby's view on believers' rapture, dispensationalism and pre-millennialism. Tim LaHaye agrees with the prophetic-historical view that the 7 churches portray 7 periods of church history. He says, In my commentary on the Book of Revelation, I pointed out that the seven churches of Asia were selected out of the hundreds of young churches at that time because they were types of the seven church ages that would exist from the first century to the present. (*No Fear of the Storm*, p. 41)
5. The early 1990s saw the development of a revised form of dispensational theology called "progressive dispensationalism." Scholars-- Craig A. Blaising, Darrell L. Bock, and Robert L. Saucy—are considered the primary spokespersons for progressive dispensationalism. In his book, *Darby, Dualism, and the Decline of Dispensationalism*, Ronald Henzel says, "Some of the very academic institutions founded to promote Dispensationalism have moved away from unqualified allegiance to that hermeneutical and eschatological system. Over the objections of traditional Dispensationalists, many scholars have embraced a new variety known as Progressive Dispensationalism, while others have defected to Covenant Theology." [Ronald M. Henzel, "*Darby, Dualism, and the Decline of Dispensationalism*"(2003)]

6. An example of the continued teaching of Brethren eschatology within LSM's Local Churches would be the message of LSM's Senior Editor, Ed Marks, one of the "blended coworkers" on *The Church in Pergamos Prefiguring the Church that entered into a Marriage Union with the World...* in LSM's *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No. 6 (June 2004) pp. 35-36.
7. We refer to the saying circulated within 'LSM circles' to the effect that "God's written Word was canonized in AD 397 [at the Council of Carthage], the 'interpreted word' was canonized in 1997." To "canonize" means "to consider or treat as sacrosanct or holy, to sanction or approve authoritatively." [Dictionary.com] In this context, the "interpreted word" refers to W. Lee's exposition embodied in the Recovery Version footnotes. The fact that W. Lee passed away in 1997 makes that year significant within 'LSM circles.' W. Lee identified LSM's Recovery Version of the Bible as "Watchman Nee's interpretation." He states, "Watchman Nee spent much time to study and collect all the proper, major interpretations of the Bible...I was laboring closely with him for 18 years, he told me what he had collected. Thus, today our interpretation of the Bible is according to the proper interpretations throughout the past 19 centuries...The Recovery Version actually is not my version because my understanding of the Bible depends absolutely on Watchman Nee's interpretation. Furthermore, Brother Nee's interpretation depended upon the proper interpretations of all the saints in the past 19 centuries." [W. Lee, *The Ten Critical 'Ones' for the Building Up of the Body of Christ* Chap. 1] This interpretation is embodied in the Recovery Version's extensive footnotes. LSM's "senior editor" contends that these footnotes are "all-inclusive." Ron Kangas is on record saying, "The footnotes in the Recovery Version of the Holy Bible are all-inclusive. The truth, the life, the light, the revelation, and the vision in these notes are inherited...Every positive element of vision in the Scriptures is included..." [RK, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 8, Sept. 2005, p. 17] LSM's "blended brothers" declare, "We need to come back to God by coming back to His written Word and His interpreted word." [EM, *The Ministry*, Vol.9, No. 1 (Jan. 2005) p. 259] In this context, God's "written Word" means the text of Scripture; God's "interpreted word" means the exposition contained in LSM's Recovery Version footnotes.
8. For example the call for overcomers in each of the seven churches is surely a principle relevant in every era of the Church. Hence W. Nee writes, "Although the Lord desires that the entire Church would obey, He fully realizes that only certain individuals will overcome and will obey. There is no such thing as the whole group turning and repenting. For this reason He promises great rewards to those overcoming individuals." [W. Nee, "Meditations on Revelation," *The Christian* (2), Collected Works of W. Nee, vol. 4, p. 275] W. Nee draws the lesson that "There is no such thing as the whole group turning and repenting;" there is no such thing as an "overcoming church," only overcoming individual believers. Contrast this with the call of LSM President, Benson Phillips for overcoming churches; he said, "All the churches in the Lord's recovery must become overcoming churches today. We must overcome individually, but we also must overcome as the church." [BP., *The Ministry* magazine, vol. 9, No. 8, Sept. 2005, p. 70],
9. Thus W. Nee writes, "When we read the seven epistles, we also must regard them as prophecy. However, when we read them today, they have already become history." [W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 14] Later he says, "Only Revelation 2 and 3...show us the prophecy of the church...and the fulfillment given by history. We thank God that the prophecies have already been fulfilled." [W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 91]
10. Notice that the Outline of Revelation in LSM's Recovery Version appears to suggest that the prophetic section starts with chapter 4. Based upon Rev. 1:19 the Recovery Version divides the Apocalypse into five major sections: [1.] Introduction 1:1-8; [2] "The things which you have seen" 1:9-20; [3] "The things which are" 2:1-3:22; [4] "The things which are about to take place [after these things]" 4:1-22:5; [5] Conclusion 22:6-21. So, the epistles to the seven churches are in the section entitled: "The things which are [existing]" and not the prophetic section, "The things which are about to take place [after these things]" 4:1-22:5. Nevertheless the Recovery Version notes indicate that the 7 epistles will be interpreted prophetically. An early example of expositors rejecting the prophetic interpretation of Rev. 2 & 3 is Archbishop Trench of Dublin (1864-1884) rejected the prophetic-historical interpretation of Revelation's seven epistles. He discounted it, saying, "The whole thing was a subjective fancy of men's minds, not an objective truth of God's Word" (Trench, *Epistles to the Seven Churches*, p. 301) "The multitude of...books, which have been written, and still are being written, in support of this scheme of interpretation, must remain a singular monument of wasted ingenuity and misapplied toil; of the disappointment which must result from a futile looking into Scripture for that which is not to be found there..." (p. 312).
11. This statement does not slight either W. Nee or W. Lee; it is merely recognizes the source of this teaching. The present author was born & raised among the "Open Plymouth Brethren." He heard this teaching concerning the 7 churches typifying the course of Church history 50 years ago while among the Brethren.
12. Andrew Miller's *Church History*, (1873, pp 4-6) Pickering & Inglis (1963, one-volume edition). "The Brethren Writers' Hall of Fame" tells us that Andrew Miller (1810-1883) was the "author of 'Miller's Church History.' A businessman, he was converted to the plain ways of the [Exclusive] Brethren while a voluntary pastor, and took his church with him! [He] Supported and financed [publication of] the 'Notes' of C. H. McIntosh on the Pentateuch."
13. Cyrus I. Scofield (1843-1921), *Scofield's Reference Bible* (1909, 1917). "The Brethren Writers' Hall of Fame" tells us "C. I. Scofield (1843 - 1921) [was] not of the Brethren, but his Reference Bible gave a new popularity to the Dispensational teaching [of Darby]." Scofield "believed the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation were symbolic of seven periods of the Church Age. He said the messages to the churches had a fourfold purpose. The fourth purpose is "prophetic, as disclosing seven phases of the spiritual history of the church from, say, A.D. 96 to the end." (*The First Scofield Study Bible*, p. 1331). He explained what each church represented. Watchman Nee

- helped translate Scofield's Bible Correspondence Course into Chinese. [W. Lee, "W. Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation," p. 201]
14. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, The Collected Works of W. Nee, Vol. 47. The editor's preface indicates "The Orthodoxy of the Church is based on a Bible study conducted by W. Nee during the period between 1942 and 1948." W. Lee's "Preface to the English Edition" designates these chapters as "messages given and published in 1945." W. Nee takes the epistles to the 7 churches as prophetic. He states, "Revelation...is a book of prophecy...even the seven epistles are prophetic." A little later he says, "These seven churches are representative of all other churches...the history of the seven churches constitutes the complete history of the church." [W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 10]
 15. W. Lee, *Life-study of Revelation*, Message One, p. 1
 16. W. Lee, *Life-study of Revelation*, Message 14, p. 169
 17. So W. Nee says "the outward appearance of the church is extremely confusing. The church in her appearance has many manifestations in history..." [W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 93] A little later he says, "the confusion on earth does not affect the spiritual reality. God's spiritual reality still remains. But the church in her outward appearance, at least, is confused. The Roman Catholic Church claims that it is the Body of Christ." [W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 94] LSM's interpretation deals with the outward appearance, e.g. The Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant denominations etc.
 18. W. Lee, Rev. 2:1, RcV., note 1
 19. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 93
 20. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 94. The quote in context reads: —"the last four continue their days on the earth together. They did not begin at the same time, but they end at the same time."
 21. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 95. Only the third church, Philadelphia—"the brothers who love one another"—is left unidentified by W. Nee. Later he adds, "whether or not we are Philadelphia remains a question...Whoever claims to be Philadelphia no longer appears as Philadelphia." [W. Nee, *Orthodoxy*, p. 96.]
 22. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 94. A little later, he adds, "Today [1945] there are **four different kinds of churches**. In all four there are people who are saved—some are better and some are worse. God has put us in a time where there are **four ways from which we can choose**." [W. Nee, *Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 94, emphasis added.]
 23. Notice that in the context of W. Nee & W. Lee's discussion, "Protestant" does not mean "non-Catholic." It refers more narrowly to the Protestant-Reformed churches which emerged from the 16th century Reformation. W. Lee illustrates this understanding when he says: "The reformed church...has denied the Lord's name by denominating herself with many other names, such as Lutheran, Wesleyan, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Baptist...to denominate the church...is spiritual fornication." [W. Lee, *Life-study of Revelation*, message, 15, p. 187] Strictly speaking this definition of "Protestant" does *not* include the classical Pentecostal churches (e.g. "Assemblies of God") which began in the late 1800s & early 1900s. Obviously "Protestant" does not include the Eastern Orthodox churches (e.g. Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox) which split from the western Roman Catholic Church around 1000 AD.
 24. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 82.
 25. W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 94.
 26. W. Lee, Rev. 2:1, RcV., note 1
 27. W. Lee, *Life-study of Revelation*, message 15, p. 191
 28. W. Lee, *Life-study of Revelation*, message 16, p. 197
 29. Note that the "substitution" of the "Lord's present recovery" for the Brethren is nowhere predicted by the Church-historical prophecy of Revelation 2 & 3. It seems to be a contrived method of "reading oneself into Bible prophecy."
 30. LSM-adherents feel that they are fulfilling W. Lee's exhortation: "Satan's chaos, which has resulted in three accumulations, which are three 'isms': Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism....We have to be the overcomers who conquer everything of **Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. In the eyes of the Lord, these three 'isms' are more evil than sin, than the world, and than our self**. Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism should be the first category of things that you and I have to conquer. ...The Lord charges us in these epistles to conquer, to overcome, Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism." [W. Lee, *The Satanic Chaos in the Old Creation and the Divine Economy for the New Creation*, chp. 4 (Messages given by W. Lee in Irving, Texas, May 23-25, 1992), emphasis added] Along the same lines, W. Lee said, "Surely we should not remain in anything of Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism. If we are going to be overcoming believers, we have to overcome, to conquer, these three kinds of 'isms'." [W. Lee, *The Satanic Chaos in the Old Creation and the Divine Economy for the New Creation*, chp. 4]
 31. Notes on the Table:
 - Aggregate data from Todd M. Johnson, Peter F. Crossing & Bobby Jangsun Ryu, *Looking Forward: An Overview of World Evangelism, 2005-2025* (2004) p. 8. Total 2,233M is for "Affiliated Christians;" (2005) "Doubly affiliated" are counted twice.
 - Figures for LSM's Local Churches; In Nov. 2003 LSM's President Benson Phillips declared, that there were, "300,000 saints in over 3,000 churches outside mainland China...Inside mainland China there are conservatively, 850,000 saints in the Lord's recovery and multitudes of churches." [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No 3, (March 2004) p. 91]"

- Figures for “Plymouth Brethren” is “Christian Brethren” from World Christian Database (2005) includes both “Open Brethren” & “Exclusive (Closed) Brethren.” Largest concentrations (2005): India: 500,000; Angola: 400,000; Chad: 350,000. Figures for UK: “Christian Brethren (Open)”: 122,000; “Christian Brethren (Exclusive, Closed)” 48,900.
- Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christianity*, The Atlantic Monthly, Oct., 2002
 - Todd M. Johnson, “3 Waves of Christian Renewal: A 100-Year Snapshot,” International Bulletin of Missionary Research, [IBMR] Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2006
 - Todd M. Johnson, “Three Waves of Christian Renewal: A 100-Year Snapshot,” IBMR, Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2006. The authors’ 2025 projection of 800M: “Status of Global Mission” IBMR, vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan, 2010) p. 36
 - Allan Anderson, *The Globalization of Pentecostalism in the Twentieth Century*, IBMR, vol. 31, No. 1, Jan. 2007
 - On more than one occasion W. Lee recounted the following incident “In my home town of Chefoo, [China] not too far from our hall was another hall where a group of Pentecostals met. Once their leader came to me trying to convince me to take up the Pentecostal way. I said to him. ‘Brother, I surely know what your intention is in coming here. Since you have been in your way for years, how many do you have meeting with you?’ When he told me that they were under one hundred, I replied, ‘I am not in your way, but among us are close to one thousand. **Do you have the power or do I have the power?**” [W. Lee, *Fellowship Concerning the Lord's Up-to-Date Move*, Elders' Training, Book 5, chapter 1, p. 19, emphasis added] W. Lee also appealed to numbers as vindication of his work. For example, he is on record saying, “Since I left mainland China in 1949, about three hundred eighty churches have been raised up on five continents through this ministry...What the Lord has done since 1949 is a strong evidence that what God needs on earth today is the practical expression of the mystical Body of Christ.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of 1 Cor.*, pp. 525-6] More to the point is the fact that LSM’s historical-prophetic interpretation purports to describe the future course of the Christian Church as it is manifested upon earth until the end of the church age. That prophetic description should include features like the numerical rise of Pentecostalism & Independent churches.
 - “Seven Letters to Seven Churches” in “The Midnight Cry” (2002, 2004) p. 33. The document itself is anonymous; the pdf “document properties” indicate the author is “Ted Edelinski.” The author acknowledges “The basic premise is certainly not original. The historical approach to interpreting the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 can be found in the notes on those chapters in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. The same approach is taken in Watchman Nee’s *The Orthodoxy of the Church* (Living Stream Ministry, publisher), although Brother Nee lived in a time when the final church period was a little more difficult to anticipate than it is today.” This writer does not agree with this designation. Our point is that at least the “Midnight Cry” recognizes the omission of the 20th century Pentecostal/Charismatic movement within the Brethren’s usual prophetic scheme.
 - W. Nee had a positive assessment of Azusa St. and the “latter rain.” He said, “At the same time that this [Welsh] revival was going on, another **new work began in Los Angeles in the United States. From 1908 to 1909, a number of black believers on Azusa Street experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues...** These individuals saw that the prophecy of Joel 2 was only partially fulfilled at the time of the apostles and that the day of the latter rain must come before the complete fulfillment occurs. Spiritually speaking, **‘the day of the latter rain’ refers to today.**” [W. Nee, “*What Are We?*,” Collected Works of W. Nee, vol. 11, p. 855, emphasis added]
 - “A Vast Movement: Contemporary post-denominationalism is a movement sweeping throughout the churches worldwide. It is a vast, scattered movement of many distinct and separate...independencies, reformations, and renewals. Today it includes over 20,000 movements, networks, or new denominations with 394 million church members.” [David B. Barrett *et al*, *Annual Statistical Table...*: 2001, IBMR, vol. 25, No. 1, Jan., 2001]
 - David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing *Missiometrics 2008: Reality Checks...* Table B. 2008: *50 new facts and figures about...global Christianity*, IBMR, Vol. 32, No. 1, Jan, 2008
 - The World Christian Database [WCD] includes the “Assembly Hall churches” (“Little Flock” churches of W. Nee) among the “House Church” movement. The table below presents WCD’s estimates of congregations and membership for China’s major “house church networks” in 2005. Some are identified by location (province or city), others by emphasis (e.g. “Born Again Movement.”) The “Little Flock” local churches associated with W. Nee are designated as “Assembly Hall Churches.”

CHINA’S HOUSE CHURCH NETWORKS estimates for 2005

Name	No. Congregations	No. Members
Born Again Movement	275,000	24.5 Millions
Anhui	120,000	12.0 M.
Fangcheng	120,000	12.0 M.
Assembly Hall Churches	120,000	10.0 M.
Nanyang	65,000	6.0 M.
Tanghe	85,000	4.5 M.
Wenzhou	23,000	2.3 M.
TOTAL All Networks	843,000	68.3 M.

42. According to the World Christian [Religions] Database [WCD] in 2005 there were 100.6M Christians in mainland China. Of these, 13.7 M were Catholic and 22 M. Protestant. The government-approved “Three-self Patriotic Movement” Church claimed a membership of 21 M. Together these constitute about 50M. [This eliminates double-counting—there is a government-approved “patriotic” branch of the Catholic Church in China, plus some Christians meet with both government-approved and unofficial “house churches.”] The WCD gives the number 73M for “Independents.” Deducting the official “Three-self Patriotic Movement” Church figure of 21M yields 52M.
43. A. H. Anderson, “*Types & Butterflies: African Initiated Churches & European Typologies*” IMRB, 25:3, July 2001
44. Allan H. Anderson, “*Types and Butterflies: African Initiated Churches...*” IMRB, 25:3, July 2001
45. Bakht Singh (1902–2000) established local assemblies in India, Pakistan & elsewhere on the principle of “one church, one city.” They are collectively known as the “Indigenous Churches of India.” [Roger E. Hedlund, *Indian Expressions of Indigenous Christianity*, Studies in World Christianity, vol. 10, No. 2 (October, 2004) p. 192]. The WCD reports that in 2005 these “Indigenous Churches of India” had 260,000 members in India, 23,000 in Pakistan, 10,000 in Nepal, plus additional members in Bhutan, Bahrain & Kuwait.
46. Coworkers in the Lord’s recovery, “*Beliefs & Practices of the local churches*” (1976)
47. These figures are from David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, *Christian World Communions: Five Overviews of Global Christianity, AD 1800–2025*, IBMR, Vol. 33, No. 1, January 2009. The Percentages given are “Independents” (line 32) as % of “Church members” (line 25) For unspecified reasons the 2010 up-date the last figure—420M—has been revised downwards to 370M. [David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, et. al., “*Status of Global Mission, 2010...*” IBMR, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan. 2010), p. 36] Nevertheless the central point remains unaffected—the “independent” category is large and constitutes the fastest growing “mega-block” at 2.42% p.a. vs. 1.35 for Christians of all kinds. [IBMR, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan. 2010), p. 36]
48. Professor Robert says, “Non-Western historians are cautioning against blanket use of the word ‘Pentecostal’ to describe indigenous Christianity.” Concerning African Initiated Churches, African Christian scholars argue “vigorously against the label of Pentecostalism being plastered onto indigenous churches. Not only have these churches been founded by African prophets, but they have recruited their members largely from the traditional population, not from so-called mission churches. Although they emphasize the Holy Spirit, the AICs deal with issues arising from African culture, not from Western Pentecostalism.” [Dana Robert, *Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945*, IBMR, April 2000]
49. See the figures quoted in note 41 above.
50. The quote is from “DL” (Dan Leslie?), *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No. 2 (February, 2004) pp. 153-4, Note however, that since this is an outline point and section heading in LSM’s *The Ministry* magazine, according to LSM protocol, it is a direct quotation from Witness Lee’s own published message.
51. In this context LSM’s “blended brother” asserts that “In the Lord’s recovery we see and experience that we are joined to the Lord in our spirit.” [“DL,” *The Ministry* magazine, Vol. 8, No. 2 (February, 2004) p. 153]
52. IBMR Editor, *Global Christianity 2000: Expansion, Shift, and Conundrum*, IBMR, Vol. 24, No 2, April 2000
53. Todd M. Johnson, David B. Barrett, and Peter F. Crossing *Christianity 2010: A View from the New Atlas of Global Christianity*, IBMR Vol. 34, No. 1, Jan. 2010
54. Todd Johnson, *World Christian Trends, Update 2007*, August 2007
55. A. F. Walls, *Eusebius Tries Again*, IBMR, Vol. 24, No. 3, July 2000
56. Todd M. Johnson, Peter F. Crossing & Bobby Jangsun Ryu, “*Looking Forward: An Overview of World Evangelism, 2005-2025*” (2004) p. 8
57. A. F. Walls, *Eusebius Tries Again*, IBMR, Vol. 24, No. 3, July 2000
58. Dana Robert, *Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945*, IBMR, April 2000
59. Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christianity*, The Atlantic Monthly, Oct., 2002
60. Thomas D. Ross points out that the “seven stages of the Church’s progress” does not fit the history of the Eastern Church. He says, “Eastern Orthodox [Church] has even less to do with the prophetic theory; the events that are said to be represented generally happened in the West and had little effect on its sphere of dominance. No claim for representation of important turns of events in Eastern Catholicism, such as suppression under Communism and modern resurgence in post-cold war Russia, appears.” [Thomas D. Ross, *The Historical Ages Interpretation of the Churches of Revelation Two and Three*, p. 6]
61. One would expect a prophetic scheme presenting “the history of the church from the first century to the present” to predict the rise and expansion of Islam, beginning from the 7th century. As of 2010 the Muslim faith has 1,544M adherents globally (22.4% of the world’s population). In terms of world religions, it is second only to the Christian faith, with 2,292M adherents (33.2% of world pop.). Moreover Islam is growing at a faster rate than Christianity (1.82% versus 1.35%). By 2025 Islam is predicted to reach 24.5% of global population. However, nowhere in the Plymouth Brethren’s or LSM’s historical-prophetic interpretation is the rise of Islam identified. This omission again highlights the focus on Christianity’s history in Western Europe.
62. Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity* (2009). The quote is from inside the dust-cover. Prof. Noll’s in the book’s opening sentence says, “The new world situation...demands a new history of Christianity.” (p. 9) He continues by saying the older histories of Christianity “presume a core Christian narrative **dominated by events, personalities...in Europe and North America**—and then surrounded by a fringe...scattered throughout the globe.” [Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity* p. 9, emphasis added] The point is that the changing shape of the global Christian faith means that European historical events and people that were considered the core of the

Christian narrative, become less crucial (and “peripheral” non-western events & people become more crucial) in the light of more recent trends and developments. However, a God-inspired prophecy would foretell the events according to their actual importance; it would not need revision (or a revised interpretation) in the light of subsequent developments!

63. Wilbert R. Shenk, “*Toward a Global Church History*” IBMR, Vol. 50, No. 2, April 1996. The quote in context reads: “We must move beyond the conventional framework, which is governed by the assumption that what happened in the course of Western Christendom is universally normative for Christian history.”
64. Dana Robert, *Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945*, IBMR, April 2000
65. Dana Robert, *Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945*, IBMR, April 2000
66. Philip Jenkins, *Godless Europe?* IBMR, Vol. 31, No. 3, July, 2007
67. Philip Jenkins, *Godless Europe?* IBMR, Vol. 31, No. 3, July, 2007
68. Philip Jenkins, *Godless Europe?* IBMR, Vol. 31, No. 3, July, 2007. The extended quote reads: “European levels of church attendance fall far short of American, and the situation is deteriorating fast. Around 40 percent of Americans report visiting a place of worship weekly, compared with less than 20 percent in most of Europe. According to some estimates, the British attendance figure is 15 percent, with 12 percent in Germany, and Scandinavia below 5 percent.”
69. For details on this case of “prophetic fulfillment” and others, see F. Roy Coad, “Prophetic Developments with particular reference to the early Brethren Movement.” *C.B.R.F. Occasional Paper Number 2* (Pinner, Middlesex, 1966) p. 13. Coad describes the response this “prophetic fulfillment.” “Historicism had in fact reached its zenith. Its remarkable interpretations appeared at last to be coming true. For centuries men had wrestled with those obscure prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation: and now at last they were being fulfilled before their eyes. Interpretation gave way to a flood of excited speculation. If these dates had proved correct, so would others... The end days were upon them and in a few decades the culmination of all things would be seen.” [F. Roy Coad, “*Prophetic Developments...*” *C.B.R.F. Occasional Paper Number 2* (Pinner, Middlesex, 1966) pp. 13-14.]
70. The number 1260 days equals 42X30 i.e. 42 months or 3.5 years the duration of the great tribulation, according to some expositors. For example, W. Lee says, “1260 days after Antichrist sets up his image, Christ will come to earth. Thus, His open coming can be calculated.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Matthew*, message 62, p. 728] Also he says, “When Antichrist sets up his image, we may begin to count 1260 days until Christ descends publicly to the earth.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Matthew*, message 62, p. 729]. The figure of 1260 years took on special significance by association.
71. Figures from David B. Barrett & Todd M. Johnson, “*Martyrs*” Lists 1-6 from “*Global Top Ten Lists...*” in *World Christian Trends, 2001*” The 1900s rank #1 in “Centuries with most martyrs” at 41M. The 200s rank as #10 with 400,000 martyrs (the 100s had less). The authors estimate there have been approx. 70M martyrs over the past 20-centuries. 60% of all Christian martyrdoms occurred since 1900, beginning with China’s “Boxer rebellion” in 1900.
72. Todd Johnson, *World Christian Trends, Update 2007*, August 2007, www.lausanneworldpulse.com
73. Professor Rodney Stark concludes that “The total number of Christians martyred by the Romans probably was fewer than a thousand. But their steadfastness greatly strengthened the faith of other Christians and impressed many pagans.” [Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 164, emphasis added.] Stark also states that “usually only bishops and other prominent figures were singled out. Thus for rank-and-file Christians the threat of persecution was so slight...” [Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 180.]
74. David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, et. al. *World Christian Trends, 2001*, p. 32 These authors estimate that 9M Christians have perished at the hands of Islam since it began in the 7th century (long after the end of Smyrna, the “suffering church,” in LSM’s paradigm).
75. The proposal is that we abandon LSM’s historical-prophetic interpretation of the 7 churches in Revelation 2-3. This does *not* mean we abandon the prophetic interpretation of Rev. chapters 4-22. This proposal is consistent with W, Lee’s Outline of Revelation which classifies chapters 2 & 3 as: “The things which are [existing at the time of writing] (Rev. 2:1-3:22) and chapters 4-22 as: “The things which are about to take place [after these things]” (Rev. 4:1-22:5).
76. W. Lee adopts the position of the Brethren’s dispensational theology—that the prophecies in Matt. 24 apply to the Jews and not to the church. He says, “Matthew 24:4-31 is a sketch of 20 centuries of Jewish history.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Matthew*, message 62, p. 722, emphasis added] Also he says, “We need to remember that [Matt] 24:1-14 speaks of the things between Christ’s ascension and the end of the age. All these verses **must be applied to the Jews** during this period of time.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of Matthew*, message 62, p. 722, emphasis added]
77. W. Nee says, “In the Old Testament there are very clear prophecies concerning Judah.... Well-known prophecies such as those in Daniel...are very detailed concerning the Gentiles....Where is the prophecy concerning the church? ...[in] Paul there are no prophecies [of this type]....Matt 13...is not sufficiently clear...Therefore, we may say that **only Revelation 2 and 3...show us the prophecy of the church.**” [W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, p. 91, emphasis added] Again this statement *assumes* that the church requires specific prophecy *on par* with Scriptures’ prophecies concerning the Jews (Israel) and the nations.