

LSM's UNORTHODOX THREE-STAGE PNEUMATOLOGY

LSM Stonewalls in Response to 70 Evangelical Scholars

It's been over a year since 70 evangelical scholars issued¹ an "Open Letter" addressed to the leadership of the "local churches" and Living Stream Ministry (LSM). Their January 2007 Letter was a public appeal to withdraw controversial statements about the doctrine of God & man, to rescind utterances denigrating denominations and to cease using lawsuits. To our knowledge LSM has yet to engage in constructive dialogue with the 70 Christian scholars; their response² was to "circle the wagons," claim quotes were taken out of context and reaffirm Brother Lee's orthodoxy. Meanwhile LSM continued its Harvest House lawsuit until the US Supreme Court quashed it. Reportedly they're covertly backing litigation by pro-LSM groups against "wayward" local churches. Moreover, there is no indication LSM's denigration of denominations has ceased.³ So, for the past year, LSM has continued to "conduct business as usual," while stonewalling the Christian scholars' attempts to initiate dialogue. LSM's refusal to address issues of biblical truth is perplexing. While claiming to be the "recovery of biblical truth," Bro. W. Lee's writings are treated as a "sacred cow," virtually infallible and inerrant, to be accepted and affirmed without question. Indeed, Witness Lee's "Interpreted Word" is venerated⁴ above the Bible itself. This violates Watchman Nee's foundational maxim—"The Bible is our unique standard." We believe the main issue for the 70 scholars is Witness Lee's theology regarding the Triune God. Here we take a small step by addressing LSM's unusual "three stage" pneumatology.

The birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were momentous events which changed human history. These major steps of Christ form the basis of the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15:3-4) and the means for us to become God's children and Christ's Body. From another angle these "steps" are profound mysteries affecting the Person of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Incarnation and resurrection, central tenets of the faith, are historical events which occurred in time. The birth of Christ is commonly dated around 3 BC; the resurrection approximately A.D. 30. These points are not controversial. However, more contentious is Witness Lee's and his LSM-successors' claim that an additional historical event—the Spirit's "intensification"—is as significant as Christ's incarnation and resurrection. According to this doctrine, at some point, late in the first century, the Spirit "changed" in a substantial way. This momentous event—"Christ's third becoming"—occurred, they claim, between Paul's martyrdom and John's publication of his Apocalypse. They maintain that, thereafter, the Spirit had new abilities not previously possessed, new strength not formerly available, even at Pentecost; henceforth the Spirit could accomplish goals unattainable earlier. This doctrine, propounded in LSM publications, touches on fundamental issues regarding the Person and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. LSM's senior editor, Ron Kangas calls this⁵ "a matter of particular theological importance, especially for Christology and pneumatology." Here we examine LSM's "three stage Christo-Pneumatology" in the light of Scripture.

LSM's Three Stage Christo-Pneumatology

The "1969 Erie conference" was a milestone for the Recovery in the US Midwest. Brother Lee's inspirational messages on the "seven Spirits" in the Apocalypse as the "sevenfold intensified Spirit" were mightily used by God to initiate the church-life in Akron, OH, from whence it spread. He shared that when Revelation⁶ "was written, the church had become degraded; the age was dark. Therefore, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God was needed for God's move." Later this teaching was developed into a more systematic theology. Among his final published works, Bro. W. Lee's *Incarnation, Inclusion and Intensification* fully develops this theme. It refers to,⁷ "The three stages of Christ, that is, the three periods of the history of what Christ is—incarnation, inclusion, and intensification." These terms, at first sight, appear strange; they were chosen to produce three "I's." With reference to the "first stage," Christ's ministry on earth from his birth to his crucifixion, W. Lee affirms that⁸ "through incarnation Christ as God became flesh." The "second stage," which produced the Church at Pentecost, began when⁹ "in His resurrection, the Christ...became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b)" Hence, appealing to Scripture, Witness Lee says,¹⁰ "Christ...has had two becomings. The first becoming is seen in John 1:14—the Word became flesh. The second becoming is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:45—the last Adam (Christ in the flesh) became the life-giving Spirit." Concerning the "second stage," the word "inclusion" was coined because¹¹ "many things were included in the pneumatic Christ, in the Christ who is the life-giving Spirit." "Intensification," the term describing the "third stage," derives from W. Lee's phrase¹² "the sevenfold intensified Spirit." It is this last, "third stage," which we want to focus on.

The Spirit of Pentecost—Inadequate, Not Strong Enough?

Despite Christ becoming the Spirit which was poured out at Pentecost, LSM's writers assert this was inadequate. W. Lee says,¹³ "Paul spoke about the Body, but I do not believe that Paul saw the actual building up of the Body." Therefore, W. Lee continues,¹⁴ "In order for the Body to be produced in a full and complete way, there is the need of the third stage of Christ...intensification in which Christ becomes the sevenfold intensified Spirit." Notice this logic suggests a certain inadequacy on the part of the Spirit; it implies the "one-fold" Spirit was somehow "not strong enough" to achieve God's goal; so something "stronger" was needed. LSM's "blended brothers" implicitly admit this, saying,¹⁵ "For producing the church, the life-giving Spirit is sufficiently strong; but under the degradation of the church, this strong Spirit has been intensified sevenfold." They say the "Spirit is sufficiently strong" for "producing the church." However, apparently, **the "one-fold" Spirit was not strong enough to combat the church's degradation.** Hence,¹⁶ "this strong Spirit has been intensified sevenfold"—from strong to super-strong! Similarly, they maintain,¹⁷ "The one Spirit is adequate to renew us...but the Spirit *had to become* seven times as strong because of the degradation." Again this implies a certain inadequacy. Evidently **the "one-fold Spirit" was not adequate for degradation.** Yet Bible students, reading about the Spirit out-poured at Pentecost and active throughout Acts, do not sense any inadequacy. They are mystified by LSM's claim the Spirit of Pentecost was (in some way) *inadequate, not sufficiently strong* and therefore needed to be strengthened. On the contrary, many Christians regard the Spirit's strength recorded in Acts as greater than anything the Church has experienced since. To them LSM's scenario seems counter-factual. Moreover, most Church historians regard the Church's degradation during the Middle Ages (A.D. 500 to 1500) as more severe than that detected in the New Testament. They would ask—why was the degradation of the Middle Ages deeper if (as asserted) the Spirit was stronger? LSM's publications don't address these questions. On the other hand, LSM's *Affirmation & Critique* lambastes Christianity for neglecting the "intensified Spirit." They declare,¹⁸ "None of the creeds and...none of today's theologies adequately emphasize the fact that...the Spirit of God is the intensified life-giving Spirit." Let's examine the parameters of this "third stage" of Christ and the Spirit.

LSM's Third Stage of Christ—Intensification—An Historical Event?

LSM's writers maintain the "second stage of inclusion" was¹⁹ "a relatively short period of perhaps thirty to sixty years"—from Christ's resurrection to the Church's degradation (i.e. from Pentecost in approx. A.D. 30 until A.D. 60 or A.D. 90). As W. Lee describes it,²⁰ "Shortly after the church was produced, it began to become degraded. This is clearly seen in Acts...Eventually the church degraded to such an extent that the Lord could no longer tolerate it, and He reacted by intensifying Himself sevenfold to become the sevenfold intensified Spirit (Rev. 1:4; 5:6)...to deal with the degradation of the church." LSM's "blended brothers" assert that, due to the Church's degradation²¹ "frustrating the accomplishment of God's eternal economy," Christ²² "was forced to become the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit." They claim,²³ "If the church had not degraded, there would be no need for the Spirit of Christ to be intensified." This process ushered in the "third stage."

Here is a striking assertion—at some point in early Church history something fundamental happened to the Spirit, which "changed" the Spirit in an elemental way—the "one-fold" Spirit was intensified, becoming the "sevenfold" Spirit.²⁴ They are not merely talking about a further revelation concerning the Spirit, but an actual alteration from "one-fold" to "seven-fold." LSM's writers tell us this is not a change in "nature or essence," but in²⁵ "level or intensity." Nevertheless, it's important enough to be called a "third stage" produced by Christ's "third becoming." **When did this momentous event happen?** W. Lee suggests it occurred after the Apostle Paul's martyrdom. He says,²⁶ "Paul spoke about the Body...but I do not believe that Paul saw the actual building up of the Body...there [was] the need of the third stage...intensification..." He continues,²⁷ "After Paul died, the Lord waited more than twenty years until John wrote the book of Revelation...In this book Christ...has become the sevenfold intensified Spirit." Evidently, this change happened two decades after Paul's passing, shortly before John wrote Revelation. LSM's "blended brothers" concur, saying,²⁸ "Not long after the Church was established, around A.D. 67, the apostle Paul said that all who were in Asia had turned from him. This was the degradation. Towards the end of the Apostle John's ministry, around A.D. 90-95, [in his epistles] he said that anti-Christ had come among God's people." Hence, according to this doctrine, sometime late in the 1st century, between the Paul's passing (circa. A.D. 67) and John's Revelation (circa. A.D. 90, Rcv), there was a change from "stage two" to "stage three;" at that juncture, the Spirit "changed," becoming intensified sevenfold. This change was crucial enough to be called another

"stage." In LSM's pneumatology, this transition was a momentous event, equal in significance to Christ's becoming the Spirit in resurrection. Yet, what is the Scriptural basis for these bold assertions?

No Biblical Basis for a "Third Becoming" Event

The Bible clearly records the events surrounding the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They form major parts of the New Testament narrative. They are central tenets of Scripture. Moreover, they are explicitly stated in Scripture. For example, the Bible says, "when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). It also asserts, Christ "was designated the Son of God in power...out of the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4). There is no such narrative concerning the postulated late-1st century event by which the Spirit was intensified and which constitutes "Christ's third becoming." Nor does the Bible state that the Spirit's "intensification" /Christ's "third becoming" occurred in a certain period; it is (at best) an inference, an extrapolation not founded upon "the rock" of God's Word; it is LSM's speculation.

Does "Revelation...tell us that the...Spirit had another change"?

LSM's "blended brothers" declare²⁹ "These three stages correspond to *the three 'becomings' of Christ*. His first becoming...incarnation, is in John 1:14...The second stage began with the becoming in 1 Cor. 15:45b." Yet, notably, thereafter no reference is made to Scripture. This omission is significant. The "blended brothers" merely assert,³⁰ "Christ's third becoming is in the third stage of His ministry, in which He became the sevenfold intensified Spirit." Elsewhere another "blended brother" claims³¹ "we can see the degradation of the church in Acts and the Epistles. However the Lord was not through... Christ had *another becoming*. Revelation 1:4; 4:5; 5:6 and 3:1 tell us that the...Spirit *had another change*...He became the sevenfold intensified Spirit." However, contrary to this assertion, **Revelation does not tell us that "Christ had another becoming" nor "that the...Spirit had another change."** Those references all refer to the "seven Spirits." The verbs "change," "became" and their synonyms do not appear in any of these references. For example, Rev. 3:1 says, "He who has the seven Spirits of God" (RcV). The Greek verb translated "has" is present, active—"He who *is having* the Seven Spirits" (Young's Literal trans.). There is no implication of "change" or "becoming" in the Greek text. This is a case of *eisegesis*, reading a meaning into the text of Scripture. It is an unjustified extrapolation beyond these verses to infer a specific late-1st century event in which the Spirit "changed" and "*became* the sevenfold intensified." **The Bible affirms only "two becomings" of Christ** (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45). Nowhere does the Bible explicitly state that the Spirit *became* intensified at a certain point in time, either late in the 1st century or some time thereafter. This is LSM's speculative deduction. While Bible expositors concur that there is a further revelation of the Spirit in John's Apocalypse, few (if any) agree that the Spirit *actually changed* shortly before John's writing. Indeed a skeptic might retort—there's no more evidence for LSM's posited "third becoming" event than for the conjecture that Jesus Christ visited North America after His resurrection! Moreover, this doctrine cannot be easily dismissed as simply an imaginative exposition of Scripture, falling within the scope the "preacher's license." Within the Recovery, Bro. Witness Lee's teachings are accorded apostolic authority; his teachings are equated with Scripture. Hence, LSM-President, Benson Phillips says,³² "We need to declare to the whole universe that *the ministry we have been under is the apostles' teaching.*" LSM's doctrine of the Spirit's late-1st century "intensification" is part of their systematic theology. Moreover, this is not an insignificant claim, easily glossed over. LSM asserts that there was a fundamental "*change*" related to Christ and the Spirit. This implies a "*change*" in the Triune God.³³

LSM's "Third Becoming" Event—For "Internal Consumption Only"?

According to LSM's publications, Christ's ministry has three distinct stages. By this pedagogical device, they place the "third, intensification stage" *on par* with the previous two stages—Christ's human living and heavenly ministry in resurrection. Moreover, they maintain an historical event—"intensification"—occurred late in the 1st century. This event, dubbed "Christ's third becoming," is placed *on par* with His incarnation and resurrection. Yet these other "two becomings" of Christ are fundamental items of the Christian faith (Gal. 4:4; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Belief in them is necessary for the believer's salvation. "Christ's third becoming" is certainly not an essential item of the faith. LSM castigates Christianity³⁴ for its blindness in failing to see this "intensification" process. Yet, there is no solid Scriptural basis for their alleged "third becoming"—a late 1st century event whereby the Spirit "changed" in a fundamental way. Perhaps realizing they are "skating on thin ice," LSM's publication for "outsiders," *Affirmation & Critique* ["A&C"] deftly avoids³⁵ the issue of when the Spirit was intensified,

while expounding this topic before a theologically-informed audience. In Ron Kangas' A&C article, it is [God's people who need to be intensified!](#) He says,³⁶ "unless some *overcomers among God's people are intensified* by His Spirit, God's dispensational move...cannot be completed." Here the Spirit's posited intensification, between the eras of Paul and John, is overlooked! The contrast is marked; when addressing "insiders," local-church believers, the chronology of Christ's "third becoming," the Spirit's intensification is expounded in detail. A specific time is identified—shortly before John's Apocalypse (circa. A.D. 90). However, when presenting this subject to a theologically-informed "outside audience," via *Affirmation & Critique*, LSM's writers adroitly avoid the issue. Skeptics would ask: Is LSM's unorthodox pneumatology intended only for "internal consumption" by believers within the Recovery?

Rejecting the Extra-biblical in LSM's Pneumatology

We do not dispute the fact that the "seven Spirits" in Revelation designate the Holy Spirit. Nor do we object to the exposition of the seven Spirits as the "sevenfold intensified Spirit." We have no problem with Bro. W. Lee's basic proposition that when Revelation³⁷ "was written, the church had become degraded; the age was dark. Therefore, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God was needed for God's move." However, this basic proposition has been expanded, systematized and extrapolated; it has been vested with a conjectural chronology. We take the Bible as our unique standard. Hence, we are constrained to reject LSM's speculative deduction of a definite historical event marking a "third stage/becoming" of Christ as the Spirit. We cannot accept as biblical LSM's teaching that, at a definite point in time (late 1st century,) the Spirit underwent a fundamental change; that, just prior to John's Revelation, the Spirit acquired new abilities not previously possessed; that, henceforth, the Spirit could produce overcomers, the actual building of Christ's Body and the New Jerusalem, goals that were previously unattainable. We find dubious LSM's claim that the Spirit after Pentecost was (in some sense) inadequate or "not strong enough" to achieve these goals. These deductions are not firmly founded in Scripture. Were not the proto-martyrs in Acts, Stephen and James (Acts 7:59; 12:2,) and even Paul himself (2 Tim. 4:7), overcomers, even though (in LSM's view) they preceded the sevenfold Spirit? There is insufficient biblical basis for LSM's assertion of a late-1st century "third becoming" of Christ. This is an extrapolation, beyond "what has been written" in Scripture (1 Cor. 4:6). Stated rhetorically, if "intensification" was an event of such historically significant proportions (as LSM claims) wouldn't God have recorded it explicitly in His Word? Evidently, He did not; that fact is significant.

Should the Creeds add LSM's "Three Stages" & "Three Becomings"?

It appears LSM's writers have developed an "inspiration" into a dogmatic teaching. In so doing they extrapolate beyond the Bible—postulating "three stages/becomings." This has produced an unorthodox pneumatology which fundamental evangelical believers will be compelled to reject. This "third becoming" event is not part of the progression of truth. As Brother Nee said,³⁸ "the progression of truth can only develop within the bound of the Scriptures. Doctrines that are developed apart from the Bible cannot be considered a progression of truth." He also warned,³⁹ "We cannot force God's truth to go our way just because we want to go that way." LSM's publications contend that⁴⁰ "None of the historic creeds and confessions...stress adequately...the seven Spirits of God." That includes the notable Nicene-Constantinople Creed (A.D. 325, 381). Are LSM's writers suggesting their doctrine of "intensification," with its "three stages/becomings" be incorporated into this Creed? Given the lack of biblical basis and its speculative nature, fundamental evangelical believers will surely reject it!

In response to this presentation some might ask—how do you explain the "seven Spirits" in Revelation? An adequately answer is beyond this article's scope. A first step would be to divest LSM's "three-stage/becomings" teaching of its extra-biblical trappings and its speculative chronology. An alternative perspective is that the Apostle John, under the Spirit's inspiration, employed his own unique terminology to give the believers a new realization of the Holy Spirit's capabilities existing since Pentecost. There was no independent "third becoming of Christ"; everything is completed in the "two becomings" (incarnation and resurrection) testified in Scripture. There was no fundamental "change" in the Spirit subsequent to Christ's resurrection. Everything (including the "seven Spirits") was innate in the Spirit out-poured at Pentecost. It was *not* that the Spirit Himself fundamentally changed or assumed new abilities just prior to John's writing; rather John's Apocalypse was *a further revelation* providing the believers with a new apprehension of the Holy Spirit's capabilities *innate since Pentecost*. Some will dismiss this response as mundane; however, at least it is consistent with Scripture. It contains no outrageous claims based upon speculative chronological extrapolations beyond the Bible.

The Evolution of an Inspiration into a Systematic Theology

Early in Bro. W. Lee's ministry in North America a conference was held in Erie, PA. That was a landmark event, establishing local churches in the US Midwest. Brother Lee shared inspiring messages on the "sevenfold intensified Spirit." Due to the Spirit's work many attendees were motivated to leave their jobs, businesses and homes to relocate in Akron, OH to begin practicing the local church life. From that small beginning in Akron, OH, the church-life prospered and spread to other cities in Ohio and surrounding states. Today many saints and local churches can trace their roots back to Bro. Lee's Erie conference on the "sevenfold intensified Spirit." Yet, this teaching was not presented as a doctrine, but as an inspirational word. In fact, among the local churches in that era, "dead doctrines" were distained; systematic theology was despised and seminaries were scorned as "cemeteries"!

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, over the decades, all this changed. The few Witness Lee books published by LSM multiplied to fill many bookshelves. The blue volumes of Watchman Nee's *Collected Works* and the green *Life-study* volumes were joined by *Truth Lessons*, *Life-Lessons*, *Conclusion of the New Testament* series, *Crystallization-studies*, Training Outlines, "High Peak" books and *Holy Word for Morning Revival* (HWMR). Add to this the "blended brothers'" expositions in *The Ministry* magazine. Today the Recovery has its own body of teaching, its own systematic theology. Moreover, the Local Churches now have their own seminaries. "Summer Schools of Truth" prepare young people for the Full-time Training in Anaheim (FTTA) where trainees are educated in the Recovery's theology. The FTFA was franchised throughout the globe. They are the equivalent of Bible seminaries. However, in marked contrast to most evangelical seminaries, the entire curriculum consists of the writings of Witness Lee, supplemented by Watchman Nee. Most local church believers' reading is also limited⁴¹ to these authors. The "LSM-faithful" subsist on a steady diet of *Holy Word for Morning Revival* (HWMR).

The Local Church's systematic theology has developed in isolation from the wider Christian community. It has not benefited from objective evaluation by Christian scholars. Yet, Watchman Nee warned,⁴² "On no account should we think that the truth...only issue[s] forth from our midst." Over the years, an elevated status was attributed to Witness Lee. Whether by design or default, the Recovery became a⁴³ "one-man show." Bro. Witness Lee was hailed as the sole "Minister of the Age." His speaking was accepted, *carte blanche*, as "the Lord's up-to-date ministry," God's "Interpreted Word," virtually infallible and inerrant, equal to⁴⁴ (if not greater than⁴) the Bible. Within the Recovery, Bro. Lee's teachings have not been evaluated against Scripture. LSM's own *Affirmation & Critique* critiques and denounces⁴⁵ the theologies of other Christians. Yet, in its pages, Witness Lee is "given a free pass," his teachings are only affirmed, never critiqued.⁴⁶ In this LSM is vulnerable to the charge of operating a double standard. The attitude of LSM's "blended brothers" exacerbates this situation; outside observers' evaluations which don't fully endorse LSM's views are seen as "attacks on the Recovery." Commentary from within (other than affirmation) is stigmatized as motivated by ambition and rebellion. LSM's three-stage pneumatology with its "three becomings" of Christ exemplifies the result of this situation. Gradually an inspirational word on the "sevenfold Spirit" evolved into a teaching about "Christ's full ministry in three stages" with "three becomings" of Christ. Today this constitutes part of LSM's core theology—"The High Peak of the Divine Revelation"⁴⁷—the final part of W. Lee's teaching which trumps his earlier speaking (in the "blended brothers'" view). Yet the resulting theological edifice of "three stages/becomings" lacks a firm foundation in Scripture. A kernel of truth was embellished with speculative deductions and a conjectured chronology. A molehill has been made into a mountain. Measured against Scripture, LSM's "third becoming" of Christ—intensification—is a "molehill" compared to the "twin mountain peaks" of Christ's incarnation and death/resurrection, which are essentials of the faith. Yet, in LSM's theological scheme these "three becomings" are assigned equal rank. Something's wrong here! It's time LSM's teachings were re-evaluated against Scripture. It's time Local Church leaders enlisted the aid of evangelical scholars to help them discern orthodox, biblical teachings from the unorthodox and unscriptural.

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NOTES:

1. The "Open Letter" was issued January 9, 2007 — According to the press release, "More than 70 evangelical Christian scholars and ministry leaders from seven nations have signed an unprecedented open letter asking the leadership of the "local churches" and Living Stream Ministry to withdraw unorthodox statements by their founder, Witness Lee. The letter also calls on the movement's leaders to renounce their decades-long practice of using lawsuits and threatened litigation to respond to criticism and settle disputes with Christian organizations and individuals." See: <http://www.open-letter.org/>
2. LSM issued "A Brief Response to 'An Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the 'Local Churches'" on February 11, 2007 The LSM response said (in part) "It grieves us to see passages from the ministry of Witness Lee wrenched from context. Harvest House and its authors did this repeatedly in spite of our protests, and now it seems the authors of the open letter have followed them in this practice. This falls far short of the scholarly standards that many of the signers and their institutions espouse. Even the Lord's own words can be misunderstood and misrepresented when wrenched from context (e.g., Luke 14:26). In fact, Christ's crucifixion was justified largely based on taking His words out of context (John 2:19; Matt. 26:61). It is impossible in this short space to clarify each of the quotes cited in the open letter. As mentioned, we will undertake to do that separately. In this space, we will simply present what we believe, which is the common faith delivered to all believers (Jude 3)." For more, see: <http://lctestimony.org/ResponseToOpenLetter.html>
3. Take for example the following sweeping condemnation: "Christianity, which is filled with unscriptural teachings and practices." "*An Appeal to the Young People in the Lord's Recovery*," Posted on *AFaithfulWord.org* (July 10, 2006). This statement was posted in July 2006 and still remains on this website hosted by the LSM-affiliate DCP.
4. One example of the "blended brothers" use of the phrase "the interpreted word" is: "we must recommend the use of the Life-studies and the Recovery version. We need to spend time to dig into **the interpreted word of God...**" [Minoru Chen, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3, (March 2005) p. 55 emphasis added] In this context the role of the Life-studies and footnotes is emphasized; "We all need to be helped through the Life-studies and Recovery version with the footnotes to see the intrinsic significance of the word of the Bible. The collection of footnotes in the Recovery version is a precious gem. The practical way to be educated and thus to be reconstituted with the truth is with the tools of the Life-studies and Recovery version with the footnotes." [Minoru Chen, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3, (March 2005) p. 53] Consider also the following statements by LSM-President, Benson Phillips: "Today we have the Bible in our hands, but not many believers understand the Bible. It is closed to them. However, in the Lord's recovery, we have the Bible that has been properly translated. The recovery version is probably the best translation available. We also have the ministry of the age. Through the ministry of the age, the Lord has continued to unveil His word. The ministers of the age have interpreted and given the sense that is in the Word. Today we not only have the Bible; we also have the ministry that interprets the Word of God and gives the sense of the Word." [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3 (March 2005) p. 117] Benson Phillips continues by making some striking exclusive claims: "In Nehemiah's time they had the Word, and they **had the interpretation**. They were given the sense of the Word, entering into its intrinsic significance. Today we have the same. **This takes place only in the Lord's recovery**. Everything in the publications circulated among Christians today is old. However, in our publications everything is new. The Word is opened; every page opens up the Word along with its intrinsic significance. Only here can it be said that there is such a deep and real opening of the Word." [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3 (March 2005) pp. 117-8, emphasis added] We note also the exclusive claims, "only in the Lord's recovery", "only here" etc.
5. Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God" in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 28
6. W. Lee, *God's New Testament Economy*, (1986) p. 221. This exposition is also re-printed in W. Lee's *Conclusion of the New Testament* series. Space prohibits us from analysing the development of Bro. W. Lee's teaching on this topic. We focus therefore on its final form in W. Lee's writings on this topic, in his *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification* and its elucidation by LSM's "blended brothers." This latter book assumed a greater importance due to being a part of the "High Peak of the Divine Revelation" books W. Lee authored from 1991 to 1997.
7. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 7 (LSM, September, 1996) Based on messages given by Bro. W. Lee in Anaheim, CA during April & June 1996.
8. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 7
9. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 7 It is worth pointing out that Brother W. Lee was not the only expositor to recognize the importance of 1 Cor. 15:45. See for example the writings of Christian scholars: James D. G. Dunn, "1 Cor. 15:45--Last Adam Life-giving Spirit" in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, Barnabas Lindars & Stephen S. Smalley (eds.) & "LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT": PROBING THE CENTER OF PAUL'S PNEUMATOLOGY by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, (JETS) Vol. 41, No. 4 (December 1998) pp. 573-589
10. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 7
11. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 22 This is related to the topic of the "Compound Spirit."
12. Bro. W. Lee was not the first Bible expositor to employ the term "sevenfold Spirit." Richard of St. Victor, renders Rev. 3:1 as "the sevenfold Holy Spirit" in place of "the seven Spirits of God." (RcV.) [cited by Richard Trench,

- Synonyms of the New Testament.*] With reference to the term "intensify," the LSM writers appeal to the Old Testament saying, "two instances of sevenfold intensification can be seen in Daniel 3 and Isaiah 30." [R. Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 33] Daniel 3 says "heat the furnace seven times hotter than it was usually heated" (Dan, 3:19); Isaiah 30 says, "the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days." (Isaiah 30:26)
13. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19. The quote, in context, reads: "In his Epistles Paul spoke about the Body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 1:23; 4:4, 16; Col. 2:19), but I do not believe that Paul saw the actual building up of the Body. Paul could see the church expressed in various localities, but he could not see, in actuality, the church as the Body in a perfect and complete way. In order for the Body to be produced in a full and complete way, there is the need of the third stage of Christ, the stage of intensification in which Christ becomes the sevenfold intensified Spirit. [W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19.]
 14. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19. Bro. W. Lee makes it clear that the "seven Spirits of God" do not imply seven "Persons" of the Spirit nor imply a polytheistic concept of God. He states, "In substance and existence God's Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God's operation God's Spirit is sevenfold." [W. Lee, *God's New Testament Economy*, (1986) p. 221] Moreover, Bro. W. Lee emphasizes that the "sevenfold" Spirit is a matter of God's administration or economy and not of God's "essence." In his terminology it is a matter of the "economical Trinity," not of the "essential Trinity." He writes, "in God's existence, the Spirit of God is one, but in God's economy the Spirit of God is seven in function. Essentially God's Spirit in existence is one, but economically God's Spirit has to be intensified to fulfill His function to carry out God's economy." [W. Lee, *God's New Testament Economy*, (1986) p. 222]
 15. BL, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 34
 16. BL, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 34
 17. DT, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 2, (Feb. 1998) p. 124
 18. The editors, *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 64. Along the same lines Ron Kangas says, "**None of the historic creeds and confessions** and none of today's theologies **stress adequately** five critical points concerning the Spirit of God: the Spirit who was 'not yet'..(John 7:37); the last Adam (the incarnate Christ) became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b); the compound Spirit...(Exo. 30:23-25); the Spirit of life...the compound Spirit who gives life (Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 3) and **the seven Spirits of God.**" [Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 28, emphasis added]. In this context, the "seven Spirits of God" is one of the 5 critical points not "stress(ed) adequately."
 19. BD, *The Ministry*, vol. 2 No 3 (February 1998) p. 118
 20. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 18. Along similar lines, he contends, "Not too long after the church was formed, it became degraded...Because of this degradation, the...Spirit was intensified sevenfold..." [W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 11]
 21. BL, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 31
 22. DT, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 27
 23. JL, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 52
 24. The LSM-writers assert that this is not a change in nature, but in "intensity." One "Blended brother" says, "The third stage...is **not different** from the second stage **in nature....The level, intensity**, application and administration of whatever the Spirit is doing...**is now seven times as much.**" [DT, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 2, (Feb. 1998) p. 124, emphasis added] This echoes W. Lee's caveat, "In substance and existence God's Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God's operation God's Spirit is sevenfold." [W. Lee, *God's New Testament Economy*, (1986) p. 221] Nevertheless, by presenting this as a "third becoming" and a "third stage" they imply that this event was of great significance—In terms of their theology, it marks the transition between "stages" equal in significance to the events of Christ's incarnation and resurrection.
 25. "The third stage is the intensification of the stage of inclusion. **It is not different** from the second stage **in nature...The level, intensity**, application and administration of whatever the Spirit was doing in inclusion is now seven times as much." [DT, *The Ministry*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1998) p. 124, emphasis added.]
 26. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19
 27. W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19
 28. JL, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) pp. 52-3
 29. DT, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 2 (Feb. 1998) p. 122, emphasis added
 30. DT, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 2 (Feb. 1998) p. 122
 31. BL, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 31, emphasis added The Scriptural basis offered by Bro. W. Lee for the Spirit's intensification is the title "the seven Spirits" employed in Revelation (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). W. Lee writes that John's Revelation "is very different in character from all the other Epistles in the New Testament. In this book [Revelation] Christ...has become the sevenfold intensified Spirit. In Revelation 1:4 the third of the Divine Trinity, the Spirit, becomes the seven Spirits and is ranked as the second of the Divine Trinity." [W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19] In the context of Revelation, W. Lee teaches that "this sevenfold

- intensified Spirit is for the overcoming of the degradation of the church and the producing of the overcomers so that the Body of Christ can be built up in a practical way to consummate the New Jerusalem." [W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 11]
32. BP, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3, (March 2005) p. 124. In this context, "the ministry we have been under" refers to Bro. W. Lee's ministry and "the apostles' teaching" refers to the entire New Testament. Hence, Bro. Benson equates Witness Lee's ministry & teachings with the New Testament. He also refers to Witness Lee's ministry as "the New Testament ministry in all its fullness." [Letter from Brothers Benson Phillips & Liu Suey to various Great Lakes' brothers, dated Aug. 10, 2006] The "blended brothers" show no aversion to equating Witness Lee to the Apostle Paul. For example, to quote Benson Phillips: "he [Witness Lee] said, '**We need to imitate the apostle [Paul].**' To me this means that **we need to imitate Witness Lee...**" (BP. *The Ministry*, v. 9, no. 2, February 2005, p. 107, emphasis added)
 33. W. Lee does indeed suggest that something changed related to the Trinity. He says, "In Revelation 1:4 **the third of the Divine Trinity, the Spirit**, becomes the seven Spirits and **is ranked as the second of the Divine Trinity.**" [W. Lee, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*, p. 19]. This raises the question whether the fact that the Spirit (the seven Spirits) being mentioned second (in Rev. 1:4) is merely a matter of emphasis or reflects a more fundamental change. The LSM-writers' doctrine of "three stages" and "three becomings" suggests a more fundamental change.
 34. For example, in the context of discussing "intensification," LSM's "blended brothers" comment, "In the theology of today's Christianity there is a lack of understanding concerning the overcomers. One prevailing theology is that once we are saved, we have no further problems." [EM, *The Ministry*, vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1998) p. 63]
 35. See Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 40. LSM's Senior editor, Ron Kangas writes: "However, not long after the Church came into being, it began to degrade, and the degradation gradually worsened until, in the sight of the Lord, it became intolerable. Then as the Book of Revelation makes emphatically clear, **He who has the seven Spirits of God** intervened to deal with the Church's degradation and to sound out a call for overcomers. For the producing of the church the life-giving Spirit is sufficient, but for dealing with the degradation of the Church it was necessary for **the Spirit to become the seven Spirits**, the sevenfold intensified Spirit." [Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 40, emphasis added] Notice, that the writer asserts, "**the Spirit to become the seven Spirits**, the sevenfold intensified Spirit." However, he has protected himself against the charge of alleging that the Spirit changed by also using the expression, "**He who has the seven Spirits of God.**" The latter phrase seems to suggest that **the seven Spirits of God were already in existence, even prior to the Church's decline**. Hence, this exposition clouds the issue and appears open to the charge of apparent contradiction. We note that when addressing the issue of Intensification before a theologically-informed audience, LSM's journal *Affirmation & Critique* does not address the issue of when the Spirit was intensified and makes no assertion this event occurred between the death of the Apostle Paul (circa. AD 67) and John's writing of Revelation (circa. AD 90-95).
 36. Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 33. The quote—a thesis statement—in context reads: "As we shall see...unless some *overcomers among God's people are intensified* by His Spirit, God's dispensational move, His move in this age to build up the organic Body of Christ, cannot be completed." Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 33, emphasis added. We note the absence of any discussion in this address to a theologically-informed audience of the issue --**when was the Spirit intensified sevenfold?** This silence in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique* stands in marked contrast with W. Lee's presentation in *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification* and the "blended brothers'" expositions on this topic in *The Ministry* magazine.
 37. W. Lee, *God's New Testament Economy*, (1986) p. 221
 38. W. Nee, *How to Study the Bible*, Collected Works, vol. 54, p. 143
 39. W. Nee, *The Character of the Lord's Worker*, Collected Works, vol. 52, p. 154
 40. Ron Kangas, "The Seven Spirits of God," in *Affirmation & Critique* (October, 1996) No. 4, p. 28 The quote in context reads: "**None of the historic creeds and confessions** and none of today's theologies **stress adequately** five critical points concerning the Spirit of God: the Spirit who was 'not yet'..(John 7:37); the last Adam (the incarnate Christ) became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b); the compound Spirit...(Exo. 30:23-25); the Spirit of life...the compound Spirit who gives life (Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 3) and **the seven Spirits of God.**" In this context, the "seven Spirits of God" is one of the 5 critical points not "stress(ed) adequately."
 41. The lack of literature from the wider Christian community in the libraries of local-Church believers is not surprising, given the hostile attitude conveyed by LSM's "blended brothers." Statements such as: "The books in Christianity are full of superstition, superficiality, and lukewarm theology, not to mention error in many cases. We are not part of organized Christianity." [MC, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9 No. 3, March 2005, p. 36] "Everything in the publications circulated among Christians today is old. However, in our publications everything is new." [BP, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9 No. 3, March 2005, p. 118] "**We should not bring anything of Christianity into the Lord's recovery.** We only take the faith. If some in Christianity are in the faith, then we accept them, but we accept nothing of Christianity." [BP, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9, No. 3, March. 2005, p. 121, emphasis added]

42. W. Nee, *Further Talks on the Church Life*, p. 69. The quote in context reads: "We must absolutely not cherish any thought of systematizing. **On no account should we think that the truth and gospel of God only issue forth from our midst.** (p. 69) ...When I go to many places, I am going to seek fellowship. Besides Elijah there were also many prophets. There could be several thousand Elijahs in the same place standing on the same ground. They are our brothers, and they also see that we are their brothers." (p. 70) [W. Nee, *Further Talks on the Church Life*, pp. 69-70, emphasis added]
43. In the late 1970s W. Lee used the term "one-man show." He said, "Some have said that **the Lord's recovery is a one-man show**, that there is room only for the ministry of Witness Lee, not for the ministry of anyone else. This is absolutely false. **This is not my intention nor is it my practice.**" (W. Lee, *Truth Messages*, p. 42, emphasis added) In retrospect, although W. Lee said, "this is not my intention," in fact the Recovery became a "one-man show." Moreover, the "Minister of the Age"-teaching propounded in the 1980s, justified this type of one-man show.
44. One "blended brother" proclaims, "Many times [Brother Lee] would remind us to say, 'The Bible says,' not 'Brother Lee says,' even though **what he spoke was simply what the Bible speaks.**" [EM, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9, No. 6, (June 2005) p. 179, emphasis added] The statement—"what **he [Witness Lee] spoke was simply what the Bible speaks**"—makes Bro. W. Lee's teaching equivalent to the Bible. This concept is being conveyed from LSM's podium. However, **no Bible expositor** "simply speaks what the Bible speaks." It is the expositor's understanding & interpretation.
45. The list of Christian authors, scholars and Church-leaders whose works have been reviewed and denounced in LSM's *Affirmation & Critique* includes: Warren Wiersbe, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, Bill Hybels, Philip Yancey, Charles Swindoll, Charles Colson, Bruce Wilkinson, Rick Warren & Gordon Fee. The antagonistic attitude of LSM's "blended brothers" towards the writings of Christians "outside the Recovery" is exemplified by the following quotes: "The books in Christianity are full of superstition, superficiality, and lukewarm theology, not to mention error in many cases. We are not part of organized Christianity." [MC, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9 No. 3, March 2005, p. 36] "Everything in the publications circulated among Christians today is old. However, in our publications everything is new." [BP, *The Ministry*, Vol. 9 No. 3, March 2005, p. 118] As a specific example, consider the following denunciation of Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-driven Life*: "...**The Purpose-driven Life** was written by an ingenious church-growth pastor. ...according to what the Lord has shown us, what these books present is **merely methodology and philosophy.** This is not what we need." [MC., *The Ministry*, vol. 8, no. 7, (July/Aug. 2004,) p. 92, emphasis added]
46. The asymmetry, pointed out above, between the standards applied to other Christian authors by LSM's *Affirmation & Critique* and their "kid-glove" handling of the teachings expounded in Bro. W. Lee's book, *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification* exemplifies this statement. If LSM's *Affirmation & Critique* subjected the writings of Bro. W. Lee to the same standards of evaluation which they apply to other Christian authors wouldn't they critically examine the Scriptural basis for the "three stages" and "three becomings" in *Incarnation, Inclusion & Intensification*? Wouldn't they address the speculative nature of the chronology it proposes? Instead they adroitly avoid these issues, giving W. Lee "a free pass," a *carte blanche* affirmation.
47. What LSM terms the "High Peak of the Divine Revelation" consists of Witness Lee's spoken ministry during his final years, 1991-7. According to LSM's website, "Beginning from the 1991 Winter Training on the *Life-study of Jeremiah*, Brother Lee's remaining years of ministry focused on what he called the high peak of the divine revelation: *that God became man in order that man might become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.*" The LSM lists approx. 50 books by Witness Lee that fall in this category. The "High Peak" Books constitute ten-percent of the 474 titles by W. Lee which LSM lists.