

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

Misaiming concerning the Triune God and the incarnation of Christ: “If a statement in and of itself is heretical, it will remain heretical even when it is viewed in its original context. Hundreds of examples could be cited; here is just one:

...the entire Godhead, the Triune God, became flesh.

Though that is just part of a sentence, no amount of explanation or context can change the fact that Witness Lee taught that the *entire* Trinity became flesh. He taught this repeatedly, making himself dogmatically clear when he said:

God was just God in eternity past, but one day the entire God, the complete God in the second person of His divine Trinity, became incarnated...The Triune God entered into a human virgin’s womb and stayed there for nine months.

Such a teaching is utterly foreign to biblical Christianity” (Harvest House Publishers, http://harvesthousepublishers.com/about_cstatement7.cfm).

Truth: We should first situate in context and then comment on the sources of the quotations used by the Harvest House writers. Reproduced here is the paragraph, in its entirety, in *God’s New Testament Economy* from which the first quotation is extracted, which appears here in italics:

According to our thinking the Son became flesh and the Son was the One who was manifested in the flesh. The Bible, however, tells us that the Word became flesh and that the Word was God. John 1:1 does not say that the Word was the Son, but that the Word was God. Do you believe that only one-third of God became flesh, one-third remained on the throne, and one-third was as a dove soaring in the heavens? The Bible does not divide God, the entire God, into thirds. Paul also tells us in 1 Timothy 3:16 that God was manifested in the flesh. This again shows us that *the entire Godhead, the Triune God, became flesh*. Economically speaking, God became flesh in the Son. This One who was conceived of the Holy Spirit was born to be a God-man. We cannot say that this God-man is the Son-man. This God-man is the Triune God-man. We believe that Jesus was the complete God and the perfect

man. He was the Father, Son, and the Spirit-man. He lived on earth as the Triune God for thirty years before the beginning of His earthly ministry. In those thirty years, He was mainly a carpenter in Nazareth. While He was doing His carpentry, the Father was there with Him (John 16:32). Also, while the Father was with Him He did everything by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28). He is a wonderful Person. (218)

Since this passage, taken from chapter 10, is a continuation of the author’s thought concerning the incarnation, it is worthwhile to refer to the line of thought from chapter 2 here:

The first crucial item of God’s New Testament economy is the incarnation of the Word...The Word as God’s definition, God’s expression, and God’s embodiment, became flesh. The Word...needed to be embodied further in a Person, and this Person was God the Son...When the Word became flesh, He was sent by God and with God (John 7:29). When the sent One came, He came with the sending One. When the Son came by becoming a man, He came with the Father...The Son came not only from the Father, but also with the Father...When the Son came, He did not leave the Father in the heavens on the throne...Our concept has been that when the Son came to the earth, He left the Father sitting on the throne. We all must see that when the Father sent the Son, He sent the Son with Himself. The Son indwells us (2 Cor. 13:5) and the Father does also (Eph. 4:6)...We must also realize that while the Father is with the Son and in the Son, He is also on the throne. The two are distinct, yet not separate...God the Father was with Jesus on the earth and at the same time He was on the throne...Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:18 and 20 also show us that the Son came by the Spirit...When the Son came, He came with the Father. When He worked, He worked by the Spirit...In Him we see the Father, the Son, and the Spirit...The entire New Testament is an unveiling of such a unique Person who is the embodiment of the Triune God in a Man...In this perfect Man, Jesus Christ, is the Father, the Son, the Spirit—the complete God...He is the embodiment of the Son, with the Father, by the Spirit. (23-27)

The second quotation in the statement by Harvest House is taken from *The Organic Building Up of the*

Churches as the Body of Christ to Be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God. The following excerpt provides the context of this quotation, which appears here in italics:

The essence of the church is the divine life, and the divine life is Christ as the very embodiment of the processed Triune God (John 14:6; Col. 2:9). *God was just God in eternity past, but one day the entire God, the complete God in the second person of His divine Trinity, became incarnated.* Incarnation is a wonderful process whereby God entered into man. *The Triune God entered into a human virgin's womb and stayed there for nine months.* It was by this wonderful process that He put man upon Himself and that He Himself became a man. God with His divine Trinity was embodied in a man. (11-12)

We should note that such a teaching concerning the involvement of the Triune God in the incarnation of Christ, far from being idle speculation, is based on the Scriptures, especially the Gospel of John. If we would have the proper understanding of what Witness Lee is saying, we need a spiritual understanding of the profound revelation of the Triune God in the Gospel of John and then compare this revelation with what is alleged to be “biblical Christianity.”

It should be made clear at the outset that Harvest House Publishers is accusing Witness Lee of heresy regarding the Triune God. Also, Harvest House, in making this accusation, assumes the position of upholding what is called “biblical Christianity.” Two things should be noted here. First, Harvest House speaks not of truth or of the divine revelation in the Word of God or of the common faith unveiled in the Scriptures, the faith delivered once for all to the saints (Jude 3), indicating thereby that their intention is to testify not of the truth in the Scriptures but of a traditional theological notion that is supposedly in keeping with “biblical Christianity.” The second point concerns the fact that Christianity has become a formal religion characterized by organization, the system of clergy and laity, virtually numberless divisions, and doctrines that deviate from the teaching and fellowship of the apostles (Acts 2:42). Such a religious entity cannot in any legitimate sense be classified as biblical. The Word of God should not be twisted to support a so-called “biblical Christianity”; rather, its revealed divine truth concerning the Triune God and the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God should be embraced and testified. The crucial question, therefore, is this: What does the Bible teach regarding the incarnation of Christ in relation to the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? Our answer to this question, although necessarily brief, will demonstrate that Witness Lee teaches the truth about God and Christ and that Harvest House,

perhaps unintentionally and unconsciously, actually promulgates the heresy of tritheism, the erroneous idea that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separated and thus are three distinct Gods. No misaiming, no departure from the truth, is more serious than this.

The Bible reveals that there is one true and living God and that the true God is three-one, triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. All three are God, all three are eternal, all three coexist, and all three coinhere. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three temporary and successive modes of the manifestation of the one God (the heresy of modalism), and neither are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit three Gods (the heresy of tritheism). Central to the proper understanding of the truth concerning God is that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, although distinct in the Godhead, are inseparable. Where one is, there the others are. To suggest otherwise would be to divide the Godhead into thirds and fall into the heresy of tritheism.

The New Testament clearly and emphatically reveals that “the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14), for “God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him” (v. 9). God sent “His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin” (Rom. 8:3). “When the fullness of the time came,” Paul declares in Galatians 4:4, “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law.” This was according to “the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

But how did God send the Son, and in what way did the Son of God become a human being? Did the Father send the Son by separating Himself from the Son and sending the Son into the world apart from Him? Absolutely not! Although God sent the Son, He Himself came in and with the Son, for the Father and the Son, being inseparable, coinhere, that is, dwell in one another. Where the Son is, there the Father is also. To deny this is to separate the Son from the Father and thus to teach tritheism. To know the truth we need simply to consider the words of the Lord Jesus in John 14: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works” (v. 10). When the Son of God was on earth speaking to Philip, the Father was in Him. When the Son of God was working on earth, the Father, who was abiding in Him, was doing His works. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came in the flesh, and the Father was in Him (not only in the heavens). Regarding this, we should obey the Lord’s command: “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me” (v. 11). Sadly, many who profess to be regenerated believers in Christ neither believe this nor know it. To them the Lord’s

word in John 10 is applicable: “Even if you do not believe Me, believe the works so that you may come to know and continue to know that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father” (v. 38). The Father was embodied and expressed in the incarnated Son of God.

The question of how the Son of God became a human being is answered in Matthew 1. Verse 18 tells us that Mary “was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word rendered *of* literally means “out of,” referring to the source. Hence, *of the Holy Spirit* denotes the Holy Spirit as the unique source. This point is reinforced in verse 20, where we are told that “that which has been begotten in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit.” To be sure, Christ was born of Mary (v. 16), but He was a child of the Holy Spirit, with His birth being directly of the Holy Spirit. If we realize this, we will understand that His source was the Holy Spirit and that His element was divine. As a child of the Holy Spirit, He was truly the God-man—a wonderful person who is the complete God and a perfect man. We have the same thought in Luke 1. The angel Gabriel informed Mary that she would conceive in her womb and bear a son—Jesus—who would be called Son of the Most High (vv. 31-32). When she asked how such a thing could take place, Gabriel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God” (v. 35). The Holy Spirit, who cannot be separated from the Father and Son, was clearly involved in the incarnation of Christ.

With such portions of the Word before us, we testify that through incarnation the Son of God came with the Father and by the Spirit. Yes, God sent His Son, and this beloved Son became the Son of Man, but the Father came in the Son and with the Son. Furthermore, the Son came by the Spirit. Since the Father came in and with the Son and the Son came by the Holy Spirit, we believe and testify according to the Scriptures that the entire Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—was involved in the incarnation of Christ. When the Son came, the Triune God came, for the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are inseparably one.

Although we believe that it was the Son of God and not the Father or the Spirit who was incarnated, we need to see that the New Testament does not actually say that the Son was incarnated. Rather, the Word of God says that the Word became flesh, that God was manifested in the flesh, and that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily. The Word, who is God, became flesh (John 1:1, 14). The God, who is the Word, is not a partial God or one-third of God, but the entire God—God the Son, God the Father, and God

the Spirit. The New Testament does not say that the Word, who became flesh, was God the Son. Rather, the whole revelation in the Gospel of John indicates that the Word, who was in the beginning, was the entire Triune God—the Son with the Father and by the Spirit.

This understanding is strengthened by 1 Timothy 3:16, which testifies that God was manifested in the flesh. In His incarnation Christ is God manifested in the flesh. He was manifested in the flesh not only as the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Regarding this, we need to be impressed with the fact that the New Testament does not say that the Son of God was incarnated; it says that God was manifested in the flesh. The entire God rather than only the Son of God participated in Christ’s incarnation; hence, in His incarnation Christ is the entire God manifested in the flesh.

Perhaps the most powerful and convincing biblical testimony of this is found in Colossians 2:9: “In Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” To be sure, *all the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The fact that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not only the Son of God but also the entire God. He is the embodiment of the Triune God; the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—the three distinct yet inseparable persons of the triune Godhead—are all embodied in Him. For eternity, the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily.

The Bible reveals not only that Christ is the infinite God but also that He is the complete God. This means that Christ is not merely one-third of God—God the Son—but the totality of God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. For Christ to be the complete God means that He is the Triune God. When Christ was incarnated, the entire Triune God, who was embodied in the Son, was involved, for the Son of God came to be a human being with the Father and by the Spirit. This is the truth concerning the true and living Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in His participation in and involvement with the incarnation of Christ the Son.

The Harvest House writers have accused Witness Lee of heresy for teaching that the complete God, the entire Triune God, participated in the incarnation of Christ. In fact, there is nothing heretical in the assertion that Christ the Son became a man through

incarnation with the Father and by the Spirit, for this is the clear testimony of the Word of God. Ironically, a strong case can be made that Harvest House itself promulgates heresy concerning the Triune God. By denying the scriptural revelation that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were all involved in Christ's incarnation, Harvest House seemingly has separated the Son from the Father and the Spirit, thereby dividing the Godhead into thirds, into three separate entities, and thus has fallen into the grave error of tritheism. Such theological notions are surely what Harvest House supposes to be "biblical Christianity."

Misaiming concerning the Lord's Description of the Condition of the Church: "We disagree with The Local Church's description of Christianity as 'a human religion saturated with demonic and satanic things'" (Harvest House Publishers, http://harvesthousepublishers.com/about_cstatement7.cfm).

Truth: The misaiming here is not that Harvest House disagrees with a certain description of fallen and degraded Christianity, for they are fully free to disagree with any theological statement, and they can certainly disagree with the expression cited above. The misaiming consists in the fact that Harvest House disagrees with the Lord Jesus and with His prophetic word. In an effort to establish this claim, we will first examine the context from which the quotation is excerpted and then show from the New Testament, in a brief, initial way, that Harvest House apparently disagrees with the Lord's assessment of the corrupted church, commonly known as Christianity.

The thesis of *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* is that God has an economy, a plan to carry out His eternal intention to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people and thereby make them His organic, corporate expression—the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem. Furthermore, the New Testament reveals not only this economy itself but also the way ordained by God to practice and carry out the divine economy. This way is in many respects contrary to the traditional practices in formal, organized Christianity, or we may say that various practices in deformed and degraded Christianity are deviations, if not contradictions, of the way ordained by God. If we would be faithful to the God-revealed economy and the God-ordained way to practice it, we need to abandon all unbiblical teachings, systems, and practices and return to the scriptural way to serve God and to meet together as believers in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The quotation is taken from chapter three, "The Deformed and Degraded Christianity," which compares

"what is seen in the Bible with what is seen today in Christianity" (25). "The deformed and degraded Christianity," we read on page 28, "has left the God-ordained way for carrying out the New Testament economy," because Christianity, as a religious system, takes a way that is compatible not with divine revelation but with human cultural and religious tradition. A fuller context of the quotation used by Harvest House, which is italicized, appears below:

This degraded religious system takes the natural, human, traditional, cultural, and religious way. Humanly speaking, religion is a good thing, but spiritually speaking it is something against God's economy. God does not want a religion, but He surely wants to see His economy accomplished. We are not here for religion but for God's economy, which is to propagate His completed Christ to produce the church as the Body of such a Christ. Christianity is not focused on the divine economy but is *a human religion saturated with demonic and satanic things*. This natural, human, traditional, and cultural religion is full of organizations. Without organizations, Christianity could not survive. The Catholic Church and all the denominations depend upon organization....Organization kills. We trust in the living Spirit. The church as the Body of Christ should be a divine organism full of the living Spirit. (28-29)

Harvest House disagrees with this, and we respect their right to do so.

This description of degraded Christianity in *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* is based upon the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in the Scriptures, especially certain of His prophetic utterances found in the books of Matthew and Revelation.

Many serious and faithful students of the Bible regard the three parables in Matthew 13:24-43 as a prophetic history of the church in its degradation throughout the centuries. In the parable of the tares (vv. 24-30, 36-43) we read of the tares, the false believers, the nominal Christians, those who are not truly the regenerated children of God. It cannot reasonably be denied that in many of the major Protestant denominations, there are false believers among both clergy and laity, some of whom are highly-ranked ecclesiastical figures who publish books attacking the essentials of the faith. The parable in verses 31 and 32 describes the mutation, actually the transmutation, of the church from an herb into a great "tree," in the branches of which all manner of evil spirits and evil persons come and roost. Surely, this is not the church—"My church"—spoken of in Matthew 16:18. Moreover, according to the parable in 13:33, the church, which should be a loaf formed

of unleavened fine flour (1 Cor. 5:7-8), has been thoroughly permeated with the “leaven” of erroneous teachings and evil practices. Tares, the great tree, leaven—these all signify aspects of degraded Christianity, a corrupted religious system, in its historical development and present condition.

The Lord’s word in Revelation 2 and 3 is strikingly parallel to His word in Matthew 13. We agree with numerous students of the Bible in regarding these chapters as delineating a prophetic history of the church, that is, a picture of how genuine local churches as expressions of the unique, universal Body of Christ would, under the influence of Satan, the world, and religion, develop into degraded religious entities. It was the Lord Jesus Himself who spoke of the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9), “the teaching of Balaam” (2:14), “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (v. 15), “the woman Jezebel” (v. 20), and “the deep things of Satan” (v. 24). It was the Lord Jesus Himself who declared, “You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead” (3:1); “I have found none of your works completed before My God” (v. 2); “because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth” (v. 16); and, as the One outside the church, “behold, I stand at the door and knock” (v. 20). All believers in Christ today, especially those who participate in some kind of religious activities, should

read these words with sobriety, opening to the Lord for His enlightening and to the Spirit for His application. It is with such portions of the Word as our basis that, in faithfulness to the Lord, we must stand with Him in His indictment and judgment, not of fellow believers but of the deformed and degraded situation of deformed and degraded Christianity. Although we embrace the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and we receive all true believers in Christ—that is, all whom God and Christ have received (Rom. 14:1, 3; 15:7)—we must simultaneously echo the Lord’s word concerning organized, religious Christianity in its deviation, deformation, and degradation.

In this brief response to a misaiming, we cannot touch a crucial portion of the Word related to the consummate exhibition of deformed and degraded Christianity—chapter 17 of the book of Revelation, especially the section about the woman riding the beast. A fairly recent book (still in print) on the subject was written by Dave Hunt and bears the title *A Woman Rides the Beast: The Roman Catholic Church and the Last Days*. Significantly (but perhaps inconsistently) this book is published by Harvest House Publishers.

by the Editors

Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the Bible *(continued from p. 71)*

on the earth, also in the Son (Luke 2:49) and by the Spirit (Luke 4:1; Matt. 12:28). At the beginning of the Son’s ministry on the earth, the Father anointed the Son with the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 4:18) in order that He might reach men and bring them back to Him. Just before He was crucified in the flesh and resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), He unveiled His mysterious trinity to His disciples in plain words (John 14—17), stating that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son (John 14:9-11), that the Spirit is the transfiguration of the Son (John 14:16-20), that the three, coexisting and coinhering simultaneously, are abiding with the believers for their enjoyment (John 14:23; 17:21-23), and that all that the Father has is the Son’s and all that the Son possesses is received by the Spirit to be declared to the believers (John 16:13-15). Such a Trinity is altogether related to the dispensing of the processed God into His believers (John 14:17, 20; 15:4-5) that they may be one in and with the Triune God (John 17:21-23).

...In the book of Revelation [John] blessed the churches in different localities with grace and peace from God the Father, Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from God the Spirit, the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from God the Son, Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:4-5). John’s blessing given to the churches indicated also that the processed Triune God, in all He is as the eternal Father, in all He is able to do as the sevenfold intensified Spirit, and in all He has attained and obtained as the anointed Son, is for the believers’ enjoyment, that they may be His corporate testimony as the golden lampstands (Rev. 1:9, 11, 20).

Thus, it is evident that the divine revelation of the trinity of the Godhead in the holy Word, from Genesis through Revelation, is not for theological study but for the apprehending of how God in His mysterious and marvelous trinity dispenses Himself into His chosen people, that we as His chosen and redeemed people may, as indicated in the apostle’s blessing to the Corinthian believers, participate in, experience, enjoy, and possess the processed Triune God now and for eternity. Amen.