

A FAITHFUL WORD

SERIES THREE

“A Chosen Vessel to Me”

**THE
MINISTER OF
THE AGE
AND THE
WISE
MASTER
BUILDER**

Book

2

DEFENSE & CONFIRMATION PROJECT

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Phil. 1:7 – Even as it is right for me to think this concerning you all because you have me in your heart, since both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you are all fellow partakers with me of grace.

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PREFACE

Acts 9:15 – But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.

In March 1986 Brother Lee released a crucial series of messages published in which he showed that throughout the record of the Bible and throughout church history in every age God gives only one vision to man (Acts 26:19).¹ This *vision of the age* constitutes the present advance of the revelation or the recovery of the revelation contained in the Bible that God intends to govern the life and service of His people in that age. Watchman Nee defined *the ministry of the age* as the service which carries out the particular recovery and work in an age. In other words, the ministry of the age is the service that carries out the vision of the age. When God releases the vision of the age to govern and be carried out by the ministry of the age, he does so through a particular vessel (Acts 9:15). The vessel chosen by the Lord to release His up-to-date vision and to take the lead in His ministry is *the minister of the age*.

The month before releasing these messages Brother Lee had fellowshipped in the elders' trainings that there should be only one trumpet in the ministry in the Lord's recovery,² that all of the ones serving as co-workers and elders should labor according to the leading of the wise master builder,³ and that all of the brothers participating in the ministry should be restricted in one publication for the sake of preserving the oneness of God's building.⁴ The Apostle Paul referred to himself as a wise master builder (1 Cor. 3:10). A wise master builder is a person who has the complete blueprint of the building of God, who releases that blueprint as the vision of the age, and who

¹ *The Vision of the Age*.

² *Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, pp. 75-89.

³ *Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, pp. 91-105.

⁴ *Elders' Training, Book 8: The Life-pulse of the Lord's Present Move*, pp. 161-164.

oversees the building of God's house according to that blueprint. Thus, the minister of the age is at least in principle a wise master builder.

Today some have risen up in the principle of the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16), attacking the uniqueness of the vision of the age, the ministry of the age, and minister of the age. By subtly redefining these terms, they seek to assert a special position for themselves and their kind of ministry and to tear down the leadership in the ministry in the Lord's recovery today. Because of this, it is important that all of the saints be educated to know the meaning of these terms—*the vision of the age, the ministry of the age, the minister of the age, and the wise master builder*—as they have been used in the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and by the co-workers in the Lord's recovery today and to see how they apply to our present situation.

This book contains articles by Brothers Bob Danker and Kerry Robichaux. Bob Danker's article first reviews the biblical record concerning the minister of the age and the wise master builder and shows the danger of having different companies of workers doing independent works. He then shows the need for all of the workers to serve under a common vision and examines the way in which Brother Lee co-labored with Watchman Nee as a pattern given to us by the Lord. The article by Kerry Robichaux evaluates the claim that Watchman Nee taught that there is no unique minister of the age.

ON THE MINISTER OF THE AGE AND THE WISE MASTER BUILDER

Introduction

After the blended co-workers issued their statement *Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery* in July 2005, a number of dissenting writings have appeared and been propagated through the Internet. These writings attempt to annul certain scriptural principles that are vital for the practical oneness in the Lord's recovery. These principles relate to three crucial matters: (1) being restricted in one publication for the testimony of our oneness in the Body of Christ and for the preservation of the integrity of the Lord's ministry among us; (2) the scriptural revelation that in every age God gives His people only one vision through one ministry and one minister of the age; and (3) the fact that in God's economy there is only one wise master builder, a unique person who unveils the design of God's building and is qualified to superintend the building work. The intent of the dissenting ones is obvious—to justify the existence of separate works in the recovery involving different companies of workers under different leaderships with different teachings and different ways of carrying out the recovery, including multiple publication works to spread the different teachings and views. This is absolutely contrary to the divine revelation in the Scriptures. As Brother Lee pointed out, if such a situation were allowed to exist in the recovery, the result would be confusion and ultimately division.

In an article entitled “One, Unique ‘Minister of the Age’? — What did Watchman Nee Teach?” the author selectively quotes Watchman Nee's writings and then distorts the meaning of Brother Nee's words in an attempt to convince his readers that the vision given by God to His people in a particular age and the ministry of that age do not belong to any one person who can be considered the minister of the age. In another article entitled “A Unique Wise Master Builder of the Age,” the author, a different brother from the first, puts forth his personal interpretation of

the Scriptures to “prove” that there is no such thing as one wise master builder in God’s unique building work.

It is noteworthy that neither of the above-mentioned articles refers to the writings of Witness Lee on the matters in question. This is reprehensible, since Brother Lee provided the interpretation of the Scriptures on which the recovery stands firmly today. Brother Lee had much to say concerning the vision of the age, the ministry of the age, the minister of the age, and the wise master builder in the building of God, all of which are crucial in the carrying out of the one work in God’s economy for the building up of His organism, the Body of Christ. The authors’ setting aside of Brother Lee’s ministry on such crucial matters appears to indicate that they have no intention to practice the Lord’s recovery under the complete vision presented to us by our brother. It may also indicate that they are attempting to deceive the unsuspecting saints by hiding the fact that their teaching is in direct conflict with the teaching of Brother Lee, whose ministry brought the Lord’s recovery to us and has maintained us in the recovery to this day.

In the paragraphs that follow I do not address the matter of one publication; this has been ably addressed by others. I limit my comments to the minister of the age and the one wise master builder in God’s unique building. I have made no attempt to be exhaustive in my treatment of these subjects, but have only tried to present the plain truth as I have received it from the ministry of Brother Nee and Brother Lee, to whom I am unashamedly indebted for opening the Word of God on these and countless other matters related to the truth and practice of God’s economy.

The Vision of the Age and the Minister of the Age

A significant body of Brother Lee’s writing regarding the vision of the age, the ministry of the age, and the minister of the age is found in *The Vision of the Age*, published by Living Stream Ministry (1997). Concerning the fact that in any age God gives His people only one vision for that age, Brother Lee’s words, based on the consistent revelation of the Bible, are very clear.

On page 11 he says, "We have to see that in every age, God gives only one vision to man." On page 13 he says, "We must be clear that in every age there is the vision of that age. We have to serve God according to the vision of the age," and on page 21 he says, "There is a great controversy in Christianity about this matter of one vision for one age. However, God's Word reveals to us clearly that in every age there is only one vision." Finally, on page 23 we find this unmistakably clear statement: "The Bible shows us clearly that in every age God gives only one vision to man." God, His people, His purpose, and His move to accomplish His purpose are all one. To preserve the oneness and the one accord among His people for the sake of His one move to accomplish His one purpose, God gives His people only one vision in every age.

Furthermore, as the Scriptures clearly show, He conveys His unique vision through only one man. In *The Vision of the Age* Brother Lee gives a brief overview of the visions given by God to His people in each age (pp. 11, 31-36). Along with the vision, he mentions the unique person recorded in the Scriptures through whom God gave the vision to His people. These unique persons, all of whom were ministers of the age, include Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the judges, Samuel, David, and the prophets. The vision each received from God did not annul any of the visions received in previous generations. On the contrary, each inherited all the visions given to his predecessors and lived under these visions; in addition, he went on to see something further.

Turning from the Old Testament to the New Testament, on page 21 Brother Lee says, "We see clearly from the revelation of the New Testament that when the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was acting under the vision. Outside His leading, there was no vision." This indicates that the Lord Jesus was the minister of His age. He inherited all the visions of the previous ages and also brought in the vision that matched His age. After the Lord completed His portion of the New Testament ministry, Peter and his co-workers were under the vision. Brother Lee says,

“After the Lord’s ascension, it was Peter and his co-workers who were under the vision. We are not saying that Peter had one vision, and John, James, and the other apostles had another vision. There was only one vision, which was the vision of Peter. This vision became the vision of his followers” (p. 21). These statements are echoed by Brother Lee on page 111 of *Elders’ Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord’s Move*:

In the book of Acts there are two sections. Chapters one through twelve are the first section, and chapters thirteen through twenty-eight are the second section. In the first twelve chapters the Lord’s move with one accord was according to Peter’s teaching. At that time, John was there also, but the teaching was not given through two persons. It was given through Peter. Even though John went with Peter and was with Peter much of the time, the mouthpiece was only one. There is no message recorded in Acts that was given by John. Acts 2:42 says, “They were continuing steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles.” In this verse “apostles” is plural, but we must realize that the mouthpiece in giving the teachings was one.

Peter’s vision inherited and expanded the vision given through the Lord Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20).

In the second part of Acts, Paul was raised up by the Lord to continue the New Testament ministry. In accordance with the facts in the Scriptures, Brother Lee says of Paul, “Although Paul had many co-workers, no one except him saw any other vision. They all had one vision, which was the vision that Paul saw” (*The Vision of the Age*, p. 21). It is clear, then, that in the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, only one man was used by God to bring His vision to His people in a particular age. Since Peter was the one who brought in the vision of his age, he was the minister of that age. Paul continued Peter in the ministry of the age and saw something much higher than what Peter saw.

Concerning the vision in the Lord’s recovery, beginning from the time of Martin Luther, Brother Lee said:

At the time of the Reformation in the 1520s, when Luther was raised up, anyone who wanted to serve under a vision had to join himself to Luther. In the seventeenth century, anyone who wanted to serve under a vision had to join himself to

Madame Guyon. In the eighteenth century, anyone who wanted to serve under a vision had to join himself to Zinzendorf. Even John Wesley received help from Zinzendorf. In the nineteenth century, J. N. Darby took the lead among the Brethren, and the vision was with him. In the twentieth century, the vision came to us. (p. 27)

According to Brother Lee's application of the scriptural principle and his evaluation of church history, he considered Martin Luther, Madam Guyon, Zinzendorf, J. N. Darby, and "us" (Watchman Nee and Witness Lee) all ministers of their respective ages. Although there were others who ministered in those ages, their ministry cannot be considered the ministry of the age, and hence those ministers cannot be considered the minister of the age. This is in full harmony with Watchman Nee's words in *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 57: *The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, pages 260-261:

In the Old Testament, both Solomon and David represented the Lord. The two persons represented the one ministry in two separate ways. In the Old Testament, there were many ministries. After Moses, the judges were raised up. After that, there was Solomon, the kings, and the prophets. After the Israelites were taken into captivity, the vessels for the recovery were raised up. The Old Testament is filled with different kinds of ministries. In every age, there is the ministry of that age. These ministries of the ages are different from the local ministers. Luther was a minister of his age. Darby was also a minister of his age. In every age, the Lord has special things that He wants to accomplish. He has His own recoveries and His own works to do. The particular recovery and work that He is doing in one age is the ministry of that age.

A careful and unbiased reading of Brother Nee's words indicates that, according to Brother Nee's view, in every age there is the ministry of that age. Not only so, the ministry of a particular age is associated with one particular person, who is the minister of that age. Brother Nee mentioned Moses, the judges, the kings, including David and Solomon, the prophets, the vessels for the recovery, Luther, and Darby as ministers of the age. Although there were what Brother Nee calls "local ministers," the ministry of these local ministers was different from the ministry of the age. That is to say, there is a distinction between the local

ministers and the minister of the age. God raises up the minister of the age to convey His unique vision for that age to all His people on the earth. In order for God to accomplish what He desires to accomplish in a particular age, all those who serve Him must enter into the vision of the age and serve under that vision.

Concerning Watchman Nee and himself, Brother Lee offered this sobering word:

I hope that you will clearly see the vision of the Lord's recovery and will follow this vision. You are not following me as a person. Sister Faith Chang can testify for me. She witnessed how I followed Brother Nee absolutely, yet I was not following the person; I was following the vision that he saw. In that age, the vision that came up to God's standard was the vision that Brother Nee saw. If you remained in that vision, you were serving according to the vision. If you did not remain in that vision, you were not serving according to the vision. Today Brother Nee has passed away. I have no intention to make a new start, but the Lord has commissioned me with this ministry. I can only take the lead willingly and obediently. The vision that I have brought to you today is God's vision for this age. If you remain in this vision, you are serving according to the vision. If you do not remain in this vision, you should be aware of what your end will be. (*The Vision of the Age*, p. 52)

This and many other passages in Brother Lee's writings indicate that he considered both Watchman Nee and himself to be the ones who passed on to God's people the vision of the present age.

One Wise Master Builder

Brother Lee's teaching concerning the one wise master builder in God's building work is related to the matter of the minister of the age. Based on the New Testament revelation, Brother Lee taught clearly that in the work of God's building, as seen in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there is only one wise master builder in every age. In *Words of Training for the New Way*, volume 1, pages 21-22, Brother Lee said concerning the one ministry, the many ministers in that ministry, and the one master builder:

Throughout the generations there has been the work of the Lord's move. In the Old Testament, during Noah's age, the Lord's move was the building of the ark. This work of building the ark was the ministry in Noah's age. Noah was the chief minister in that ministry. However, just by Noah alone, there was no way to build the ark. At that time, there must have been some who built the ark together with Noah. The work of building the ark was the ministry in that age. Do you think that in that ministry there were two or more different works, or two or more groups of different people, or two or more different leaderships? Certainly not; otherwise, the ark could never have been built.

The Bible shows us very clearly that in Noah's age there was only one ministry; yet many ministers were there together building the ark. This does not mean that every minister was a master builder. Only Noah was the leader in the ministry of building the ark.

During the age of Moses, God desired to build the tabernacle with its furniture, the most important of which was the ark. Moses himself alone could not have built all those things, but he had the ministry of building the tabernacle, which was the work to fulfill God's unique purpose. In this ministry, there was not only Moses himself; Moses was one of the ministers, and, undeniably, he was the leading one in that ministry. If there had been other leaders besides Moses, there would have been confusion in that situation.

During the age of David and Solomon, God desired to build the temple. The building of the temple was not merely a work, but a ministry. At that time, there were not two different ministries building the temple; hence, there were not two different leaderships. In David's age, it was David who was taking the lead. After David passed away, Solomon was the one taking the lead. However, anyone who had a part in the ministry of building the temple, including the stone-cutters and stone-movers, was a minister in that ministry.

From these words we can conclude that Noah, Moses, David, and Solomon were all master builders in their respective ages. In addition, there was only one group of workers who labored together in the same ministry under the one leadership of the unique master builder.

In *The Vision of the Age*, on pages 29 and 30 Brother Lee said:

According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it....For another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid..." (1 Cor. 3:10-11). This means that anyone who does not build upon Paul's foundation is not serving according to the vision. In the eyes of man, this is too presumptuous, but Paul was not apogetic at all. He said that he was a wise master builder. He had given everyone the blueprint of the building, and he was supervising the building work. The phrase *master builder* here is *architekton* in Greek. It denotes a person who has the blueprint and builds and supervises the building according to the blueprint. The anglicized form of this word is *architect*. We know that in construction, the only person whose word counts is the architect's. This was Paul's position. No one else's word counts; only Paul's word counts because he had the blueprint.

We see the same thing at the time of Moses. Moses received the pattern of the tabernacle from God, and he supervised the building work. Moses was the one who had the dimensions of the tabernacle and the ways to construct it with all the utensils. In the building of the tabernacle, only his word counted; no one else's word counted. If everyone would have had his say in that work, I am afraid there would have been a hundred or two hundred different kinds of tabernacles. This is the situation with Christianity today...No one is building according to the blueprint that Paul received; no one is building according to the revelation of the Bible. Everyone is building according to his own desire.

There is only one blueprint and one master builder in the proper, correct building. The only master builder is the architect who has the blueprint in his hand. This is true in every age. The Lord issues the blueprint, the revelation, and the utterance, and through one man He supervises and completes the building work. All those who do not build, speak, or serve according to the blueprint released by the Lord through that man are void of light and revelation and are not serving according to the vision. Today in the Lord's recovery, some are preaching and publishing messages. The portions in their messages that impart light, revelation, and the life supply invariably derive their source from this ministry in the Lord's recovery. Other than those portions, there is no revelation or vision in their writings.

In *Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, page 96, Brother Lee said:

In 1 Corinthians 3:10 Paul says that he is a 'master builder.' The Greek word for master builder is *architecton*. The English word 'architect' is the anglicized form of this word. An architect is one who designs the building and superintends its construction. In chapter five we saw who the apostles are, but not all the apostles are master builders. With a building, there cannot be two master builders. That would bring in confusion. A master builder may have a helper, though. Likewise, in an army there cannot be two commanders in chief. A commander in chief may have someone who is second in command, but he is the one in charge of all the troops. Not all the apostles are wise master builders. Paul said that according to the grace of God given to him, he was a wise master builder (3:10).

These words of our brother make it abundantly clear that in every age God does not give His vision, the design of His building, to two men; He gives it to only one man. The man who holds the blueprint of God's building and supervises the building work is the wise master builder; he is the minister of the age. In God's unique work of building His eternal habitation, only the word of the master builder counts. Anyone who speaks for God in any particular age must speak according to the design and the blueprint that the master builder has unveiled. God does not give other ministers their own light and revelation. All the ministers in a particular age must enter fully into the vision of that age, speak only the contents of the unique vision, and carry out their portion of the building work strictly according to that vision. This is a strong principle that holds in every age, including today.

The Peril of Having Different Companies of Workers

On page 21 of *The Vision of the Age*, Brother Lee mentions two companies of workers, the company of Peter and his co-workers and the company of Paul and his co-workers. Brother Lee taught clearly that in Peter's age, only Peter saw the vision, and all his co-workers served under his vision. The same was true of Paul. No one except Paul saw any other vision from God. All Paul's co-workers served under the vision that Paul saw.

Peter, James, and Paul were contemporaries. In the first part of Acts, Peter was the minister of the age. The apostles' teaching at that time was Peter's teaching. However, in the second part of Acts, Paul was raised up by the Lord to unveil a further vision to His people. The vision that Paul saw was more advanced than what Peter saw. What Paul saw was mainly related to God's eternal economy, which is His plan to dispense Himself in the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit into His chosen and redeemed people for the building up of His unique organism, the Body of Christ. Only Paul's Epistles use the terms *God's economy* and *the Body of Christ*. There is no record that Peter ever used these terms in his writings or his ministry.

Concerning the relationship of Peter's ministry to Paul's, Brother Lee said, "Once Paul came on the scene, Peter's ministry faded away" (p. 22). In his second Epistle, which was written after Paul's martyrdom, Peter acknowledged Paul's writings as being part of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Regarding this, Brother Lee said, "This means that even the aged Peter had to submit to the vision of Paul" (p. 22). According to Acts 10 and 21 and Galatians 2, Peter was held back from fully entering into Paul's vision, because he remained to some extent in his Jewish tradition. On page 41 Brother Lee said:

Peter was no longer as absolute and strong in following the vision as he was in following the Lord during the first three and a half years. He became somewhat weak. The vision had come into conflict with his tradition, and he could not quite go along with it. He remained to a certain extent in that tradition. It frustrated him and hindered him from going on. We see a falling behind in his case with respect to the vision. We have to pay attention to this matter and be warned by it.

On pages 44 and 45 Brother Lee makes a crucial observation regarding Peter and James in relation to Paul:

At the time Paul was fulfilling his ministry, it seems that James and Peter were one with his vision. However, they were not one with it. The best we can say about them is that they did not oppose Paul. They were going along in a general way but were actually not in the same company. They received the same grace as Paul did, and they were apostles together. They

should have belonged to the same group and the same company. Yet they were not of the same company, though they were of the same general group. Galatians 2:9 says that James, Peter, and John gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that they should go to the Gentiles, and they would go to the circumcision. It seems as if they were shaking hands with Paul and saying to him, "Okay, Paul. Go to the Gentiles to fulfill your ministry, but we will not go with you. We are apostles to the Jews, and you are an apostle to the Gentiles."

Not only were men like Gamaliel and Barnabas falling behind in the vision; even apostles such as Peter and James were in danger of missing out on the vision. They were of the same general group as Paul, but they were not co-working together. When Paul went up to Jerusalem for the last time, James said to him, "You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20). Before this time, Paul had said clearly in Galatians that the law is over. But here, James, the leading apostle in Jerusalem, was exhorting him to keep the law. This shows that even a person as renowned in the church as James could be short in the vision. James did not walk according to the flesh; he was not a light person in any way. From history we know that he was quite a pious person. Yet he was not serving under the vision. We can say that even Peter did not catch up with the vision; even he was not in the vision.

Brother Lee's word here is very enlightening. Peter and James did not oppose Paul. They went along with Paul in a general way. They were in the same general group as Paul, but they were not in the same company. To be in the same general group is to be genuine apostles who receive the same grace to serve the Lord, whereas to be in the same company is to work together in one accord, doing the same work under the same vision and under the unique leadership in God's move. At that time the vision of the age and the leadership in God's move were with Paul. He was the minister of the age, the one wise master builder who had the blueprint of God's building and was qualified to supervise the work of all who were laboring on the building. Peter and James should have joined themselves to Paul's company and worked together with Paul under the vision the Lord had given him. The vision Paul received included the

joining of the Gentile believers to the Jewish believers for the building up of the Lord's one Body (Eph. 2:15-16; 3:3-6). All the workers, including Barnabas and Apollos, should have entered fully into Paul's vision and served together with Paul in God's move at that time. However, the fact is that Peter, James, Barnabas, and Apollos were not fully one with Paul but carried out their own works under their respective visions. This caused problems in the churches and almost led to division (1 Cor. 1:10-13a). If all the workers had served under Paul's vision and had taken Paul's leadership, the churches in the Jewish and Gentile worlds might have been brought fully into God's New Testament economy and rescued from the influence of Judaism and other distracting elements. Furthermore, the church in Jerusalem might have been spared the destruction by Titus and his Roman army in A.D. 70. This shows the seriousness of carrying on different works by different companies of workers under different leaderships with different visions.

In the first century, especially while Paul was alive, there were a number of apostles, and there was more than one company of apostles working for the Lord to raise up churches and edify the saints. If we view that situation in a natural way according to the letter of the Bible, we may think that it was satisfactory according to God's ordination. We may think that today the situation should be the same, that today it should be acceptable to have a number of leading co-workers, each with his own company of workers laboring under his leadership in a certain region of the earth. We may think that as long as these companies of workers respect each other and teach according to the Scriptures, they can all carry out their separate works under the Lord's full blessing. However, if we are governed by the revelation of the Bible under the light of the ministry of the age, we will realize that the situation in the first century was not satisfactory according to God's way in His economy. As Brother Lee made clear to us, God's way is to have all His people serving Him under one vision to build up His unique divine building according to His unique design under the supervision of one master builder. In *The Vision of the Age* Brother Lee pointed out repeatedly that those who joined Paul to walk and work with

him in his ministry, such as Aquila, Priscilla, and Timothy, all served the Lord in Paul's vision, which was the vision of the age, and thus carried out the Lord's unique work in that age. However, those who were not one with Paul and were not working together with him, such as Barnabas, Apollos, James, and even Peter—although they were sincere, godly, knowledgeable in the Scriptures, and spiritual—were not serving in the vision of the age in their work for the Lord. This is a serious matter.

Serving Under the Vision in the Lord's Recovery Today

As Brother Lee made clear to us, the vision under which the Lord's recovery is serving God today is the all-inheriting and all-encompassing vision of the complete Bible, beginning with Adam's vision of the tree of life in the garden of Eden and extending all the way to the New Jerusalem with the tree of life. This is the vision that matches the present age, the vision that inherits all the visions in the past and is all-inclusive. Concerning today's vision, on page 48 of *The Vision of the Age* Brother Lee said:

In order to serve God according to the up-to-date vision, we need to come up to the level of Paul's very last Epistles. In fact, we need to come up to the level of the epistles to the seven churches in Revelation as well as the revelation which covers all the ages, including the kingdom, the new heaven and new earth, and the ultimate consummation of the church—the New Jerusalem. Simply put, in order for us to serve God today, our vision must extend all the way from the first vision of Adam in Genesis to the ultimate vision of the manifestation of the church, the New Jerusalem. This and this alone is the complete vision. It is not until today that this vision has been fully opened to us.

On page 51 Brother Lee said, "It is the Lord's mercy that He has revealed to me the vision," and on page 52 he said, "The vision that I have brought to you today is God's vision for this age."

Outside the vision Brother Lee brought us—God's consummate vision, the completed vision of this age, the bountiful and all-sufficient vision of God's eternal economy in the entire Bible—there is no other vision. The vision for this age has been passed

on to us in the writings of Brother Nee and Brother Lee. Our unique responsibility today is to enter fully into this vision and to serve the Lord in His unique recovery under this unique vision. Furthermore, we must serve in one company, even in one Body, under the proper leadership in the Lord's move, until the vision becomes a reality.

On page 53 Brother Lee wrote:

If you remain in this vision, you are serving according to the vision. If you are not in this vision, you could still be an Apollos, expounding the Scriptures in a powerful way; you could still be a Barnabas, visiting the churches; you could still be a James, serving piously; and you could even be a Peter, who served as the leading apostle. However, you would not be in the vision.

Only by serving together under the unique vision of this age can we have the one accord among us. Different visions and different degrees of apprehending the vision are the cause of discord. On page 54 Brother Lee said:

Today we can be in one accord because we have only one vision and one view. We are all in this up-to-date, all-inheriting vision. We have only one viewpoint. We speak the same thing with one heart, one mouth, one voice, and one tone, serving the Lord together. The result is a power that will become our strong morale and our impact. This is our strength. Once the Lord's recovery possesses this power, there will be the glory of increase and multiplication.

An Excellent Pattern

In following the ministry of the age and serving under the leadership of the wise master builder in God's building, Brother Lee is an excellent pattern for all of us. Concerning his serving in the Lord's recovery under Watchman Nee, Brother Lee said:

When I came into the recovery, I realized what the recovery was and that it was uniquely one. The one who brought the recovery to China among us was Brother Watchman Nee. If I would not have taken the way of the recovery, I could have had a work in northern China, but I gave that up. I fully realized that the Lord has only one Body, one work, one Bible, one revelation, and one current, one flow, in one fellowship. At that time Brother Nee was being used by the Lord. I never

tried to speak anything different from his teaching. This does not mean that I did not have any other teachings, but my speaking always followed Brother Nee's speaking in order to keep the unique fellowship in the Lord's unique recovery. I felt that it was a glory to participate in the Lord's recovery in such a subjective way with Brother Nee. I thank the Lord that He had mercy upon me in helping me to have the best choice...There is only one Lord, one Body, one Bible, one divine revelation, one speaking, one recovery, one fellowship, and one way to practice the recovery. (*Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (2)*, p. 118)

While I was involved in the work on mainland China for eighteen years, I recognized and admitted that I did not have the portion to take the lead there. I recognized, respected, and regarded Brother Nee as the unique master builder. I had no idea concerning the way the Lord's recovery needed to take. The design came from Brother Nee. He was the superintendent, so I had no right and no position to express any kind of opinion. My position and my right, thank the Lord, was just to take Brother Nee's instructions. (*Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, p. 98)

In the eighteen years that I was involved in the work on mainland China, I did a lot but no one ever heard any opinion from me. They only heard my voice in giving messages all according to Brother Nee...I labored without voicing any opinion. In the co-worker's conferences sometimes Brother Nee would ask, 'Witness, what would you say?' I had nothing to say. My attitude was that whatever Brother Nee told me to do, I would do it. It was that simple. From 1932 to 1950 no one ever heard me expressing any opinion regarding the work in mainland China. (*Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, p. 83)

Brother Lee's serving under Brother Nee's leadership and vision should be our pattern today. All the co-workers with the leading ones and the saints in all the churches should be wise to acknowledge the minister of this age and the master builder in this age and should serve together in one accord in the Lord's unique recovery without dissenting or expressing any opinion. We all need to be diligent to enter into the vision of the age, and we need to set aside our own interests to carry out the one work of the New Testament ministry under the leadership in the Lord's ministry today. We need to be like Solomon, who did not

do his own work but inherited the pattern of the temple from his father, David (1 Chron. 28:11-19), and faithfully accomplished the building work according to this pattern. We also need to be like Timothy, who inherited the vision from his spiritual father, Paul, walked according to the vision and guarded it as a good deposit, and ministered the vision to others (2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2). If we remain in the all-inheriting and all-inclusive vision given to us by God through Brother Nee and Brother Lee and labor together in one accord to carry out this vision everywhere on the earth, the Lord will have a way to complete the building up of His Body and the preparation of His bride for His soon return.

Your brother in His recovery,

Bob Danker

NO UNIQUE MINISTER OF THE AGE? IS THAT WHAT WATCHMAN NEE TAUGHT?

The CBs reproduce a little article by N. Tomes in which he argues against the notion of a singular minister of the age. But has he proved anything at all? If the saints read carefully what he has to say and weigh his arguments soberly, I believe that they will see that he is trying to pull the wool over their eyes.

Tomes rejects the notion that the vision of the age and the ministry of the age can belong to a singular minister of the age. I believe that he agrees that there is a vision of the age and with it a ministry of the age; hence, Tomes takes exception to a singular minister of the age. He is certainly within his right to believe what he wants to believe, but I take exception to how he tries to persuade us of his personal belief. I am actually quite surprised at how he argues his point.

Before he wades too deep into the matter, he admits that “we should ask, Is this teaching according to the New Testament?” but he conveniently “defer[s] the question to another occasion.” Deflecting attention from an obvious authoritative source always raises a red flag when I read an argument, so I had to pause and consider why Tomes did not consider the issue from the perspective of the New Testament and be done with it. It seems to me that he could have spared himself a lot of effort if he could have shown that the notion of a singular minister of the age does not accord with the New Testament. Tomes (and the CBs who put him forth as their champion) elsewhere challenged the brothers to support their views by showing that their views are founded on the Scriptures. But here he conveniently lets himself off the same hook. Is there some double standard here? I think so. As his readers, what we should ask is, Why didn’t Tomes appeal to the New Testament on this occasion? Perhaps he realizes that he would have no support there. Or perhaps he remembers that Brother Lee already considered all these matters in light of the Scriptures and offered a Scriptural basis for it. Of course, Brother Lee could

be wrong about it all, but Tomes would have to take exception with Brother Lee, and he probably does not want to be so bold.

Freeing himself from the requirement he places on others, Tomes instead appeals to Watchman Nee to buttress his claim: “Did Watchman Nee teach that there is one, unique ‘minister of the age’? Did Brother Nee see himself as the unique ‘minister of the age’?” (Tomes’s emphasis). Of course, we all respect Brother Nee, so I find his appeal to Brother Nee acceptable. I trust Brother Nee’s grasp of the truth and am always interested in hearing what Brother Nee has to say. I do not, however, trust Tomes’s grasp of what Brother Nee has to say, and therein lies the problem.

In response to his first question, Tomes offers two “supports.” In this note I will address only the first support, which is Brother Nee’s general comments on the matter: “In every age there is the ministry of that age,” and later in the same place, “Luther was a minister of his age. Darby was also a minister of his age” (*Collected Works*, vol. 57, p. 260). Then, Tomes argues:

Note the indefinite article, ‘a minister of his age.’ The Chinese can also be rendered, ‘Luther was *one* minister of his age, Darby was also *one* minister of his age’ When directly addressing this issue, Brother Nee does not refer to either Luther or Darby as *the* unique ‘minister of the age.’ We cannot find a statement by Watchman Nee affirming one, unique ‘Minister of the Age.’ (Tomes’s emphasis)

I think that many of Tomes’s readers will find something creepy about his reasoning, even if they are not able to clearly put their finger on it. The fact is, Tomes is not being completely fair in his interpretation, because he fails to allow that the indefinite article is ambiguous here. If “in every age there is the ministry of that age,” then as we consider the various ministers across the ages (as Brother Nee does in the context), we could naturally refer to each as a minister of his age. If I say, “Luther was the minister of his age,” and “Darby was the minister of his age”; I could easily say in the same breath that each was a minister of his age: “Luther was a minister of his age. Darby was also a minister of his age.” The ambiguity of the English indefinite article in this context should prevent Tomes from

wresting his particular meaning from Brother Nee's words, but it doesn't. Either it eludes him, or he is deluding others. It does not necessarily follow that because Watchman Nee used the indefinite article (or the quantifier in Chinese) here, the notion of the minister of the age "did not match his view of God's recovery work throughout history and in his own era," as he finally concludes. Brother Nee's general comments, taken in isolation as given by Tomes, could go either way. His interpretation is not definitive at all, and even in their massaged form Brother Nee's words do not make Tomes's point. In their full context, Brother Nee's words seem to have a different sense.

It may be helpful now to quote the entire portion that Tomes uses for his support. (This may be the best part of my post on the matter.) The quotation is from the online edition at <http://www.ministrybooks.org/collected-works.cfm> (click on vol. 57: "The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry," then on link "27" for "Brokenness and Ministry [Chapter Twenty-Five]):

CONCERNING FOLLOWING THE MINISTRY OF THE AGE

Seeing the Ministry of the Age

Question: How should Jonathan in the Old Testament (Saul's son—1 Sam. 14:1-46) have chosen his way?

Watchman Nee: In the Old Testament both Solomon and David represented the Lord. The two persons represented the one ministry in two separate ways. In the Old Testament there were many ministries. After Moses, the judges were raised up. After that, there was Solomon, the kings, and the prophets. After the Israelites were taken into captivity, the vessels for the recovery were raised up. The Old Testament is filled with different kinds of ministries. In every age there is the ministry of that age. These ministries of the ages are different from the local ministers. Luther was a minister of his age. Darby was also a minister of his age. In every age the Lord has special things that He wants to accomplish. He has His own recoveries and His own works to do. The particular recovery and work that He does in one age is the ministry of that age.

Forsaking the Past Ministries

Jonathan stood between Saul and David. He was one man standing between two ministries. He should have followed the

second ministry. However, because Jonathan's relationship with the first ministry was too deep, he could not disentangle himself. In order to catch up with the ministry of the age, there is the need for us to see the vision. Michal was married to David, yet she did not see anything. She only saw David's condition before God, and she could not tolerate it. As a result, she was left behind (2 Sam. 6:16, 20-23).

All Being a Matter of God's Mercy

It is God's mercy that a person can see and come into contact with the ministry of that age. Yet it is altogether a different thing for a man to take up the courage to forsake the past ministry. It is a precious thing to see, and it is a blessed thing to come into contact with something. Yet whether or not one can set aside his past ministry is entirely up to God's mercy.

This is the entire piece on the ministry of the age, taken from a series of apparently unrelated questions and answers posed to Brother Nee during a co-workers' meeting in April 1948. In reading the entire piece, we are able to make some interesting observations about what Brother Nee taught concerning the ministry of the age and the ministers of the age. First, he indicates that there is one ministry in the Old Testament. Then, he points out that various persons represented the one ministry in different ways. But it is interesting to note that in substantiating this from the biblical record, he gives chronological examples: "After Moses, the judges..."; "after that,...Solomon, the kings, and the prophets"; "after the Israelites were taken into captivity, the vessels for the recovery...." Each example shows that for each age there was a ministry of the age, and for each ministry of the age there was a representative person of that ministry of the age. In answer to the question, "How should Jonathan in the Old Testament have chosen his way?" Brother Nee expresses the ministries of the two ages that Jonathan stood between in terms of the persons who represent each: "Jonathan stood between Saul and David. He was one man standing between two ministries. He should have followed the second ministry." In Jonathan's case, the ministry of the age was changing, and each ministry of its respective age was represented by a unique person—Saul, then

David. Would we say then that Brother Nee did not believe that there was a unique representative of the ministry of the age in each age? Certainly there were others at the time of Saul and David of whom it could be said that they too represented the ministry of their age. But Brother Nee inserts an important qualifier here: “These ministries of the ages are different from the local ministers.” Tomes conveniently omits this sentence in his quotation of the portion, but Brother Nee mentions this because indeed he wishes to make a distinction between the local ministers and the one representative of the ministry of the age. He then goes on to single out particular individuals in church history as representatives of the ministries of the ages: “Luther was a minister of his age. Darby was also a minister of his age.” Why would he single out in this context Luther and Darby as ministers of their ages unless he wanted to show that even in the long history of the church there are certain ministers that singly represent the ministry in their particular ages? We need not be scholars of church history to know that there were others teaching justification by faith in the sixteenth century (e.g., Philip Melancthon, Andreas Osiander, etc.), but as Brother Nee says elsewhere, and as Tomes allows Brother Nee to say in quoting him, “the truth of justification by faith...was Luther’s particular recovery” (*Collected Works*, vol. 11, p. 845). I think it is absolutely fair to say that Brother Nee believed that Luther was the single and unique representative of the ministry of his age and, in that sense, was the minister of his age.

Tomes titles his argument “One, Unique ‘Minister of the Age’?—What Did Watchman Nee Teach?” But the first part of his argument is only a very narrow presentation of the exact wording of Brother Nee’s comments on the matter, wrenched from their full context and pressed into an interpretation that stands at odds with the whole point that Brother Nee is trying to make. After reading the entire portion, I come away with a view of what Watchman Nee taught on the matter that is quite different from what Tomes wants us to believe. If I read the entire portion, I understand Brother Nee to be saying that if Jonathan had followed the one unique David, he would have been properly aligned with the ministry of the age, because

David was uniquely the representative of the ministry of his age. In that sense, he was the minister of his age. I do not believe that the notion of a unique minister of the age is foreign to Brother Nee's thought and teaching at all, even if in these narrow portions we are not able to find the exact term with the definite article. To build a case upon the lack of a definite article is pedantic in view of the full text of Brother Nee's comments.

After considering Tomes's argument and the CBs' reliance thereon, one has to ask: Why are these brothers arguing against a singular minister of the age? What is driving them? Well, think about it. If there is no singular minister of the age, then there must be other ministers of the age, in their mind. And who might those be? Where are these other ministers of the age? To be the—or assuming *arguendo*, a—minister of the age, one must be speaking the vision of the age. It is a simple matter: If you are speaking the vision of the age, if you are in the ministry of the age, then, yes, you are a minister of the age, even if you are not the minister of the age. That is so obvious that you really don't need to post it on a Web site. But I believe that at the base of their argument is the intention to promote one or more of their local ministers as ministers of the age and to find for them some larger audience than they now have. The problem is, their local ministers are not being accepted as ministers of the age (except among small pockets of saints here and there), because they do not minister according to the vision of the age. This necessarily disqualifies them from being ministers of the age. Even if Tomes et al. could establish that Brother Nee did not teach that in each age there is the minister of the age, there is still the simple fact that it is the vision of the age that makes ministers of the age what they are. Proving the possibility of more than one minister of the age doesn't prove that any particular teacher is a minister of the age, which, I believe, is the actual implication to be drawn from Tomes's argument.

[Kerry Robichaux]