

## One, Unique ‘Minister of the Age’ – What do the “Blended Co-workers” Teach?

“The Minister of the Age” was a phrase virtually unknown until after Brother Lee’s departure. At least this was the case among English-speaking saints in the Lord’s recovery. It is true that Brother Lee ministered on this topic in Chinese in Taiwan in March 1986. Yet (for whatever reason) these messages remained unpublished in English for more than a decade. It was only after Brother Lee’s passing in 1997, that the topic, ‘The Minister of the Age,’ appeared in print, first in the inaugural issues of *The Ministry* magazine<sup>1</sup> and subsequently in 2003 as the book, *The Vision of the Age*<sup>2</sup>. That year this became a ‘hot topic’ of the “blended brothers” spoken and printed messages<sup>3</sup>. Hence, it is paradoxically true that this subject’s prominence owes more to the “blended co-workers” than to Brother Lee’s own active ministry. It seems appropriate therefore to consider the “blended brothers” teaching on this subject. (We defer an examination of Brother Lee’s teaching to another occasion.) A previous article analysed Watchman Nee’s teaching about ‘The Minister of the Age.’<sup>4</sup> The present one examines the teaching of the “blended co-workers,” embodied in their published messages. In addition, we ask, who is today’s “Minister of the Age”?

The Minister of the Age is usually bundled together with the Vision and Ministry of the Age. However, these three matters are conceptually distinct. There can be a unique vision and one ministry in an age, yet, they may not belong exclusively to a particular “Minister of the Age.” Hence, one may concur that there is a vision and ministry in an epoch, yet reject the notion of a singular “Minister of the Age”<sup>5</sup>. Here we examine the “blended brothers” teaching concerning this particular servant of the Lord, “the Minister of the Age.”

### One, Unique ‘Minister of the Age’— What do the “Blended Co-workers” Teach?

The “blended co-workers” teach that in each era there is a unique vision, a ministry and a minister of the age. They say<sup>6</sup>, “*In every age there is the ministry of that age and the vision of that age. ... If you want to be in what the Lord is doing, you have to see who the minister of the age is and where the vision of the age is.*” Moreover, they emphasize the central role of the “minister of the age,” “*In every age there is a particular vision. This vision is released **not through many persons but through one person who is the minister of that age.** There is the vision of the age, and **the one who receives this vision becomes the minister of the age.** All the others who are with him are led through **this one**, ... they speak ... according to the leading of **the one** whom the Lord has chosen to give the vision of the age.” (p. 34)*

Further, they identify various “Ministers of the Age” for each century, from the Reformation onwards<sup>7</sup>—Martin Luther, Madam Guyon, Count Zinzendorf and J. N. Darby. What about the twentieth century?

In the twentieth century, Brothers Nee and Lee are recognized as successive ministers of the age, “*The Lord raised up our brother Nee in approximately the first half of the twentieth century. The vision of the age was with him. **He was the minister of the age.** God stood with him, and **Witness Lee followed him**, ... But then, in the sense of opening up the vision of the age to His people, God set Watchman Nee aside when he was put into prison. Who did God bring in? **Who continued this? It was Witness Lee.**” (p. 35) Along the same lines, another “blended co-worker” says, “*In the twentieth century the minister of the age was Watchman Nee and then Witness Lee as the continuation of Watchman Nee. **These brothers were ministers of the age.** There is no doubt about this.*”<sup>8</sup> Thus the “Blended Co-workers” have no reservations about designating Watchman Nee as the “Minister of the Age,” even though Brother Nee himself never assumed this role. After him, Brother Lee is recognized as having the same role.*

The “Minister of the Age” is identified by the “blended co-workers” with the active ministry of the Lord’s special servant in that era, not the spiritual legacy contained in his writings. Consider,

for example the following, *“In the case of Elijah and Elisha, one followed the other. ... It was the same with Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. ... The Lord raised up our **Brother Nee** ... He was the minister of the age. God stood with him, and **Witness Lee followed him, just like Elisha followed Elijah... God set Watchman Nee aside when he was put into prison. Who did God bring in? ... It was Witness Lee.**”* (p. 35) Here a parallel is drawn; Elijah’s departure ended his active ministry and inaugurated Elisha’s ministry. Similarly, Brother Nee’s imprisonment ended his active ministry and ushered in Brother Lee’s ministry. We deduce that (according to the “blended brothers”) the “ministry of the age” represents someone’s **active** ministry; his role as “minister of the age” ceases with his departure<sup>9</sup>.

### **Brother Nee, Brother Lee and Brother “We”**

Since Brother Lee’s departure in 1997, the obvious question arises: **“Who is today’s Minister of the Age”?** After all, the “blended co-workers” identify successive “ministers” throughout the Old and New Testaments from Adam to the Apostle John. Moreover, a specific “Minister of the Age” is identified for every century of Church history since the Reformation. Specific people have been identified as **the** “Minister of the Age” over a span of 6,000 years from Adam to Brother Lee. Naturally, one would expect the twenty-first century would have its own unique “Minister.” So, **“Who is today’s Minister of the Age”?** Brother Lee never directly answered this question, so the “blended co-workers” cannot simply respond, “Brother Lee said...” What is their answer?

The response is surprising. They say: *“At the end of the ages, the Lord has raised up our brothers as five-talented servants ... The ministry of Brother Nee and Brother Lee is to raise up and perfect us as the one-talented ones. Their ministry was not to raise up another five-talented one .... We are the one-talented ones. ... Brother Nee and Brother Lee have gone to be with the Lord, therefore **today in the Lord’s recovery it is now the time of “Brother We.”**”* (pp. 14-5) Contrary to expectations, we are told there is **no** unique servant of the Lord today, because **“it is now the time of ‘Brother We.’”** Why is this? According to the “blended brothers,” there are no more “five-talented members,” only the “one-talented ones.” But, may we ask, is this logical; is this Scriptural?

The Bible never says the “five-talented members” will cease. In fact, the New Testament tells us that the ascended Christ gives gifted members, (apostles, prophets etc.) to the Body “until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith...” (Ephesians 4:11-13). Since Brother Nee’s seminal work, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, the Lord’s recovery has clearly taught that there are apostles throughout the Church age<sup>10</sup>. There is an obvious contradiction here. The “blended co-workers” clearly state that, **“in every age there is a particular vision... released ... through one person who is the minister of that age.”** (p. 34). However, when applied to the current time, the brothers balk at the obvious corollary: In this age there is **one person** who is the minister of this age! It seems the “blended co-workers” lack the courage of their convictions to carry their teaching through to its logical conclusion – **there should be a unique “Minister of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”!**

### **Who is today’s ‘Minister of the Age’? -- “Brother We”**

Instead, the “blended brothers” shrink from the obvious and take refuge in the nebulous term, **“Brother We.”** Who then is this mysterious “Brother ‘We’”? The brother continues, *“Some have spoken of a successor to Brother Lee; but in actuality, **the successor is the Body of Christ. The successor is all the members – the one-talented ones – doing the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ.**”* (pp. 14-15) But this is evasion, mere “smoke and mirrors.” The Body of Christ did not come into existence with Brother Lee’s passing; it began at Pentecost. Why then, at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is the Body of Christ suddenly introduced? If the inauguration of Christ’s Body is decisive, they should argue that Christ is the one unique “Minister of the Age of Grace” (Heb. 8:2)

and the Body of Christ is His unique successor on this earth. If that is the case, there is no need for individual “ministers of the age” within the Church era. The introduction of “**Brother We**” looks like equivocation in the face of the obvious. May we ask, if the “blended brothers” are not willing to apply this teaching to the present, why do they insist on applying it to the past?

### **Who is today’s ‘Minister of the Age’-- “Brother ABCDE”?**

Another answer has been proposed to the question, “Who is today’s “Minister of the Age”?” “Brother ABCDE – Brother Andrew Yu, Benson Phillips, Chen (Minoru), Dick Taylor & Dan Towle, Ed Marks and (don’t forget) Ron Kangas.” According to this “cute response,” the “blended co-workers” are today’s “Minister of the Age”! This retort may be the concept of many saints in the recovery. However, this is **not** what the “Minister of the Age” teaching implies. Intellectual honesty demands a different answer. The brothers’ own teaching emphasises, “**not many persons,**” but “**one person.**” Hence, it is either “Brother A” **or** “Brother B” etc. It is not “Brother ABCDE.” If the “blended co-workers” insist on this teaching, they should name this “one person,” telling the saints plainly who is the current “Minister of the Age.” Is it one of the “blended brothers”? If so, which one?

Alternatively, perhaps today’s “Minister of the Age” has not yet been manifested. If that is the case, shouldn’t the “blended co-workers” inform the saints in the recovery, asking them to pray fervently that today’s “Minister” might be raised up and manifested? Moreover, this situation leaves today’s young people in the unfortunate position of being “untimely born,” standing between two ministries. They were too young to enjoy Brother Lee’s active ministry; yet they also risk missing the “Minister of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” should this person not be manifested for decades. Moreover, isn’t it possible that the next “Minister of the Age” may not arise from among us, but from the “wilderness”? We are reminded of Brother Nee’s words, when he said<sup>11</sup>, “*Here is a matter of principle: The students of Wesley could never be equal to Wesley, nor could the students of Calvin match Calvin. The schools of the prophets seldom produced prophets—all the great prophets were chosen by God from the wilderness. The Spirit of God descends upon whomsoever He will. He is the Head of the church, not we.*”

### **A Truth to be Absolute For?**

Brother Watchman Nee emphasised the need to be absolute for the truth. He said<sup>12</sup> “*Every worker of the Lord must uphold the absoluteness of the truth. ... A basic requirement for being a servant of the Lord is to not sacrifice the truth.*” According to Brother Nee, the truth of God’s Word is the unique standard which should not be compromised. He says<sup>13</sup> “*God wants us to uphold the absoluteness of the truth. If God’s Word says something, it is so, no matter who is involved. We cannot make exceptions because of some special relationships. If we do, we are lowering the standard of God’s truth.... We are here to follow the truth, not man, and we are here to maintain the absoluteness of the truth.*”

Applied to the present context, the question arises, is the unique “Minister of the Age” a Scriptural truth for which we should be absolute? Certainly the “blended brothers” claim<sup>14</sup>, “*This matter of the vision of the age is a great point and a great revelation in the Word of God.*” Moreover, recently an article on an LSM-sponsored web-site<sup>15</sup> asserts that “**the Minister of the Age**” belongs among “*certain scriptural principles that are vital for the practical oneness in the Lord’s recovery.*” This item specifically refers to “*the scriptural revelation that in every age God gives His people only one vision through one ministry and one minister of the age.*” Here is an unequivocal declaration, endorsed by LSM, that the unique “Minister of the Age” is a “**scriptural principle**” and a “**scriptural revelation.**”

Published messages by the “blended co-workers” buttress this view. They are on record saying<sup>16</sup>, “*What is revealed here [in the New Testament and the Old Testament] is that in every age there is a particular vision. This vision is released **not through many persons but through one person who is the minister of that age.** There is the vision of the age, and the one who receives this vision becomes the minister of the age.*” This statement affirms, as a truth revealed in both Testaments, that for every era there is “*one person who is the minister of that age.*” Again, if (according to the “blended brothers”) this as a crucial truth, its absoluteness must be upheld. That includes its application today. As Brother Nee says<sup>17</sup>, “*If God’s Word says something, it is so, no matter who is involved. We cannot make exceptions because of some special relationships.*” Hence if God’s Word reveals, as a “*scriptural principle*” and a “*scriptural revelation,*” there is a unique “minister of the age” in every era, **there is also one today.** If that is the case, the “blended co-workers” should reaffirm this and reveal the identity of today’s “Minister of the Age.” **Who is today’s “Minister of the Age”?** Conversely, if the “blended co-workers” are unable or unwilling to answer this question, this raises the question -- do they in fact regard the “Minister of the Age” as a Scriptural truth to be absolutely upheld?

### “Minister of the Age” – Eternal Truth, Dispensational Truth or “Interpretational Prism”?

The lack of a definitive answer will cause some to ask, Is the “Minister of the Age” a Scriptural truth to be absolutely upheld today? Clearly there is no passage of Scripture which specifically teaches this. No New Testament verse says there is a unique Minister in each age. Moreover, Watchman Nee taught us<sup>18</sup> to “*distinguish between God’s dispensational truths from His eternal truths.*” He explains, “*We have to distinguish between the dispensational truths and the eternal truths. This is very important. Some words [in Scripture] are dispensational in nature. They are directed towards men in one age, not for men of all ages. Other words are eternal in nature; they apply to all men of all ages.*” Based upon Brother Nee’s word, we ask, Is the unique “Minister of the Age” an eternal truth, a dispensational truth or (perhaps) neither? Is it **an interpretation** of Scripture, rather than a Scriptural truth? Is it best regarded as a “particular prism” through which the Bible and Church history can be viewed? In this case, the “Minister of the Age” is a periscope that, for certain purposes may enhance particular aspects of God’s move? Yet, as believers, shouldn’t we “*take the truth as the unique standard,*”<sup>19</sup> rather than the “particular lens” through which the truth is viewed?

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### NOTES:

1. *The Ministry*, vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1997); vol. 1, No. 2 (November 1997); vol. 1, No. 3 (December 1997)
2. Witness Lee, *The Vision of the Age*, Anaheim, CA, Living Stream Ministry, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, April, 2003.
3. The LSM 2003 International Training for Elders in Anaheim, CA, April, 2003 featured three messages on the ministry of the age, published in *The Ministry*, vol. 7, No. 6, Aug., 2003
4. One, Unique ‘Minister of the Age’ – What did Watchman Nee Teach? In *Fellowship Journal*, vol. 5, No.1 In that piece we asked, “What did Watchman Nee Teach?” In answering this question, we focused on **primary sources** – Watchman Nee’s **own** published writings, rather than “secondary sources.” We follow the same principle here.
5. To avoid misunderstanding, we reaffirm that we agree there is a vision and a ministry (service) in each age. As Brother Nee said, “*In every age there is the ministry of that age.*” Brother Nee explains “*In every age the Lord has special things that He wants to accomplish. He has His recoveries and His own works to do. The particular recovery and work that He does in one age is the ministry of that age.*” (*Collected Works* vol. 57, pp. 260-1)
6. *The Ministry*, Vol. 7, No. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 12. Subsequent references are to this issue unless otherwise indicated. Any emphasis has been added.

7. “In the sixteenth century, there was Martin Luther. In the seventeenth century, there was Madam Guyon and the mystics. In the eighteenth century, there was Count Zinzendorf. In the nineteenth century, there was J. N. Darby. **These were the ministers of the age.** If it is Luther’s time, we should join ourselves to Luther and do what Luther is doing. At Darby’s time, we need to be one with Darby. Likewise, in each age **we should be one with the minister of that age.**” (pp. 13-4)
8. *The Ministry*, vol. 9, no. 6, June 2005, p. 114, emphasis added
9. This corresponds to Watchman Nee’s word: “**David ‘served his own generation,’ and slept (Acts 13:36). He could not serve two! Where today we seek to perpetuate our work by setting up an organization or society or system, the Old Testament saints served their own day and passed on. This is an important principle of life. ...Men pass on, but the Lord remains. ...God Himself takes away His workers, but He gives others. Our work suffers, but His never does. Nothing touches Him. He is still God.**” *W. Nee, Collected Works Vol. 40, pp. 84-85.*
10. Take as an example: “The twelve apostles are also in a class by themselves; they are only twelve. But there is another order of apostles, chosen by the Holy Spirit, and **as long as the building up of the Church goes on** and the Holy Spirit’s presence on earth continues, the choosing and sending forth of **this order of apostles will continue too.**” (W. Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, Collected Works, vol. 30, p. 5)
11. Watchman Nee, *Collected Works*, Vol. #47, p. 57, (emphasis added)
12. W. Nee, *The Character of the Lord’s Worker*, Collected Works, vol. 52, p. 151
13. W. Nee, *The Character of the Lord’s Worker*, Collected Works, vol. 52, p. 152
14. *The Ministry*, vol.7, no. 6, August, 2003, p. 32
15. The article is entitled: “**On the Minister of the Age and the Wise Master Builder**” and appears the “Contributions” section of the web-site: [www.AFaithfulWord.com](http://www.AFaithfulWord.com) (April, 2006).
16. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, No. 6, Aug., 2003, p. 34.
17. *The Ministry*, vol.7, no. 6, August, 2003, p. 32
18. W. Nee, “**How to Study the Bible...**” in *The Collected Works of W. Nee*, vol. 54, p. 141
19. W. Nee, “**The Absoluteness of the Truth**” in *The Collected Works of W. Nee*, vol. 57, p. 137