

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF LIVING STREAM MINISTRY TO THE MINISTRY AND THE WORK

Just as there is a definite distinction between Living Stream Ministry (LSM) and the local churches, there is also an important distinction between LSM and the ministry and the work in the recovery. In a broad sense the Bible uses the word *ministry* to refer to the service that God's people render to Him. However, in some passages the expressions *the ministry* or *this ministry* are used more particularly to refer to the service of those who open the divine revelation and supply the churches with the riches of the Word of God through the apostles' teaching (Eph. 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Cor. 4:1; 3:6; Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9). *The work* refers to the preaching of the gospel and raising up of local churches for the increase and spread of the Lord's testimony in the move of God's economy on earth (Acts 13:2). LSM does not exercise leadership in either the work or the ministry. Rather, LSM is a Levitical service that directly serves the ministry and cooperates with the work. LSM neither directs nor controls the work and the ministry, though some dissenters foster that misunderstanding. If we see that the ministry and the work are distinct from LSM, we will avoid much confusion, which is contrary to the nature of our God (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). The New Testament shows that the ministry and the work initiated by God are carried out in an orderly way and absolutely according to His divine arrangement (cf. Mark 6:7-11; Luke 10:1; Acts 6:1-4, 13:2-3, 6-7).

Witness Lee said that he established Living Stream Ministry "to publish the messages in book form and to distribute these messages in both video and audio tapes" (*A Timely Word*, 39). He described it as "a Levitical service serving my ministry to put out the word of God in print and through video and audio tapes" (39). Although there have been many technological advances, to this day LSM's role remains that of a publisher and distributor of the ministry. In support of this role it facilitates the release of the ministry by providing practical services in the carrying out of trainings and conferences (for a more complete description see "The Relationship between Living Stream Ministry and the Local Churches"). All these functions are in the nature of a Levitical service. In the Old Testament the Levites were engaged in the service of God, but there was a definite distinction between those who offered practical service in the outer court and the priests who ministered in the sanctuary (Ezek. 44:11, 15-16). The Levites served under the oversight of the priests (Num. 3:32; 4:19, 27-28, 33). In the same way, the burden of the ministry and the work in the recovery, including the ministering of the word in trainings and conferences and the raising up, visiting, and strengthening of local churches, is not borne by LSM but by the blending co-workers.

Brother Lee's experience with Brother Nee showed him the need for entities to publish and distribute the ministry. He called these "ministry stations," which are for, but distinct from, the churches, the ministry, and the work of the organic Body of Christ. For example, in speaking of the Taiwan Gospel Book Room, which publishes the ministry in Chinese, Brother Lee made a definite distinction between the ministry itself and a ministry station that serves it:

The ministry station is composed of the Levites who serve the ministry. We all should see that the fact that the churches on the earth today can be established and supplied is altogether due to this ministry. And this ministry can become widespread, for the most part, due to the help rendered through the Levitical service in the ministry station. Suppose for these twenty years I had gone to the United States, and there had been no issue of publications, cassette tapes, or videotapes. In that case the spread of the ministry would have been reduced by more than one-half. The expansion of this ministry depends not only on the effectiveness of the ministry itself but also on the effectiveness manifested by the coordination between the work of the Levites in the ministry station and the ministry. (*Words of Training for the New Way*, vol. 1, 26-27)

The ministry is one thing, and the ministry stations that serve it are another; they are not synonymous. "The ministry" does not mean, and has never meant, Living Stream Ministry. Rather, "the ministry" refers to the unique New Testament ministry. Moreover, the leadership in the ministry in the Lord's recovery is in actuality the apostles' teaching as a controlling revelation brought to the churches through those co-workers who have been constituted with a particular portion and function to minister Christ, to bring to light the revelation of the Bible concerning God's economy, and to perfect others for the building up of the Body of Christ (Acts 1:17; 6:4; 1 Tim. 1:12; Eph. 3:9; 4:11-12, 16).

### The Ministry and the Work Being Directly under the Holy Spirit

The Body of Christ is an organism constituted with the divine life. Whereas the local churches are the expressions of the Body, the ministry and the work are the activity of the Body to serve the churches in fostering growth and

propagation. Human organization is just as foreign to the organic ministry and work of the Body as it is to the local churches as the living expressions of the Body. The Body is the basic principle of the churches, the ministry, and the work, and all three, being organically related, are under the Head, Christ. The scriptural pattern set forth in Acts 13 is unambiguous. Barnabas and Paul were *set apart* unto the work by the brothers in Antioch and proceeded with the divinely sanctioned work of raising up and establishing local churches without any direction from the church in Antioch, much less from any man-made organization (Acts 13:2-4). Brother Nee points out:

The only scriptural record of the sending forth of apostles is found in Acts 13, and there we see that it is the prophets and teachers [in the church in Antioch] who set them apart for their ministry. Scripture provides no precedent for the separation and sending forth of men by one or more individuals, or by any mission or organization; even the sending out of workers by a local church is a thing unknown in the Word of God. The only example provided us there is the separating and sending forth of apostles by the prophets and teachers. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Vol. 30: The Normal Christian Church Life, 28*)

The separation of Paul and Barnabas from the church in Antioch unto the work indicated that their activities were to be absolutely under the Spirit's leading (16:6-7). In the same way, those who take the lead in the ministry or in the work in the recovery today do not do so under the direction of any organization or local church. This principle helps to ensure that the co-workers who bear the burden of the ministry and the work among the churches remain directly and intimately under the Spirit's leading without being simultaneously constrained by the particular needs, interests, or concerns of any controlling entity. It also assures that their ministry and work is not sectarian but universal, not for building up an organization but for the benefit of the entire Body of Christ. Brother Nee continues:

In sending Barnabas and Saul from Antioch, the prophets and teachers stood for no "church" or mission; they represented the ministry of the Body. They were not the whole Church; they were only a group of God's servants. They bore no special name, they were bound by no particular organization, and they were subject to no fixed rules. They simply submitted themselves to the control of the Spirit and separated those whom He had separated for the work to which He had called them. (30)

### **Maintaining Distinctions in Practice**

In the Lord's recovery, the co-workers do not act under the direction of LSM in either the work or the ministry. Rather, certain brothers who function in the ministry seek the Lord together for His present speaking to the churches, and it is in the fellowship of the blending co-workers that the current burden for the work is sought directly from the Lord. According to their function, these brothers are, as were Paul and his co-workers, separate from any local church or any organization, but they are not independent of one another, for they are, by definition, those who co-labor together with one another and with the Lord in the one ministry and the one work for the building up of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 16:10; 2 Cor. 6:1).

The Bible gives examples of brothers who function in multiple capacities. Peter and John, for instance, were apostles and elders (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1; Matt. 10:2; 2 John 1). The same thing exists today. A brother may be an elder in a locality, a co-worker, and an LSM serving one concurrently. Just as an elder's service is circumscribed by his locality, so each role in which a brother serves has its own sphere with its own boundary. Although a co-worker may also be an elder or bear responsibilities at LSM, his function as an elder remains in the sphere of his locality, and his function as a serving one in LSM remains in the sphere of LSM. Conversely, in the fellowship of the co-workers such brothers do not function in their role as elders or as LSM serving ones; rather, they function according to their role in the ministry and the work in the recovery. It is incorrect either to attribute actions taken by the co-workers to LSM or to assume that LSM directs the co-workers in the work or the ministers in their service in the ministry. Although LSM exists to serve and facilitate the ministry to the churches and may be asked to support the work, it remains distinct from both the ministry and the work. Saints who fail to maintain the proper distinctions in their concepts or speech can foster misunderstanding, which Satan can use to sow dissent and ultimately division. Similarly, those who serve in multiple capacities must endeavor to maintain these distinctions to avoid confusion and disorder. This exercise preserves the ministry and the work under the direct leading of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of all the local churches produced by the work and supplied by the ministry for their organic building up as the Body of Christ as God's goal in this age.