

Witness Lee Business Failures Disrupt the Church

Around 1959 Mr. Lee had some investment failures and he lost a great deal of money. This brought the first financial crisis to the church. All the donations and contributions from the church members were used, and still the church owed people a large amount of money. Because of this situation, Brother Lee forced the elders to sell a piece of land belonging to the church in order to pay the debt. That piece of land was located on 19 East Road, section 4, and had been bought by the church to build a training center and a new assembly building. Because of that many coworkers and church members were especially unhappy about this fiasco. Mr. Lee knew this was something that he did wrong and because of that he went to the United States and stayed on the West Coast.

After Mr. Lee left Taiwan, the church coworkers formed two sides. One side was Mr. Lee's strong followers, while the other group had questions about some of Mr. Lee's activities. Those two groups had a strong difference of opinion, which greatly impacted the church activities and made much of the church work difficult to carry out. Finally, some of the coworkers who were Lee followers asked Mr. Lee to come back to Taiwan to resolve differences. In the summer of 1965, Mr. Lee came back to Taipei. He decided to get rid of those coworkers who disagreed with him. Consequently, there were thousands of people who left the congregation. At that time almost 30 % of the regular members left, a most serious situation was that about 80-90% of the young members who were college students left the church. This was a very bad example for the church in Taipei to have this type of cleansing massacre and also to establish factionism within the church. Moreover, there was clearly some tendency to promote individualism and worship of a certain idol.

There was another incident that happened toward the end of the 1950's that involved Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. Mr. Lee and some of the overseas coworkers developed some serious differences because the coworkers could not take Mr. Lee's absolute authority. Everything was dictated by Mr. Lee, and he would not take any input from anybody. In addition some of the well-to-do church members were very unhappy about his handling of the financial matters. This was due to the fact that a lot of the money had been contributed by these church members, and Mr. Lee would handle the finances according to his own viewpoint. The overseas coworkers did not feel they could trust him anymore. Because of the differences they split up. Originally, the Philippines were very important for Mr. Lee because there were several well-to-do church members there who supported the church financially for a long time. So in 1960 the Manila church decided to sever relationships with Mr. Lee totally.

When Mr. Lee left Taiwan to the U.S. in 1960, it was not really that he went there to open up new frontier. Rather, it was because of his own personal failure in Taiwan that he escaped to the U.S. As he left Taiwan, the church work in Taiwan was in serious disarray. Also the Philippines work was split off. This was the first period of our history.

(excerpt from Larry Chi's book on the history of the church in Taipei, 1985, translated into English by professional translator non-church member, 2003)