

June 18, 2008

David Franco's testimony:

I was captured for the Lord's recovery in the year 1970. The Lord used two North American brothers to contact me. Brothers John Cowan and Fred Malir had moved to Brazil to serve, because at that time there were only Chinese-speaking saints in the church life in São Paulo. The local saints could not speak Portuguese so these two and their wives were of great help to the saints in Brazil because they could speak Spanish. My sister was their Portuguese teacher and they invited her to go to a home meeting. She invited me to go with her. I enjoyed the fellowship very much, especially the matter of pray-reading the Word and calling on the name of the Lord. After that, I started to attend the meetings every week. Brother Fred Malir started to translate the book *Further Talks on the Church Life* by Watchman Nee for me. I was really impressed and the Lord started to open my eyes to the vision of the Church. At that time the elders in São Paulo were Brother Liu Tsu Yuin, Brother Dong Yu Lan and Brother Chua Tee. I attended the Saturday night young people's meeting and the Lord's table meeting.

After meeting with church for a few months, Brother Fred Malir and Brother John Cowan in fellowship with the local elders invited me to go to a conference in Los Angeles in 1971 where Witness Lee was going share on "The Visions of Ezekiel." With the help of the saints I was able to attend a conference with Witness Lee for the first time. After that conference I was fully captured for the Lord's Recovery. I was especially impressed with the vision of the Body of Christ expressed in the churches. After seeing such vision I wanted to go back right away Brazil to share with others the vision that I received. I wanted to share particularly with my friends and relatives. However, the elders of the church in Los Angeles encouraged me to stay for a while to live the normal church life in Los Angeles and to practice the vision that I had just received. I decided to stay and enjoy the church life in Los Angeles.

In 1973 I heard reports that the Lord was gaining many local saints in Brazil through the help of Brother Chang Wu-Chen (Brother Watchman Nee and Witness Lee's co-worker). He visited Brazil a few times and had given conferences in many cities. During that time Brother Dong shared very little in the meetings and in conferences. He used to go with Brother Chang Wu-Chen to help the churches and the saints in several localities since the Lord was gaining many local saints to the recovery. That year Brother Chang and Brother Dong came to the conference in Los Angeles and encouraged me to go back to Brazil to help and to live the church life there. I decided to fellowship with Brother Lee about this matter, and we both felt good about it. I went back to Brazil and started to live the church life in São Paulo. There were still only a few Chinese speaking saints meeting there, but they always translated the meetings for me. There were also some young saints that could speak Portuguese. They were the children of the Chinese saints that had been raised in Brazil. I started to serve with the teenagers and the young people together with them.

At that time I traveled several times with Brothers Dong to the city of Belo Horizonte. There some Chinese families began the church life and the Lord was gaining some local young saints. During that time Brother Dong shared short messages on the truth concerning the church.

In 1975 the Lord brought more and more local young saints to the churches in several other localities. These young people were gained through the reading of the available printed work of Brother Nee. Due to

the urgent need some young people, including me, started to translate the Life-studies of Witness Lee in an informal way. The Gospel of John, small booklets, and some hymns were translated to supply the saints and to meet their needs.

Soon after, Brother Dong decided to open a publishing office and began publishing books by Brother Nee and Brother Lee. The first book I remember was *The Life-study of Genesis*. It was a wonderful thing that the Lord did in Brazil through this publication. The saints were greatly helped by it. At that time the elders (Brother Liu, Brother Dong, and Brother Chua Tee) in the church in São Paulo continually shared on that topic in the church meetings.

A co-worker called Samuel Cheng from Taiwan, who had been in Indonesia, moved to Brazil to help with the young people and the work in Brazil. In the mid-1970s Brother Chang Wu-Chen also visited Brazil often. Brother Samuel Cheng was especially effective in helping the young people and young adults among the Brazilians. Both co-workers would visit the churches and give conferences. Brother Dong would travel with them but he did not share very much during those times.

Brother Dong used to attend the Conferences in Los Angeles at least twice a year. Later, he went to Anaheim to participate in the trainings with Brother Lee. Whenever I had the opportunity I also went to these trainings with Brother Dong. During those years many saints were encouraged to participate in the trainings. There was a time in which more than 100 saints from Brazil went to the trainings in Anaheim. Brother Dong would come back to Brazil, listen to the tapes of the trainings, and, twice a year, would give a conference in Brazil to share on the messages given by Brother Lee.

In 1984, Brother Lee came to Brazil. He ministered on *The Divine Economy*. He was very happy with the situation in Brazil because the saints were enjoying the Lord and getting much help from the *Life-studies*. This was our testimony to Brother Lee and his own testimony concerning us. One of the few written publications of Brother Lee's in Portuguese that we had at that time was the *Life-study of Genesis*. After that year Brother Lee was not able to come back to Brazil.

From 1986 onwards Brother Dong increasingly departed from the ministry being released by Brother Lee. The subjects of the messages spoken by Brother Dong were still the same as those given in the training in Anaheim, but the content became increasingly different. In the beginning, he used the same outlines as Brother Lee but did not follow that content; soon he did not distribute the outlines at all. At first Brother Dong excused the change in content both in public and in private by saying that the word ministered in the trainings was too high and consequently too difficult to understand, and that therefore he needed to digest the messages first and then adapt them to the local and regional situations. This, he said, would allow the saints to be nourished. The contents of his summer and winter training messages were completely different from the messages given in Anaheim, and even strange in their content. Because many of us knew English and some of us also attended the trainings in Anaheim, we became very aware of these differences in the messages. This situation caused most the saints, however, to lose direct contact with the word of the ministry. This was especially hard on those who did not speak or read English and for those that could not go to the summer and winter trainings.

After 1987, Brother Dong seldom did anything to promote or encourage the saints to go to the trainings in Anaheim or even to have the video trainings in the local churches. In 1986 he also began to publish

individual messages of his own speaking and used these to replace the churches' diet of the weekly Life-study messages. Following this trend, by 1989 or 1990 Brother Dong started to publish the *Daily Food*. By 1991 he used the messages he shared in his biannual conferences in Sumaré for the *Daily Food* content. These messages were very different from Witness Lee's speaking.

Around 1986, Brother Dong made a false accusation against Brother Samuel Cheng of introducing Pentecostalism into the churches. Brother Dong made this accusation in a public meeting which was video taped. Brother Cheng was not present in that meeting and, when he learned what Brother Dong had done, he left Brazil and moved to Canada. Brother Cheng today lives in California.

In 1986, Brother Dong prohibited Brother Chang Wu-Chen from sharing in a conference at which he had been previously scheduled to speak. He also prohibited Brother Chang from sharing in the meetings of the church in São Paulo. After that, Brother Chang Wu-Chen never returned to visit Brazil again.

Brother Liu Tsu Yuin one of the elders of the church in São Paulo unhappy with Brother Dong and due to his wife's poor health withdrew from the eldership in the church in São Paulo.

In 1988 Brother Dong appointed five new elders in the church in São Paulo—Peter Dong, Fernando Monte-Serrat, André Dong, Renato Birolli, and myself—after the conclusion of a bread breaking meeting. In February 1990, Laerte Salvador moved from Salvador, Brazil, to São Paulo at Brother Dong and Peter Dong's request and was appointed as an elder in São Paulo. In 2002, Brother Renato left the eldership due to personal matters, leaving Peter Dong, Fernando Monte-Serrat, André Dong, Laerte Salvador, and myself as the elders in São Paulo.

Brother Dong continued to serve as the President of Board of the church in São Paulo. In the by-laws Peter Dong was made by him the new Vice President of the church's Board of Directors. Brother Dong rarely attended any elders' meetings of the church after we were appointed. Instead, Peter Dong would come to the elders' meeting each week with Brother Dong's directions for the church and for the work. Our role was to carry out Brother Dong's directions. From the time of our appointment Brother Dong also hardly ever attended any of the regular church meetings in São Paulo.

The church's by-laws were written in such a way that the President and the Vice President were the only ones with power to act on behalf of the church. They could and did do so without consulting anyone else. While I was serving as an elder, I found many things that were not practiced according to the truth. When Brother Liu was serving he was a balance to Brother Dong, but by 1988 most all the things carried out were done based on Brother Dong's desire and without fellowship with all the elders. Brother Dong and his sons decided who would speak in the church meetings. Church financial matters were also considered out of bounds for the rest of the elders. For example:

1. In 2003, André Dong and Peter Dong sold the meeting hall number 4 of the church in São Paulo even though the other elders did not agree with selling it. Without fellowship, they then bought a large piece of land to build a bigger meeting hall for the church and arranged for the building to be built by Peter Dong. They always justified their actions saying that since Brother Dong was the "Apostle" and he was commissioned by the Lord, we had to go along with the purchase of the land, with or without our agreement whether we agreed or not. They said that it was the "will of the Apostle" and consequently the

Lord's will. We were then accused of standing against "the Apostle's will." Because we three brothers—Laerte, Fernando and I—did not agree with such independent decisions and actions concerning the church in Sao Paulo taken by Brother Dong, Peter Dong and Andrew Dong, we were considered to be "rebellious" brothers.

2. Most of the churches in South America, including Sao Paulo, were charged to give 5% of their offerings to "the work." This was referred to as "the gift for the house of Aaron" and, in practice, meant that the offerings were passed on directly to Brother Dong with the understanding he could use the money as he saw fit and without any accountability.

3. Individuals were also encouraged to give to "the work," which, in practice, also meant giving directly to Brother Dong (the work) with the understanding that he had the full liberty to use the money however he wanted. One such practice was referred to as "the ministry of material riches." A dinner would be arranged for potential "ministers of material riches" with Brother Dong and Peter Dong as the guest speakers, culminating in asking for a commitment in writing to donating at least 1000 reals per month to Brother Dong. A similar practice has been to bring businessmen and professionals together to make a written commitment to give a certain amount monthly to the work for Brother Dong's free use.

By 1998, Brother Dong and some of his co-workers began to promote the work and the churches in Brazil and South America as being something special of the Lord. About 200 or so Brazilian saints went to Taiwan in 1998, many of whom were commissioned to promote the special portion of the recovery in Brazil. At this point in time, many saints were very unhappy with what was happening in Brazil and most of South America. One issue that made so many of the saints unhappy, especially after Brother Lee went to be with the Lord, was the criticism against the blended brothers, the trainings, the seven feasts and the churches in the USA. These criticisms became increasingly public from 1999 on.

Soon, Brother Dong and his co-workers were publicly saying that the churches in the USA had become judicial rather than living and organic and that the American co-workers had stopped calling on the name of the Lord.

The situation by 1999 was to the point that some brothers were completely discouraged by Brother Dong and his co-workers from attending the trainings, FTTA and conferences. When the brothers would fellowship with Brother Dong or his co-workers about attending one of the seven "feasts", they would tell the brothers that if they did go to the trainings, etc. they would certainly come back negative.

There were many examples of saints being hindered from participating in the FTTA or Trainings and conferences in Anaheim or Russia. There were cases when the saints had already registered, but they were completely discouraged from participating after fellowshiping with Brother Dong's coworkers, who said these times were something negative. By 2004, almost all the churches in Brazil no longer participated in the summer and winter trainings (live or video).

A very serious matter that happened in 2005 concerned Brother Dong's speaking on the four Gospels. He shared that three gospels, Matthew, Luke and Mark, were not written in the Spirit. When I heard those troubling words during a conference at the Estancia Arvore da Vida, I quickly approached Brother Miguel Ma, one of Brother Dong's co-workers. I asked him to please translate to Brother Dong my feelings about

his words on this matter. Miguel translated my feeling to Brother Dong and told me that Brother Dong did not have anything to say to me on this matter. Brother Dong said that this was what he had shared and so it was okay. Soon after that Brother Dong spoke the same deviation from the truth several more times. His speaking was recorded on tape and caused much disturbance among the saints.

To resolve the unsettled situation Brother Dong's workers spoke a lot on the matter of authority. They emphasized that the saints should be subject to authority, and Brother Dong's authority in particular, and not to speak anything different from him. Peter Dong said many times that Brother Dong is the "commissioned one." He said, "We have to see this fact and to obey him. It does not matter if he is right or wrong. We only have to obey. We can do this because Brother Dong is the one who will give an account to the Lord, not us."

It became almost compulsory for the saints in the church in Sao Paulo to read Brother Dong's Booklet *Daily Food*. The saints were expected to purchase it for every family member. Often the saints bought this book just to avoid problems. The majority of the responsible brothers did not agree with that situation. For this reason they were considered as "rebellious" and "those who were not one with the Apostle." Every time any brother was going to share any message they were obligated to share based on the *Daily Food*. Those words were considered by them to be the present truth of the Lord's recovery. For a while several saints in the lead shared in the meetings using the general topic in the *Daily Food*, but basing the content of the speaking on the Life-studies and some of Brother Lee's other books that were completely according to the apostles' teaching. This once again led Brother Dong and his workers to consider us as "rebellious against the Apostle."

In 2005, Brother Dong brought a brother from Brasilia to be an elder in the church in Sao Paulo. Although Fernando, Laerte, and I were serving as elders in the church, this action was taken without fellowship with us or with the saints in the church. This brother had no knowledge at all of the saints in the church, but he was brought in as a way of strengthening Brother Dong's ministry and standing in Sao Paulo. One of his first jobs when he arrived in Sao Paulo was to fire many serving ones from Editora Arvore da Vida. This action strengthen the control of Editora Arvore da Vida.

The churches in South America were exhorted to read Brother Nee's book *Authority and Submission*. The church in Sao Paulo also was reading this book and the points of the messages given by Peter Dong during this time were always about "the rebellious ones who were against the Apostle." I gave a message in one meeting in which I spoke concerning the qualification of the proper authority, saying that actually only God has authority and that the authority Moses had was just his submission to God. Peter Dong and Ildeu Rodrigues dos Santos quickly stood up and declared "We are not here to talk about the one exercising authority, but the one under the authority."

In that same year, 2005, I was called by Brother Andrew Dong and another coworker of Brother Dong on behalf of Peter Dong to a meeting. In this particular meeting, they wanted to talk to me about Brother Dong. They said to me, "David, we know you traveled to the USA. Are you speaking something to them not good about us?" I said no. One of Brother Dong's coworkers told me "I am 100% one with Brother Dong. Whatever he says, I agree!" They told me if I was going to be a worker or an elder I had "to be 100% one with Brother Dong and that if I was not able to do this, they said it was better for me to resign as Brother Dong's co-worker and as an elder in the church. (Note: These same conditions have also been

imposed on many other brothers in Brazil, conditions for them to be in the work or in the lead in their church, but also as a condition for them to be in the meetings of the church.) At that moment I realized that the ground of the church in Sao Paulo had been changed by them because they made absolute submission to one person—“the Apostle”—a requirement for the oneness. I told them that I could not do this regarding anyone except the Lord Himself.

A few days later Peter Dong called a secret meeting for all the responsible brothers (deacons) and elders and told them that Laerte Salvador, Fernando Monte-Serrat and I were not longer co-workers of Brother Dong and no longer elders in the church in Sao Paulo. We discovered that we had been removed from responsibility when some of the brothers called us after the meeting to ask us about what they were told.

From that time, I felt I could no longer break bread in the church in Sao Paulo because its ground had changed, but I did attend the meetings for a while. The speaking against “the rebels” was so strong that many of my own relatives would not receive me in their homes or even talk with me. A few months later I decided to move temporarily to Irving, Texas, where part of my family was. The church in Irving received my wife and me with joy and we were able to enjoy a normal church life. Since then, I have continued to receive reports over the years of Brother Dong and his co-workers identifying me, as well as Fernando Monte-Serrat and Laerte Salvador and other saints, as “rebellious ones.” Even though I moved to the United States, I still remained in contact with many saints in Brazil who have been praying and meeting together to enjoy the word of the ministry through the videos, CDs, and DVDs in their houses.

Today I, together with so many other saints in Brazil and South America, are praying to the Lord and asking Him to intervene in this situation through His Body that His will may be done in South America.