

Lee, Clinton Wellington (1893–1982)

KUK HEON LEE

Kuk Heon Lee graduated from Sahmyook University (B.A.), Newbold College (M.A.), and Sahmyook University (Ph.D.). From 1990 to 2009, he served as a pastor at Korean Union Conference. In 2010, he joined Sahmyook University as a lecturer and professor at the Theology Department. His research and teaching interests are in Church History. He wrote several books and published several papers on the subject. Currently, he is also the Dean of Planning at Sahmyook University.

Clinton Wellington Lee (Korean name, Lee, Si Wha) was dispatched to Korea as a missionary in August 1920 and was one of the leaders who led the Korean Adventist Church in mission, administration, and education.

Early Life

Lee was born March 3, 1893, into an Adventist family in Bedford, Michigan. Beginning in 1915 he studied theology for two years at Emmanuel Missionary College, the predecessor of Andrews University. From 1917 he served in Arkansas, and in 1920 he and his wife, Grace Mabel Wright Lee, were called to serve as missionaries in Korea.¹

Ministry in Korea

In 1921 the second general meeting of the Chosen Union Mission was held, at which Pastor Clinton W. Lee was appointed as the director of the South Chosen Mission.² The Korean territory had been organized by the Chosen Union Mission in 1919, and the West Chosen Conference, Central Chosen Mission, and South Chosen Mission were established as subsidiaries.³ Lee lived in Gyeongsan, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Jeolla Province where the South Chosen Mission was headquartered, and he was responsible for the mission until 1927. During this period, he



Clinton Wellington Lee

Photo courtesy of Kuk Heon Lee.

and his wife had three sons—Robert (1921), Donald (1922), and Bruce (1926).

On his sabbatical year in 1927, Lee returned to the United States to complete his remaining theological courses at Emmanuel Missionary College.⁴ Upon returning to Korea in October 1928, Clinton Lee was appointed as the head professor of the ministerial course established at the Sunan Uimyeong School. The ministerial course had been established in 1917. It began as a two-year course, but it was closed from April 1927 until October 10, 1928, immediately after Clinton Lee returned to Korea. Lee established the theology curriculum as soon as he was appointed as head professor, and he compiled textbooks corresponding to each course. Below is a list of the theology textbooks that Clinton Lee began compiling at that time:

Bible Doctrine (1927, 207 pages), *Higher Doctrine 1* (1930, 210 pages), *Higher Doctrine 2* (1931, 164 pages), *Daniel Study Lecture* (1930, 200 pages), *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1931, 210 pages), *Bible and Science* (1932, 72 pages), *Research of Prophets* (1932, 226 pages), *Advent Movement's Beginning and Progress* (1932, 226 pages), *Introduction to the New Testament* (1933, 153 pages), *Pauline Letters 1* (1934, 415 pages), *Church Politics* (1934, 38 pages), *Revelation Studies* (148 pages), *Archeology and the Bible* (1936, 126 pages), and *Ancient World* (1938, 308 pages).⁵

At the general meeting of the Chosen Union Mission held in January 1931, it was decided to move the ministerial course to Seoul. Accordingly, Clinton Lee moved the ministerial course to the church headquarters in Hoegidong, Seoul, on April 6, 1931, along with the professors, and the school was named Chosen Union Mission Theological Seminary.⁶ The principal of the seminary was appointed by Pastor Oberg, the president of the union mission, and Clinton Lee became the vice-principal and head professor who actually ran the seminary. His wife, Grace Lee, also served as a teacher. After the seminary was relocated to Seoul, a great evangelistic meeting was held at the Gyeongseong Public Hall for 40 days beginning on September 20, and Clinton Lee led these meetings along with the theology students.⁷

The 1930s were a period of recession following the global economic depression. Therefore, the Chosen Union Mission Theological Seminary was closed one year after moving to Seoul. It was replaced by the theological education courses offered by the correspondence school beginning in 1933. Clinton Lee was appointed head of the correspondence school and conducted theological education through this means until the end of 1936.⁸ Correspondence schools operated during this period were not regular schools, but systematic theological education was carried out, and it was a very important educational process for training ministers.

Clinton Lee systematically managed the correspondence project and reported regularly to the *Church Compass* so the project could be operated successfully as an alternative program for theological education.⁹ The training course for ministers was reopened on April 12, 1937, as the Chosen Union Mission Training Center.¹⁰ The general meeting of the Chosen Union Mission re-appointed Pastor Clinton Lee, who had led the theological education as the head of this training center. Clinton Lee continued in the role of a key theological educator for the next ten years. One of his most important responsibilities was to train leaders. Under his guidance, Yeo Sik

Lee and Seong Ui Lee led in the theological education after the teachers withdrew.

The Chosen Union Mission Training Center, which was operated under Clinton Lee's administration, suffered from Japan's religious oppression policy. After the Chinese-Japanese War in 1937, Japan expanded its battlefield to East Asia. Accordingly, the US canceled the US-Japan Trade and Navigation Treaty in July 1939. In response, Japan planned war with the United States and urged all American missionaries in Asia to return to their home country. Because of this, American missionaries in Korea began to return home beginning in the 1940s. In the case of Adventist missionaries, the Far Eastern Division Council in Singapore in December 1940 resolved to withdraw the missionaries, and they began to leave Korea in November 1940.¹¹ Clinton Lee, who was the director of the Chosen Union Mission Training Center, left Korea and was transferred to Manila, the Philippines, on February 26, 1941.¹²

While serving in the Philippines, Clinton Lee was held in a prison camp after the Japanese occupation of the Philippines; and after the defeat of Japan, he was released and returned to the United States. In February 1951, at the height of the Korean War, the Council of the Far Eastern Division appointed Clinton Lee as president of the Korean Union Mission.¹³ He was unable to enter Korea immediately due to the war, but he returned to Korea on September 11, 1951, and returned to the Korean Union Mission headquarters, which had moved to Busan and Jeju due to the war and was later returned to Seoul. In May 1952, the 16th general meeting of the Korean Union Mission was held in Cheongju. Before the general meeting, a grand evangelistic meeting was held in Cheongju for a month. Pastor Clinton Lee served as a speaker and prepared more than 70 candidates for baptism.¹⁴

Clinton Lee served as president of the Korean Union Mission for about six years. He ended his 27-year missionary work on July 29, 1957, and permanently returned to the United States.¹⁵ While serving as a missionary in Korea, he suffered the pain of losing his son, Robert.¹⁶ After returning home he translated the *Church Manual* and the *Pastoral Manual* into Korean. With his help, the Korean Union Mission was able to publish two books in Korean in 1961 and 1964. In addition, the books published in Korea were available at the Andrews University library to provide materials to study the history of the Korean Adventist Church.¹⁷

Later Life

After Lee resigned as president of the Korean Union Mission and returned to the United States, V. E. Adams, who was the secretary of the Korean Publishing House for five months, was acting president of the union mission. Clinton Lee's service ended when Pastor C. H. Davis was elected president of the Korean Union Mission at the general meeting of the Far Eastern Division that was held in December 1957.¹⁸ Clinton W. Lee died August 27, 1982, at Chico, California, at the age 89.¹⁹

Church Compass. June 1932; October 1932; June 1937; March 1941; July 1957; January 1970.

"Clinton W. Lee," IDE file, record ID 56467. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

"Lee, Clinton W." Obituary. *ARH*, November 18, 1982.

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Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1922 and 1958.

NOTES

1. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 201, 202.
2. Yung Lin Lee, *A Comprehensive Study in the History of the Adventist Church in Korea* (Seoul: Sunmyung Cultural Press, 1968), 53.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1922), 99, 100.
4. According to the IDE (Interdivision Employee) documents, he graduated from Emmanuel Missionary College in 1936 ("Clinton W. Lee," IDE file, record ID 56467, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.).
5. Jae Shin Kim, *History of the SDA in North Korea* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 1993), 84.
6. Man Kyu Oh, 324.
7. *Church Compass*, June 1932, 2.
8. *Church Compass*, October 1932, 15.
9. Kuk Heon Lee, *History of One Hundred Years of Sahmyook University* (Seoul: Sahmyook University Press, 2008), 154-160.
10. *Church Compass*, June 1937, 34.
11. Man Kyu Oh, 675.

12. *Church Compass*, March 1941, 16.
 13. After liberation, the Chosen Union Mission changed its name to the Korean Union Mission as the national name was changed.
 14. Yung Lin Lee, 103-104.
 15. "Clinton W. Lee," IDE file.
 16. *Church Compass*, July 1957.
 17. *Church Compass*, January 1970, 12.
 18. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 96.
 19. "Lee, Clinton W.," obituary, *ARH*, November 18, 1982, 22.
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