News & Opinion from Adventist Today

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Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 8: Worship Him: In the 8th chapter of his book, Victory Over the Beast, Dr. Thomsen talks about true worship. He lists seven things Revelation 5:12 says the Lamb is worthy to receive (Hint: You can find them in a libretto chorus by George F. Handel.) The author suggests that in giving these seven things to Christ in worship, we will find the true meaning in life. He also offers an evaluation tool—not for rating worship services, but for rating ourselves as worshipers....

(Book Review) Highly Committed: The Captivating Story of the Wilson Family and Their Impact on the Adventist Church

DeWitt S. Williams
**Adventist Church:** A book fit-for-a-king has just been published, featuring the dynastic leadership history of the current Church president. It's full of human interest, pictures, and mission stores, but as investigative history it's an ultra-light-weight study....

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La Sierra University Constituents Revise Bylaws Despite Controversy and Delays

Submitted: May 30, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team Update appended at the end on June 1

Last week a special constituency meeting convened on the campus of La Sierra University, the Seventh-day Adventist institution in Riverside, California. The delegates from local conferences and the Pacific Union Conference voted 69 to 10 to adopt changes to the university's bylaws that have been discussed for two years and attracted significant debate and pressure from various groups and viewpoints. The meeting has been planned for some time and when it finally occurred, "lightening did not come down from heaven," one observer told Adventist Today. The group had attempted to meet in February in conjunction with meetings at the union conference office in Westlake Village, California, until someone dug up an obscure bylaws provision that required the meeting to be held on campus, as Adventist Today reported at the time. The changes were made because in 1996 the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the regional accrediting body in California, questioned some aspects of the Adventist institution's governance. Nonprofit organizations are legally required to be governed by their board not another organization, unlike for-profit companies that are often owned by another corporation. WASC is particularly sensitive about this issue relative to educational institutions. The Adventist denomination has often invested significant influence in a few leaders to exercise wide authority in many denominational organizations and institutions. This has increasingly led to questions about the integrity of the Adventist system by outside observers, especially where Adventist institutions play a crucial role in the larger society. The revisions in the La Sierra bylaws permit the chairman of the board to be elected by the board from among the four Pacific Union Conference officers instead of the union conference president automatically holding that position. The concern expressed by WASC is that the current board chairman, Pastor Ricardo Graham, also holds the same position at Pacific Union College. California is the only state in the U.S. where there is more than one Adventist institution of higher education. The amended bylaws allow the board to deal with any
"conflict of interest" issue as well as reduce the heavy burden on the union conference president. Other revisions attempted to make clear that the role of the board is to focus on assuring the missional focus and sustainability of the university rather than "micromanage" too many details of a large, complex organization. A number of groups and individuals have expressed the concern that this might prevent the board from changing key personnel or giving directives essential to assuring the faith commitment of the faculty, staff and institution. A few Adventist ministers and a number of independent web sites have engaged in sustained criticism of La Sierra University for the past several years regarding how the topic of evolution has been addressed in biology classes. This has led to broad claims that the university was in danger of leaving the Adventist Church although no one has ever come forward with such an agenda and no critic has identified anyone with that goal. Some observers have questioned whether the accrediting body (WASC) was over-reaching in its assessment of a faith-based university that has a First Amendment right to maintain a strong connection to the Adventist Church. Because accreditation has become essential to the survival of a university, both to assure that its students have access to funding to pay tuition and to give its diplomas meaning, it could be used to undercut the founding vision of the institution. Others have seen something sinister in the fact that Dr. Richard Winn, the executive director of WASC, is a former Adventist minister who played a key role in the founding of the independent (and unaccredited) Weimar College near Sacramento, and another key staff member at WASC is an Adventist; Dr. Richard Osborn who once served as vice president for education at the denomination's North American Division and has a long career in Adventist education. Last week Spectrum, the journal of the largest organization of Adventist academics, published a story which tried to pinpoint direct intervention by Pastor Ted Wilson, the president of the General Conference, in decisions at La Sierra last year to terminate faculty and force board members to quit. The story lacked a "smoking gun," but well illustrates the fears of many Adventist educators and alumni who support the kinds of changes made in the bylaws.

In coverage of this story today the Adventist Review, the denomination's flagship journal, pointed out that La Sierra University is "still under review" by the Adventist Accreditating Association and that "its endorsement ... may be linked to church financial aid to the university." At least one local conference in North America has already refused to extend to La Sierra the educational subsidy that is due to children of their employees under denominational policy. The Michigan Conference is in a different union conference and Adventist Today has been unable to identify any instance in which this has actually affected a family.
The Adventist Review quoted Dr. Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, General Conference education director: "At its October 9, 2013, meeting the board of the Adventist Accrediting Association will consider the report of the review team that conducted a Focused Visit to La Sierra University from April 16–18, 2013. [It] will consider the bylaws that were voted since the site visit."

"I believe that there are plenty of cooler heads on that board who will work to find a solution other than launching a holy war between Adventist universities and colleges," a source told Adventist Today. "If someone gets the idea that the denomination's accrediting process can be used to chop down your competition, it would be destructive not only of Adventist higher education, but eventually the denomination as a whole."

La Sierra University was founded in 1922 as a secondary school and by 1946 had grown to become a four-year college. In 1967 it merged with Loma Linda University just 20 miles away and then became an independent institution again in 1990. The most recent General Conference Annual Statistical Report indicates that it has an enrollment of about 2,300 students.

Updated on June 1

One of the key concerns of WASC was the fact that the board appointed academic leaders such as department chair. It "prefers that administrators handle such academic decisions," stated a report in the Press–Enterprise, the daily newspaper in Riverside. One of the changes made in the bylaws was to assign this authority to the university president.

In an article published on Friday, the newspaper also reported that the president of WASC, Dr. Ralph Wolff, had "expressed concern that [the LSU board chair] sometimes took actions that primarily were in the interests of the church, not the university." Despite this concern, the constituency "voted to more forcefully state in [the] bylaws that the mission of La Sierra reflects the goals of the Adventist Church." Yet, Wolff told the newspaper on Friday "that he was pleased with the changes" made in the bylaws. He also clarified that "under the accrediting agency's rules, religion-affiliated institutions such as La Sierra can teach students about church beliefs that the world was created in six days ... but must also accurately instruct students that the scientific consensus favors evolution." This is the approach that the university and all Adventist colleges and universities have taken for a long time.
Seventh-day Adventist elected President of the Swiss Bible Society

Submitted: May 26, 2013

By APD
On Friday (May 24) the delegates of the Swiss Bible Society in Aarau unanimously elected Pastor Reto Mayer as the new president. Pastor Jakob Bösch of the Swiss Reformed Church retired after ten years as president. Mayer has served as a board member for the past ten years and was vice president when elected.

The 52 year-old Mayer started his career in the insurance industry and has been serving as a pastor for many years after theological studies at the Adventist University of France and completing a Masters in Leadership at Andrews University. He currently serves as an associate treasurer of the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A native French speaker, Mayer is also fluent in German and English.

Adventists in Switzerland enjoy guest status in seven cantonal Working Groups of Christian Churches, in Basel since 1973 and on a national level since 2012. The Adventist Church became a member of the Swiss Bible Society in 1982. Since many member organizations of the Swiss Bible Society are independent churches (not the established denominations with historic relationships with the canton governments in Switzerland) it is a given that the voices of those churches should be well represented on the board, according to Pastor Bösch.

The Swiss Bible Society has 45 members, including the Swiss Reformed Church, the Old Catholic Church, independent evangelical churches, cantonal Bible societies and Christian
societies and working groups which share the society’s charter of Bible distribution. The Swiss Bible Society is the center of excellence for Bible translation and publishing in Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein. It is the aim of the 146 national Bible societies belonging to the United Bible Societies to bring the Bible in easy-to-read, modern language and form closer to the people.

APD is the Adventist news service in Europe.
Pastor Esther Knott will transition to a full-time position with the Ministerial Department of the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with responsibility for in-service education for pastors. She has been working part time as an associate pastor at Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and part time with the NAD Ministerial Department.

The Redlands, California, Adventist Church has opened its new facilities and the Redlands Daily Facts, sent a reporter who gave the church high praise despite the furor the newspaper kicked up months ago when it published stories about the removal of some trees. "Some people come to just sit," wrote Toni Momberger. "This is a high statement of success for the architects ... because the more [Senior Pastor Zach] Thorp narrated, the more I understood the point of the building as a venue for Redlanders to take a minute and be." The story quoted Thorp, "There are very few places of pause (in life.) ... We want people to slow down. We want them to spend time with each other. Students have started to come study here" after school. "Everywhere you turn there is beauty," the reporter wrote. "It feels like a mission right out of the 1800s, with arches, wooden beams, iron fixtures and tiled courtyards." Again she quotes Thorp; "We looked at the old architecture in Redlands and saw the deep heritage. We wanted to keep that." Bottom line, "We didn't want it to be a place where people walked by and it was a church. We wanted it to be a place of hope."
Justine Greening, the **cabinet minister for international development for the United Kingdom** (UK) and a member of the British parliament, visited the office of the **Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) UK affiliate** on Monday (May 20) to discuss a project in Burma. She told the Watford Observer that she was pleased with ADRA’s approach building up the capacity of communities among the poorest people in developing nations to create sustainable infrastructure and viable businesses. The British government provides funding to ADRA for these projects. Richard Harrington, the member of parliament from the local area, was also present for the occasion.

**Jevan Maseko**, a government official and retired general in Zimbabwe with Adventist connections, died Monday at age 70. His funeral was held Friday in the Selborne Park Seventh-day Adventist Church, reported The Herald. He will be buried at the National Heroes Acre on Sunday. "He was a humble man," the newspaper quoted a politician well known in Zimbabwe. "Unlike some of us, Maseko spoke nicely with his subordinates. He was indeed a gentleman." He fought for a decade in the guerilla warfare that led to the overthrow of Rhodesia and became an army officer at independence in 1980. He served as governor of Matabeleland North and then Zimbabwe's ambassador to Algeria from 1991 to 1994, Russia 1995 to 1998 and Cuba 1999 to 2009.

**A Center for Gender and African Studies has been established at Babcock University in Nigeria** to conduct research and disseminate information about women, gender and related issues in the context of Africa. The director, Dr. Mobolanle Sotunsa, is the coeditor with another faculty member, Dr. Olajumoke Yacoh–Haliso, of a new book entitled *Women in Africa: Context, Rights, Hegemonies*. The book addresses controversial issues with solid scholarship, according to a review by Dr. Olakunbi Olasope, chair of the department of classics at the University of Ibadan. Babcock University is a major institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and this development is an indicator that attitudes on the role of women are changing among Adventists in Africa.

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Dr. David Wilbur: Power and Illusion: Religion and Human Need. Part 13, Chapter 12

Submitted: May 29, 2013

By Ervin Taylor

This is Part 13 of the summary of Dr. Wilbur’s book. It should be emphasized that all of the text in this series of blogs in bold font in the body of the text of the chapter summary has been kindly provided by Dr. Wilbur. If there are any of my own comments, they will follow in regular type.

Summary for Chapter 12: The Universals and the Particulars of Religion

All religions seek to satisfy a similar set of human needs and thus they share many features. However, to justify their independent existence, each must also claim unique knowledge or beliefs.

Possible Universals

Immortality, Happiness, Justice, and Other Worlds

Almost universal in religion is a belief in some form of human immortality either here or in some other realm, spiritual or physical. Along with this opportunity for some form of continued existence comes the claim that eternal happiness is possible in some future existence. In addition these future lives are supposed to allow justice to be served on a personal and even cosmic level.

Ethics and Social Support

To maintain their place among the world religions, they need to provide a high quality of personal ethics. Some problems may arise in applying their ethics to the diverse world. Many people prefer certainty in ethical decisions, so religions often paint the world with a black or white brush—when reality is really shades of grey. Many religions also apply ethics
differently to the community of believers than to the wider world of “evil doers” who reject the insider’s beliefs.

The Gods

All religions of which I am aware have at least some strands that offer anthropomorphomorphic Gods or supernatural figures that respond to our entreaties, needs and search for salvation or enlightenment. Alternatively, the philosophical religious specialists, in at least the major world religions, have brought us an alternate God who is beyond human understanding or description—but still cares in some way about our plight here.

Mysticism and Origins

Mystical experiences seem important in the history of most if not all religions. They seem to be there at the start of all new religious strands, justifying them as coming from an experience of the divine. Such experiences are usually a minority activity, but the person who is gripped by these ephemeral events often feels empowered and wants to share. Establishing a religious orthodoxy means controlling or channeling these sometimes disruptive messages.

Sacrifice and Memorial Architecture

The donations of wealth and life to one’s preferred religion have been regular features of religious cultures both historically and in pre-history. Throughout much of this time, it involved the actual taking of life in some religious ritual. These days, giving a human life to God usually means dedicating it to furthering the goals of a religion in monastic or missionary service or in some other approved-of endeavor. At least part of the wealth donated to a religion is spent on memorial architecture ranging from altars to grand mosques.

Religion, Sexuality, and Family Life

There is evidence within the practices of most religious traditions that at some times and places—even at all times—they consider sexuality and family life to be in conflict with the highest and most dedicated religiosity. No one notices that such people cut off from some central experiences of being human may not reach the highest emotional and intellectual development.

One Proposed Model for the Structure of a Religion

Loyal Rue has offered a model for the structure of a religion and described how his model
applies to five major religions. The model proposes a central narrative myth that relates the facts of the universe and the duties of the believers. The central myth is supported by intellectual, experiential, ritual, aesthetic and institutional practices that shape the religion and make the mythic narrative come alive for the believer—shaping his emotions and goals. Dr. Rue believes these systems are the result of the selective processes associated with the social and cultural evolution of the human species.

The Uniques

Religions have two groups of unique features. One group comes from the cultural background where the religion originated. The general culture and the religious culture within which it worked out its belief system often leave marks such as patriarchy. The most important differentiating features of religions probably lie in their metaphysical or supernatural claims. These claims are almost always untestable empirically and so they can never be disproven. Believers are expected to hold all alternate interpretations of the universe as fatally flawed.

Conflict between Religions

The very existence of a religion depends on its maintaining that it has a unique understanding of the universe. These claims usually result in some behavioral demands. Such claims are inflexible. Popper called such systems “oracular irrationalism” and noted that differences could seldom be negotiated and often led to violence if adherents had political power.

Within Religion Conflict: The Moderate versus the Fundamentalist

Within each religious tradition there tends to be a moderate or progressive wing that accepts an evolving human world and expects its religion to accommodate to these changes. In opposition there is almost always a fundamentalist wing with a confident dream of past glory when God founded the group and things were really done as He intended. They can’t accept compromise and are sometimes willing to be violent in their pursuit of this dream. Such a conflict is found somewhere in most religions.

“The illusion is that religion is here to give us peace and togetherness. The reality is that it does this but usually in practice it does it on a limited, piecemeal basis, with the ever-present risk of intense violence, or at least intolerance between conflicting visions.”

ET Comments: As has been noted in an earlier segment of this series, we moderns need to keep in mind that the cultural category which we call “religion” is a relatively recent creation
of the Western enlightenment tradition.

When we speak of ancient Roman, ancient Egyptian, or ancient Hebrew religion, we are employing a category which almost no member of those societies would have recognized.

There were a few exceptions to this generalization, mostly among a very small number of Greek intellectuals who became cognizant of the contrasts between Greek and non-Greek ways of thinking and became interested in describing and explaining these differences—including differences between Greek and non-Greek (especially Egyptian) religious beliefs. With this and a relatively small number of other exceptions, most humans in most human groups did not think of how they approached what we would call the supernatural or the spirit world as representing a “religion” among many religions.

How their group did it and what they “believed” was simply what the ancestors had done and thought. How others outside their group did it was hardly relevant, since “those people” might not even be considered human.

We can see early traces of the beginnings of changing perspectives on this point among the Hebrew prophets, the two Isaiahs and Jeremiah, as well as a number of other major sages living from Greece in the west to China in the east during what German scholar Karl Jaspers called the Axial Age, a 600-year period from about 800 to 200 BC. Others in this group would include Lao Tzu, Homer, Socrates, Confucius, and Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha).
Feasting and Fasting

Submitted: May 29, 2013

By Debbonnaire Kovacs

Chapter 12 of The Monastery of the Heart is particularly interesting in light of Adventist emphasis on health. Chittister compares the rules for eating and drinking that were originally written by Benedict of Nursia with the abstemiousness of many monks and nuns of the era. As Luther made famous, many monastics would go without food for long periods of time, often in an attempt to somehow gain God’s attention or love, or purify themselves enough to be worthy of that love.

Luther learned differently. Benedict seems to have already understood differently, several centuries earlier. His rules insist on moderation; extremes of ascetism are as much to be avoided as extremes of gluttony. He takes “due regard for the infirmities of the sick,” allows for personal choice, and sees to it no one goes hungry. He also encourages fresh fruit and vegetables when available, and—interestingly—except for the very ill, “wants all to ‘abstain entirely from eating the meat of four-footed animals.’”

One vegetarian in our small group wanted to know why only four-footed ones, but I found it interesting that in the 6th century, he called for any sort of vegetarianism at all.

Chittister goes on to ask:

What are we to think of these guidelines
in a culture of excess
here and now?

Is it ‘religious,’ ‘holy,’ ‘spiritual’
to be fed with care
and trusted to know when enough
is enough?
Is it monastic to live on anything
but bread and water?

The answer is a plan one
in the context of the Rule:
sanctity is not about excess
of any kind,
not the physical,
not even the spiritual.

This is where she particularly struck me. I had never thought of the words “excess” and “spirituality” in the same sentence. Is it possible to be too spiritual? Well, I guess it depends on what you mean. It can’t be possible to be too totally given over to God, and I’m pretty sure Benedict or anyone else who devotes his or her entire life to a convent would agree! But it is certainly possible to become obsessed with anything at all, including good things like the Bible or health rules. We all know someone we think is too obsessed with something that, in itself, is spiritual, godly, and good. We are not as likely to know where our own obsessions lie.

“We do not become holy,” writes Chittister, “on food and drink—either the kind we eat and drink, or the kind we do not.”

That sounds familiar... who said something similar? Oh, I remember!
It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth." Jesus (Matt. 15:11, NLT)

You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. God, through Isaiah. (Is 58:4, NIV)

The chapter asks another question, too: In our own eating and drinking, are we paying
attention to the needs of others, as well? Do we know who raised our food, how, and whether they were paid fairly for their work? Do we know whether God’s creation was harmed by its production? Do we know if there are hungry ones on our streets, in our churches, in our communities?

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

Isaiah 58:6–9

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Remnant — A Parable

By Andy Hanson

Readers,
The extraordinary literary work that follows was sent to me by a good friend and physics professor. He has informed me that he has a large collection of “garish rubber swim caps.” I got the impression that he would be happy to distribute them on demand.

Andy

Remnant — A Parable

It was a small boat, as boats went. It was hardly more than a rowboat, really; but it was safe, dry, and watertight. Rather pretty too, James thought, as he and the other rowers took a short break. It was white, appropriately enough, with a neat line of oars down one side and sturdy wooden benches for the crew. Its name, which they were all so proud of, was stenciled in large red block letters on each side of the bow. Everyone could see that this was no ordinary rowboat: this was the Remnant.

It was a strange name for a boat, but that name filled the crew with hope. They had a mission: saving swimmers. They had a destination: port. They had promises, given to them by The Captain Himself. He had promised them that the Remnant would never sink. He had promised that all those on board would live. He had promised that they would reach port safely. And so, day after day, they rowed.

It seemed to James that surely they should have reached port by now. He knew they weren’t lost—they had a map, drawn by The Captain Himself. It was spread out on a small platform near the bow, next to the careful painting of a compass that showed them they were heading the right direction. Despite all that, though, they had not reached port. James still
wondered occasionally if they should have oars on both sides of the boat; but when they had tried that they had run aground almost immediately. "We should return to the old ways," the leaders had told them in the aftermath of that disaster, "and row harder."

James tried to remember how long he’d been on the boat. It seemed like he’d been rowing all his life. Perhaps he’d been born on the boat! After all, his parents were on the boat too, just a few benches away. Come to think of it, so were his grandparents. Well, he grinned to himself as he began to row once more, The Captain hadn’t said how long the trip was—He’d just promised that they would get there safely.

Not everyone on the Remnant had been born there, of course. Next to James sat Steve, who’d been pulled from the surrounding water quite recently. Steve still dripped and smelled a little bit like chlorine, but James didn’t mind. It felt good to have been a part of saving a man’s life. He wished that he could do more for the rest of the swimmers surrounding the boat; but most showed no desire to come aboard. They seemed utterly unaware of their lost and drowning condition as they splashed happily about in their indecent outfits and garish rubber hats. Some swam back and forth endlessly, as if they could reach port on their own. Others clung to small inflatable toys, as if those could carry them safely through the great storms of the end. Most seemed to treat their condition as a game, unconcerned that they weren’t on the Remnant.

Sadder still to James were his memories of those who had once been on the Remnant but had left. His sister had rowed for a long time on the bench beside him, until one day she’d started talking excitedly about “looking farther” and “seeing the big picture”. They had all tried convincing her to calm down and keep rowing, but she wouldn’t. She and his best friend had jumped overboard, and were last seen wading hand in hand into the distance. Someday, he hoped, they would come back to the Remnant; but until they made that choice there was nothing he could do. He bent his back once again into his oar as the painted compass pointed them onwards.

Far above, on the bridge of the great ocean liner, REMNANT, the watch was changing.

"Morning, Gabe. Coffee?"

"Thanks, Michael." The glowing creature folded himself into a chair with a sigh and held the steaming mug under his nose.

"Ah, that hits the spot. Quiet watch?"

"I wish! More of the usual, I'm afraid, with emphasis on wars and rumors of wars. I'll be glad
when this trip is over!"

"We're almost there now, I'm sure. Soon we'll all be home..." It was such an old joke that they snorted the punchline almost in unison: "...Even the Adventists."

The two archangels sat for another companionable moment before Gabriel broke the silence. "I know this is a strange question to ask after so many years, but I was working with the situation down on China deck in the mid-nineteenth century and missed all the fun. How'd they get that lifeboat to the pool deck in the first place?"

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Sixty Inches

By Adam Hendron

Our new water heater is bigger than the old one. That makes for better showers, but required remodeling to fit it in. The location, however, is not discrete. Our home's builder put this unit right next to the kitchen sink. We've employed a drop cloth to make it less noticeable.

The horizontal wall strips that make our home look like a log cabin needed to be trimmed back. Having just measured the needed length, I cut my first board at 60 inches. Turns out, that was 6 inches short. In a tone unworthy of the name, I cried out, "Jesus! Why did you let that happen?"

I had committed my day to Christ that morning, as is my custom. If I make a mistake, there is usually at least a hint of warning beforehand. This time, nothing.

Fist pumping, jaw clenched... I was hacked. This was aged wood of an irregular, rough grade. The original appearance would be impossible to reproduce.

Resigned to tack a piece on the end and see an extra seem, I continued cutting the other 5 boards. Coming to number four, I realized that it needed to be cut even shorter than the first; I could swap it with the 60" piece and recover the 6 inches that I'd lost!
Okay, Jesus, I see why you allowed this. I'm the one who needs to be cut down to size.
Thanks... again.

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Graduation Ceremony for One

Submitted: May 29, 2013
By Debbonnaire Kovacs
On Sabbath afternoon, May 11, 2013, the tiny church in Richmond, KY was in for a surprise. Between Sabbath School and worship service, head elder David Frasier announced that Danny Saputra had something he would like to share. Members watched with interest as Danny, decked out in all the regalia of a master’s degree in computer science, went to the microphone. “This is my graduation day,” he explained in his strong Indonesian accent. Because Eastern Kentucky University’s graduation ceremony was on Sabbath, Danny came to church instead, sitting in his usual seat near the back on the right. No one knew what he had planned, but he brought his cap and gown and mantle to church and created his own ceremony of celebration.

Danny was known in the church as a quiet young man. The congregation was alert and curious to see him standing up front, telling them he wanted to share the story of how he had come to this point. “This church has been such a blessing to me. I never could have made it without the kindness and acceptance I’ve found here,” he said, and launched into his story. By the end, everyone in the room, including Danny, was choked up and wiping away tears. Here, with extra details provided in an interview with *Adventist Today*, are the highlights of Danny’s story—a testament to what God can accomplish with a few godly people and one boy’s persistence.
Danny was born in Palembang, Indonesia, the only one of the three children in his family to be born outside the United States. When he was 18 months old, his family came to the States to attend college at University of Kentucky. So it was in Lexington, KY that Danny first became known as the “bad boy with the bad attitude.” He says he was nearly kicked out of elementary school even though he was so small, but someone anonymously paid for him to be put in the Seventh-day Adventist elementary school in Lexington. His family were Adventist, but couldn’t afford the high prices for church schools in America. “I still don’t know who did that. I would like to be able to thank them,” Danny told AT.

But it didn’t cure his attitude problem. When he was in second grade, his family moved back to Indonesia, where his parents sent him to Adventist school again. He says the school there was not very good. “It was considered a warehouse school.” In Indonesia, children have to pass tests to get into schools, but “the Adventists took anybody.” The teachers did their best, but “there were a lot of bad kids,” and Danny, by his own account, was one of them.

“But school and church had a way of bending me. Also my parents, and Pathfinders. Pathfinders taught me discipline and a respect for other people.”

He also reported that in Indonesia, the common belief is that you can’t get into public school after going to church school (at least this particular school), because you can’t pass the entrance exams. “But my parents got me tutors. They sent me to ‘cram school’ to get me ready. I hated it, but it helped me a lot.” With the highest score on the entrance exam, he got into one of the best schools in the city.

By this time, Danny’s attitude had improved. His parents had high expectations for him, and his whole family, from his Ph. D. father, to his mother, to aunts and uncles, as well as his friends, the local church members, and his cram school teachers, had all dinned it into him that he was going to be a doctor.

Because of his high scores, most teachers knew of him as soon as he entered, and he was now known for his leadership and responsibility. Danny credits Pathfinders with this. “I was in my Guide class by this time, [he eventually became a Master Guide] and was responsible for my team, and for the people under me. Being a good leader is not just telling how to do something; it’s taking responsibility. If my team did something wrong, I got the harshest punishment. It taught me to be responsible.”

So, feeling he had failed his parents in elementary school, he was trying hard to do well, but the high school had classes on Sabbath, and Danny wouldn’t go. He asked his pastor to write a letter, and fortunately, his uncles had gone to the same school and had, as Danny put it, “fought the fight in earlier years,” so most teachers would let him do the homework from the Sabbath classes and take the tests on other days. But he felt he had to act better and do better work the rest of the week. And he got A’s. Even in one class which met only on Sabbath, economics, he received a 90 because he studied so hard, although he never attended one class.

Now, Danny owned his own education; it was no longer just something his parents were forcing him to do. And he succeeded to the point that he was given an application to try out for
valedictorian, something he is proud of even though he did not succeed in gaining this prestigious position.

Now Danny faced his first serious failure—he failed the entrance test to get into medical school. He and his family were very disappointed, but he would be able to try again the next year. In the meantime, decided to attend a computer school. But he was still determined to get into medical school one way or another. The school he attended was one of the toughest in Indonesia, with a dropout rate of 40%. And of course, there were classes on Sabbath. Most teachers would give exams on another day, but one held out.

The following year, Danny tried for medical school again, and this time he passed. Now he had a decision to make. Praying and trying to decide the right thing to do, he realized he really liked computers and his tough school. He was still interested in biology, and thought perhaps he could do something with bioengineering, but his school didn’t have anything like that. Still, in the end he stayed in computer science.

His friends were upset. “Why did you do that? You took that seat from someone else!” they said. (The place he had tried for would not be passed on to another person attempting to get into medical school.) Danny says he wanted to prove to his parents and himself that he could do it, but he felt that staying in his computer school was the right thing to do. He thinks now that it’s because of the plans God had next.

His life path took several bewildering turns. He was already in computer science instead of medicine. Now a prestigious job dropped into his lap, paying twice what other entry level positions offered—but higher management had some kind of falling-out and the contract was not renewed. Immediately, he was interviewed for a managerial position in the largest bank in Indonesia. For two months, he had weekly interviews and tests in various subjects. Many family members couldn’t believe he got as far as the final interview, since he is Chinese, a minority that is commonly, and sometimes violently, discriminated against in Indonesia.

But Danny got all the way to the board of directors. . . who told him training was on Sabbath and there was no recourse. “So I didn’t sign the contract.”

So his parents told him to find a school in America. They had saved for years, and would send him. He began looking, but in the meantime, friends offered him work helping to start a company. He told them he would help, but might be leaving anytime. They said that was fine. Danny helped to set up a company that is still going in Indonesia, but he was also sending letters to American universities. Two sent back “try again in spring” messages. While Danny was away on a different island, working, just two weeks before the term began, Eastern Kentucky University sent an acceptance.

Hastily, Danny had a friend send him his passport from his home city while he dashed to the embassy for a visa. Because he had been in the States before, he got one right away. Plane tickets were another matter. The only ticket he could find would get him to America after the beginning of the term. Packing in a rush, Danny got a call. His ticket had been cancelled. “However, we have a cancellation. We could get you another ticket, but it would mean you’d have to leave earlier . . .” Danny says he still finds it hard to believe the next words—the new ticket would get
him to Kentucky the day before classes began. “I was 30 minutes late for my orientation,” he exclaims, smiling.

His parents had saved some money, and they gave him enough to get started. They assumed they would have to find a way to send him money every year. At first, Danny was told he would have to pay expensive out-of-state tuition; his parents’ money wouldn’t even have covered one semester. But he talked to his advisor, and there was just one graduate assistant job left. It cut his tuition in half, and has covered everything. His parents never had to send him money again.

Danny tallies up the unexpected blessings: he thought he wanted to be a doctor, but loves his computer work better, and “if I’d gone to medical school, I never would have come to America.” He had wanted to come much earlier, but instead he got here just when he was turning 25, which made him eligible for much cheaper housing, in a private apartment with no roommate. He asked for a lab position, but his grad assistant job, besides being much easier, paid him for more hours than he actually worked. He was put in charge of a summer robotics camp and now teaches the instructors.

He also found a little Adventist church a few miles away. His parents had always told him, that’s the first thing you do, everywhere you go. Find a local Adventist church.

As he stood, capped and gowned, in front of the small Richmond congregation—his American family—he choked up. “Everything just fell into place. God is so good! And I appreciate this church and these people so much! Adventists are so kind! Somebody took me to church every Sabbath because I didn’t have a car. If I need anything, you’re there. This is the kind of church you will enjoy going to. It’s small, you know everybody, you know when somebody’s in trouble, what problems we have, everybody speaks out about it.”

There were few dry eyes in the house. The impromptu graduation ceremony was small, but it was powerful. Danny Saputra got a standing ovation. So did God.
Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 8: Worship Him

Submitted: May 29, 2013
By Ervin Thomsen

Worship Him
For He Alone is Worthy!

The genuine worship of Jesus as Lord and Savior is the key issue in the great controversy between good and evil. No wonder that Satan hates such worship, because the enthronement of Christ in heaven’s open courtroom is a reminder of the devil’s defeat at Calvary’s cross. Consequently, our defeated foe has wasted no time in diverting our focus from Christ’s victory, as proclaimed in genuine worship, to agitations about music and worship styles, worship wars if you please, as if these are the real issues – contemporary versus traditional, piano versus guitar, et cetera. Such worship wars usually steal God’s glory when we insist that our personal likes or dislikes should be the norm for acceptable worship.

Scenario One: “I did not get anything out of worship!” The story is told of a family returning from the church services, and each member of the family took turns commenting about the service: “The soloist sang off key;” “They sang the same old hymns they always sing;” “Why did that woman wear that outfit?” were mom’s observations. “The sermon was not relevant,” added Dad. Finally, having observed his dad’s meager contribution in the offering plate, the eight-year old son piped in, “But Dad, what do you expect for a dollar?” The scriptures call for our whole-hearted response to God in worship. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name” (Psalm 103:1). In far too many places, we rate worship services in much the same manner as consumers would rate an automobile or a restaurant. But if God were to rate you as a worshiper, what rating would He give you?

Scenario Two: “Now I am really worshipping!” A believer once remarked that in a certain worship service he did not get much out of the first two songs in the worship time, but “but by the time we started singing the third song, the song leader really got us going and by then I was really worshiping.” I ask the question—what then were you doing before you got to that third song? Is worship merely our response to the religious cheer-leading of some performer? [1]

Scenario Three: “Have it your way” – In far too many instances the worship services in many churches has become a marketing program, the success of which is determined by how we are able to attract and retain an audience with our religious entertainment. If a church wants to market itself to a certain population segment, it may advertise a variety of worship styles tailored to specific audiences – contemporary or traditional? Some may think that their greatest need is to find a church that caters to their tastes of music and worship styles. What if we fail to address our greatest need – to receive the gospel of God’s cure for our fatal sin-disease offered by the great Physician, Jesus Christ? When Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up (Isaiah 6), and he cried out, “Woe is me! I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips!” – would we even today consider this as an outstanding worship experience? To come face-to-face with the reality of our sinfulness as revealed in the worship of our great and awesome God can indeed become one of the greatest life-changing experiences that we can experience.
What Is Worship?

To worship is to recognize the supremacy of Jesus Christ above all principalities and powers. It is to give Him what He is worth. And the witnesses and the jury of heavenly beings, assembled in heaven’s courtroom all affirm with exuberance (Revelation 5:9, 10, 12) that Jesus is worthy to receive worship. Do you agree with their declarations? Worship of anyone other than the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is idolatry. The worth of worship is found in the One we worship and whose highest desire is that we come to know Him personally and intimately. Worship is really a display of what we consider of highest value. Genuine “worship is seeing what God is worth and giving Him what He is worth.” [2]

Worship is not a performance before God whereby, in exchange for our doxologies, prayers, and good works, we bargain for His favor. His heart is already favorably inclined toward us, and He has expressed His favor toward us in His everlasting covenant, which is the everlasting gospel. He has provided worship as a means of entering into His presence where we may find “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11) truly enabling us to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). But worship is not only for God; it is also for people, just as the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. “God has given worship as a means for man’s recovery, restoration, reviving, redemption and refreshing.” [3] The primary reason for our redemption is not to learn truths about God, but that we may serve Him with our praises and people with His sufficiency for their every need.

So what is the main feature in the worship service? It is the sermon? Is it some special musical feature? Is it to promote Christian service? Or is it the teaching of truths about God? Sometimes we conduct worship as if we, the worship leaders, are the performers, God is the prompter, and the congregation is the audience. The Biblical pattern, as noted by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, is that in a worship service we (the entire congregation) are the actors or performers, the worship leaders are the prompters, and God is the audience.

The Glorious Dimensions of Worship

1. **In worship we participate, with the witnesses in heaven’s open courtroom, in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.** Are these witnesses telling the truth (see Revelation 5:9, 10, 12) the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about God and His Son, Jesus Christ? Do we agree with the judicial testimonies rendered by these witnesses in that courtroom? Will we join with them in joyous worship of the Lamb? In commenting on the unity of worship of the church in heaven with the church on earth, Ellen G. White wrote…

“The church of God below is one with the church of God above. Believers on the earth and the beings in heaven who have never fallen constitute one church. Every heavenly intelligence is interested in the assemblies of the saints who on earth meet to worship God. In the inner court of heaven they listen to the testimony of the witnesses for Christ in the outer court on
earth, and the praise and thanksgiving from the worshipers below is taken up in the heavenly anthem, and praise and rejoicing sound through the heavenly courts because Christ has not died in vain for the fallen sons of Adam. While angels drink from the fountainhead, the saints on earth drink of the pure streams flowing from the throne, the streams that make glad the city of our God. Oh, that we could all realize the nearness of heaven to earth! When the earthborn children know it not, they have angels of light as their companions. A silent witness guards every soul that lives, seeking to draw that soul to Christ. As long as there is hope, until men resist the Holy Spirit to their eternal ruin, they are guarded by heavenly intelligences. Let us all bear in mind that in every assembly of the saints below are angels of God, listening to the testimonies, songs, and prayers. Let us remember that our praises are supplemented by the choirs of the angelic host above” [4]

The lyrics of the Doxology speak ever so clearly about this unity between the worshipers above in heaven above and believers on the earth below. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below; praise Him above ye heavenly host, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

2. **Worship is God’s Remedy for our sin-disease.** Worship is a most vital exercise for the spiritual health of God’s universe as well as the spiritual health of individuals. We have been infected by a virus, originating in the lies of our enemy, which comes to us in different versions, all saying the same thing. “Look out for yourself—no one else does;” “guard your life so you don’t lose it;” “fill my needs” (but too often we have confused our wants for needs). We have become so focused on the key words of our narcissism - “I, me, and myself…” that we often forget the words of Jesus, “for whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:21)—words also echoed in Revelation 12:11 “…and they did not love their lives to the death.”

In the genuine worship of the Lamb, we focus on the merits, mercies and glories of Jesus as revealed in His redemptive activity, so that when His sufficiency fills our lives we will no longer be obsessed with the guarding, protecting, promoting and enhancing of our sinful, sick selves. “Praise dethrones self and enthrones God and His love in the pattern of one’s thinking. When God is forgotten, the mind is thrown off-center. When love is restored, God is enthroned in His rightful place. Praise is the ax which cuts at the root of all those disorders which attack us.”[5] “When praise is absent,” continues Jack R. Taylor, it “simply means that someone has an inadequate view of God. To know Him is to praise Him for He is always worthy of praise! Repent of the sin of believing that things are as they appear to be. Ask God to reshape your whole perspective around the vision of God on His throne.” [6] When we praise God, we invite His presence into our lives, homes, and churches. Praise, like a straight line, is the shortest distance between a saint and his God.

Praise is God’s prescription to protect us against the spirit of heaviness and depression. The prophet Isaiah, in speaking of the work of the coming Messiah, wrote, He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are
bound...to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...” (Isaiah 61:1-3). Many Christian authors acknowledge the life-transforming benefits of such worship.

“The absence of praise produces an atmosphere in which all sorts all sorts of germs foreign to spiritual health are allowed to proliferate. Productivity is stifled. Fulfillment is limited. Man is frustrated. God is grieved. When we praise, productivity is maximized, fulfillment is realized, and frustration is neutralized.” [7]

“Praise is at once the powerful tonic for a tired soul and the greatest weapon for a heavy spirit. Praise is the church’s secret weapon against which the enemy has no defense and before which his ranks fall into confusion and disarray. Praise douses doubts and waters faith at the same time...Praise is a powerful disinfectant that kills on contact a myriad of germs which are allowed to proliferate in a praiseless atmosphere. Praise crowns obedience and puts the praiser over into the victory column.” [8]

Ellen G. White observed that “God desired that the whole life of His people should be a life of praise,” [9] and also noted that “nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray.” [10] Such praise will even improve the appearance of our faces, for the Bible says, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.” (Psalm 42:11). Do we really believe this?

Did you know that the Bible has more to say about praise and worship than about the Sabbath and certain other of our favorite doctrines? If we believe that God inspired the Bible writers not only in what to write, but also in the amount of material they devoted to certain subjects, then should we not seek to major in what they majored in? [11] Through my own study of the Scriptures, I have observed that the subject of genuine praise is one such neglected, much less practiced subject, especially in our study of the book of Revelation.

“I am so sorry for my Master, because he hears so little praise, so little thankfulness, for the love that He has bestowed upon us...if you sit in heavenly places with Christ, you cannot refrain from praising God. Begin to educate your tongues to praise him, and train your hearts to make melody to God; and when the evil one begins to settle his gloom about you, sing praise to God. You can drive out the enemy with his gloom; his dark shadow will be swept from your pathway by praising God, and you can see, O, so much clearer, the love and compassion of your Heavenly Father” [12].

3. **Worship is an affirmation of our true identity.** One of the major assaults of our enemy Satan is on our identity. This is because our identity, rooted both creation and the cross, is our inner operating system which provides God’s programming, His direction and purpose for our lives. As sons and daughters of God, we are legitimately appointed heirs now of the heavenly King, and because Jesus has been declared worthy, judicially qualified, to open the seals of God’s everlasting covenant we may now come and receive the covenant benefits therein intended for us from all eternity. (Romans 8:14-17). As His
blood-bought children we receive a favorable verdict in the judgment, secured by Christ in advance of the final judgment, continual access to Christ and His help in time of need, and the promised presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Just as many persons daily utilize virus protection programs on their computers, likewise genuine praise and worship is the heaven-ordained program that will remove from our lives the viruses of Satan’s lies, before they damage our internal spiritual operating system residing in our identity.

4. **The evangelistic potential of worship.** While we must ever guard against our worship services becoming a mere marketing approach to evangelism, we must never forget that genuine worship can indeed become a door to evangelism and the building up of the saints. The joy with which we worship, and thus express our contentment with the sufficiency of our great God, has a truly evangelistic potential. “I will bless the Lord at all time; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad” (Psalm 34:1, 2). “He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and trust in the Lord” (Psalm 40:3). Evangelism is really to brag about God. Such worship will make local congregations contagious in their witness as they give joyful testimonies about the sufficiency, supremacy, and sovereignty of Jesus Christ for all areas of our lives.

To Worship Is to Give Ourselves to God

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing”—Revelation 5:12. The jury of beings in heaven’s courtroom declares that Jesus is worthy to receive worship. But for Him to receive worship, we must first give it [worship] to Him. He always respects our freedom, and He will only receive what we willingly give Him. This is how Christ’s kingdom-rule over us is established, as we give Him those things which far too often are merely our flawed sources to find personal fulfillment and significance. This is a heaven-ordained way of overcoming both the deceptions of Babylon and the beast, the antichrist.

The spirit of Babylon, as exhibited also in the methods of the beast, is to depend on our idols for self-worth, significance and salvation, expecting that such idols will give us power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor and glory and blessing. Genuine worship is really to give up on ourselves and our own strategies to make our lives work, and to depend on God to supply all our needs in Christ (Philippians 4:19). When we give these (seven things) to God, we humbly wait for His timing in giving them back to us as He in His providence shall indicate. To worship is to take our affections off our idols and to place them on God. [13]

In Worship We Give God . . .

- **power**—which means that we acknowledge our helplessness and powerlessness, and instead depend on His strength, for God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- **riches**—which means that we abandon all our materialistic pursuits as being able to satisfy our deepest needs.
- **wisdom**—which means we acknowledge the vanity and limits of our wisdom; we confess that even our best thoughts about Him are still incomplete in understanding Him fully. Intellectual pride is an idol that must be cast down.
- **strength**—which means that we allow Him to effectively work in our behalf; we give up all our attempts to have everything under our control.
- **honor**—which means that the greatest honor we can give Him is to trust Him and to distrust ourselves. “God loves and cares for the feeblest of his creatures, and we cannot dishonor him more than by doubting his love to us.” [14]
- **glory**—which means that we let go of all our attempts to earn our salvation, and instead we give Him the glory by receiving salvation as a free gift. It is far more important for God to look good, than for us to pretend that we are good.
- **blessing**—which means that instead of always looking for blessings for ourselves we rather praise Him, saying “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (Psalm 103:1)

### A Worship Prayer

It is so easy to believe that learning truths about God is worship. To display our intellectual comprehension of God’s truths may not be worship at all, but an exhibition of personal pride. It may be nothing more than a subtle kind of self-deception, whereby we try to equate our understanding of God with being the ultimate truth about God. Worship is one of the primary ways through which we internalize God’s truths in our lives. So don’t just settle for learning truths about worship, but rather reach out to our infinite God and start serving Him with your praises. So as you read this prayer audibly, do it as an act of worship of the King of the Universe.

“Father, we cast ourselves at your feet. You are the Lord God Almighty, Who keeps covenant from everlasting to everlasting. We acknowledge You as the God above all gods. You are exalted above all the heavens and the earth.

There is no one like You, Lord. You are King, God!


Unparalleled in Your greatness. Limitless in Your power.

Infinite in Your wisdom and Your knowledge.

Absolute in Your justice. Magnificent in Your splendor.


Terrible in Your wrath. Unsearchable in Your understanding.


Unswerving in Your faithfulness. Unending in Your mercy.

Blazing in Your glory. Awesome in Your holiness.

Pristine in Your purity. Fascinating in Your personality.

God! O, how our hearts leap within us as we look at You and say, “O for grace to love You more.”” [15]
Life Applications

Questions to Ponder

1. Is church attendance on the 7th day Sabbath the entire fulfillment of God’s command for us to worship Him? What is God really looking for?

2. What difference would it make in your life if you understood that your expression of worship is about how you rate God?

3. Instead of rating worship services as you would rate restaurants or concerts, how would you rate yourself as a worshiper?

4. How would God rate you as a worshiper (scale of 1 to 7)?

- enthusiasm
- heartfelt participation
- your desire to know Him as He really is.
- your desire to please Him in all things
- listening to the message as God’s word and not just as the word of a man.
- making melody in your heart (even if you cannot sing).
- offerings of gratitude
- giving Him joyful praises for His goodness.
- attending worship services even though you may not like the other worshipers
- reaching out to other worshipers to meet some of their felt needs.

5. Instead of asking, what did I get out of worship? ask instead, what does God get out of my worship? Do I in my worship with joy magnify God in such a manner as to attract others to Him?

Text to Remember

O come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms” (Psalm 95:1, 2)
Truths versus Lies

To enhance your immunity against Satan’s last-day deceptions, replace these lies (or half-truths) of the enemy with God’s truths that will set you free.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Satan’s lies or half-truths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depend on yourself and your own resources (people, places, power, position, possessions) [beasts/idols] to satisfy your deepest needs.</th>
<th>Worship Him who Created because your God is big enough to handle anything in your life and to supply all your needs with His infinite resources.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worship is a duty that a demanding God imposes upon you.</td>
<td>Worship is the path for you to discover and realize the highest dimensions of your position and identity as a child of the heavenly King.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You must worship God in order for Him to provide for your needs.</td>
<td>Worship opens the door for You to personally know God as the provider of your needs. Worship is a delight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worship is a chore and a duty.</td>
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NOTE: If you are enjoying this series and would like Dr. Thomsen to come to your church or organization and do one of his seminars, please visit www.streamofhealing.org.

Endnotes Chapter 8

[11] The same principle should also apply to our approach to the writings of Ellen G. White: Let
us major in what she majored in, and minor in what she minored in.


[13] See this link for a document on “Seven Reasons to Worship God” at
http://streamofhealing.org/mss/SevenReasonsToWorship.pdf


Highly Committed: The Captivating Story of the Wilson Family and Their Impact on the Adventist Church

By DeWitt S. Williams
Publisher: TEACH Services, Inc., 2013
(www.TEACHServices.com)

Reviewed by Ron Spencer

William Henry Wilson joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1904. He and his Adventist wife and their children lived near Pacific Union College in California at the time, and he made a special trip in from the family residence to join her on Sabbath to hear Ellen White deliver a camp meeting sermon and altar call in Healdsburg. William Wilson heeded that call and, as they say, the rest is history, as the Wilson dynasty of male leadership in the denomination set a benchmark in career advancement never before seen, and not soon to be surpassed, on the North American continent.

William Henry’s son, Nathaniel Carter Wilson, became an Adventist minister and eventually a vice president of the Church and a member of its executive committee; his grandson Neal C. or great-grandson Ted N.C. have occupied the church presidency for 14 of the past 34 years.

These last two men, in particular, have shown an ambitious flair for leadership in a media-savvy church, and have accepted high office without apology and with a profound sense of divine calling. Unlike denominational founder James White, who objected to serving in the presidency on grounds that he did not want to be perceived as overly ambitious in a Church highly sensitive to evidence of kingly power, the Wilsons have displayed no public sensitivity to the proposition that serving in the same high offices for successive generations somehow smacks of that very thing. Some have suggested that the Wilsons have become, in effect, the first family of Adventism—and seem very comfortable in that capacity.

Both the “Time-Life” format of this book and its upbeat biographical content (derived primarily from past issues of denominational publications, family members themselves, and funeral elegies and testimonials) further the view that this is a sort-of coronation-issue compendium of Wilson II’s ascent to hereditary entitlement. With ancestors such as his (his father is portrayed as an avid and gifted sportsman who was never more comfortable than when rubbing shoulders with other powerful men and thrived while putting in superhumanly long hours in service to the Church—and yes, on five hours or less of sleep per night), the Church clearly should be grateful for this dynastic gift from God (and there’s little doubt that much of the world Church is extremely comfortable with Wilson II at the helm).
The book is written by DeWitt S. Williams, a long-time departmental worker at the General Conference during the presidency of N.C. Wilson, and in the first paragraph of acknowledgements Williams writes, “I was not commissioned by anyone in the Wilson family or in the church to write this book. I took the initiative and began writing it on my own….I knew Neal Wilson personally from the time I first came to the General Conference in 1974, and I valued his counsel and leadership while I was serving as an administrator and departmental leader.”

The book contains a wealth of information and pictures and provides a competent narrative of the general contours of the careers of Wilson men who succeeded spectacularly in the Adventist system. Neal’s much-younger brother, Bruce, who is said to have pursued a lifestyle of which the family is less-than-proud, is mentioned and pictured hardly at all. It would have been instructive to have seen included in this tome at least some mention of how the family dealt with the heartbreak of a spiritual underachiever in its august midst. Perhaps this story will be told another day.

One highly redeeming historical quality of the book is its fairly earnest presentation of N.C. Wilson’s role in helping calm the waters of racial discord in the church, during his tenure as North American Division president. That author Williams chooses to bring forward this element of the times is commendable, and for the good.

Overall the book accomplishes what it sets out to do, and I thoroughly enjoyed the historical elements of the narrative, including (as a former missionary myself who knew the first President Wilson overseas) the great amount of space devoted to the family’s work outside North America. This book will sell briskly overseas (perhaps far better than in US book centers) and this may be a reason the book has no retail price listed in US dollars. I expect the book will be especially appreciated by those with encyclopedic interest in inspirationally written biographies designed to elevate the stature of heroic Adventist men and their families.

It will be far less satisfying for those seeking an in-depth analysis of the decision-making acumen and legacies of these men, but to many this may not matter, for is not God clearly guiding the Church and does He not overrule and mitigate the shortcomings of his faithfully anointed? This is clearly the attitude of many in the Adventist Church, and *Adventist Today* readers should be conscious of the tremendous capacity of the Adventist people to forgive those whose administrative élan has at times fallen short through the years.

The author is to be commended for preparing this lengthy tribute to the Wilson family; given his advancing years and his personal relationship with the family, as the Bible says, “[he] has done what he could” and the result is a readable, though lightweight contribution to the historical record.