

In Vain They Do Worship – Chapter 7

In Vain Do We Worship

Ch 7: A Worker in Waiting · By Willis Young

September 15, 2010

In Vain They Do Worship

By Willis G. D. Young

<u>Chapter 1</u>	In the Beginning
<u>Chapter 2</u>	The Doctrine of Jesus Christ
<u>Chapter 3</u>	The Outward Jew
<u>Chapter 4</u>	The Signs of an Apostle
<u>Chapter 5</u>	The Christian at Home
<u>Chapter 6</u>	Loopholes
<u>Chapter 7</u>	A Worker in Waiting
<u>Chapter 8</u>	My Sojourn in "the Work"
<u>Chapter 9</u>	Back to the "Drawing Board"
<u>Chapter 10</u>	In Summation
<u>Chapter 11</u>	Epilogue

CHAPTER 7: A Worker in Waiting

I began Chapter I by saying that I was brought up believing that one day I would become a Christian, and that, one day, I did. As I wrote those words, I was reminded that I grew up also believing that one day I would become a worker as well.

One day I did.

But I didn't imagine myself as being just *any worker at all*. No, I fully believed that I would be called to preach in a far-off land such as Chile, or Jamaica, or Greece, or Afghanistan, or . . . You know the place. We all know the places. Places where lost souls are wandering around in their God-less and barbaric condition waiting for someone from Ireland, from New Zealand, from the U.S.A. or from Canada to sacrifice his or her life in a foreign field and go to them, learn their language, ride on donkeys to their isolated villages, and eat stew from their homemade kettles covered with cow dung pads for lids.

Oh, yes, I was not going to be just any old, run-of-the-mill worker.

That day did *not* come.

But from June, 1962 to July, 1963 I tried with all my might to advance the doctrine of the Two-by-Two's right here in Ontario— if I wasn't running around with a herd of workers from one set of Special Meetings to another, or when I wasn't at "preps" sweeping out sheds and hen houses. I also tried to be "instant in season and out of season," and to show a very small sector of an unbelieving and a sinful world that it was by "the foolishness of preaching [that God would] save them that believe."

You read the dates correctly.

I tried for one whole year, one very long year, and one devastatingly unpleasant year, probably one of the unhappiest years of my life, to "fit in" with one of the most unnatural routines and lifestyles that a self-sufficient, fully independent-thinking human being could ever be subjected to. But I could not make it work for me, and I decided to cry "uncle" while I was still sane enough to return to the world of reality where "evening and morning" became one day at a time, where I could breathe and read and go for a drive without permission and supervision, where I could be ill or tired and decide to "sleep in" some Saturday, or, in short, where I could again be a normal adult struggling to earn his living in the world around him.

As you can suppose from those last few sentences, I have much, much more to tell you and many more details to relate, but, if you will bear with me, I will endeavour to do that in my next chapter and will, at this time, attempt simply to explain why I considered myself for the first third of my lifetime being "in waiting" for "God's great call to His Harvest Field."

I was 27 years old on the memorable day that I dropped my letter to Carson Cowan into the mailbox and then sat back in fear, trembling, and something just short of absolute panic to await what I hoped would be a very prompt reply. (You will remember, of course, that Carson Cowan was—and still is at time of writing—the Head Worker in Ontario and Quebec, and, as I'm sure he would put it, it has never been God's will that he should hold a *field assignment* anywhere west of Sault Ste. Marie or east of the Quebec border.)

But what of my so-called formative years— that third of my lifetime between the womb and the tomb?

I've told you most of it already, and what I haven't told you I'm sure you've either inferred or surmised. Some of it, however, may do with a bit of elaboration, and I would plead for your patience as I try to fill in the gaps and expand on some of the areas that I felt, for me, at least, were preparing me for—and impelling me toward—a life of dedication and higher service to the God I loved as well as to his earthly creation in the world around me.

As I previously stated, I was brought up, as it were, “at the feet of Gamaliel,” and, as the Apostle Paul also said, I was “thoroughly trained in every point of our ancestral law.” I never knew what it was like to NOT go to a meeting unless I was ill or the snow was too deep. There were Sunday morning meetings; sometimes there were Sunday evening meetings; there were always Wednesday evening meetings; there were the annual Special meetings; we always attended at least one full convention every year with three meetings a day for either three or four days; and there was almost always a mission going on, and, for all of my early days, that meant three, four, or five meetings a week.

Is it any wonder that, instead of playing “Cops and Robbers,” I was playing “Meeting”?

Oh, yes, I played “meeting.” I played “convention.” I played “baptism.” I played “worker.” I played “professing,” and I played “losing out” or “going back.”

How terribly prophetic my play-acting turned out to be!

I stopped “playing” and professed at North Hatley Convention in Quebec in July 1945 when I was eleven years old. I just knew I had to do it, and I thought about it and planned it out very carefully for several months during the year. I was too self-conscious to tell anyone what I was going to do, but when we got to convention that year a cousin of mine was there with his parents, and, when I confided in him and told him what I was planning, he decided that he should “stand up” too. I remember how he and I went away down into the woods well beyond the convention “grounds” and prayed silently, and each in turn aloud, that God would give us the strength to go through with what we planned to do, and that He would help us to know that we were doing the right thing.

There was no “play-acting” about those prayers, and, for me; at least, there was an almost-ominous sense of the looming reality that I was somehow stepping from childhood into an unknown future where only adults dared to go.

And that “unknown future” lasted for the next thirty-six years.

Now, when I went to school, I could no longer say that “The Black Stocking Gang” was the religion of my parents and grandparents.

Now, when I went to school, I could no longer get away with saying that those “Two-by-Two” preachers were my parents’ and grandparents’ ministers.

Now, when I went to school, would I have to bow my head and “give thanks” before eating my lunch?

Now, before going to school, I would have to find time to read my Bible and get down on my knees *and pray* instead of rattling off the Lord’s Prayer that I had been programmed to do.

Now, before going to bed *every night*, I would have to take time to kneel down again and to humbly beg a loving God for forgiveness for my failures and inadequacies of that day and to thank that same loving God for giving me the privilege of witnessing for him and being ridiculed by my fellow students and a few teachers, as well.

Now, morning, noon, and night, I would have to bear in mind that I was professing, that I was now a “child of God,” and that it was always going to be my duty and responsibility to bear witness for that God who had, mysteriously, singled me out for that very purpose.

Now, school or no school, homework or no homework, I would have to be prepared to “take part” in meetings, and I knew in my innermost being that that was going to be one of the hardest hurdles for me to clear.

Now I knew that I would have to be baptized before I would be allowed to “break bread,” and I knew I would have to spend at least a year harbouring feelings ranging from anxiety to sheer terror at the very thought of what that ritual would be like.

And now, from that moment on, I knew that I could never “lose out” for, if I did, I could never fulfill that next inevitable step of going into “the Work,” for, even at eleven years of age,—no, *especially* at eleven years of age—I was convinced that that was where I would eventually have to spend my life.

I was a worker in waiting.

From the moment that I “stood up” in that convention meeting, I took my “profession” very seriously. But, being eleven, or twelve, or thirteen, or whatever age I became, I was still a kid growing up, and, as such, I had to go through the natural processes that have forever been part of the teen-age evolution. I was often far from well-behaved both at school and at home, and the sad thing about any trouble that I either perpetrated or encountered was that I was always burdened with an extra layer of guilt because I was constantly reminded that “my righteousness had to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees” who I was given to believe were everyone else in the school but me.

Even though it seems I was “born going to meetings,” I did not grow up in a particularly happy home.

My mother was strict to a fault, and, “though [she would have bestowed] all [her] goods to feed the poor, and though [she would have given her] body to be burned,” she was filled with some sort of inner drive—a veritable rage, really—that made it very hard for her to show her soft and charitable side, and she and I rarely were able to get along together. I could never confide in her or talk to her about my problems, and I feel that I missed a lot of joy and satisfaction that I could have had if she and I had been able to see things eye to eye.

But there was more to our unhappy home than that.

When my mother was not angry with me, she was fighting with her mother. When my grandmother was not fighting with my mother, she was finding fault with me, and she and I would fight. And, of course, my mother and father fought regularly and often, and there was no secret about the fact that my father did not care very much for his mother-in-law.

I am not writing about this to elicit sympathy from anyone, but I do wish to make the point that it was often a very difficult task to go to meeting on Sunday morning or Wednesday night and try to “take part” in an atmosphere of spirituality when one had to overcome such strong feelings of animosity toward one’s own loved ones who were now sitting piously around the room looking as if sugar wouldn’t melt in their mouths. But I had to do it, and I did it over and over and over again.

Is it any wonder, then, that I grew to crave visits from the workers? “Oh!” I would silently plead, “Please let the workers come to stay with us for as long as possible.”

On the days and nights when they were “abiding in [our] house,” that house became a home—a very peaceful and pleasant place to be, indeed.

“Oh! Please, God, don’t let the workers leave.”

There were two other pleasant and redeeming features. My father and I were very close, and it would never have dawned on me to either fight with him or even argue with him. It wasn’t that we did that many things together as fathers and sons so often do, but, in a quiet and subtle sort of way, he seemed to let me know that he supported and respected me for who I was, what I was learning, and, above all, for what I wanted to become. Too, my maternal grandfather and I got along very well, and I have wonderful memories of him and me spending many afternoons fishing in a nearby lake.

In retrospect, I realize it was not because I felt the workers cared that much for me or that they paid so much attention to me that I loved so much to have them around, but I longed for the sense of peace they brought, and I craved one day to be like them and to carry that atmosphere of quiet dignity into the homes where I would be staying.

I was a worker in waiting.

As I grew older, it began to dawn on me that I really didn’t *want to* go into “the Work” at all. I was pretty sure I would, though, because I “knew in my heart” that I had “heard the Call,” but, oh dear, I did not want to go. The world and flesh and devil got blamed for a tremendous amount of temptation that I was experiencing and, strangely enough, even though I put all thoughts of that foolishness of preaching on hold, I believe the temptation, itself, actually strengthened my resolve to one day turn my back on my chosen career and plunge headlong into a future that terrified me half to death.

I was a worker in waiting.

After I started to attend school away back when I was six years old or so, I began to add a new game to my repertoire. I still had no desire to be a cop or a robber, but I began to “play school.” I was not considered a very good student—and I have the marks to prove it—and, because I was “picked on” and teased so extensively about my “religion,” I did not even find school such a happy experience; but I knew, yes, somehow, I *knew* that I wanted very, very much to become a teacher.

One day I did.

I managed to get through high school by the skin of my teeth, and just as the thought of going into “the Work” gave me the strength and motivation to profess, so now the prospect of becoming a teacher drove me to persevere until, in 1956, I emerged from Teachers’ College with a mortar board on my head, a gown on my back, and a diploma clutched lovingly in my right fist.

I was a teacher. I had a job in Aylmer, Quebec, near Ottawa, Ontario. I was on my own and on my way to fulfill a dream that I had lived with for almost ten years. But. . .

I was a worker in waiting .

I know that teachers are supposed to love their work, but I would challenge any teacher on earth to tell me that he or she loved it more than, or even as much as, I did. Somehow it fell my lot to be directed into working with students with learning disabilities, and I

had many days in which I was not happy, but my own difficulties in coping with my own elementary and high school experiences seemed to enable me to understand just what snags some of my students were caught on.

And I began to make a groove for myself.

I bought a car, and I felt free. I was free to attend as many meetings as I could squeeze into my busy schedule. I gave the workers an extra set of my car keys, and I felt so blest when they would come to town and borrow it to go on their visits and mission work. I was free to go to two or three conventions a year and I went, believe me, and I loved going. I was free to plan many weekend excursions to Quebec City where Oscar Waterbury and George Poole were pioneering in the “French Work.” I was free to invite everyone I could think of to attend gospel meetings with me, and I often sat until two or three o’clock in the morning trying to convince good unsaved associates that they were on a certain path to hell if they wouldn’t profess and become a member of “a church that had no name and no founder save Jesus Christ himself.”

I was as free to travel as my salary would allow. I flew to Jamaica for convention and arranged, en route, to meet a group of “professing folk” in Nassau in the Bahamas. I went to Washington, D.C. and looked up as many “friends and workers” as I could find both there and in Richmond, Virginia. I went to Florida and to the Canadian Maritime Provinces, and I want you to know that I never missed either a Sunday morning or a Wednesday evening meeting during all my ramblings.

But, even with all my freedom, throughout all my wandering, and in all the hubbub of my activity, one nagging thought kept coming back to haunt me and permeate my innermost being because . . .

I was a worker in waiting.

One morning in February, 1962, on my way to school, I stopped at the post office and posted that memorable letter which I had written laboriously and—dare I say it?—prayerfully the night before to Carson Cowan, telling him that I had decided to put an end to the waiting and, if there was an opening for me, I would like to go into “The Work” after the convention at Almonte, Ontario that very next July.

When I look back over the material in this chapter, I realize that I may have created or conveyed a wrong impression when I listed some of the many things I tried to do to show my support for the “Workers” and the “church.” I can see that I may have sounded boastful, or self-righteous, or even smug as I attempted to explain why I believed that God was directing me to serve him in a different capacity. I wish I could assure you, however, that that was not my purpose in telling that part of my story or even laying bare some details of my life that are difficult for me to share with anyone.

The impression I wanted to leave with you is really quite simple. I loved the way of worship which I called “The Truth,” and I never felt better about myself than when I was immersed in what I considered was “the Lord’s work.” I wanted to show the workers that they had my complete and unflagging support because of their lives which, I fully believed at the time, were being spent in sacrifice and service to God in heaven. My only motive in all my efforts was to learn all I could about what I believed and to prepare myself for that same sacrifice, which I was, convinced God had called me to make.

I knew in my soul that I loved what I thought was the Way of God, and, later, when I saw the loopholes and began questioning the reasons for such emphasis on “teaching for doctrine commandments of men,” I was hurt more deeply than mere words could ever convey when I began to be snubbed and rejected by the very “ministry” that I had trusted and supported with my body, soul, and spirit for well-nigh forty years.

Go to **Chapter 8**