

# Thomson, William Wilson (1917–2004)

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CLIVE P. DOTTIN

Clive P. Dottin is currently the field secretary and the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director of the Caribbean Union Conference. He has served on the Police Service Commission (2006-2009). He assists several non-governmental organizations such as Servol: Roman Catholic Youth Development Programme, Alcoholic Anonymous, and the Loveuntil Foundation which empowers youth in crime-saturated areas. His qualifications include a D. Litt. from the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC) for community service, an M.P.H. from Loma Linda University, and a B.A. in Theology from USC. In 2014, he received the National Award of Trinidad and Tobago the Chaconia Silver for his work in rescuing endangered youth from gangs and the drug trade. His publications appear in the *Bell Journal* and the *Youth Horizon*.

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William Wilson Thomson was an Adventist minister and administrator in the Caribbean Union for thirty-two years.

William Wilson Thomson, better known as W. W. Thomson, was born in Castara, Tobago, on November 24, 1917. He attended Adventist schools, and married Enid Yip, the daughter of Benjamin Yip. Four children were born to the couple: Patricia Saliba (deceased), Rosalind Maycock, Roland Thomson (former treasurer of the Caribbean Union Conference), and Robert Thomson.<sup>1</sup>

Until 1950, Thomson worked as a photographer with a studio on Frederick Street in Port of Spain, Trinidad. In 1950, he accepted his first position in denominational employment when he became Book and Bible House (Adventist Book Center) secretary for the South Caribbean Conference.<sup>2</sup> Ordained to the gospel ministry on December 17, 1955, he served many churches throughout Trinidad. Among these were the Arima, San Juan, Cleveland Temple, and Dundonald Street churches. Thomson was a man of "deep conviction, with unswerving loyalty to the God whom he knew so well. He practiced what he preached."<sup>3</sup>

In 1954, Thomson became Sabbath School and Young People's Missionary Volunteer secretary.<sup>4</sup> Under his leadership, Trinidad held its first Pathfinder workshop at Camp Cumana in 1954.<sup>5</sup> In 1957, Thomson also became acting secretary-treasurer for the South Caribbean Conference.<sup>6</sup> He was later promoted to secretary-treasurer.<sup>7</sup>

Thomson became the administrator of the Port of Spain Adventist Hospital in 1962, a position he held for eight years. In 1970, he was elected president of the East Caribbean Conference, and in 1975 he was elected the first president of the North Caribbean Conference. Organized on August 27, 1975, the North Caribbean Conference encompassed Anguilla, Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, St. Eustatius, St. Croix, St. Johns, St. Martin, St. Thomas, Tortola, and Virgin Gorda. At the time, membership numbered 7,000 people organized in forty-two churches.<sup>8</sup>

As a leader, Thomson's "warm and effervescent personality" made him popular.<sup>9</sup> He was also patient and tolerant, earning himself the sobriquet "Mr. Understanding."<sup>10</sup> Among his major accomplishments in the East Caribbean Conference were positioning the church in the community as a caring, responsive institution; strengthening youth ministry and providing a stimulus for Pathfinder and Master Guide clubs; and supporting innovative health programs such as "Keep Barbados Beautiful and Healthy." On average, two new churches were planted annually during his administration. Thomson also mentored successful evangelists such as K. S. Wiggins, who in 1971 baptized 800 people in Barbados, Guyana, and St. Croix.<sup>11</sup> The complete record of his administration from 1971 to 1975 counted 6,100 persons baptized, six new pastors ordained, tithes increased by 62 percent, fifteen new church buildings dedicated, eleven new congregations planted, four new schools opened, and several child care centers constructed.<sup>12</sup>

Thomson played a vital and meaningful role in the transition period of 1975 during which the original East Caribbean Conference was divided into two conferences. As a senior statesman, he led by example in what was an almost seamless transition. Not only did Thomson distinguish himself as a bridge-builder, but he provided visionary leadership to the new North Caribbean Conference of which he became the first president.

Retiring in 1982, Thomson remained active by serving as interim administrator of the Port of Spain Adventist Hospital for a brief period in 1984.<sup>13</sup> W. W. Thomson passed away in Florida at the age of 86 on March 12, 2004.<sup>14</sup> He left an indelible mark in the areas of health, youth, evangelism, and leadership. He inspired confidence, nurtured young ministerial workers, empowered subordinates, and brought his business acumen to bear on the financial development of the Adventist Church in the Caribbean.

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## NOTES

1. "William Wilson Thomson obituary," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, July-September 2004, 15; E. W. Carnegie, "Farewell Salute," *Inter American Flashes*, November 9, 1982, 1.
2. Eric John Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago 1891-1981* (Port of Spain: College Press, 1982), 101.
3. "William Wilson Thomas obituary," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, July-September 2004, 15.
4. "South Caribbean Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), 109.
5. Eric John Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago 1891-1981* (Port of Spain: College Press, 1982), 101.
6. "South Caribbean Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 115.
7. "South Caribbean Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 125.
8. "New Conference Organized in Caribbean Union," *Inter American Flashes*, October 14, 1975, 1.
9. Glenn O. Phillips, *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over a Century of Adventism 1884-1991* (Bridgetown, Barbados: East Caribbean Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1991), 83.
10. E. W. Carnegie, "Farewell Salute," *Inter American Flashes*, November 9, 1982, 1.
11. Glenn O. Phillips, *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over a Century of Adventism 1884-1991* (Bridgetown, Barbados: East Caribbean Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1991), 85.
12. Leon Phillips, "East Caribbean Conference Session," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, vol. 48, third and fourth quarters, 1975, 3.
13. Ian Green, *Centenary of Adventism, Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1991*, 55.
14. "William Wilson Thomson obituary," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, July-September 2004, 15.

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