



THEODORE C. DAWSON

HUMANITARIAN, NETWORKER

1903-1998

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

—ACTS 11:24

Theodore Casper Dawson (also known as Deacon Ted and Brother D) lived a humble and full life. His goal was to make the world a better place. His *modus operandi* was to do good. His objective was to help anyone in need within his reach. A consummate organizer and a lover of God and humanity, Theodore Dawson's favorite words were "Get the job done." He believed in doing good wherever he could, whenever he could, to whomever he could.

Theodore didn't require much because he practiced a minimalist approach to life. He provided for his family and helped others, but did little for himself.

Some have likened Dawson to a modern-day St. Francis of Assisi. He gave, but never asked for or expected a payback. Like the biblical Dorcas, when Dawson died, people came from all over the world to tell stories of his deeds of goodness that had changed their life and helped them to achieve their dreams and aspirations. People from every station in life—health care professionals, ministers, politicians, educators, blue collar workers—testified to the impact of Dawson, a man who stood only five feet tall, but had a huge heart.

Theodore was born November 25, 1903, to William and Margaret Dawson in Richmond, Virginia. Orphaned during early childhood when both of his parents died, he knew early on what it was like to have to fend for himself. It was a difficult way to grow up, but through it he developed an inner toughness and sensitivity to those who were disadvantaged.

At the age of 16 Theodore moved to Wisconsin and lived with a Seventh-day Adventist couple who studied the Bible with him and helped him to focus on developing a blueprint for his life. As a result, Theodore accepted Christ as his personal Savior and became a devout Seventh-day Adventist. He later observed that the Adventist lifestyle saved him from all kinds of “mess and messiness.” He credited his acceptance of Adventism as one of the most important decisions in his life because it gave him the key to understand the Bible and God’s message for this time in history. He was fond of saying that “conversion turned him right-side up.”

His travels led him to Los Angeles, where he met Lila Thrasher, whom he married. In Lila he found his soul-mate, and a partner equally committed to doing good. Dawson was quick to admit that while neither of them was perfect, especially him, they did form a good team for helping others. The Dawsons had four children—Theodore Jr., Pearl (Runnels), Shabethai, and Wanda. They

moved to Loma Linda, California, where their children could receive Christian education and they could establish a base for their helping ministry.

In the 1940s, Dawson worked at what is now Loma Linda University in the pharmacy and bakery. Later he became the director of custodial services at Loma Linda Academy and the “Deacon at Large” for the 4,750-member Loma Linda University Church. Shortly thereafter he became involved in providing ways for students to earn tuition for Christian education. His ways were diverse and creative—engaging students in doing literature evangelist work, student labor, yard work, and other projects.

His theme was: “If you want to be something and do something, you have to work for it.” He believed in helping, but he knew that in order for people to get the most benefit from his assistance, they needed to help themselves. His practice was “help, but no handout”! Christian education, as Dawson saw it, was a means to a noble end—to develop character to get us from this life to the life to come. If a student was willing to work, then Dawson was there to help. He was a humanitarian with an inimical way of mixing patience, disinterested benevolence and disarming humility.

Dawson had found his primary niche for doing good in helping young people obtain a Christian education. Although not an “educator” himself, he did everything possible to promote Christian education—from building churches and schools, to buying school buses and paying the tuition for students of all races and ages. At one point in time, Dawson was responsible for providing the funds to keep 30 students in school.

From his position as a deacon in the Loma Linda University Church, Dawson leveraged his contacts with physicians and other health care professionals to help worthy students. Over the more than 40 years of Dawson’s ministry, it

is estimated that he helped up to 1,500 young people and raised approximately \$250,000 for students at Loma Linda Academy, La Sierra University, Oakwood University, Walla Walla University and other schools around the world.

In 1963 Loma Linda Academy dedicated the yearbook to Dawson. Three years later, the citizens of the city of Loma Linda recognized the Dawsons' far-reaching community benevolence by naming a park in their honor—the Theodore and Lila Dawson Park. It is impossible to calculate the boundaries of Dawson's efforts on behalf of students and Christian education. Many civic, church, and thought leaders are today serving in places all over the world as a result of Dawson's commitment.

One such leader is Dr. Delbert Baker, the tenth president of Oakwood University. Baker states that Dawson was a transformational influence in his life. Dawson was a mentor, and it was largely because of him that Baker was able to receive a Christian education. Like others that Dawson impacted, he is forever thankful for the example Dawson set of unselfish giving.

Baker relates that one time, as a teenager, he tried to convey his thanks to Dawson and express how much he meant to him. But Dawson never took credit personally; in humility he consistently pointed to Jesus as the source of all good. Baker resolved that he would pay Dawson back by passing on to others the good that he had received whenever he could, thereby spreading the ripple that Dawson started.

Theodore Dawson died at the age of 95, after a faithful life of service. Baker had the honor of delivering the eulogy. The main message of the eulogy, taken from Acts 11:24, along with the testimony of family and friends that day, summed up his life impact: Brother Dawson was a good man.⁹⁰