

Geraty, Thomas Sinclair (1914–2013) and Hazel Mae (McVicker) (1912–2001)

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Thomas S. Geraty served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for almost forty-five years as a teacher, pastor, missionary, and educational administrator in three divisions and at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Early Life and Education

Thomas “Tom” Sinclair Geraty was born in San Francisco, California, the United States of America, on December 2, 1914, the eldest of five siblings: Francis Gertrude, Marcella, Joseph, and Sarah Jean. His father, Thomas Michael Geraty (1886–1979), was the son of an Irish immigrant who operated a small general merchandise store in Lathrop in the San Joaquin Valley in California. His mother, Frances (Sinclair; 1886–1975) was born into a Baptist family in Bottineau, North Dakota, where she spent her childhood. She trained as a nurse in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and had then moved to Lathrop to care for an aged aunt. The couple met in Lathrop and



T. S. Geraty, 1954.

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Adventists Archives.

married in 1913. They then moved to San Francisco, where at 2345 Clement Street in the inner-city suburb of Richmond, they set up a grocery store of their own and lived in the apartment above the shop. Frances and the children attended the 21st Avenue Baptist Church, a ten-minute walk from their home. Many of the customers of the family grocery were Chinese immigrants, which gave the Geraty family an early exposure to foreign languages and cross-cultural issues.

In 1922, Tom's mother befriended members of the Platt family, who were newly arrived in the neighborhood and who for a time worshipped with the 21st Avenue congregation. Discovering that the Platts were, in fact, Adventists, Frances soon began attending the local Adventist church with the Platts and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Her husband remained a life-long Catholic but was eventually comfortable participating in Frances's new church life from time to time. In 1927, after studies with Elder John Tindall, Tom, at age 12, and his sister Gertrude were also baptized into the Adventist faith.¹

From 1922 to 1930 Tom attended the Alamo Elementary school just a few minutes' walk from his home. Because of a health problem, he had delayed starting school for a year and thus spent all eight years in the same class as his sister Gertrude. At the end of grade eight, they attended for a time at the Lowell High School because of its links with the prestigious state university at Berkeley, but the values of the school clashed with young Tom's faith, and he and Gertrude subsequently decided to attend the local Adventist Junior Academy that convened on the premises of the Capp Street Adventist Church. They then attended the Adventist Golden Gate Academy in the east Oakland Hills even though this involved a 90-minute commute on public transport.

In 1937, Geraty graduated from Pacific Union College in Angwin with a major in English and secondary education, and in the fall began his career teaching seventh and eighth grades at Golden Gate Academy in Berkeley. On July 10, 1938, he married a college classmate, Hazel Mae McVicker from Lodi, who worked as an elementary school teacher.

Missionary Service (1940–1959)

Six weeks after their wedding as Tom was beginning his second year of teaching, Elder E. D. Dick of the General Conference secretariat corresponded with the couple to ask whether they would consider mission service and requested that they complete an information questionnaire, apparently with a view to having them take an appointment as a teacher in the Zambesi Union Conference.² Eighteen months later, by which time Geraty had transferred to Mountain View Academy in Mountain View as Bible teacher, the General Conference placed a call for the couple, but it was not to go to Africa. The call was to China, where it was planned that the 25-year-old Geraty would become the principal of the China Training Institute and also serve as the education secretary of the Northwest China Union Mission located at Chiao Tou Tseng, Kiangsu, near Nanking.³ With the outbreak of World War II in Europe just a few months earlier, Geraty was reluctant to accept such a call immediately, and his principal at Mountain View Academy pressed him to stay. The couple was expecting their first child, which also

gave them pause. The General Conference assured them, however, that the circumstances in China were safe for a young mother and baby and that a lengthy period of initial language study at Shanghai would give them time to settle in their new assignment. The family, with four-month-old Larry, born April 21, 1940, left San Francisco for China on September 6, on board the *Asama Maru*.⁴

Three weeks after the couple arrived in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, security conditions deteriorated rapidly. "Because of the intensity of the international situation, we in the China Division have received definite counsel to evacuate," Geraty reported from Shanghai to readers of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.⁵ Under advice from the U.S. State Department, the Geraty family and five other missionary families were hastily withdrawn first to Hong Kong and then to the relative safety of Rangoon in British-occupied Burma.⁶ The China Training Institute faculty and staff also evacuated to Hong Kong but not without the tragic loss of life for eight national teachers.⁷ Some language teachers followed shortly afterward to Burma, and for the next 12 months, Geraty continued his study of Mandarin, becoming highly fluent in the language. As security again deteriorated with the threat from Japanese-occupied Thailand, the missionary families moved to Kalaw, a British hill station in the Shan Highlands in Central Burma, and as circumstances permitted, Geraty engaged in evangelistic endeavors with an Australian missionary couple, Harold and Dorothy Baird.⁸ An accident playing volleyball in Kalaw resulted in a broken leg and the need for surgery in Rangoon. Near the end of 1941, while he was in the hospital for further surgery, the surgical procedures were interrupted by the Japanese bombing of Rangoon as they prepared for their overland advance in Burma. Shortly afterward, Geraty, his family, and other missionary wives and children were evacuated by air back to China. The other missionary husbands traveled by truck "over the hump" to China. Geraty's leg injury troubled him for many years.⁹

Back at Chungking by early February 1942, Geraty at last took up a teaching assignment at the West China Union Training Institute, a school with an enrollment of about 200.¹⁰ Students and faculty had recently settled on a site at Sung Pao, 20 miles north of Chungking, after having been repatriated from Hong Kong. The changed arrangements meant that Geraty was no longer needed to be the principal, but shortly after his arrival at Sung Pao, the role of business manager was added to his duties.¹¹ Wartime conditions and political unrest created particular hardships for the family and for their fellow students and faculty in very crowded conditions (chapel meetings were held in a large tent), but during the next five years the school prospered, changed its name to San Yu Theological Seminary, and produced a total of 165 graduates.¹²

Actively involved in evangelistic outreach as well as ministerial training, Geraty was ordained to the gospel ministry along with several fellow missionaries on July 8, 1944.¹³ On September 10, 1944, the couple's second child, Edwin, was born, who suffered from poor health. Fifteen months later at the end of 1945, as Hazel was returning with the children to the U.S.A. to seek medical care for Edwin, he contracted pneumonia from exposure to cold weather en route, and on December 29 he died in Shanghai, where he was buried. After the simple funeral, Geraty returned to Chungking while the grieving Hazel (unaware that she was pregnant) and five-year-old Larry continued on to the U.S.A. to live for a time with relatives in California. On September 8, 1946, a

third son, Ronald, was born. Geraty did not get to meet his third son until 10 months later, when in June 1947, after seven years of service in Asia, Geraty was able to join his family in the U.S.A. on furlough. A substantial part of the year-long furlough was spent in graduate study at Potomac University and with evangelist J. L. Shuler in Detroit, Michigan.¹⁴

In January 1948, Geraty was appointed president of the China Training Institute, which, during his absence, had been made into a central institution of the newly reorganized division. Because of political disturbances connected with the communist uprising under Mao Tse Tung, the institute had been relocated 1,500 kilometers (932 miles) to the east (back to the original campus at Chiao-Tou-Tseng near Nanking). This time, it was hoped, the move could be less rushed and more carefully planned.¹⁵ Geraty arrived with his family for another term of service in China in mid-1948 in time for the new academic year and with the immediate challenge of erecting new buildings for the new-old academic campus. At this time, Geraty was also appointed as the division Educational secretary in addition to his duties as the college president. The rapid advance of Mao Tse Tung's communist forces on Nanking in mid-1949, however, necessitated another emergency evacuation. Under Geraty's leadership, transport on a U.S. Navy gunboat and on a large privately leased coastal steamer was hastily secured, and the entire college faculty and student body along with as much school equipment as could be quickly packed along with household furnishings and even some farm animals were taken down the Yangtze river to Shanghai and then south along the coast to Hong Kong. The secondary school with its local staff and student body was left in place. In Hong Kong, the college was merged with the South China Training Institute already established at Clear Water Bay. Arrangements were made to share the administrative responsibilities for the merged institutes and the associated Hong Kong secondary and elementary school. Geraty also served as Education secretary for the South China Union. The news emanating from his former school site as the new communist authorities requisitioned his recently constructed school buildings for military use caused heartbreak and created acute suffering and difficulties for remaining secondary students and church members.¹⁶

With no prospect of an early return to China and apprehensions about the security of foreign personnel even in Hong Kong, uncertainty prevailed as to whether Geraty might next best serve in Indonesia or in Taiwan. Some at the General Conference, however, felt that Geraty's leadership skills would be better utilized in Lebanon as the president of Middle East College. Thus, in January 1951 a call was extended to the family to move to Lebanon.¹⁷ In his new assignment in the newly created Middle East Division, Geraty was again requested to carry additional duties. For the first half of his eight years of service in the field, he also served as Education secretary of the division (1951–1955) and as Missionary Volunteer secretary (1951–1954). These assignments involved him in substantial travel around the division territory in countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey and enabled him to expand the enrollment of the college recently settled on its new mountainside campus east of Beirut. As president of the college, Geraty oversaw the acquisition of additional college land purchased at the foot of the mountain for a farm to expand vocational training opportunities for students and to ensure a dependable

supply of water for the main campus on the hill. A bakery and furniture workshop were added later. Geraty was known for his emphasis on the work-study program.¹⁸

In early 1955, the Geraty family welcomed the arrival of a daughter, Kathleen, born on January 17. Later that year, a new administration building was completed on campus, and enrollment in the college continued to grow. In 1959 an additional floor was added to the men's residence.¹⁹ During the quadrennium under Geraty's guidance, two important new secondary schools were established on new locations, one in Egypt and the other in Iran.²⁰

Before leaving on his second furlough in mid-1955, which he had deferred for a year in order to meet the needs of his field, Geraty secured an additional year of study leave to enable him to undertake graduate study in California.²¹ In 1956 he completed a master of science degree in educational administration and a master of education degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Southern California. Before his return to Beirut in late 1957, he also succeeded in completing the requirements for a doctoral degree in higher education administration with a dissertation entitled "An Investigation of Higher Education in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon." His growing expertise in this mission field with its unique challenges persuaded General Conference officials to decline an attempt by the Far Eastern Division to again secure Geraty's service in Asia with a call to serve as president of the Malayan Theological Seminary in Singapore.²²

General Conference Service (1959–1970)

In May 1959, just 18 months after his return to Beirut, the General Conference extended an invitation to Tom Geraty to join the General Conference Education department as an associate secretary.²³ By September, he had moved to Washington, D.C., to take up his new duties, which focused on the expanding role of the church headquarters department in providing an accreditation function for the international network of Adventist schools and colleges. During the ensuing decade, Geraty chaired scores of accreditation panels in 35 different countries in eight different division territories and assisted with accreditation policy development. In the North American Division, he succeeded in coordinating accrediting arrangements between the General Conference Board of Regents and the regional accrediting associations to lessen the sometimes-onerous overlapping burden of paperwork on Adventist higher education institutions.²⁴

In the summer of 1963, almost three years after his arrival in Washington and upon the departure of Richard Hammill from the department for Berrien Springs, Michigan, to take the leadership of the newly established Andrews University, Geraty was appointed to replace him as editor of the *Journal of True Education*.²⁵ Geraty carried the role of editor for eight years in addition to his role as an associate secretary. In 1967 he initiated a change in title for the journal to *The Journal of Adventist Education*.

When, at the end of the 1960s, Andrews University sought to strengthen its graduate education programs and considered the need to launch doctoral study programs, the Andrews Board called Geraty to head up the School of Education and to work on securing regional accreditation for a new doctor in education degree.²⁶ In the summer of 1970, Geraty moved to Berrien Springs as a professor and chair of the Education Department. Strengthening staff and developing a research profile, library resources, and appropriate curriculums took time, but he was successful in introducing a range of new doctoral programs in administration, religious education, and counseling and guidance. Andrews was the first church institution to move into this field. The university graduated its first Ed.D. candidates in spring 1976.

Retirement and Volunteer Service

In 1977, Geraty retired from Andrews University, and he and Hazel returned to Angwin, California, where caring for his aging father became a priority. The western location enabled short-term volunteer teaching at his alma mater and a three-month relief assignment assisting the church's education system in Hawaii. Following the death of his father in 1979, Geraty developed a reputation as a local artist as he took up painting for a hobby, focusing largely on outdoor scenes in the Napa Valley. Where possible, he and Hazel continued to associate with Mandarin-speaking Adventist congregations and used their Mandarin Bible in study groups.

For three years, from 1982 to 1985, he served as education secretary for the Hawaii Conference on a voluntary basis and later as an adjunct faculty member at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, where his eldest son, Larry, served as president from 1985 to 1993.

Further terms of volunteer service in retirement included adjunct teaching at Andrews University, at Pacific Union College, and at Weimar; an itinerary around four Far Eastern Division colleges conducting seminars on the work-study philosophy (1983); and a six-month period of policy handbook development in the Far Eastern Division (1988). Following the death of Hazel in 2001, he spent a year teaching again at Middle East College (2002–2003), and upon his return to the U.S.A., three years as a part-time residential dean caring for international graduate students at La Sierra University.²⁷ He remained active with numerous speaking and informal teaching appointments in his local community at Loma Linda, California, until his death at age 99 on December 23, 2013. A memorial service was held in the Campus Hill Church at Loma Linda after his body had been donated to medical science.

Contribution

Thomas Geraty was widely known and respected for his passionate commitment to the ideals of Adventist education and the practical ways that he found to put these into practice in the Church's schools and colleges. His mission service was given in two very difficult fields of service where sensitive cross-cultural understanding and communication were critical. His educational leadership in China during the communist revolution helped

ensure the continuance of the church's educational program during a politically disruptive period. His contribution to the development and strengthening of accreditation policy frameworks and to the establishment of graduate programs at Andrews University provided a strengthened, enduring foundation for the development of Adventist education. Later, at Andrews University, he played an important role in helping launch the institution's first doctoral study programs in education.

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NOTES

1. Biographical details on Geraty's life are drawn from his service record files in "GC Secretariat Records," File ID 15634 (electronic file 00015634) in the General Conference Archives. Page numbers given in parentheses in the endnotes refer to the electronic page numbering of the PDF file. Information on his early years may be found in Angela Barrett, "The Life of Thomas Sinclair Geraty: From Teacher to World-Renowned Leader in Adventist Education: A Biographical Study" (EdD diss., La Sierra University, 2015).
2. T. S. Geraty to E. D. Dick, September 27, 1938. T. S. Geraty "Information Questionnaire," September 26, 1938. "Information Blank, T. S. Geraty," March 4, 1940 (320).
3. A. W. Cormack to T. S. Geraty, March 22, 1940 (318).
4. T. S. Geraty to A. W. Cormack, September 3, 1940. See also Lael Caesar, "Thomas Geraty: Giant in Adventist Education," *Adventist World*, December 2015, 38, 39.
5. T. S. Geraty, "Just Before the Dawn," *ARH*, February 13, 1941, 1.
6. T. S. Geraty to A. W. Cormack, November 27, 1940 (290).
7. T. S. Geraty, "China's Central Training School," *ARH*, July 3, 1947, 15.
8. T. S. Geraty to A. W. Cormack, April 7, 1941; T. S. Geraty to E. D. Dick, August 6, 1941 (285).
9. Lawrence T. Geraty, interview by Gilbert M. Valentine, December 20, 2018.
10. T. S. Geraty, "The China Division School," *ARH*, April 1, 1943, 11, 12.
11. Ibid. A. W. Cormack to Mr. and Mrs. T. M. Geraty, February 5, 1942 (279). In the interim, James D. Wang had been appointed as principal.
12. Geraty, "China's Central Training School," 15.
13. E. L. Longway reports the evangelistic programs in "Chungking, China," *ARH*, November 2, 1944, 9, 10, and in "Good News from a Far Country," *ARH*, November 9, 1944, 11. Longway reports the ordination of overseas ministers as occurring in January 1944. Personnel records report Geraty's ordination date as July 8, 1944 (142).
14. "T. S. Geraty: Information on Returning Missionaries," October 5, 1947, GC Archives (264).
15. Geraty, "China's Central Training School," 15. N. W. Dunn to T. S. Geraty, January 20, 1948 (261).

16. T. S. Geraty to W. H. Branson, April 13, 1951 (237–239). W. H. Branson to T. S. Geraty, April 30, 1951 (223, 224).
17. "It was the feeling of the brethren that inasmuch as Brother Geraty is not serving as principal of the school, he might be spared at this time. Over in the Middle East, he could carry a full load as president of their educational institution, though I dare say his presence in South China Training Institute is of considerable value also." W. P. Bradley to C. H. Davis, March 5, 1951 (251). See also T. S. Geraty to E. E. Roenfelt, April 12, 1951 (240).
18. G. A. Appel, "The Middle East Division," *ARH*, June 26, 1958, 133.
19. "Middle East College," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 883.
20. "Education Department," *ARH*, June 23, 1958, 68.
21. T. S. Geraty to D. E. Rebok, December 9, 1953 (210).
22. C. P. Sorrenson to W. P. Bradley, September 26, 1956; W. P. Bradley to F. A. Mote, November 5, 1956. General Conference Archives (184, 185).
23. The appointment was to replace Professor L. R. Rasmussen, who had accepted an appointment to the Pacific Union. General Conference Executive Committee Minutes, May 27, September 24, 1959. See E. E. Cossentine, "New Associate Secretary General Conference Education Department," *ARH*, June 25, 1959, 32.
24. "T. S. Geraty: Vita" (129).
25. "A Tribute: Richard Hammill," *Journal of True Education* 25, no. 5 (Summer 1963): 4. See also *Journal of True Education* 26, no. 1 (September–October 1963): 4.
26. Minutes of the General Conference Executive Committee, February 19, 1970 (70-1884); Minutes of the General Conference Executive Committee, April 23, 1970 (70-2007).
27. D. A. Roth to T. S. Geraty, December 16, 1982 (118). Caesar, "Giant in Adventist Education," 39.

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