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## Fletcher, Lee Herbert (1929–2009)

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### **BERTRAM MELBOURNE**

Bertram Melbourne, Ph.D., author, preacher, and scholar, is a professor at Howard University School of Divinity, pastor at Rockville SDA Church, and founder of "Collaborate to Educate Our Sons," an organization designed to facilitate caring relationships and education for boys and young men. He was chair of the religion departments of Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University) and West Indies College (now Northern Caribbean University). He is married and has three children.

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Lee Herbert Fletcher was a youth leader and mentor, college president, administrator, and visionary educator with

international experience. He held a proven track record of enhancing and launching innovative and high-impact educational programs.

## Early Life and Education

Lee Herbert Fletcher was born December 3, 1929, in Black River in the parish of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica to Lee Herbert, Sr. and Viola Fletcher. In 1957 he married Olive Nation.<sup>1</sup> They had two children, Barbara and Herbert, Jr. He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1957.<sup>2</sup> He spent his early years in local public schools depending on where his parents were living at the time. It was there that he successfully completed all three Jamaica local examinations. The rest of his academic career was spent in Adventist schools.

Fletcher's Christian education began at New Hope College (now Kingsway High School)<sup>3</sup> At New Hope College he developed lasting friendships. The recollection of three colleagues speak to his impact from those early days. They recall him as "an impressive teenager in short pants."<sup>4</sup> It was there also that he passed the Cambridge University School Certificate Examination.<sup>5</sup> His next educational stop was for junior college at the West Indian Training College (now Northern Caribbean University).

## Service

On graduation, he began work for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a teacher-pastor<sup>6</sup> This assignment in the West Jamaica Conference saw the beginning of his educational career, since he served as head master of the infant Montego Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church School,<sup>7</sup> which later grew into Harrison Memorial High School. The effectiveness of his tenure is noted in the British West Indies *Union Visitor* which compliments him for the high percentage of passes his students received in the Jamaica Local Examinations.<sup>8</sup> The assignment developed in him a passion for teaching young people and influenced him to dedicate the rest of his life to serving the youth of church, country, and region.

This goal was furthered by his next assignment as Bible teacher and assistant principal of his alma mater, Kingsway High School, and associate pastor of Kencot SDA Church. Before embarking on his third educational appointment, Fletcher spent four years in the pastorate. The British West Indies *Union Visitor* on December 1, 1955, notes his effectiveness as a pastor in the organization of a new church.<sup>9</sup> His work with the youth is also chronicled.<sup>10</sup> In late 1956 he was assigned to the MV and Education departments of the East Jamaica Conference.<sup>11</sup> He and his wife, Olive, then moved overseas to prepare for further service. He earned his baccalaureate degree at Washington Missionary College (now Washington Adventist University) and his master's degree at Andrews University.

In 1960 he returned home to direct the Youth and Education departments of the East Jamaica Conference. He served in those capacities until 1966 when he was elected to serve as director of the same departments in the West Indies Union. From 1970 to 1973 he served as treasurer of the West Indies Union. His greatest impact on education in the region generally and in his homeland particularly came between 1973 and 1980<sup>12</sup> when he served as president of West Indies College. His enormous grasp of education, his visionary outlook and perceptive engagement were prominent here when he increased the enrollment, increased the number and quality of the faculty, established affiliations, expanded the industries, built new buildings, developed strategic plans, worked on accreditation, and instituted a manual arts program.

Reflecting on his accomplishments, especially where personnel were concerned, Fletcher said, "God gave me one talent and that is the ability to choose five talent people."<sup>13</sup> When told he too was a five-talent individual, his modesty would not allow him to accept that accolade. Notwithstanding, this highlights another of Dr. Fletcher's gifts. He was a mentor *par excellence*. Throughout the Inter-American Division and the North American Division, one can find teachers, youth leaders, principals, departmental directors, and presidents who were mentored by this educational giant during his years at West Indies College and later.<sup>14</sup> Fletcher's worldwide reach and contributions reached their peak at the 1975 General Conference session in Vienna, Austria, when he was elected to serve as secretary of the nominating committee that selected leaders to serve the world church during the next quinquennium.<sup>15</sup>

In 1980 he was called to the Inter-American Division as director of the Department of Education in which capacity he served until 1995.<sup>16</sup> From 1995 to 1996, Dr. Fletcher served as coordinator of Special Projects for the Inter-American Division and climaxed his service to the church as interim president of Caribbean Union College in 1997.<sup>17</sup>

Fletcher also impacted Seventh-day Adventist education through his pen. He contributed more than 29 articles<sup>8</sup> which were instrumental in shaping the outlook of the Inter-American Division and the development of graduate education, especially in the academic fields of theology and education, in several locations in Inter-America.

Dr. Fletcher's "distinguished service," especially in providing innovation and educational opportunities "to the Seventh-day Adventist church in Jamaica"<sup>19</sup> and the Inter-American Division are manifold. He established the first graduate extension program in religion at West Indies College. He instituted affiliate graduate programs between Andrews University and the Inter-American Division. He launched graduate extension programs between Loma Linda University and the Inter-American Division. He initiated three graduate programs at Montemorelos University in Mexico. He was instrumental in elevating the status of two institutions, Dominican Adventist University in the Dominican Republic<sup>20</sup> and the Venezuelan Adventist University Institute in Venezuela from secondary schools through college status to university status.<sup>21</sup>

## Contribution

Dr. Lee Herbert Fletcher's contributions to church and society were recognized both within and without the church. In 1980 the government of Jamaica awarded him the Order of Distinction in recognition of his years of exemplary and dedicated service to the education of the youth of Jamaica. Academic institutions of the church also noted his contributions and he was recognized by Andrews University, Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University) and Northern Caribbean University, among others. Columbia Union College named him an alumnus of the year. Andrews University awarded him the Jesse Wagner Award and an Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters, *honoris causa*. Northern Caribbean University, formerly West Indies College, named him an alumnus of the year and also awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*.<sup>22</sup>

The most significant recognition of Dr. Fletcher's contribution to the church generally and to education particularly, came in 2012 when the Inter-American Division established the Herbert Fletcher University. The doors were opened in 2012, and in 2016 it was approved to operate as a university by the Council of Education of Puerto Rico. Herbert Fletcher University is an online distance educational institution.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Herbert Fletcher gave more than 44 years of dedicated service to the church.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Ouida Westney sums up his life and influence in her reflections, "Looking back on the life and contributions of Dr. Lee Herbert Fletcher, I can say that God gave him a special personality and requisite skills to do great things for the furthering of the gospel during his allotted time on planet Earth."<sup>25</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Lee Herbert Fletcher's funeral program, Miami Temple SDA Church. Miami, FL, December 6, 2009, 2.?
2. Mrs. Olive Fletcher, interview by author held via telephone, November 16, 2018.?
3. Ouida E. Westney, "Remarks of Dr. Ouida E. Westney regarding Dr. Lee Herbert Fletcher," email message to author, November 15, 2018.?

4. Ouida E. Westney, "Memories of Dr. Lee Herbert Fletcher, Jr.," November 4, 2009. Remarks made at the funeral service on behalf her husband Lennox, her brother-in-law Adrian and herself who were seniors at New Hope College when Herbert arrived in 1946. Together with Lizette, Adrian's wife, they became "lifelong trustworthy friends."?
5. Lee Herbert Fletcher's funeral program, 2.?
6. "IAD Staff (continued)," *Inter-American News Flashes*, December 9, 1980, 2.?
7. Lee Herbert Fletcher's funeral program, 2.?
8. "Noting Events in the West Jamaica Section," *British West Indies Union Visitor*, November 1, 1951, 5.?
9. "East Jamaica Conference News Notes," *British West Indies Union Visitor*, December 1, 1955, 3.?
10. "Portland Youth Congress," *British West Indies Union Visitor*, September 1, 1955, 3.?
11. "Personnel Changes," *British West Indies Union Visitor*, January 1, 1957, 4.?
12. "Profile L. Herbert Fletcher," Citation in the Northern Caribbean University 81<sup>st</sup> Commencement Program, August 13-15, 2004.?
13. This insight was shared with the author by Dr. Fletcher in repeated oral conversations in the 1980s and 1990s.?
14. Bertram Melbourne, personal knowledge obtained from working in the Inter-American Division from 1968 to 1982 and especially at West Indies College from 1978 to 1982. Information was also obtained from oral conversations with persons who were mentored.?
15. Telephone conversation on December 3, 2018, with Dr. Newton Hoilette, a mentee, co-worker, and adopted son-in-law. See *ARH*, July 13, 1975. for further documentation.?
16. Lee Herbert Fletcher's funeral program, 3.?
17. *Ibid.*?
18. To view these articles, please visit:  
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19. "Profile L. Herbert Fletcher," Citation in the Northern Caribbean University 81<sup>st</sup> Commencement Program, August 13-15, 2004.?
20. "Dominican Adventist University," accessed November 16, 2018, [https://www.revolv.com/page/Dominican-Adventist-University.?](https://www.revolv.com/page/Dominican-Adventist-University.)
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22. "Profile L. Herbert Fletcher," Citation in the Northern Caribbean University 81<sup>st</sup> Commencement Program, August 13-15, 2004.?
23. "Who We Are?" Herbert Fletcher University, accessed December 4, 2018, [https://www.hfuniversity.org/who-we-are/.?](https://www.hfuniversity.org/who-we-are/)
24. *Ibid.*?
25. Ouida E. Westney, "Remarks of Dr. Ouida E. Westney Regarding Dr. Lee Herbert Fletcher," email message to author, November 15, 2018.

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