

Jemison, Thomas

Housel

(1914–1963)

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Thomas Housel Jemison was a prominent Adventist educator, theologian, and authority on the writings of Ellen G. White whose career spanned college teaching, denominational leadership, authorship, and the founding of Blue Mountain Academy. A key advocate of Last Generation Theology, he significantly shaped mid-twentieth-century Adventist thought through his textbooks, his work at the White Estate, and his emphasis on Christian perfection.

Early Life, Marriage, and Education

Jemison was born on October 27, 1914, in Trenton, New Jersey.¹ In 1931, he completed high school at Schenley High School, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During the Depression, he worked at a hospital in Colorado where he came into contact with two Adventist women on the staff. This resulted in his accepting the Adventist faith and being baptized in 1933.

After graduating with a B.A. from [Pacific Union College](#) in 1939, he married Hedgwig Nagele in Oakland, California, on May 21, 1939. They had one child, Barbara. After graduation, he was an intern in the [Northern](#)



Thomas Jemison

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[California Conference](#), where he held an evangelistic series at Mount Shasta. He spent two years teaching Bible at Loma Linda Academy, and then two more years at Lodi Academy. He was ordained in 1942. From 1945 to 1949, he taught in the religion department at Pacific Union College. In 1948, he received an M.A. degree at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.

Ministry

From 1949 to 1953, he was chairman of the Department of Religion at Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University). He spent two years on the staff of the White Estate where he wrote *A Prophet Among You*, becoming, according to Robert W. Olson, the first person with significant academic training to work for the White Estate.² In 1955, he was the founding principal for Blue Mountain Academy at Hamburg, Pennsylvania. Jemison was seen as the ideal choice as a stalwart and conservative educator who knew Ellen White's writings very well, and therefore he could develop a boarding academy that would exemplify all of Ellen White's writings *par excellence*. Many General Conference leaders enrolled their children at the school, only to discover that they were typical kids, and they were also like Arthur L. White's youngest son, Horace, who found creative ways to escape from campus.³ After the first semester, Jemison had to resign due to ill health.⁴

From 1956 to 1959, Jemison was a member of the General Conference Department of Education. During this time, he authored *Christian Beliefs* and *Facing Life* as textbooks. His *Christian Belief's* book offered more Ellen White quotations than Biblical references to support and explain Adventist beliefs.⁵ It also focused on the Laodicean state of the church.⁶ Ultimately, he believed, the remnant church must "demonstrate what God's message is doing" so that others may see "that your service will be genuine and effective."⁷ The strong focus on achieving perfection, along with extensive lists of Ellen White quotes, at the focus of these Jemison textbooks contributed in no small part to the extensive prevalence of his ideas, especially a strong focus on perfectionism within the Adventist culture of the 1960s.

In 1959, Jemison received a Ph.D. in history and philosophy from the University of Maryland.⁸ He then became chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at the Theological Seminary. In 1960, he became chairman and professor in the Department of Education at Andrews University. In 1961, he created the initial White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University. He was "a recognized authority on the life and writings of Ellen G. White." After his death, his wife Hedwig (Heddy) became responsible for the White Estate materials.⁹

Jemison was a leading advocate of "Last Generation Theology" during his lifetime. In his book, *A Prophet Among You*, he urged the reading of *The Great Controversy* in order to prepare for end-time events. "Few books can do as much to prepare a Christian for the difficult times of trouble ahead. The portrayal of the triumphant ending of this drama of the ages will strengthen a person's determination to be victorious."¹⁰ In his three major books, the idea of being victorious before the time of trouble and achieving Christian perfection so that Christ could

return were prominent themes. The apogee of his teaching on this topic were his presentations about the 144,000 achieving perfection right before Christ's return at the (September) 1952 Bible Conference.¹¹

Early Demise

On February 12, 1963, Jemison died under tragic circumstances, a loss that came as a “shock” to the Andrews University campus, according to the university President Dr. [F. O. Rittenhouse](#). Jemison had a “recurring illness” that caused a reduction in his teaching load and obliged him to resign as department chair. He suffered from severe headaches, arthritis, and a painful bone calcification of the feet.¹² [Kenneth H. Wood](#) described his death as a tragic loss for the church.¹³ Dr. Rittenhouse read a biographical sketch, and Dr. Daniel Walther, professor of church history, paid a final tribute, at the funeral at Pioneer Memorial Church.¹⁴ His loss deprived the campus of “a gifted, competent, and devoted teacher who will be sorely missed.” His remains were interred at George Washington Memorial Cemetery.¹⁵

SOURCES

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“Death of T. Housel Jemison.” *ARH*, February 28, 1963.

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NOTES

1. For genealogical information, see: https://www.ancestry.com/invite-ui/accept?token=r887ix5O-ub1gPbVwrN5l1Rn_LfaHgDDnbjFmLdlwZA=.
2. Michael W. Campbell interview with Robert W. Olson, interview 2, November 4, 2004, 19; interview 4, November 18, 2004, 5.
3. Michael W. Campbell interview with Robert W. Nixon, May 10, 2025.
4. *ARH*, January 5, 1956, 26.
5. The 387-page textbook with at least a quarter of the space in each chapter is reserved for Ellen White quotations along with an additional supplement featuring 58 more pages of additional White quotations.
6. T. Housel Jemison, *Christian Beliefs*, 355-361. See especially: "The changes necessary to prepare the remnant church for the second advent will take place during this time of judgment, *within* the Laodicean church" (358).
7. *Ibid.*, v.
8. T. Housel Jemison, "The Concept of Theory in the Writings of Three Major Educational Theorists," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1961.
9. <https://xpc.andrews.edu/agenda/45008>.
10. Jemison, *A Prophet Among You*, 436.
11. <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=C8Z3&highlight=1952|bible|conference>.
12. "Dr. Jemison, 48, Of Andrews, Dies," *The Herald-Press*, February 13, 1963, 1; "Final Rites Are Set for Dr. Jemison: Andrews Teacher Died on Tuesday," *The Herald-Palladium*, February 14, 1963, 13.
13. Based upon personal conversations with Elder Kenneth H. Wood in conjunction with a series of oral history interviews I conducted in 2005.

14. See note *ARH*, March 28, 1963, 22.

15. "Final Rites Are Set for Dr. Jemison," *The Herald-Palladium*, February 14, 1963, 13.

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