

**TRIBUTE TO THE  
GERIGS:  
A SEQUEL**

By  
**D. Vincent Palmer**

*D. Vincent Palmer, M.A.,  
M.R.E., is a lecturer in  
Bible and Theology at the  
Jamaica Theological  
Seminary, and head of  
the Theological Studies  
Department at the  
Caribbean Graduate  
School of Theology,  
Kingston, Jamaica.*

In the closing years of the last decade the founders of the Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST), Dr. and Mrs. Gerig, were honoured in the schools' first theological journal (Allen 1997, 4-6). This was on the occasion of their retirement from missionary work in the region. In his editorial, president of the two schools, Dr. Diumeme Noelliste, wrote at that time:

Throughout history God, who is rich in wisdom and grace, has made some unusually gifted individuals available to His Church in order to accomplish His purpose. We, in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean region, are fortunate to have been graced with the presence of Dr. Zenas and Mrs. Esther Gerig. (Noelliste 1997, 1)

At the dawn of this new century the Gerigs have been once again the recipients of another honour by the JTS/CGST family. During the joint graduation exercise of 2001, Zenas was conferred with a Doctor of Divinity *honoris causa*. From the citation read by Dr. Alfred Sangster we learnt that "Zenas was pronounced dead at birth by the attending physician. Instead, his family wrapped baby Zenas in a blanket and warmed him behind the stove for a week, from where he emerged alive and well. Two years later Zenas barely survived another brush with death when he was run over by the large metal wheel of a hay loader. Zenas escaped from death to life a third time at the age of eight, when his father led him to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, this in the very same room where he had originally been declared dead as a newborn baby" (Erdel 2001).

The honorary doctorate was followed up with a national award in October of the same year when the Jamaican government (with the approval of the American counterpart through its embassy) appointed Dr Gerig the Order of Distinction in the rank of Commander (CD) at the

National Heroes Day Awards Ceremony (*JTS/CGST UPDATE*, Nov 2001, 1).

Before the Gerigs departed for their "second" home, the JTS/CGST family, wanting to have the final valediction, once again paid tribute to the Gerigs in an informal gathering chaired by Mrs. Madge Spencer, and attended by a few invited guests. The hour-long service, which was held in the sanctuary of the St Andrew Lutheran Church, saw the following persons paying tribute: Mrs. Dolly Bloise, on behalf of the JTS alumni; Rev Courtney Richards, on behalf of the Missionary Church; Dr. Alfred Sangster, on behalf of the board; Dr Billy Hall on his own behalf and Mr. Omar Morrison for the JTS student's council.

Mr. Morrison was eloquent in his praise of the Gerigs for their years of dedicated and faithful service, a theme that was echoed by all the other speakers. The Rev. Mr. Richards highlighted the fact that Dr. Gerig was more than an educator on the campus of JTS, because he was not afraid to play the role of janitor when the need arose.

The Rev. Mr. Richards also highlighted the invaluable service of Mrs. Gerig as unofficial curator of the JTS "botanical gardens"—not to mention her more substantive role of wife and mother of three children. This latter role she carried out in a truly exemplary spirit. The complementary manner with which Mrs. Gerig performed her role as wife came into sharp providential focus when the chairperson pointed out that the "E" in Zenas E Gerig does not stand for anything, and Dr. Hall (not uncharacteristically) "corrected" her by pointing out that it is for "Esther".

Although Zenas was the only Gerig to have received a CD from the Jamaican government, Mrs. Bloise pointed out that Esther, along with her husband, could look forward to receiving her "WD", that is, the Lord's "Well done".

Last year, JTS, the first institution founded by the Gerigs, celebrated its fortieth anniversary. The scores of graduates from JTS have over the years served as pastors (such as Rev. Peter Spencer, one of the first graduates, and Rev Rennard White), missionaries (Colleen Scarlet, Lance Lewis, Ansel Aiken, Jo-Ann Richards, Marshalee Brown), counselors (like Dr. O'Neal Walker and the late Gene Denham [1995], whose biography (Linton [2001] was published recently), builders (Bud Messer and the late Leroy Westcarr), mentors (Rev. Courtney Richards, Mrs. Vivette Henry, and the inimitable Grace Maureen), broadcasters (Nigel Wilkinson and

Trevor Smith, whose programme on Bonaire is heard in 17 Caribbean islands), a senator in the person of Paul Miller, denominational leaders like Rev. Peter Garth, and not a few college/university lecturers and teachers (among whom one of the most distinguished is the Rev. Glen Archer).

The school has also produced its fair share of researchers. Those who come to mind readily are people like the late Vince Rose (2001); Dr. Dameon Black (2002); the Rev. Mr. Chisholm (1997), a prolific producer of educational audio cassettes and who last year delivered the inaugural address in the Lecture Series on Ethics (2001); Ms. Kathy Earle (1996; 2000; 2001), the first female to have graduated from CGST's Theological Studies programme; Dr. Murrell (1997); Dr. Edmonds (1993); Dr. Dennis (1995), former academic dean of CGST; Dr. Oliver (1991; 1997; 1998), present dean of CGST; Rev. Fritzner Dunois (1998); Mr. J. Richard Middleton (1984;1985; 1995); Rev. Garnet Roper (1986; 1999), who has the distinction of not only lecturing at his Alma Mater but at the United Theological College<sup>1</sup> as well; Rev. Glen Thompson, (1995) -- the first JTS graduate to pursue a D. Phil. at Oxford; Rev. Errol Joseph (1992); Rev. Don Hamilton (1993); Dr. Donavan Thomas (1997) — the present Youth for Christ director of the Caribbean; Rev Robert Jacobs (2000), and Pastor Patrick Harrison (1998)<sup>2</sup>.

But what has been apparently overlooked over the years is Dr Gerig's own scholarly contribution in the form of his doctoral dissertation (1967). The work was completed about 8 years after receiving his Bachelor of Sacred Theology (STB) from New York Theological Seminary, and 2 years after having graduated from Indiana University with a Masters degree in education (MS).

Dr. Gerig's dissertation<sup>3</sup> was written against the background of the new independent nation grappling with issues of self governance and the forging of an educational programme that would meet the needs of all

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<sup>1</sup> *Theologue*, 1991, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Harrison's thesis has been inadvertently omitted from the most recent CGST catalogue. Other notable research projects include the "Church" trilogy of: Green (1995), Neil (1993), and Thomas (1996).

<sup>3</sup> A review of this dissertation is deemed appropriate at this time since both JTS, founded by Dr Gerig, and Jamaica (whose culture was examined by him) celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries only two years apart.

concerned. In light of this, Gerig focussed his mind on the important field of adult education in the church, an area which he felt held promise in playing a crucial role in the development of the new Jamaica.

The purpose of the study was to analyze certain aspects of the Jamaican culture "which seem to have the most influence upon the educational programme of the church" (Gerig 1967, 4). The three facets of the Jamaican culture examined were family relations, religion, and education in the wider society.

Each of these facets was analyzed from the perspective of its historical background, ideals, and prevailing state of affairs. Gerig first of all traced the development of family patterns in Jamaica since the period of slavery up to the time of independence. He also recorded the churches' response to this, including that of the para-church structure, the Jamaica Council of Churches. This organization sponsored a week-long conference in Kingston on "The Christian Home and Family", out of which came a recommendation that the church should launch an educational programme with the objective of encouraging its membership, as well as the wider society, to fully embrace monogamy and chastity as important pillars in the cultivation of family life. Against the background of a society which encouraged early sexual liaison (with the average age for women being 17 and men even younger), and with the typical "exploitive male and sexually defenseless female" (22), this recommendation was considered crucial.

Gerig then went on to describe and classify the "patterns of marriage associations" that were prevalent at the time. These included what he called "the single union...a relationship in which the woman is paid regular visits by a steady boyfriend with whom, by mutual consent, she has sexual relations" (26).

Another type of relationship was the common law union. "In this relationship the man and the woman cohabit but have no binding commitment to each other. This custom is often called 'non-legal union' or 'faithful concubinage' and generally had more stability and permanence than the 'single union'. From a study done just before independence, it was discovered that 60% of these unions eventually broke up and a much smaller percentage changed their status to the next family type that Gerig dubbed "Christian Marriage." This he defined as the "cohabitation of the

man and woman in a legal bond<sup>4</sup>" (27). In Jamaica, Gerig observed, this kind of relationship "is rather the final state in an ascending process... In a sense ... [it] is the final graduation for those who have been successful in passing the earlier stages. It is therefore a hallmark of economic success and social achievement." (27).

Gerig then went on to examine the religious landscape of Jamaica, focusing first on "the opening lines of the recently adopted national anthem written by Hugh Sherlock, a Jamaican Methodist minister" (35), to illustrate what he observed to be the deeply religious character of the people. While his attention throughout this section was on the predominantly Protestant Church, Gerig did mention the rapid growth of the Roman Catholics in the late 50s and early 60s, as well as the development of the revivalist cults which he felt catered "primarily to the satisfaction of the psychological and emotional needs of their adherents." In tracing the history of the church in Jamaica, Gerig used the English 1655 conquest of the island as his *terminus a quo*.

Following this significant event, the first Anglican Church was built in St. Jago Dela Vega (Spanish Town) in 1662. Later the non-conformist Moravians, Baptists, and Methodists made their presence felt, particularly among the majority slave population.

In recent years the church has taken a more united interest in the social problems of the island, especially the densely populated, economically depressed area of Western Kingston...

The churches are uniting to establish basic schools, community centers, centers for adult education, and homes for caring for working mother's children. (Gerig 1967, 72)

In his conclusion to this section on the country's religious milieu, Gerig made the following observations:

- 1) the church played a vital part in the abolition of slavery;
- 2) the older established churches have expressed a renewed interest in social reform; and
- 3) the younger churches have been more involved in evangelistic outreach, but with little or no thrust toward ameliorating the depressed social condition in which they found themselves. The

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<sup>4</sup> Though of course there is nothing distinctively Christian about this definition.

Jamaican church by and large was "not in closest contact with the people who have the most pressing needs...." (76-77).

Gerig then turned to his area of greatest interest -- education. His opening remark is a sad reminder of the country's pedagogical heritage: "For nearly two centuries after the British conquest of Jamaica, education was not only de-emphasized, it was deliberately discouraged" (77). Against this background, it was no surprise to learn then that before 1823 only a couple of schools were established for the vast majority.

According to Gerig, it was with the emancipation of the slaves in 1834 that the first real crisis in the island's educational system came about (80). How was this particular crisis addressed before independence? And what plans were put in place by the framers of the Jamaican constitution to ensure the total eclipse of what was originally British educational policy?

In response to similar queries Gerig pointed out that the British government did include in its Emancipation Act a monetary grant for the education of ex-slaves. Although the grant was said to be substantial, it only covered the period between 1834-1844. The funds were administered through the churches. With the establishment of a Board of Education in 1892, further progress was made in the area of primary education, and at the turn of the last century nearly a thousand elementary schools sprang up islandwide. Later church and state co-operated in the founding of the first local teachers' colleges.

With his focus on the state of Adult education in its broadest sense, Gerig went on to trace the various attempts at raising the level of the educational process, both at the secondary and tertiary strata. Accordingly, entities such as the Department of Extra-Mural Studies (attached to the UWI), which sought to provide for adult learning and self-improvement, and the adult literacy movement were carefully assessed.

How did all this impact on the adult education thrust of the church? The answer to this question is the focus of Gerig's final chapter.

Based on the evaluation of the foregoing cultural elements, Gerig then attempted to construct an educational paradigm that would effectively meet the needs of the Jamaican church. A crucial aspect of his summary stated that "... during the past centuries the Jamaican church has had a very

positive influence on the history of the island. There is evidence however that this influence is weakening"<sup>5</sup> (110).

Gerig went on to express that "very few activities would strengthen the church's influence more than an aggressive, relevant involvement of the adults of the church in a program that is speaking to the very needs that this analysis has revealed" (110).

Here we have a succinct presentation of Gerig's philosophy of adult Christian education. As it stands, it reflects a solid approach to the process of human socialization. In its more elaborate form it represents a synthetic framework of educational principles carefully extrapolated from an analytical base.

Perhaps it is hardly worth noting that some of what Gerig has written is now dated. However, what I find gratifying is that much of his research is still quite relevant today, and it is hardly surprising that some of the data he gathered, collated and analyzed helped to shape the first Jamaican institution which he headed up.

That institution, JTS, continues to be a work in progress. So is the culture in which it has been planted. As Jamaica celebrates 40 years of independence in 2002, there are some who would like to believe that JTS (like other Christian institutions of higher learning, such as UTC and NCU) has made a small but significant contribution to nation building. To what extent this has taken place, only God knows. One thing seems certain, -- the Jamaican government has signally acknowledged the presence of the seminary and its sister institution, CGST<sup>6</sup>, in appropriately honouring their founding father. At his last JTS chapel session, Dr. Gerig, the preacher, shared this gem: *It's your attitude — not your aptitude — that will determine your altitude*. On reflection, we have all come to realize that this nugget was very precious to his own life and ministry.

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<sup>5</sup> If this was true in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, what can be said concerning the church today? There is a sense in which things have got worse since independence, as we have witnessed increasing levels of crime and violence, and the like. But despite these negative trends, the church by and large has held its own.

<sup>6</sup> The current president of the two schools was recruited by Dr. Gerig. See the account in Woodbridge (1997: 142-3).

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## Palmer: Tribute to the Gerigs

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It is *a propos*, then, that we join an eminent son of the Jamaican soil, Dr. the Hon. Vincent Lawrence, executive chairman of the Social Development Corporation, in saying to Dr. Zenas Gerig,

*We have noted with pride, the honour of Order of Distinction in the rank of Commander bestowed on you by the Government of Jamaica, in recognition of your years of dedicated and sterling service to our country.*

*Congratulations and best wishes....<sup>7</sup>*



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<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from a letter dated September 3, 2001, written by Dr. the hon. Vincent Lawrence, executive chairman of the Social Development Corporation, Jamaica.



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