

Mission Stories and the Adventist Future

Fernando and Ana Stahl as a Case Study

By Charles Teel, Jr.

The content of Christian faith... is best expressed in the shared lives of its believers; without such lives, that faith is dead. These lives in their integrity and compelling power do not just illustrate, but test and verify (or by their absence or failure falsify) the set of religious convictions that they embody.

—James Wm. McClendon, Jr.¹

Adventist Students and the Adventist Story: Good News and Bad News

The good news: Adventist teachers find meaning and motivation in the col-

lective story of Adventism. Whether we are first, second, third, or fourth-generation members, we boast a shared history: we were born in the Great Disappointment of 1844; we named the beasts that prowl the Patmos zoo of St. John the Divine; we overcame parochial presuppositions fostered by Shut Doors; we wrested free of antiorganizational Babylonian biases. We geared up for the long haul to take the Third Angel's Message to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. We enthusiastically affirm this collective story as our own.

The bad news: While we seem relatively clear about our shared history, what haunts us, I think, is the matter of a shared future. Our young people appear less likely than those of earlier generations to identify the Adventist story as their story. In short, the "believing" dimension of the Adventist experience has not successfully translated into a sense of "belonging."²

A hunch: Telling, enacting, and

researching mission stories of a rich Adventist past may help to solve this dilemma. Kindergartners no less than the university crowd may well discover colorful characters in the Adventist narrative. Through their demonstration of the unity of belief and action, these heroes can inspire a contemporary generation to embrace the Adventist story as their own.

**Combining Theology
and Ethics:
The Adventist Experience as
Shared Story**

I think I know one reason why Adventist youth seem less willing today to claim the Adventist story as their own. They have not been exposed to it. Therefore, they see it as irrelevant. As long as they think Adventism doesn't make a difference in their lives or anyone else's, they will continue to search for other stories with which to identify.

We can recapture Adventism's relevance by affirming the *narrative* nature of the church's texts and traditions. This will show that the Adventist *vision* is integrally related to Adventist doctrine and experience.

Ethicist/theologian Stanley Hauerwas reminds us "that there are no doctrines for which one must search out moral implications; rather 'doctrines' and 'morality' gain their intelligibility from narratives that promise to help us see

and act in a manner appropriate to the character of our existence."

Accordingly, the narrative nature of Christian convictions helps us see that "ethics" is not what one does after one has gotten straight on the meaning and truth of religious beliefs; rather Christian ethics offers the means for exploring the meaning, relation, and truthfulness of Christian convictions.¹

The church is first informed by the stories of Scripture. Subsequently, the church gives birth to its own stories, which bring greater clarity and understanding of the biblical stories. The church, Hauerwas concludes, is thus "nothing less than that community where we as individuals continue to test and are tested by the particular ways these stories live through us."²

In this article I offer a modest thesis: The Adventist story may be passed on to our children only as we integrate theology and ethics. Only when young people see a connection between doctrine and practice will they view the Adventist story as capable of shaping and sustaining meaningful lives. The significance of Adventist convictions becomes apparent when those convictions are *lived*.

Baptist theologian Jim McClendon echoes Hauerwas when he stresses the significance of the church's story for its life. He urges us to focus on the stories of our particular faith communities. By doing this, McClendon says, we both display the significance and test the validity of our story-shaped convictions. We

must be true to the narrative, as Hauerwas suggests. However, the meaning of that narrative is itself narratively disclosed through the lives of those who strive to be faithful to it.

Might a generation of contemporary Adventist students be renewed if they reviewed their roots? What if they discovered that the Adventist story boasts authentic "missionaries, visionaries, and revolutionaries"?

One story that could inspire them is that of the faithful lives of Fernando and Ana Stahl.

**"Missionaries, Visionaries,
and Revolutionaries"**

Fernando and Ana Stahl are my spiritual forebears. The Christian gospel which they preached came to be enacted not only in Adventist Churches and clinics and schools, but also in town markets and provincial law courts and the national legislature. In the truest sense, the Stahls were missionaries, visionaries, and revolutionaries.³

This tribute to two pioneer Adventist missionaries wouldn't have surprised me if it came from an SDA missions promoter. But my informant was a Catholic priest, a Maryknoll missionary based in the Peruvian highlands.

A Latin American Protestant theologian, Samuel Escobar, is equally laudatory. He says that "the gospel which came to Latin America with Protestantism came with liberating force because it brought with it the power of the bibli-

cal message.⁶ As proof, Escobar points to the work of the Stahls and their cohorts in the Peruvian highlands. He tells clearly why he begins his book with the Adventist story: Adventism offers "a dramatic example" of the personal, social, economic, judicial and political, and spiritual witness that can be evoked by an authentically biblical and evangelical faith.⁷

Non-Adventists like these have given me a new perspective on an old and—I had thought—familiar story. My probings into the life and work of the Stahls suggest that there may be many chapters in the narrative of Adventism that need to be discovered or rediscovered.

Who were these Adventists who have won such enthusiastic support from outside the denomination they served? Converted to Seventh-day Adventism as young adults in the midwestern United States, Fernando and Ana Stahl volunteered for a mission appointment to South America during the first decade of this century.⁸ Told that the church could not finance their passage, the Stahls and their two children paid their own way to South America, leaving Main Street, U.S.A., to land in the Bolivian and Peruvian *altiplano* (highlands) in 1909.

Ana bartered her professional skills as a nurse to the social elite, and served the destitute as well. Fernando stumbled about indigenous villages intuitively exploring what it meant to be a missionary.¹⁰ He began by selling religious magazines. However, he soon discovered that most of the indigenous population could not read. Furthermore, the privileged classes had every reason to keep them uneducated in order to maintain their social and economic advantages.¹¹

By 1911, magazine peddling took a back seat to establishing schools, as the Stahls linked up with indigenous visionary and early Adventist convert Manuel Camacho on the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca.

A near feudal social system dominated the Peruvian highlands at the turn of the century. Geographical barriers prevented national laws from being enforced in the *altiplano*. Cultural barriers created a caste system. With the support of religious and political functionaries, a small group of *mestizo* and white landowning families kept in total subjection the 95 percent of the population from Aymara and Quechua ancestry. Land expropriations, forced labor, and arbitrary taxation were the chief tools of oppression. These abuses triggered a series of violent revolts that erupted throughout the *altiplano* during the 1930s.

Illiterate, with no opportunities for education, the indigenous peoples had little contact with the world beyond the

Lake Titicaca basin.¹² An exception was Camacho, who had encountered Protestant missionaries in his travels beyond Lake Titicaca. His call for indigenous education as the "only sure way of salvation from the subjugation in which we find ourselves,"¹³ enraged the ruling elite. As a result, Camacho endured for a full decade the bribes, threats, terror, beatings, arrests, and imprisonments meted out to those who have the temerity to act out their visionary hopes. It was in this social context that the Stahls' educational endeavor flourished.

Adventist Education Begins

The Stahls probably could not have articulated an academic definition of the term "near-feudal social system" that historians use to describe the *altiplano* at the beginning of the century. Yet Fernando's *In the Land of the Incas*, published in 1920 in English and later in Spanish, shows a clear perception of the

injustices perpetuated by an unholy alliance formed by a trio he explicitly identifies: town judge, village priest, and wealthy landowner.¹⁴

The Stahls embraced Camacho's vision for mediating salvation to the *altiplano*, casting their lot with the indigenous people. Fernando and Ana assumed the highlands as their parish. For a full decade they traveled about on muleback, on horseback, and later on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, establishing schools, chapels, clinics, and markets.¹⁵

The statistics are impressive. Fernando and Ana Stahl birthed an educational system in the Andes that encircled Lake Titicaca and included as many as 200 schools,¹⁶ ranging from humble village home schools to large boarding institutions.¹⁷ So great was the demand for indigenous education that the Stahls' successor received 12 requests for schools in a single day.¹⁸ In these schools

Classroom Projects for Heightening Awareness of Adventist World Mission

K-12 Level

- Show and tell.** Invite missionaries, world travelers, and immigrants to bring memorabilia to the classroom.
- Cut and Paste.** Obtain *National Geographic* magazines, travel guides, and tour company brochures. Have students mount them on posterboard to display in the classroom.
- Cultures and customs.** Invite immigrants to tell about the missionaries who introduced them to the gospel. They can describe the ways in which their culture differs from the culture of the missionary's homeland—and how they were able to hear the gospel speak across cultural barriers.
- Maps and faces.** Purchase a wall map and attach faces of SDA missionaries to it, showing where they are serving or have been stationed (photocopy pictures printed in *Adventist Heritage* magazine or other sources).
- Scripts and skits.** Drawing upon classical mission story books, write and produce plays that communicate arresting mission adventures from various parts of the world.

Academy/College Level

- Stories and histories.** Begin to collect audio and/or video tapes with structured interviews of SDA missionaries. As students use these materials for research or creative writing, help them wrestle with such themes as cultural pluralism, cultural relativity, and gospel contextualization.
- Displays.** Build locked display cases and invite former missionaries and other world travelers to loan their collections to your institution.
- Archives and collections.** Request that missionaries permit your school to photocopy letters and papers that offer insights into their experiences.
- Research and writing.** Assign research projects that permit students to explore ways that the presence of missions and the lives of specific persons have changed the culture of various parts of the world.
- Biographies and bibliographies.** Begin building a bibliography on the subject of missions, starting with a collection of biographies, autobiographies, articles, and citations.

Note: The Stahl Museum for World Mission would welcome receiving collections of mission artifacts as a way of "passing a vision to our children." Contact:

Dr. John Eick, Curator
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tens of thousands of Quechua and Aymara received an education.

Thanks in large part to these educational efforts, baptized members in the Lake Titicaca Mission numbered 6,579 by 1940. The national census of the year showed fully four times that number of self-identified Protestants (virtually all of whom would have been Adventists) in the Lake Titicaca basin. Adventism had indeed established an enduring presence in the *altiplano*.¹⁹

Yet numbers cannot fully describe the Stahls' accomplishments. Personal commentaries flesh out statistical skeletons. The Adventist presence did contribute to social and structural change in the *altiplano*. This is borne out by educator Ruben Chambi, son of the Stahls' early guide and translator: "The Adventist school system opened the way for the indigenous population of the highlands to achieve selfhood and self-sufficiency," he asserts. "The Stahls' gospel both converted hearts and changed the social fabric of the highlands."²⁰

The rapidity of the social change in the highlands is seen in the fact that this same Ruben Chambi—but one generation removed from Puno's near-feudal

past—was elected by the Punoenos to the National Congress.

Progressive Acclaim

The Stahls and their Adventist band drew rave reviews from *indigenistas* and other progressives:

- One radical son of Puno—a co-founder of the *avant garde* literary circle *Grupo Orkopata*, whose cobbler father was a co-founder of Puno's first Adventist congregation—described the Plateria schools as initiating "la revolucion de la Plateria."²²

- National Congress deputy and former rector of Lima's top-ranked San Marcos University, well known for his involvements in land reform and educational change, pledged solidarity with these missionaries as "co-workers" in "the labor of human redemption."²³

- The director of the national library cited the Stahls and Camacho by name, lauding their educational work as achieving "unanticipated and transcendent results."²⁴ He concludes with an equally rare unqualified generalization: "For the first time, the Indian acceded to letters, hygiene, and a consciousness of his own dignity."²⁵

The progressives, often anti-clerical, liked to contrast the Stahls' method of evangelization with that of the priests:

- One liberal from the provincial capital of Arequipa contended that while Puno's priests planned religious feasts, their Protestant counterparts established clinics and schools.²⁶

- A fellow progressive noted that while the Protestant leaders taught and healed, their Catholic counterparts sang masses and planned fiestas.²⁷

- An influential social critic, not known for his enthusiasm about any kind of institutionalized religion, noted approvingly that whereas the Jesuits contented themselves with the teaching of the wealthy elite while enjoying the comforts of Lima, the Adventists braved the rigors of the *altiplano* to instruct the disinherited classes.²⁸

- A leading Andean educator succinctly observed that the village priests worked to "save souls," but the Stahls worked to "save lives."²⁹

Conservative Reaction

Retaliation to the Stahls' efforts was swift and decisive. Clerical opposition

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reached an apex on March 3, 1913, when the Puno-based bishop personally led a mob of 200 men, on horseback, to expel the Protestant heretics.³⁰ After wreaking havoc at the Camacho and Stahl homes (the inhabitants being away at the time), the mob lashed together eight Adventist believers with leather thongs and led them off to prison in the dead of night.

Fernando's account notes how these bound prisoners were repeatedly assaulted by man and beast as they stumbled the 21 miles to the prison on foot, "hatless and coatless."³¹ The subsequent acquittal and release of the prisoners does not end the story. Commentators on the history of religious liberty in Peru say this incident provided the impetus for a 1915 constitutional amendment guaranteeing freedom of religious expression.³²

De jure change does not, of course, translate immediately into *de facto* reform. As the Adventist schools multiplied, so did the opposition to them. On numerous occasions, the Stahls barely escaped with their lives. Scores of believers were murdered, schoolhouses were burned, Adventist teachers were assaulted, and at least one student was reported to have been beaten to death after enrolling in an Adventist school.

Conservative newspapers catalogued alleged misdeeds of the Adventists. The perceived threats to the social order presented by these schools are explicitly described in a *memorial* filed from Azangaro in 1923:

These false evangelical schools bring together daily large numbers of suggestible individuals of suspect social desires, and ignorant Indians attracted through false and fantastic premises.

At these schools they teach the most depraved and heretical practices, and preach a war of extermination against faithful Catholics and the Church itself.

At these schools they work a labor of dissolution. They spread doctrines of the most crimson communism. They attempt to destroy patriotism and the spirit of the nation by inculcating the most extreme and dangerous socialist concepts of social organization, class and racial equality, and unbounded liberty in the ignorant masses...

At these schools, finally, they openly attack our property system.³³

Near the end of the Stahls' stay in the *altiplano*, Puno progressives called for a commission to investigate local abuses and institute reforms, a call that was

headed by Lima.³⁴ When the visiting commission arrived, Fernando seized the opportunity to showcase Plateria's indigenous students' lobbying for social change. Commissioner Erasmo Roca, head of the Ministry of Development's Labor Bureau, reports on the "spectacle" that Stahl orchestrated:

What a beautiful spectacle it was for us, just a few days after our arrival in Puno, to see nearly two thousand Indian evangelists [sic] from the region of Plateria... who, in correct military formation and led by two musical bands, paraded before the commission.³⁵

Inhabitants of the neighboring town of Azangaro may well have taken a cue from the "evangelists," massing fully 8,000 such greeters, also "in correct military formation," when the commission arrived in their tense town a few days later.

As a result, nervous landowners wired Lima for troop reinforcements and at least one local *indigenista* leader was placed in preventive detention. News accounts report that the local elite debated whether the same fate ought not to be accorded to Fernando Stahl.³⁶

The Stahls doubtless took no small satisfaction in contrasting the 1913 forced march from Plateria with the demonstration of solidarity that Fernando staged just seven years later. The earlier band of eight captives had been lashed together with leather thongs and herded "hatless and coatless" over the same 21-mile course to the taunts and jeers and assaults of captors and onlookers. Now, that course was traversed by a throng of disciplined Aymara and Quechua intent upon demonstrating to the visiting dignitaries that the gospel had liberated them from the internal and external principalities and powers that had formerly held them in bondage.

A Concluding, Unscientific Postscript

Responses by poets, politicians, and academics on three continents to the Stahl chapter of the Adventist story suggest that the narrative remains an inspiring one. Tapping that capacity for inspiration will enable us to successfully transmit our Adventist heritage.

If we as teachers are to articulate to our students an account of Adventism that is compellingly attractive, we must demonstrate that Adventism makes a difference. To show them how identifying with the Adventist story shapes and sustains lives will support our claim that it is worth taking seriously. It will give that story meaning and highlight its validity. The Adventist story will thus provide hope and renewed confidence to those, young and not-so-young, who wonder whether that story is true. Only

as we tell such stories as the Stahls—which integrate believing and being in a way that only stories can—will our students continue to sense the need for belonging. □

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- See Richard Rice, "But the Greatest of These Is Belonging," *Spectrum*, 20:3 (April 1990), pp. 22-31.
- Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 90. The notion of "religious convictions," helpfully deployed here by Hauerwas, is analyzed in greater detail in James Wm. McClendon, Jr., and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).
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- See Charles Teel, Jr., "Missionaries, Visionaries, and Revolutionaries," *Adventist Heritage*, 12:2 (Summer 1988), p. 3.
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- Key accounts of the Stahl's story include: Alejandro Bullon Paucar, *El nos amaba* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1976); Barbara Westphal, *Ana Stahl of the Andes and Amazon* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1968); and _____, *A Bride on the Amazon* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948).
- Robert G. Wearn, "Fernando Stahl: Missionary to Peru," *Adventist Heritage*, 12:2 (Summer, 1988), p. 17.
- Fernando Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1920) pp. 85, 291.
- Stahl, pp. 68-70.
- The indigenous percentages are likely conservative, since they are based on the 1940 census: Ministerio de Hacienda y Comercio (Direccion Nacional de Estadística), Censo Nacional de Poblacion y Ocupacion 1940; cp. Jose Tamayo Herrera, *Historia social e indigenismo en el altiplano* (Lima: Trentaires, 1982), p. 95; and Wilfredo Kapsoli, *Ayllus del Sol: anarquismo y utopia andina* (Lima: TAREA, 1984), pp. 19-21, 32-34.
- Interview with Jorge Camacho, December 23, 1988, in Juliaca, Peru (No. 25).
- Stahl, pp. 85-88; in the chapter entitled "Una raza oprimida," he discusses at length the abuses perpetuated by the wealthy landowners, as well as the prefects, subprefects, and priests; for the English version, see *Land*, pp. 105-107.
- Dan Chapin Hazen, *The Awakening of Puno: Government Policy and the Indian Problem in Southern Peru, 1900-1955* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1975), offers a concise summary of the Stahls' endeavors: "Adventists have consistently been in the forefront of change in the Altiplano—the missionaries combined appeals for individual salvation with a broad-based program of medical, education, and market facilities open to all" (p. 121).
- Estimates vary in part, no doubt, due to differing definitions as to what constitutes a school. Key variables include home school, village building, church-owned building, mission-appointed teacher. The number 200 comes from Hazen (p. 122), although he recognizes that "official church statistics only indicated around eighty," Ted Lewellen (*Peasants in Transition: The Changing Economy of the Peruvian Andes—A General Systems Ap-*

proach [Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1978, p. 130]) also estimates the number of Adventist schools at 200.

¹⁷ Le Escuela Normal de Plateria and Colegio Adventista del Titicaca (also identified by other names) in Chullunquiani, Juliaca, are the system's boarding schools.

¹⁸ E. H. Wilcox, *In Perils Off* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1961), p. 100. The title of an article by Wilcox hints at the skyrocketing demand for personnel: "Indian Believers: Thirty Calls for Teachers Unanswered," *Review and Herald* (January 15, 1925); p. 8; see also Fernando Stahl, "Opening in the Lake Titicaca Region," *Review and Herald* (February 1, 1917), p. 13.

¹⁹ *Statistical Report*, Hazen, p. 121.

²⁰ Teel, "Missionaries," pp. 6, 7.

²¹ Interview with Ruben Chambi on December 7, 1987, in Nana, Lima, Peru. Chambi was elected as a deputy on the ticket of the Christian Democratic party in 1972, but a military coup prevented him from taking office.

²² Gamaliel Churata, "Prologo," *Un ensayo de escuela nuevo en el Peru*, by Jose Antonio Encinas (Lima: Minerva, 1932), p. vii.

²³ Encinas, pp. 148, 149.

²⁴ Herrera, p. 95.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Francisco Mostajo, "Diez hovas con don Francisco Mostajo" (reportaje) *La Sierra* (January 1927), pp. 27-30.

²⁷ Ernesto Revna, "Evangelista," *La Sierra* (April-May 1928), pp. 15, 16.

²⁸ Manuel Gonzalez Prada, *Propaganda y Ataque* (Buenos Aires: Iman, 1939), pp. 85-89, 119.

²⁹ Julian Palacios Rios, cited in Hazen, pp. 122, 402-414.

³⁰ While the figure 200 is consistently reported, Stahl has all 200 mounted on horses, while Camacho contends that only some were mounted. See Stahl, *pais*, pp. 131-133 for both the Stahl and the Camacho reports. Equally full reporting of this incident appears in Jean-Baptiste August Kessler, Jr., *A Study of the Older Protestant Missions and Churches in Peru and Chile With Special Reference to the Problems of Division, Nationalism, and Native Ministry* (Goes, Netherlands: Oosterbaan, 1967), pp. 231, 232.

³¹ Stahl, p. 163.

³² Herbert Monev, *La libertad religiosa en el Peru* (Lima: Antartida, 1965), p. 37.

³³ *El Herald*, 3:144 (June 2, 1927) prints this memorial drafted by the women of Azangaro.

³⁴ Dora Mayer, ed., *El indigena pervano a los cien anos de republica libre e independienio* (Lima: Casanova, 1921), p. 57.

³⁵ P. Erasmo Roca, *Por la clase indigena*, ed. Pedro Barrantes Castro (Lima: Biblioteca de la Revista de Economia y Finanzas, 1935), p. 192.

³⁶ *El Siglo* (August 9, 1920); Roca S., pp. 253, 254.