

# Gnutzmann, João

## (1900–1995)

### THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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João Gnutzmann, 20 years of age, as a student at Brazil College

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

João Gnutzmann was a pastor, missionary, teacher, and canvasser from Brazil.

## First Years

João Gnutzmann, pastor, missionary, teacher, and canvasser, was born on December 27, 1900, in Monte Alto District, in the Jaboticabal Region, São Paulo.<sup>1</sup> His parents, Joaquim (d. 1935<sup>2</sup>) and Ana (1871-1945),<sup>3</sup> learned the Adventist message through a canvasser named Amador Alves de Campo<sup>4</sup> in 1918. Through their contact with Adventists, they received an invitation to participate in the biennial assemblies of the Sao Paulo Conference in January 1919. The invitation was accepted; the family attended all the meetings and Alfredo Hoffmann, a Bible

instructor, was sent to study the Bible with them. On June 24, 1919, João and his parents were baptized by Pastor R. Suessmann at the Riacho do Laranjal.<sup>5</sup> João had siblings, among them Minervina, who helped him at the beginning of his pedagogy course.<sup>6</sup>

In 1920, João started his studies at the Santo Amaro Adventist Seminary.<sup>7</sup> To pay for his studies fees, Gnutzmann canvassed<sup>8</sup> in several cities such as Uberabinha (1922),<sup>9</sup> Santo Antônio da Platina (1939),<sup>10</sup> Xavante e Ribeirão Claro (1920-1921), Uberaba (1921-1922),<sup>11</sup> Birigui (1923),<sup>12</sup> and São José do Rio Pardo and Caconde (1924-1925).<sup>13</sup> He also worked in public evangelism in São João da Boa Vista (1925-1926)<sup>14</sup> and in Brás (1926-1927),<sup>15</sup> cities located in the state of São Paulo. In 1923, he finished his first cycle of studies at the seminary, becoming able to serve wherever the church needed. His first call was to work as a teacher in Alexandra, Paraná.<sup>16</sup> The following year, in 1924, he went back to school graduating in theology on December 24, 1927.<sup>17</sup>

In 1916, a young lady named Lucinda was baptized and she began her studies at Brazil College (now Central Adventist University of Sao Paulo) in 1922<sup>18</sup> and met João at the school.<sup>19</sup> João Gnutzmann and Lucinda were married on December 30, 1926, in a rural area of São Paulo State. As a result of this union, Noemi was born on October 12, 1927,<sup>20</sup> Enola on January 25, 1930,<sup>21</sup> a son who was stillborn on November 15, 1931,<sup>22</sup> and Alice on August 23, 1933.<sup>23</sup> Lucinda was a good companion and always a dedicated collaborator with her husband, taking on the responsibilities of the missionary work when he was absent.<sup>24</sup>

## Ministry

In 1928, João continued to teach some subjects in higher education at Brazil College<sup>25</sup> during the same period that he took charge of the college's food factory. At that time, the factory produced granola, cereal coffee, cookies, and other products to distribute not only in the state of São Paulo, but throughout Brazil.<sup>26</sup> That same year, João was called to serve as a missionary on the African continent,<sup>27</sup> focusing on Bongo in Angola.<sup>28</sup> After Gnutzmann left the college's food factory, the production was stopped. However, the factory later started producing again with a new person managing it. The dream of reaching the whole country was achieved by the food factory, now known nationally as the Brazil Food Factory (*Superbom*).<sup>29</sup>

On December 22, 1928, at 8 pm, the Gnutzmann family boarded the *Kanagawa Maru* ship headed for the African continent. On January 9, they disembarked at the city of Cabo da Boa Esperança where they stayed for 7 days and boarded a different ship, the "Angola," toward their final destination.<sup>30</sup> The reception in the country was very friendly with 130 Angolan students coming to welcome them. The students sang, expressing their joy for the family's arrival.<sup>31</sup>

Gnutzmann served as director of the Bongo School<sup>32</sup> at which he intended to instruct native teachers for parish schools. These teachers were sent to villages that didn't know about God yet, to teach people how to read and write and spread the Adventist message.<sup>33</sup> After they finished their time in the villages, these teachers returned to the school for a summer course each year; this way they could be more prepared.<sup>34</sup> During the school

holidays, João sold books to complete a week of canvassing with each of the Bongo missionaries; therefore, João spent a month canvassing.<sup>35</sup>

The Gnutzmann family spent approximately six years outside Brazil.<sup>36</sup> In the time they were outside of Brazil, two of their daughters were born: Enola<sup>37</sup> and Alice.<sup>38</sup> But after a time, the family had to return to their original country for political reasons because of a law that gave permission to only Portuguese nationals to teach school in the country. The family received the news through Pastor Curtis at the end of the Southern African Division annual meetings in February 1935. On this occasion, they also received the news they would have to return to the South American Division.<sup>39</sup> In 1934, 83 people were baptized in that region of Africa.<sup>40</sup> In 1929, when they arrived in Angola, there was only one school in a village, located in the village of Yava. In 1934, the year of the family's farewell, there were 20 schools in the Bongo Mission.<sup>41</sup>

When they returned to Brazil, the family was welcomed by Bernardo Schuenemann who took them to the headquarters of the São Paulo Conference. Later, he also took them to Brazil College where they stayed at the Aracely da Silva Mello's house; he was Lucinda's brother-in-law.<sup>42</sup> On that occasion, Professor Peixoto asked Gnutzmann to help in the bakery of Brazil College. João accepted and worked there for three days, helping improve the quality of the bread that was made.<sup>43</sup> At that time, the family received a letter from the South American Division giving them permission to visit Lucinda's family in Rio Grande do Sul. The letter also contained information about a call from the East Brazil Union Mission.<sup>44</sup>

On their journey to the south, they stopped at the headquarters of the East Brazil Union Mission in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro where they found out they were going to the Amazon at the end of August. They were informed that the work to be carried out would be as a teacher and medical missionary. Because of this, Gnutzmann asked to participate in the vacation course that was intended for primary school teachers. The request was granted, and the mission trip was postponed. During this period he pastored the following churches: Mogi das Cruzes, Jacareí, Barra Mansa, Bananal, Resende, Barreiro de Baixo, Angra dos Rei, and Volta Redonda. At the end of that year, Mr. Joaquim Gnutzmann, João's father, passed away.<sup>45</sup>

João and his family went on a trip to the Amazon when he finished the teaching course. On January 31, 1936, they arrived at the new workplace, Maués.<sup>46</sup> There, they replaced teacher Zulmira Ubaldino de Moraes. The arrival of the new family was eagerly awaited by the residents of the region.<sup>47</sup> The family began to live on the Centenário farm.<sup>48</sup>

On the first Monday of February, registration for students and classes began, which took place on the porch of the Michiles family's home because they didn't have another place to do it. In a conversation with missionary Leo Halliwell, he began to think about the possibility of building a big shed that could be used as a school and church. The students' parents embraced the idea and provided the materials and helped with the labor.<sup>49</sup> The classes took place in the morning and in the afternoon the shed was built. The Baixo-Amazonas Mission helped with the donation of a blackboard, a globe, and some maps.<sup>50</sup> The government of the time provided several

school desks. The size of the school in Maués was 592 sq. ft. (55 m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>51</sup>

Due to difficult access to the city, school utensils were slow to arrive, resulting in a lack of supplies. Noemi, the oldest daughter, helped improvise materials for students, sewing sheets of foolscap paper to create a notebook. In addition, she copied lessons to supply booklets to the 60 students of the school. At the shed, João taught classes in all grades during the morning. It was very difficult to deal with all classes at the same time so he gave an activity to one group, while explaining the subject to another. In this way, he was able to teach each age group.<sup>52</sup>

At that place Gnutzmann served as a pastor, doctor, and teacher. He taught in the morning, and in the afternoon he prepared lessons, corrected exercises, and attended to sick people. He also visited Adventist homes and people who were interested in the true message. Many families moved close to the school so their children could study.<sup>53</sup> Lucinda helped with medical work.<sup>54</sup> In 1940, they left for the south of the country to enjoy a time of vacation. On the way, they went to São Paulo where they left their oldest daughter at the Brazil College to continue her studies.<sup>55</sup>

During the period they lived in Maués, the group that gathered at the Centenário farm along with the Tabuleiro group, were organized into a church.<sup>56</sup> The Gnutzmann family resided in Maués until 1943. They were later transferred to Parintins, being replaced by missionary Fernando Garcia.<sup>57</sup> During this period, as soon as he was established in the new place, João oversaw both the Parintins and Barrerinha Districts. He also worked in the cities of Limão, Limãozinho, Ramos, and Espírito Santo and on the Mamuru, Uaicurupá, and Andirá Rivers to Ponta Alegre. During the day he attended sick people and helped with manual services and at night he held meetings with slide projections, drawing people's attention.<sup>58</sup>

In 1946, during a vacation period, the Gnutzmann couple took their youngest daughters to study at Brazil College.<sup>59</sup> From August to December, the couple stayed in Belém, where they helped to build the *Luzeiro B*. They returned to Parintins the end of December. Lucinda arrived by ship while João arrived by the *Luzeiro B* boat. In Belém, the couple worked in the São João and Pedreira Districts, conducting evangelistic meetings. In Parintins, they boarded the *Luzeiro B* when a man named Carlos Gonzales was the attendant on the boat. Lucinda became steward and nurse while João assumed the post of commander, nurse, and missionary pastor. In 1948, João was ordained to the pastoral ministry.<sup>60</sup>

The couple decided to live on the *Luzeiro B* since their daughters were studying and it was only the two of them.

<sup>61</sup> In Parintins, there wasn't a good place for church services so the Baixo-Amazonas Mission, through Gnutzmann, bought land from the city. Then, they looked for roofs in Ramos and Urubu and went looking for wood in Maruru and Uaicurupá. Members of the congregation helped build the church. In a few weeks the place was ready.<sup>62</sup>

In 1950,<sup>63</sup> Gnutzmann attended the annual meetings of the North Brazil Union Mission. Among the subjects they dealt with was Gnutzmann's transfer to the North Cost Mission where he would work in the state of Maranhão.<sup>64</sup>

The time he worked in Maués and Parintins in Amazonas was 15 years.<sup>65</sup> As soon as he arrived in Maranhão, the pastor organized a baptismal class and visited those interested in it. João started a series of meetings in Teresina at which many people accepted the invitation to be baptized. It didn't take long and a church was built.

<sup>66</sup> On October 7, 1951, the new church was inaugurated.<sup>67</sup>

In the mid-1950s, the North Cost Mission voted to build another church in São Luís, a city that had a church and an elementary school in operation. As soon as possible, they purchased land to start building a church<sup>68</sup> of which Gnutzmann was in charge.<sup>69</sup> Due to problems with building, such as constant rains that hindered construction, delays in obtaining the legal permit due to a political strike that took 33 days, and a lack of materials, João started suffering from ulcers.<sup>70</sup>

At the end of the church construction, the pastor's health got worse and worse. A doctor prescribed twenty injections to be taken every four hours. The North Cost Mission decided to send him to São Paulo so he could receive the necessary treatments there. On July 7, 1951, João arrived in São Paulo and he was received by his wife, daughter Noemi, and son-in-law Nevil Gorski. On the first Monday after his arrival in São Paulo, he went to the Sao Paulo Clinic and Hospital, (now São Paulo Adventist Hospital). Doctors recommended that João have surgery; it took place on August 3.<sup>71</sup> Since João's health was weak, he was advised not to return to Amazonas because of the climate. Therefore, the North Coast Mission decided to give him early retirement.<sup>72</sup>

In São Paulo, at São Paulo Academy, (now part of Central Adventist University of Sao Paulo), Pastor Jerônimo Garcia invited João to be a monitor. He also helped by giving English and Bible classes for high school. During the holidays in July and at the end of the year, he took care of the school canteen, helped take inventory, and developed the list of furniture.<sup>73</sup> During this period, his wife suddenly got sick and he needed to be absent from work in order to accompany her to the hospital. Lucinda's condition was unstable and she needed to have surgery. After the surgical intervention, his wife's health was good. However, due to the urgency of his wife's medical condition, João had left his work without the proper documentation and, because of that, he was dismissed when he returned.<sup>74</sup>

Gnutzmann received an invitation from Pastor Durval Stockler de Lima to work on the manufacture and sale of royal jelly.<sup>75</sup> Accepting the invitation, he worked in this position until 1964 when he decided to resign due to his age and fatigue.<sup>76</sup> João continued to receive requests from the São Paulo Conference to participate in baptisms and in preaching.<sup>77</sup> He served the Church at the following locations: Ribeira, Apiaí, Barra do Chapéu, Fazenda das Laranjeiras,<sup>78</sup> Piracicaba,<sup>79</sup> Mogi das Cruzes,<sup>80</sup> Mogi Mirim,<sup>81</sup> and Rio Claro.<sup>82</sup> In October,<sup>83</sup> 1966,<sup>84</sup> he was invited to be the pastor in the Lins District<sup>85</sup> where he remained until the end of that year.<sup>86</sup>

In January 1967, he went to São José do Rio Preto to substitute in Pastor Antônio Nepomuceno's district during his holidays. After the pastor's vacation was over, João returned home and enjoyed retirement for two months.<sup>87</sup> On April 8, they received the news that Pastor Eloy Wallauer was killed in an accident. João was asked to go to

Jaú District to replace the recently deceased worker. In this district, João began visiting members, assembled the church building commission, and reorganized the baptismal class.<sup>88</sup> The church construction received special attention. The construction was scheduled to be completed by the end of that year.<sup>89</sup> Initiated by Pastor Eloy in 1966, the church was completed and dedicated to God on October 28, 1967.<sup>90</sup>

## Last Years

Gnutzmann said goodbye to the Jaú church in March 1968,<sup>91</sup> and started to enjoy being with his wife and together they were growing vegetables and fruit trees in the backyard.<sup>92</sup> In 1972, due to Pastor Elias Valiante's state of health, João took over Santo Amaro District until Valiante recovered,<sup>93</sup> working in that place for two months.<sup>94</sup> In 1975, Pastor João received an honor at the Brazil College, along with other pioneers. On that occasion, the biography of each of the honored pioneers was read and they received a souvenir from representatives of Brazil College.<sup>95</sup>

On December 26, 1976, the Gnutzmann couple celebrated their golden anniversary with friends and family in a service at the Hortolândia Adventist Church, São Paulo. To share events that occurred during their marriage, some family members and friends gathered at the couple's residence in Hortolândia. The president of the Angola Union, Pastor Armando Casaca, who was present, told about the work done by the Gnutzmans in Bongo Mission.<sup>96</sup> On January 16, 1988, at the age of 88, Lucila passed away in Brasília.<sup>97</sup> On July 6, 1995, in the city of São Paulo, João passed away.<sup>98</sup>

## Contribution

João Gnutzmann made an important contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil and in the countries where he worked. He served for 40 years, having been the first official Brazilian missionary to work in another country.<sup>99</sup> He served at the Brazil Food Factory in its beginning, helping to improve the products.<sup>100</sup> Besides being a teacher, he took the lead in building churches in Maués,<sup>101</sup> Parintins,<sup>102</sup> Teresina,<sup>103</sup> São Luís<sup>104</sup> and Jaú.<sup>105</sup> Even after retirement, he continued serving in the Church by witnessing, pastoring,<sup>106</sup> and performing baptisms<sup>107</sup> in different places. While working in Angola, he was responsible for training many teachers,<sup>108</sup> thus increasing the number of schools in the country.<sup>109</sup> His ministry was fruitful, leaving a great legacy of faith and service in spreading the Adventist message.

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