

# Hetze, Reinhardt (1851–1939)

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Reinhardt Hetze was one of the first Adventists in South America and the first person to accept the Adventist message through the missionary work of Geörg (Jorge) Heinrich Riffel (1850-1917) in Argentina. His home was located near the current River Plate Adventist University in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina, which was likely the place of the first Bible meeting held by Seventh-day Adventists in the territory of the current South American Division. Hetze was an elder of the Church for 30 years and a fervent missionary!<sup>1</sup>

## Beginnings

Born on January 21, 1851, in Dreispitz, Saratov province, Russia, he married María Gerlach in 1873. Maria was born on September 8, 1856, in Dobrinka, Russia. They left Russia in 1887 and settled in Argentina. María and Reinhardt had eight children: David, Santiago, Alejandro, Amalia, Catalina, Julia, Emilia, and Ana. David was married to María Nuss, Alejandro to Paulina Lust, Amalia to Juan Ziegler, Catalina to Andrés Lerke, Julia to David Heinitz, Emilia to Godofredo Klos, and Ana to Alfredo Bernhardt. A few years before, Reinhardt's older brother Gottlieb immigrated to the United States where he accepted Adventism and became a self-supporting missionary.<sup>2</sup> Apparently Reinhardt Hetze was introduced to Adventism in Europe through his brother Gottlieb Hetze.<sup>3</sup>

Reinhardt Hetze wrote to *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review]: "Before brother Riffel had returned from Kansas, United States, I received a letter from my brother who lived there and also another one from Riffel, in which they told me that the latter would come to bring us the truth of Saturday. I lived two leagues [just over ten kilometers] from the Protestant Village, near Diamante. When I heard that he had arrived I hooked my horse and went to see him. He started telling me about my brother, but I said: 'Don't tell me about my brother; tell me about the truth.'"

A neighbor said: "He won't evangelize anybody here in the Protestant Village." And I replied: "He evangelized me." The second day people came to my house. There were 60 people there. The first person I evangelized was my wife. Soon we had meetings every night. We gave Bible studies and preached everywhere. When Pastor Francisco Westphal arrived, he started working and soon we evangelized 120 members and we split into two churches, namely Diamante and Ramírez."<sup>4</sup>

## Commitment to South American Adventism

With the arrival of Geörg (Jorge) Heinrich Riffel (1850-1917) from the United States in 1890, Hetze started to observe Saturday and Adventist doctrines.<sup>5</sup> His wife took a little longer. The evidence indicates that Riffel (also a German-Russian farmer) and Hetze had known each other in Russia and had been communicating for some time. It is known that the first Adventist meetings in South America were held at his home<sup>6</sup> When or where they were baptized is unknown, but Reinhardt and María were likely baptized together by Jorge Riffel. Hetze dedicated his life to preaching the Adventist message and shared his faith despite ridicule and contempt. He was treated as if he was crazy and was attacked by dogs. At times his opponents set him up on the road to make him fall, they threw stones on the roofs of the houses to interrupt the meetings, or released pigs from the pigsty to make noises in order to interrupt the meetings while he was giving Bible studies.

As he had done in Russia, he never stopped working the land to support his wife and children. His work allowed him to be generous with the Church, its institutions, and the community. For the Church and its mission it was invaluable support. When the harvests were over, he drove in his car to visit the neighborhood and nearby towns to share the gospel. He believed that Christ would come very soon and felt the urgency of proclaiming the advent of His kingdom.

He joined the believers based in Aldea Jacobi, near Crespo, Entre Ríos, Argentina, in 1894, to form with them the first officially organized church in the territory of the current South American Division. In his house church were held meetings, and with their support a rustic new chapel was built which brought together the adults and children who made up the church. Hetze was an elder of the Crespo Church and one of the founders of the Ramírez Church. He was zealous for the Church and a defender of order, reverence, and punctuality.

At the request of the work leader he visited brothers and sisters in order to confirm them in the faith and train them for mission. On those trips he preached, celebrated the Lord's supper, and baptized converts.<sup>7</sup> In 1906 he was present at the meeting in which it was decided to establish the River Plate Sanitarium.<sup>8</sup> He was on the board of directors of the Association and received a missionary credential in 1907. In his old age, Hetze offered his home to start an Adventist school.

María Gerlach de Hetze died on September 8, 1911, at age of 55. After the death of his wife, Hetze married Maria Schott.

## Final Years and Legacy

Reinhardt Hetze spent his last days at River Plate Sanitarium, Entre Ríos, Argentina. In his last week of life Hetze told his grandson, Pastor Santiago Bernhardt, who was taking care of him, about the visit of an angel who told him: "Reinhardt, don't fear. I am your angel. I am the same angel who accompanied you that Friday afternoon, when on the road between the port of Diamante and your house, you accepted Jesus as your Savior. I am the

same angel who closed the dogs' mouths so they wouldn't bite you when people kicked you out of their homes because you offered them the Bible. I have been sent to tell you that just as your Savior died on a Friday to enter Sabbath rest, on Friday of this week you will be picked up and you will sleep in peace. Take heart and trust the Lord."<sup>9</sup> That Friday, December 15, 1939, he died, just a few days before his 89th birthday. He left eight children, 65 grandchildren and 49 great-grandchildren. His remains and those of his wife currently rest in the cemetery of Aldea Jacobi, Entre Ríos, Argentina.<sup>10</sup>

Hetze is remembered for being a great missionary who led many people to Christ and to the Church. His missionary spirit was perpetuated in many of his descendants, given that more than 50 of them have worked or currently work in the cause of God. Pastor Frank H. Westphal considered him an apostle.<sup>11</sup> His brother Joseph W. Westphal wrote about him: "For many years he served as one of our careful and efficient elders."<sup>12</sup> For South American Adventism, he was a pioneer and an example. He was an enthusiastic advocate and a disseminator of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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## NOTES

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2. Gottlieb Hetze (1848-1927) was born in Dreispitz, near the Volga river, in Russia. He emigrated to the United States in 1883, where he lived in Kansas and in Oklahoma. He became an Adventist in Kansas and returned to Russia as a self-supporting missionary. Later he was ordained to the ministry and served as an evangelist and department director. For 20 years he worked in German villages along the Volga River before returning to the United States. He died in Okeene, Oklahoma.
3. Santiago Bernhardt Hetze, "Yo soy el mismo ángel [I am the same angel] [...]," *La Revista Adventista*, year 82, n. 11, November 1982, 13.
4. Reinhardt Hetze, "Cómo empezó la obra en Entre Ríos" [How the work began in Entre Ríos], *La Revista Adventista*, year 33, n. 3, 30 January 1933, 16.
5. Robert G. Wearner, "Centenario de la iglesia adventista en la Argentina" [Centenary of the Adventist church in Argentina], *Revista Adventista*, year 94, n. 9, September 1994, 23.
6. Robert G. Wearner, "The Riffels: Planting Adventism in Argentina," *ARH*, September 13, 1984, 4-6; Wearner, "Centenario de la iglesia adventista en la Argentina" [Centenary of the Adventist church in Argentina], *Revista Adventista* [ARH], 94, n. 9, September 1994, 23.
7. Reinhardt Hetze, "Lucas González, Entre Ríos," *La Revista Adventista*, May 1906, 9.

8. Joseph W. Westphal, "The Beginnings of the Work in Argentina," *ARH*, August 12, 1920, 6.
9. Santiago Bernhardt Hetze, "Yo soy tu ángel" [I am your angel], *La Revista adventista*, May 1982, 13.
10. See the necrology of Reinhardt Hetze in Carlos Becker, "Necrología" [Obituary], *La Revista Adventista*, year 40, n. 7, July 1940, 11.
11. Frank H. Westphal, *Pionero en Sudamérica* [Pioneer in South America], Trad. Silvia Scholtus de Roscher (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: White Center Research, 1997), vii, 66.
12. Joseph W. Westphal, *ARH*, August 12, 1920, 6.

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