



Missionary dentist João Bechara, 1961.

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

Bechara, João (1905–2001)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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João Bechara, dental surgeon and missionary,¹ was born on June 8, 1905, in the city of Santo Amaro, which today is a district of São Paulo city, Brazil. His parents, Assad Bechara and Sada Bechara, were of Syrian Lebanese origin; however, they were born in Brazil.² Together they had eight children: Feres, Nadim, Salim, Elias, Adibe, Salua, Wady and João.³

The family did not profess any religion, but was fond of the Catholic Church, although not attending it. Assad and Sada were friends with the Adventist pastor Elias Zorub, who was also of Syrian Lebanese origin. It was through his advice that João was sent by his parents to study at Brazil College (now UNASP-SP), who asserted that it would be an adequate environment for him. In addition, the college was located in their neighborhood, Santo Amaro.⁴

João attended the first higher education program of this school, which had the purpose of training missionaries to join the Adventist work. He graduated from Theology in 1922, at 17 years of age, but did not take the decision towards baptism at the moment. Nevertheless, all the biblical truths he had learned stayed on his mind. Ten years later, when still living in Santo Amaro, João was miraculously cured from typhus. He kept the promise he had given to God in case he would be cured, and was baptized into the Adventist faith in 1932.⁵

In the beginning of 1933, he married Elena Miguel, better known as Júlia Bechara, in Paranapiacaba, state of São Paulo. They had two children: Assad and Eunice Bechara. At the side of her husband, Júlia served the Church by helping the Adventist Solidarity Action (former Dorcas), offering cooking classes for Adventist women, was a Sabbath School teacher and a counselor to the young.⁶

After their marriage, João studied Odontology in the city of Pindamonhangaba, state of São Paulo. Although he had not become a missionary back in 1922, God's purpose for his life was fulfilled after his conversion, since he dedicated his entire career of more than 30 years as a dentist to the missionary work. Following his graduation, he served on the Adventist missionary launch on the Ribeira River and Araguaia River, offering free dental service to local indigenous. In the city of São Paulo, João had an office at the Missionários street, district of Santo Amaro, where he also volunteered to assist needy students in the region.⁷

Later on, João participated in the project to evangelize the Jews, which began in the 1950s, by opening his house for the first Adventist meetings in Brazil.⁸ In 1959, he held an evangelistic series at Jardim Maria Sampaio, in the district of Campo Limpo, São Paulo, along with brothers Gideon de Oliveira, Hélio Serafino and Hermes dos Santos. Their work laid the basis for the foundation of a church that years later was opened on December 28, 1996.⁹ In 1961, he participated in a missionary project held in the cities of Fernandópolis and Urania, state of São Paulo, where he helped many people with dental care; in only one city, he removed about 80 teeth!¹⁰ In 1969, he donated his entire dental office to the Social Assistance Post of the Alvorada Adventist Church, in São Paulo city.¹¹

In addition, his son Assad Bechara became a prominent Adventist pastor who, among other things, worked among the Arabic population in Brazil. By his side, in 1979 he participated in the inaugural event of an evangelistic effort among Jews at the East São Paulo Conference.¹² That same year, his wife passed away on July 7,¹³ after a surgical operation from which she contracted a pulmonary embolism.¹⁴

João spent the last 22 years of his life living with his son's family, Assad Bechara. He suffered a heart attack and passed away in July 2001, at the age of 96, in the city of São Paulo.¹⁵ João is remembered for having used his profession for evangelistic purposes. Through his Christian testimony in both words and action, many people could hear about the Adventist hope.

SOURCES

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Duílio Parotti. "Posto de Assistência Social Alvorada." *Revista Adventista*, year 64, no. 08, August, 1969.

Fernando de Almeida Silva. "O Testemunho de Júlia Bechara." *Revista Adventista*, year 75, no. 08, August, 1980.

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"Na Paulista Leste Começa Evangelismo Especial em Prol dos Judeus." *Revista Adventista*, year 73, no. 09, September, 1978.

NOTES

1. Martinelli, Alcides, "O "Tiradentes," *Revista Adventista*, year 56, no. 10, October, 1961, 36.

2. Assad and Najla Bechara, interviewed by Luan Alves, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, March 11, 2019.

3. Assad Bechara, interviewed by Luan Alves, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, March 20, 2019.

4. Assad Bechara, interviewed by Luan Alves, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, July 03, 2019.

5. Assad and Najla Bechara, interviewed by Luan Alves, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, March 11, 2019.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. "Mais uma Igreja," *Revista Adventista*, year 93, no. 04, April, 1997, 22.
 10. Martinelli, Alcides, "O Tiradentes," *Revista Adventista*, year 56, no. 10, October, 1961, 36.
 11. Parotti, Duílio, "Posto de Assistência Social Alvorada," *Revista Adventista*, year 64, no. 08, August, 1969, 21.
 12. "Na Paulista Leste Começa Evangelismo Especial em Prol dos Judeus," *Revista Adventista*, year 73, no. 09, September, 1978, 21.
 13. Silva, Fernando de Almeida, "O Testemunho de Júlia Bechara," *Revista Adventista*, year 75, no. 08, August, 1980, 34.
 14. Assad and Najla Bechara, interviewed by Luan Alves, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, March 11, 2019.
 15. Ibid.
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