

Tancara, Francisco (1846–1956)

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Francisco Tancara was a chieftain and native Bolivian who became an Adventist and worked, by vocation, as a missionary and educator. Although illiterate, he used every means available so schools could be established in the villages under his management and so his people could become literate.

Early Years

Tancara was born in 1846 at the Putiri Farm, Sopocachi community, in the city of La Paz, Bolivia.¹ His conversion to Adventism took place through Pastor Reid Shepard's influence, with whom he worked in missionary and educational activities. He was baptized on May 7, 1921, along with his wife and children – who were part of the Gospel first fruits in the city of Rosario. It's worth remembering that Francisco Tancara was born precisely in the period of ebullition and formation of the Latin American national states, when there was a break with the colonial system. It was a time strongly marked by the struggles of “indigenous cultures that sought to survive” with the impact of foreign arrival² as well as an attempt to resist the takeover of their territories.³

Education and Marriage

As native from the La Paz plateau, Tancara had no opportunity to obtain a formal education because Bolivian society had almost completely secluded rural inhabitants. Thus, being illiterate was a common educational and cultural condition of the laborers as a whole. In his early life, he married Maria Rosa Quiñonez from the Tapunani community. They had five children: Pedro, Manuel, Vicente, José, and Placido Tancara Quiñonez.⁴ Vicente and Placido died during the Chaco War (1932-1935),⁵ and the rest of his children became faithful Adventists. For example, José Tancara Quiñonez stands out for his missionary, educational, and musical work and service for the local and regional Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Ministry

Denying an education to what was considered “lower” indigenous social classes was often used as a weapon. Many leaders had to stand up for the right to receive a legitimate education, and Francisco Tancara was among these leaders.⁶ This happened late in the beginning of the 20th Century, and the government had made efforts

to deny even very basic educational opportunities to the indigenous peoples, although these were very limited initiatives. Some schools were founded, but it was still not nearly enough to assist everyone. At the same time, many religious denominations sought to work among the natives. In 1912, the Seventh-day Adventist Church undertook an educational breakthrough in the city of La Paz that ended up not offering educational opportunities to as many people as the church had hoped.⁷

Francisco Tancara was a major instrument in freeing highland inhabitants in Rosario from its seclusion, which allowed abusive, social, economic, educational, and spiritual conditions. Many communities appointed him as their leader so he could represent them to city hall as well as legal, administrative, and church authorities.⁸ In 1917, the community, eager to receive a formal education, asked the Ismael Montes government, through Tancara – chieftain of Aroma provinces, Gualberto Villarroel, and Pacajes –⁹ authorization for a functioning school and a teacher to head it.¹⁰ In addition, in his struggles for improvement of life for his people, Tancara fought to have the land ownership returned to his community. Therefore, in 1918, he suggested a few people for the position of principal, but none of his candidates were elected.¹¹

It was during a trip around the indigenous communities in the beginning of 1920 that the meeting between Francisco Tancara and Reid Shepard took place. Later, when attending the annual meeting with representatives of the General Conference, South American Division, Inca Union, and the Bolivian Mission, Tancara formalized his request for a school to be opened in Rosario.¹² He persisted even when he was told that he should not consider teaching people to write and read one of his life's objectives. Yet, he wanted his people to learn how to read God's Word.¹³ Thus, accompanied by missionary Shepard and Urbina, he went to the city of Rosario on July 2, 1920.¹⁴ In that region, Tancara became a propagator of Adventism in Rosario highland. As an SDA member, he served in two areas: Sabbath School and as a deacon.

Because of his influence, Francisco Tancara accomplished a lot for his community. On one occasion, he accompanied the Adventist missionaries during a meeting with government authorities. When they asked him if, in fact, the indigenous wanted a missionary presence among them, Tancara interceded for his people before these government representatives.¹⁵ He outlined the pressing educational needs of his people, who wanted and needed a school and a teacher. Thus, despite of an incipient beginning, Rosario Adventist Academy obtained its operating license on August 20, 1921.¹⁶

The institution had clear educational goals, which were: to provide Christian education, increase the community's literacy, and share the Adventist message with natives. Many of the indigenous population had a strong desire to learn how to write and read, and when they accomplished this, they often would teach their siblings and share the Adventist message. Francisco Tancara's resolute work in bringing Adventist education to his people brought a channel of blessings to them, including literacy, biblical values, and health principles!¹⁷

Later Years

Tancara was of advanced age when he went to live in the tropical area of Caranavi with his wife and other countrymen. A few kilometers from this city, he founded the community of Santa Fe, which was made up of residents of the Rosario plateau –almost entirely Adventists – in Nor Yungas province (current Caravani), state of La Paz. Tancara died in that same city in 1956. Despite the threats he received for leaving the Catholic fraternity,¹⁸ he lived and died in the faith of the Adventist message.¹⁹

Contribution

His most important contribution was to bring Adventist education to his community. Despite having faced great opposition²⁰ in the beginning, after a while almost all the population was converted to Adventism. From 1897 to 1920, there were only 19 Adventist members in Bolivia. However, thanks to the work done in Rosario, 86 people were baptized in their first baptismal ceremony. This experience was a milestone in Bolivian Adventist history. This caused the community's first missionaries and Adventist teachers to appear in this highland territory in La Paz.

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NOTES

1. Rene Samuel Antonio Chávez, "*Un estudio histórico sobre el aporte de la educación adventista en la vida del indígena Aymara de Rosario 1920-1930*" [A historical study about the contribution of the Adventist education in the life of the indigenous Aymara of Rosario] (Master's thesis, Peruvian Union University, 2010), 81.
2. Maria Ligia Prado, "*A Formação das Nações Latinas Americanas*" [The Formation of the Latin American Nations], (São Paulo: Editora Atual, 1998), 3, 4.
3. Marcelo Ramos Flores. "Santos Marka Tula y las demandas de los Caciques apoderados en la primera parte del siglo XX" [Santos Marka Tula and demands of the proxy chieftains in the first part of the 20th century], Sources, Library Review and Historical Record of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly 10, no. 47 (December 2016): 24.
4. Chávez, 83.
5. War between Bolivia and Paraguay for the region of Chaco boreal, which led to more than 80 thousand soldier deaths. Rafael Archondo. "La Guerra del Chaco: ¿hubo algún titiritero?" [Chaco war: was there any puppeteer?], Población y Desarrollo [Population and Development], 2007, accessed February 11, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2SCjtbl>.
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9. Chávez, 81.
10. Marcos Chuquimia Espinoza, *Breve reseña histórica de la primera iglesia adventista de Bolivia en Rosario* [Short historic review of the first Bolivian Adventist church in Rosario] (La Paz, BO: n.e., 1986).
11. Canqui, 99-112.
12. Fernando Stahl, *En el país de los incas* [In the Incas' country] (Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Publishing House, 1910), 276-277.
13. H. U. Stevens, "An Indian Chief Intercedes for his People," *Signs of the Times*, July 18, 1927, 5-6.
14. Matthew Urbina is an Adventist Peruvian native teacher who came from Peru highlands, along with Reid Shepard Rosario, in Bolivia. Stahl, *En el país de los incas*, 276-277.
15. Stevens, 5-6.
16. Chávez, 67.
17. Ibid., 68.
18. Hector J. Peverini, *En las huellas de la providencia* [In the footsteps of Providence] (Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Publishing House, 1988), 195.
19. Chávez, 81.
20. Ibid., 83.

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