

García Díaz, Julio Domingo (1890–1971)

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Paula Rosa García Soto, graduate in literature and in education, emphasis on literature (Universidad de los Andes), was born in San Juan de los Morros, Guárico, Venezuela, to María Soto de García and Julio García Díaz. She is the youngest of their children and has written a biography of her father, Julio García Díaz, entitled *Bajo los Cielos de Camaguán...un Atardecer en San Juan de los Morros*.

Julio Domingo García Díaz was a colporteur, a preacher, a worker, and a missionary from Venezuela.

Early Life and Family

Julio Domingo García Díaz was born in Camaguán in the Venezuelan state of Guárico on December 20, 1890. He was the son of Colonel Sixto García, who served under General Joaquín Crespo, and of the indigenous Venezuelan Dolores Díaz, known as “Malore.” He had only one sister, Mercedes, who later became the wife of colporteur Pedro Ramón González, a friend of Garcia’s youth.¹

Garcia’s first marriage was to Emilia Pérez, the widow of General Quintana. She already had three daughters, Isabel, Antonia, and Esther. From her marriage with Julio García were born Paula Witremunda, Emilia Eunice, Olimpia Basilisa, Sara Elena, Julia, and Ana Euqueria. Theirs was one of the wealthiest families in town. Julio played the guitar skillfully with his left hand (he was left-handed) and was the heart and soul of parties?²

Garcia became acquainted with the Adventist message through the colporteur Rafael López Miranda, originally from Puerto Rico. At that time, López was working as a missionary colporteur in Venezuela; a short time later he would die of injuries sustained in the town of El Cobre in southwest Venezuela when attacked for religious reasons. As López was traveling to Caracas to attend the colporteur institute, he stopped in the town of Camaguán, about 400 kilometers from the capital, on June 28, 1920. He asked for the most influential man in town and was referred to the home of Julio García, then a businessman with a department store. Although he had only attended school through the fourth grade of elementary school—all that was offered in that town at the time—Garcia was self-taught. López studied the Bible with him in the evenings. “He was an expert artist who drew before my eyes, night after night, the images of Daniel Chapters 2 and 7, and from the prophecies of Revelation...” wrote Julio García in one of his letters.³

On July 2, 1920, Garcia decided to close his business and keep his first Sabbath, together with his family. This allowed López to also visit several of Garcia’s friends and business acquaintances in town, and they also began to receive studies on Daniel and Revelation. In January of 1921, two Adventist ministers, William Baxter with his wife and baby, and Fitch, with his wife, arrived in Camaguán. Baxter was then president of the Venezuela Mission, and he and the others had come to meet with this group of Bible students. They stayed in Julio García’s

house. The following Friday, about two hundred people gathered for an improvised meeting; they were motivated by curiosity regarding the visitors. This was also their first contact with Protestantism. On his return to Caracas, Baxter sent the colporteur Francisco Cabrera to continue work started by López.⁴

April 22, 1921, Julio García, his wife, and three oldest daughters, along with seventeen other people were baptized on April 22, 1921. Baxter baptized them in the Portuguesa River, and they formed the second Seventh-day Adventist church in Venezuela.⁵

Tragedy soon struck Garcia's family. On Thursday, November 19, 1921, his youngest daughter, Ana Dolores, died at the age of six and was buried the next day. Twenty days later, her sister, Julia Euqueria, eight years old, died of the measles, and their older sister Emilia Eunice was infected. Because she was running a fever and contagious, they put her out into the hall, where they expected her to die also. That night, out in the back yard in his hammock, Garcia dreamed that a tall white man said to him, "Julio, read Isaiah 1:25." It says, "...and I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross, and will remove all your alloy." He got up and called his wife, and together they went to check on their daughter Emilia, who had sweated out her fever and was better.⁶ (She later became the mother of the two Venezuelan pastors, Iván and Jorge Omaña.)

Ministry

In 1922, Garcia joined the Adventist work as a colporteur, a preacher, a worker, a missionary, and a minister without authorization to baptize. In 1930, he was sent as a delegate to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in San Francisco, California.⁷ He was ordained as a pastor by E. E. Andross, president of the Inter-American Division, on April 15, 1933, becoming the first ordained Venezuelan pastor and, for a long time, the only Venezuelan worker in the country.⁸

Garcia travelled, preached, and taught all through the central states of Venezuela, and cared for the new congregations that rose from his missionary work in the western states. He almost always travelled on the rivers, navigating the Guárico, Portuguesa, Barinas, Guanare, Guanarito, Botucal, Tinaco, and Cojedes by *bongo* (canoe). On land, he travelled by ox cart, burro, or mule. Accompanied by his wife, Emilia, and his four daughters—Paula, Olimpia, Emilia, and Sara—he would show slides with a projector and use a traveling organ to play music. He baptized 238 people and married thirty-two couples during his ministry, which ended in 1942.⁹

Later Life

After resigning from the ministry, Garcia worked as a municipal judge in Tejerías, Aragua, Venezuela, and then as a judge over civil, commercial, labor, criminal, and transport cases in the Roscio district of the state of Guárico, until his retirement. He also collaborated with Leoncio Martínez, a newspaper reporter, in the writing of articles for "El Fantoche," a popular Venezuelan weekly. On September 16, 1951, his wife Emilia died, leaving

him totally alone, as his daughters had grown up and had their own homes.¹⁰

Meanwhile, William and Berna Baxter, whom Garcia called his spiritual parents, contacted him and encouraged him to return to the path of salvation. Berna Baxter wrote him in one of her many letters, “nobility does not consist in not falling, but rather in getting up again.” On May 7, 1959, Garcia was re-baptized in the La Concordia church in Caracas, Venezuela, by Harold Bohr, president of the East Venezuela Mission.¹¹ Garcia was always a friendly man, cheerful, and easily entered into conversations, but from the day of his recommitment to God, his face acquired an lasting glow, his words flowed with more assurance, his walk was more vigorous, and a new joy filled his heart.

Garcia established himself in San Juan de los Morros, capital of the state of Guárico, and again began to fervently preach the soon-coming of Jesus, holding evangelistic meetings in different towns and cities, as well as writing for the newspapers *El Nacional* and *El Universal*, both of which had a national circulation. At the same time, he married María Soto, a widow, who was also an Adventist and had a daughter, Elisa. Julio and María Garcia had four more children of together: Ana Mercedes, Yona Emilia, Julio Ramón, and Paula Rosa. They also started a chicken farm on their property.¹²

Garcia formed a long friendship and innumerable memories of the work in Venezuela with Henry Baasch, president of the Colombia-Venezuela Union Mission. He also continued to exchange letters with William Baxter, former president of the Venezuela Mission, well into his old age.¹³

Garcia died of a myocardial infarction in his home on February 7, 1971, in San Juan de los Morros, Guárico, Venezuela.¹⁴ He was 85 years old. He was buried in the cemetery of San Miguel Arcángel in that same city.¹⁵ The words of the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled in his life: “The word of the Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness.” (NASB, 1960)

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Paula García, *Bajo los Cielos de Camaguán...un Atardecer en San Juan de los Morros* (Mérida, Venezuela: Talleres Gráficos Universitarios, Universidad de los Andes, 2010), 28.
2. Ibid., 43.
3. Ibid., 40.
4. Julio García to Pastor Harold Bohr, May 5, 1963, private letter, personal collection of Paula García.
5. Ibid.
6. Paula García, *Bajo los Cielos de Camaguán...un Atardecer en San Juan de los Morros*. (Mérida, Venezuela: Talleres Gráficos Universitarios, Universidad de los Andes, 2010), 49.
7. Julio García to Pastor Henry Baasch, August 23, 1965, private letter, personal collection of Paula García.
8. Paula García, *Bajo los Cielos de Camaguán...un Atardecer en San Juan de los Morros* (Mérida, Venezuela: Talleres Gráficos Universitarios, Universidad de los Andes, 2010), 77.
9. Ibid., 109, 111.
10. Ibid., 165, 133.
11. Ibid., 154.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 206.
14. García was survived by faithful children who all join in the work he loved, the preaching of the gospel. These included his children (Elisa, Yona, Ana, Julio and Paula), his grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. It can be pointed out that two of his grandchildren, Pastors Iván Omaña García (now retired, but once the first president of the Venezuela-Antillian Union Mission, which today has become the West Venezuela Union Mission and the East Venezuela Union Mission), and Jorge Omaña García, a retired minister, and his great-grandson, Iván Omaña Herrera, an active pastor in the United States, were all workers employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
15. Ibid., 205.

