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Japas, Salim (1921–1992)

JUAN CARLOS PRIORA

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Salim Japas, pastor, evangelist, minister, theology professor, writer, and international speaker, served in South America, Inter-America, and the Middle East.¹

Early Years and First Contact with Adventism

Salim was born on October 13, 1921, in Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires province, Argentina. He was the first of ten siblings: Salim (1921-1992), Salima (1924-1948), Ángel (1925-2010), Ángela (1928-2017), Adib Nure (1930-1965), Horacio (1932-1996), Nélide, Ricardo, Armando, and Nora. His father, Nure Japas (born on February 20, 1899) and mother, Uahíba Chami (born on March 20, 1904), were both born in Homs, Syria.

Salim Wazzani, Nure Japas' friend, immigrated from Homs to Argentina (1930) and settled in a neighborhood near Japas, in Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires province, Argentina. Wazzani was an Orthodox Christian. Soon after settling in he was visited by an Adventist canvasser Cayetano Gigliotti, who had recently arrived from Italy. Wazzani understood and accepted the Adventist message, including the Saturday Sabbath, and soon joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He shared the new doctrines with Nure and his wife, who were prosperous traders, but found them to be resistant. Notwithstanding, they hosted Wazzani and discussed the Bible. Young Salim listened to the discussions about the Bible. One day he asked his father for a Bible. Not long after that, an evangelical canvasser, Ignacio Ramón, visited the Japas and sold them a Bible.² Salim received Bible studies from Pastor Humberto Cairus and at 16, was baptized by Pastor John L. Brown in December 1937 at the church in Palermo, Buenos Aires.

Following his baptism, Salim's relationship with his father became tense. He became discouraged and one day decided to end his life. He walked along Boedo de Lomas de Zamora Street in the direction of the railroad crossing with the intention of throwing himself in front of the locomotive. Going the same way, but in the opposite direction, was an Adventist named Jerónimo Ripa, who seeing him, spoke to him, took him home, prayed with him, and told him that God had good plans for him. Salim gave up on his suicide plans. However, his father continued to oppose his son on religious matters. Salim left the house and, to support himself, became a street seller in Vicente López, Buenos Aires, Argentina. The time came when he decided to be a missionary, but his parents did not support him. Vain were the efforts of the pastors Walter Schubert, Pablo Beskow, Ellis Maas, Justo Joaquín Vallejos, Juan Riffel, David Rhys, Fernando Chaij, and D. J. von Pohle to convince Nure to allow Salim to go to River Plate Academy in Entre Ríos, Argentina. Nure tried to persuade his eldest son, proposing to pass the prosperous trade to his name, but even that did not twist Salim's iron will. Finally, at 22, Salim's perseverance was rewarded and his parents authorized him.

Salim Japas attended primary studies at Bartolomé Miter Public School No. 1 in the city of Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires. From the first to third year of high school he attended Buenos Aires Academy, Vicente López, Buenos Aires. The fourth year he studied at Admiral Brown National College in Adrogué, province of Buenos Aires. The fifth year of high school he attended River Plate Academy, Entre Ríos, Argentina.

Higher Education, Family, and Missionary Service in South America

Salim graduated with a Bachelor in Theology from River Plate Academy in 1945 and later graduated with a degree in philosophy and pedagogy from the National Higher Institute of Teachers in Buenos Aires.

On July 30, 1946 he married Oliva Ruth Gerber, who was born on July 25, 1923 in Colonia, Uruguay. Her parents were Carlos Gerber and María Hugo, descendants of the first Adventists in Uruguay. She was baptized into the SDA Church in December 1973. Oliva became an excellent companion in the successful ministry of Pastor Salim Japas. Oliva and Salim Japas had three children: (a) Carlos Alberto, a physician, born in Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires, on August 30, 1947, who married Graciela E. Utz, (b) Norma Alicia de Hernández, born in Trelew, Chubut, Argentina, on June 19, 1951 and (c) Estela Beatriz de Rojas, born in Trelew, Chubut, Argentina, on December 18, 1952. All three settled in the United States. They had seven grandchildren: Claudio, Melisa, Daniel, Lizzy, Esther, Oscar, and Kewin and seven great-grandchildren.

Salim joined the Adventist work on March 1, 1946. Between 1946 and 1953 he worked as an evangelist in the old Buenos Aires Conference which embraced a large territory, from the Federal Capital to Tierra del Fuego and the Falkland Islands, first as an aspirant to the ministry in the church of Palermo under the leadership of Pastor Hugo Beskow. He later served as pastor in the churches of Valentín Alsina, Avellaneda (Buenos Aires), Trelew (Chubut), Florida (Vicente López, Buenos Aires), and Palermo (Buenos Aires), among others. During 1954 and 1955 he was Director of the Department of Young Volunteer Missionaries at the Buenos Aires Conference. From 1956 to June 1961 he was an evangelist for the Buenos Aires Conference. From July 1961 to February 28, 1966 he served as an evangelist in the Austral Union Conference where he performed memorable evangelistic series in Montevideo (Uruguay), San Juan (Argentina), and many other large cities.³ In 1963 he was invited to conduct evangelistic campaigns in the Southern California Conference, United States, with a series in Lynwood, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. In a certain way, he continued the evangelistic work of Pastor Walter Schubert. The book *Light Bearers* reports: "Beginning in 1954, Schubert and three other South American evangelists, Arturo Schmidt, Carlos Aeschlimann, and Salim Japas introduced the new evangelizing method in Inter-America."⁴

Later Years, Literary Production, and Legacy

From 1966 he continued his fruitful ministry outside Argentina. He held evangelistic campaigns in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. From 1967 to 1970 he served as an evangelist in the Middle East Division and lived and preached in Beirut, Lebanon.

Dr. Japas continued his ministry in the Inter-American Division. From 1970 to 1985 he served as a pastor and president of the theology department at Las Antillas Adventist School, Puerto Rico. At the same time he earned a Masters in Divinity and a Doctorate in Pastoral Theology (1978) at Andrews University, Michigan, United States⁵

At the General Conference Congress held in New Orleans in 1985 he was appointed Secretary of the Ministerial Association and an evangelist of the Inter-American Division until, at the end of 1989, in the midst of an evangelistic campaign in Greater Mexico, a serious illness was detected which prevented him from finishing the campaign⁶ He was operated on in Fort Worth, Texas, losing his pancreas, gallbladder, duodenum, and part of the stomach⁷ He retired in 1990 after 44 years of service to the Church. A temporary recovery allowed him to bear witness of his gratitude to God for those years of fruitful ministry. After the surgery, he bought about three hectares of land (7,413 acres) that bordered his son Carlos' property where he planted fruit trees and cultivated vegetables. He spent his days serenely, placing his trust in God, caring for his loving family, meditating, reading, writing, and praying. In the end the disease returned and he rested in the Lord on November 28, 1992, in Burseson, Texas, United States. He was buried in Keene Cemetery, Texas, United States.⁸

Dr. Salim Japas wrote many articles published in denominational journals such as *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], *El Ministerio Adventista* [Adventist Ministry], of which he was advisor, as well as for other popular magazines. He also wrote six books and academic papers, such as: *Fuego de Dios en la evangelización* [Fire of God in evangelization]; *Cristología: El misterio de Cristo según la Sagrada Escritura y el espíritu de profecía* [Christology: The mystery of Christ according to Sacred Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy]; *Cristo en el santuario* [Christ in the sanctuary]; *Llama divina: Respuesta al problema de la evangelización contemporánea* [Divine flame: Answer to the problem of contemporary evangelization]; *Herejía, Colón y la Inquisición: ¿se repetirá la historia?* [Heresy, Columbus and the Inquisition: will history be repeated?].⁹

Pastor Salim Japas was a hardworking, consecrated man, not only in his specific duties as a pastor, lecturer, administrator, and teacher, but he also valued manual labor. He had an elegant figure, was slim, of deep thought, was simple and had a soft expression, and a captivating smile. He was an outstanding servant of God and a passionate preacher of the news of salvation and the return of Jesus.

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NOTES

1. Daniel Oscar Plenc, *25 Historias de misioneros* [25 Stories of Missionaries] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 2013), 132-134. Information corroborated with file 743 of the former Austral Union Conference, existing in the archives of the Argentine Union, accessed on April 9, 2018. See: Sergio Collins, "Una entrevista con el pastor Salim Japas" [An interview with pastor Salim Japas], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], year 63, n° 7, July 1963, 6-7. Jorge Luorno, "Salim Japas, un ideal de servicio" [Salim Japas, an ideal of service], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], year 94, n° 1, January 1994, 30. The author thanks the collaboration of Dr. Armando Japas and his wife, Rosita Friedrich and Doris Samojluk, and Dr. Daniel Plenc, for the elaboration of this semblance.?
2. This canvasser is associated with the Adventist message and has also joined the Adventist Church through the baptism of the Liniers Church, Buenos Aires, Argentina.?
3. Carlos Ayala, "An Advancement in Southern Chile," *South American Bulletin*, vol. 38, n° 1, January-March 1962, 6. A. E. Collins, "Total Evangelism in Montevideo," *South American Bulletin*, vol. 39, n° 3, July-September 1963, 5, 6. J. J. Aitken, "Vuestra Redención está cerca" [Your Redemption is near], *South American Bulletin*, vol. 42, n° 1, 2, January-June 1966, 2.?
4. Richard W. Schwarz y Floyd Greenleaf, *Portadores de luz: Historia de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día* [Light bearers: a history of the Seventh-day Adventist church], trad. Rolando A. Itin, Tulio N. Peverini (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 2002), 542.?
5. H. J. Brignoni, "Brotherhood and Victory Day," *Messenger, Flashes*, n° 17, July 27, 1971, 1. Salim Japas, "A strategy for Seventh-day Adventist public evangelism within a Roman Catholic society context in Hispanic America" (DMin, dissertation, Andrews University, 1978). See: Ray Minner, "¡Felicitaciones, Dr. Japas!" [Congratulations Dr. Japas!], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 1978, 12.?
6. Luis González, "Festival of the Lasty in Costa Rica," *Flashes*, n° 358, April 1986, 1.?
7. See: Salim Japas, "Nací 3 veces" [I was born three times], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], year 91, n° 7, July 1991, 10.?
8. Jaime Castrejon, "They Rest in the Lord," *Inter-American Division News, Flashes*, n° 437, January 1993, 1-2. Jaime Castrejón, "Adiós, heraldos de la fe" [Goodbye, heralds of faith], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], year 93, n° 6, June 1993, 31. "Salim Japas Dies," *Review and Herald*, vol. 170, n° 2, January 14, 1993, 7.?
9. Salim Japas, *Fuego de Dios en la evangelización* [Fire of God in evangelization], 1st ed. (Puerto Rico: Antillian College, 1973), 4ª ed. (1977), 124 pp. *Cristología: El misterio de Cristo según la Sagrada Escritura y el espíritu de profecía* [Christology: The mystery of Christ according to Sacred Scripture and the spirit of prophecy] (Puerto Rico: Antillan College, 1977), 76 pp. *Cristo en el santuario* [Christ in the sanctuary] (Mountain View, California: Publicaciones Interamericanas, 1980), 128 pp. *Llama divina: Respuesta al problema de la evangelización contemporánea* [Divine flame: Answer to the problem of contemporary evangelization] (Miami, Florida: Interamerican Publishing Association, 1989), 122 pp. *Herejía, Colón y la Inquisición: ¿se repetirá la historia?* [Heresy, Columbus and the Inquisition: will history be repeated?] (Arkansas: Creation Enterprises International, 1992), 141 pp.?