

Tahay, Moises (1911–1970)

JUAN FRANCISCO LÓPEZ

Juan Francisco López Ac, a journalist by profession, has served the Adventist church for more than 32 years, beginning as a worker on the radio station Union Radio starting in 1979 and eventually becoming its manager, a position he has held since 2001. He has also worked in various areas of communication for the Guatemala Union and its communications systems. He is married to Patricia Meda de López, and they have a daughter.

Moisés Tahay was an Adventist pioneer evangelist and pastor among the native tribes of Guatemala.

Early Years and Education

Moisés Tahay was born on September 4, 1911, in Totonicapán, Guatemala. He was the son of Pedro Tahay and María Vásquez de Tahay.

In 1939, he graduated as an elementary school teacher from the *Instituto Nacional para Varones de Occidente* in Quetzaltenango. Around that time, he attended a series of evangelistic meetings held by the local Seventh-day Adventist church, and he was baptized in 1940 by Pastor José Aguilar Canjura.¹ He was the first in his family to become an Adventist. Towards the end of 1943, he graduated from the *Academia Adventista Hispanoamericana* in Costa Rica, where he studied theology.

On December 15, 1954, he was ordained to the pastoral ministry. During that same year, he was interviewed by the Inter-American Division president, Pastor A. H. Roth. Tahay held two pagan idols in his hands as he spoke to Pastor Roth. "I once worshipped the gods of stomach pain, headaches, and toothaches before I heard about the Lord Jesus." At that point Tahay threw the idols on the ground and said, "They are just as dust today, since I have made a place for Jesus in my heart." He also said that although there were people in his town who worshipped Jesus, his heart cried out for the more than two million Mayas who did not know Jesus.²

Tahay was aware of the need for teachers, schools, preachers, and doctors to continue the work of evangelism in the region. His life story as a district pastor in Totonicapán was described as "filled with miracles and faith experiences. Often he returns to the school which, as a young man, he founded in Momostenango and tells stories to the children there."³

His love of God's work was such that he was tireless in visiting places in the region. He would always take a rolled-up piece of foam rubber with him, which he would use as a bed on which to sleep in whatever place he found himself at dusk. He did not seek comfort, but rather to preach the message in all opportune places.⁴

Marriage

On February 8, 1946, Moises Tahay married Isabel Alvarez Paiz, an elementary school teacher. The couple made a good team for the preaching of the gospel in Guatemala. While he worked in evangelism and Adventist education, she trained church members to be good Sabbath School teachers for children and adults. She served also as the church treasurer, shared her knowledge of natural medicine, and taught nutrition classes.⁵ Moises and Isabel had four children: Eduardo Alfonso, Vilma Elizabeth, Samuel, and Ruth Elena.

Despite their many responsibilities and the vast territory assigned to him, the Tahays created a solid Christian home, whose descendants continue to be members of the Adventist church.⁶

Contributions to the Work of the Church

Pastor Tahay is remembered as a pioneer of the Adventist Church among the native tribes of Guatemala. He spent his whole ministry visiting his congregations on foot and by bus, by night or by day.

He was dedicated to the study of the Bible and its prophecies, and for this purpose, his knowledge of Latin was very helpful. In 1941, Nicaragua Mission called him to start an Adventist school in the city of Managua. In 1942, he was called to start an Adventist school in San José, Costa Rica, which would be called *Colegio Adventista La Patria*.⁷

In 1944, he was invited to take charge of the Spanish department of the Central American Union Mission's academy.⁸ At the end of that year, Moises and Isabel were called to work at the Guatemala Mission and start the *Centro Cultural Indigenista* as a means for reaching out to the native population. The center was founded in early 1949.

About three years ago a definite work for [the "over 2,000,000 pure-blooded" "Maya-Quiche and other Indian tribes of Guatemala"] was started in the form of a school at Momostenango. ...this school has become the model of education for many miles around, and always ranks 'tops' in the government examinations. Besides being a credit to the director, Professor Moises Tahay, it is also the pride of the community, and all school functions are attended by the mayor and the city fathers.⁹

During this period, in addition to his duties at the educational center, Tahay also worked as a pastor and church planter. He started the churches in Santa Ana and Santa Isabel and preached the Adventist message in Pitzal, El Salitre.¹⁰

In 1955, Tahay was moved to the Occidente district, which included the departments of Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Totonicapán, Quiché, Sololá, and Retalhuleu. During the time he worked in this large district, he started several churches with a total membership of 64, each a convert from spiritism.¹¹

The churches were in Olintepeque, Concepción Chiquirichapa, Chuculjuyup, Paxtocá, Juchanep, Pasajoc, Paquí, El Edén, Tocache, San Pablo, Nueva Zelandia, San José Ojetenam, San Cristóbal (where years later an Adventist clinic was started), and Cantel, where there is now a school, *Colegio Adventista El Adelanto*.¹²

The Adventist Church received a donation of a large property “in a very central section of the city, just a block from...the Pan American Highway exit,” in Guatemala. Here they hoped to build the Guatemala Junior Academy soon after, and “Professor Moises Tahay will take charge of this new training center.”¹³ Because of his training and experience, he led the new center of education that later became the *Liceo Adventista el Progreso*.

Tahay had a very interesting experience as he began a series of meetings on the western slopes of the Andes in Maya-Quiche land. He and a lay member were going from house to house, inviting people to attend an evangelistic series. The last house on their visit list was that of a witchcraft priest. The lay brother who accompanied Pastor Tahay refused to go with him into the home, but Tahay decided to go anyway and speak to this priest and invite him to the meetings. During his conversation with the priest, Tahay sensed that something was not right but did not know what.¹⁴ When he returned to his room, he found that all his equipment and sermon materials had been destroyed. “The priest had warned him, and now he was seeing the evils of witchcraft.” However, Pastor Tahay did not give up, and he began his Bible studies. The witchcraft priest attended the meetings regularly and became interested in the biblical teachings. “Through the months and with great difficulties and struggles, the priest finally overcame his evil vices and was converted to the truth. He became a free man and a Seventh-day Adventist.”¹⁵

At the beginning of 1963, Pastor Tahay was sent back to the Occidente District, which was now a smaller territory, including departments of Huchuetenango, Totonicapán, and Sololá. There, he started the churches of Chuisuc, la Esperanza, Valparaíso, La Mesilla, La Libertad, El Chalum, San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Cuilco, San Pedro Necta, Panajachel, Almolonga, and Cantel 2, among the others. He participated in the purchase of the land for the construction of the Central Church of Quetaltanango and made the plans for the Adventist school that now bears his name.

Later Years

In 1966, Tahay was moved to a new district that included the departments of Chimaltenango, Quiché, Alta Verapaz, and Baja Verapaz, where he started congregations in Chitatul, Chichicastenango, Santa Rosa Chujuyú, Canillá, Sacapulas, Tierra Blanca, Uspantán, Chicamán, Cunén, San Pedro Jocopilas, Nebaj, Rabinal, Xicalcal, Salacuín, San Pedro Carchá, Telemán, San Antonio Senahú, and Tukurú. He worked in this district until his death on March 24, 1970.¹⁶ The year before his death, he had baptized 54 new members.¹⁷ In his Bible, he left written the words that embody his attitude toward his work for God: “Wherever You call me to go, Lord, there I will go, with this, Your Word, in my mind, in my hand, in my heart, and in my soul. Wherever You wish me to take it, there I will surely go to bring glory to Your name.”

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NOTES

1. Eduardo Alfonso Tahay Alvarez, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, August 25, 2021.
2. Walter T. Crandall, "Our Reporter's Story for Sabbath, May 29," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, July 5, 1954, 5.
3. "The story of...." *Columbia Union Visitor*, September 19, 1968, 4.
4. Sinforiano Alvarado, interview by author, Guatemala, Guatemala, October 30, 2021.
5. Eduardo Alfonso Tahay Alvarez, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, August 25, 2021.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. N. H. Kinzer, "Graduates Find Places in the Work" under "Echoes from Central America," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, December 1944, 5.

9. Elmer G. Ross, "Adventism Among the Maya-Quiches," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, April 1952, 6.
 10. Eduardo Alfonso Tahay Alvarez, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, August 25, 2021.
 11. Unnamed radio narrator, "An Evening with Inter-America," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, September 1954, 12.
 12. Eduardo Alfonso Tahay Alvarez, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, August 25, 2021.
 13. Noel H. Kinzer, "Activity in Central America," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, August 1946, 5.
 14. L. L. Reile, "I would like...," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, February 1961, 9.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Eduardo Alfonso Tahay Alvarez, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, August 25, 2021.
 17. "From Guatemala comes the news..." *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, June 1970, 11.
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