

# Roth, Ernesto

## (1904–1999)

### THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Ernesto Roth

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

Ernesto Roth was a carpenter, teacher, missionary, canvasser, pastor, and administrator.

## Early Life, Carpentry Work, and Baptism

Ernesto Roth was born on July 22, 1904, in Lachweiler, Wurttemberg, Germany.<sup>1</sup> Ernesto was a farmer's son, and he had four siblings: Carl (1894-1989); Frederico (1896-1984), who was a pastor; Adolfo (1900-1923); and Marie (1900-1931), who was converted to Adventism through Frederico's work.<sup>2</sup> Ernesto was diagnosed with diphtheria at age five. As a faithful member of the Lutheran Church, his mother promised that, if her son got well, she would dedicate him to God's service as a carpenter and missionary.<sup>3</sup>

Ernesto attended elementary school for seven years and was then trained in the craft of carpentry, fulfilling part of his mother's promise. His mother died when he was 15. He worked building hangars until age 20. Life in post-World War I Germany wasn't easy. Ernesto had to work for food for 13 hours a day in the summer and eight hours a day in the winter. During this time, he learned about the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment. He had received a copy of the New Testament as a Lutheran, but, when he found a complete Bible in his employer's house, Ernesto began studying the Bible in his spare time and discovered lessons previously unavailable to him.<sup>4</sup> After a dream in which God showed him that the Sabbath should be observed and that he should preach, even if it meant to preach in a foreign language, Ernesto was convinced of what he had read in the Bible. He requested to have the Sabbath off, and his boss authorized it. However, his boss's wife said that if Ernesto didn't work on Sabbaths, he should not work on Sundays either, forcing him to fast during the weekend.<sup>5</sup> Ernesto didn't know of a church that kept the Sabbath Commandment, so, for weeks, he searched in the big cities for a congregation that believed the biblical truths he had discovered. One day, he found the Adventist Church, and, with no formal Bible studies, he was baptized in 1922.<sup>6</sup>

## Missionary Work, Training, and Marriage

Ernesto Roth decided to look for a new job to avoid confrontation in his old job. He found work in an architecture company since he had experience and skills in this field. After two years, he received an invitation to be a company partner. That was when a member of Roth's church told him to enroll in the missionary program at the Marienhoehe Seminary. When he arrived at the school, Roth enrolled and remained a student for two years, when his money became almost worthless due to the growing inflation rate. New opportunities then came up in the carpentry field, and Ernesto was soon promoted to chief of carpentry.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1920s, the church in Germany focused its missionary efforts on Africa, and Ernesto was one of their first chosen candidates. Pastor Stahl had also invited him to be a missionary in Peru. Roth decided what to do with his future when, in his last year at the Seminary, he received a letter from Pastor Schubert encouraging him to work in Brazil. He arrived at the harbor of Santos in Brazil on July 4, 1928, with his friend, Jorge Hoyler. They went to Brazil College and stayed four months practicing Portuguese and working in carpentry. He successfully canvassed in the city of São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul State, which was considered a fortress of Catholicism.<sup>8</sup> Because of his demonstrated potential, Roth was invited to be the first teacher at Adventist Taquara Academy (now IACS or Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist Academy).<sup>9</sup>

After working as an evangelist, the Rio Grande do Sul Conference offered Roth the position of department head to work in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, from 1931-1940.<sup>10</sup> He worked in the organization of primary school projects of the Santa Cruz district and as a district pastor in Ijuí. Education was his priority, therefore, during his administration, the number of schools increased from six to thirty.<sup>11</sup> While he was in Ijuí, he

met the woman who would soon be his wife, Erna Rockel.<sup>12</sup> They were married in Ijuí on June 18, 1931, with Pastor John Boehm officiating the ceremony.<sup>13</sup> The couple had two children, Erlo and Salo, and also adopted an orphan child.

## Teaching and Pastoral Ministry

In the beginning of 1940, Roth was called to serve the church as a department head at the Rio-Espírito Santo Mission. The Mission was small, having only 800 members, and it included parts of bordering states, like Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. Roth encountered resistance to his pastoral ministry, for instance, when explaining the health message to the Espírito Santo people, who consumed large amounts of pork as part of their diet. Through his teaching ministry, the gospel was spread through the region until it reached the north of the Doce River, where the church had no presence.<sup>14</sup> During this time of World War II, the Nazis began sinking Brazilian merchant ships, creating a national hatred for German people.<sup>15</sup> Because he was German, Roth would suffer the consequences and was thus transferred to Rio de Janeiro to protect him from the Nazi/Brazilian conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

In Rio-Minas Gerais Conference, Roth worked during the war with a permit issued by the police. In 1945, he started working as a teacher and pastor at the Petrópolis Church (now Petrópolis Adventist Academy). He stayed there until 1948,<sup>17</sup> when he was called to be the president of the Rio-Espírito Santo Mission. By this time, a strong evangelistic campaign had begun, mission was sufficiently funded, the biennial system was supported, and the mission sponsored biblical conferences.<sup>18</sup> With this, the Mission became a Conference, contributing strongly to the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the region. Since the Conference office had outgrown the physical space of the church basement it was located in, it moved to another floor of a building constructed specifically to house the Conference.<sup>19</sup>

## Administrative Service

In 1954, he went back to Petrópolis Adventist Academy as its director. In this new cycle, he focused on the structural growth and financial health of the school. Roth's wife developed an educational project to teach children Christian principles.<sup>20</sup> In 1958, the Roth family went back to Espírito Santo. Roth, besides assisting in the construction of new buildings, also visited smaller churches located in the countryside. Adventist members in the region had an interest in establishing an Adventist educational institution in Espírito Santo. Later, with Roth's support, they began the Espírito Santo Academy building plans and found the ideal land for its construction. The land was owned by the State Agronomy Secretary, who agreed to sell the land to them when he heard about their construction plans.<sup>21</sup>

In 1962, when a General Conference session was to be held in San Francisco, California, USA, Roth received a four-month license to travel. He also traveled to Israel, Rome, and Germany,<sup>22</sup> where he visited "Neandertal," a

nursing home. In 1969, Roth and his family moved to Hortolândia, São Paulo, Brazil, where he helped in the church. He worked with the bricklayers to build a children's home and, on June 18, 1972, founded the "Neandertal Children Home" with financial assistance from the elderly people from the nursing home in Germany.<sup>23</sup>

## Contribution and Legacy

During his 30-year ministry, Ernesto Roth greatly contributed to the Adventist Church. He died in Hortolândia on March 30, 1999,<sup>24</sup> and was buried in the same grave as his wife in Cemitério da Paz in Santo Amaro. He received honors from the *Revista Adventista* (Brazilian Adventist Review) and other church periodicals for his work at Adventist institutions. After his death, the city of Hortolândia honored him by naming a street after him.<sup>25</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Carta 1," Collection of the National Center of Adventist History/Ellen G. White Research Center (UNASP-EC, Engenheiro Coelho, SP), 1.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. Ibid., 1.; and Carlos Almeida, "Pr. Ernesto Roth – Uma Vida para Deus," *Monograph*, 1987, 3.
4. Almeida, 6; "Carta 1," 1; and "Pastor Roth – 50 anos de Brasil," *Revista Adventista*, May 1978, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://acervo.revistaadventista.com.br/>.
5. "Pastor Roth – 50 anos de Brasil," *Revista Adventista*, May 1978, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://acervo.revistaadventista.com.br/>; Almeida, 4; and "Carta 1," 1.
6. Almeida, 5; and "Pastor Roth – 50 anos de Brasil," *Revista Adventista*, May 1978, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://acervo.revistaadventista.com.br/>.
7. Almeida, 6; and "Carta 1," 1.
8. Almeida, 8-9; and Ivacy F. Oliveira, "Pastor Roth – 50 anos de Brasil," *Revista Adventista*, June 1978, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://acervo.revistaadventista.com.br/>.
9. "Declaração," Collection of the National Center of Adventist History/Ellen G. White Research Center (UNASP-EC, Engenheiro Coelho, SP); and "Carta 1," 1.
10. Ibid.
11. Almeida, 11.
12. Ibid., 10.
13. "Carta 1," 1.
14. Ibid., 12.
15. C. C. Maximiano and N. R. Bonalume, *Brazilian Expeditionary Force in World War II* (Long Island City: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 6, cited in "World War II by Country: Brazil," Wikipedia, accessed June 17, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II\\_by\\_country#Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_by_country#Brazil).
16. Ibid., 13.

17. Almeida, 13-14.
18. Ibid., 14-15.
19. Ibid., 16.
20. Ibid., 17.
21. Ibid., 17-18; and Ivacy F. Oliveira, "Pastor Roth – 50 anos de Brasil," *Revista Adventista*, June 1978, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://acervo.revistaadventista.com.br/>.
22. Almeida, 24.
23. Ibid., 24-25; Ivacy F. Oliveira, "Pastor Roth – 50 anos de Brasil," *Revista Adventista*, June 1978, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://acervo.revistaadventista.com.br/>; and Wilson Sarli, "Lar Neandertal," *Revista Adventista*, October 1972, 24.
24. "Falecimento de Ernesto Roth," Collection of the National Center of Adventist History/Ellen G. White Research Center (UNASP-EC, Engenheiro Coelho, SP).
25. "Funeral de Ernesto Roth," Collection of the National Center of Adventist History/Ellen G. White Research Center (UNASP-EC, Engenheiro Coelho, SP).

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