



Gideon de Oliveira

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

## Oliveira, Gideon de (1919–2013)

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### THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Gideon de Oliveira was a physician, theologian, teacher and lecturer in Brazil.

## Early Years

Gideon de Oliveira was born on October 26, 1919, in the city of Curitiba, state of Paraná, Brazil.<sup>1</sup> Son of Saturnino Mendes de Oliveira (May 10, 1890 - August 18, 1977) and Jerônima Cervo de Oliveira (May 6, 1898 - October 7, 1988),<sup>2</sup> he had four siblings: Enoch de Oliveira, who worked as a pastor until his retirement; Ruth Oliveira (de Paula), who studied Theology and Accounting and worked in administrative areas at Brazil Food Factory and São Paulo Adventist Hospital; Ruben de Oliveira, who was a Biology and History teacher; and an older sister who died as a baby, also called Ruth.<sup>3</sup>

Gideon grew up in an Adventist home, and his parents' missionary life had a major influence on his formation as a Christian.<sup>4</sup> His father joined the canvassing work in 1910 and served in this area for 51 years, of which 34 he was a canvassing director. It is reported that he visited a total of 830 cities and villages.<sup>5</sup> His mother was also interested in religious matters and even completed courses on Adventist Church history, offered by the Department of Volunteer Missionaries,<sup>6</sup> and on hygiene and home care, prepared by the medical department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>7</sup> In addition, she was very engaged in her children's learning, and taught Gideon to read when he was three years old; from the age of five, he began to read the Bible.<sup>8</sup>

Gideon entered primary school in his hometown, later continuing it at the Adventist school in Juiz de Fora, state of Minas Gerais, from 1928 to 1930.<sup>9</sup> During this period the local church was built and inaugurated, with great help from his mother, who led the fundraising campaigns.<sup>10</sup> In 1931 he finished primary education at the parish school of the Méier Adventist Church, city of Rio de Janeiro. After this he entered secondary education at the local public school, the *Ginásio Méier*.<sup>11</sup>

At 16 years of age, in December 1935, Gideon was baptized by Pastor José Rodrigues dos Passos, in the city of Salvador, state of Bahia.<sup>12</sup> In 1936, still in Salvador, he finished secondary school at *Ginásio Ipiranga*. Afterwards, he canvassed to raise funds in order to study the Theology course, offered by the Brazil College (now UNASP-SP),<sup>13</sup> from which he graduated in 1938.<sup>14</sup>

After his graduation, Gideon returned to the city of Salvador,<sup>15</sup> where in 1941 he passed the medical entrance exam.<sup>16</sup> In order to be excused from classes on Saturdays, he even gave Bible studies to some teachers, and in this way he got the understanding and support of the majority of teachers.<sup>17</sup>

## Ministry

Since 1942, still as a medical student, Gideon was involved in combating social ills related to health issues, giving lectures on education, hygiene and disease prevention, and also leading campaigns against alcoholism and smoking.<sup>18</sup> He dedicated a good part of his life to promoting lectures and courses on temperance and health, from São Paulo to outside Brazil; he was especially involved in the *How to Quit Smoking in 05 days* campaigns (Five Day Plan), together with Dr. Ajax de Oliveira.<sup>19</sup> Gideon also gave lectures at the civil and military police academies, for lawyers and delegates, and in several penitentiaries, seeking the recovery of detainees. His work as a lecturer brought positive fruit, resulting in the baptism of many people.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning in 1944, Gideon authored several publications on the Adventist philosophy of life.<sup>21</sup> He contributed to this cause with several journals and articles, both in the denominational field and in the press in general. Through this activity, he became a member of the *Associação Baiana de Imprensa* [Bahia Press Association] and the *Associação Brasileira de Imprensa* [Brazilian Press Association].<sup>22</sup> He was also very interested in preserving the Adventist history in Brazil, and his researcher line made him exchange interesting correspondences with pioneer church workers.<sup>23</sup>

Gideon graduated from medicine in 1946, at the Faculty of Medicine of Bahia.<sup>24</sup> That same year, he received an award from Professor Leôncio Pinto de Carvalho for his research work in neurology on *Paludal Polyneuritics* disease.<sup>25</sup> Between 1947 and 1949, he worked as a surgeon at São Paulo Adventist Clinic, the current São Paulo Adventist Hospital, where he was a pioneer as the first surgeon to operate at the hospital.<sup>26</sup> The work done by Gideon was intense, since the institution was going through a difficult financial time.<sup>27</sup> Many of the patients who sought the hospital for physical care were also comforted spiritually, accepting Jesus as their personal Savior. The importance of his formation in theology stands out, which prepared him to be more efficient in the service of others.<sup>28</sup>

From 1950 to 1954, Gideon was president of the Graduates Association of Brazil College, which its purpose was to intensify the value of education for the training of Brazilian missionaries.<sup>29</sup> Also in 1950, he was registered as a journalist and founded the magazine *O Adeceano*, having published many articles aligned with the denomination.<sup>30</sup>

In 1950, Dr. Gideon de Oliveira was part of a project called *Sociedade de Homens Adventistas de São Paulo* [Society of Adventist Men of São Paulo], which had as its main objective the literacy of less favored people, with a view to their moral and material development; he served as director of the Art and Culture Department of this Society and had the initiative to promote an intensive junior high school in the Liberdade neighborhood, city of São Paulo, led by teacher Flávio Monteiro.<sup>31</sup>

In 1951, Gideon accepted the call to be a teacher at secondary and higher levels at Brazil College, where he taught for a total of 32 years, until 1983.<sup>32</sup> For technical collegiate courses in Pedagogy (called *Normal* in Brazil, at

the time) and Commercial, he taught Natural History, Biology and General Sciences.<sup>33</sup> At a higher level he taught for the courses in Theology, Nursing, and Education. In addition, simultaneously, he also served as the institution's doctor.<sup>34</sup>

During this period, in 1955 Gideon was chosen to be part of the Brazilian National Delegation that participated in the XX International Congress of Surgeons in Geneva, Switzerland. As a surgical observer, he visited the main medical and surgical centers in Europe for a period of two months.<sup>35</sup> One year later, he was elected titular of the Brazilian Association of Criminology and Penitentiary Science of the State of São Paulo.<sup>36</sup>

In 1959, on July 8, he married Wilma Alvarenga de Oliveira (1935-1986), in the district of Santo Amaro, city of São Paulo,<sup>37</sup> whom he had met through a couple of friends in common. Wilma was a teacher at an Adventist parish school in Niterói, and after their friends talked about one to the other, Gideon traveled to Rio de Janeiro and went to the school just to meet her. They started exchanging correspondences until they made the relationship official and sealed the marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Wilma dedicated herself to the educational area of the Church, acting as secretary of the Espírito Santo Conference's department of Education, as a teacher at the East Brazil Academy (now Petrópolis Adventist Academy) and at the Niterói church school, in addition to other activities related to this area.<sup>39</sup> She also was a present wife and mother, taking care of the children, home, and finances.<sup>40</sup> From 1964 to 1971, Wilma was the founding director of the Chapeuzinho Vermelho School,<sup>41</sup> attached to her home, so she could teach and follow the progress of her four children.<sup>42</sup> From their marriage were born: Tatiana Alvarenga; Gideon, Jr.; Gladstone; and Galton,<sup>43</sup> who died at the age of 18 due to an automobile accident.<sup>44</sup>

In 1970, Gideon made some trips with the purpose of observation and cultural enrichment to Buenos Aires, aiming at cancer research; the United States of America, where he visited several medical institutions and participated in a symposium on abortion and pollution in Chicago; and Japan, observing the cult of traditions, folklore, modern culture, and advanced audiovisual education techniques.<sup>45</sup>

Gideon de Oliveira was a missionary worker. He sacrificed a lot of his time with his family on behalf of the Adventist cause.<sup>46</sup> Since 1977, he performed free medical appointments in several churches, in order to assist the poor and elderly.<sup>47</sup> According to his wife Wilma, if the patient could pay with a chicken, the chicken was the payment; if they could not pay, the consultation was free.<sup>48</sup>

On October 10, 1986,<sup>49</sup> Dr. Gideon de Oliveira, along with his wife and daughter, suffered a serious car accident while traveling to Rio de Janeiro to pass Wilma's birthday weekend, and visit his brother Enoch and wife, who were in town to attend a congress. Mrs. Oliveira died at the spot due to a severe traumatic brain injury,<sup>50</sup> while Gideon suffered internal injuries, and their daughter was not harmed.<sup>51</sup> Wilma's death caused tremendous sadness to family members, students, teaching classmates, and friends.<sup>52</sup>

## Last Years

After the accident, Dr. Gideonde Oliveira continued with clinical assistance in his private practice until his retirement.<sup>53</sup> He also pursued hosting conferences about the Adventist history and wrote several papers and articles on this subject, which were published by *Revista Adventista* (Adventist Review) and other media.<sup>54</sup>

In his final years, Dr. Gideon de Oliveira fell ill with MRSA-induced septic pneumonia, but died as a consequence of his age, on May 18, 2013, at the age of 93. He was buried in the cemetery of the district of Morumbi, in the city of São Paulo.<sup>55</sup>

## Contribution

Gideon de Oliveira measured no effort in his contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil. His work as a doctor not only saved lives here on earth, but contributed to the baptism of many people, including well-known and traditional church personalities. Several of the members of the churches that were organized in the proximity of Brazil College were a fruit of his work.

Dr. Gideon was a knowledge enthusiast and mastered different areas of learning. He loved to teach and made his son Gideon de Oliveira Jr. a disciple.<sup>56</sup> He was a scholar of the history of the Adventist Church, and knew important details about the birth of the work in Brazil and its founders. Gideon is remembered for his more than 30 years dedicated to educational work and more than 40 to medical work.<sup>57</sup>

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