

Trummer, Ernest Max (1875–1960)

ENOC IGLESIAS

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Ernest Max Trummer was a missionary and administrator in South and Central America.

Early Years and Marriage

Ernest Max Trummer was born in Germany in 1875. He arrived in the United States at the age of 18. While working as a tractor driver on a farm, a neighbor spoke to him about the Bible. He soon became interested in the Adventist church and was baptized.¹ Later, his decision to study took him to Union College in Nebraska where he worked in the campus kitchen and colporteur during summer vacations. His success as a colporteur earned him a call to serve as director of publications at the college while he helped train student colporteurs.²

Trummer married Noema Fontana, a native of Argentina who assisted him in his work. She was principal of the newly-founded Adventist academy in Bucaramanga from 1934 to 1935 when the student body consisted of twenty students. The Trummers had two children, Sarita and Max.

Early Administrative Responsibilities

In 1909, having completed his studies in German language and literature at Union College,³ Trummer received a call to Argentina to lead the publications department. Despite his limited ability to communicate in the Spanish language, he was successful in his work. Trummer, now married, traveled back to the United States to continue his work with Bible worker I. S. Town, who had established a highly successful school of colporteurs in Las Tunas in 1898. While director of publications, Trummer had enrolled in the early classes. The two men helped to train men and women in sales and the Adventist work prospered significantly in South America⁴ as a result of the work of these students.⁵

In 1920, the General Conference issued a call to Trummer to work with the West Caribbean Conference, based in the Canal Zone of Panama. His work there eventually took him to Colombia where there already were believers on the islands of San Andrés and Providencia. Even so, there was much work yet to be done despite the admirable efforts of colporteurs such as Gilbert Schewrin, Harold C. Brown, and George Kneeland.

Trummer had hoped to travel to Colombia in 1918, and had sent ahead boxes of books and pamphlets under the care of a boat captain on his way to Cartagena de Indias; however, no one from the Adventist work was there to claim the boxes. The captain finally decided to place the books in the hands of the Presbyterian pastor, José Antonio Redondo Bonilla, who, as a result of reading through the material, became very interested in the Adventist work.⁶

Trummer finally traveled to Colombia in April of 1921 with the Bible worker, L. V. Cleaves. The Colombian Mission, organized in 1921, was assigned to Pastor Trummer while he was president of the West Caribbean Conference.⁷ As the first Adventist pastor to arrive on continental Colombia,⁸ Trummer traveled widely in the country. He visited the Alto Magdalena zone and the capital, Bogotá, where he used the sale of the book *Heraldos del porvenir (Heralds of the Future)* to meet his personal expenses and get to know the Colombian people. The first public evangelistic meeting took place in Bogotá under the direction of Trummer and I. V. Cleaves in 1922. "One needs to keep in mind that it was not as easy a task as it is today (to hold evangelistic meetings) [...]. During the first part of the twentieth century there were strong prejudices and very little religious liberty."⁹

Later, Trummer traveled with Pastor Redondo Bonilla to Cartagena de Indias, Cereté, and Bolívar (today Córdoba). In the latter city, in 1922, he baptized the Redondo Camacho family: José Antonio, his wife Ana María, and Carmen, their eldest daughter. The arrival of Redondo Bonilla in the IASD strengthened the work through his dual roles as Bible worker and pastor. He traveled to Barranquilla to prepare several evangelicals for baptism in 1924. Trummer officiated at this baptism around the same time the Escandón Hernández family was accepting the Adventist faith.¹⁰

On their return from the United States to Colombia, the Trummers settled in Medellín in order to launch the work in that important Colombian city.¹¹ In 1929, Trummer was nominated president of the Antioquía Mission, based in Medellín, the city where the Central Church had been organized in 1926. Trummer's concern for young people became evident through his practice of establishing youth societies in the churches. These societies were filled with promising young talent that required Adventist education. Eventually he approached the leaders of the Colombian-Venezuelan Union about establishing an IASD-sponsored educational center where Adventist youth might be educated.¹²

Trummer also ministered in Bucaramanga where he faced numerous difficulties that led to his imprisonment.¹³ In the departments (provinces) of Santander and North Santander, he suffered numerous setbacks as a result of religious persecution and saw many Adventists succumb. Even so, many others responded to the gospel. At this time, he also held the position of president of the Central Mission.

In Bogotá, as a result of the opposition to the Adventist faith, Trummer sent a letter to the then president of Colombia. In the letter he laid out the beliefs of the Adventist church and its work on behalf of society, and he offered him the services of the IASD. The president responded with, "I wish you good fortune."¹⁴

In 1935, Trummer traveled to the Colombian Mission of the Atlantic where the churches had suffered from the absence of a pastor for five years. Also, an evangelistic campaign had never been held in that area, even though other missions and conferences in the Colombian-Venezuelan Union had benefitted from this type of activity. Even so, the Adventist membership in Colombia had grown to 150.¹⁵ aided by the Trummer's work was fruitful work in the Caribbean Coast, increasing membership to 400 people.¹⁶ Trummer's outstanding work earned him the nomination of president of the Colombian Mission of the Atlantic in 1940.

The Later Years

The fruitful labors of the Trummers were carried out during just over a half century in Colombia. "While the Trummers related their trying experiences, they said they could not compare them to the sufferings of the church members during those times of violence that began in 1948 and continued until 1957."¹⁷ These are the words Trummer expressed to his wife, Noema: "The persecution of the brethren was more intense in Bucaramanga than in any other place."¹⁸ In a 1958 letter addressed to the brothers and sisters of Colombia, the Trummers underscored the following: "It merits mentioning that during the ten years of cruel persecution in Colombia, the membership tripled in size."¹⁹ They further indicated that in 1947 there were 2,240 members while that number grew to 6,240 in 1957.²⁰ After a life of fruitful labor, Ernest Max Trummer died on October 20, 1960. The Trummers' life work can be summarized in two words: intense effort and dedication.²¹

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2. Ibid., 64.
3. F. Greenleaf, *Historia de la educación adventista. Una visión global* [History of Adventist Education: A Global Vision] (Florida, Argentina: Asociación Casa Editora Sudamericana-Adventus: Editorial Universitaria Iberoamericana, 2010), 137.
4. Ibid., 137, 138.
5. Ibid., 137.
6. Escandón, 64.
7. Cecilia Moreno Garcés, "La hora adventista," [The Adventist Hour.] (Pregrade thesis, Universidad Simón Bolívar, 1994). In E. Iglesias Ortega, *Presencia adventista en Colombia (The Adventist Presence in Colombia)* (Medellín, Colombia: El Faro Editores, 1996), 102.
8. M. L. Luna Atuesta, *Historia de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día* [History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church] (Medellín, Colombia: Litografía William Anyhel, 1998), 103.
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11. W. R. Westphal, *Soldados de la cruz. Emocionante historia de los comienzos de la obra adventista en Colombia* [Soldiers of the Cross: Exciting History of the Beginnings of the Adventist Work in Colombia] (Mountain View, CA: Publicaciones Interamericanas, 1976), 55.
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13. Ibid., 73-74.

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16. E. M. Trummer, Letter to Tirso Escandón, June 1940. Cited in E. Iglesias Ortega, *Presencia adventista en Colombia* (Medellín: Faro Editores, 1996), 80.
17. Westphal, 119.
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19. Ibid., 127.
20. Ibid.
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