

Costa, Domingos de Souza (1882–1971)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP (2)

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Domingos de Souza Costa, a pioneer of Adventism in Brazil, was an evangelist and colporteur.¹

Early Years

Domingos de Souza Costa was born on August 4, 1882,² in Alagoinhas, Bahia, Brazil,³ to João Ribeiro da Silva and Maria Teófila de Jesus.⁴ The facts surrounding Domingos' childhood are not known. However, he was born during a period of significant social change in Brazil. Coming into the world just 11 years after the enactment of the Law of Free Birth (1871) and three years before the Sexagenarian Law (1885), Costa grew up in a society still deeply marked by slavery and its enduring effects.⁵

It is also known that he spent part of his youth in Salvador, where he lived with his godfather, Alcibiades da Silva Lima, and worked as a salesman in his store.⁶

Conversion and Baptism

The story of his conversion to Adventism began in Alagoinhas, Bahia, where the Adventist message arrived through Pastor Manoel Kümpel around 1914. Domingos was originally a member of the Methodist Church.⁷ At the age of 32, still young and single, he learned about the Brazil Adventist College (CAB) in São Paulo and decided to study there. It was in that environment that he embraced the message of hope proclaimed by Adventism.⁸



Domingos de Souza Costa

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During this time, he was baptized, marking the beginning of his faith journey. This act not only symbolized his commitment to a new religion but also represented a decisive step in his life in which the pursuit of knowledge and social inclusion became the guiding principles of his mission.⁹

Education and Ministry

Domingos' dedication to his new faith, along with the support of Pastor Kümpel, led him to pursue theological training. In 1915, he enrolled in what was then the Adventist Seminary, later known as the Brazil Adventist College (CAB), located near present-day São Paulo. During his years of study, Costa showed great commitment and a strong desire to learn.¹⁰ However, he was unable to complete the course due to racial issues, leaving the school in the year that would have been not only his graduation, but the first graduation of CAB in 1922.¹¹

He worked diligently as a colporteur and Bible instructor in western, eastern, and southern Minas Gerais in the 1920s, in cities such as Formiga, Salto de Cima, and Bambuí.¹² During this time, he faced difficulties and dangers, working in areas that were "fanatical" and did not readily accept Protestantism, and suffering threats from an armed man, priests, police officers, and soldiers.¹³

Domingos was a prosperous and dedicated colporteur. On one occasion, he sold 102 materials in just under four days.¹⁴ Similarly, in 1926, he traveled more than 25 kilometers to reach Daniel de Oliveira's farm, where, after being welcomed by the family, he taught their children and led Bible studies for adults for a year and a half. Thanks to his efforts, everyone in the family converted, including Geraldo Gomes de Oliveira, who later became an evangelist and teacher.¹⁵

However, he did not work exclusively in Minas Gerais. Still in that decade, he would be directly involved in the founding of two churches in Santa Catarina: the church of Sertão do Valongo, originating from a community descended from slaves to whom Domingos offered the books *Life of Jesus* and *The Great Controversy*,¹⁶ and the church of Brilhante, in 1927, which was born from the house of Marcelino Rodrigues, where Domingos taught the Bible.¹⁷ Similarly, he did colportage in Santa Rita da Extrema, São Paulo, which, even without cooperation with workers, produced results.¹⁸ At the end of the decade, in 1928, he went to Goiás and, the following year, taught for a few months in Riachão, where a school had been established.¹⁹

The 1930s kept Domingos in Goiás (which at the time also encompassed the territories of Tocantins), where he was for years the only Adventist colporteur in the state.²⁰ In fact, by the time the second colporteur arrived years later, Longino Niz, Domingos had already covered the entire territory.²¹ There, he was persecuted again for his faith. On September 25th, while canvassing in Jaraguá, he was ordered to leave the city that same day by a priest, who had the support of the local lieutenant. Undeterred, Domingos went to speak with the lieutenant that night and showed him the Ten Commandments in the Bible. The lieutenant, in response, still asked him to leave the city, but allowed the colporteur to stay for three more days to receive a book order he was expecting.²² Even though it wasn't a pleasant experience, besides convincing six people of biblical truth in Jaraguá, he

managed to convince three more in Itaberaí, which pleased him greatly.²³

In 1931, the first Adventist Church in Goiás was organized, the Church of Fazenda Riachão (today located in the vicinity of Uruaçu), the result of the hard work of pioneers like Domingos, who became a leader and elder of the congregation. In addition, the colporteur established a school in the area, where he taught for years and educated the people of the area.²⁴ Also in that year, he married Guilhermina Souza Costa, with whom he had three children: Dulcineia (teacher), Lourival (farmer), and Emerson Souza Costa (pastor).²⁵ Within his family, Domingos was just as dedicated as he was to his work. Even though he sometimes had to travel for long periods to support his wife and children, he never neglected his duties as a father. He taught not only school subjects but also how to have a relationship with God. He led the children in a year-long Bible study program²⁶ and gathered the whole family under a tree for sunset worship services, where he played hymns on his flute.²⁷

By the arrival of 1934, Domingos reports that he had already worked in almost the entire state with the book *Practical Guide to Health* and was now trying to sell religious books. He also suffered religious persecution in Anápolis, where a vicar published an article against the colporteur. In the midst of everything, however, he remained firm and motivated to continue working.²⁸ Between 1937 and 1939, he again worked as a teacher at the Palmital farm in Jaraguá, for the children of Otávio Alves da Costa, the landowner, and his neighbors. The place functioned as a school during the week and a church on Saturdays. After that, he also did colportage in the cities of Itumbiara and Jataí.²⁹

His efforts can be seen not only in the fruits of colportage, but also in the Christian example he gave to his brothers and sisters. For example, Francisco R. de Oliveira, a member of the church in Riachão, working with Domingos, decided to follow in his footsteps and became a missionary. He traveled to Rio Verde, where Domingos had done colportage in 1931, and began assisting the group,³⁰ which led to its organization in 1937.³¹

In 1941, more than a decade since the beginning of his work in the state, Goiás already had four Sabbath schools, one in the capital (which had 90 members at the time), and three in the interior: in Rio Verde, Jaraguá, and Riachão; in addition to 13 colporteurs, who sold 50 contos de réis worth of literature up to that point, a great advance since the beginning, when he was the only colporteur in the state.³² In 1946, he was called by the former Goiana-Mineira Mission to replace Pastor Oscar dos Reis, working as a minister in the city of Monte Alegre, Minas Gerais, until 1948, when he returned to Riachão and retired.³³

Legacy

Domingos' missionary activities took him to various regions of Brazil, including Goiás, Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina, and São Paulo. In each place where he preached, he left a trail of light and hope, bringing the Adventist faith to marginalized communities, such as immigrants, indigenous people, and quilombola communities.³⁴ His travels, in addition to being exhausting due to the long distances he covered, deprived him of comforts, as he had to sleep on bushes and eat food such as dried meat and *rapadura* with flour.³⁵

Furthermore, at that time, Domingos undertook his colporteur journeys alone, facing many dangers along the way. One evening, he asked a farmer for permission to sleep in the barn on his property. The man refused, telling him he should seek shelter at another farm a few miles away. When Domingos finally arrived at the new location, he found warm water prepared for his bath and dinner already served. Curious, he asked the owner how everything was ready to receive him even though he had arrived unannounced. Then the man revealed the reason: After Domingos left the first farm, the other farmer took out a revolver and tried to shoot him six times, but the gun misfired in every attempt. Fearful, the farmer went ahead and asked him to prepare everything to receive Domingos as he was certainly not an ordinary person.³⁶

In addition to working as a colporteur and teacher, Domingos Costa played a fundamental role in the founding of several congregations and churches throughout his career, including the first Adventist church in the state of Goiás, on the Riachão Farm. He was also the first evangelist colporteur in the state, where he worked for several years and taught in different places.³⁷ His contribution was not limited to his own ministry, but also extended to encouraging and supporting other religious leaders in training, such as the great evangelist and speaker Geraldo Gomes de Oliveira who, influenced by Domingos, decided to study Theology and enter the pastoral ministry,³⁸ as well as his son, Emerson, and grandson, Dimas, who cite Domingos' example as one of the main reasons they became pastors.³⁹

Final Years

In his old age, even facing difficulties, he would walk long distances to Goiânia to participate in training.⁴⁰ He spent his last years in Uruaçu, where he spent his days reading the Bible and resting.⁴¹ The legacy of Domingos has endured for decades. He passed away in 1971 while living in Uruaçu and was laid to rest in the pioneers' cemetery at Fazenda Riachão. His final words to his family were: "Guard your hearts."⁴²

His life and story are acknowledged and celebrated, showing that his impact extended far beyond his time and continues to inspire new generations. Domingos Costa stands as a symbol of faith, the pursuit of social inclusion, and resilience. His journey, which began in a turbulent time in Brazil and was marked by tireless missionary work, remains a lasting source of inspiration.⁴³

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