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Chaij, Fernando (1909–1991)

JUAN CARLOS PRIORA

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Fernando Chaij was an outstanding Adventist scholar, pastor, administrator, writer, editor, and religious freedom supporter from Argentina. His ministry strengthened the church in South and Central America, and in the United States of America.¹

Early Life and First Contact With Adventism

Chaij was born in San Fernando, province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, on February 23, 1909. His last name, Chaij (actually Sheikh), in the original language means chief or mayor.² His family was from a Lebanese village called Esh-Sheikh Mohamed in the Trablous-Lebanon area, northwestern Lebanon, near Tripoli. Miguel Sheikh and Sara Al Tahuil got married in that area and had three children who emigrated to Argentina around 1905: Gabriel, Emilio Miguel, and Abraham. Gabriel Chaij (1876–1945) married Augustina Samaan (1877–1944), and they had eight children: Miguel (1900–1957), Alfredo (1902–1964), Afif (1903–1963), Nicolás (1906–2006), Fernando (1909–1991), Victoria (1912–1991), Fortunato (1914–1940), and Adela (1916–2011).

Gabriel Chaij was an Orthodox Christian, and his wife Augustina, was an Evangelical; both were readers of the Bible. By 1924 his fourth son, Nicolás Chaij, was in the city of Balcarce, province of Buenos Aires, working at a tailor shop. He attended the services of a small Evangelical Methodist Church of about thirty members. In the religious service of Christmas he met two young visitors. They were Braulio Pérez Marcio and Daniel Hammerly Dupuy, student canvassers from the River Plate Adventist Academy, Entre Ríos, Argentina. The young canvassers studied the Bible with Nicolás for several weeks, and before leaving Balcarce, they invited him to study at the River Plate Adventist Academy. Nicolás Chaij was the first Seventh-day Adventist in this large family. He was followed by his brothers Miguel, Fernando, Adela, and Fortunato, by his mother, and then by his father. About thirty members of the Chaij family adopted Adventism, 11 of whom served the church.³ Nicolás instructed his brother Fernando in the biblical truths, and he was baptized in 1926.⁴

Fernando Chaij did his elementary studies at a public school in the city of San Fernando, province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. He got a degree in commerce at the famous Carlos Pellegrini High School of Commerce, at the National University of Buenos Aires. He also received a nursing license from the Argentine Red Cross in Buenos Aires.

Work in South America (1928–1960)

He graduated in theology at the River Plate Adventist Academy, Entre Ríos, Argentina, and got a degree for teaching history in normal secondary and special education schools, by the National University of Buenos Aires (UBA), in 1941, with honors.⁵ He got a PhD in philosophy and language arts, at the philosophy and Language Arts College at the National University of Buenos Aires, with a specialty in history, in 1947.⁶ And in that prestigious university institution, Fernando Chaij proved to be a student committed to his faith, of which he testified to professors and students.⁷

On April 1, 1928, he was invited to work in the drafting of the South American Spanish Publishing House, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Then he became a canvasser (1928–1929) and director of canvassing (1930–1931) in the Buenos Aires Conference, Argentina. After that, he returned to the editorial office of the South America Spanish Publishing House (1931–1942).

Fernando Chaij married Sara Ramos on February 20, 1942. Sara was born on April 22, 1913, in La Pampa. She was Hermógenes Ramos and Daniela Hernández's daughter. Sara graduated as a teacher at River Plate Adventist Academy. She served the church for 43 years. Sara worked in the office of the Austral Union Conference, in the South American Spanish Publishing House and in the Pacific Press Publishing Association. She was also manager in the *El amigo de los niños* [The Children's Friend] review.

Later Chaij was transferred to River Plate Adventist Academy, Entre Ríos, Argentina, where he worked as a teacher (1942), technical director (1943), internal head of school (1944), and school principal or rector (1945–1946).⁸ He spent a year studying in the United States (1947) and went back to the South American Spanish Publishing House in Buenos Aires as editor in chief (1948–1960). On January 11, 1958, he was ordained to the pastoral ministry.

Work in the United States (1960–1979)

In the last stage of active service, he served as editorial director of Inter-American publications, Hispanic division of the Pacific Press Publishing Association, California, United States (1960–1979). Under his direction, publications were produced not only in Spanish but also in German, French, and Ukrainian.

Fernando Chaij wrote 12 books, all deep and enriching. Some of them were translated to several languages: *El desenlace del drama mundial* [The Outcome of the World Drama] (1952), *Hacia una vida mejor* [Toward a Better Life], *Separación de la Iglesia del Estado* [Separation of the Church From the State] (1956), *Breve compendio sobre las iglesias cristianas occidentales* [Brief Compendium on Western Christian Churches] (1957), *Paz en la angustia* [Peace in Anguish] (1958), *Libertad del temor* [Freedom From Fear] (in coauthorship with Braulio Pérez Marcio and Héctor Pereyra Suárez) (1964), *El drama inminente* [The Impending Drama], *El dilema del hombre en esta hora de revolución* [The Dilemma of Man in This Hour of Revolution], *Preparación para la crisis final* [Preparation for the Final Crisis] (1967), *Fuerzas misteriosas que actúan en la vida humana* [Mysterious Forces Acting in Human Life] (1968), *La glosolalia, ¿un nuevo pentecostés?* [The Glossolalia, a New Pentecost?] (1970), *El secreto de la victoria* [The Secret of Victory].⁹ He also translated 16 books and wrote hundreds of articles published in the Hispanic reviews *Vida Feliz* [A Happy Life], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] and *El Centinela* [The Sentinel]. He also wrote syllabuses for classes and brochures.¹⁰

Among other responsibilities he was part of the board of directors of the Argentine Bible Society and member of international organizations on religious freedom.¹¹ The building that houses the library and the White research center at the River Plate Adventist University, Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, is named after Fernando Chaij. Part of the Chaij couple heritage was used for the construction of the building that is named after him, inaugurated in 2001.

Later Years and Legacy

In December 31, 1979, Chaij retired, devoting his time to lecturing, translations, writing articles and books. Fernando Chaij and his wife, Sara Ramos, passed away on Saturday, March 16, 1991, because of a car accident when they returned from the church in Campbell, California, where he had preached the sermon.

Humberto Mario Rasi remembers Fernando Chaij as a man of firm personality and leadership skills, disciplined, complacent, and punctual, of formal but courteous treatment. He was a knowledgeable reader. As a writer, his style was clear, his vocabulary was precise and his argumentation was persuasive. He was convinced of the value and influence of editorial work. He loved the church with all his heart and had given his life to Jesus Christ. He was committed to the mission. He kept abreast of theological discussions, he knew the Bible thoroughly, and held the writings of Ellen White in high esteem, whose several books he reviewed or translated into Spanish.¹² Tulio N. Peverini emphasized Fernando's influence in his personal life and in the Latin American Adventism.¹³ He considered Chaij a teacher of Christian journalism and language arts. He took care of his time and of the quality of editorial products. These were to be biblical, Christocentric, balanced, free of criticism and encouraging. Chaij was a Christian with integrity, and he worried about other people's welfare. He exerted an imponderable influence in South America, Inter-America, and North America, by his voice as by the pen, with lasting results.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Some of the information came from Fernando Chaij's services registry, available in the Argentina Union Conference archives. Accessed on April 9, 2018. See: Nicolás Chaij, "*Mi admirado hermano Fernando*" [My Admired Brother Fernando], *Milagros en mi vida* [Miracles in My Life] (Miami: Inter-American Publishing Conference, 1998), 160–165. Daniel Oscar Plenc, *Misioneros en Sudamérica: Pioneros del Adventismo en Latinoamérica* [Missionaries in South America: Adventism Pioneers in Latin America], 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House Conference, 2008), 148.?
2. This etymology explains why Chaij signed some articles as Fernando Mayor. See: "*¿Es para todos la libertad religiosa?*" [Is Religious Freedom for Everyone?], *Vida Feliz* [A Happy Life], November 1974, 19.?
3. See: Nicolás Chaij, *Milagros en mi vida* [Miracles in My Life], 40–44. Nicolás Chaij was a church pastor, director of publications in Uruguay, Argentina, and the Antillean Union. For 12 years he ran the Publications Department of the South American Division and spent seven years in the Inter-American Division. He translated 14 books and spent ten years revising the version of the Bible Reina Valera of 1909, which was published with the title of Nueva Reina Valera.?
4. The existing file in Argentina Union Conference says that the baptism occurred in Puiggari, Entre Ríos, Argentina, in November 1928.?
5. Both certificates are part of the author's personal archive.?
6. The thesis was entitled: "*El gobierno de Pascual Echagüe en Entre Ríos: 1832–1841*" [The Government of Pascual Echagüe in Entre Ríos: 1832–1841] (252 pages).?
7. See: Fernando Chaij, *El desenlace del drama mundial* [The Outcome of the World Drama] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 1950), 262–267.?
8. In March 1, 1943, Professor Fernando Chaij was named principal of the River Plate Adventist Academy to the government educational agencies. In these positions he managed and obtained the incorporation of extracurricular studies into the national education system. See: Egil H. Wensell, "*El poder de una esperanza, que educa y sana*" [The Power of Hope, Which Educates and Heals], (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: Editorial River Plate Adventist Academy, 1993), 124, 125.?
9. Fernando Chaij, *Hacia una vida mejor: El camino al éxito y la felicidad* [Toward a Better Life: The Road to Success and Happiness] (Florida, Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 1951); Fernando Chaij, *Breve compendio sobre las iglesias cristianas occidentales* [Brief Compendium on Western Christian Churches] (Florida, Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 1957); Fernando Chaij, *Paz en la angustia* [Peace in Anguish], 1st ed. (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 1958); Fernando Chaij, Braulio Pérez Marcio, Héctor Pereyra Suárez, *Libertad del temor* [Freedom From Fear], 1st ed. (Mountain View, California: Inter-American Publishes, 1964); Fernando Chaij, *Preparación para la crisis final* [Preparation for the Final Crisis], 1st ed. (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House Conference, 1967), 160; Fernando Chaij, *Fuerzas misteriosas que actúan en la vida humana* [Mysterious Forces Acting in Human Life] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House Conference, 1968); *Fernando Chaij, La glosolalia, ¿un nuevo pentecostés?* [Glossolalia, a New Pentecost?], 1st ed. (Mountain View, California: Inter-American Publishes, 1970).?
10. For example: Chaij, *Breve compendio sobre las iglesias cristianas occidentales* [Brief Compendium on Western Christian Churches].?
11. Fernando Chaij, "Una inspiradora asamblea de las Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas" [An Inspiring Assembly of the United Bible Societies], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 1959, 12.?
12. Humberto Mario Rasi to the author, Loma Linda, California, May 2012, author's personal file.?
13. Tulio N. Peaverini to the author, Yucaipa, California, May 23, 2012, author's personal file.?