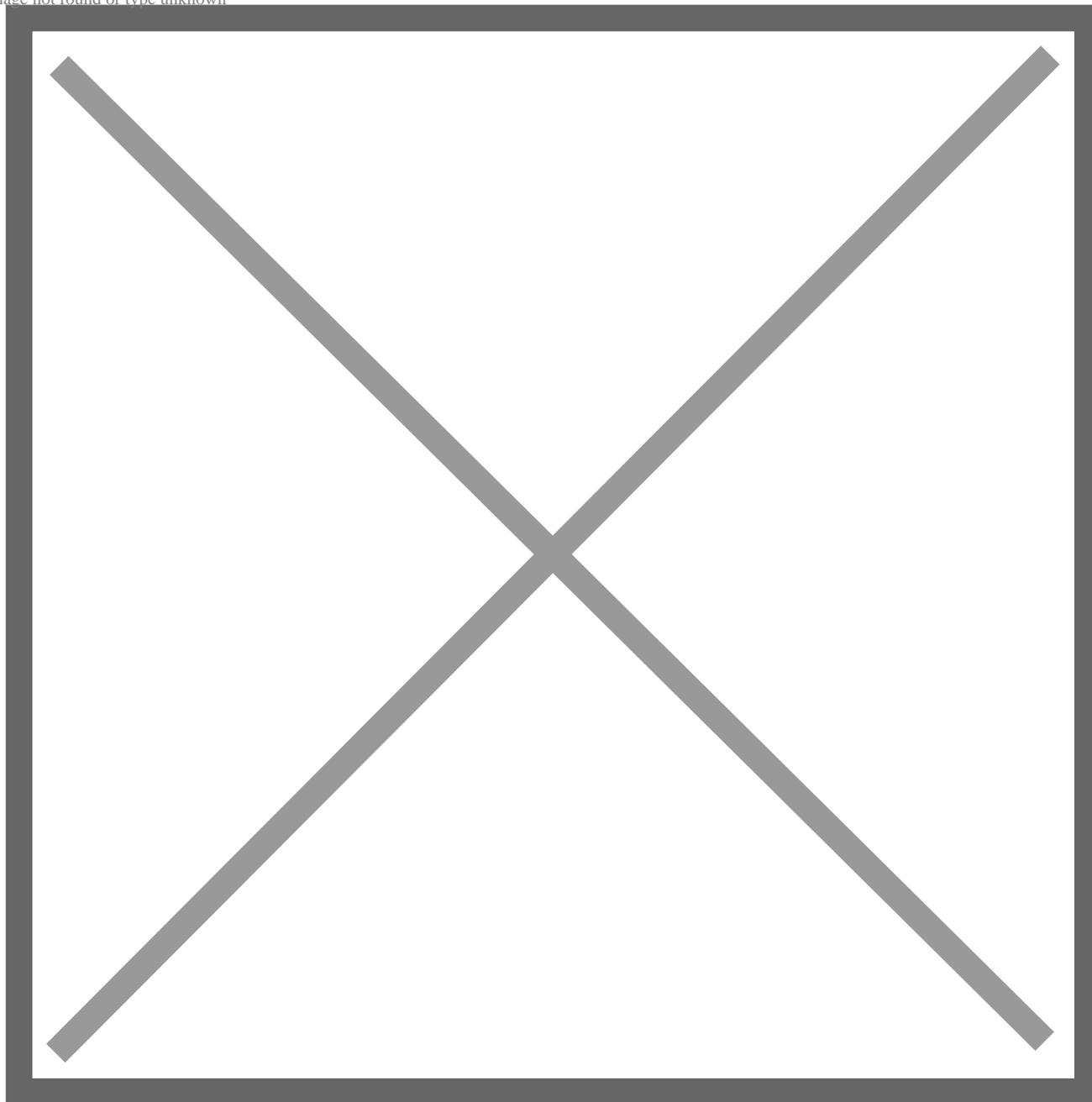


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## Ferreira, Ernesto (1913–2012)

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### PAULO LIMA

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Ernesto Ferreira was an educator, author, pastor, and church administrator in Portugal and Angola.

## Early Years

Ernesto Ferreira was born April 14, 1913, in Ericeira, Portugal, to the family of Julião and Palmira Ferreira. They were a devout Roman Catholic family. As a result of his upbringing, Ernesto revealed a strong propensity to the spiritual life from an early age. At the age of ten, he was sent by his parents to study in a Catholic school. After some years, he entered a monastery of the Franciscan Order in Spain. In 1935, when he was 22 years old, he was ordained as a priest.<sup>1</sup>

Ferreira served for three years as a priest in Portugal. However, in 1938, the course of his life was to undergo a radical change. One of his female parishioners had bought two books from a Seventh-day Adventist colporteur. They were W. A. Spicer's *A Nossa Época e o Destino do Mundo* (*Our Day in the Light of Prophecy*) and Ellen G. White's *O Conflito dos Séculos* (*The Great Controversy*). The woman had noticed that they didn't have the *imprimatur*,<sup>2</sup> so she went to ask for the priest's permission to read them. Ernesto was of the view that he needed to read them first in order to be able to give his advice, so he did; but his reading left him intrigued and perplexed. He decided to write to the Portuguese Publishing House<sup>3</sup> asking for someone able to explain to him these new doctrines. He started then to study the Bible with Pastor Manuel Leal. After considerable study and reflection, Ernesto was baptized as an Adventist.<sup>4</sup>

## Ministry and Marriage

After a brief period of theological training in Lisbon, Ernesto started his ministry in 1940 as editor of the *Revista Adventista* (*Adventist Review*). At that time, *Revista Adventista* was the newly created flagship journal of the Portuguese Union. He would remain its editor until 1947. In 1940 he married Irene Vieira. In 1941 he was invited to be part of the faculty responsible for the Bible course that was run in Lisbon. After 1943 the Portuguese Union opened the Seminário Adventista de Portalegre (Portuguese Adventist Seminary) where Ernesto continued to teach until 1945. From 1945 to 1949, he was the director of the seminary. In 1949 he traveled to the United States of America to study for one year at Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University)<sup>5</sup>

## Into Administration

When Ferreira returned to Portugal he was elected president of the Portuguese Union. He began his tenure in July 1950 and remained in office until December 1957. The two tenures of Ernesto Ferreira as president of the Portuguese Union were characterized by a strong emphasis on the evangelization of the people that lived in the Portuguese field.<sup>6</sup> In June 1953, at the end of his first tenure,<sup>7</sup> the report presented by Ernesto as president indicated that considerable growth had occurred in the union. Within four years there were about 739 baptisms. The number of churches grew from 19 to 26 and the membership increased from 1,263 to 1,771. Again in 1957,<sup>8</sup> after his second tenure, the report showed 759 baptisms as the fruit of the work of four years.

## The Angolan Years

At the end of 1957 Ferreira was elected president of the Angolan Union, a territory then under Portuguese administration and located in southwest Africa. He held that position from 1958 until 1968. During this time the work in Angola showed significant progress. The number of members nearly doubled (from 9,876 in 1957 to 19,304 in 1968). The Angolan Publishing House was created. The radio program *Voz da Esperança* (*Voice of Hope*) began to air, and the Angolan Bible Correspondence School started to function. Also, there was an expansion in the construction of churches in the main cities across the country. New schools and missions were developed and built. For all these reasons, the presidency of Ferreira was considered by Alexandre Justino, the historian of the Angolan Field, as the "golden days" of the Adventist work in Angola.<sup>9</sup>

## Back to Portugal

In January 1969, Ferreira was again elected President of the Portuguese Union. A new emphasis was placed on the evangelization of the Portuguese territory. This was to be done through the medium of radio. A new studio for the radio program *Voz da Esperança* (*Voice of Hope*) was inaugurated and more radio stations started to broadcast the program. In October 1971, another session of the Portuguese Union took place. In his report the president told the delegates that between 1967 and 1971 there had been 1,489 baptisms, increasing the membership to 4,122 believers. This session also had important implications for the organization of the Portuguese field. The Portuguese Union was dissolved and the Portuguese Conference was created (as Associação Portuguesa dos ASD). This new conference became part of the new South European Union. Ernesto was elected president of the new Portuguese Conference. He would remain in office until October 1974. During these years there was an increase, not only in the membership, but also in the construction of chapels and in the opening of places of worship across the country. Evangelistic activities were promoted with the Bible Correspondence School playing a crucial role in the outreach effort that swept across Portugal. In 1974 Ferreira was invited to head the Theological Department and pastor the church of Sagunto College in Spain. Always a teacher at heart, he remained in Spain until mid-1977.<sup>10</sup>

From July 1977 until July 1979 Ferreira again served as president of the Portuguese Conference. During this period, he promoted programs aimed at the evangelization of Portugal. The outreach effort of the church was manifested in the global evangelistic campaigns called *Acção 78* and *Acção 79*. There was also increased activity of the Bible Correspondence Course associated with the radio program *Voz da Esperança*. As a result of these and other efforts, between 1977 and 1979 there were 893 baptisms, increasing the conference membership to 5,079 believers who worshiped in 42 churches across Portugal.<sup>11</sup>

## Retirement Years

In January 1980 Ferreira retired, but he continued to work for the church in Portugal as an editor at the Portuguese Publishing House. He was director of *Sinais dos Tempos* (*Signs of the Times*) from 1980 until 1993, and again from 1997 until 2003. Between 1995 and 1997 he was the director of the Lisbon Adventist School (Colégio Infanta Dona Joana). From 2003 until his death he wrote two important books: *Arautos de Boas Novas* (*Heralds of Good Tidings*), a history of the Adventist Church in Portugal, and *A Verdade Cristã* (*The Christian Truth*), his final literary legacy. Pastor Ernesto Ferreira died November 21, 2012, at the age of 99. His wife, Irene, had died at the age of 74. The couple had a son, Teófilo, who also became a pastor.<sup>12</sup>

## Contribution

Ernesto Ferreira contributed greatly to the development of the Portuguese Field. He was the only person to be elected five times to the presidency of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal. His five tenures as president were characterized by a surge of development and growth. His tenure as president of the Angolan Field was also extremely successful. In addition, Pastor Ferreira was an author. He published a host of articles in the *Revista Adventista* (*Adventist Review*) and in the *Sinais dos Tempos* (*Signs of the Times*) and wrote six books: *O Senhor Vem* (*The Lord is Coming* - 1971), *Edificados sobre a Rocha* (*Built upon the Rock* - 1987), *Profecias Cronológicas na História da Salvação* (*Chronological Prophecies in the History of Salvation* - 1992), *A Alegria da Salvação* (*The Joy of Salvation* - 2002), *Arautos de Boas Novas* (*Heralds of Good Tidings* - 2008), and *A Verdade Cristã* (*The Christian Truth* - 2012). In 1997 the General Conference Education Department conferred an award on Ferreira—the Medallion of Distinction—that recognized his contribution to the promotion of Adventist education. Ernesto Ferreira's last achievement was to write the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal, at the age of 95. *Arautos de Boas Novas* (*Heralds of Good Tidings*) was written to celebrate the centennial of the Adventist presence in Portugal (1904-2004) and remains an enduring legacy to the denomination in Portugal.<sup>13</sup>

## Legacy

The legacy of Ernesto Ferreira is, in some measure, the result of his initial training as a Roman Catholic priest. His activity as an educator at all levels was a natural reflection of the impulse that he received in his youth and his subsequent experience as a Franciscan monk. Ernesto's academic training—initially as a Catholic priest and subsequently as an Adventist pastor—was crucial in making him a towering figure in Portuguese Adventism. His outstanding contribution to the development of the Adventist movement in Portugal has its roots in his solid academic training.

Although other Portuguese Adventist pioneers have contributed greatly to the establishment and the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal, none has had such an outstanding impact on the overall development of the Portuguese field as Ernesto Ferreira. His life of dedication stands out among the contributions made by the Portuguese pioneers.

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## NOTES

1. See Sandra Blackmer, "Dois livros, um simples pedido e uma vida transformada," *Revista Adventista*, June, 2013, 27; Sandra Blackmer, "Two Books, a Simple Request and a Changed Life—The Story of Ernesto Ferreira," *ARH*, April 11, 2013, 20; Ernesto Ferreira, *Arautos de Boas Novas: Centenário da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia em Portugal 1904-2004* (Sabugo: Publicadora SerVir, 2008), 225.?
2. An official license issued by the Roman Catholic Church to print an ecclesiastical or religious book.?
3. It was then named Sociedade Filantrópica Adventista.?
4. See Blackmer, "Dois livros, um simples pedido e uma vida transformada", 27-28; Blackmer, "Two Books, a Simple Request and a Changed Life," 20, 21; Ferreira, *Arautos de Boas Novas*, 225.?
5. Blackmer, "Dois livros," 28; Blackmer, "Two Books," 21. Ferreira, 225.?
6. Ferreira, 207-227.?
7. The first term of office ended with the union session that was held in June 1953.?
8. The second term of office ended with the union session that convened in May 1957.?
9. Alexandre Justino, *Pregoeiros da Verdade Presente: História da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia em Angola (1924-2004)* (Benedita: Edição do Autor, 2007), 199-213.?
10. Ferreira, 246-263.?
11. Ibid., 273-278.?
12. Ferreira, 225; Artur Machado, "Obrigado, Pr. Ferreira!" *Sinais dos Tempos*, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, 2004, 4.?
13. "Pastor Ernesto Ferreira," *Revista Adventista*, April, 9; Blackmer, "Dois livros," 28; Blackmer, "Two Books," 21, 22.?

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