

Block, Godofredo (Gottfried)

(1868–1933)

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Godofredo Block was one of the first ordained Adventist ministers in Argentina and an influential pastor and evangelist, especially among the German communities in the country.¹

Early Years

Godofredo Block was born in Alt-Galka, Saratov, Russia, on June 27, 1868.² His parents, Maria Katharina Bernhardt and Jorge Enrique (Georg Heinrich) Block, were descendants of Germans based in the Volga River region. Godofredo had a simple and cheerful childhood with his only brother Enrique. But his life changed with the death of his father and his mother's new marriage. His stepfather was a harsh man who punished the children frequently, so the Block brothers found shelter in an uncle's house. Sometime later, their mother and her new husband went to live in the United States and then in Canada. She had two more daughters, but Godofredo did not get to know them or see his mother ever again, although they kept in touch through letters.

At the age of 11, Godofredo went with his uncle to Argentina and lived there for a couple of years in a Protestant village near Diamante, Entre Ríos. The agricultural projects they started did not prosper, so they returned to Russia. In Russia, Godofredo learned the carpenter's trade. He liked parties and music a lot. Godofredo was good looking and had a very sweet voice. He met Catalina Elizabeth Held (March 20, 1867–December 10, 1947) at a party, married her, and had a son Godofredo. When called to military service, he decided to escape from Russia. Some Jews smuggled him into Germany in a barrel that was used to export wine, and after many days of traveling, he went back to Argentina.

He went to a Protestant village and worked with distant relatives as a carpenter until he could send for his family. Catalina and the child would later come with Enrique, Godofredo's brother. Finally, his wife and son left for Germany by train, and from there, they took a boat to South America. An Adventist missionary came up to Mrs. Block at a railway station and sold her a book about the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Catalina loved reading, so she read the book with great interest during the long boat trip and became convinced of its

teachings. Godofredo waited for his wife and three-year-old son at the harbor of Diamante, Entre Ríos. After unpacking her baggage, Catalina told her husband they were going to be Seventh-day Adventists. Godofredo did not take this statement very seriously.

Conversion and Ministry

Catalina participated in the meetings led by Pastor Frank H. Westphal (1858–1944) without her husband. She insisted he attend the meetings until Godofredo decided to accompany her. He did not want to go inside, so he stayed with his friends outside and listened through the window. The Adventist settlers sang some hymns in German with such enthusiasm that Godofredo was moved to tears and decided to go in. He sat in one of the first seats, and after that night, he did not miss the meetings. Godofredo was baptized with his wife. He was convinced of the truths preached by Pastor Westphal, and a great desire to be a preacher also arose in him.

The Blocks went through hard afflictions. Their daughter Amalia died at the age of 12 because of a burn, and another son died shortly after birth. Catalina used to tell her children what she read in her books and taught them Bible verses.

Godofredo Block and his wife moved from the village of Palma (near Crespo) to Camarero in 1902 (currently, Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos), where the Adventist school was located. There they cultivated a large area of land and raised their children: Godofredo (1889–1978), Catalina Elizabeth (1895–1931), Susana (1895–1991), Jorge Enrique (1897–1988), Amalia (b. 1900), Flora Natalia (1902–1990), Teodoro (1904–1990), and Roberto Heraldo (1907–1982). Almost all of their children were involved with the organized work of the Church.³ Godofredo supported Colegio Camarero (currently, River Plate Adventist University) during its early days. He built doors and windows for the first building. With his daughters Catalina and Susana, he planted the trees that delimited the entrance and exit of the school.⁴

After a brief course at the school, Godofredo and his classmates dedicated themselves to the distribution of Adventist publications. (He had to learn Castilian in order to speak and write correctly.) Although Godofredo did not have much academic education, he did have a great desire to bring people closer to God, and his work was fruitful. He was ordained to pastoral ministry in Gualaguay, Entre Ríos, on October 26, 1907, by J. W. Westphal and N. G. Lowve. He served in the pastoral work for 34 years.

Godofredo Block became an outstanding pastor and noted preacher. He was loved and respected inside and outside the Church. While he liked the countryside, he could rarely enjoy home life as his mission work took him to different places, and when he was at home, he wrote pastoral letters to the newly baptized to confirm them in the faith. He directed evangelistic campaigns in many towns in the province of Entre Ríos and in other cities around the country, such as Rosario (Santa Fe), Santa Fe (Santa Fe), Bahía Blanca (Buenos Aires), and Guatraché (La Pampa).⁵ His ministry inspired many.

On June 14, 1933, Godofredo Block died at the age of 65 in Puiggari, Entre Ríos, from stomach cancer. Those who visited him during his illness reported that he said, "I'm sorry I can't preach anymore."

Legacy

Pastor Frank Westphal summarized Pastor Block's life well when he wrote the following:

I also remember brother Godofredo Block, who accepted the message that I personally presented to him, went to school and studied with his own children[,] and after some preparation he went out to preach the message. Then he was ordained to the evangelical ministry, and among all our workers in that field there was no one to win more souls for Christ than him.⁶

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. The absence of precise data prevents specifying the years in which the different stages of Godofredo Block's life happened. See Walter Schubert, "Necrología" [Obituary], *Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]* 33, no. 7 (July 17, 1933): 15. Daniel Oscar Plenc, *25 Historias de misioneros* [25 stories of missionaries] (Buenos Aires: Casa Editora Sudamericana, 2013), 8–14. See Daniel Oscar Plenc, Silvia Scholtus, Eugenio Di Dionisio, and Sergio Becerra, *Misioneros fundacionales del adventismo sudamericano [Foundational Missionaries of South American Adventism]*, 3rd ed. (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2012), 49, 127. Some of the information presented in this article was taken from three notebooks that Flora Block de Beskow, daughter of Pastor Godofredo Block, wrote for her children—Erwin Omar, and Leroy—and their descendants in 1986, when she was 83 years old. There is a copy in the archives of River Plate Adventist University's Ellen G. White Research Center in Entre Ríos, Argentina. See "Pastor Gottfried Block," Vik Haakull Family History, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://www.haakull.com/TNG/getperson.php?personID=I60484&tree=cvh>.
2. Godofredo Block's grave in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina, records his year of birth as 1866 (data probably wrong).
3. Godofredo and Teodoro were pastors. Susana married Pablo Beskow (who was a treasurer in Argentina and Brazil). Jorge Enrique was a teacher for a while and director of Adventist schools in the province of Entre Ríos. Flora was married to Pastor Hugo Beskow. Eugenio Di Dionisio, interview by author, March 18, 2018, author's personal archive.
4. Three Block sisters married three Beskow brothers: Susana Block married Pablo Beskow, Amalia Block married Otto Beskow, and Flora Block married Hugo Beskow.
5. Godofredo Block, "Viaje Misionero" [Mission trip], *Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]* 13, no. 8 (August 1913): 14, 15. E. Emmenegger, "Reunión especial en la iglesia de Villa Alba, Pampa Central, Rep. Argentina" [Special meeting in the church of Villa Alba, Pampa Central, Rep. Argentina], *Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]* 16, no. 1 (January 1916): 13, 14. Luis Ernst, "El esfuerzo público en Rosario, A. R." [The public effort in Rosario, A. R.], *Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]* 17, no. 3 (March 1917): 16. Godofredo Block, "El esfuerzo en Rosario, A. R." [The public effort in Rosario, A. R.], *Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]* 19, no. 4 (April 1919): 9.
6. Frank H. Westphal, *Pionero en Sudamérica* [Pioneer in South America], trans. Silvia Scholtus de Roscher (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: Ellen G. White Research Center, Universidad Adventista del Plata, 1997), 66.

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