

†
Site Oficial
Pastor Dr. João Filson Soren

†
Lewis Malen Bratcher
(1888-1953)
“The Apostle of Sertão Brasileiro”

Lewis Malen Bratcher was born on June 11, 1888 in Black Rock City, Kentucky, USA.

In 1915, he married Artie Amanda Porter. They settled in Louisville, where he attended the City Baptist Seminary, receiving his Doctorate in Theology in 1917. The theme of his thesis was "Missionary Work in Latin America". Following graduation, the couple expressed to the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board their desire to work in Brazil, a request which was happily granted. On February 5, 1919 at the city harbor of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, their arrival was warmly welcomed by Pastor Dr. Francisco Fulgêncio Soren, Pastor Dr. Joaquim Nogueira Paranaguá and other dedicated Christians.

Soon after his arrival, Dr. Bratcher was made Administrator of the “Fluminense Baptist College” in the village of Campos, whose inhabitants desired to give their children an education in the Christian Life. His first missionary journey within Brazil, in 1925, was to Sertão, in the north, where he hoped to familiarize himself with the region and eventually to open a new Mission for the State of Goiás, as suggested to him by the renowned missionary, Salomon Ginsburg. During this exploration, Dr. Bratcher met the English doctor and missionary, Dr. Franstone, who served as his guide to the city of Anápolis, where Franstone resided. Following this journey, however, Dr. Bratcher was informed by the Head Church in Richmond, USA, that the establishment of the Sertão Mission was not a financially feasible undertaking at that time. Undaunted, Dr. Bratcher became Dean of the Baptist College in Rio de Janeiro, and joined the Faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

On 4 January 1926, Dr. L. M. Bratcher was named Executive Secretary of the Board of National Missions in Brazil, in which position he served with distinction until his death in December 1953. During his remarkable tenure, he tirelessly trained many missionaries and systematically built Missions all across the River State of Tocantins, as far as the Amazon.

In May 1926, he sent the necessary support to the missionary pioneers Zacarias Campêlo and wife Noemi Falcão Campêlo, to build and develop the first Craô Indian Mission. Six years later, in 1932, he and Stela Câmara co-authored the book “The Heroine of Craonópolis”, celebrating the life of Noemi Falcão Campêlo.

On two occasions, in 1928-29 and 1933-1935, Dr. Bratcher assumed the responsibilities of Interim Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Rio de Janeiro, of which he was a member.

Accompanied by the young doctor, Jaime de Andrade, Dr. Bratcher set out on his second missionary journey on February 21, 1931, with the blessing of his Pastor, Dr. Francisco Fulgêncio Soren, his wife Jane Filson and other church members. The 8,250 kilometer journey from Rio de Janeiro to Belém, by horse, mule, in canoes and occasionally by train, lasted six months.

The very harsh conditions they have survived included having to sleep in tents under torrential rains, and to endure blazing heat waves in excess of C. 40 degrees.

In 1935 and 1937 Dr. Bratcher made additional journeys, accompanied in 1937 by his musician-son, Robert, whose brilliant violin playing in evangelic meetings aroused great interest and inspiration among the “sertanejos” listeners. This was especially true among the Craô Indians, thrilled to hear their familiar hymns played for the first time on this strange, magical instrument.

The next missionary journey, in 1939, lasted six and a half months, winding its way from the “Sertão”, through The Amazon, to the frontiers of Peru and Colombia. It was 12,802 kilometers in length. In his diary, Dr. Bratcher described his wonderment at the immense beauty of his surroundings, while recognizing the challenges that would be faced by future missionaries on such vast and difficult journeys.

Another of his splendid accomplishments was the construction, in 1952, of the Marituba Leper Colony Church in Belém, Pará, and its subsequent maintenance. This Institution exists to the present day.

A prolific writer, Dr. Bratcher published thousands of brilliant, informed articles and fascinating documentaries in Brazilian and American newspapers, on the work of the Baptist Mission. In January, 1946, he introduced the first ever Brazilian missionary magazine, "A Homeland for Christ", edited by Pastor Raphael Zambrotti, and penned a biography of his beloved pastor and friend Francisco Fulgêncio Soren, entitled "Christ's Interpreter to Many Lands". Additionally, accounts of his amazing journeys were reported in "Mules Tales from Inland Trails"⁽¹⁾. These travels encompassed São Francisco, Paraíba, Alagoas, Pernanbuco, Sergipe, German churches in Rio Grande do Sul, continuing over the Brazilian border to Bolivia, Peru and Colombia. A celebrated English language stylist, Dr. L. M. Bratcher received “The Award for English Language Literature”, at that time given to only ten other distinguished writers, among whom was Winston Churchill.

The marriage with Artie Bratcher was blessed with three children: Lewis Malen Bratcher Jr., Robert and Edward Ballance Galveston.

His unparalleled vision and relentless tenacity in the face of inhuman challenges proved him to be a man of immense integrity, a noble, courageous and tireless pioneer, and an exemplary Christian. His legendary devotion to the Missionary Life, which saved and uplifted hundreds of lives, earned him the title “The Apostle of Sertão”. He was an inspiration to all men, everywhere. He died on December 16, 1953, in his beloved Brazil.

Amaru Soren
Berlin, September 2016.

Bibliography:

*Mathews, Ruth Ferreira “O Apóstolo do Sertão”. Rio de Janeiro, Casa Publicadora Batista, 1967.
In Portuguese only*

*I highly recommend his biography, especially the chapters: “In the Valley” and “Great Experience”
p. 37 to 43, excerpts transcribed from his diary.*

(1) Books written by Dr. Bratcher:

“Christ’s Interpreter to Many Lands”. Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman Press, 1938.

“Mules Tales from Inland Trails”. Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman Press, 1948 / Internet Archive, Literary Licensing, 2012.

“The Secret of His Presence”. Montana, Kessinger Publishing, Legacy Reprints, 2010.