

# WANTED



**“AT THESE SCHOOLS THEY WORK A LABOR OF DISSOLUTION. THEY SPREAD DOCTRINES OF THE MOST CRIMSON COMMUNISM. THEY ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE PATRIOTISM AND SPIRIT OF THE NATION BY INCULCATING THE MOST EXTREME AND DANGEROUS SOCIALIST CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, CLASS AND RACIAL EQUALITY, AND UNBOUNDED LIBERTY FOR THE IGNORANT MASSES. . . .”**

**—Women of Azangaro, 1923**

# FERNANDO AND ANA STAHL:

## Missionary Social Activists?

Growing up in Loma Linda, California, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, I was taught a strong personal ethic. The Pathfinder Club Law taught me to “Keep the morning watch, Do my honest part, Care for my body, Keep a level eye, Be courteous and obedient, Walk softly in the sanctuary, Go on God’s errands.” I was also taught never to refer to blacks using the “N word.” In these placid years, God was in His heaven, Dwight David Eisenhower was in the White House, *Leave It to Beaver* and, later, *The Brady Bunch* modeled ideal family life, and seemingly, all was well with the suburban world. In the Loma Linda of the 1950s, there were no freeways, no minorities, and little obvious sin. With very few exceptions, its gene pool was blandly white. This personal ethic of eschewing the “N word” was strictly followed in a town where we basically all looked alike.

In 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine with regard to race, and soon, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. burst into the American consciousness. Loma Linda slumbered on as an isolated village surrounded by orange groves. Only when a West Indian Adventist physician family moved into the community did this village wake up: My father—

**“In the face of severe injustice, suffering, and oppression, the Stahls identified with the poorest of the poor and incarnated the gospel in ways which profoundly impacted the spiritual, social, economic, and political life of the Peruvian highlands. The experience of our friends Ana and Fernando calls us to live with the tension of enacting the ‘now’ of God’s kingdom while recognizing that the ‘not yet’ fullness of that kingdom eludes human history.”**

—Gustavo Gutiérrez, Catholic Priest and father of Liberation Theology, *La Sierra University Stahl Center Indigenous Education Conference, Lima, Peru, 1997.*



About the same time, I heard a mission story about a husband and wife nursing team from the midwest United States who had left a thriving business, and—bundling up two young children and paying their own passage—ended up in Peru’s *altiplano* (high plain) on the shores of Lake Titicaca. The only other scrap of information I retained from this story was their surname (Stahl) and the fact that they and their followers had established a “Broken Stone Mission” in response to a village chieftain who requested that the Adventists open a school in his village.

then pastor of the Loma Linda University College of Medical Evangelists Church—was deluged with phone calls from members complaining that “a black family has plans to move onto our side of the tracks.” At that point, those residents of our town who had ears to hear realized that their personal ethics were being challenged by changing social norms, structures, and institutions. They were being called upon to recognize that racism must be challenged, not only as cherished in individual hearts, but also as manifested in America’s traditions, laws, and social institutions. We gradually realized that personal transformation and social transformation were inseparable.

BY CHARLES TEEL, JR.

## The Stahls as Missionaries, Visionaries, and Revolutionaries

Fast forward some three decades. I traveled to the Peruvian Andes as a tourist, eager to bask in the glory of that “Wonder of the Modern World,” the Machu Picchu, a citadel nestled in a glorious landscape on the Inca Trail that appears to have been a ceremonial center. While in these mountains, I found myself in conversation with a Roman Catholic Maryknoll priest from Butte, Montana, who had labored in the Peruvian Andes for two decades.

Upon learning that I was an Adventist, the priest exclaimed: “Then you know the story of Adventist missionaries Fernando and Ana Stahl.” I said that I vaguely recalled an account of a “Broken Stone Mission” established by this couple that had thrived under the direction of an early convert. The priest responded with the following paean of praise: “We in the Catholic Maryknoll Order claim the Stahls as our spiritual forbears. The gospel that they incarnated was experienced not only in chapels and churches but in entrepreneurial free markets, in health-education initiatives, in clinics, and—above all—in the first coeducational school system for the marginalized Quechua and Aymara indigenous peoples, a system that would come to include as many as 200 schools and would train this fenced-out population to read, to write, to compute, to speak Spanish, to study the Judeo-Christian Scriptures for themselves, and to claim their place in society.”

Expanding on the fact that these excluded peoples represented 92 percent of the Andean population, the priest observed with admiration: “The Stahls’ actions on behalf of this dispossessed majority even contributed to the inclusion of a religious toleration clause in the National Constitution.” He concluded with a flourish: “Indeed, these Adventists were missionaries, visionaries, and revolutionaries.”<sup>1</sup>

### The Stahls’ Transformational Initiatives

While I have authored several articles on the Stahls’ work,<sup>2</sup> what follows are mere snippets that offer abbreviated glimpses into the priest’s assertion that Fernando and Ana Stahl fostered a social transformation that affected social institutions as well

as a personal transformation that impacted individual minds, hearts, and bodies.

For centuries, geographical realities kept the Peruvian *altiplano* isolated from the legal structure of the nation’s capital. Cultural barriers had reinforced a caste system in which white and *mestizo* (mixed race) land-holding families and merchants, plus state officials and religious functionaries of the state church (an eight percent minority), kept the 92 percent (Aymara and Quechua) in what historians refer to as a “near-feudal” condition.

These indigenous peoples were illiterate and had virtually no contact with the world beyond the remote Lake Titicaca Basin.<sup>3</sup> Land expropriations, forced labor, and arbitrary taxation were the chief tools of oppression.<sup>4</sup> These abuses created the climate for a series of violent revolts that erupted throughout the Peruvian highlands, lasting well into the 1930s. In this social context, far-reaching personal and social transformation endeavors would eventually flourish.

Unable to speak Spanish and unfamiliar with Latin American customs, Ana Stahl initially bartered her professional skills to the wealthy to keep bread on the table while Fernando stumbled about, intuitively exploring what it meant to be a missionary.<sup>5</sup> His first strategy, selling religious magazines to an indigenous population that could not read, failed miserably. However, this experience opened his eyes to the fact that the elite privileged class, in order to maintain their social and economic advantages, had every reason to keep the Aymara and Quechua peoples uneducated.<sup>6</sup>

By 1911, magazine peddling had taken a back seat to establishing schools, as the Stahls linked up with an Aymara visionary, Manuel Comacho, who had for some years clandestinely attempted to introduce reading skills to the Aymaras. Comacho had been jailed on more than one occasion for this offense. For a number of months, the Stahls shared quarters with the Comachos, living and teaching in a humble hut with a thatched roof and dirt floor.

The Stahls garnered funds to purchase property on the shores of Lake Titicaca in the sleepy village of Platería. Despite opposition by the privileged classes, in 1913 a “mother school” opened its doors, providing co-educational offerings in reading, writing,

### Selected Stahl Commentators

*With the coming of the Adventists to Puno, indigenous education was initiated with unanticipated and transcendent results. For the first time the Indian acceded to letters, hygiene, and a consciousness of his own identity.*

—José Tamayo Herrera, Peru National Library Director, 1982

*The Adventist school system opened the way for the indigenous population of the Altiplano to achieve self-hood and self-sufficiency. The Stahl gospel both converted hearts and changed the social fabric of the highlands.*

—Rubén Chambi, Congressional Deputy, 1989

*Stahl transforms the spirit of the Indian, making him aware of his rights and obligations and showing him the route towards human dignity—treating him more as a comrade than a proselyte. I render homage to those Protestant educators who sacrifice all to the service of human redemption.*

*The gospel which came to Latin America with Protestantism came with a liberating force because it brought the force of the biblical message. A dramatic example is found in Peru with Manuel Comacho and Fernando and Ana Stahl.*

—Samuel Escobar, Peruvian Theologian, 1987



Left: Luciano Chambi and his wife.

Above: This regional assembly of believers testifies that the Stahls inspired a “people movement.”

and arithmetic, as well as hygiene and religion.<sup>7</sup> When credentialed professors imported to administer the new school could not handle the high-altitude conditions (over 12,000 feet),<sup>8</sup> Ana took over the administrative responsibilities, assisted by Camacho, and his young protégé Luciano Chambi<sup>9</sup> (Chambi would later run the Broken Stone Mission). As demands mushroomed for schools throughout the surrounding countryside, teacher-training courses were instituted in Platería, occupying classrooms on a year-round basis.<sup>10</sup>

The Stahls were generally welcomed by the indigenous peoples of these highlands, and even in the face of strong opposition by the privileged overlords, schools and churches soon encircled the vast Lake Titicaca, sprouting up like flowers following a spring rain.<sup>11</sup> The schools ranged from humble home schools to large institutions. By 1916, 2,000 students were registered in 19 schools; by 1924, 4,000 in 80 schools; and by 1947, a high of nearly 7,000 in 109 schools.<sup>12</sup> The Stahls’ successor, E. H. Wilcox, reported that on one unforgettable day, 12 requests for village schools arrived from various villages.<sup>13</sup>

Church congregations followed schools. The baptized membership in the Lake Titicaca Mission numbered 445 in 1916; 2,255 in 1920; 5,963 in 1924; and 7,340 in 1927.<sup>14</sup> By 1940, membership rolls had been purged of non-attending members and showed a total of 6,579. *Yet that year’s national census showed that in the Lake Titicaca area alone, there were fully four times that number of self-professed Protestants, virtually all of whom would have been Adventists.*<sup>15</sup>

### The Privileged Class Responds

As these schools multiplied, the monied elite and their political and religious functionaries readily grasped that their way of life would be threatened should the Quechua and Aymara peoples learn to read, write, and compute.

As the Adventist educational presence evolved from informal meetings in a mud hut to schools in permanent buildings, the power structure responded in force. In 1913, a mob of some 200 mounted men, led by Puno Bishop Monsignor Valentín Amuero, sacked the Stahl home in their absence, bound eight believers wrist to wrist, and led them on a 21-mile march to jail. As these *Protestantes* stumbled “hatless and coatless” on this overland trek, they were repeatedly “assaulted by man and beast.”<sup>16</sup> In 1916, the Stahls were violently attacked while inaugurating a new school, barely escaping with their lives.<sup>17</sup>

Only a few weeks later, the Stahls were run out of town in a neighboring village, and 50 of the villagers who had entertained them were beaten and placed in stocks or jailed.<sup>18</sup> Toward the end of 1920, 12 believers were murdered in the Azangaro province,<sup>19</sup> and later in the same area, as many as 15 believers met the same fate.<sup>20</sup> Schoolhouses were burned, Adventist teachers were assaulted, and one student was reportedly beaten to death.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the perceived threats to the social order that these schools presented were made explicit in a memorial filed from Azangaro in 1923:

“These insidious evangelical schools daily bring together large numbers of impressionable and ignorant Indians attracted through false and fantastic promises made by individuals of suspicious social intentions.

“At these schools they teach the most depraved and heretical

practices, and preach a war of extermination against faithful Catholics and the Church itself.

“At these schools they work a labor of dissolution. They spread doctrines of the most crimson communism. They attempt to destroy patriotism and the spirit of the nation by inculcating the most extreme and dangerous socialist concepts of social organization, class and racial equality, and unbounded liberty for the ignorant masses. . . .

“At these schools, finally, they openly attack our property system. . . .”<sup>22</sup>

### On the Benefits of Personal and Social Transformation

The dramatic impact of the Stahls’ efforts in effecting personal and social transformation can be witnessed in a 1920 march that traced the same route as the Bishop-led forced march to jail in 1913. José Antonio Encinas, congressional representative and future Rector of Lima’s flagship University of San Marcos—among the scores of researchers, academics, and politicians on three continents who laud the social transformation work of the Stahls—praised the Stahls as agents “in the service of human redemption,”<sup>23</sup> calling for a commission to investigate local abuses in the highland and to implement reforms.

The Stahls seized upon the arrival of the visiting commission as an opportunity to showcase the indigenous students and to teach them how to lobby for social change. Commission member Erasmo Roca, distinguished head of the Labor Bureau in the Ministry of Development, reported on the “spectacle” that the Stahls engineered:

“What a beautiful spectacle it was for us, just a few days after our arrival in Puno, to see nearly two thousand Indian evangelists from the region of Platería . . . , who, in correct military formation and led by two musical bands, paraded before the commission.”<sup>24</sup>

The Stahls doubtless took no small satisfaction in witnessing initial graduates of these indigenous schools parenting children who subsequently were elected to Peru’s National Congress. Rapid social change, indeed! Likewise, they must have experienced satisfaction in contrasting the conditions that marked the Bishop-led forced march in 1913 with the demonstration that they had been able to stage in 1920, just seven years—but thousands of students—later. The route followed on both of these marches was the same, but the conditions were vastly different. The 1913 forced march consisted of individuals under arrest, tied, and “assaulted by man and

beast.” But seven years later, the march featured nearly 2,000 Aymara and Quechua students parading before the commission on their own terms: confident, self-assured, and intent on demonstrating that an integrated gospel of personal and social transformation had liberated a fenced-out people from those internal and external principalities and powers that had formerly held them captive and in bondage.

Shortly thereafter, these self-taught North American Adventist change agents—“missionaries, visionaries, and revolutionaries”—would soon leave the Andean *altiplano* to work in the Amazon jungles for the next two decades of their lives.<sup>25</sup>

In 1938, the Stahls retired in Paradise, California, where they now rest from their fruitful labors as personal and social transformers. There they await that day when that New Earth envisioned by the prophets and that Kingdom described by the Gospel writers become a reality for all. The Stahls’ contributions are now commemorated by the Stahl Center at La Sierra University and its tours to the Amazon, as well as in the university’s “Path of the Just,” where their names are engraved on



Students and community members from La Sierra University’s 36th Andes Study Tour pose at the Stahl/Camacho statue in the Platería main square, celebrating the centennial of the forced march that marked the beginning of the Adventist educational presence in the Peruvian highlands.

a split-granite boulder as examples of church members who functioned as transformers of societies no less than transformers of souls.

We hallow the memory of these “missionaries, visionaries, and revolutionaries.” But much more: We affirm that educators and educational systems can improve the life of societies and effect social change as well as offering academic and religious training.

### The Stahl Legacy

While the Stahls’ true legacy is in the lives of the peoples of Peru’s Andes and Amazon, institutions currently bearing the Stahl name include:

- *Colegio Fernando Stahl*. This “Mother School” in Platería is located on the shores of Peru’s vast Lake Titicaca.
- *Clínica Adventist Ana Stahl*. This clinic is perched on the banks of the Amazon River in Peru’s provincial capital of Iquitos.
- *The Stahl Center for World Service and The Stahl Center Museum of Culture*. Founded in 1989 on the La Sierra University campus, the center’s mission is “Passing a vision of world service to a new generation.”

### Stahl Center Initiatives

- *Peru Andes and Amazon Tours* each March, which attract students, alumni, and people from various locales, follow in the footsteps of the Stahls cruising the Amazon, sailing Lake

Titicaca, touring Cusco, marveling at Machu Picchu, and walking the Inca Trail.

- *The Stahl Center Museum*, which features the Stahl Family Collection of artifacts and documents from the Andes and Amazon plus other artifacts bequeathed to the museum by missionary families and other world travelers.

- *Global Village* with ADRA International, which attracted more than 20,000 campus visitors who experienced authentic indigenous global habitats throughout the developing world.

- *Global Quilting*, which called for 1,000 handmade infant quilts to distribute with Archbishop Desmond Tutu to AIDS babies in South Africa—and garnered fully 20,000 such quilts! These quilts have been distributed to AIDS hospices and orphanages in such varied locales as South Africa's townships, Peru's Andes and Amazon, Russia's steppes, Thailand's sex triangle, Brazil's jungles, Armenia's cities, and numerous other global venues.

- *Stahl Center Sabbath* at the La Sierra University Church and campus, which annually celebrates the lives of individuals who have contributed to world mission and international development.

- *The Path of the Just*, on the campus of La Sierra University, which was initiated by the Stahl Center in concert with the university administration. It features a series of waterworks, international patios, and split granite boulders that honor the Stahls and others "whose lives of altruistic service have fostered human rights, individual empowerment, or religious toleration." (See [http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae\\_201274042410.pdf](http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae_201274042410.pdf).)

*For further information:*

The Stahl Center for World Service at La Sierra University  
4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Riverside CA 92505  
(951) 785-2041 / e-mail: [cmteel@aol.com](mailto:cmteel@aol.com)  
<http://www.lasierra.edu/doperu>



**Charles Teel, Jr., Ph.D.**, is Professor of Religion and Society at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, and Director of The Stahl Center for World Service. He is temporarily serving as acting Curator for the Stahl Center Museum of Culture, which houses and displays, in addition to the Stahl Family Collection, some 120 family collections of artifacts bequeathed by travelers and missionary families. As Director of the Stahl Center, Dr. Teel leads annual tours that follow in the footsteps of the Stahls in the Peruvian Andes and Amazon.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Conversation with Maryknoll Order priest Father Steven Judd in Cusco, Peru, 1988.

2. Articles by Charles W. Teel include: "Missionaries, Visionaries, and Revolutionaries: Logging a Passage in Search of Fernando and Ana Stahl," *Adventist Heritage* 12 (Summer 1988):3-14; "Revolutionary Missionaries in Peru: Fernando and Ana Stahl," *Spectrum* 18:3 (1988):50-52; "Las raíces radicales del Adventismo en el Altiplano peruano," *Allpanchis* 33 (primer semestre 1989):209-238; Peruvian Adventist University, "Las raíces radicales del Adventismo en el Altiplano peru-

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3. The indigenous percentages are likely conservative in that they are based on the 1940 census: "Ministerio de Hacienda y Comercio" (Dirección Nacional de Estadística, *Censo Nacional de Población y Ocupación 1940*).

4. José Tamayo Herrera, *Historia social e indigenismo en el Altiplano* (Lima: Treintatrés, 1982), p. 208 (face page).

5. F. A. Stahl, *En el país de los incas* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1976), p. 67. See also F. A. Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1932): pp. 85, 291.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 105ff.

7. Rubén Chambi y Ch., *La obra educativo de los adventistas en el Altiplano*. Doctoral thesis from the Universidad Nacional de Cuzco (Puno: Comercial, 1959), p. 38.

8. J. W. Westphal, "The Work Among the Indians of Peru," *Review and Herald* (August 19, 1915):10, 11.

9. Chambi y Ch., *La obra educativo*, op. cit., p. 39.

10. J. M. Howell, "School Work Around Lake Titicaca," *Review and Herald* 94:3 (January 18, 1917):11, 12.

11. La Escuela Normal de Platería and Colegio Adventista del Titicaca (under other names as well) in Chullunquiani, Juliaca, have been the chief boarding schools in the Lake Titicaca Mission school system.

12. *Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions* (title varies), 1918-1960; *Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (title varies), where *Statistical Report* only repeats 1940. A table is produced in Dan Chapin Hazen, *The Awakening of Puno: Government Policy and the Indian Problem in Southern Peru, 1900-1955*. Doctoral thesis, 1974, page 112, noting that the other works "offer different figures, though variations are generally minor."

13. E. H. Wilcox, *In Perils Oft* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publ. Assn., 1961), p. 100. The following article titles communicate the skyrocketing demands for personnel: E. H. Wilcox, "Indian Believers: Thirty Calls for Teachers Unanswered," *Review and Herald* 102:3 (January 5, 1925):8; see also F. A. Stahl, "Openings in the Lake Titicaca Region," *Review and Herald* 95:6 (February 1, 1917):13.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Hazen, *The Awakening of Puno: Government Policy and the Indian Problem in Southern Peru, 1900-1955*, op. cit., pp. 121, 122.

16. Stahl, *En el país de los incas*, op. cit., p. 228; see the English version in Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, op. cit., page 273.

17. "Al margen de los crímenes cometidos en la Provincia de Chucuito," *El Siglo* (June 21, 1916), quoted in Stahl, *En el país de los incas*, op. cit., p. 201; see the English version in Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, op. cit., page 245.

18. Stahl, *En el país de los incas*, op. cit., p. 228; see the English version in Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, op. cit., page 273.

19. Pedro Kalbermatter, *Veinte años como misionero entre los indios del Perú (apuntes autobiográficos)* (Paraná: Nueva Impresora, 1950), pp. 88ff.

20. Wilcox, *In Perils Oft*, op. cit., pp. 167ff.

21. Assaults on missionaries are noted in *ibid.*, pp. 112, 116, 122, 166ff; and Stahl, *En el país de los incas*, op. cit., pages 127, 150. See also references in Kalbermatter, *Veinte años como misionero entre los indios del Perú*, op. cit., pages 88ff, and Barbara Westphal, *A Bride on the Amazon* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1948).

22. *El Herald* 3:144 (June 2, 1927):7 prints a memorial drafted by the women of Azangaro in September 1923.

23. José Antonio Encinas, *Un ensayo de escuela nueva en el Perú* (Lima: Imprenta Minerva, 1932), pp. 148, 149.

24. P. Erasmo Roca Sanchez, *Por la clase indígena*; Pedro Barrantes Castro, ed. (Lima: Biblioteca de la Revista de Economía y Finanzas, 1935), p. 192.

25. The Stahls worked out of Iquitos and the Upper Amazon until their retirement, returning to the United States in 1938.