

Riffel, Benjamín (1914-1998)

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Christian Alejandro Varela, M.A. in theology, is a pastor in the Central Argentina Conference. He has written academic articles and book chapters. Varela is married to Vanesa Quiroz Cornejo and they have three children.

Benjamín Riffel served as a pastor, promoter of denominational publications, department director, and administrator in the South American and Inter-American Divisions.¹

Early Years

Born February 14, 1914, in Entre Ríos province, Argentina, his parents were David Riffel (1873-1937) and Juliana María Weiss (1880-1963).² David was the only son of Jorge Riffel (1850-1917), first self-supporting missionary in the region of the Rio Plata. David and Juliana Riffel had 16 children, 13 boys and 3 girls.³ Benjamín Riffel spent his childhood among the family fields in Aldea Jacobi, near the town of Crespo, Entre Ríos, Argentina.⁴

Riffel began his studies at River Plate Academy, Entre Ríos, Argentina, in 1930 and graduated from the ministerial course in 1937.⁵ On October 12, 1938, he married Lidia Ema Schneider, in the city Ramírez, Entre Ríos, Argentina, Dr. Carlos Westphal acting as officiating pastor.⁶ The Riffels had two children, Marlyn Benidia (born 1941) and Raúl Enrique (born 1945).⁷

Ministry in South America and at Pacific Press

After graduation, he received a call as interim publishing director for the Central Argentine Conference. Next, he became publishing director for the North Argentina Mission. Then, beginning in 1943 he served in the Buenos Aires Conference for three years. Later, he worked in the Central Argentine Conference. At the end of 1946 the Inca Union Mission (Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador) named him director of publishing and lay activities. Later he went to the Central Peru Mission as president (1953).⁸ In 1954 the Austral Union Conference elected him publishing director.

During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s the denomination experienced strong membership growth among Hispanics, encouraging the Pacific Press Publishing Association to organize a team in its foreign language department to produce and promote Spanish publications for the church in both Inter-America and North America. Thus, in 1958 it invited Benjamin to be the first director of its international sales department where he would remain until his retirement in 1980.⁹

Final Years and Legacy

Benjamín Riffel dedicated 42 years of service, mainly in publishing. He wrote inspirational books for literature evangelists such as *Éxito sin límites, y Providencias de Dios* [Success without limits, and Providences of God], as well as continual reports about the canvassing work in the fields where he served.¹⁰ Another valuable contribution was his dedication for raising funds for projects at River Plate Academy and for church buildings.¹¹ After his retirement, he lived in Los Altos, California, United States, until his death May 13, 1998. His wife died at age 101, August 1, 2017.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. For an autobiography, see: Benjamín Riffel, *Providencias de Dios en métodos de superación que mejoran la personalidad* [Providences of God in methods that enhance personality] (Coral Gables, Florida: Inter-American Division Publishing Association, 1983), 11-25.

2. For a biography of Jorge Riffel, see: Daniel Oscar Plenc, *Misioneros en Sudamérica: Pioneros del Adventismo en Latinoamérica* [Missionaries in South America: Pioneers of Adventism in Latin America], 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: South America Spanish Publishing House, 2008), 14-24. See also: Sergio E. Becerra, "Geörg (Jorge) Heinrich Riffel," in *Misioneros fundacionales del adventismo sudamericano* [Pioneer missionaries of South American Adventism], Daniel Oscar Plenc, Silvia Scholtus, Eugenio Di Dionisio, Sergio Becerra, 3rd ed. (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: Editorial River Plate Adventist University, 2012), 11-21.
3. David Riffel (1873-1937) was 4 years old when they left Russia. Juliana María was born in Poland and emigrated with her parents to Brazil, and then to Argentina. Their children were Santiago (1897-1964), David (1898-1972), Daniel (1901-1972), María Luisa (1903-1963), Samuel (1904-1975), Enrique (1905-1994), Juan (1907-1987), Jonatán (1908-1996), Jorge (1910-1994), José (1911-2006), Andrés Hipólito (1912-1997), Benjamín (1914-1998), Rosita Elisa (1918-1994), and Ana (1920-2001). Two others, Daniel and Alejandro, died as children. Daniel Oscar Plenc wrote a brief biography of David in the chapter "Una familia numerosa" [A numerous family], in *25 Historias de misioneros* [25 Stories of Missionaries] (Buenos Aires: South America Spanish Publishing House, 2013), 34-44.
4. Evelyn Weiss, e-mail to the author, June 14, 2018.
5. See: *La voz del colegio: Revista publicada por los alumnos del Colegio Adventista del Plata* [The Voice of the Academy: Published review by the students of River Plate Academy] (Puiggari, Entre Ríos: November 1930), 29; *La voz del colegio* [The Voice of the Academy: Published review by the students of River Plate Academy], year (Puiggari, Entre Ríos, Argentina: November 1937), 3.
6. Benjamín Riffel, *Providencias de Dios en métodos de superación que mejoran la personalidad* [Providences of God in methods that enhance personality] (Coral Gables, Florida: Inter-American Division Publishing Association, 1983), 37.
7. His children and grandchildren live in Los Altos, California, United States.
8. L. H. Olson, "Inca Union Biennial Sessions," *South American Bulletin*, March-April 1953, 2. See Benjamín Riffel's articles: "La iglesia madre la Unión Incaica" [The mother church Inca Union], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], June 1953, 6. "Perspectivas halagüeñas en la Misión peruana" [Flattering Perspectives in Peru Mission], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], August 1953, 12. "Ocho esfuerzos públicos en la misión peruana" [Eight public efforts in the Peruvian mission], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 1953, 9, 10.
9. Manuel Vásquez, *La historia aún no contada: 100 años de adventismo hispano* [The story not yet told: 100 years of Hispanic Adventism] (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000), 433.
10. See the following articles by Benjamín Riffel: "De la misión del Norte" [The North Mission], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], June 1939, 15. "¿Duro o maduro?" [Hard or ripe?], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 21, 1944, 12. "Mi yugo es fácil" [My yoke is easy], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], March 27, 1944, 7, 10. "Siete de veinticuatro" [Seven out of twenty-four], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 18, 1944, 12. "Medio millón durante 1949" [Half a million during 1949], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], April 1949, 11. "El gran propósito del colportaje" [The great purpose of literature evangelism], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], August

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11. Egil H. Wensell points out that the tambo opened in 1986 at the River Plate Academy was "fully funded by former students Juan and Benjamín Riffel." See: Egil H. Wensell, *El poder de una esperanza que educa y sana: Reseña histórica* [The power of a hope that educates and heals: Historical review] (Villa Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: Editorial River Plate Adventist University, 1993), 108. Manuel Vásquez, *La historia aún no contada: 100 años de adventismo hispano* [The story not yet told: 100 years of Hispanic Adventism] (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000), 444.

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