

Wilfart, Ricardo

José (1878–1944)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Ricardo Wilfart

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Ricardo José Wilfart, pastor and administrator, was born June 26, 1878, in the city of Roubaix, Northern France. He was son of Henri Wilfart (b. 1846) and Zenoibie Dumoulin Wilfart (b. 1838), and his sister was Lucien Wilfart (b. 1880).¹

Son of Belgian parents who migrated to France, Ricardo was born and lived in French territory until he was ten. At the end of 1888 his family moved to South America, settling down in the city of Rosário de Santa Fé, Argentina. In 1890 they went to Brazil, establishing residence in the countryside of São Paulo.² Ricardo stayed in Brazil for the rest of his life and later became a Brazilian citizen.³

He received a Christian education from his family. At the age of 13, through his parents' teachings, he acknowledged that he was a desperately lost sinner. However, it was only in 1901, at the age of 23, that he

acquired more biblical knowledge through contact with the Presbyterian Church. He became a member of that denomination in 1903 and even worked as a presbyter.⁴

One year later, on September 29, 1904, he married Jeredyl Batista de Carvalho (1887-1969). From this union were born three daughters: Abigail Wilfart (Lopes), Alice Wilfart (Peixoto da Silva), and Ady Wilfart (Roloff). The couple learned of Adventism in June 1908, and after a few months of studying the Bible they were baptized by Pastor Emílio N. Hôlzle on November 22, 1908, in the city of Ibitinga, São Paulo State.⁵

As soon as he was baptized, Ricardo became involved with the gospel proclamation. He also became a canvasser, despite the challenge of selling Adventist literature which at the time was limited and very cheap. The following year he accepted an invitation to work as a canvasser and as a Bible instructor in Rio de Janeiro. While in this region, he became a licensed minister of the Rio-Espírito Santo Mission (1911-1913) and received ordination to the pastoral ministry in January 1914.⁶ Also that year he was appointed president of the East Brazil Union Mission (currently Northeast Brazil Mission), which at the time was in charge of the states of Bahia, Alagoas, Paraíba, Sergipe, and Pernambuco.⁷ From 1916 to 1918 he was president of the newly founded Pernambuco Mission in the same region.⁸

In 1919 Ricardo accepted an invitation to work in the state of Minas Gerais, where he headed the East Minas Mission.⁹ At the request of the church, the following year he returned to the state of Rio de Janeiro where he headed the Rio de Janeiro Mission until 1924.¹⁰ With the organization of the Rio de Janeiro Central Church in 1925, he was appointed pastor of this church where he served until 1930,¹¹ when he was reappointed president of the Rio de Janeiro Mission.¹²

In the following years he worked as pastor in: the São Paulo Central Adventist Church (February 1931 to December 1933); the Campinas district, which covered the cities of Rio Claro, Limeira, and Valinhos (1934-1935);¹³ the Porto Alegre Central Adventist Church, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (1935-1939);¹⁴ and the Central Rio de Janeiro Adventist Church (1940). From 1941 to 1942 he was interim president of the Rio Minas Gerais Mission.¹⁵

In 1942 he was named evangelist of the South Brazil Union Conference and worked especially with radio evangelism.¹⁶ In August 1943, while conducting a series of meetings in the city of Recife, state of Pernambuco, Ricardo was stricken with pulmonary edema which prevented him from continuing his evangelistic work with the same intensity. Thereafter, his health became increasingly weakened, and he died on February 17, 1944, at the age of 66. The funeral ceremony was held by Dr. Clarence Schneider at the Rio de Janeiro Central Church.¹⁷

In the 35 years of his ministerial career, Ricardo Wilfart contributed significantly to the advance of Adventism in Brazil. He stands out as a pioneer for his participation as the first president of the Pernambuco Mission¹⁸ and in the initial organization of the Voice of Prophecy radio program.¹⁹

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NOTES

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3. J. H. Boehm, "Ricardo José Wilfart," *Revista Adventista*, year 39, n. 5, May 1944, 24-25.
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15. Boehm, 24-25.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid; Biography of Ricardo José Wilfart, 3-4.
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19. Ibid.

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