

Riffel, Juan (1907-1987)

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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.

Juan Riffel was a pastor, departmental director, and administrator noted for training and mobilizing lay members in the Austral Union Conference and South American Division.¹

Early Years, Studies and Family

Born February 8, 1907, in the rural area of Crespo, Entre Ríos, Argentina, Juan Riffel's parents were David Riffel (1873-1937) and Juliana María Weiss (1880-1963).² David Riffel was 3 years old when his parents left Russia and went to South America. He was the only son of Jorge Riffel (1850-1917), the first lay missionary in the region of River Plate.³ Juliana Weiss was born in Poland and emigrated with her parents to Brazil, and then to Argentina. Of David and Juliana Riffel's 16 children (13 boys and three girls), Juan was the seventh one.⁴

Juan began his studies in River Plate Academy, Entre Ríos, Argentina, 1925, and completed his ministerial course in 1929.⁵ On February 12, 1930, he married Elodia Rostán. They had three children: Belkys (born October 12, 1931), Hugo (born November 4, 1940), and Angélica (born April 22, 1944).

South American Journey

During October 1930, church leadership assigned him to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings in the city of Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina. Between the years 1931 to 1935 he was a pastor in the city of Santa Fe, Argentina. Then in 1935 he moved to Córdoba to serve as pastor for the entire province. On January 23, 1937, he was ordained to the pastoral ministry at River Plate Academy.⁶ In 1938 leadership called him to the church at Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina, site of the headquarters of the Central Argentine Conference. In 1939 he was designated director of Sabbath School and personal ministries of the Buenos Aires Conference, headquartered in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

By 1942 he took up the same functions in the Austral Union Conference, territory that included Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay. In 1948 he was elected president of Uruguay Mission. Two years later he became president of the Central Argentine Conference, with headquarters in Paraná, Entre Ríos, Argentina. In 1954 the South American Division, headquartered in Montevideo, Uruguay, appointed him director of personal ministries,

and the General Conference Session in 1958 re-elected him.⁷ In 1960 the South American Division appointed him director of humanitarian assistance programs along with the responsibility of the public relations department. Finally, in 1963, the division appointed him director of the Sabbath School department.

Final Years and Legacy (1966-1987)

Because of his wife's health, Juan and Elodia moved to Glendale, California, United States, in 1966. There Juan Riffel started his ministry as chaplain and stayed for 19 years at White Memorial Medical Center, Los Angeles, California.⁸ At the same time he raised funds from doctors and patients for the building needs of River Plate Academy,⁹ becoming the former student who raised more funds for the student canteen in the history of the institution. Today it bears his name.

His ministry focused on the training of volunteers and laity. The motto of all his training was: "Go and preach!"¹⁰ He then promoted the training program called "Los 120 de hoy" [Today's 120].¹¹ Also he became noted for the missionary program "Un minuto para otros" [A minute for others].¹²

A prolific author, Riffel wrote articles and reports in *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] on the importance of the Sabbath School,¹³ personal ministries,¹⁴ and the devotional life.¹⁵ Juan died February 18, 1987, in Glendale, California, United States.

Pastor Juan Riffel was a charismatic leader in the training of church members in South America to enable them to be missionaries engaged in the preaching of the gospel.

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NOTES

1. The author thanks Hugo D. Riffel Rostán, Juan Riffel's son, for providing him an unpublished family document detailing his father's ministry. Sent by e-mail June 19, 2018. Dr. Hugo Riffel also made the final review of this article.
2. Daniel Oscar Plenc wrote a brief biography of David Riffel in the chapter "Una familia numerosa" [A Large Family], of the book *25 Historias de misioneros* [25 Stories of Missionaries] (Buenos Aires: South America Spanish Publishing House, 2013), 34-44.
3. 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* [Founding 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. For the Riffels family background, see Benjamín Riffel, *Providencias de Dios en métodos de superación que mejoran la personalidad* [Providences of God in methods that improve personality] (Coral Gables, Florida: Inter-America Publishing House, 1983), 26-29. See also: Juan Riffel, "Diamonds for God," in *Outward Bound* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1964), 241-246.

4. 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), Ana (1920-2001). Daniel and Alejandro died as children.
5. *La voz del colégio* [Voice of the Academy], Puiggari, Entre Ríos: 1925, s/n; *La voz del colégio* [Voice of the Academy], Puiggari, Entre Ríos: 1929, 9.
6. N. P. Neilsen, Walter Schubert, E. E. Andross, Walter Murray, H. G. Stoeler, and Carlos E. Krieghoff signed the ordination certificate. Hugo Riffel, email message to author, June 27, 2018.
7. "Division Directory," *South American Bulletin*, January-March 1958, 8. "General Conference Report no 6," *ARH*, June 26, 1958, 129.
8. Samuel D. Schmidt, "Necrología-Riffel" [Riffel Obituary], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], June 1987, 13.
9. 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." In *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.
10. Juan Riffel, "Y será predicado este evangelio..." [And this gospel will be preached...], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], November 6, 1944, 3, 5.
11. See Juan Riffel's articles, "Para formar parte de los 120 de Hoy" [To be part of the 120 of Today], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 1958, 9, 10. "Los 120 de Hoy en la Asociación Argentina Central" [Today's 120 in the Argentine Central Conference], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], April 1958, 14. "Investidura de los 120 de hoy" [Investiture of the 120 of today], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], May 1958, 16.
12. See Juan Riffel's articles, "Una donación excepcional" [An exceptional donation], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 7, 1944, 11, 12. "La recolección como actividad ganadora de almas" [Harvest-ingathering as soul-winning activity], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 1959, 7. "La más grande de todas: La campaña de recolección anual de 1958" [The largest of all: The 1958 annual harvest-ingathering campaign], *La Revista Adventista*, January 1958, 10. "Ingathering: A Soul-Winning," *South American Bulletin*, July-September 1959, 2.
13. See Juan Riffel's articles, "Cómo conseguir que la escuela sabática agrade a los niños" [How to get Sabbath School to please children], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 1944, 5, 15. "La escuela sabática gana almas" [Sabbath School wins souls], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 7, 1944, 16. "Dos importantes asambleas" [Two important assemblies], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 9, 1944, 15. *Missions Quarterly*, Fourth Quarter, 1966, 2.
14. See Juan Riffel's articles, "Asamblea de predicadores voluntarios" [Assembly of volunteer preachers], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], July 10, 1944, 13. "Y será predicado este evangelio..." [And this gospel will be preached], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], November 6,

1944, 3, 5. "Notas de la Misión Uruguaya" [Notes of Uruguay Mission], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], March 1949, 9, 10. "Nos están esperando" [They are waiting for us], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], April 1949, 6, 7. "Los predicadores voluntarios de la Asociación Argentina Central" [The volunteer preachers of the Central Argentina Conference], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 1953, 13, 14. "Interesantes aspectos de la obra misionera en la Unión Incaica - I" [Interesting aspects of missionary work in the Inca Union - I], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 1958, 13. "Interesantes aspectos de la obra misionera en la Unión Incaica - II" [Interesting aspects of missionary work in the Inca Union - II], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 1958, 10. "Interesantes aspectos de la obra misionera en la Unión Incaica - III" [Interesting aspects of missionary work in the Inca Union - III], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], April 1958, 11.

15. See Juan Riffel's articles, "Peligros que amenazan a la iglesia" [Dangers that threaten the church], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], June 1953, 3, 15. "Peligros que amenazan la iglesia - II" [Dangers that threaten the church - II], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], August 1953, 4, 5.

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