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RIO de JANEIRO YOUTH CONFERENCE

By
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The fourth Baptist Youth World Conference at Rio de Janeiro was one of the most successful international Baptist gatherings ever held. It was attended by over 10,000, most of whom were Brazilians. Total delegate registration reached 1,500 representing thirty countries. Nothing happened to mar the vigorous spiritual relationship of the races. This was in part due to the superb preparation for the conference. The Brazilians under the leadership of Werner Kaschel demonstrated masterful maturity and know-how in conference technique. Everything was perfect including registration, entertainment, housing, and decorations. The First Baptist Church, Rev. John Soren, pastor, was beautifully adorned outside with a row of silver staffs from which floated the flags of the nations represented, and inside with oil painted national shields. The building which seats about 1,200 people was always crowded with fully 600 others packed into the aisles and foyer. The Brazilians were aided in their preparation by the Youth Committee of the Baptist World Alliance, Robert S. Demy, Nashville, Tenn., chairman, and Joel Sorenson, youth secretary, Stockholm, Sweden. The committee under leadership of these men worked for two years arranging the program and enlisting attendance. They raised more than \$30,000 to finance expenses of many of the delegates.

The conference was fully spiritual, marked by a conscious devotion to the Living Christ. The theme "The Living Christ Must Reign" echoed in every single message. The delegates were dedicated Baptist young people as much concerned with the practice of Christianity as they were the idea of Christianity. On Sunday they formed out into the rural sections to preach Christ. One group because of a broken-down bus failed to reach the appointed place. Undaunted, the youth selected a street corner and began singing. Roger Fredrickson, Ottawa, Kan., preached. Several of the Brazilians raised their hands indicating interest. Fredrickson said of the experience, "Surely God was there."

One may also say that it was a studious conference. Each of the seventeen seminars conducted daily attracted maximum crowds of eager, thoughtful youth. After the first few minutes of uneasiness, due to language difficulties and the necessary adjustment of leaders to interpretation, the seminars were marked by quick and free exchange of ideas. Questions were intelligent. Observers had little

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doubt that these alert young people were true Baptists in line with our common traditions. In the evenings great crowds of Rio young people swarmed the lovely grounds of the First Baptist Church two hours before sessions began. They stood in a line sometimes a block long hoping to get into the church even for standing room. And in the mornings the auditorium was always full at 8:30 to hear Dr. Culbert Rutenber of Pennsylvania in his powerful Bible studies. The devotion of so many youth from so many nations says much for the present maturity and the future strength of the Baptist denomination in the world.

Also, the conference was forward-looking. It adjourned with two convictions apparent. First, the youth went home sobered by the bigness of their world and convinced surely that "the Living Christ MUST reign." The bigness of the world was accented by their discovery of the bigness of Latin America, a continent vast and rich, now in its industrial and agricultural infancy. So vital was the Brazilian Baptist witness that the conference no doubt has brought about the shifting of the Baptist world axis to include in a way never included before this vital young Baptist community of Brazil now numbering ninety-two churches. These discoveries plus the life strengthening throb of Baptist world spiritual fellowship brought the other conviction, voiced by many a young person like this, "We've had such a wonderful time we must all meet again soon."

A conference like this can't help but have a strong, unifying effect for Baptists the world over. Indeed, during the conference itself one of the most satisfying experiences was the regional meetings. There were four of them Europe, North America, South America, and Australasia. The one from North America was especially successful. The young people recognizing certain secondary differences among Baptist groups of North America, felt that in spite of these, there could be much gained through regular seminars or conferences for fellowship and for study of the faith.

At the close there were salient questions (1) when do we meet again? Joel Sorenson said this would be determined by the direction taken by the Baptist World Alliance itself. Will the youth want to meet in connection with that body? Or will they seek a meeting similar to the Rio conference in 1958? (2) Is there a deficit for the Rio meeting? There is no deficit according to Robert S. Denny.

As always is true with any Baptist meeting, one of the high points was the music. The fellowship never reached higher than in a moment of lofty spiritual fervor the tongues mingled in "Bless Be the Tie That Binds." The tie of unity in Christ, so keenly felt by the young people, is an overtone of joy and vitality that will last for many months to come. The youth are showing us the way.