

Lohne, Alf

(1915–1993)

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Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

Alf Lohne was a dynamic leader.¹ His kind and honest personality, combined with his good abilities and enthusiasm quickly brought him into leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, where he served for more than 50 years. Most of the time his influence was felt primarily in the Scandinavian countries and Northern Europe, but as a milestone in his service was his work at the General Conference for the Church in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the communist era.

Early Years

Alf Lohne was born in Kristiansand, Norway, October 31, 1915.² His parents were Edvard August and Anna Helene (née Berntsen) Lohne.³ Alf's mother, who was an Adventist, died when Alf was 15. The same year her sister, Oline Berntsen, had Alf enrolled in the Adventist school, Onsrud Missionskole in Jessheim. He studied there from 1931 to 1935. When he arrived in 1931, he was a smoker, but according to the rules of the school he immediately had to drop the cigarettes, and he did. The high standard of the school influenced him, and he was converted and baptized by Pastor O.S. Lie in 1932. The schooling was influential to his future life course and inspired him to choose the gospel ministry. In his last school year, he became close friends with Agnes Plata Torkelsen, and they married in 1940.⁴

During the summer of 1932-1935 Alf Lohne went canvassing with Adventist literature. When he left school in 1935, he commenced working as a Bible worker with the veteran preacher T.S. Valen. A year later he worked on



Alf Lohne.

Photo courtesy of the Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists (HASDA).

his own as an evangelist in East and North Norway. From the start he experienced God's blessings and saw progress in his work. In 1939 he was granted study leave to continue his studies at Newbold College in England.⁵ Because of the war he had to return to Norway after only a year.⁶ Here he was elected as Sabbath school and Youth director for the West Nordic Union (Denmark, Iceland and Norway) with its office in Oslo.⁷ However, because of the war, Norway was cut off from the rest of the union, travelling was restricted, and conducting evangelistic meetings was hampered by the occupying German forces. Public meetings were allowed, but it was impossible to obtain the use of satisfactory halls. "In Trondheim the Germans took our beautiful church for a hospital, but the effort continued in the cellar and many souls were won.... In spite of all difficulties, the work has gone on mightily. We have won more souls these years than ever before."⁸

As a departmental director during the war, Lohne showed clear evidence of courage and enthusiasm, which was to characterize the rest of his life.⁹ It was also during this time that he began developing his writing skills by attending courses in journalism.¹⁰ He was the editor of the union youth paper, *Advent Ungdom*, from 1940-1946.¹¹ He was ordained to the gospel ministry by pastor P.G. Nelson in Oslo in 1945.¹²

After a year at the Theological Seminary in Takoma Park, D.C., U.S.A., 1946-1947,¹³ Lohne was elected Sabbath School and Youth director for the Northern European Division.¹⁴ One memorable event for the participants, especially from the Nordic countries, was the youth rally in Dovre, Norway, in 1947. For many that was the first reunion after the war. Alf Lohne coordinated the meetings.¹⁵ To his responsibilities were added the office of press relations,¹⁶ where he made an outstanding contribution.¹⁷

Administrative Responsibilities

In 1950 Lohne was elected president of the East Norway Conference.¹⁸ However, his administrative duties did not stop him from actively engaging in public evangelism. He started a series of public meetings in Oslo that became known a long way outside the city limits. Before the meetings were due to start, people had lined up from Bøndernes Hus (The House of the Farmers) in Rosenkrantz gate down the street and all the way, almost 200 meters, to the entrance of the Grand Hotel in Karl Johan gate, where the meetings were held.

After a busy year as conference president, Lohne was asked to be the president of the West Nordic Union, a position he was to hold for the next 16 years (1952-1967).¹⁹ One of the main challenges facing the Union was to build a new junior college for the young people of Norway. The old school buildings at Onsrud had been so badly damaged by troops stationed there during the war that it was not economical to repair them. So, the property was sold, and the proceeds were set aside to be used for the establishment of a new school.²⁰ In the meantime, many Norwegian students attended Vejle fjord High School in Denmark (1952-1958).

A committee under the chairmanship of Lohne found a choice site for the school on the shores of Lake Tyrifjord in the heart of southern Norway and acquired it in 1955. By 1958 a new administration building, an office building, and one dormitory were completed. In September of that year the school was able to open its doors to

students.²¹

Lohne's main focus as a church leader was to bring the hope of salvation to as many people as possible. He developed a series of 21 lectures, with slides and cassette tapes, to be used by church members. He worked on this mainly during his free hours and at night. This series became a success right from the beginning, it engaged many lay evangelists, opened many homes, and brought many converts into the church in Denmark and Norway.²²

With two publishing houses, two junior colleges, a food factory, a physiotherapy school, a large sanitarium and several other health institutions in Denmark and Norway there were often board meetings to chair and many challenges to meet in addition to evangelistic and church growth activities. Despite these challenges, Lohne took time to write many articles and several books, especially on practical Christianity. He wrote two books for the youth, *Foran ligger livet* (The Life Ahead of You) and *I morgen begynder i dag* (Tomorrow Begins Today). His book *Trygge spor* (Confident Tracks) became a classic as an introduction to the Advent message.²³ From 1951 to 1967 Lohne edited the union ministerial paper *Sjelevinneren* (The Soulwinner).²⁴

International leadership

The year 1967 marked a turning point in Lohne's active service. He was elected secretary of the Northern European Division, later to become the Northern Europe-West Africa Division.²⁵ There followed six demanding years in a division where the mission fields were in rapid development. In 1972 he reported of his visit to one country, Upper Volta in West Africa, that had recently been entered with the message of the "everlasting gospel."²⁶ In 1973 he was elected as president of the Division.²⁷ During his time in the Division he was also editor of the division paper *Light* (formerly *Northern Light*).²⁸

At the General Conference session in 1975 he was elected a general vice-president of the General Conference.²⁹

Special Assignment

One of Lohne's main responsibilities in the new office at the General Conference was to coordinate the work of the Church in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. The General Conference leaders knew that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had many members there. But how did they fare? Lohne was asked to find out. It was before the fall of the iron curtain, and communism still dominated. Freedom of conscience was under increasing pressure, the right to choose one's spiritual course in life met with stronger and stronger resistance, and the churches there felt it almost daily.³⁰ Lohne had already visited the U.S.S.R. in 1969 on a tourist visa. At the request of the General Conference, he returned in 1977 and was much encouraged by the difference in climate among Adventists.³¹ From then on Alf and Agnes Lohne made several journeys to these areas. They became well known and dear to the tens of thousands of faithful members they met.³² With the help

of other administrators, Lohne accomplished the delicate task of bringing about reconciliation among the different factions of the church in the U.S.S.R. in a time when religious activities were restricted. During those years a strong foundation was laid that bore more fruit after restrictions were lifted.³³ Pastor Lohne, who was an eminent communicator and gifted writer, kept the World Church up to date on these visits in the *Review and Herald* and thus prepared the way for closer relationships with brothers and sisters in the East.³⁴ In his book *Adventists in Russia*,³⁵ he gave an insight into the beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist work in that part of the world, as well as intriguing stories of his visits there.

Later Years

As vice-president of the General Conference, Lohne also traveled to other parts of the world to keep in touch with areas that could not easily report back to the GC headquarters. In a report from his visit to China in 1980 he told of the changes for the better that were taking place there. During the cultural revolution and the subsequent rule of the “gang of four” those who practiced religion were in great danger. Imprisonment, mistreatment, torture and even death were not uncommon. By 1980 the situation for Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians was rapidly changing. Sabbath keeping and serving the country as a conscientious objector were now allowed. He observed that there was a great shortage of Bibles but was told by a bishop that the government had made provisions for printing 100,000 new Bibles before the end of the year. Lohne was much encouraged by seeing people crowding into the churches, by listening to the impressive singing, and by hearing preachers holding the listeners spellbound by powerful sermons.³⁶

Lohne retired in 1985 and settled down with his wife, Agnes, in their native Norway. His gift of simply and clearly expressing himself in speech and writing made him a sought-after speaker. He had a flair for collecting apt illustrations to season his sermons. His last book, *Lyse Horisonter* (Bright Horizons),³⁷ has been a help to many people searching for meaning and led them to Jesus Christ.³⁸ From 1889 to 1993 he was editor for the paper *Aktiv Pensjonstid* (Active Retirement Time).³⁹ During what was to be his final sickness, two prominent representatives from the Adventist members in Russia visited Lohne in his home in Oslo. They came to bring their heartfelt appreciation for what he and his wife had meant for the work among the now nearly one hundred thousand members in the former Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Alf Lohne passed away on November 17, 1993.

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NOTES

1. Walder Hartmann, *Adventnyt*, No.1, 1994

2. Alfred C. Berger, "Minneord," *Evangeliets Sendebud*, December, 1993.

3. Biographical Information Blank of Alf Lohne, accessed by Sven H. Jensen from the archives at HASDA on March 18, 2022.

4. Hans Jørgen Schantz, *I troens bakspejl* (Nærum, Denmark, Dansk Bogforlag, 1998), 84-85.

5. Berger, "Minneord."

6. Schantz, 85.

7. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1941, 173.

8. Alf Lohne, "Wartime Evangelism in Norway," *Ministry Magazine*, March 1946, 5.

9. Berger, "Minneord."

10. Lohne took courses in journalism from Korrespondanse Akadamiet in Oslo in 1943 and from Norsk Korrespondanceskole also in Oslo in 1945. These were followed up by a course taught by J.R. Ferren when he attended the Theological Seminary in the United States in 1946 (Biographical Information on Alf Lohne kept in the archives of HASDA, Denmark; Hans Jørgen Schantz, *I troens bakspejl*, 84).
11. Biographical Information on Alf Lohne kept in the archives of HASDA.
12. Ibid.
13. Service Record of Alf Lohne, copy kept in the archives of HASDA, Denmark.
14. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1947, 133.
15. Berger, "Minneord."
16. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1949, 144.
17. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Alf Lohne."
18. Service Record of Alf Lohne, and *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1951, 163
19. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1952-1967.
20. C. L. Torrey, "New Junior College in Norway," *ARH*, January 22, 1959, 1 and 24.
21. Berger, "Minneord"; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Alf Lohne."
22. Author's personal knowledge and experience.
23. Schantz, 85.
24. Biographical Information on Alf Lohne kept in the archives of HASDA.
25. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1968, 177.
26. Alf Lohne, "Seventh-day Adventists Enter New Country," *ARH*, June 8, 1972, 1, 17-18.
27. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1973/1974, 207.
28. Biographical Information on Alf Lohne kept in the archives of HASDA.
29. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1976, 15; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Alf Lohne."

30. Berger, "Minneord."
31. Alf Lohne, *Adventists in Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1887), front flap.
32. Berger, "Minneord."
33. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Alf Lohne."
34. Alf Lohne, "I Preached to Thousands in the Soviet Union," *ARH*, July 14, 1977, 1, 4-5; "Siberian Adventists welcome first visitor from headquarters," *ARH*, November 24, 1983, 7-8; "Trip shows religion not eradicated in Soviet minds," *ARH*, November 1, 1984, 21-23.
35. Alf Lohne, *Adventists in Russia*, front flap. Also Published in Norwegian, Danish, German, Spanish, and Portuguese.
36. Alf Lohne, "China Report," *Ministry Magazine*, September 1980. 4-7
37. Published by Norsk Bokforlag, Oslo, Norway, 1986.
38. Berger, "Minneord."
39. Schantz, 84.
40. Berger, "Minneord."

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