

Anderson, Alfred (1894–1984)

BERTIL WIKLANDER

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Erik Alfred Anderson was a pioneering evangelist, pastor, administrator, and Bible teacher in Sweden.¹



Alfred Anderson, 1930.

Photo courtesy of Bertil Wiklander.

Early Life and Education

Alfred was born in Strömnäs, seven km south of Kramfors, in the parish of Gudmundrå in the province of Ångermanland on May 13, 1894. His parents were Otto Walfrid Anderson (1862-1940) and Sara Erika Nordlander (1865-1899). Otto worked as a farmer in Strömnäs and Sara came from a family of farmers near Sundsvall. As the fourth among five siblings, Alfred lost his mother who died of tuberculosis when he was 5 years old. His stepmother from his age of 11 was Petronella Nilsdotter (1872-1915). The children borne by Alfred's mother, Sara, were Fredrik Brynolf (born 1890), Ragnhild Eugenia (born 1891), Otto Alexander (born 1893; he lived only one day), Erik Alfred (1894-1984), and Otto Alexander (born 1896).²

Alfred completed the compulsory school (*folkskolan*) at the age of 13 and began work at the Strömnäs Sawmill. As a young man, he was known as a "loner," brooding on the meaning of life, the existence of God, and the trustworthiness of the Bible. His friends called him "the seeker." He dreamt of becoming a politician. His military service in 1915-1916 made him a persuaded pacifist.³

On April 13, 1918, Alfred married Anna Paulina Wiklander (1897-1962) from the small village of Viett in the parish of Styrvästra north of Kramfors. She was baptized and "confirmed" in the Lutheran church of Styrvästra in 1911 and had a firm Christian faith. Their lives radically changed in the spring of 1919, when Seth Lundström, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor from Härnösand, 37 km to the south, conducted evangelistic meetings in

Strömnäs. Anna was initially more interested than Alfred, but the presentations of biblical prophecies convinced him of Bible truth, and he experienced peace and joy as he gave his life to Christ. Both were baptized in Härnösand on August 3, 1919. Alfred's conversion developed into a calling to the preaching ministry.⁴

By the end of 1919, their son, Erik Bertil (1919-2009), was born. Next to his name in the Gudmundrå church book appears the note: "not baptized" and "Adventists."⁵ Alfred and Anna had three more children: Gösta Alfred (1923-2014), who became an SDA pastor and union president, Anne-Marie Gunborg (1925-2019), and Harry Folke (1926-2012). The three brothers took their mother's surname, Wiklander, in 1958.⁶

Ministry

In September 1920, the Anderson family moved to the Ministerial Seminary in Nyhyttan, Västmanland. Based on the level of his previous studies, Alfred started in the second year of the four-year course. Administration asked him to teach some of the lower classes, and he conducted successful evangelistic series near the school. After he graduated on April 30, 1923, the school hired by the school to care for the newly baptized and he did literature evangelism until the beginning of 1924.⁷

Alfred had a brief internship in Ronneby and Karlshamn in southern Sweden, during which he assisted pastor Clarence Anderson beginning January 15, 1924. Together they reported a good number of baptisms. The family then moved to Stockholm in the summer of 1924, where Alfred was an active youth leader while conducting evangelistic meetings.⁸

In the fall of 1925, Alfred Anderson received a call to northern Sweden, where he and his family remained for nine years. A remote area of Sweden near the Arctic circle, where Sabbath observance is particularly challenging, because of the sun setting at about 12.58 pm in December and not at all in parts of June, it had very few Adventists. Another challenge was the climate—the winter temperature could fall to minus 40 degrees Celsius. By God's grace and constant prayer combined with a deep sense of calling and an extraordinary commitment and tenacity, Alfred Anderson worked in Boden, Luleå, Svartöstaden and Södra Sunderbyn (1925-1927), Malmberget, Gällivare and Kiruna (1927-1929), Örnsköldsvik and Domsjö (1929-1930), Umeå and Vännäs (1930-1932), Sundsvall, Svartvik and Vivstavarv (1932-1934), baptizing more than 200 believers and founding four local churches. People began referring to him as the "Apostle of the North." The local conference session in July 1929 ordained for the ministry.⁹

After his pioneering work in the north, he returned to Stockholm as church pastor (1934-1937) and was elected as the North Swedish Conference president (1937-1942; re-elected 1942-1944).¹⁰ He continued to engage in evangelism, and as a result, during 1934-1944, the Stockholm church increased 25-30 members annually.¹¹ Besides holding various evangelistic series in Stockholm, Södertälje, and Uppsala, he founded a new Swedish church magazine called *Messages in Advent Times* through which he widely distributed his sermons. We can see their nature in his "World Events and the Future," published as chapter six in the book *När I sen allt detta* ("When

you see all these things") in 1942. With the Second World War raging around the Swedish borders (Hitler's plans to invade Sweden in August 1943 were not yet known) he used dramatic titles in advertising his meetings, drawing on the war as a sign of the Second Advent and, therefore, urging his audience to find salvation and peace in Jesus Christ.¹²

He became known as a powerful and engaged evangelist with a strong eschatological emphasis connected with a conservative Adventist Bible interpretation.¹³ Another trait that characterized him was his firm belief in God's intervention in human lives through miracles, dreams, and spiritual signs.¹⁴

Alfred Anderson then transferred to Göteborg, serving as the South Swedish Conference president (1944-1948; re-elected 1948-1950). When Anna's failing health forced him to end his busy administrative work, he accepted an appointment as Bible teacher at the Ministerial Seminary at Ekebyholm, Rimbo, and as chaplain at the "summer sanitarium." In 1954, he was again elected as the North Swedish Conference president, moving to Stockholm a third time. In 1958-1962 he resumed pastoral duties in Stockholm. However, Anna fell seriously ill and passed away during surgery in June 1962. Having reached the age of 68, Alfred formally retired shortly thereafter and moved to Göteborg, close to where his children lived with their families. On January 1, 1963, he began serving as a minister in the local church, conducting evangelistic meetings in Göteborg and Falkenberg.¹⁵

Through the years, his studies of Revelation 3 had led him to question the traditional Adventist understanding that "Laodicea" symbolized the SDA Church. He noted that God rejects lukewarm Laodicea in Revelation 3:15-17. Instead, he considered "Philadelphia" as the model of the true Seventh-day Adventist Church, calling attention to Ellen White's identification of Laodicea with apostate Adventists (*ARH*, August 19, 1890). He did not publicly share his views, however, but in 1968 he reported his research to the General Conference and left the matter in the hands of leadership.¹⁶

Alfred Anderson passed away on November 2, 1984, and was buried at Kviberg cemetery in Göteborg. His life had turned from darkness to light at his conversion to Jesus Christ in 1919. He then served his Lord faithfully for 65 years and was laid to rest "in the Lord," still awaiting His imminent return.¹⁷

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, information contained in this article is from the personal knowledge of the author.
2. Gösta Wiklander, *Styrda steg*, 2001, 3, 4; Gösta Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare* (Stockholm: Skandinaviska Bokförlaget 2012), 15-19.
3. Wiklander, *Styrda steg*, 4, 5; Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare*, 20-25.
4. Gösta Wiklander, *Styrda steg*, 2001, 5-10; Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare*, 26-31.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Gösta Wiklander, *I vår Herres tjänst*, 6.
7. Gösta Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare*, 32-34.
8. Ibid., 35-39.
9. For further details regarding the years of intense evangelism in the North in 1925-34, see ibid., 40-122.

10. For some of Alfred Anderson's division reports as conference president, see: Alfred Anderson, "The North Swedish Conference," *The Advent Survey*, April 1938, 1, 2; Alfred Anderson, "The North Swedish Conference," May 1939, *The Advent Survey*, 2; Alfred Anderson, "Possibilities for Lay Evangelism," *The Advent Survey*, April 1940, 5, 6.
11. One such meeting led by Alfred Anderson was recorded in some detail in William T. Bartlett, "Workers Meeting in Stockholm," *The Advent Survey*, December 1937, 7, 8.
12. Gösta Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare*, 2012, 122-151. Ingemar Lindén's doctoral thesis (*Biblicism – Apocalypticism – Utopia*, 1971) gives special attention to Alfred Anderson's eschatological-evangelistic preaching style, which had deep roots in Seventh-day Adventism (pp. 398-401), and his public debates in newspapers concerning biblical truths neglected by other Christians (pp. 412-414). Cf. the study of Anderson's sermons in Gösta Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare* (Stockholm: Skandinaviska Bokförlaget, 2012, 174-179).
13. Yvonne Johannsson Öster, "Alfred Anderson." *Svenskt Frikyrkolexikon*, 2014.
14. This is apparent in his private "Book of Experiences," in which he collected experiences of how God had answered prayers and healed the sick as well as dreams and signs and their fulfillment; see Gösta Wiklander, *Från stabbläggare till förkunnare*, 185-189.
15. Ibid., 152-164, 158-164, 166-172, 190-191, 193-194, 196-202.
16. Ibid., 180-184.
17. See further Olle Eriksson, "Alfred Anderson *In memoriam*," *Missionären*, December 14, 1984, 14.

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