

# Tobiassen, Tobias

## (1876–1963)

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### SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

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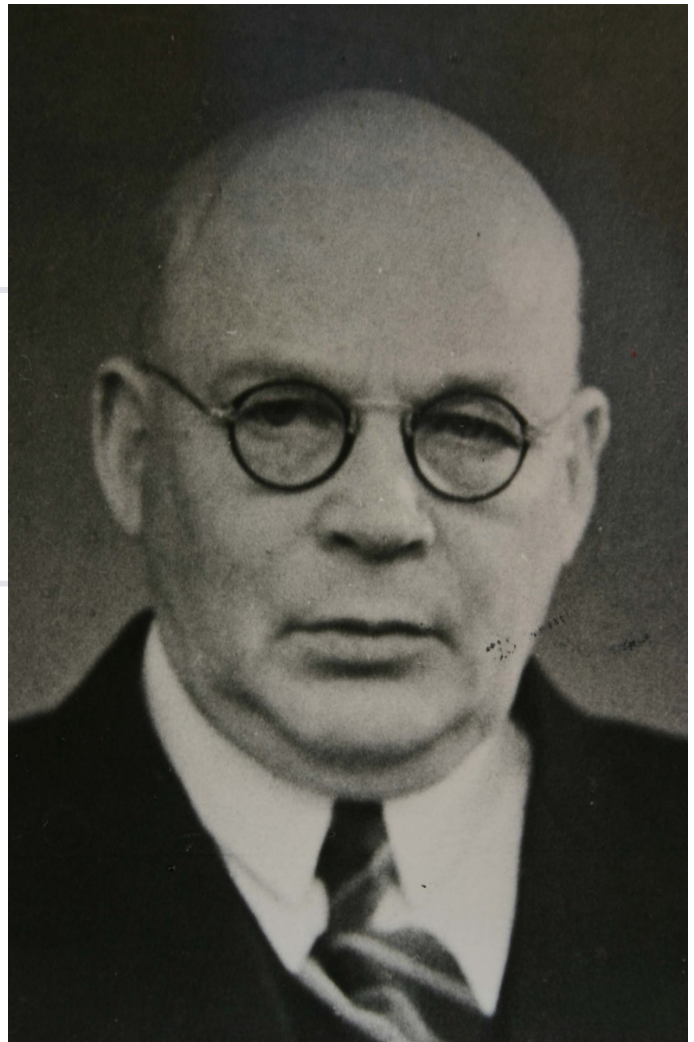
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Tobias Tobiassen became an Adventist in his 40s when he began his preaching ministry. He was one of the most successful Seventh-day Adventist preachers in Denmark and Norway of his time, and later also added administrative responsibilities to his service for the church. Many were led to the Savior through his ministry.

### Early Life

Tobias Tobiassen was born on October 11, 1876, in Kristiansand, Norway, the oldest of six siblings.<sup>1 2</sup> He completed his elementary school, which much later in life was supplemented with some evening courses in Copenhagen.<sup>3</sup> Early in his life he learned to work. He began as an errand boy, and at the age of 8, he toiled long hours at the rolling wheel in the tobacco factory for 13 øre a day.<sup>4 5</sup> Six years as an apprentice to a butcher set the course for life in Frederikshavn in Denmark where he worked his way to becoming the leader of a factory that canned fishing products. In Frederikshavn, he met Karoline Mathilde Johansen<sup>6</sup>, whom he married in 1901 and who became the mother of their four sons: Erland, Carl, Erling, and Erik.<sup>7</sup>

Tobiassen came from a deeply religious home,<sup>8</sup> and he had begun to attend the Methodist church.<sup>9</sup> His brother, Christian, had in the meantime become an Adventist at home in Norway and zealously worked to lead him to conversion by sending him tracts and other literature - but without any success. Tobias was just as zealous to get his younger brother out of the Adventist church, considering it a sad delusion. Self-assured, Tobias made the



Tobias Tobiassen.

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

trip to Norway to set his brother straight. Thoughtful, he returned to Denmark after the greatest defeat of his life. Later, he would consider his brother Christian his spiritual father.<sup>10 11</sup>

Then a tragedy happened. One Sabbath morning, Tobiassen's firstborn lay deadly mutilated under a train just outside the Adventist meeting hall in Frederikshavn. A doctor tried to save him, but four-year-old Erland expired in the arms of his mother.<sup>12</sup> This tragedy became a turning point for Tobiassen and his wife. New longings were born. Their goal became heaven. In 1906, they decided to be baptized and became members of the Seventh-day Adventist church.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, Tobias lost his job, but the Adventist health institution, Skodsborg Sanatorium north of Copenhagen, welcomed him and employed him for 13 years, first as assisting business manager and also as leader of the fruit preservation plant.<sup>14</sup> When the sanatorium needed a stoker, Tobiassen offered to take the lower position and at the same time prepared for his engineer examination. He became known as "the reading and studying stoker." His last position at the Sanatorium was manager.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, he involved himself eagerly in church life. Sabbath School especially meant much to him, first as a student, then as a teacher, and then as a leader. He started to lead in small meetings and then in worship services. The conference saw the potential in him and began to send him out as a lay preacher to other churches on Sabbath. He mentioned later, "The Sabbath School is the only Adventist school I ever attended, and it can well be said that it was through this experience that I came out in the direct mission work."<sup>16</sup>

## Preacher and Church Leader

Public evangelism became his love and passion. In 1917, during World War I, he was called as an intern to the gospel ministry at the age of 41 and lead his first evangelism meetings in Kongens Lyngby while still at Skodsborg.<sup>17</sup> Then followed a major effort in Slagelse in 1918 where he planted a church of 57 members. In quick succession he worked in Kalundborg and Næstved and had many respond to his evangelistic efforts wherever he went. He had found his real calling. In 1920, that calling was confirmed by an ordination service in Copenhagen, where A. G. Daniells, L. R. Conradi, and L. H. Christian officiated.<sup>18</sup>

At an evangelistic series in the large hall of the Odd Fellow Palace in Copenhagen in 1920-1922, many attended, and almost 200 people were baptized and accepted into the church. Then followed meetings in Hillerød, Helsingør, Aarhus, and Aalborg.<sup>19</sup> Someone wrote about him that his "great evangelistic efforts went as a whirlwind over the country. Without apology it can be said, that T. T. as well as the brother Chr. T. belong to the golden age of evangelism for the advent people in our countries." Further "T. T.'s sermons were well organized, logical masterpieces. When he had spoken, one knew what had been spoken about. The words and thoughts were nailed to the inner chambers of the memory."<sup>20</sup> His greatness as a preacher did not lie in the fluctuating emotional proclamation. "You do not build your faith on emotions, but on the word of God," he said. And yet he set the longings of his audience in uproar and their hearts on fire. But it was especially as a distinctive and

concise speaker that he established his fame.<sup>21</sup>

After seven years of intense and wholehearted evangelism, he was asked to be the president of the Norwegian Conference (1924-1929). Then followed presidencies in the South Norway Conference (1929-1931) and the East Denmark Conference (1931-1938). From 1938-1939, he was asked to be the director of Fysisk Kuranstalt, a health institution in Copenhagen, and then back to Norway as president of the North Norwegian Conference (1939-1942).<sup>22</sup>

In World War II, a special situation arose. The West Nordic Union Conference (WNU), comprising Denmark, Norway, Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland, could no longer be directed from the Union headquarters in Akersgatan 74 in Oslo, Norway. At the beginning of 1941, it was decided to move the union president, P.G. Nelson, and the union treasurer, A.C. Christensen, to Denmark. The other workers in the union would remain in Norway. The oldest of the two presidents in Norway, T. Tobiassen, would, in addition to his responsibility for North Norway, be asked to serve as WNU vice president (1941-1945) overseeing all the work in Norway. The union committee was divided into two so one part would take care of the work in Denmark and the other Norway, although they tried very hard to stay in close contact. For practical reasons, the WNU committee in Norway would work under the name "De Norske Syvende Dags Adventisters Fællesraad" (The Joint Council of the Norwegian Seventh-day Adventists).<sup>23</sup> When, in 1942, Norway was divided into four conferences, Tobiassen took over the presidency of the East Norway Conference (1941-1945) and remained as a member of the Union committee until 1946.<sup>24</sup>

Even as a church leader he continued to conduct evangelistic meetings. As he said, "It would be unbearable to be president if one could not have evangelistic efforts."<sup>25</sup> He also found time to write a book in Norwegian with the title *På Klippegrund* (Grounded on the Rock).<sup>26</sup> As a leader, Pastor Tobiassen belonged to the patriarchal school: authoritative, impartial, and just. He did not seek popularity by fickleness or flattery. He took his stand after mature consideration without regard to what might benefit himself, and he had the courage of his opinions.<sup>27</sup>

From 1946, he served as a pastor in the West Denmark Conference until his retirement in 1949. But even as a retiree, he was sought after and a popular speaker. The evening before he fell ill, he was working on a new sermon. As a person, he was kind even when he stood "at the pinnacle of power" in the full strength of manhood. He was if anything a reluctant person, and there was a certain reservation in his dominating personality. Still, he understood how to come into vital contact with his surroundings. He was easy to talk with. He was married twice, first with Karoline, the boys' mother who died in 1936. "Much of the credit goes to her for him becoming the great preacher he became." He married Edith in 1939, and they enjoyed 24 years together before he was laid to rest in Odense on November 20, 1963.<sup>28</sup>

## Legacy

Pastor Tobias Tobiassen will be primarily remembered for his zeal and talent for evangelism and for the many he brought to Christ. He was a respected leader in the Adventist cause wherever he was needed.

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Tobiassen, T., Undated notes kept in the archives of HASDA, Denmark.

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## NOTES

1. T. Tobiassen to L. Muderspach (president of the Danish Conference), April 25, 1928, Letter, 1. Kept in the archives of HASDA, Denmark.
2. Børge Larsen, "På besøg hos T. Tobiassen" (Visiting T. Tobiassen), interview with T. Tobiassen, *Adventnyt*, January 6, 1962, 6.
3. T. Tobiassen to L. Muderspach, 1.
4. Emanuel Pedersen, "Ungdommelig fødselar" (Youthful birthday person), *Adventnyt*, November 1956, 3.
5. 1 Danish krone = 100 øre. The value of 13 øre in 1886 would be an estimated DKR 10.50 (US\$ 1.62) in 2020.
6. Karoline Mathilde Johansen (1880-1936).
7. Emanuel Pedersen, "Ungdommens fødselar," 6.
8. Børge Larsen, 6.
9. T. Tobiassen, Undated notes kept in the archives of HASDA, Denmark.
10. Emanuel Pedersen, "Pastor T. Tobiassen in memoriam," *Adventnyt*, February 14, 1964, 14.

11. Christian Tobiassen later became a successful Seventh-day Adventist preacher in Norway.
12. Emanuel Pedersen, "Pastor T. Tobiassen in memoriam," *Adventnyt*, February 14, 1964, 14.
13. Emanuel Pedersen, "Ungdommelig fødselar," 4.
14. Børge Larsen, 6.
15. Emanuel Pedersen, "Pastor T. Tobiassen in memoriam," 14.
16. T. Tobiassen to L. Muderspach, 1.
17. Ibid.
18. Børge Larsen, 6.
19. Committee action in Norwegian from an unidentified committee (West Nordic Union Conference or East Norwegian Conference) with a discussion of the retirement benefits of the widow after T. Tobiassen and a record of his services.
20. Emanuel Pedersen, "Ungdommens fødselar," 4.
21. Emanuel Pedersen, "Pastor T. Tobiassen in memoriam," 14.
22. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbooks*, 1925-1942.
23. P. G. Nelson, "Unionsbestyrelsesmedlemmer i Danmark" (Union Committee members in Denmark), *Missionsefterretninger*, May 1941, 2-3.
24. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbooks*, 1943-1946.
25. Emanuel Pedersen, "Pastor T. Tobiassen in memoriam," 14.
26. Børge Larsen, 7.
27. Emanuel Pedersen, "Pastor T. Tobiassen in memoriam," 15.
28. Ibid.

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