

Meyer, Sylvain (1922–2014) and Liliane (Streit-dit-Provins) (1922–2000)

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Roland Meyer, Docteur en théologie protestante (Doctor of Protestant Theology) (Strasbourg University, France), was a teacher and a pastor in the Swiss French Conference. He taught systematic theology teacher at the Adventist University of France. His published articles and books include *La vie après la mort. Saint Paul défenseur de la résurrection* (1989), *Le retour à la vie* (1997), *Paul et les femmes* (2013), "Pourquoi Jésus est-il mort sur la croix?" in *Servir: Revue adventiste de théologie* (2018). Meyer collaborated on the revisions of the *Nouvelle Bible Segond* (2002) and the *Bible en français courant* (2019).

Sylvain Meyer served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as pastor, missionary, and administrator during much of his life in Switzerland, Réunion, and Cameroon. Liliane Meyer was a nurse and joined her husband in the mission field.

Early Life

Sylvain was born November 16, 1922, in Algiers, while his parents, Albert and Marguerite Meyer, were missionaries in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.¹ During his childhood, Sylvain lived both in Algeria and Morocco, an intercultural experience which built the foundation for his life. He became acquainted with his home country, Switzerland, on holidays between the missionary appointments of his parents. In 1936 the family returned to Europe, initially to Angers, France, before settling in Switzerland in 1938. There Sylvain's father was appointed president of the Conference of French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino (at that time, the Lemman Conference). Sylvain then began his studies at the Lausanne Business School.²

Education and Marriage

Like his father, Meyer wanted to be a pastor. In October 1940, during the Second World War, he began his theological studies at the Adventist Seminary in Collonges-sous-Salève, France. During this period, he was actively involved in the life of the Adventist Youth of French-speaking Switzerland and in the spiritual and social life of the seminary. German army troops occupied the area and, like many students from this time and region, he helped some of the Jews cross the French-Swiss border.

On September 1, 1943, he was hired as a pastor by the Lemman Conference in Switzerland. The war was not yet over; thus, Meyer visited and provided supplies to refugees in the nearby camps of the region. In the spring of 1946, the Southern European Division asked Meyer to go to Réunion Island, Indian Ocean Union Mission, as a missionary. Réunion was mainly a Catholic territory, and Adventism had been introduced to this region about ten years earlier thanks to the work of Paul Girard's family.³ With the need for more missionary work, and the transfer of the Girards to the North African Union Mission,⁴ Meyer accepted this call. He was then dating Liliane Streit-dit-Provins, granddaughter of Henri Streit-dit-Provins, who was one of the first preachers of the Lemman Conference in the early twentieth century. Liliane finished her training as a nurse at La Lignière Clinic, located by Lake Geneva, Switzerland. In order to promptly answer the call, the couple was married on July 18, 1946.

Mission Work in Réunion and Cameroon

Sylvain Meyer was ordained as a pastor in Geneva on October 5, 1946. The ceremony was conducted by Walter Raymond Beach, president of the Southern European Division, Robert Gerber, treasurer, and by Sylvain's father, Albert Meyer, then head of the Ministerial Association of the division.

On October 10, 1946, they began their journey from Geneva to Marseille to Réunion Island via the Suez Canal. They were joined by Roland Vertallier and his wife. M. Vitry, a missionary from Mauritius, later joined this team.⁵ In 1947 the Réunion Mission was organized with Meyer as director.⁶ That same year, on April 6, 1947, Monique their first child was born. On October 1, 1948, medical work began. After more than a year of waiting for authorization to open a dispensary, the mission received approval. Liliane Meyer directed the dispensary with assistance from C. Kone-Sone, a nurse and midwife. The opening of the clinic enabled Liliane and the midwives of the region to welcome women and their infants for consultation and treatment. Liliane Meyer used the contact with patients to add other lines of social service. She influenced the Dorcas Society of St. Pierre Adventist church⁷ to make clothes for children. After the cyclone of 1948 that devastated the island of Réunion, clothing received from the United States was also distributed to the people. This was combined with the distribution of tracts, magazines, and Bibles.⁸ Evangelistic meetings were also conducted, even though the population did not always receive Adventists in a friendly manner.⁹

In 1949 a baptism was conducted that saw 40 people join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁰ This was significant in that Adventists were the only Protestant denomination in Réunion at the time. Several attempts by other Protestants to establish a church on the island had not succeeded. Adventists in Réunion likewise had a rough beginning. They were generally rejected by the people, and groups of children would follow them calling them "Dirty Protestants!"¹¹

On August 12, 1950, Roland, the Meyers' second child, was born. On May 5, 1951, the family left Réunion Island on furlough. While on furlough, the Southern European Division asked Meyer to go to Cameroon in the French Equatorial African Union Mission. There Meyer became the director of the Kribi Mission from 1952 to 1954.¹²

From 1954 onwards, Meyer was the director of the Nanga-Eboko Mission in Cameroon. At the same time, he served as principal of the newly opened French Cameroon Training School there.¹³ When he arrived at Nanga-Eboko, Meyer expanded the existing school and organized the seminary to train pastors. A dormitory for boys and girls and an apartment for teachers was built.¹⁴ While he taught and managed the mission, Liliane developed the clinic and taught courses related to health. This missionary assignment, interspersed with a holiday in Europe, ended in July 1960. Before they left Nanga-Eboko, Meyer laid down plans for the construction of a church for the leper colony in Mvobeti.¹⁵

Administrator in Switzerland

When the Meyer family returned to Europe, Meyer was next appointed pastor of the Adventist church in Geneva, Switzerland. He did this for 15 months until the division asked him to take over the management of La Lignière Clinic in Gland in 1962. The French Swiss Conference also gave him the responsibility of leading the church in the clinic. During this period (1962-1974), Sylvain organized a significant construction program planned by the division to develop the clinic, as well as the construction of a new chapel. The various medical departments were developing, and the number of beds was increasing considerably. Liliane helped to manage the physiotherapy section.

In May 1974 Meyer became the secretary-treasurer of the French Swiss Conference.¹⁶ Beginning in 1978 he was in charge of the churches in the Canton of Valais in the South of Switzerland. In 1981 Meyer was appointed director of the medical and social establishment (retirement home) "Le Flon" in Oron-la-Ville. Liliane was appointed head nurse and governess of the establishment. Meyer had various other responsibilities in addition to managing the institution: he was pastor of the church at the retirement home, secretary of the Swiss Union, director of the Communication, Stewardship, and Temperance departments, as well as manager of "La Ligue Vie et Santé."¹⁷

Later Life

Sylvain Meyer retired in November 1987 and, with his wife, settled in Lausanne, Switzerland. The conference gave them the responsibility for the Adventist Relief Center in the city, which they managed for a decade. Sylvain also served as a pastor for a three-year interim period at the Adventist Church in Lausanne. His wife's health declined and she passed away in 2000. Later, at the age of 80, Meyer renewed ties with a friend from his youth, the widow Madeleine Vasserot Garsin. They married in 2002. Meyer enjoyed the company of his second wife for 12 years. He died March 15, 2014, at age 92. Three months before his death he was still active in voluntary service for the conference.

Contribution

Sylvain and Liliane Meyer were strongly devoted to the Adventist Church. Early in his career, Meyer contributed to the development of the Adventist Youth ministry in French-speaking Switzerland. Between 1946 and 1960, the missionary commitment of the Meyers in Réunion and Cameroon greatly contributed to the development of Seventh-day Adventism's influence in the areas of church life and education. The years in Switzerland enabled Meyer to contribute actively towards the development of La Lignière Clinic, the French-Swiss Conference, and the home for elderly people, "Le Flon."

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Read more about Albert and Marguerite Meyer in Meyer, Albert in this encyclopedia.
2. Raymond, Sylvain's elder brother, was born in Lausanne (Switzerland) in 1916, and his sister Isabelle was born in Sainte-Croix (Switzerland) in 1917.
3. See "Réunion Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1937), 218.
4. The 1948 yearbook shows that Paul Girard had become the superintendent of the North African Union Mission. See "North African Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 204. In Réunion, he served as the director of the mission while his wife served as the secretary-treasurer. See "Réunion Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938), 224.
5. Mention of this is made in a letter from Sylvain Meyer dated August 12, 1948. See Marius Fridlin, "Good News from Lands Afar," *Quarterly Review*, December 1948, 10.

6. See the mention of this in "Réunion Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 209. Roland Vertallier and his wife were also at this time working with the Meyers in Réunion.
 7. Since this was a Catholic region, there were towns and cities like St. Denis and St. Pierre. It is logical that the Adventist church there was named after the city of St. Pierre.
 8. See Fridlin, "Good News from Lands Afar," 10.
 9. Once during one of the meetings conducted near a village airfield, they were received with stones. See *Ibid*.
 10. "Here and There," *Quarterly Review*, March 1950, 12.
 11. See Albert Meyer, "Our Missions in the Indian Ocean," *Quarterly Review*, September 1948, 3; Fridlin, "Good News from Lands Afar," 10.
 12. "Kribi Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 205.
 13. See "Nanga-Eboko," and "French Cameroon Training School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), 180, 209; Marius Fridlin, "God's Spirit at Work in Mission Lands," *Quarterly Review*, March 1955, 11.
 14. See "Southern European Division" in "In Brief," *ARH*, April 4, 1957, 26.
 15. This church was constructed by Edwin Ludescher the successor of Meyer in Nanga-Eboko. See J. M. Eyetemou, "A Church for the Lepers in Cameroun," *Quarterly Review*, December 1961, 1.
 16. It covered the French and Italian speaking territories of Switzerland.
 17. "La Ligue Vie et Santé is an organization in a conference or in union that organizes health programs in France. For instance, the Five-day Plan. See "Swiss Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 177.
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