

Schuberth, Heinrich Franz (1868–1961)

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Heinrich Franz Schuberth was a teacher, minister, editor, and president of several conferences, pioneering the work in various parts of Germany.

Early Life

Heinrich Franz Schuberth was born April 14, 1868, in Hamburg, a port and trading city in Germany. His father Friedrich was a successful businessman, a copartner of the music publishing company J. Schuberth & Co. Whether young Heinrich had siblings is unknown. Schuberth grew up in an influential home that afforded him a quality education and an apprenticeship as a businessman. He could have made a career in his father's business, but he decided to move to the United States in May 1887, at the age of 19.¹

From New York he made his way west, where he worked on a farm in Salem, Oregon, in the autumn of 1888. Here he noticed that there was no work on Saturday and that some of his colleagues spent their spare time reading a book and writing something in a notebook. Schuberth had not yet been involved in the Christian faith. He did not know much about the Bible and saw himself as an unbeliever. Curiously, he asked questions and finally his colleagues invited him to a prayer meeting led by his employer. He was impressed and immediately



Heinrich Franz Schuberth

Photo courtesy of Historical Archives of the Seventh-day Adventists in Europe, Friedensau, Germany.

convinced by the short sermon that he purchased his own Bible and a Sabbath School lesson. He studied diligently and was baptized three months later at a camp meeting in Portland, Oregon. At this camp meeting John N. Loughborough (1832-1924) encouraged Schuberth to dedicate his life fully to God's service. Schuberth hesitated because he had a contract with a relative and wanted to remain true to his word. He prayed about it, and a few days later his relative canceled the contract. Schuberth saw this as an answer from God and began to work as a literature evangelist and Bible worker among the German-speaking people in California.

Ministry

While working in this capacity, he noticed his lack of education. He learned about a training course in Battle Creek, Michigan, but he did not have the money to enroll; for when Schuberth had decided to become an Adventist, his father stopped providing him with financial assistance.

At a large camp meeting in Oakland in 1889 he met Ellen G. White. She asked him to be her chauffeur and to take care of her borrowed horse and cart. Schuberth agreed and accompanied Ellen White to her meetings. At the end of the camp meeting Ellen White asked him if he would like to attend the school in Battle Creek. Schuberth told her about his financial situation, but Ellen White had a solution. She invited him to stay at her home. The following weeks were very formative for Schuberth and influenced his relationship with and view of Ellen White throughout his life.²

Upon his completion of the Bible courses, he taught German at the school in Battle Creek. He did so well that O. A. Olsen (1845-1915), president of the General Conference, offered to let him teach German at the new school in Lincoln, Nebraska. The president even offered to let him study in Germany with the support of the General Conference, but Schuberth declined because of his differences with his father.

When he received the news of his father's death in 1891, he travelled back to Hamburg to manage matters of inheritance. Then Schuberth decided to stay in Germany and study in Bremen at his own expense to prepare for teaching at Union College in Nebraska. While in Hamburg, he learned of the new Adventist mission and its leader, Ludwig R. Conradi (1856-1939). It also was in Hamburg where he met his future wife, Elisabeth Blass (1872-1934).

Elisabeth came from Wiesbaden. Together with her mother and sister, she was baptized in 1891 through the work of Gerhard Perk (1859-1930) and had joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church there. Newly baptized, she went to Berlin with Perk and worked there as one of the first colporteurs. Before that she had received a short training at the Hamburg Mission School and probably met Heinrich Franz there. Towards the end of 1891, they married. They would soon have four children. The firstborn son, named Otto (1893), became a minister, a second son (name unknown) died in infancy shortly after they arrived in Hamburg (1894), their daughter (name unknown) died at age 14 (1894-1908), and the last born son, Albert (1899) became a doctor, working in Switzerland.

Schuberth returned to the United States in 1892 and taught at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, where was in charge of German Literature in the German department.³ In 1894 the foreign mission board decided to send Schuberth as a missionary to Germany to be the director of the mission training school in Hamburg. On September 14, 1894, at the age of 26, Schuberth arrived at the school to teach 16 students. Schuberth describes the beginning of the mission work in Germany as follows:

In 1894, besides our church in Hamburg, we had a small work established in eight other places, and our membership was 302. We were looked upon as an American sect, and the greatest of prejudice existed against us, so that we had to labor in the most cautious manner. Furthermore, the cause was young, and we had very little money at our disposal.⁴

While teaching, he also gave Bible lessons, held public meetings, and went from house-to-house as a literature evangelist. When the publishing house was moved from Basel, Switzerland, to Hamburg in 1895, due to difficulties with Sunday work, Schuberth took over the editing of various magazines. At the age of 30 (in 1898), he was ordained to the ministry.

Administrator and Editor

With the relocation of the mission school from Hamburg to Friedensau in 1899, Schuberth got more involved in the administration of the church. According to the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, he served as vice president of the German Union Conference (1902-1907) and, at the same time for two years, as director of the Holland Mission (1902-1904), where he solved theological differences with a dissident group⁵ two years as president of the German-Swiss Conference (1905-1906); and two years as president of the West German Conference (1907-1908). From 1905 to 1906, while serving for the German-Swiss Conference, Schuberth lived in Basel, Switzerland.

In the autumn of 1906, Schuberth went to Russia for a month with Walter K. Ising, taking the place of Ludwig R. Conradi, who had been called to Washington for an urgent consultation. While in Russia, Schuberth led out in conferences in Riga, Bender, Kiev, and Saratov. The journey was dangerous because of the political turmoil that plagued the country and caused loss of lives.⁶

About a year after the experience in Russia, the seventh annual meeting of the German Union Conference was held in Friedensau in July 1907, with more than 1,200 workers participating.⁷ Schuberth was elected president of the German Union Conference (starting 1908, the same year his daughter died). The following year, the German Union was divided into the West and East German Union Conferences, and Schuberth became the pioneer president of the East German Union Conference for the next 13 years (1909-1921). Through all these years, Schuberth served on the publishing board of the Hamburg Publishing House (established 1895)⁸ In this capacity, he was responsible for editing various magazines.⁹

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, leaders of the European Division were taken by surprise and had to act promptly. With the entire German Adventist membership expecting the leaders' guidance on how to deal with members drafted into the armed forces and the use of arms of war, they resolved that such members were to discharge their duties in the military service.¹⁰ Schuberth wrote a letter to the Department of War in Berlin, which caused considerable conflict, pointing out that German Adventists would bear arms and fight, even on the Sabbath.¹¹ The letter was supported by L. R. Conradi, at this time president of the European Division, G. W. Schubert, president of the Central European Union Conference, and Paul Drinhaus, president of the Saxon Conference. The letter's content caused estrangement among German Seventh-day Adventists to the point that a "reformed movement," that refused to side with the leadership on the bearing of arms for Adventists in the military, began in 1915.

In July 1920, the president of the General Conference, Arthur G. Daniells, came to Friedensau, Germany, for a hearing of the followers of the newly founded "reform movement." Regarding the breach caused by the letter and the consequences of the war, Schuberth regretted his view and said that the letter could have been better worded.¹² From December 27, 1922, to January 2, 1923, the board of the European Division of the General Conference met in Gland, Switzerland, where the leaders voted, confirmed, and signed the following statement:

Our position during the war, as expressed in various documents, has been verified, and we hereby reaffirm by our own signature, which was already declared in Friedensau in 1920, our regret that such documents were issued. We are in full agreement with the statement adopted by the committee today.

(Signed) L. R. Conradi, P. Drihaus, H. F. Schuberth, G. W. Schubert¹³

Schuberth became vice president of the German Mission Society (established 1913) until 1927. In 1922 Schuberth moved to Bern, Switzerland, serving as field secretary of the General Conference until 1927. In 1926 and 1927 he was the European Division secretary for religious liberty.

In 1927 the Inter-Union Association of Seventh-day Adventists in Germany was organized, which included the East German, West German, and Central European Unions. Schuberth was elected president. The next year the European Division was divided and Schuberth became president of the Central European Division, constituting East German, West German, South German (formerly Central European), Hungarian, and Czechoslovakian Union Conferences, the Netherlands, East Indies, the Arabic Union Missions, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Turkey, Persia, and Liberia. At the same time Schuberth served as president of the German Inter-Union Association (1928-1933) and as president of the Advent Mission Society (1928-1932).¹⁴

Later Life

In 1933, at the age of 65, Schuberth announced his retirement about the same time that the National Socialists came to power in Germany. Schuberth relocated to Switzerland the following year where his wife Elisabeth fell ill

and died after 42 years of marriage. She was laid to rest on July 14, 1934, in Germany,¹⁵ while he remained in Switzerland. In 1936 he married Christine Zybach, who had taught French, English, music, and church history in Friedensau for 23 years (1905 to 1928). She supported Schuberth's active retirement and involvement in the local community's welfare work. She fell ill and died in 1959.

At 91 (1959), Schuberth moved to his eldest son's home in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA. While at Otto's house, he fell and broke his hip. Shortly after, he died on his 93rd birthday on April 14, 1961. He was laid to rest four days later at Fort Lincoln Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Contribution

H. F. Schuberth served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in various capacities with dedication, diligence, and passion; he was also known for his unusual friendliness.¹⁶ He contributed significantly to the growth of the mission school in Hamburg. His 35 years of service as a pastor and president at various levels contributed to the growth of the church in Germany and Switzerland. He played a prominent administrative role in the sustenance of the church during the First World War, in spite of the major conflict on military service in which he was involved. As an editor of various church periodicals, he ensured the propagation of her distinct teachings through printed pages. It can be safely stated that Heinrich Franz Schuberth was one of those whose indelible pioneering efforts grew the work in central Europe.

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NOTES

1. For more details, see Marc Gunnar Dillner's diploma thesis about Heinrich Franz Schuberth: "Heinrich Franz Schuberth (1868-1961): Ein biographischer Gang durch die Adventgeschichte in Deutschland," Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, 2002; and Thomas Eissner, "Zum 150. Geburtstag: Heinrich Franz Schuberth (1868-1961)" ["On his 150th birthday: Heinrich Franz Schuberth (1868-1961),"] accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.ellenwhite.de/h-f-schuberth-150/>
2. Schuberth later wrote "It was my privilege to attend the early morning meetings of the workers. Often Mrs. White came in and gave strong testimonies. I saw old preachers break down in tears and confess their sins, and a wonderful spirit came into the meetings. This experience made such a deep impression upon my mind that I shall never forget it. During my stay in the White home I had an opportunity to observe Mrs. White in everyday life. I was impressed with the fact that she was a good Christian woman who practiced what she taught." Heinrich F. Schuberth, "My Confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy," *ARH*, June 1, 1939, 15.
3. "Nebraska," and "Educational Institutions," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1894), 33, 44.
4. Heinrich F. Schuberth, "Evangelism in Central Europe," *ARH*, July 16, 1931, 9.
5. Dillner, "Heinrich Franz Schuberth (1868-1961)," 26.
6. Karl Waber, *Streiflichter aus der Geschichte der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in der Schweiz*, vol. 2 (Zürich: Advent-Verlag Zurich, 1999), 40.
7. *Ibid.*, 50.

8. From 1925 to 1930 he was the vice president and from 1932 to 1933 he was the president.
9. *Gute Gesundheit* ("Good health," until 1905), *Herold der Wahrheit* ("Herald of Truth," until 1909), *Der Protestant* ("The Protestant," 1909-1919), *Der Erzieher* ("The Educator," 1915-1922), *Kirche und Staat* ("Church and State," 1927-1932) and *Rundschau der Gemeinschaft der S. T. A Mitteleuropäische Division* ("Review of the S. D. A. Central European Division, 1932-1936").
10. Johannes Hartlapp, "Military Service—a Comparative Study between the New Testament Teaching and the Attitude of German Adventists," Master's Thesis, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1993, 56.
11. "Most Honorable Lord General and Minister of War,

Since of times our point of view concerning our duty; and especially, since our refusal to serve, in times of peace, on Saturday (Sabbath) is regarded as fanatical, therefore I take the liberty, Your Excellency, to present to you in the following, the principles of German Seventh-day Adventists, especially just now in the present war situation. While we stand on the fundamentals of the Holy Scriptures, and seek to fulfill the precepts of Christendom, keeping the Rest Day (Sabbath), that God established in the beginning, by endeavouring to put aside all work on that day, still in these times of stress, we have bound ourselves together in the defence of the 'Fatherland,' and under these circumstances we will also bear arms on Saturday (Sabbath). On this point we take our stand on the Scripture found in 1 Peter 2:13-17. (Signed) H. F. Schubert, President." English translation found in Dr. Brian P. Phillips, "First World War and Adventists in the UK," accessed July 2, 2020, <https://adventist.uk/fileadmin/adventist.uk/adventist-history/WWfilesImages/First-World-War-and-Adventists-in-Uk-Brian-Phillips.pdf>.
Original: Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 43 II No. 179/62, quoted in Johannes Hartlapp, *Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten im Nationalsozialismus unter Berücksichtigung der geschichtlichen und theologischen Entwicklung in Deutschland von 1875 bis 1950*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2008, 90-91.
12. Hartlapp, "Military Service," 57.
13. Gland Statement, January 1923 (cf. William A. Spicer, "Our European Brethren and Noncombatancy," *ARH*, March 6, 1924, 4-5).
14. In the same period, he chaired an organization that operated the Sanitarium at Zehlendorf and various Old Peoples's homes in Germany. Together with Hulda Jost he initiated and achieved state recognition of the Advent Charity Association (Advent-Wohlfahrtswerk) in Germany as a registered association in 1928.
15. "Obituary Records for 1934," *SDA Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1935), 397.
16. His nickname, built from his initials, was "Halt-Fest-Schubert," meaning "Hold-on Schubert," implying his caring attitude.

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