

Schantz, Børge

(1931–2014)

SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

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.

Børge Schantz's¹ denominational service included pastoral work, church administration, teaching, and lecturing at colleges and universities. He set up a global center for Islamic Studies and taught Adventist-Muslim relations. He wrote books and articles that had worldwide readership.

Early Years and Education

Schantz was born on August 3, 1931, in Holstebro, Denmark, and was raised in an Adventist family as seventh in what was eventually a sibling group of twelve. He attended Vejlebjerg Højskole (Vejlebjerg High School), where he was baptized in 1948 and began his education in preparation for the gospel ministry. It was there that he met Iris Stahl from Hamburg in Germany, and they married in 1952. After his initial education, he began as a ministerial intern in 1951, did his Danish national service, and served as a licensed minister in different places in Denmark and the Faroe Islands until his ordination in 1958.^{2 3} After three years on the Faroe Islands,⁴ he was granted study leave so that he could complete his B.A. in Theology at Newbold College in 1962. Børge Schantz was always keen to further his education so that he could serve his church and people in a more effective way.

Serving in West Africa



Børge Schantz (formerly director of the Center for Islamic Studies of the General Conference of SDA) made annual trips to Riyadh in the 1990's to teach ethics and whole-person-care.

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

After he left Newbold College, Pastor Schantz started a new chapter in his ministry that took him far and wide. A call to Sierra Leone in West Africa came in 1962. The three weeks travel from Hamburg in Germany to Africa was by cargo ship putting in at every port on the way. His first appointment was as pastor of the Freetown SDA Church and Bible teacher at Waterloo Secondary School nearby. This was followed by his appointment as president for the Sierra Leone Mission in the West African Union the following year⁵ with the headquarters in Bo further inland. During this period Masanga Leprosarium and Yele Secondary School were started and developed.⁶ After five years of Home Study supervised by Iris, the Schantz family were ready to go on permanent return, wishing to have their two boys in a Danish school.⁷

There was, however, an urgent need for a leader for the church in troubled Northern Nigeria. And Schantz was persuaded to accept a new call in 1967 to move to the North Nigeria Mission, in a predominantly Muslim populated area, covering two-thirds of Nigeria. Here he served as its president for three years, and his wife, Iris, served as the secretary-treasurer.⁸ It meant that they were separated from their oldest son, Steen, who went back to Denmark to attend Vejlefyrdskolen, an Adventist boarding academy, where Børge Schantz's elder brother, Hans Jørgen Schantz, was the principal. Their younger son, Kim, joined his brother later.¹⁰ The time in Nigeria happened to coincide with the Nigerian Civil War (1967--1970), also known as the Biafran War.¹¹ As a result, Schantz worked with SAWS (the Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service), later to be known as ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), to relieve the human suffering in the affected areas.¹² The immediate consequences of the war included ethno-religious violence and anti-Igbo pogroms and persecution in Northern Nigeria, where some of the active Adventist church members and almost all the colporteurs were from the Igbo people. This meant that many had to relocate to safer places.¹³ Church statistics show a drop in membership in the North Nigeria Mission in these years, which undoubtedly reflected the unstable and violent situation.¹⁴

Denmark, Study Leave, and the Middle East

In 1970 Børge and Iris Schantz returned to Denmark, where he became the senior pastor of Nærum SDA Church in the East-Denmark Conference. Public evangelism in the area and a diligent visitation program resulted in a fruitful ministry. Børge organized the church members into cell groups, which inspired other churches to follow.¹⁵ It was also here that he introduced a Bible exhibition in the church and marathon reading of the Bible as an introduction to his evangelistic meetings.¹⁶ This approach was later followed by other pastors. After nearly four years he was granted study leave to go to Andrews University to study for a master's degree, graduating in 1974.¹⁷

On returning to Denmark in 1974, a call came to go to Beirut in Lebanon, another trouble spot of the world. He was asked to be president of the East-Mediterranean Field (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and Cyprus) in The Middle East Union, which was part of the Afro-Mideast Division (AMD), with its headquarters in Lebanon. In June 1976 he was appointed as lay-activities and youth director in the AMD.¹⁸ The AMD territory covered twenty-three

countries in the Middle East, North and East Africa, organized into the Middle East, East Africa, Tanzania, and Ethiopian unions, and with a membership of about one hundred sixty thousand at the time.¹⁹ His role required much traveling and many days away from home. Again, Schantz was caught in a challenging and violent situation when the Lebanon Civil War (1975–1990) tore the country apart. This war caused much anxiety and suffering and put limitations on traveling.

Some of the missionaries, and even nationals and their families, were beginning to leave the country. As the situation escalated, it became more difficult and increasingly risky to move around in Beirut. Pastor Schantz was known to ignore these risks and often ferried people to and from the airport which required crossing the “Green Line”²⁰ and avoiding the bullets and shrapnel that might be flying around. With his Danish passport, it was sometimes easier for him to move from place to place. It was a time of hardship and great danger for the families that remained behind to keep the church organization running. Iris Schantz describes the situation in graphic terms in her chapter in the book *Var det umagen værd?* (Was It Worth the Effort?), in which she recounts an incident when their apartment was hit by a shell.²¹ Because of the worsening situation, the AMD office and its leaders and staff moved temporarily to Cyprus. The Schantz’s stayed on in Lebanon but were eventually told to move to Cyprus, as well. No doubt his times in the Muslim North Nigeria and then in the Middle East whetted his appetite for further insight into the challenges of reaching the Muslim world with the Adventist message. This led to the next step in his church experience.

Studies in California and Lecturing at Newbold College, England

In 1980 Børge and Iris moved to California in the United States, where he was offered a free place at the reputable Fuller School of World Mission, while Iris was working on her M.B.A. They moved to Pasadena close to the Fuller campus. Parallel to his studies, he was on contract as a lecturer in theology at Loma Linda University. As there was a shortage of pastors in the conference, Pastor Schantz for a short time assisted both in the German church, as well as the church in Pasadena, where they lived. Iris was employed as an accountant at Southern California Conference, and “with a good salary,” as she expressed it. On the same weekend in June 1983, they both graduated from their universities, he with a Ph.D. in Missiology and she with an M.B.A.^{22 23 24}

The next station was Newbold College in the United Kingdom, where from 1983 Børge was a lecturer in the Religion Department and from June 1987 the chair of the same department.^{25 26}

The Global Center for Islamic Studies

A call from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists also came around this time for him to set up a Global Center for Islamic Studies at Newbold College.²⁷ An office with study facilities was arranged in the old laundry building. Furniture, equipment, and books were secured and bought, and in July 1989 he became the

first director of the center. He remained in that position, together with being a principal lecturer at Newbold College, until his official retirement in 1995.^{28 29 30} As director of the center, Børge was asked to teach about Adventist-Muslim relations on many occasions and in various places in the world.

Retirement Years, Writings, and Travels

For his retirement years, he settled in Denmark, but not in inactivity. As his wife, Iris, mentioned, “For many years Børge had served his church abroad, now he felt an obligation to spend his last years of service in his homeland.”³¹ For the first two years Børge Schantz worked part time as a pastor of Roskilde SDA Church.³² Schantz also was active in teaching homiletics for lay preachers in the church.³³ He authored several books and articles on Church Growth, Islam, and Missiology.³⁴ In 2002 he wrote the book *Muslimere blandt kristne i Danmark* (Muslims Among Christians in Denmark)³⁵ and held a series of lectures on the subject all over the country. The book was revised in 2006 and an extra chapter added when a major diplomatic crisis occurred, and the Danish flag was burned in several Muslim countries following the Muhammed drawings in the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten*.³⁶ Shortly after his death, the Sabbath School Quarterly “Biblical Missionaries” was published.³⁷

Even in retirement he held professorships at Andrews University and Loma Linda University in the United States and at Newbold College in England. As adjunct professor at Loma Linda University, he was invited to lecture at the headquarters of the Saudi Air Force in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and in Seoul, South Korea, and other places. Schantz had a large network and kept in contact with many former colleagues and people he had known through his years of service.³⁸ Some of these contacts went all the way back to his time in West Africa. He heard that in Bukuru, Plateau State, in Northern Nigeria, where he and Iris had lived while he served as president for the mission, the church building on the mission compound had still not been completed, although the foundation was laid more than thirty years before. He and Iris therefore decided to transfer their memberships from Denmark to Bukuru and help support the church and the building project there. When the building eventually was finished and ready for dedication, he was invited and decided to be present. His membership was still in Bukuru when he passed away shortly after.³⁹ In an obituary in *Kristeligt Dagblad*, a Christian Danish daily, the journalist wrote: “Schantz was one of the most prominent Seventh-day Adventists in Denmark.”⁴⁰

SOURCES

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Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks, 1968-1970, 1977. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

NOTES

1. For many years he was known as Børge Schantz Christensen or simply B.S. Christensen, the name listed in Adventist yearbooks and his first employee service records.
2. Arne Sandbeck, Obituary, *Adventnyt*, No. 1, 2015.
3. Much of the information in this article is taken from Børge Schantz's Employee Service Records, kept at HASDA Denmark, Vejlebjergskolen, 8721 Daugaard, Denmark.
4. According to his wife, Iris, this was a lonely and hard place especially for her as a pastor's wife in a culturally different environment with a language, she did not understand (Iris Schantz, interview by the author, June 23, 2021). This probably helped the family to meet even greater challenges in foreign service in the future.
5. Arne Sandbeck, Obituary, *Adventnyt*, No. 1., 2015.
6. Iris Schantz, "Missionsmedarbejder?" (Mission Co-Worker?), Børge Schantz and Hans Jørgen Schantz, *Var det umagen værd?* (Was It Worth the Effort?), Nærum: Dansk Bogforlag, 1999, 239.
7. *Ibid.*, 240.
8. Børge Schantz's Employee Service Record, kept at HASDA.
9. Due to shortage of treasurers from home, spouses familiar with accounting and bookkeeping were often asked to take that position (Iris Schantz, interview by the author, July 15, 2021).
10. Iris Schantz, 242.
11. A civil war fought between the government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra from July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970. Biafra represented nationalist aspirations of the Igbo people, who felt that they could no longer co-exist with the Northern-dominated federal government.
12. Between 500,000 and 2 million Biafran civilians died of starvation. In mid-1968, images of malnourished and starving Biafran children saturated the mass media of Western countries, and significant efforts of international NGO's was set in motion to meet the emergency.

13. Iris Schantz, interview by the author, July 15, 2021.
14. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks*, 1968-1970.
15. Interview on June 24, 2021, with Ib Melkersen, Børge Schantz's assistant pastor at the time.
16. One of the members in his church had a large collection of old and valuable Danish Bibles. These were exhibited together with other old and modern versions from libraries and the Danish Bible Society. During a 24-hours period, members of the church took turns to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation while others had a prayer vigil for the coming evangelistic meetings. Iris Schantz, interview by the author, June 13, 2021, and personal knowledge of the author.
17. Børge Schantz's Employee Service Record.
18. Ibid.
19. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1977), 107.
20. The Green Line was the line of demarcation during the war, which separated the mainly Muslim factions in the predominantly Muslim West Beirut from the predominantly Christian East Beirut controlled by the Lebanese Front. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Line_\(Lebanon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Line_(Lebanon)). Accessed June 24, 2021.
21. "Every day we prayed for the work and our lives – personal possessions had become irrelevant – in full confidence that God had the power to keep us... In periods when we did not have water, we used the little we had collected in the bathtub five times. First, I washed myself, then Børge, after this the clothes, followed by washing of the floor, and lastly the toilet was flushed. At a time when it was very cold, we could not get heating fuel. We had to go to bed with our clothes on, and not until I had put on my long, woolen Danish winter coat was I able to fall asleep... One afternoon when we both had come home and had retired to the back of the apartment because of the shooting, we heard a huge bang! We started. Even before the dust came from the door crack, we knew that our apartment had been hit. A shell had come through one of the windows and had jumped from wall to wall and was thrown back to the balcony where it laid unexploded. ... We were happy we were alive. From this day on we slept in the basement together with the Lebanese on the other side of the street" (Iris Schantz, 243-244).
22. Iris Schantz, 245-246.
23. Børge Schantz's Employee Service Record.
24. Title of his dissertation: "The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Thought – A Contemporary Approach".
25. Børge Schantz's Employment Service Record.

26. Iris was teaching accounting. That class developed into B.B.A. in accounting and management. As a result, her students were later working all over the world. – Interview with Iris Schantz July 15, 2021.
27. Newbold College was chosen as the site for the Center in agreement with General Conference p Seventh-day Adventists president, Neal C. Wilson, as England was closer to the Muslim world than the United States, and travel from there to the mission sites would be easier.
28. Arne Sandbeck.
29. Børge Schantz's Employment Service Record.
30. As a curiosity may be mentioned that the author of this article became his first student at the Center, before moving to a position in the Middle East Union to work for the churches in that predominantly Muslim territory.
31. Interview with Iris Schantz June 23, 2021.
32. Interview with Carl-David Andreasen, president of the Danish Union of Churches during the part-time employment of Børge Schantz.
33. In 2003 the author and Børge Schantz joined together to teach classes in homiletics for lay preachers in both East and West Denmark.
34. The following books were published in English: *Your Muslim Neighbor and You, A Manual for Personal Evangelism* (1993), *A Path Straight to the Hedges: Evangelism in Developing Areas* (2000), *Islam in the Post-9/11 World* (2004).
35. Børge Schantz, *Muslimere blandt Kristne i Danmark* (Muslims Among Christians in Denmark), Nærum: Dansk Bogforlag, 2002, 2006.
36. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons_controversy. Accessed July 4, 2021.
37. Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School, Bible Study Guide, 3rd quarter 2015.
38. Arne Sandbeck.
39. Personal knowledge by the author.
40. Bente Clausen, Obituary, "Han nåede ikke at se sit livsværk færdigt" (He Did Not Manage to See His Life's Work Finished), *Kristeligt Dagblad*, December 20, 2014.

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