

# Raft, Julius Christensen (1863–1934)

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Julius Christensen Raft was a Danish pastor, evangelist, and administrator. He served as president of the Danish Conference, from 1906 to 1908, and the Scandinavian Union, from 1908 to 1922. He was a field secretary in the European Division from 1922 to 1928, and a field secretary of the Southern European Division until 1932. For many years he was chairman of the Scandinavian Philanthropic Society and owner of Skodsborg Sanitarium, which grew to be the largest health institution within the Adventist Church during his time!<sup>1</sup>

## Youth and Emigration

Julius Christensen Raft was born in Sandby, Maribo, Storstrom, Denmark on August 8, 1863, to Frederik Nielsen Christensen Raft and Maren Johanne Sørensdatter.<sup>2</sup> They were a nominal Lutheran farmer's family living on the southern Danish Island of Lolland. At the age of 18, Raft emigrated to the United States of America wearing wooden clogs and the trousers his mother had sewn for him from old flour sacks. He went to his uncle in Neenah, Wisconsin, where he met the Adventist faith. In May 1883 he was baptized by O. A. Olsen. At the age of 23, he was elected to serve as an elder of one of the Wisconsin churches. In 1886 he married a young lady of



J. C. Raft

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

Irish descent, but sadly she died in childbirth a year later at the age of 20. The baby died a month later.<sup>3</sup>

Having no formal education, Raft attended the Danish-Norwegian department of Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, between 1891 and 1893. While there, the General Conference asked him to return to Europe, something he had promised himself he would not do.<sup>4</sup> O. A. Olsen, then General Conference president, had apparently seen Raft's leadership capabilities. A year after his arrival in Christiania (Oslo), he was ordained as a minister by Uriah Smith and Steven Haskell. His field was both Denmark and Norway. Some months after his ordination, he entered studies at the University of Copenhagen.<sup>5</sup>

## The Evangelist

In July 1894, Raft conducted evangelistic meetings on his birth island. At this time, he saw his family for the first time since he had left for the United States; however, they did not understand his new faith, nor had they any interest in it. About this time, he met the Norwegian colporteur, Christine Hansen, who had been sent to assist him with music during his meetings. A relationship blossomed, and they married in 1896. They were to have four children, although sadly the first baby died in childbirth and the third, a son, at age three. Ingeborg, their second child, would later marry H. L. Henriksen with whom she served as a missionary to Madagascar and, later, the Southern European Division. Their youngest son, Jacob, became a medical doctor in Denmark.

Raft's university studies were to serve him well as he launched upon evangelistic meetings in Scandinavia. Raft drew the public from all classes, including the upper class with its demand for an intelligent and logical presentation of the Bible. This, along with the fervor of his convictions, was convincing to people from all walks of life. He usually started his biblical lectures with very Christian topics: "No. 1: Is man's eternal salvation or condemnation predestined?" Subtitles were: "Will in the end all men be saved for eternity? Will any kind of faith lead to heaven?" "No. 2: Holy Scripture: Is the Bible God's book or is it a manmade product? Is it true that the Bible contradicts itself?" Having established the basis of the Christian faith Raft would then proceed to the topic of Christ's Second Coming. In lecture No. 8 he would turn to Daniel 7 and ask: "Mohammedanism or papal power?" Then would follow lectures on Christ and the law, freedom and slavery, asking: Who is under the law and who is under grace? Both prominent questions in Lutheran Scandinavia. Finally, he would present the Sabbath in the new covenant under the title: "The Sabbath from Paradise Lost to Paradise Restored."<sup>6</sup>

The lecture notes were sold after each lecture at the price of 5 öre, which even then was cheap.<sup>7</sup> This gave the skeptics, especially clergy from other denominations, the opportunity to undertake further study at home. Whether this was a boon or bane is questionable. When Raft campaigned in Helsingborg, in order to establish a church congregation in Skåne,<sup>8</sup> he had to answer a heavy onslaught in the daily papers. He was a prolific writer, and using the Bible and logic, he was able to address the issues raised. He was firm in his conviction.

## The Administrator (and Still an Evangelist)

Raft was convinced on a certain question, as he said, "through prayer," nobody could talk him out of it. In 1909 as the leader of the Scandinavian Union, he tried in vain to get any Swedish evangelist to work in the wealthy but very secular province of Skåne. Nobody volunteered as everybody knew this was indeed a hard area to reach, and no one wanted to try and fail. Raft, who travelled widely and incessantly across the territory of the Union,<sup>9</sup> decided that he would prove his reluctant colleagues wrong and conduct evangelistic meetings himself!<sup>10</sup> He did, and between 200 and 400 people attended his biblical lectures, which were published in a book called *Ett Ord i Rätt Tid (A Word Timely Spoken)*.<sup>11</sup> After a year of meetings, he had the joy of bringing the people to baptism in the Ebenezer Adventist church in Copenhagen. On August 7, a new church was organized, and after a second baptism in September, the church had forty-two members. There had only been five Seventh-day Adventists in the area before Raft's campaign. At the conference the following summer, the Helsingborg church was accepted into the Swedish Conference. Raft's daughter Ingeborg states that although he gave God the honor, he also saw it as a personal victory.<sup>12</sup>

When Raft became secretary of the Southern European Division in 1922, he had to continue the frequent travels. The longest journey of his life was through the mission fields allocated to that division in East Africa, including Madagascar, Mauritius, Palestine, and Syria. In 1928 he impressed the Tanzanians, who had offered to carry him up the Kilimanjaro, by undertaking the whole trek up the mountain himself at the age of 65. This mission visitation journey meant an almost seven-month absence from home. Raft had great problems with seasickness. His well-kept diary, with entries every day, gives a unique insight into the conditions not only of travelling non-existent roads in the interior of Africa, but also of the life at the mission stations in the early days, and the devotion of the African members to their new-found faith. Their admiration for this strong and courageous leader from the far north became quite evident!

Amazingly, in 1930 Raft, then 67, was asked to undertake another even more strenuous inspection tour, this time to West Africa. Between these trips, he travelled continuously to different annual meetings, being an absent but loving father and husband. His wife, who had health issues, stayed with her daughter in France. The West African journey could well have ended Raft's life. On his way north from Cameroon's Atlantic port of Douala to the church's first mission station in Cameroon, Nanga-Eboko north of Yaoundé, a severe accident happened. It was a miracle that Raft, and others, were not killed. In his diary, he is quite graphic as to the conditions of the small hospitals but always grateful to God for saving his life.

Raft's last year with a heavy travel schedule took him to different meetings, including a visit to Algeria by airplane in 1932. He was now suffering frequent heart problems that surfaced intensely during a visit to Skodsborg, Denmark. He had to retire from this intense travelling life. His wife planned for them to move to their home in Switzerland, but he was too ill, and they decided to stay in Denmark. They settled in Skodsborg where he preached regularly over the following year. The Sabbath before his death on February 1, 1934, he preached his last sermon in Skodsborg entitled: "Have Faith in God." This had been the motto of his own life. He

never ceased to give God the glory and honor for the extraordinary life he had had in His service.

## Legacy

Raft served in Scandinavia for thirty years, both in leadership and as an outstanding and brilliant evangelist. In Southern Europe he was highly esteemed for his long experience as a preacher and leader. His had been a strong, able, and structured leadership, which also showed a personal connection with people evidenced by the numbers he brought to Christ and the Adventist faith.<sup>13</sup>

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### SOURCES

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*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996.

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### NOTES

1. Steen Rasmussen, "J. C. Raft obituary," *Missionären* nr 4, 1934, 42-44; Steen Rasmussen, "J. C. Raft obituary," *ARH*, April 5, 1934, 20,21; "Raft, Julius C." *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 416.
2. "Søren Julius Christensen Raft," Ancestry.com, 2022, accessed February 3, 2022, <https://www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/soren-julius-christensen-raft-24-rsng15>.
3. Carl Raft *Bondedrengen der blev verdenspredikant* (Herning, Denmark: Forlaget Poul Kristensen, 1997), 9f
4. He had made a reservation against being sent back to Europe.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), 416.
6. J. C. Raft, *Bibliska föredrag* [Biblical Lectures] (Stockholm: Skandinaviska Förlagsexpeditionen, 1915), 1.

7. One crown=100 öre.
  8. The Swedish province closest to Denmark.
  9. The Scandinavian Union territory included Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. Raft would travel by train and boat.
  10. Raft still held all the responsibilities of union president while conducting this outreach.
  11. J. C. Raft, *Ett Ord i Rätt Tid* [A Word Timely Spoken], (Stockholm, n. p., 1927).
  12. Carl Raft, *Bondedrengen*, 42-44.
  13. Steen Rasmussen, "J. C. Raft obituary," *Missionären* nr 4, 1934, 42-44; Steen Rasmussen, "J. C. Raft obituary," *ARH*, April 5, 1934, 20-21.
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