

Wibbens, Joseph (Jacob) (1874–1973)

CHIGEMEZI NNADOZIE WOGU

Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu, MTS, is a Ph.D. student at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands and a research associate at the Institute of Adventist Studies in Friedensau Adventist University, Germany. At Friedensau, he manages the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventist* research project for some parts of Europe. Wogu is a junior member of the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion. He is co-editor to *Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination in the Old Continent* (Möckern: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020).

Joseph (Jacob)¹ Wibbens was a pioneer missionary, worker and pastor in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Early Years, Education and Marriage

Joseph Wibbens was born on March 13, 1874, in Middelstum, Groningen, the Netherlands.² In 1894, at the age of twenty, Wibbens emigrated to the United States. There he lived with his uncle, a tailor, who became an Adventist. Wibbens also became an Adventist and was baptized in 1896. He then attended Battle Creek College in Michigan and became an assistant pastor in Colorado.³ On November 1, 1900, Joseph Wibbens was married to Grace Berdella Hilbish (born January 1, 1874, in Ohio) in Mesa County, Colorado.⁴

Missionary

The following year, on June 1, 1901, the young couple were sent as missionaries to Holland under the auspices of the Colorado Conference, which was willing to pay their expenses for two years.⁵ Wibbens was employed as an auxiliary pastor in the province of North Holland.⁶ After Wibbens met with Joseph Wintzen in Amsterdam, the duo began working in Alkmaar and Hoorn. Through their efforts, the Adventist congregation in the Amsterdam area grew.⁷ Working in the Netherlands was not an easy task. Wibbens had to deal with those who considered themselves “irreligious,” theorists, sceptics, atheists, and modern.⁸

In the summer of 1902, the Adventist Church in Holland experienced a schism as a result of a conflict among the members. Some questioned the Adventist teaching on the sanctuary, the person and writings of Ellen White, with a nationalistic attitude towards some foreigners in the background.⁹ In the face of the crisis, Reinhold G. Klingbeil, then president of the conference, stepped down temporarily while Hans F. Schuberth from Germany stepped in as acting leader. The next year, Klingbeil was sent to begin mission work in Belgium. This provided Wibbens with a leadership responsibility as he took an active part in the discussion with the dissenters while doing his work from The Hague.¹⁰

Belgium, Ordination

In 1904, Wibbens and his family moved to Antwerp, Belgium, where he and his wife, Grace, worked for a short time.¹¹ In September of 1904, the Wibbens' moved to Amsterdam. There Wibbens began working closely with Piet Schilstra in organizing public lectures and weekly meetings. Wibbens also became involved in publishing work: translating Adventist English literature into Dutch and editing two magazines, *Zions Wachter* and *De Arbeider*.¹²

Between 1905¹³ and 1907, Wibbens worked in Utrecht, Hilversum, and The Hague, respectively. In those Dutch cities, Wibbens conducted public lectures, openly spoke about the Sabbath when the Dutch Reformed Church published against Sabbath observance,¹⁴ and was instrumental in planting Adventist congregations.¹⁵ He also conducted personal Bible studies as well as personal and public evangelism.¹⁶ Around 1908, Wibbens reported of the successful work he had been doing among the Dutch in The Hague.¹⁷

In a conference that took place from July 30 to August 2 of 1908, Wibbens was ordained together with Piet Schilstra and Joseph Wintzen.¹⁸ From October of 1908, Wibbens and his family moved to Brussels. There he worked closely with F. Jochmans for three years conducting lectures, evangelistic meetings and (nine) baptisms.¹⁹

Administrator

In July 1911, Wibbens was made leader of Adventists in the Dutch field. He organized evangelistic and tent meetings in the cities of The Hague, Hilversum, Gouda and Groningen, and was successful in getting baptisms.²⁰ However, the challenges of moving back and forth as well as working in the Dutch/Belgian field took a toll on the Wibbens' family. Towards the end of 1913, Grace Wibbens returned to the United States because it became difficult for her to live in Holland. Wibbens himself asked the General Conference to approve his transfer to the Dutch East Indies, specifically Sumatra, from where there was a call for a missionary. However, the financial details involved in the request made the General Conference executives refuse the request.²¹ Subsequently, Wibbens informed the General Conference that he had resigned as president of the Dutch field. This must have come after pressure from his wife, Grace. Wibbens then requested the General Conference to pay for his return to America in May of 1914.²²

The move to the United States did not materialize because of the outbreak of the First World War. During this period, Wibbens played a key role in holding the Dutch Adventist congregations together, especially when Europe was rocked with the military service question in the wake of the First World War. While Ludwig R. Conradi, the leader of the Adventists in Europe, encouraged young people to follow their conscience in bearing arms and serving in the military, some Adventists, especially in Germany were not happy about this. This caused a breakaway group that came to be known as Reformed Adventists. Although Wibbens did not follow the Conradi approach, he remained loyal to leading the Dutch Church in spite of pressures from the Reformed Adventists, who also had a strong following in the Dutch field.²³

Unfortunately, the marriage between Wibbens and Grace ended in a divorce. It seems that when Wibbens got stuck in Europe during the war, he channeled all his attention towards the crisis in the church helping the situation that arose from the military service question. This may have heightened Grace's displeasure; hence divorce seemed inevitable. Grace was listed as divorced in the U.S. Census of 1920.²⁴

Back to Belgium and Later Life

In 1919, when the Dutch field was reorganized and split into two, East and West, Wibbens was appointed leader of the Dutch Adventists in the West. However, in a quick stream of events, Wibbens was transferred back to Belgium because Klingbeil, the leader of the Adventist mission in Belgium, was removed as leader and moved to the Dutch field.²⁵

It was the same year that Wibbens was remarried to Hermiena Linschoten, from the Linschoten family who were part of the first group of Adventists in The Hague. Hermiena had been living in Antwerp since 1906. She was a worker who had been assisting Klingbeil in the Belgian mission field. Wibbens and Hermiena settled in Boitsfor, a suburb of Brussels where Wibbens helped to grow the mission and continued working in the Belgian field as leader and pastor. In 1923 and 1926 respectively, Wibbens applied to move back to the Dutch field. However, his requests were not accepted. In 1941, Wibbens requested to minister among Adventists in The Hague, the birth place of his wife. This request was partly granted as the conference administration approved his family to move to Apeldoorn, the Netherlands.²⁶ This move never occurred since the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook of 1942* onwards lists Wibbens as an ordained minister under the Belgian Conference.²⁷

When Wibbens retired, the couple settled in Antwerp at Vijverlaan no. 53. Hermiena ended up in a wheelchair in 1956 as a result of paralysis of the vertebrae. She died two years later. Wibbens spent his last years in the Adventist retirement home in La Manière in Ittre, Belgium, until he died on May 12, 1973. He was almost 100 years old.²⁸

Contribution

Joseph (Jacob) Wibbens served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a pioneer missionary, church administrator, editor, and pastor in the Netherlands and in Belgium. As a missionary, he was a founding member and catalyst to the growth of Adventism in the regions he served. As an administrator, he was careful in holding the church together and stirring it in times of crisis. As a pastor, he was instrumental in the conversion of many Dutch and Belgians to the gospel. As an editor, he ensured the spread of Adventist ideas and beliefs through distribution of literature and magazines.

Adventbode, April 1, 1958.

Ancetry.com, Year: 1920; Census Place: Fremont, Steuben, Indiana; Roll: T625_461; Page: 10A; Enumeration District: 153.

Conradi, Ludwig R. "The Annual Meeting in the Holland Mission." *ARH*, January 26, 1905.

_____. "The German Union Conference." *ARH*, December 2, 1902.

"Fremont." *Angola Herald*, Angola Indiana, Friday April 30, 1915.

"Field Reports." *Echoes from the Field*, March 5, 1902.

General Conference Committee Minutes. April 8, 1914. General Conference Archives, accessed, October 2, 2019, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1914.pdf>

General Conference Committee Minutes. December 10, 1913. General Conference Archives, accessed, October 2, 2019, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1913.pdf>

"General Conference Proceedings." General Conference Session Recording Secretary Minutes, April 18, 1901. Accessed June 20, 2020, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCSM/1901/GCRS19010418.pdf>

"In the Field." *Union Conference Record*, February 17, 1908.

"News and Notes." *ARH*, July 9, 1901.

"Our Work and Workers." *Signs of the Times*, November 14, 1900.

Russell, E. T. "Words of Appreciation." *ARH*, December 26, 1907.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook Washington D. C.: Review and Herald, 1910-1942.

Stichting Historisch Archief Nederlandse Adventkerk. "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens." Compiled by H. G. van Rijn. Accessed May 22, 2020, <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/joseph-wibbens/>.

Wibbens Jacob. "Amsterdam, Netherlands." *Echoes from the Field*, April 15, 1908.

_____. "Across the Seas—Holland." *Echoes from the Field*, March 4, 1903.

_____. "Holland." *Echoes from the Field*, February 3, 1904.

_____. "Some of Our Missions," *European Division Conference Review*, Second quarter, 1913.

NOTES

1. Several Adventist sources identify him as Jacob Wibbens. A biographical compilation has been done by H. G. van Rijn in Shana Adventist: <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/joseph-wibbens/>.

2. Stichting Historisch Archief Nederlandse Adventkerk, "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens," compiled by H. G. van Rijn, accessed May 22, 2020, <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/joseph-wibbens/>
3. Ibid. See also "Our Work and Workers," *Signs of the Times*, November 14, 1900, 13.
4. Grace was daughter of Ammon and Mary Ann (Knauer) Hilbish. Her father died in 1904.
5. See "News and Notes," *ARH*, July 9, 1901, 18. "General Conference Proceedings," General Conference Session Recording Secretary Minutes, April 18, 1901, 61, accessed June 20, 2020, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCSM/1901/GCRS19010418.pdf>; See "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens," <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/joseph-wibbens/>
6. See "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens," <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/joseph-wibbens/>
7. *Adventbode*, April 1, 1958, 3.
8. See Joseph Wibbens "Hoorn, Netherland," in "Field Reports," *Echoes from the Field*, March 5, 1902, 3; See Jacob Wibbens, "Across the Seas—Holland," *Echoes from the Field*, March 4, 1903, 2; E. T. Russell, "Words of Appreciation," *ARH*, December 26, 1907, 18. Interestingly, this was also at the backdrop of the political railway strikes that made the Dutch to be more interested in religious matters. See J. Wibbens "Amsterdam, Netherlands," *Echoes from the Field*, April 15, 1908, 2.
9. See Ludwig R. Conradi, "The German Union Conference," *ARH*, December 2, 1902, 15, "Stichting Historisch Archief Nederlandse Adventkerk: Reinhold Klingbeil," accessed June 2, 2020, <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/reinhold-kleinbeil/>
10. According to H. G. van Rijn, after many years, in the 1950s Wibbens responded in a number of letters addressed to Frederik Voorthuis on this matter. According to Wibbens, Uriah Smith and Conradi became entangled in geopolitical statements in their comments. Especially with regard to Daniel 8:11-14. See "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens," compiled by H. G. van Rijn, accessed May 22, 2020, <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/joseph-wibbens/>
11. J. Wibbens, "Holland," *Echoes from the Field*, February 3, 1904, 2.
12. See "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens."
13. See report by Ludwig R. Conradi, "The Annual Meeting in the Holland Mission," *ARH*, January 26, 1905, 18.
14. When articles by the Dutch Reformed Church against celebrating the Sabbath appeared in one of the weekly magazines. Wibbens was given the opportunity to respond to this. Wibbens wrote an 'Open Letter' to one of the ministers. Hundreds of copies of this letter were distributed house-to-house with tracts about the Sabbath.
15. "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens."

16. Wibbens "Amsterdam, Netherlands," *Echoes from the Field*, 2.
17. See "In the Field," *Union Conference Record*, February 17, 1908, 7.
18. "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens."
19. Ibid.
20. See report by Joseph Wibbens, in "Some of Our Missions," *European Division Conference Review*, Second quarter, 1913, 14.
21. See General Conference Committee Minutes, December 10, 1913, 106, General Conference Archives, accessed, October 2, 2019, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1913.pdf>.
22. See General Conference Committee Minutes, April 8, 1914, 140, General Conference Archives, accessed, October 2, 2019, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1914.pdf>.
23. Ibid.
24. It is possible that the divorce happened in 1915 or before, since a local newspaper listed her full first name as "Mrs. Grace Hilbish Wibbens" after she cared for a "Mrs. Wilder" near Orland. As retrieved from Ancestry.com, Year: 1920; Census Place: Fremont, Steuben, Indiana; Roll: T625_461; Page: 10A; Enumeration District: 153; for the appearance near Orland, see the first page and section "Fremont" in *Angola Herald*, Angola Indiana, Friday April 30, 1915;
25. "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens."
26. Ibid.
27. See "Belgian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D. C.: Review and Herald, 1942), 182.
28. "Levensloop Joseph Wibbens."

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