

The Story Of The CHURCH OF GOD (Seventh Day)

by Robert Coulter

PART III

The General Conference of the Church of God

In 1899, the General Conference of the Church of God held its annual meeting in Stanberry, Missouri. This conference acted upon a proposal which had been pending before it to incorporate in the state of Missouri. Incorporation was approved and application to incorporate was made. Articles of Incorporation were issued by the Gentry County Circuit Court in December of 1899. From that time through the first decade of this century, the General Conference underwent many changes. The work of the Conference which originally had been limited to the churches in Michigan, Iowa and Missouri, by the early teens had been extended into California, Oregon, Washington, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota.

In this period many of the early pioneer ministers and founders of the church were taken by death. In 1900, A. C. Long, a leader of the Missouri church and past president of the Conference, died at his home in Browndale, Missouri. Gilbert Cranmer, at the age of 89 years, died on December 17, 1903. A. F. Dugger, a pioneer in the Nebraska church, died in 1910. Jacob Brinkerhoff died at the age of 75 in 1916.

As these and other pioneer ministers passed on, new leadership began to emerge in the church. Among the most prominent leaders of this time was Andrew N. Dugger.

Andrew Dugger was the son of A. F. Dugger. The elder Dugger had been among the founders of the General Conference in 1884. He had been a minister for the Advent Christian Church. While serving that organization he decided to write a tract on the subject of why the seventh-day Sabbath should not be observed. After a thorough study of the subject he accepted the Sabbath and observed it faithfully. Elder Dugger began his

association with the Church of God in 1874, and became editor of the *Bible Advocate* magazine in Stanberry, Missouri, from 1903 to 1909. Through his ministry A. F. Dugger was instrumental in building a large congregation in Bassett, Nebraska, and later in organizing the Nebraska/South Dakota Conference.

It was from this background that Andrew Dugger began his own ministry with the Church of God in 1906. In 1914, Andrew became both president of the Conference and editor of the *Bible Advocate*. During his tenure, Elder Dugger exerted much influence upon the church. It was in this period that the Church of God experienced some of its greatest growth.

In 1923 the General Conference adopted an amendment to its name. The Conference decided to try to distinguish the church from other denominations using the name of Church of God. To accomplish this, they added the phrase, Seventh Day, to the name so that the name of the church became Church of God (Seventh Day).

During the period of the 20's, the church experienced more growth than it had previously. A missionary spirit seemed to be exemplified by the church and its leadership. The September 22, 1925, issue of the *Advocate* reports a partial list consisting of 79 congregations scattered over 17 states. In addition, the church had made contacts in several countries outside the United States. In the 1923 Conference a proposition was discussed to facilitate the publication of literature in German, Hebrew, two Indian dialects and to support seven ministers in China. As well, the Conference discussed the establishment of a publishing operation in Mexico. The church had contacts in these places in addition to contacts in the West Indies, Africa, Central and South America.

As the number of congregations and members grew, the General Conference began to adopt new policies. From the beginning, the church's papers had been regarded as a forum in which different points of view were published. The General Conference itself had begun as a loosely knit confederation of state conferences in which congregations and members functioned quite autonomously. At the time the Conference was organized, much anti-organizational sentiment was expressed and even published in the *Advocate*. In the 1920's the General Conference began to adopt steps to remedy the problem of doctrinal disunity and any uncoordinated effort expended on behalf of the church.

One of the first reforms instituted was that of A. N. Dugger's regarding financial policies. Dugger observed that some of the ministers solicited tithe from the membership by mail. He took measures in an effort to stop the flow of tithe to ministers directly. He advised members to tithe to the Conference or to state conference treasurers. This resulted in many members shifting their tithe from individual ministers to the Conference.

Some of the leaders whose in-

come was cut off began to express strong anti-organizational feelings. On the other hand, Dugger's policy change resulted in a dramatic increase of funds available to the Conference. It permitted the Conference to take an active role in supporting the evangelization of new fields and resulted in noticeable growth.

In the 1927 Conference meeting held at Rich Hill, Missouri, the membership dealt with the doctrinal disunity of the Church of God (Seventh Day). A bylaw was adopted which stated, "No member of the conference shall teach any doctrine in public which is not believed by the conference body, without clearly stating that such belief has not been endorsed by the Church of God, but that it is his own individual opinion."

Actions of this nature began to engender contention and strife within the church. The leadership was divided over the question of the amount of authority the Conference should exercise in matters of doctrine and policy. Unfortunately, the Conference's attempts to solve these problems were not effective. Dissatisfaction was about to erupt into an explosion that would bring division.

Jerusalem Headquarters

For many years, Dugger, who in 1931 was editor of the *Bible Advocate* but no longer president of the General Conference, had wanted to go to Jerusalem, Israel. He proposed that the church establish its world headquarters there. The 1931 conference voted to send Dugger to Jerusalem to prepare the way for making this move. On October 3, 1931, Dugger gave his farewell address to the Stanberry church and left with his family for Palestine. John Kiesz was called upon to move from South Dakota to Stanberry to become assistant editor of the *Advocate*. Dugger returned to the United States in the following October (1932). The church continued to function from Stanberry. The conference operations were never actually established in Jerusalem.

The Year 1933

In the meeting of the General Conference held at Stanberry in August, 1933, the discontentment over doctrinal and policy differences came to a head. There had been contention in these areas for more than a decade within the church.

In the election of officers for the conference a tie vote was cast for the two nominees for the office of president. Candidates for the office were A. N. Dugger and A. S. Christenson. The presiding officer, who was William Alexander, broke the tie by casting his vote for Christenson. This was a sore disappointment to Dugger.

Dugger claims that upon his return from Palestine several of his acquaintances were discussing the need for restoring "Bible organization" within the church. Their use of the terms, "Bible or scriptural organization," meant that the church should use a combination of committees or boards composed of twelve, seventy and seven members.

When this plan was fully developed, its promoters proposed that a board of twelve should be selected to look after the spiritual affairs of the church, a board of seven members should take care of the financial business and seventy members should be selected to go forth two by two to give the "warning message of the hour." The "warning message" was identified as the impending judgment of God upon the world as contained in Revelation 14:9, 10.

This discussion was made known to Dugger and he proceeded to present the plan for "scriptural organization" to the 1933 conference without success. This and other key doctrinal issues including the proper time for the observance of the Lord's Supper, clean and unclean meats for food, the use of tobacco, the third angel's message and the new birth proved divisive to the conference. It is said that the conference spent three days discussing the proper time for the observance of the Lord's Supper.

On the other hand, some observ-



The delegates who met at the 1933 General Conference. Many of these men were active ministers.

ers of the 1933 conference suggest that the real problem was a struggle for leadership. The issues at stake were reduced to who was going to run the church and what policies were going to prevail — conformity or individual liberty.

The Division

According to reports, several weeks prior to November 4, 1933, Dugger sent a letter to persons known to him in about 25 countries. He invited them to pray that God would lead His church as in apostolic times. In addition, he reported that he had sent ten thousand letters to people living in the United States.

All of this was done in preparation for a meeting which had been called to convene on November 4, 1933, at Salem, West Virginia. Dugger stated that members and ministers gathered at Salem on Friday, November 3, from far and wide. They spent the night in an all-night prayer meeting, fasting throughout the time. On Sabbath, November 4, a box was prepared and 140 names were written on slips of paper and placed in the box. The group assembled in Salem were about to initiate the reforms they felt necessary in restoring scriptural organization in the

church. The selection of the twelve and seventy was to be made by lot — that is, by drawing the slips of paper containing the names from the box.

It is reported that at a few minutes past 11:00 A.M., following a brief silent prayer, the names of the twelve were drawn one by one from the box. This was followed for the seventy. Lastly, the congregation selected the membership of the board of seven. A prayer meeting followed which lasted until late Sabbath afternoon.

The Church of God (Seventh Day) was divided into two separate organizations on that day (November 4). The one, which was the original body, continued to look to the conference which operated out of Stanberry, Missouri. The second established Salem, West Virginia as its headquarters in the United States. This body considered itself the reorganization of the apostolic church of the Book of Acts. Its seal read, "The Church of God, organized 33 A. D., Jerusalem, Palestine, reorganized November 4, 1933, Salem, West Virginia, U.S.A."

On November 6, 1933, the newly organized Salem conference issued a *Bible Advocate* magazine which carried the same volume number

as the original *Advocate* still being published in Stanberry. But subsequent issues dropped the volume number of the Stanberry paper.

These two Churches of God (Seventh Day) existed from 1933 to 1949.

Some Highlights of Events Between 1933 and 1949

The division of the Church of God (Seventh Day) caused the membership and leadership much grief. Many members and prospects were discouraged by the frequent attacks one church launched on the other. In many instances, ministers switched organizations, bewildering the membership. In other cases, the membership became pawns in the struggle between ministers who were vying for their loyalty and support.

The membership growth of the 20's was not realized nor even approached in the decades of the 30's and 40's. It is difficult to state affirmatively, but there is a strong indication the membership of the church decreased during this period.

The Radio Church of God Developed

Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Radio Church of God, which later became known as the Worldwide Church of God, was challenged by his wife's acceptance of the Sabbath in 1926. In that year he reports that he began to search the Bible in order to disprove her faith and practices. By the spring of 1927, Armstrong recanted and accepted his wife's views on the observance of the Sabbath and other doctrines of the Church of God (Seventh Day). This brought Armstrong into membership with the church in Oregon. By 1931, Armstrong had accepted a Ministerial License from the Oregon State Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) and was preaching regularly for the church.

When the division occurred in the conference in 1933, Armstrong gravitated toward the Salem church. In its initial organizational meeting of November 1933,

Armstrong was selected as one of the seventy. In 1934 Armstrong began a radiobroadcast called "The Radio Church of God." He also began to publish the *Plain Truth* magazine.

Soon, Armstrong received ministerial credentials from the Salem conference. His frequent reports and articles were published in the church's papers. However, Armstrong believed and taught at least two doctrines to which the Church of God (Seventh Day) has never given official support. These doctrines were the observance of the annual Hebrew festivals and the identification of the English-speaking peoples as the posterity of Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). His insistence upon preaching these concepts ultimately alienated him from the Salem conference. His ministerial credentials were revoked in 1937.

Armstrong moved his work from Oregon to Pasadena, California in 1947. He founded Ambassador College in that city.

The Worldwide Church of God teaches many doctrines in common with the Church of God (Seventh Day). Many of the basic doctrines of that church came directly from the Church of God (Seventh Day).

The Merger of the Stanberry and Salem Conferences

The first attempt at bringing about a reunion of the Church of God (Seventh Day) occurred in 1942. This try was unsuccessful.

The later effort which succeeded in bringing about a merger was started in 1947. In that year each of the conferences agreed to appoint three members to form a joint "unity committee." The unity committee met for the first time on November 7, 1947. The committee was composed of:

Salem

E. A. Straub
K. H. Freeman
W. W. McMicken

Stanberry

S. J. Kauer
L. I. Rodgers
Charles Adams



The first ministerial council following the 1949 merger. Photographed in Denver in 1950.

The moderator for the committee was A. E. Lidell, a neutral who was respected by the leadership of both conferences.

Through the efforts of this committee, a plan for merging the two churches was developed. The plan called for the ministry and leadership of the churches to meet together February 12-17, 1948, at Fairview, Oklahoma, the oldest church in Oklahoma. In this meeting the details of the merger plan were explained and perfected. The report of the committee was endorsed unanimously by the 61 delegates at this joint meeting.

In the summer of 1948, a joint camp meeting was held at Stanberry, Missouri. Members from both churches gathered together in August for an eight-day meeting of fellowship and inspiration. The Stanberry meeting provided ample evidence that the membership of both churches was ready for the Church of God (Seventh Day) to become one church again.

Both the Salem and Stanberry conferences held their 1949 meetings in Stanberry, August 12-21. The conference held joint worship services. Business meetings were held separately. After the merger plan was introduced in a joint conference meeting, the brethren met in their respective places to consider the adoption of the merger

plan. The membership of both conferences adopted the merger by an overwhelmingly favorable vote.

Following the adoption of the amended charter and bylaws reflecting the merger plan, the articles of incorporation of 1899 were amended. These amended articles reflect the fact that the united Church of God (Seventh Day) was an extension of the work first begun in the 1850's and 60's in Michigan and Iowa.

One of the conditions of the merger was that neither Stanberry, Missouri, nor Salem, West Virginia, was to be the base of operations for the church. Early in 1950, Denver, Colorado, became the site for conference operations. The earliest offices were located in the basement of the building newly built by the Denver congregation at 44th and Clayton Streets. In 1953, a large residence was purchased at 1510 Cook Street and was converted into the conference offices.

In 1972 a new building was constructed on 33 acres, north of the city of Denver adjacent to Interstate 25 highway. That facility now houses the conferences offices, the church's publications agency known as the Bible Advocate Press, and Summit School of Theology, the church's graduate ministerial training school.

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munities. They are opening up their churches as day care centers, for community services, workshops, for disaster relief. Why can't you? Do not let the limited willingness of others affect your own thinking or actions. Here's what you and I *can* do.

We can conduct seminars for tobacco addicts, cancer clinics, alcoholic rehabilitation. We can offer family counseling services, summer schools, camping and outdoor education programs. We can patronize the arts, open our doors to concerts, scouting programs.

If resources are not available in the church, turn to your community for service. You can become active with advisory councils, on school boards, in the Red Cross. Volunteer yourself for human services fund raisers. Organize a home Bible study. In other words, you and I need to get out there into the mainstream of life to become relevant and viable.

It is time our conferences were "jam-packed" with excited, concerned, participating members who are ready to voice concerns and mobilize their charges. The time is appropriate to call for ACCOUNTABILITY on every level of church operation. We need accountable congregations and pastors, accountable district operations, accountable conference entities.

And it is time to call for accountability in our communities and governments. Organizations and governments are *people*. The *power* is in the people and it is up to all of us as *people* to bring into account the actions of our representatives in government, in society, in the church, in our very homes!

These actions call for preparation, for training, for a readiness. One may have to return to school or make commitments to gain experience, so that he can be ready for the action of God's plans for him. God uses us within the level of our skills and interests. The action will always grow to fill the space which it has been allotted. It is always based on the preparation and enthusiasm of its respondent.

In other words, *you* determine how and whether God can use you. And it is you who decides whether the church will stand!

What can you do? What *will* you do?

Go at life boldly, without fear and hesitation. As one unknown writer has well said, by committing yourself to such a course of action, "you will find the forces of God and nature closing round you and coming to your aid." Make life in Christ exciting and joyous. Live it — every minute of it. **BA**

THE STORY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD (Seventh Day)

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The Church of God (Seventh Day)

Today, in the year 1980, one hundred and twenty-two years since Gilbert Cranmer first began to establish churches in southwestern Michigan, the Church of God (Seventh Day) still thrives. The church has a roster of 121 congregations in the United States and Canada. The conference has a ministerial staff of 100 active and 10 retired ministers.

The Church of God (Seventh Day) is actively represented by national conferences and missions in 17 countries ranging from Latin America, the West Indies, western Europe, and western Africa to the Orient. It has contacts in more than 45 countries on every continent around the world through its literature program.

In 1980, the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) established a goal to double the church's membership by 1990 in the United States and Canada. The leadership of the church believes it is God's will that the Gospel of Jesus Christ be preached around the world. The Church of God (Seventh Day) is prepared to share in that great commission — to direct men and women everywhere to the life-giving Saviour, Jesus Christ. **BA**

book review

Divine Rest for Human Restlessness, by Samuel Bacchiocchi, distributed by the author, 230 Lisa Lane, Berrien Springs, MI 49103, 1980.

329 pages.

Price: U.S. \$8.95.

The name Samuel Bacchiocchi is not unfamiliar to many Sabbath-keepers, and hopefully his new book, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, will better acquaint him with Sunday-keepers as well. Bacchiocchi subtitles his recent work as "a theological study of the Good News of the Sabbath for today." The author's point of view is primarily to demonstrate the practical value of keeping God's Sabbath as a day of rest and rejuvenation. Bacchiocchi's book is non-polemic, and truly gives the reader a sense of practical benefit and value to be derived from Sabbath-keeping.

Perhaps the best review of *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* comes from Dr. James Wesberry, editor of *Sunday*, executive director of the Lord's Day Alliance USA, and himself a Sunday-keeper, who says, "It is a practical presentation of how the Sabbath . . . can provide a divine remedy to some of the pressing human problems of today."

While *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* will no doubt find a place in many Sabbath-keepers' libraries, this book is highly recommended for our Sunday-keeping friends. It is an information-packed volume that firmly establishes what we Sabbath-keepers already know — "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

— Steven Brightbill