

CoG7's Middle Years:

The year 1914 was pivotal for the Church of God (Seventh Day). With new leadership, the next twenty years were characterized both by energetic vision and severe testing, leading to our darkest hour.

Prior to 1914, General Conference activity was limited mostly to publishing the *Bible Advocate* and other literature, issuing ministerial credentials (licenses came from state conferences), plus the business at general campmeetings — usually in Missouri or an adjacent state.

In those years, local churches and state conferences had a great deal of autonomy. Other than a shared name and common beliefs, no general plan existed for ministry. Tithe was often given directly to the pastor or evangelist, with little or no provision for a united work or missions. Most laborers in the gospel were bi-vocational, performing itinerant ministry only as their labor (usually farming) permitted.

The *Bible Advocate* magazine was published then as a forum for doctrinal issues. The debate in its pages occasionally became so intense that the editor would call for a moratorium on the current topic. Jacob Brinkerhoff's policy as editor (1874) reflected the *laissez faire* attitude of the Church: "... we feel that the paper belongs to the brotherhood ... it depends upon you each

and everyone to make [it] interesting and what you would like to see." The editor often raised much of the funds needed to publish the magazine and provide his own living.

By 1914 Jacob Brinkerhoff retired as BA editor and was replaced by Andrew N. Dugger, also selected as General Conference president. Dugger was a Nebraska farmer and schoolteacher whose father, A. F. Dugger, Sr., had been one of the founders of the General Conference thirty years before.

The young Dugger was visionary, keen-minded, and assertive. He was a strong debater in an era when debating was an accepted way to air opposing views. Dugger soon put these traits and gifts into action to pursue a stronger, more effective church. His innovative leadership and organizational reforms became the object of both praise and criticism for a half-century of churchmen.

One of the first changes implemented under Dugger's guidance was the editorial policy of the *Bible Advocate*. The open forum policy was changed to limit publication of articles to those who supported the Church's teaching. To clarify this, Editor Dugger published an article in 1917 entitled "What the Church of God Believes, and Why." It contained forty "irrefutable" statements covering about

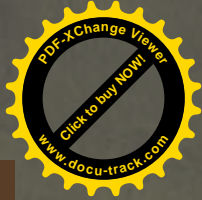
a dozen distinct teachings, with a Bible reason for each. These soon became the accepted doctrinal statements of the Church and remained so in the Stanberry group until 1949.

Another innovation was Church-wide financial reform. President Dugger urged members to send tithe to the Conference office or state treasuries, rather than hand it to an individual. This brought a significant increase of funds, resulting in growth for the Church through evangelistic and other united efforts. On the other hand, it angered some ministers who were accustomed to receiving tithe directly from the membership.

To distinguish the Church from other Churches of God, Elder Dugger promoted adoption of the words *Seventh Day* in the official Church name. Accordingly, the Conference became the Church of God (Seventh Day) in 1923.

Energized by greater funding and his own zeal, Dugger was the first president of the Conference to travel extensively among the Conference's congregations and members. This enabled him to build a broad base of support for his programs, as well as serve with other itinerant evangelists and pastors who were contributing to the Church's growth.

Thus the 1920's became a time of impressive increase. One thousand new members report-



1914 - 1950



Elder A. N. Dugger

edly were added to the Church in a twelve-month period (1921). A partial list of affiliated churches published in a 1925 *Advocate* contained seventy-nine congregations in seventeen states. Many CoG7 ministers received assistance from the General Conference or a state conference. The subscriber list of the *Bible Advocate* expanded considerably and into foreign fields, as did the distribution of literature produced at the Stanberry, Missouri, publishing house.

By 1925 the Church had undergone a fairly significant makeover. It had an energetic and popular president, a workable financial policy, an enlarged doctrinal statement, and a distinctive name. About this time the Church published its first *Bible Home Instructor*, a book-length study guide to the Church's teachings. Several colporteurs were recruited to sell this book from door to door, further stimulating the Church's growth.

In spite of these good things, growing tensions within the Conference became evident in the late 1920's:

- sharp differences over how much authority the Conference should wield over its state conferences and congregations
- doctrinal issues, some longstanding and others advocated for the first time by the influx of new members
- development of new leaders

who began to challenge some reforms and proposals of Elder Dugger and others.

These tensions were exacerbated to some degree by actions of the 1927 and '29 conferences in session, as they called for more conformity in doctrine and practice. Unhappily, these attempts to solve the Church's problems were not truly effective. The discontent would soon erupt into full-blown division.

To fulfill a personal dream, Elder Dugger and his family traveled to Palestine (with support of the Conference) in 1931, hoping to establish CoG7 world headquarters there. When he returned a year later, another divisive item – that of Church structure with twelve apostles, seven deacons, and seventy elders – was co-sponsored by him and added to the Conference's agenda.

In 1933 the fault lines of doctrine, authority, and structure came gaping open at the Church's conference and camp-meeting in Stanberry. The divide showed itself most plainly in election of Conference officers when men backed by Elder Dugger and his supporters lost by a single tie-breaking vote – not once but twice.

The disappointment of this narrow defeat prompted the Dugger party to circulate letters calling for formation of a new conference pat-

terned after the "Bible numbers" of twelve, seven, and seventy. Such an organization was born in Salem, West Virginia, on November 4, 1933, effectively dividing the Church of God (Seventh Day) into nearly equal halves. (For a fuller account of the 1933 events in Stanberry and Salem, including Elder Dugger's seven doctrinal concerns, go to www.cog7.org/BA).

This division introduced sixteen years of stagnation in the Church. It would not be repaired until the merger of 1949 and relocation of central offices to Denver, Colorado, in 1950 – events that will be covered in the next issue. Meanwhile, Elder A. N. Dugger, who helped design the Church's modern structures and develop its doctrines and who was the Church's most influential leader prior to 1950, completed his ministry in Jerusalem, Israel, and died there in 1975. His name will always be closely linked to the Church's progress and growth after 1914, as well as to the controversies that surrounded and followed 1933.

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