

ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH OF GOD
IN MARION, IOWA

Early in the year 1860 a man named M.E. Cornell made his appearance in Marion, Ia., preaching the second coming of Christ, the unconscious state of men in death, and the observance of the Sabbath-day. Who he was, what he was, or who sent him, no one seemed to know. His preaching made quite a stir, especially that on the Sabbath, inasmuch that the ministers of the various churches began to oppose his preaching. The more they fought it the greater the interest. So much so that the Disciples' Minister was stirred up to debate the Sabbath, and the state of the dead questions with him. This made the interest still greater and the ministers were confounded, not knowing how to meet his arguments assuming many heretofore unheard of positions. The final result was the organization of a church of Jesus Christ in Marion, by Eld. M.E. Cornell, consisting of upwards of fifty members gathered out of the different churches in Marion.

The compact that formed the basis of the new organization consisted of an agreement to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, taking the Bible alone for a rule of faith and practice. It was not long until we who entered into this organization discovered that a change was to be made in the organization that might be a severe trial and test to some of the members, and a tutoring process was carried on to prepare the organization for such a test. To prepare the mind for the coming change it was urged that a more perfect organization was needed in order to hold church property. Finally the crisis came. The name was changed from Church of Jesus Christ to that of Seventh-day Adventists, and to the compact was added an agreement to take the visions of Ellen White of like authority with the Bible, if not of greater authority because of their direct application to the present time.

Fully half of the members refused to enter into this new arrangement with its new conditions but remained firm on the original organization. And so it was that the new organization abandoned its original organization and compact, and those who still remained perpetuated the original one.

To those who remained in the original organization was added quite a number of persons who had been holding back that now came forward and united with them, who were then made stronger than the party that left. Following the Church of Christ at Marion similar churches were organized in other places. One at Vinton, Ia. of about a hundred members. At La Porte a small number united together to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus and at Lisbon also was a small company of believers. There were all tested in the same way that the Marion Church had been, which finally resulted in their final disruption, and the few that remained faithful to their original vows have been more or less associated with the Marion people, while the S.D.A. Church formed at Marion became extinct long ago.

As soon as it was discovered that some of these neighboring churches clung to their original faith a circular letter was written calling for a conference of the scattered believers, which met in Marion Nov. 5, 1862. When it ordered the publication of the circular letter and its general circulation. The following extract from that letter was published in "The Hope of Israel" (the infant state of the Bible Advocate), Sep. 7, 1864. "We will here give a sketch of our history for the last two years and a half. On the tenth day of June 1860, something over fifty of us adopted a form of church ~~compact~~ covenant drawn up by M.E. Cornell, one of the approved messengers of the truths we had recently adopted. The following is a copy of the covenant:

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'We the undersigned, do hereby express our wish to be associated together in Christian Fellowship as a Church of Jesus Christ at Marion, whose covenant obligation is briefly expressed in keeping the commandments of God and faith of Jesus, taking the Bible, and the Bible alone as the rule of our faith and discipline.'

"Near a year and a half afterwards the same messenger held up publicly some other volumes of recent date by the side of the Bible, and averred that these recent publications were of equal authority and binding forever with the Bible, and urged us to accept their teachings also as a rule of faith and discipline. A portion of us were unwilling to accept these new planks in the platform of our church. Certainly not until we had time to test their soundness and fitness. The result was that about half of the Church decided to receive these volumes as valid scripture and drew off from us, or rather repelled us from them, denouncing us as rebels, etc, distinctly intimating that they no longer desired nor would tolerate our company in their religious meetings otherwise than as spectators.

"We now discovered that the cry for organization had been made under false colors; and that while the plea of holding church property and securing the church against imposters was held out, the real object was to put the visions of Ellen G. White on the same eminence with the Bible, and secure the recognition of Elder J. White as the ~~platter~~ ^{platter}-day Moses."

"As it regards us as being rebels, we boldly assert that we are NOT REBELS! We have not rebelled against the constitution which we adopted, for we stand FIRM on it yet. We have not rebelled against Ellen G. White for we never endorsed her; nor have we rebelled against any of the messengers, for we never acknowledged allegiance to them. So the charge of rebellion reflects with shame on them who made it, they being the ones who have departed from their first position, the Bible and the Bible alone.

V.M.Gray

E.F.Goff

Committee."

When this conference M.N.Kramer

was being planned some of the S.D.Adventists at Marion conceived the idea that its purpose was to raise up E.W.Shortridge, who had been one of their ministers, but who at that time was in disrepute with them, perhaps mainly because of his return to the original faith as adopted by the Church of Christ from which he had withdrawn in order to join them and to accept the visions. So it was reported to the "Advent Review" at Battle Creek, Michigan, that the "rebels at Marion" as they called us, were calling a conference to raise up E.W.Shortridge and make him their minister for as yet we had no minister among us, for all the ministers they sent out had to accept the S.D.Adventist doctrine, especially the visions.

It had been the policy of their leaders to keep from the different churches any knowledge of separations or dissatisfaction of any kind toward the receiving of the visions. But affairs at Marion had obtained such prominence that it could not be hid from others, and the fact that E.E.Shortridge did not live at Marion or even in Iowa, the publishers of "The Review" did not realize that there would be any risk in its publication nor fear that its publication would lead to any divulgence of what was going on in other places, so did not hesitate to publish such report.

Yet a letter addressed by some person in Michigan to E.E.Shortridge, Marion, Iowa, where he supposed Shortridge lived, found its way to him in Illinois and opened up a communication with the Michigan people. And by its means the Marion people learned of the existence of many churches in Michigan and elsewhere that had been separated

because of the visions.

We then learned that the ministers with whom we had been acquainted or who had visited us prior to their separation from us were connected with the S.D.A. Church, and were sent out by them to preach and organize churches of Jesus Christ in the same way that Marion had been. At first we had no minister with us nor did we then know of any minister who was not a Seventh Day Advent, so one of our members, V.M. Gray, a farmer, took charge of our meetings.

By the information thus obtained we discovered that there had been a number of separations in the churches of Michigan and other places on account of the visions, similar to that which took place in the Marion Ch. By the same means we also learned that the Michigan and Eastern Churches were holding conferences already before we had the noted separation at Marion, and that they were preparing to publish a church paper which commenced on August 10, 1863, Enos Eaton being editor of the first number, after which H.S. Dillie conducted it for some time. It was named "The Hope of Israel."

After many difficulties and some halting on the way it finally came to a standstill in Michigan, Oct. 18, 1865, after an existence of one year and ~~ten~~ months, in which time 30 numbers had been issued, making one and a half volumes. Thus it was proved that the first church to separate on account of the visions was not the Marion Church, but that many other churches had been separated before then.

During the last few months of the publication of "The Hope of Israel" in Michigan the question of the change of the church name was discussed, and after a prolonged discussion in "The Hope" the name Church of God was adopted instead of "Church of Jesus Christ."

After a rest of about six months the "Hope of Israel" was taken up again and published at Marion, Iowa, beginning May 29, 1866. Elders Snook and Brinkerhoff had quite recently left the S.D.A. Church and united with us at Marion. Elder William Brinkerhoff became editor of "The Hope of Israel" and Elder B.F. Snook went out to preach.

There have been stories circulated on the Pacific Coast calculated to give the impression that the Marion Church was the only church that "rebelled" against the S.D. Advents of all the churches it raised up. But this is far from the truth in every particular. As had already been stated they claimed for themselves to have a new organization, a more perfect one, as they called it, and that we who were left were but a very small portion of the church. But this claim condemns itself for if it were a very small portion they would not have made so much as they did of the great "Rebellion" at Marion.

As for Snook and Brinkerhoff being the leaders to take that few out of from among them, no church of Christ ever came out of the S.D. Advent Church, but they invariably separated themselves from the Churches of Christ which they had organized. So far as Snook and Brinkerhoff having anything to do with their separated condition we have a distinct recollection that they did not come with us for three or four years after the S.D.A. Church had been separated from us. Besides I have in my possession today* the entire publication of "The Hope of Israel" in Michigan and also at Marion.

* These were later given to the "Church of God Publishing House" at Stanberry, MO.

"The Hope of Israel" contains the doings of "The Church of Christ" of those times in Iowa, Michigan, and some Eastern states. And yet "The Hope" makes no mention of the names of Snook and Brinkerhoff prior to May 29, 1866, about four years after what they picture as the "Great Rebellion",

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to which could not have been if they had been our leaders to take us out. In a short time Snook had penetrated into southern Iowa and Illinois. A letter from A.C. Long in Missouri, dated July 9, 1866, was received at "The Hope" office giving the information that help was greatly needed there, which indicated that the Church of God believers had the same difficulties that churches in other places had because of the recognizing of the visions. It was suggested that Snook might visit them while on one of his southern trips in Iowa. I have found no statement in the history of the churches of Michigan as to the number of churches established there at an early date, for a state conference was organized in Missouri in 1873 that has been kept up continuously since that time. And from there A.C. Long came to Marion and preached in Iowa a number of years.

According to the numbering of the General Conference it must have been organized in 1883, and probably all its meetings have been in Missouri and mostly in Stanberry where the Bible Advocate has been printed for a long time. It is probable that the Marion Church has had much to do with the organization of the General Conference that now stands forth in a prosperous condition. This it was proved by the account of the visions was not the Marion Church, but that many other churches had been organized during the last few months of the publication of "The Church of God" in Marion, Iowa, and after a prolonged discussion in "The Hope" the name Church of God was adopted instead of "Church of Jesus Christ".

It is a well-known fact that those of us who were in the Marion Church and published at Stanberry, Iowa, beginning May 29, 1866. William Snook and Brinkerhoff had just recently left the B.D.A. Church and united with us at Marion. After William Brinkerhoff became editor of "The Hope of Israel" and after B.F. Snook went out to preach. There have been stories circulated on the Pacific Coast calculated to give the impression that the Marion Church was the only church that "rebelled" against the B.D.A. Advances of all the churches it raised up. But this is far from the truth in every particular. As had already been stated they claimed for themselves to have a new organization, a more perfect one, as they called it, and that we who were left were out a very small portion of the church. But this claim condemns itself for it is a very small portion that would not have made so much as they did of the great "Rebellion" at Marion.

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