

An
Inside Look
at the
Church of God
(Restoration)
and Related Denominations

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Introduction

Since our return to the USA about two years ago, I have had several conversations along the following line—especially since the Church of God Restoration has recently held evangelistic meetings in my community:

“Say”, someone asks me, “have you ever heard of a group that calls themselves ‘Church of God’?”

“Yes”, I reply. “That is my church background.”

“Really! I ran into someone the other day that said they are part of that group. I never heard of it before.”

“My paternal grandfather and my maternal grandmother were Church of God preachers”, I continue.

“Oh? I never knew they existed before...”

As the conversation continues, I usually hear the following question:

“And if that is your church background, may I ask why you left it?”

On a couple of occasions, at the end of the conversation, the person I have been talking to tells me that I should talk to so-and-so, as said person would be very interested to hear what I have shared. This paper is a way to do that; give a closer look at the Church of God movement.

As mentioned, I grew up in the Church of God movement. By saying “movement”, I mean to say that, as I will explain later on, there are several sub-groups of churches that call themselves Church of God, which derive from the movement started by Daniel Sydney Warner in the late 19th century. I have personal acquaintance with at least 8 different branches of this movement, of which the “Church of God (Restoration)” springs from.

And, being an avid reader, I have read much church history and literature from many other groups. What I write then, is not merely something that I “pop off the top of my head”. Since childhood (and I am 39 years old at this writing) I have been searching and watching and contemplating. By saying this, I do not want to say that I know everything about the Church of God movement—rather, I desire to let the reader know that what I say does not come from one or two visits to a meeting somewhere.

I intend to point out some negative and some positive points of the movement. May each of us learn one from another. Were it not for the Church of God movement, where would I be? My maternal grandmother was drawn from a life of sin and became a missionary to Nigeria. My paternal grandparents sought for something deeper than the superficial Baptist church they were a part of. Cousins on both sides of my family—cousins whose parents rejected the teachings of their parents—are

druggies, fornicators, and adulterers (most are married to the second or third companion). The message of holiness that the Church of God taught has kept me from a lot of sin and grief.

With this in mind, I begin with...

A brief look at the history of the Church of God

I well remember driving down the street in Hartford City, Indiana¹ one day and seeing the following inscribed in the cornerstone of a Church of God building:

The Church of God- founded A.D. 33

It struck me as a bit hypocritical. I was only a young teenager , but I knew that *that* particular branch of the Church of God had not been founded in A.D. 33. *That* branch of the Church of God was in apostasy—at least in my young mind.

But in the minds of many Church of God people, their church does indeed date back to the Pentecost. In their judgment, what they teach and practice is exactly what the Apostles taught and practiced. To suggest that their church was founded at a later date is almost tantamount to blasphemy.

But the fact remains that the Church of God movement was begun in the late 1800's. Up until that time, there was no church group that taught the exact same doctrine and had the same practice. Therefore, it is only right to say that the Church of God began as a movement in the 19th century.

Most Church of God people count Daniel Sydney Warner—usually referred to as D. S. Warner—as the last reformer who finally brought about the perfect restoration of the New Testament church.

D. S. Warner

On June 25, 1842, Daniel Sydney Warner was born at Bristol, Wayne County, Ohio to David and Leah (Dierdorf) Warner. David was a tavern-keeper, and Daniel would be raised in a home where alcohol flowed freely. Yet, his mother, of “Pennsylvania Dutch” stock, is described as a “sainted person”, and Daniel would write fondly of her in later years.²

So Daniel passed the days of his youth. He was known for his speaking abilities even in his school days, and when a bit older was known to address political themes in public, standing on a stump or other

¹ My home town

² Daniel baptized her in her later years and she became a part of the Winebrennerian Church of God.

improvised stage. Taking the place of a brother, he also served a short time in the Civil War.



D. S. Warner's parents. Note the whiskey glass in his father's hand.

Coming to maturity, he decided to be an infidel, apparently from the lack of a genuine spiritual vitality in the Lutheran and Catholic community he grew up in. But while singing hymns with some youth one Sunday afternoon, the message contained in the songs struck home; conviction grabbed his soul. After a few months it waned away, but was renewed when he attended a dance and returned home to his mother, who reproved him for going to a dance while his only sister lay dying at home. A short while later, he was converted at a protracted meeting³ in a local school-house, in February of 1865.

He attended Oberlin College for a short time, married his first wife, Tamzen Ann Kerr, and taught school for a spell. A son was born, and later triplets, about 4 years after their marriage. None of these children survived, and Tamzen's death (1872) quickly followed the death of the triplets.

About one year after his conversion, Daniel preached his first sermon, at a Methodist protracted meeting. Two years afterwards, he joined the Church of God (Winebrennerian). This step is important to note, as this church left a permanent mark on his ideas of the church.

³ Protracted meetings were meetings that were held every evening in succession as long as there was a response at the "altar call". They often lasted for several weeks, and occasionally for as long as 8 weeks.



*Daniel and Tamzen
Warner.*

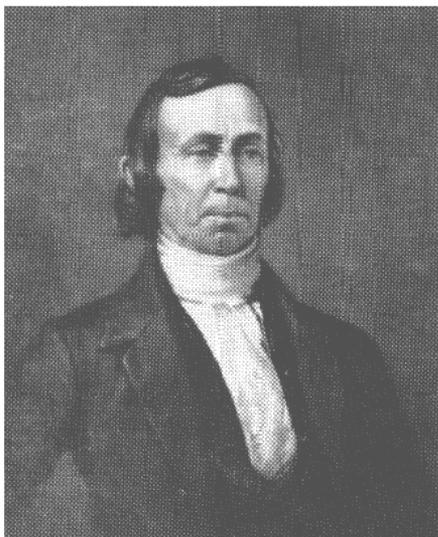
John Winebrenner and “The Church of God (Winebrennerian)”

John Winebrenner is not normally included as a part of the “reformation” in the histories composed by the Church of God groups that derive from Warner. Yes, they include Winebrenner, but only as a “pre-reformation” information. Yet, this group fundamentally affected Warner’s thinking in regard to the church. In fact, Warner practically carbon-copied John Winebrenner in this area.

John Winebrenner was born in Maryland. Raised in the German Reformed Church, he became a minister of said denomination. Experiencing a personal salvation, he gives his testimony as follows:

I was, parentally and providentially, restrained from the paths of vice and immorality. And as my mother trained me, from youth up, in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and instructed me in the great principles and duties of religion, I was graciously brought to feel my obligations to God at an early age, and my mind was deeply exercised on the subject of my soul’s salvation. These convictions, however, would sometimes wear off, and then be renewed again. Hence, I continued sinning and repenting for a number of years, till in the winter of 1817, when deep and pungent convictions laid hold of my guilty soul. Then, like Job, “I abhorred myself” [Job 19:19]—like Ephraim, “I bemoaned myself” [Jeremiah 31:18]—with the prodigal, I said, “I will arise,

and go to my Father” [Luke 15:18]—and with the publican, I cried, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” [Luke 18:13]. And after “chattering like the swallow,” and “mourning as a dove” [Isaiah 38:14], for three or four weary months, my poor woe-fraught soul found redemption in Immanuel’s blood, even the forgiveness of sins. It was on Easter Sabbath, in the city of Philadelphia, in the presence of a large congregation of worshipers, that Jesus, the “Sun of Righteousness” arose, and shone upon my soul, “with healing in his wings” [Malachi 4:2]. Truly, that was the happiest day of my life! My darkness was turned into day, and my sorrow into joy. Jesus became the joy of my heart, and the centre of my affections. His people became lovely and precious in my sight. His word was my delight. In it I beheld new beauties and beatitudes. Sin, that dreadful monster, became more odious and hateful to my soul. Zion’s welfare lay near my heart. My bowels yearned for the salvation of sinners. I was in travail for my friends and kindred. I felt constrained to join with “the Spirit and the bride” [Revelation 22:17], and say to all, Come, O, come to Jesus!



John Winebrenner, from whom D.S. Warner learned his doctrine of the church.

After a few years in the German Reformed Church, he was effectively pushed out because of his more evangelical teachings and practices⁴ and his association with the Methodists. Greatly saddened by

⁴ Prayer meetings that might last until 4 a.m., “altar calls”, etc.

the sectarian strife, he began to form congregations of believers, each independent as far as church authority goes; he simply formed local churches of God. Concerning sectarianism, he wrote:⁵

The unhappy division of the church into such a variety of voluntary associations and parties, wearing different human names and titles, is, in my opinion, utterly wrong.

And why is it wrong?

First. It is contrary to Scripture to divide the church of God into different sects and denominations. This is sufficiently evident from the fact, as I before showed, that the word *ecclesia*, or *church*, is never used by the inspired penmen in such a sense, but always as denoting either the whole collective body of the faithful throughout the world, or a distinct congregation of Christians located in some given place. Accordingly, there are individual or particular churches; and those collectively constitute one general or universal church. Beside this division of the church, there is no divine warrant given for any other. Hence, the combination of two or more individual churches into a sect or distinct connection wearing a sectarian name and governed by human laws is highly improper and anti-scriptural...

Second. To divide the church of God into various denominations is wrong, *because it begets and promotes sectarianism.*

By sectarianism I mean a spirit of bigotry or party prejudice. And what can be more inconsistent and hateful in a professor of the blessed and holy religion of Jesus Christ than such a satanic spirit? ...nothing doubtless has a more withering influence, and is on the whole more hurtful to the cause of Christianity than a sectarian partiality...And in confirmation of it I allege, as evidence:

First. I allege as evidence *sacred or scriptural history.* The history of the church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, plainly shows the fact that sectarianism or bigotry grows out of religious parties... In further confirmation of this opinion, I allege,

Second. *Daily experience; that is, the experience and history of the church in all ages.*

⁵ I have deleted portions of the following as it is a rather lengthy quote. But I include it to show the foundation of the Church of God doctrine (as taught by Warner) of the church. This was written some 40 years before Warner spelled out his views. As well, I include this as I think Winebrenner is essentially correct in many of his views.

The Old Testament church was divided into a variety of sects and parties, as Samaritans, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, &c. The sad consequence of which was that they hated and opposed one another...

And soon after the New Testament church was established in the world, “the Dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil and Satan” [Re 20:2], began to sow the seeds of discord among the followers of the Lamb. And that this arch-enemy of God and man has actually succeeded in his attempt to divide the flock of God is too obvious to need any proof. But, oh, what a pity that this dividing principle ever invaded the hallowed pale of the church of Christ!

This appalling fact will, perhaps, be found nowhere more strictly true than in the history of the church since the days of Martin Luther, the celebrated Saxon reformer. Since that memorable time a great variety of opposing parties has sprung up in almost every part of Protestant Christendom. And I know not that these religious sects are more numerous in any country than in our own. North America abounds with them... When the Lord our God pours out His Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost, and revives His work, so that many are converted and made happy in redeeming love, all experience shows that these new-born souls are sweetly knit and joined together as one man; or like David and Jonathan, and like the first Christians, they are all of one heart and one soul. And like our heavenly Father, they have no respect to person. But no sooner than different sectarians come in among them, and begin to divide them into various sects and parties, *love to one another*, which is the cardinal mark and badge of discipleship, rapidly declines, or *waxes cold*, as the Scripture expresses it [Mt 24:12]. Now, instead of living in peace, loving as brethren, and so fulfilling their Master’s law, we soon see them acquire a sectarian likeness; they will, ere long, have common sentiments, common language, and common habits, which, when acquired, frequently give rise to a mistaken zeal for the honor of God, a blind attachment to their respective peculiarities, and such an inveterate prejudice against one another that they seldom or never meet together again for the worship of that God who made them, and whose children they profess to be...

On these grounds, then, I assert and maintain it to be utterly wrong and sinful in the sight of God to set up and promote sectarian churches. This many will acknowledge to be true, notwithstanding, persist in acting on this separating principle. And then as a kind of atonement for their sin will afterwards preach and pray for the destruction of bigotry, prejudice, and

partiality, and for unity and harmony among the people of God. Thus by their doings they promote the separating principle, and by their words they advocate the principle of union... Now, one of two things such people, in order to be consistent, ought to do—either leave off praying for a union among Christians, or quit building up sects and parties. For “no man can serve two masters” [Mt 6:24].

It is a principle in natural philosophy that every effect has an adequate cause. And on this principle the following rule is founded: *Remove the cause and the effect will cease*. Now, if the establishment of sectarian churches is the primary cause of bigotry or sectarian prejudice, then, in order to effect a destruction of the latter evil, which is the effect, the former, which is the cause, ought first to be removed. And not until this is done can any rational hope be entertained of seeing Christians *perfectly joined together, loving each other with a pure heart fervently*, and living in *unity and peace among themselves*. Thus I have ventured to give my opinion in this matter; whether I am right, and if so, how far I have succeeded in demonstrating the same, I shall leave to my unprejudiced readers to judge⁶...

As for being ashamed to wear a sectarian or nick name, I disown not the allegation. And the day is coming when, I have no doubt, there will be a great many more ashamed of it, and those perhaps who now glory in it will then be most ashamed.

A scriptural church discipline I have never opposed. But sectarian laws, penal codes, and divers machinations, which pass for ecclesiastical Disciplines, in some places and among some sects, I do not, and cannot, approve.

Loathe to start but another human-organized “Church”, Winebrenner was slow to put any organization over the various congregations. As a successful evangelist that saw hundreds of conversions under his ministry, he began to organize them into local, independent congregations of believers.⁷ As well, he was known to fellowship with other churches outside of his own congregations, such as the United Brethren and The Evangelical Association. For example, he was

⁶ This paragraph is the essential reason for the Church of God movement. **Note**, however, that Winebrenner has the cart before the horse, as Warner’s churches have also done. Winebrenner seems to think that denominations cause sectarian attitudes. Actually, the reverse is truer: sectarian attitudes make sectarian denominations. Following this mentality, the Church of God has spent a lot of energy blasting the results, rather than the cause!

⁷ But, as usually happens, another denomination was eventually formed out of these churches.

responsible for organizing a camp-meeting in which preachers from four denominations were used, along with several other preachers without any denominational attachments.

Back to Warner...

For about 6 years, Daniel preached in NW Ohio and into Indiana. He was an effective evangelist, and could number the baptisms he performed by the hundreds. This was not the “easy-believism” of today, but rather in the era when repentance meant forsaking sin.



Sarah Warner, 2nd wife and object of Daniel's affections, and later the cause of much pain.

As usual, both sides accused the other in their separation.

The Church of God (Winebrennarian) of which Warner was associated taught against many social evils that are overlooked in today's “evangelical” churches. While not emphasized, the Winebrennerian Church of God also taught non-resistance.⁸

In time, Warner was called to missionary service in Nebraska. After a short stint, he returned briefly to Ohio and married Sarah Ann Keller. His diary entries from this period show a man devoted to his work. As well, they reveal the pain of leaving his newly married wife of 19 years of age alone on the prairie while he traveled for days at a time in his ministerial duties. After a few years, he regressed to Ohio.

⁸ The doctrinal statement said: [The Church of God] believes that all civil wars are unholy and sinful, and in which the saints of the Most High ought never to participate.

Shortly after returning to Ohio, Warner became enthused, most likely through his parents-in-law, about the “Holiness” doctrine of “a second, definite work of grace, subsequent to justification”. In 1877 he openly espoused the cause, claiming to have received the experience. This would eventually cause his rupture with the Winebrennerian churches. About this time, his daughter, Levilla Modest, passed away. This was his 5th child to bury.



Daniel Hoch and wife, a minister of the “New Mennonites”. D. S. Warner sought to unite with this group at one time. It had a basically Mennonite doctrine with “Holiness” distinctives. The Church of God is a “Holiness” church with some Mennonite distinctives. Yet the two groups were unable to fully unite.

Some in the Winebrennerian churches began to accept Freemasonry. This caused a split in said denomination, and Warner put his lot in with those who opposed secret societies. A separate Eldership was formed. About this time, he also met and spoke warmly of the “New Mennonites”⁹. For a time, he worked to bring about a union between his Eldership and these Mennonites. Along with this endeavor, Warner also began to help in publishing ventures, which culminated in the paper called “The Gospel Trumpet”.

The new Church of God

⁹ This was one of several, small Mennonite groups that took on “Holiness” or Methodist doctrines and practices. Some of these merged together to become the current “Missionary Church”.

In a dispute with the new branch of the Winebrennerian Church of God that he had joined with, Warner withdrew in 1881. Together with a few others, he struck out on his own. One of the earliest congregations of the “new” Church of God composed the following resolutions:

Whereas we recognize ourselves in the perilous times of the last days, the time in which Michael is standing up for the deliverance of God’s true saints (Daniel 12:1), the troublesome times in which the true house of God is being built again, therefore,

Resolved, That we will endeavor by all the grace of God to live holy, righteous, and godly in Christ Jesus, “looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,” who we believe is nigh, even at the door.

Resolved, That we adhere to no body or organization but the church of God, bought by the blood of Christ, organized by the Holy Spirit, and governed by the Bible. And if the Lord will, we will hold an annual assembly of all saints who in the providence of God shall be permitted to come together for the worship of God, the instruction and edification of one another, and the transaction of such business as the Holy Spirit may lead us to see and direct in its performance.

Resolved, That we ignore and abandon the practice of preacher’s license as without precept or example in the Word of God, and that we wish to be “known by our fruits” instead of by papers.

Resolved, That we do not recognize or fellowship any who come unto us assuming the character of a minister whose life is not godly in Christ Jesus and whose doctrine is not the Word of God.

Resolved also, That we recognize and fellowship, as members with us in the one body of Christ, all truly regenerated and sincere saints who worship God in all the light they possess, and that we urge all the dear children of God to forsake the snares and yokes of human parties and stand alone in the “one fold” (John 10:16) of Christ upon the Bible, and in the unity of the Spirit.¹⁰

In the eyes of many—in later years—this was the moment of “the last reformation”. The true church of Jesus was now being “rebuilt”, having passed through the reformation of Luther, then of Wesley, and finally of Warner.

¹⁰ From this last article, we see that in its infancy, the Church of God did not seem to have the idea of “we are the only true church, so come join us”. It started as an attempt to be churches of Jesus. Note the annual assembly: Humanity has a hard time staying away from building denominations!



Daniel, Sydney, and Frances Warner. This was Warner's last marriage, and his only son that survived. Sydney was actually the son of Sarah, who had died after the separation from Daniel. Warner is to be commended in not remarrying until his separated spouse had died. The "liberal" Church of God branches would now support second marriages while the first spouse is alive, in certain cases.

Warner would spend his final years building up his movement. His second wife was attracted to a sort of "third work of grace" doctrine that supposedly sanctified a person to such a degree that even reproductive desires were taken away. It is not clear how much Daniel himself accepted this doctrine in the beginning, but later he clearly rejected it. In a disagreement with some of the proponents of this doctrine, Warner's wife took sides with the opposition and returned to live with her parents. Some years later she filed for a divorce and, according to some information, married another man. In spite of the obvious needs in his home life, Warner never backed off from preaching.¹¹ After her death, he married his 3rd wife, Frances Miller, in 1893.

On December 12, 1895, Daniel Sydney Warner passed to his final reward, leaving one son.

He knew much suffering in his life: first by a drunken father, then by the death of at least 5 children, the death of two wives, together with the peculiar trials of the separation from his second companion.¹² In his labours, he was fervent. Gifted in poetry, he wrote many songs and

¹¹ Titus 2:6; 1 Tim. 3:1-11

poems. And as already mentioned, he was greater-than-normal in his public-speaking abilities. But he was weak in body, and lived a shorter-than-normal lifespan.

The Church of God after Warner

Hundreds were joining the cause in Warner's last days. After his death, it would be thousands. Within two decades, missionaries were sent out into many parts of the globe. The Church of God (Anderson, IN) was the fastest growing denomination in the early 20th century, according to statistics. In the mid-20th century, the Assemblies of God took over the lead in numerical growth.

None-the-less, not all was roses. Within a few years, a controversy arose called "the anti-cleansing heresy" by the movement. Obviously, those who disagreed with the status-quo did not call it that. But in 1899, a sizable portion of the people left the Church of God, disagreeing with the official sanctification doctrine. Some estimates run as high as 50% of the ministers departing; this is probably a bit high. But it is noted that many of its more eloquent preachers quit the movement. Since those leaving never formed a rival movement, the Church of God has tended to write off this division as unworthy of consideration.

Next came the "Pentecostal" movement. No Church of God publication that I have seen has ever acknowledged it, but William J. Seymour, pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street¹³ had been associated with the Church of God. While there was not really a "division" in the sense of many congregations defecting, the "Pentecostal" movement has surely drawn away disciples that might otherwise have united with the Church of God movement.

About a decade later, the unity was further broken over the question of racial integration. The Church of God is to be congratulated for the anti-racial stance it had taken in its early days: blacks and whites were treated equally, at least as equally as the laws around them would permit. Racism still ran strong in the southern States, and in places law forbade the mixing of the races in public places. Despite this, "the Saints" broke the laws and intermingled.¹⁴

But the day came, some 15 years or so after Warner's death, when the white ministers "suggested" to the blacks that they should consider

¹² She wrote negatively about the "better-than-thou" attitude of the "Come-outers" (as the early Church of God people were called) which was printed in rival "Holiness" church papers. Daniel responded, in print, by accusing her of several short-comings.

¹³ Where a "Pentecostal" revival broke out, in Los Angeles.

¹⁴ Intermarriage was, however, strongly frowned upon.

holding a separate camp-meeting, as their presence on the campgrounds “was hindering white folks from getting saved.” The black folks willingly obliged and formed a parallel movement.

About 1915, the first major division occurred that brought about a rival movement. The “issue” was the wearing of adornment, in particular, the neck-tie. While this was the major “issue”, it was indeed a protest against growing worldliness in all areas. At this time, the Church of God (Guthrie, Ok)¹⁵ was formed. It was to this group of churches that my grandparents adhered, although later they were part of a secession from these churches, again over the sanctification doctrine.

About 1930, the “apostasy” of the “Anderson” churches got to be bad enough that others began to withdraw. Here was born the “7th-seal churches”. These churches revised the teaching of Revelation a bit, claiming that the “Warner” reformation was the opening of the sixth seal: they were now opening the seventh and final seal.¹⁶ A couple of decades later, this group of churches would fragment into several competing bodies, one of which seceded, again, over the sanctification doctrine.

And there were other divisions. I cannot even name them all, as I only hear rumors of more partitions. But in the late 1980’s, the Church of God (Restoration) was born. This last group is for the most part the product of the labors of Daniel Layne. In his childhood, his parents were part of the “Seventh-seal” and “Anderson”¹⁷ churches. After many years of a drug-ridden life, Danny turned to God in his late 30’s. Deploring the apostasy of the more liberal groups, he joined with the “Guthrie, OK” churches. But contentions over practical issues brought about his separation with these churches. Tweaking the “Seventh-seal” doctrine of opening the last seal before the coming of Jesus, the “Church of God (Restoration)” claims it is restoring the work that Warner started a century ago, blowing the seventh and final trumpet.

Is the Church of God movement special in God’s eyes?

“Of course!”

¹⁵ These churches are known in Church of God circles as “Faith and Victory” from the name of the paper that is published in Guthrie.

¹⁶ There was actually a prediction made by some[one] in this group that Jesus would return about 1930, as “silence in heaven about the space of an half an hour” was said to mean 50 years of time beginning in 1880 when “the 6th seal was [supposedly] opened”. When said date passed, the books were destroyed, but not all: I personally found one—in the 1980’s—that still predicted the 1930 date as the coming of Christ.

¹⁷ The designation of the original churches, as they had established a “headquarters” in Anderson, Ind. These churches now sometimes call themselves “Church of God (Reformation)”.

This would be the emphatic answer of most Church of God'ites. Shall we investigate the question a bit?

Most Church of God'ites feel that their movement—and their particular branch of the movement—has been signally approved of God for a couple of reasons:

1. It has the fullest doctrinal truth and has returned in all areas to the original teachings and practices of the Apostles.
2. It has prophetic endorsement.

Treating point number one: it has the truth

A question I have had to ask myself, being raised “Church of God” is this: If God has placed special approval upon the Church of God movement, where is that special approval at?

Have there been more people saved through the Church of God than through other groups? No.

In fact, while the Church of God “reformation” was supposed to be “shaking the earth once more” and “threshing out Babylon”, thousands in China and Korea were experiencing a revival that had nothing to do with the Church of God. Read about Jonathon Goforth and see when it happened—at the same time that Warner was proclaiming his “reformation”. Goforth is said to have been instrumental in the conversion of 13,000 Chinese. He was a Presbyterian, and as far as I know, never had any relations with the Church of God movement. Next we hop to Wales and look at the Welsh revival; 100,000 converts within a year’s time. The Church of God had nothing to do with this early 20th-century revival. Moving to China again, we see Watchman Nee and the “Little Flock” planting congregations of non-resistant, non-sectarian believers all over the country. The Church of God had nothing to do with this either. In Russia, the “Stundists” were multiplying. The Church of God was also working in Russia, but, obviously, God was blessing the Stundists as much as, or realistically more so, than the Church of God.

Have there been more miracles in the Church of God movement than in other movements? No.

Growing up reading stories of the “pioneer brethren”, I thought that they were a special people because there were notable miracles that occurred amongst them. S. O. Susag and E. E. Byrum and others were said to have had notable “healing ministries”. When I began to read literature from outside the Church of God movement, I found that the healings and miracles were nothing new. Other groups of the same time period also had very similar experiences, and men who claimed the same gifts.

Was the Church of God the only restoration/reform movement that formed in that time period? No.

Records indicate that the 19th century and early 20th century saw the formation of about 25 similar “Holiness” denominations. Some of the early Pentecostal groups used the name “Church of God” as well. The Plymouth Brethren and the Stone/Campbell Restoration Churches predate Church of God’ism. Then there is the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite church. Many of these groups claimed to be a restoration of the apostolic church.

Did the Church of God movement preach any new revelation of truth that other churches did not? No.

While the blend of doctrines was indeed a unique mix that no other set of churches taught, Warner did not bring to light any “long-hidden” truth, with the possible exception of making certain prophecies apply to his movement. Charles Wesley Naylor, who had spent most of his life in the Church of God movement, and who knew Warner personally, wrote the following in his later years:

Brother Warner probably got his theology mostly as follows:

1. Ecclesiology: largely from the Baptists, through Winebrenner and Alexander Campbell.
2. Salvation and holiness: largely from the Holiness Alliance.
3. Imminence of the second coming of Christ: from the Holiness Alliance and the Seventh Day Adventists.
4. Prophecy: from Newton, Adam Clarke, Campbell, Miller, and Uriah Smith.
5. Many ideas came through his opposition to doctrines taught by other people, such as are included in his book “The Cleansing of the Sanctuary”. He taught little that was original with him.

And so I have had to face the facts: Daniel Warner did not “bring to light” any new doctrines. He simply preached a unique blend of already used doctrines. And since he could not find any other churches that agreed with his particular concoction of doctrines, he started his own churches.

“But,” I can hear some say, “he taught a new truth about sectarianism!”

The above statement is perhaps the biggest fallacy within the Church of God movement. Others had taught the same thing. D. S. Warner simply copied the doctrine of the church that he had learned from the Winebrennerians. Before Winebrenner there was a smaller movement of independent churches in southeast Pennsylvania that also used the name “Church of God”. Other church movements before Warner had also said

essentially the same thing: The “Restoration movement”¹⁸, the “Plymouth Brethren”, and the 16th century Anabaptists, to a degree. After Warner was the “Little Flock” in China, which also taught non-sectarianism. They knew nothing of Warner. While Warner did emphasize the doctrine, he was not alone in teaching it, less yet, the first to teach non-sectarianism.

Treating point number two: The “Church of God” has a special prophetic place in the Scriptures

To treat this idea thoroughly would take a lot of time and pages. Despite the lack of space and time to do so comprehensively in this booklet, it is necessary to touch this theme briefly, as it is the foundational pillar of Church of God’ism. Many people are teaching that they are the “true Church” because they have books on the exposition of prophecy that prove God’s special approbation to their group!

First of all, it is needful to say that Warner taught a “church-historical” view of prophecy. This simply means that many of the symbols in Revelation are viewed to be symbolical of events in church history. This view was common in his day, but in our day has been superseded in popularity by premillennialism.

Warner himself did not actually develop the Church of God view to its present fullness. This was done in part after his death. Yet, he is responsible for the initial stages. In these symbolical applications, Warner perhaps has his only claim to originality.

The 2300 days of Daniel the Prophet

Warner spent a number of pages in his book “*The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*”¹⁹ destroying the Adventist view of the 2300 days. Yet, in the end, he only tweaked the doctrine enough to make it support his movement, instead of the Adventist movement.

William Miller was a Baptist of the early 19th century. Studying prophecy, he came to the following conclusions:

1. In prophetic writings, a “day” always represents a year.
2. The 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24 and the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 began at the same time.
3. Based on Bishop Ussher’s chronology, the countdown starts at 457 B.C.

¹⁸ Campbell-Stone movement, or “The Church of Christ”.

¹⁹ Co-authored—or better said, finished—by H. M. Riggle, as Warner had died before the book was finished.

4. Daniel 8:14 speaks prophetically of the worldwide “spiritual sanctuary,” or church, of the Christian Age being purified when Christ returns to earth at the Second Coming.

Using a few calculations²⁰, it was predicted that October 22, 1844²¹ would be the date that the sanctuary would be cleansed. This was taken to mean that Jesus would return to do his cleansing of the Church.

The day came, and an estimated 100,000 Millerites, some of whom had sold their homes and possessions, were greatly disappointed. Most then rejected the theory, but a few revised the doctrine to say that Jesus did indeed cleanse the sanctuary, only he did it up in heaven.²²

D. S. Warner repudiated this Adventist teaching. But in the end, he basically tweaked the doctrine and made the date to come out to be 1882: which fits the time of his “reformation”. John W. V. Smith, a Church of God historian, says this:

In a rather complicated fashion he wrestled with the writings of other prophets, events, and dates, and eventually ended up with the year 1882, which, he [Warner] says, “better accords with the facts”.

Although the book “*The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*”²³ does not include Warner’s mathematical deductions, it states that “here is the cleansing of the sanctuary, now going on, which restores a pure church”.

The whole theory that the Prophet Daniel foretold of the Church of God movement rests on a few “wrestled” mathematical deductions: quite shaky ground indeed!



Uriah Smith- reviser of Adventism's doctrine of the 2300 days, after the "Great Disappointment". D. S. Warner refuted his theory and made it fit the Church of God.

²⁰ Basically 457 B.C. plus 2300 years...

²¹ Wikipedia says that Miller himself was unsure of the actual date, but that others calculated this date. Miller died some years afterward, still expecting the imminent return of Jesus, supposing that the chronology had been miscalculated just a little bit somewhere.

²² The actual explanation of this doctrine is a bit difficult and long for me to include here. One can still find it in Adventist literature.

²³ As reprinted by Faith Publishing House in 1967

The 1260 days of Revelation 11

This is one of the pillars of Church of God'ism. Actually, many others have said something very similar to what the Church of God preaches, but the Church of God is more persistent in proclaiming it: The 1260 days represent the “Dark Ages” of Papal rule. By setting 270 A.D. as the starting point, one then finds the end of this time to be 1530: the date in which Protestantism was taking off in Europe. Is this dating reliable?

I personally know of no reason why 270 should be chosen as the beginning of official “papal rule”, except that it “fits the bill” if one subtracts 1260 from 1530, the date of the “Augsberg Confession”. Much ado has been written as to why 270 A.D. is the beginning of the “reign of the beast”, but there is really nothing special about said date. The apostasy of the early church (and the formation of Roman Catholicism) did not happen on one specific date, it was gradual. In fact, John wrote of it already beginning in his epistles. In Revelation, Jesus found “problems” with most of the churches. By 200 A.D. there were “Christians” in the army, according to Tertullian. The Montanists of the same period were speaking out against “drift” in the churches. On the other hand, there were still independent congregations after 270 A.D., especially in England and France. In the East, there were churches, completely separated from Rome, that were started in China and Mongolia in the 7th and 8th centuries.

All said and done, the date 270 A.D. has little support for the beginning of the “beast authority” as “*The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*” called it. It just happens to fit the need to make the calculations come out “right”.²⁴ All said and done, Warner—as most others in his day—did not seem to have a thorough and broad view of church history, and did not have access to the information available today that shows how God was working outside of Europe. Thus, his historicism is basically limited to events in Europe. If one is to adhere to the “historicism” view of eschatology, he would do well to know his history well!

Jumping to verse 9 of Revelation 11, “*The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*” says:

“Three days and a half”, the Spirit interprets to us as 350 years of Protestantism, beginning 1530, and ending with the evening light in 1880. In the evening light, the two witnesses rise up again in power.

C. W. Naylor, the Church of God writer whom I quoted above, wrote the following after spending 50 years in the movement:

²⁴ I have seen several other “datings” by other groups for this 1260-year reign of the beast, including one that is supposed to terminate about 2030.

The interpretation that these three and one-half days signify three and one-half centuries has not one fact to sustain it.²⁵ Nowhere else in Scripture is a time prophecy where days signify centuries to be found. The only support that can be given to this interpretation is the support of the interpreter's word. It is a pure assumption: it is a mere guess: it is an interpretation that has no standing. Chronologically, therefore, 1880 was not a prophetic year.

Naylor had the grace to say, in his final years: "There is no use glossing it over—we were wrong." Unfortunately, many have not seen the error, and continue teaching "assumption" for doctrine.

The mark of the Beast

"This mark signifies the instilling of the doctrines of the various sects into the minds of their adherents; their peculiar sectarian education and learning".

So says "*The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*".

In the Church of God, it boils down to this: you have the mark of the beast if you agree to any other set of doctrines except those promoted by the Church of God.

How much Biblical authority does this theory hold?

Absolutely none. Zero.

It is simply an interpretation that stands, as said above, on the sole support of the interpreter's word: an assumption! Moreover, the various branches of the Church of God are now doing that very same thing: Instilling their doctrines into the minds of their adherents. Except on rare occasions, a non-Church of God preacher is never asked to preach at a Church of God camp-meeting: Such a preacher does not have their "mark"!

The "evening light" of Zechariah 14:7

"In the evening it shall be light." This means, to a Church of God'ite, that the early church taught the true doctrines, but in the middle of the "day"—the dark ages—the truth was hidden for a while. Then, towards the last part of the Gospel day, the true doctrines were restored. And D.

²⁵ "*The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*" tries to make the point that each of the following centuries after 1530 A.D. had a distinct note about it. This, of course, is simply the interpretation of a very, but very, few historians. By this manner, the Church of God suddenly switches from "one day=one year" to "one day=one century" in their interpretation of prophecy. From my youth, I always questioned this inconsistency.

S. Warner’s “reformation” finally brought the true doctrines back to light.

True or false? For a Church of God’ite, this is undeniably true.

However, it is simply another verse that the Church of God has used for over 100 years to prove that it is the “one true church of God”. Are there any other Scriptures that help us to understand that this particular prophesy referred to the “gospel day”? No. It probably refers to the day of Jesus’ death when the sun was darkened for several hours during the middle of the day.²⁶

D. S. Warner believed two things that did not happen:

1. All true Christians would leave “the sects” and join his movement before the return of Jesus. Naylor wrote:

Brother Warner expected all Christians to be brought into this movement in a single generation—this I know from his own lips. He said so publicly in a meeting I attended, and from others I learn that he repeated the statement at other times and in other places. His expectations are not only far from being realized, but they have not even begun to be realized. No large number of Christians have heard and accepted our “come out” message.²⁷

2. The return of Jesus was imminent: Naylor wrote:

Brother Warner, in a meeting I attended, made the statement that the Lord has promised him that he should live until Jesus returned. Another brother recently told me that he heard him make this same statement in Missouri on more than one occasion. However, Brother Warner died about six months after I heard him make the statement.

Is D. S. Warner infallible?

“You mean to tell me that the Church of God thinks D. S. Warner is infallible?”

I do not think you will not find anyone who would outright say so. Yet, the founder of the Church of God (Restoration) told me the following in a personal conversation:²⁸

²⁶ Some of the preceding verses seem to have foretold other events on that fateful day: earthquake, “rent” rocks, saints coming out of the graves.

²⁷ While the Church of God was the fastest growing denomination in the USA in the early 20th century, Naylor felt that the number of true believers who did *not* join the Church of God far exceeded those who did. I have no numbers to prove Naylor right, as only God knows who was a true believer. But a worldwide look at what was occurring during this time would indicate that Naylor was on target.

²⁸ This was about 15 years ago, so the wording may not be 100% exact, but it is very close. And the man that told me this may have changed his mind. I give

“I do not think we can take away from what Warner taught. We may possibly add to it, but we cannot take away from it.”

In other words, Warner had “restored the truth”, and one could further refine his teaching, but not outright disagree. The example was given to me of understanding prophecy: Warner did not have quite the light we now have in reference to some finer details of Revelation. Specific mention was of how that Warner thought the 7th trumpet was to be the end of time. Now it is taught, by the “7th seal” and “Restoration” churches, that the the 7th trumpet is sounding—and, although it is not often said, *they* are blowing it!

The above quote from a Church of God minister effectively makes Warner infallible, like the Pope is supposed to be. Take, for example, the teaching of the Church of God concerning women preachers. Luther, who started the “reformation process” [according to the Church of God] by restoring “justification by faith”, and Wesley, who made the next step by “restoring sanctification”, both taught against women preaching in the church. Along comes Warner, making the final steps of the reformation [according to Church of God theology] and he says women preachers are biblical. Now if indeed Luther and Wesley were right²⁹ in that it is wrong for a woman to preach in the church to a man, then Warner was wrong.

But wait a minute! Warner cannot be contradicted, according to the Church of God (Restoration). If he was wrong about women preachers, he might well be wrong about this other doctrine or the next as well. And then Church of God’ism starts falling to pieces.

Myself, I will not have myself tethered to the teachings of D. S. Warner. I respect Warner; and Wesley, and Menno Simons, and Petr Chelcicky, and Watchman Nee, and many others. But for that reason (not permitting Warner to be in error), I refuse to throw my lot into the Church of God (Restoration). Essentially, the idea that Warner cannot be contradicted makes the Church of God a man-following sect—all doctrine must agree with Warner’s doctrine.

It was for this very idea of not allowing the founders of a movement to be in error, that Winebrenner and Warner left their original churches! And now the same thing is happening anew with the very churches they helped to form! Brethren, let us not tie ourselves to a man, but to the Word and the Spirit.

A word about church history...

him that liberty (and hope he has), but I have never heard otherwise.

²⁹ The early church “Fathers” were also in unanimous agreement that women should not preach in the congregational gatherings.

According to the Church of God's version of church history³⁰, "the living church retired gradually within the lonely sanctuary of a few solitary hearts" during the "dark ages". Is this true?

Some people have estimated that the number of people martyred for their faith during the medieval time to be in the millions. Are millions of martyrs "a few solitary hearts"? Hardly.³¹

The reality is that the church of Jesus has never been subdued by the hosts of hell. Sure, she has waxed and waned like the coming and going of the moon, but not for extended periods of time, like the 1260 years that "historicism" says.

For example, if the church retired into a few lonely hearts, why did the pope appoint crusades against the believers in 13th-century southern France? It took him 20 years to eliminate and scatter these believers. Twenty years of crusades to eliminate a "few solitary hearts"? While the crusades against them had political overtones, tens of thousands died in the fighting. It was no small matter.

What about the Waldensians? From all over Europe came reports of burnings and imprisonments for these "heretics". 400 here; a dozen over there; some more in another town, etc. Bibles were translated into several different tongues by these believers. A few solitary hearts? I have seen an estimate of several hundred congregations scattered throughout Europe. No one really knows, of course, just exactly how many there were, as the records have been destroyed.

Then we come to the Bohemian Brethren. One hundred years before the Protestant "Reformation", Bohemia was reformed. Out of the little-publicized branch called the *Unitas Fratrum* eventually came 100,000 believers. 100,000 out of a population of about 3,000,000. In the USA today, there are about 300,000,000 people. To get the same ratio of believers would require 10,000,000 converts. SURPRISE! There were more *Unitas Fratrum* churches, in comparison, in 15th-century Bohemia and Moravia, than there are Churches of God in the USA today. In fact, the numbers come out to be about 10 times more!³² The pope again sent crusaders, over 100,000 of them, to wipe them³³ off the face of the earth. In time, these churches were indeed pretty much "wiped out" by

³⁰ P. 237 of "The Cleansing of the Sanctuary". Jean Henri Merle D'Aubigne, author of *History of the Reformation*, is quoted, but counted as correct.

³¹ Of course, not all martyrs are genuine Christians...

³² Using 1,000,000 as the rounded number of "members" in the various Church of God branches.

³³ These crusades were against the whole of "heretics" in Bohemia. The early *Unitas Fratrum* did not fight, but in later years the compromising part did take up arms.

relentless persecution. The remnant was basically absorbed into the rising Anabaptist movement and some into Protestant churches.

As more information is found and shared, it is becoming clearer that the so-called “dark ages” were not as dark spiritually as some think they were. Read the book “The Pilgrim Church”, authored by E. H. Broadbent, for an introduction to “the rest of the story”.

And sanctification...

Warner wrote a big book defending sanctification as a “2nd definite work of grace subsequent to justification.” Space does not permit me to detail his teachings on this subject, nor why I disagree.

From the time of John Wesley, the doctrine of “perfection” has evolutionized a bit. It was not until the early 1800’s that the “Baptism of the Holy Ghost” was associated with the “2nd work”. Wesley also believed that a “gradual work of sanctification” both “preceded and followed” the arrival at “perfect love”.

Most of the “static” that Wesley received for his teaching did not come from his idea of a work of grace subsequent to justification. Rather, people threw fits because John Wesley told them that God had the ability to keep them from sinning in this present life. This was not a new idea: some of the 16th-century Anabaptists also believed that God could keep the “old man dead” and keep the believer from sin.³⁴

“Brother Mike”, someone recently told me, “I have a tape at home where [a Church of God (Restoration) preacher] says that he has not sinned one time since he was saved about 7 years ago. I don’t believe that!”

The problem with the Church of God doctrine of sanctification is often a distinction of words. What a Baptist preacher calls “sin”, a Holiness preacher calls “mistakes”. John Wesley explained it this way:

...all men are liable to mistake, and that in practice as well as in judgment. But they do not know, or do not observe, that this is not sin, if love is the sole principle of action.

(1.) Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law,) but sin, improperly so called, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown,) needs the atoning blood. (2.) I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance

³⁴ Consider the following article XII of the Augsburg Confession of 1530: “They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin.”

and mistakes inseparable from mortality. (3.) Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. (4.) I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. (5.) Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned.

I myself call sin, sin. The Bible speaks of “sins of ignorance”. See Lev. 4:2 etc. On the other hand, I understand the Church of God terminology, and agree that God has grace to keep the believer from willful sin, and in fact, we are called to live above sin. This is the coming of the kingdom of God: grace conquers sin!

Of sin and self

Some years ago I sat in a Church of God meeting where the preacher spoke on the subject of “self”. “My self”, he said, “is my greatest enemy. I deal with him daily.” For probably 45 minutes he humbly confessed his struggle and exhorted others to not let self reign.

The next evening, the same preacher spoke on the “2nd work of grace”.

“It is almost blasphemy of the Holy Ghost that some people have heard the preaching of this doctrine for years and have not accepted it” he thundered!³⁵ “This doctrine” referred to the teaching that the “old nature is eradicated” in a “2nd cleansing”. Ironically enough, he had just preached the night before that he dealt, every day, with “self”. In his book, I suppose, “self” and “carnal nature” seemed to be two distinct things ...

And so it goes. Not many weeks ago, in the most recent Church of God meeting I attended, the preacher spoke very well about dealing with “self”: a sermon I would give a 9 rating on a 0-10 scale [with 10 being good]. Exhortations were given to be aware and on constant guard against “self”: by a preacher that firmly supports the teaching of “cleansing of the sin nature”. The incongruity struck me anew.

From D. S. Warner’s diary comes the following, written after his sanctification experience:

How many times Satan had succeeded in resurrecting some self in me! The Spirit has plainly shown me that I should never speak of having prayed for certain persons in connection with their conversion, etc. Oh! I am so ashamed of my folly and weakness in often relating such things. I thought I was doing it all to the

³⁵ Again, I am recalling from memory, so the wording may not be 100% accurate...

glory of God, but now I can see that there was some self in it. O Lord! save me in the future from such presumption and sin.

On a positive note, because the “Holiness” movement has had a “no non-sense” attitude towards carnality and despises sinning, many people have taken a serious stance against any sin that might arise in their life. The final result is that there have been many victorious believers in said congregations. When the preaching emphasizes “we all sin more or less”, the tendency is to say, “Oh well, big deal if I failed today. We all fail at times. God will forgive me.” But the sin is not fully dealt with.

Concerning a “2nd work of grace” there is one point that we all must come to terms with...

The early church writings do not mention a “2nd definite work of grace, subsequent to justification”, pro or con. At least I have never seen those terms in my years of studying the Ante-Nicene writings. Looking at this objectively, we have to conclude one of two things:

1. That said doctrine was indeed taught in the NT, but was lost very quickly after John died in the first century.

2. That the doctrine never was a part of the NT.

Personally—and this is obviously not an objective comment—I find it difficult to believe that such terminology was ever used until the 1700’s. Could such a major doctrine have been lost in the early churches without someone, somewhere, saying something about it, pro or con? Practically every other theme is mentioned in the early church writings: sanctification as “a 2nd definite work of grace, subsequent to justification” is absent. Such terminology does not show up until 1600 years after the apostle John died.

Reformation, revival and quickening

Reformation is not synonymous with revival. Reformation is the action of forming again, using the original substance. Therefore, a reformation of the church is taking the old church and changing it into a new form. Consider what I say: if a church is spiritually dead, reformation is not what is needed. Death reformed is still death.

Revival is the renewing of life that is fading away. One cannot revive something that never had life. Revival is desperately needed in many congregations and individuals who are slipping away from the life they once had in Jesus.

Quickening is a word we do not use any more. It is to make alive something that is dead.

The Church of God has often confused these three. Claiming to be the “last reformation”, the theory is that if all would join the Church of

God, all would be well in Christendom. But unless reformation goes hand in hand with quickening, we only find a reformed version of death.

On the other hand, revival and quickening often brings about a natural reformation of the church. Oh, that all the efforts at reforming the church would have been, and would be, put into reviving her!

Many people feel that Church of God is guilty of lifting up the church (reformation) more than they do Christ (quicken). In some cases, this seems very true. From the church papers and the testimonies comes the following “testimony”: “I am saved, sanctified, and glad to be in the true body of Christ.” Like a scratched record, one sees and hears this again and again and again. To a Church of God’ite, this is the chorus of heaven. To some of the brethren of Jesus, it is, as used by the Church of God, the tinny tinkling of a worn out religious cliché that has not the “testimony of Jesus”: a “cookie-cutter testimony”.

Emotionalism

“Last night my children popped in a tape of singing from a Church of God campmeeting” a Christian brother recently e-mailed me. “It sure made them jump around a bit.”

What was it in the singing that made these little children “jump around”? Was it the truth of the song, or the manner in which it was sung?

Obviously, it was the “foot-stompin” style of singing.

Strong emotional expression has been a part of the Church of God since its commencement a century ago. The Winebrennarians and the Holiness churches, both of which influenced Church of God’ism, were associated with “revivalism”, which was also associated with emotional extravagances at times.

Among the “Holiness” churches there has always been a strain of strong emotional expression. A decade or so before the modern “Pentecostal outbreak” in 1900, D. S. Warner met a Holiness group in Missouri that had people “chattering like coons and speaking in unknown tongues” as well as writhing on the floor. Warner challenged these particular expressions, and most of the group then quit acting that way.

Within the Church of God, there persists a version of emotionalism. “Amen!” and “Praise the Lord” is expected, as well as running the aisles, shouting, and jumping up and down.

Is this good or bad?

I have seen real expressions of joy that I would never desire to criticize. Can you imagine telling the lame man in Acts 3:8 who went “into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” that such

expressions were uncalled for? What about someone who has been a sinner for years, being forgiven of all his sins? Is it wrong if he expresses himself emotionally—tears, praises, or however? On the other hand, should we doubt the experiences of those who sat in silent awe when they felt their sins forgiven?

There are two problems with emotions:

One problem comes when we try to imitate someone else's emotional expression. We are all different. Some of us are not very expressive with our emotions. Others of us cannot say anything without moving our hands or shaking our head.

Who is more spiritual, the expressive man or the non-expressive man? Neither.

Let the expressive man say "Amen!" when he has it boiling in his soul. Let the non-expressive man hold his silence. Let not one or the other look down on his brother for being of a different emotional make-up than he.

Another problem with emotions is when someone works up emotions. A few examples:

At a "Holiness" campmeeting in Southern Indiana, one of the men eagerly told how that "last year we got so blessed we had people jumping out the windows of the tabernacle!" When the music got going, the shouting picked up. No one jumped out the windows that time, but during prayer, my friend and I simply slipped out. The spirit of the emotional expressions seemed to be a put-on.

At Times Square Church in Manhattan, I listened and watched as a couple thousand people "got happy". Everyone—except two people, my wife and I—was clapping and getting into the beat. My ears hurt me, literally, for ten days afterward. Is "spirituality" equal to cranking the volume up so loud that some people wear ear-plugs to church? Yes, that is true! In that congregation, some wore ear-plugs to church!

In Bolivia, I watched as a small Assembly of God congregation "got into the spirit". Hand-clapping, smiling...feeling good. The pastor of the church came to me later and said, "Brother Mike, I don't know what to do. I have seven members in the church. Six of them are living in fornication."

At a Church of God campmeeting in Louisiana, I watched the people "get happy in Jesus". The preacher threw barbs at "these people that sit all somber-faced and have no joy". His attitude was so carnal in denouncing another person³⁶ in the congregation that I walked out into the bushes and cried. Someone came up to me and apologized saying he was sorry that attitudes like that were in the church. Later, a man who

³⁶ I was not involved in the dispute, only an observer.

had not time to change his clothes directed the singing in his fatigues— He was part of the military. In emotionalism, one can get “all happy in Jesus” and then train to machine-gun his enemies, I guess...³⁷

One may hear the term “bushel-basket preacher” among Church of God people. This derisively refers to the man “who could preach a whole sermon while standing in a bushel-basket”. If one is not emotionally expressive in his preaching, he “missed his calling”. Poor Jesus! He preached the Sermon on the Mount, SITTING DOWN!

In the latest Church of God meeting I attended, I watched as people got emotional. “Carbon-copies of [the minister]” I thought to myself. They “Amen-ed” like him. They shouted like him. They all expressed their emotions just like he did.

Is that wrong? Not entirely; by nature we unconsciously tend to imitate the mannerisms of those we hang around. But I am Mike Atnip, not John Wesley, nor John Bunyan, nor anyone else. God made me to be who I am. When something moves my emotions, I should express them in the same way I express them when not in a church meeting.

When men are expected to act like someone else, they end up making a tinny-sounding rattle rather than producing a clear note of jubilee. I knew some of the folks at that meeting. I have known them for years. In their everyday, normal expressions, they were entirely different people than they were when the singing got going that evening.

In the New Testament days, men who acted out plays were called “hypocrites”. The word hypocrite literally means “play-actor”. If we try to act out someone else’s emotions, we are hypocrites.

Although natural expression of emotions is harmless, there is danger in trying to work up—or work down—emotions. This is usually accomplished with music. It can be done with instruments, or with acapella singing.

In a recent Church of God meeting, I noticed the following pattern, which I have seen in other churches as well:

1. The meeting starts with upbeat singing. Emotions are raised up.
2. Right before the message is preached, a slow, low-beat song is sung. Emotions swing down and people may feel like crying.
3. The message is upbeat. “Amen!” and “Hallelujah!” and “That’s right!” roll out.
4. The “alter call” is given with another slow, low-toned song.

By the time the “altar call” is given, the listener has been on an emotional roller-coaster ride. Up, down, up, down. He, if he is unaware

³⁷ An “eradication of the carnal nature” and the military seem irreconcilably incompatible to me... Yet this group had both, supposedly.

of what has been happening, may feel insecure and like he should respond to the “altar call”. This makes for larger numbers at the “altar”, but I am convinced it does not make for more people entering the kingdom of God.

All said and done, emotions should not be worked up by the beat of the music. If the truth makes emotions rise or fall, then so be it. If people act differently when at church meeting than when they are not, then they are probably hypocrites—play actors.

Some special words to any who are part of the Church of God movement

I have sat in many Church of God meetings, and have relatives in about six different branches of the movement. I have heard the doctrines, I have felt the spirit. I have tried to weigh both. In various versions of Church of God’ism, I have met true saints.

The words that come to my mind at the moment are:

“He that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

The Church of God movement started out in its very earliest days as a sincere attempt to unify and purify the church of Jesus Christ. I know this may make some of you angry if I say this, but it has simply failed to do so. In fact, it has essentially only added about 20 more denominations to the already long list.

The following is part of a song written by a young man (from a Church of God) about the Church of God. Why would a young man write such words?

*Now here is a brother, he just can't be right.
Why, I saw him walk into the wrong church tonight.
You said if he's right, we'd all get along.
You say we're nothing but right and all others are wrong.*

Chorus

*And I've heard you say it again and again,
We must live like Jesus before souls we can win.
O, a kickin' and a fightin', and abickerin', backbitin'
No it don't sound like Jesus to me.*

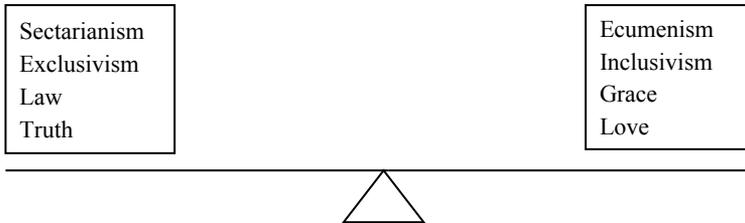
*I've seen some of you Christians criticize Brother Jones.
You say that he taking the wrong path he knows.*

*You said if he's right, he'd see it our way...*³⁸

Perhaps you say that these sentiments are not those of all the Church of God people. That, thankfully, is true. Yet there are many witnesses to say that this song represents the attitude of many in the Church of God. Where did Warner's vision fail?

In its beginning, some in the Church of God movement took on the attitude that "WE are all right, and everybody else is all wrong." Warner's second wife, while saying very little against Daniel himself, wrote against this attitude in his movement, when it was but a few years old. This arrogant spirit is still in segments of the churches today. One man said recently that he was given a Church of God tape. He had never personally met anyone from the Church of God. After listening to about 5 or 10 minutes of the message, he turned the player off. "You could just feel the spiritual arrogance oozing out of that message" he said. Sectarianism is not having erroneous doctrine; it is the lifting up of self and "beating" others who disagree. It is taking truth—as perceived by the holder—and locking out and knocking in the head all who differ.

I hear some say already: "But it is ecumenism³⁹ to accept everybody and anybody!" Consider the following graph:



On one side of the balance we have those who emphasize truth. They usually end up not being able to fellowship with others, unless the others agree with their doctrine and/or practice, 'to a T'. And so they end up with a little sect—a section out of the whole pie of believers. Webster gave this definition to sect: "A body or number of persons united in tenets, chiefly in philosophy or religion, but constituting a distinct party by holding sentiments different from those of other men."

³⁸ I am of the understanding that the writer of these words actually sang this to his congregation. It, of course, "went over like a lead balloon". His own spirit was probably not what it should have been. But SOMETHING provoked these words. (Quoting from memory again...probably not 100% accurate.)

³⁹ The word "ecumenism" in and of itself is good. But I use it to refer to the modern ecumenical movement that mixes true believers and unregenerated sinners together in an unholy alliance.

So precise can we be in making others conform to our understanding, that there are many one-man and one-family sects: they are unable to relate with anyone who does not have their i's dotted and t's crossed. One man, when recently asked if he knew of anyone that he could have Communion with, acknowledged that he did not know of anyone, anywhere that he could. This is the ultimate in sectarianism.

On the other hand, we have those who emphasize love. Doctrinal truth and daily conduct are of little or no importance. Anyone and everybody is accepted as a brother if they can mouth the words "I'm a Christian, too."

True Christian unity is neither doctrinal conformity (exclusivism) nor doctrinal dismissal (inclusivism). It is the simple loving of your brother and treating him as an equal. When one begins to think that he has arrived at doctrinal or practical perfection, he usually is setting himself up for a fall. A creed is forged and a standard of conduct is spelled out—whether written out on paper or not—and all men are judged by that creed and standard.⁴⁰

My dear brethren and friends, face up to it. The Church of God movement—and I include most of the various sub-divisions—has done the very same thing that other denominations have done: declared themselves to have become the "perfect" church, better than all others. I urge you to step down off your high-stools and see yourself as equals in the kingdom of God with your brethren. The higher we lift ourselves up, the higher we fall. As sings Bunyan's Christian:

He that is down need fear no fall,

He that is low no pride.

He that is humble ever shall,

Have God to be his guide...

If you or your congregation are anything more than a "generic" church of God (with a little c, and all that the little c represents), than you are still in sectarianism. All the citizens of the kingdom of heaven in Anytown, USA are the members of the assembly of Christ in Anytown. If the congregation at Anytown says "We are Church of God (Reformation) or Church of God (Evening Light) or Church of God (Restoration) etc" then it becomes sectarian in nature.

To be a church of Jesus, all that is required is for two genuine, born-again believers to meet together in Jesus' name. No affiliation is needed with some other group of churches. This "independence" does not mean that they cannot or will not associate with other believers and

⁴⁰ The word "creed" is not a bad word in itself; it simply means "belief". Thus the Church of God, for all its "anti-creedal" rhetoric, has a creed. It is usually called "What the Church of God teaches" (or believes).

congregations, it simply means it does not hold to any special affiliation with a certain group or movement: it is the body of Christ at Anytown.

Ok, I shall speak plainly: What I am trying to say is that, for all its “anti-sectarian” talk, the Church of God movement has become very sectarian in spirit. Is it alone in this? No. Other “non-sectarian” movements have done the same: the “Plymouth Brethren” are a prime example. Today, the “Closed Brethren” are known for their strong sectarian “WE are it” attitude.

Brethren, let’s let Jesus take care of the unity of his body. 2000 years of church history have proven again and again that when men try to forge a unity, they only screw things up.

Do you want unity with your brother? Then love him like you love yourself! You may well find that he has a better grasp of doctrine than what you do. You might discover that he puts into practice the teaching of Jesus in such a manner that you will be convicted by his presence. And, you may find the opportunity to lead him into a closer walk with Jehovah.

I have no magic formula for unity except the “magic” of divine love. I have become convinced that we need no other.

When should we “come out” of a fallen congregation?

For a full-fledged Church of God’ite, we should “come out” of any congregation that does not consider itself to be “Church of God” (with a capital C).

But what did Jesus tell the seven churches of Asia? Of these seven congregations, most of them had some serious needs in their midst, including: lukewarmness, false doctrine, false prophet, unrepented-of fornication, “dead” believers, those with defiled garments, and blindness—most certainly of the spiritual kind.

Not once are the true believers told to “come out” of these congregations.

Does that mean we should never “come out”? No. There is a time to stay and work for revival in a dying congregation, and there is a time to “come out”, unashamedly. Each of us has to seek God’s will in our own situation. Some will be easy choices, other situations will be more difficult to discern. The deciding factor is not so much where a congregation is at spiritually, but rather the heart of those who are not where they should be. Are they sincerely desiring to move ahead? Or, are they adamantly opposed to any spiritual advance? If there is false doctrine, is the congregation willing to hear more truth? Or, have they attached themselves to a man or movement and refuse to budge?

Two New Testament scriptures tell us to “come out”. Revelation 18:4 speaks of coming out of “Babylon”. It would be nice if “fleeing” Babylon were a simple matter of leaving one congregation and joining another, but that does not work. Coming out of Babylon is a spiritual journey, not a matter of church affiliation. In the same local congregation, it is possible that some are a part of the New Jerusalem⁴¹ and some a part of Babylon. Being made a member of the Jerusalem from above is something that only God can perform by a spiritual regeneration. And, leaving Babylon is exactly the same; only a spiritual rebirth can change our citizenship. Changing local church affiliations has nothing to do with being a part of the New Jerusalem or Babylon, other than the fact that our church affiliation will pull us one way or the other. Because of this pull, we may indeed need to “come out” of our local congregation and seek another. But if we only change church affiliation, without a change of citizenship, we may think we have “come out of Babylon”, but the Babylon will not have come out of us.

2 Corinthians 6:17 is the only other NT command to come out. This references to the separation of believers and unbelievers. It has nothing to do with leaving one church association and affiliating with another, unless the change is made because of sin in the congregation.

God help us all in these questions. May we unite with all true believers, and separate ourselves from obstinate sinners. Let us exterminate denominational barriers by our love one toward another.

Conclusion

So just why did I leave the Church of God movement? That is the question I have been asked several times in the last while. In summary, I cannot support Church of God’ism for the following reasons.

- The movement has become very sectarian in spirit. A lot of energy is put into lifting up the movement rather than the kingdom of God.⁴² The various branches bicker over which one is the “true church”. In some cases, worship of the church seems to prevail over worship of Jesus. By using John Winebrenner’s and Daniel

⁴¹ The New Jerusalem is NOT heaven. It is a type of the New Testament church of Jesus: his bride. Jesus is not going to marry “heaven”! In the same way, “Babylon” is a type of errant religion; of any sort, “Christian” or non-Christian.

⁴² The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Rather than focusing on getting others to be a part of a particular church group, we should be focusing on getting them to enter into the kingdom. Myself, I was made a member of the Church of Jesus when I was born of God. I need join no other. (And this happened a few years before the latest Church of God branch (Church of God Restoration) ever came into existence.)

Warner's definition of "sectarian", one is forced to say that many in the Church of God groups have become sectarians.

- I cannot set D. S. Warner up on a pedestal and proclaim that the 21st-century church cannot disagree with him.

- I have found that the Church of God has a warped view of church history, and has gerrymandered the prophetic utterances to make it look like the movement is special in God's eyes. The Church of God almost completely ignores such moves of God as the 16th-century Anabaptist movement, and instead upholds Martin Luther as a great reformer.

- I have found no evidence that God has blessed the Church of God movement more than he has other groups of believers.

- God has many children outside of the movement who are my brethren in Christ, who will never be a part of the Church of God movement. I cannot deny these brethren. Likewise, there are congregations of God who are alive in Christ, which will never be a part of the movement.

- The emotionalism in some of the churches, I "cannot away with". It seems to me to be hypocrisy—acting out emotions that are not genuine in that person.

- Most of the movement has lost its true life in Jesus and the "revival" message. If one agrees to the "true doctrines" and lives by the unwritten standard which that particular group has, he will pass off as "spiritual".

- Last, but certainly not least, I have not felt a genuine desire in most of the congregations to unbiasedly face the Scriptures.

Enter to learn, depart to serve

The latest Church of God (Restoration) meetings in my community were held in a public school-house. I attended one evening. During the meeting, I lifted my eyes up towards the ceiling. The following words were inscribed into the wall: Enter to learn; depart to serve.

God used those words to speak to my heart. Although the preaching was good, and some of the singing was good (I couldn't understand some of the words of the special singing because of the emotionalism), these words spoke to me as strongly as the words of the singing and preaching. While I have been critical of the Church of God movement in this booklet, I do not want to be the man who can only see faults and not blessings. We can learn one from another.

And so I add a few positive points about the Church of God movement:

- There have been hundreds, and probably thousands, of genuine men and women of God in these churches. Those men and women of God in the movement are my brethren in Christ, and I receive them as such.

- Some of the congregations have a truly non-denominational attitude. “Where salvation makes you a member” is written on the sign above the door. And some congregations practice this, receiving non-Church of God Christians as equal brethren.

- Not everyone who is in the movement is of the movement (in the sense of having a “better than thou” spirit).

- The conservative groups continue to uphold non-conformity and non-resistance, and have not accepted divorce/remarriage. They also uphold modesty of dress, and refuse to have a television in the house.

- The movement has had a strong missionary and evangelistic emphasis. Missionaries have gone around the globe. Thousands of tent meetings have been held in North American communities.

While I see errors and short-comings in the Church of God, I acknowledge that God has blessed it. I honestly believe that God could bless it manifold more if some of the faults could be rectified. Someone once said that the biggest enemy of “better” is “good”.

This booklet is a challenge to all of us to be the church of God in our generation; the united church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is the Head.

The church of God with a little “c”, and a big “G”.

He that has ears to hear, let him hear!

—Mike Atnip
Dec. 20, 2006

If you would like help in finding or establishing a truly non-sectarian congregation of God in your area, or have any questions about what has been written, please feel free to contact the author of this booklet.

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