

A Note on the name 'Church of God (Adventist)'

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Version 1.2

Introductory Remarks

Was the name *Church of God (Adventist)* ever officially used or registered?

I pose this question as I noticed that term used in 1973 or 1974 in a book and later it was brought up by prominent Church of God historian, Richard Nickels. This short note in no way means to disparage Richard whom I had been in frequent contact with since 1977. Rather, it is to correct a minor matter that had arisen and somehow, inexplicably, found its way into various books.

This matter has always puzzled me. Search as I may, I could not find anything conclusive and based on what information I had, I inserted this information into an article I wrote in 1996 *Sabbatarian Groups. A Scattered and Little Flock*.

Later, in 2000, I included the following in an article *The Independent Sabbatarian Groups c1800-1860. Compilation of Research Notes*:

"For instance, I read about the Church of God (Adventist) in a book listing the religious denomination in America that I found either in the school or local council library (I think it was *Handbook of Religious Denominations in the United States*). The minister above [whom was counselling me] could not understand who they were, so I commenced my own research into the matter. It took many years to find out that this was, apparently, the non-official name for the group that became known as the Church of God (Seventh Day) in 1923." (p. 3)

This was clearly a mistake which was subsequently corrected. Let us examine a little more about this issue.

The Issue

The issue is simple: is there any evidence for the name *Church of God (Adventist)* having been applied to the *General Conference of the Church of God* (as named since 1884) or for any other Sabbatarian group?

The articles listed below were sent to me by Marian de Berg, Secretary, Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, upon my request:

- Christman, G (1974) *The Early Development of the Church of God (Adventist)*.
- Sabo, J (1977) *The History of the Marion Party*.

My intention was to ascertain whether these items would throw any light on the matter or provide proofs. A thorough reading of these and other documents did not provide any proof whatsoever, but provided a clue: that an historical error has somehow crept into various books over the years. Apparently, commencing from one error that either assumed the name *Church of God (Adventist)* or it was used by an author to encompass all non-Seventh-day Adventist and non-Seventh Day Baptist sabbatarian groups – it was perpetuated over the years and decades until it formed a myth that found its way into Church of God literature.

Like anything and everything, once an error is found, it must be removed from articles and websites. Even something as minor as this.

Even the booklet *The Radio Church of God. How its teachings differ from those of the Seventh-day Adventists (1970)* makes the innocent mistake of stating that Dugger's break-away group which located in Salem, West Virginia in late 1933 as *Church of God (Seventh Day)* and the parent group at Stanberry, Missouri as *Church of God (Adventist)*. In fact, the former is officially known as *Church of God (7th Day)* and the latter as *General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* which moved head office to Denver, Colorado in 1950.

Another is *Some History and Some Information Regarding the Church of God Adventist and Seventh-Day (1944)* by a variety of Seventh-day Adventist authors. The collection includes:

- I. *An Introduction Statement* by A L White
- II. *The Early History of the "Marion" Movement* by G I Butler
- III. *Later Developments in the Church of God – Adventist* by J N Loughborough
- IV. *Experience of Mr Cranmer* by J N Loughborough
- V. *Church of God Census Statement – 1926*
- VI. *Church of God (Adventist) Census Statement - 1936*
- VII. *Church of God (Seventh Day) Census Statement - 1936*
- VIII. *Confessions of Prominent Men in the Church of God*

In section I, White mentions the Church of God split in 1905 but assumes that the parent group was known as *Church of God (Adventist)* (p. 3). In section V we find this statement concerning those that did not join the Seventh-day Adventists in the 1800s or left it for a variety of reasons:

"In a few cases such individuals formed independent local churches, not identified ecclesiastically with the Church of God, and yet somewhat affiliated with it. In 1906 these were registered as a separate body under the title of Churches of God (Adventist),

Unattached Congregations. Such organizations, if any of them existed, were probably included in both 1916 and 1926 among the independent churches or merged with other Adventist bodies." (p. 15)

While Section VI states:

"Some of the churches formed remained independent from the general organization, although holding the same beliefs. In 1906 these were registered as a separate body under the title of Churches of God (Adventist) Unattached Congregations. Many such congregations still exist." (p. 17)

As the writer extends further into the article, he inexplicably confuses the *Churches of God (Adventist)* with the *General Conference of the Church of God*. It is rather puzzling how he manages to do that! Further, no proof of registration has been found to date.

The groups which made up this loose association probably consisted of various scattered groups that eventually died out (I list them below by their periodical because, in most cases, we do not know the actual names of these groups. To make matters even more difficult, it appears that they never registered themselves with the authorities, so great was their opposition to structure and unified effort.

- **Remnant of Israel** (1915-31) - Published by G. G. Rupert, an associate of the Church of God (Seventh Day).¹
- **The Gathering Call** (Riverside, California) (Early 1900s) - The editor was A. F. Ballenger. Mentioned by G. G. Rupert in his *Remnant of Israel* periodical.
- **Bible Banner** (Early 1900s) – A magazine of the Michigan "White Cloud and Bangor congregations, pastored by John C. Branch and his brother, Lemuel Branch, respectively" of the General Conference of the Church of God (e-mail from Griffin to White, 18 Sept 2021) but may have been very loosely associated with the other scattered groups in this list. W. C. Long was the editor for a short while. The White Cloud and Bangor congregations eventually withdrew completely from the General Conference of the Church of God in 1917 and joined the Seventh Day Baptists (Robert Coulter, *The Journey. History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*, pp. 171-73).
- **Torch of Israel** (Early 1900s) - Published in Washington, DC by Elder Ziegler. According to the New York Public Library catalog: "Ceased publication with v. 31, no. 1 (March 1946). "Israel's prophetic witness." "Successor to the *Evangel of Hope*."" Given that its last publication (vol. 31) was in 1946, suggests that it commenced publication in 1915.
- **The Evangel of Hope** (Joplin, Missouri) (Early 1900s) - Mentioned by G. G. Rupert in his *Remnant of Israel* periodical.
- **The Shining Light** (Almira, New York) (Early 1900s) - Mentioned by G. G. Rupert in his *Remnant of Israel* periodical.
- **The Mispah** (Enid, Oklahoma) (Early 1900s) - Mentioned by G. G. Rupert in his *Remnant of Israel* periodical.

¹ Nickels calls Rupert's group *Church of God (Independent)* but I have been unable to find evidence for that title anywhere. Rather, his group was known as *Remnant of Israel* as was his periodical.

- **Religious Liberty** (Washington, DC) (Early 1900s) - Mentioned by G. G. Rupert in his *Remnant of Israel periodical*.
- There were likely other publications during that period, now long lost to time.

Many of the above were in contact with one another and perhaps we could assign them the tag of 'a loose association of unattached congregations.'

A thorough scan of the libraries of the cities where these newsletters were published is in order in an attempt to recover them for our research purposes. A volunteer is required for this exercise.

Let us now turn to the correspondence between Jerry Griffin and Richard Nickels. Griffin, was Director, Summit School of Theology, Church of God (Seventh Day) at the time when he corresponded with Richard Nickels about whether *the General Conference of the Church of God* was also known as *Church of God (Adventist)*. This assertion by Nickels appeared in an article *Church of God Adventist!* which appeared in several Sabbatarian periodicals.

In that article Nickels claimed that the General Conference of the Church of God (which had functioned under that name since 1884 and changed to *General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* in 1923), was also known as *Church of God (Adventist)*.

Mr Griffin stated in his 3 July 1998 e-mail to Nickels (which I have held on to ever since), that there is not the slightest shred of information in Church of God archives, publications or registration papers to suggest that this was the case. He demonstrates that though the term *Church of God (Adventist)* is used in Elmer Clark's *Small Sects in America* (1937) as well as in the 1926 and 1936 editions of *Census of Religious Bodies* by the United States Census Bureau, Clark would likely have obtained this name from the *Census* books. As Griffin pointed out

"I believe that the misnomer originated with the Census Bureau who used "(Adventist)" as a tag to identify us from other Churches of God." Then, relying on the census reports, the Federal Yearbook, Mead, Clark, and others have innocently perpetuated the misnomer." (e-mail to Nickels, 23 July 1998)

Concluding Remarks

Given all my attempts over the years to find evidence for a registered name of *Church of God (Adventist)* or its use in various Church of God publications, these have not produced any evidence.

Perhaps this grouping of unaffiliated congregations which split from the *General Conference of the Church of God* in 1905 and joined with others such as GG Rupert's *Remnant of Israel*, called themselves *Church of God (Adventist)* in a way that was an overarching term. Or the Census Bureau used that term to encapsulate all these different congregations including the *General Conference of the Church of God*.

I thought it fit to correspond with Mr Griffin about all of this given his insights, and in 2020 I sent three old Seventh-day Adventist articles to him to show how this error had somehow perpetuated through various sources over the decades. He agreed of course, given his understanding of the issues and previous attempts to correct them. He had articulated detailed thought and investigation which can only be described as "impeccable" and I make no attempt to re-hash what he has already undertaken.

In an e-mail response he remarked:

"These three SDA articles demonstrate how an early mistake in a reference book gets passed on as true. It's the proverbial "feathers in the wind." Once they're scattered, it's virtually impossible to retrieve them all." (E-mail to Craig White, 12 Nov, 2020)

How true. So, it behoves us to correct any mistakes in Church of God history to ensure accuracy and that 'urban myths' cease. We owe this to historians, our members, and future generations. That would be the most responsible thing to do.

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