

AN ADDENDUM TO JONES' *GUIDE*

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Although Charles Jones' *A Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement* (Matuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1974) lists 150 holiness groups, there are some smaller holiness groups which were missed in his compilation and were not included in Elmer Clark's *The Small Sects in America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949), or Frank Mead's *Handbook of Denominations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970). One such group is "The Church of God (Servant)" (or "Evening Light Church of God"). This Holiness "denomination" traces its origins directly to Daniel Sidney Warner and the early Church of God Reformation Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

John Winebrenner (1797-1860), a reformed clergyman, initiated a revival movement which led to the formation of an independent "Church of God" in 1825. It was into the West Ohio Eldership of the Church of God in North American that Daniel Sidney Warner was received as a preacher in 1867. By this time the Church of God (General Eldership) repudiated sectarianism, asserting that it was the true New Testament Church.<sup>1</sup>

Warner radicalized the doctrine of anti-sectarianism and to make matters more complicated, claimed (1877) the experience of entire sanctification and became an ardent exponent of that doctrine. An historian of the General Eldership of the Church of God labels Warner's views "a disease"<sup>2</sup> and argues that the only alternative was to expel him. Al L. Byers, Warner's biographer and apologist, indicates Warner was expelled from the General Eldership in 1878 because of his holiness views.<sup>3</sup> Undaunted, Warner continued as an evangelist and was elected to membership in the Northern Indiana Eldership in 1878. When this eldership founded a periodical, *Herald of Gospel Freedom*, Warner was elected as associate editor and eventually (1880) Editor.<sup>4</sup>

Warner became prominent in the larger Holiness movement. He was a delegate at the Western Union Holiness Convention which met at Jacksonville, Illinois (1880), was placed on two committees, and de-

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livered an address. His editorship of the *Herald of Gospel Freedom* brought him into contact with editors of holiness periodicals including John P. Brooks, of the *Banner of Holiness*, George Hughes, of the *Guide to Holiness*, and T. K. Doty, of the *Christian Harvester*. The main reason for Warner's prominence at this time was his view of the "true" church. His views on sectarianism were growing ever stronger, and he began to publicly label participation in denominations as sinful. He saw the holiness associations in the same light, including the prestigious National Association, under the influence of which he had derived his doctrinal orientation. Because of his schismatic activities, he is listed by Timothy L. Smith as one of the four major leaders of "comeoutism", so prominent at that time.<sup>5</sup>

Warner and his followers who were members of the Northern Indiana Eldership withdrew, organizing a congregation at Beaver Dam, Indiana in 1881. Similarly from the Northern Michigan Eldership, a congregation was formed at Carson City, Michigan.<sup>6</sup> The new denomination grew rapidly. Churches, permanent camp meetings and schools were established.<sup>7</sup> Warner edited the *Gospel Trumpet* (1880)—until his death in 1895. This periodical continued as the official publication of the Church of God (Anderson) until 1963 when it became *Vital Christianity*.

The ethose promoted by Warner was restrictive. From 1895 until 1910 it appears that his view were followed without question, but in 1910 agitation began to develop over the strict rules of the movement. These rules, largely of a negative nature, included such things as ". . . unnecessary articles of dress, outward adornment, and conformity to worldly fashions."<sup>8</sup> The wearing of neckties by men, the acceptance of titles (such as reverend, D.D., etc.), salaries for ministers, pulpit committees, preaching programs, pageants, plays, fairs, banquets, suppers, costly buildings, orchestras and pipe organs for churches, fashions, such as clothing styles, jewelry or other outward adornment, cosmetics or styling of hair for women, and the sin of sectarianism, such as joining the Y.M.C.A. or a ministerial association for Christians in general, and the use of coffee, tea and tobacco became important issues. No records of membership were allowed since the Lord was "keeping the books." These restrictions were difficult to enforce, and it is not surprising that a reaction would occur. It was not long in coming. Because of widespread violation of Warner's original teachings, a large group of ministers withdrew between 1910 to 1914. Among those leaving the original movement was C. E. Orr, author of various holiness books,<sup>9</sup> and founder, circa 1910, of the periodical *The Herald of Truth*, which

served the new group, until it was discontinued in the early 1920's.

It is difficult to establish the date of organization (if it can be called that) of the Church of God (Servant or Evening Light), but it occurred between the years 1910 and 1914. Some of the more prominent ministerials leaders were C. E. Orr, George Harmon and Fred Pruitt.<sup>10</sup> Like the parent Church of God (Anderson), this group upholds the Bible as its manual of faith and practice, keeps no record of membership and is very exclusive in its ecclesiology.

In 1918, Fred Pruitt, a disciple of George Harmon, moved to Guthrie, Oklahoma. Pruitt had accepted a call to preach in 1915, and had been convinced by Harmon of the truth of the "Evening Light" beliefs. In Guthrie, he continued in evangelistic work he had previously begun. By 1923, he commenced publication of a small periodical entitled *Faith and Victory*. The paper flourished.<sup>11</sup> It soon absorbed (1932) a children's periodical, *The Path of Life* (1928—), founded by C. E. Orr.

In 1949 another periodical, *The Beautiful Way*, for children, was initiated by Pruitt's daughter, Mrs. Anna Marie Miles. Today Lawrence D. Pruitt, son of the founder, publishes the periodicals and oversees the Faith Publishing House.

There are various problems involved in compiling statistical information for this group. Although it does function as a denomination, it does not consider itself to be a denomination, but rather a restoration movement. As stated previously, there are no membership records kept, there is no specific denominational leader and there are no denominational headquarters. Of the fourteen annual campmeetings held (one of which dates to 1907), the camp at Neosho, Missouri, is called a National Camp. It does not, however, constitute a national headquarters or a national organization for the group. The periodical *Faith and Victory* serves as a denominational paper in that it relates news and information, but has no official connection with the denomination. Likewise, Faith Publishing House in Guthrie, Oklahoma, prints many books and pamphlets for the group, but is not the official publishing house.

The Church of God (Servant or Evening Light) sees itself as being directly in the plan of God as specifically delineated in the prophecies of the Scriptures. D. S. Warner is portrayed as a reformer in the type of Martin Luther and the movement is often called "the Church of God Reformation."<sup>12</sup> Heavy emphasis is placed on standards of dress and conduct. It stands in the main stream of the holiness movement in its teachings regarding new birth, entire sanctification, holy living,

and divine healing. Three sacraments or ordinances, baptism, the Lord's Supper and foot washing are observed. The apology of the group focuses upon the history of the Church to show that theirs is the true New Testament Church in "this evening light time." Sects and denominations are considered unscriptural, and not at all the plan of God. In its understanding of prophecy, this group interprets *The Revelation* to indicate that the Protestant Reformation was a fulfillment of chapter 13, and the last Reformation (the work of D. S. Warner) as a fulfillment of part of chapter 18. They do not interpret *The Revelation* as teaching about a millenium, and consider such teachings to be heresy.<sup>13</sup> This matrix of belief remains the standard doctrinal orientation of the Church of God Servant (or Evening Light).

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a brief but helpful statement concerning the Churches of God in North America (General Eldership), see *Religious Bodies*, U. S. Government Census, Washington, D. C./Government Printing Office, 1926 and 1936.

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Byers, *Birth of a Reformation, Life and Labors of Daniel S. Warner* (Los Angeles, etc.: Gospel Trumpet Co., 1921 reprinted Guthrie Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n.d.), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.* passim. Byers presents a thorough treatment of this episode.

<sup>4</sup>It was also at this time that Warner published his first book, *Bible Proofs of the Second Work of Grace*, Goshen, Indiana: E.U. Mennonite Publishing Society, 1880.

<sup>5</sup>*Called Unto Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup>Several specific dates ought to be cleared up at this point. Jones says that Warner was sanctified "about 1880" (see *Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement*, p. 108), but Warner's biographer says it was in 1877 (see *Birth of a Reformation*, p. 253). All of the major

studies of the holiness denominations, including the works of Jones, Smith, the Government Census, Clark and Mead cited above, and Vinson Synan's *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1971) assert that Warner founded the Church of God (Anderson) in 1880, but Byers states that in actuality Warner did not separate from the Northern Indiana Eldership until 1881 (see *Birth of a Reformation*, p. 282).

<sup>7</sup>Anderson Bible Training School, 1917 (now Anderson College) and Warner Pacific College, 1937, were established. Today the Church of God (Anderson) is one of the large bodies of the Christian Holiness Association.

<sup>8</sup>Lawrence D. Pruitt, *Eighty Years in the Evening Light*, Guthrie, Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n. d. (tract).

<sup>9</sup>Books by Charles Ebert Orr include: *Christian Conduct or The Way to Heaven*, (Anderson, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet Co., 191-7. Reprinted Guthrie, Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n.d.); *Food for Lambs, or Helps for Young Christians* (Moundsville, W. Va., Gospel Trumpet Co., 1904. Reprinted by Guthrie, Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n.d.); *The Hidden Life, or Walks With God* (Anderson, Ind.; Gospel Trumpet Co., 1908. Reprinted by Guthrie, Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n.d.); *Odors From Golden Vials* (Anderson, Ind.: Gospel Trumpet Co., 1912. Reprinted Guthrie, Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n.d.). Other titles, in print by Faith Publishing House but for which earlier bibliographic data remains inaccessible include: *Heavenly Life for Earthly Living; Helps to Holy Living; How to Live a Holy Life*; and *The More Abundant Life*.

<sup>10</sup>Fred Pruitt's *Past, Present and Future of the Church* (Guthrie, Oklahoma: Faith Publishing House, n.d.) is an important source for this critical period in the history of the Holiness Movement.

<sup>11</sup>By 1961, circulation exceeded 12,000 copies;

<sup>12</sup>These teachings are articulated in the following volumes recently reprinted by the Faith Publishing House: D. S. Warner and H. M. Riggle, *The Cleansing of the Sanctuary*, (n. d.), H. M. Riggle, *The Christian Church, Its Rise and Progress*, (n. d.), and F. G. Smith, *The Revelation Explained*, (n. d.).

<sup>13</sup>These doctrines are set forth in Frederick George *What the Bible Teaches* and *The Revelation Explained*, both recently reprinted (n.d.) by Faith Publishing House, and D. S. Warner and H. M. Riggle contributed *The Cleansing of the Sanctuary, or The Church of God in Type and Antitype and in Prophecy* (Moundsville, West Virginia: Gospel Trumpet Publishing Company, 1903) now in print (n.d.) by Faith Publishing House. The doctrinal matrix found in these works remains the standard doctrinal orientation Church of God Servant (or Evening Light).