June 3, 1985

Worldwide Church of God
Attn: Good News Staff
300 West Green Street
Pasadena, California 91123

Dear Sirs:

I have just finished reading the reprint article "The Church They Couldn't Destroy," and am dismayed to find that you are still promulgating the long-discredited Dugger-Dodd thesis of 1936, that the Seventh Day Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists are off-shoots of the "Church of God." The book in which this thesis first appeared, A History of the True Church, has been rightly characterized by C. F. Randolph as having been written "by ignorant hands, unskilled in historical research and interpretation" (The Sabbath Recorder, Vol. 133, No. 26, p. 447). This assessment is justified not only by the large number of misspellings, etc., in the book, but also by the fact that its central premise is false: the denomination which came to be known in history as the Church of God (Seventh Day) is not the oldest Sabbath-keeping church at all, but rather an offshoot or outgrowth of the seventh-day adventist movement of the 19th century, having no connection whatever with the Seventh Day Baptists. This is very clearly shown by an honest examination of the pertinent historical documents; to attempt to conclude otherwise is really just a waste of time and effort.

Basic to Mr. Dugger's thesis, of course, is the notion that the early Seventh Day Baptists--that is, between the years 1650-1800--called themselves "the Church of God." This, however, is completely erroneous; these people never--repeat never--used the name "Church of God" as a congregational designation. That is to say, nowhere in the early Seventh Day Baptist record books do we find the phrase "the Church of God dwelling at" such and such a place. On the contrary, whenever any sort of name appears at all, it is always "the Church of Christ." As an illustration, let us take the four congregations specifically mentioned in your article as being "Churches of God"--Bell Lane, Newport, Piscataway and Shrewsbury--and examine the records to see what name actually appears.

(1) The Bell Lane, London, Seventh Day Baptist Church. In the Seventh Day Baptist Memorial, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 24-26 is reproduced a letter dated March 26, 1668. Its salutation (p. 24) reads as follows:

> "The Church of Christ meeting in Bell Lane, London, upon the Lord's holy Sabbath, desirous to keep the commandments of God and the testimonies of Jesus, sendeth salutations to a remnant of the Lord's Sabbath-keepers, in or about Newport, New England..." (emphasis mine throughout)

(2) Newport, Rhode Island. Another letter to the Newport brethren, this time from the East Smithfield congregation and dated December 21, 1680, begins as follows:

> "The Church of Christ, meeting together on the Lord's holy Sabbath, sendeth greeting to the Church of Christ keeping the Sabbath on Rhode Island..." (S.D.B. Memorial, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 119).

(3) Piscataway, New Jersey. The S.D.B. Memorial does, indeed, use the phrase "church of God" in reference to this congregation (Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 121). However, when we consult the original church records from 1705, from which this passage was taken--and I have a photocopy of this item--we find that a proof-reading or printing error has been made. The original record reads:

> "The Church of Christ keeping the Commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ Living in Piscataway & Hope well..." etc.

(If you would like to see this for yourselves I can send you a copy of my copy.)

(4) Shrewsbury, New Jersey. Again the Memorial uses the name "church of God" (Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 160). Again, however, a printing error has been made, for the original reads:

> "Brother Davis I charge the Before God and the Lord Jesus Christ That Thou Take Charge of the Church of Christ Dwelling at Shrewsbury..."

(I have a photocopy of this page also if you would like a copy.)

In all the original records of these early Sabbath-keepers I have seen the phrase "Church of God" just once; not as the designation or name of a particular congregation, but in its general sense such as all denominations, even Catholics, have used the term. Here is that one occurrence:

> "Have You Entire Freedom to Administer the Ordinances of God to Them As to A Church of God to pray with them and for them" etc.

This is also from the Shrewsbury records and is reproduced on the same p. 160 of Vol. 2, No. 4 mentioned above. Thus if Mr. Dugger's theory regarding the Church of God name is to be insisted upon, it must be built solely and completely on this one passage, for that is all there is.

Property of W. & P. Joyce c/o A. Peshevski

* * * * * *

Well, so much for the period prior to 1800. In 1802, of course, the Sabbatarian General Conference was formed; in 1818 the name was changed to "Seventh Day Baptist" General Conference. Now the Dugger-Dodd thesis assumes that not all the Sabbath-keeping congregations became Seventh Day Baptists; that those who did not eventually united (temporarily) with the Sabbath-keeping adventists sometime during the period 1844-1860, and then continued on as the Church of God when the majority chose the name "Seventh-day Adventist." If this did in fact occur we should naturally expect some sort of proof; we must not simply assume that it happened simply because our theology teaches that it should have.

In your article you quote the phrase "certain fanatical and unworthy observers of the Seventh-day" as if it did in fact refer to Sabbath-keepers of

this type--that is, people who continued to hold to the truth in spite of ridicule, persecution, etc., from the General Conference. Let us therefore investigate this quotation and the circumstances surrounding it to see if we can discover what group of Sabbath-keepers it is really referring to.

The quote itself is, of course, taken from p. 175 of the book Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, Vol. I, as you acknowledge. As such it is part of a summary of the proceedings of the 1826 General Conference sessions. The paragraph in which this phrase appears reads as follows:

> "A letter from the Rev. Mr. Burnside, who had died in April, acknowledges the receipt of an interesting Magazine; but requests that nothing except letters be sent him, on account of the "enormous expense;" describes certain fanatical and unworthy observers of the Seventh-day; mentions a book on "The Christian Sabbath," by the Rev. G. Holden, A.M.; gives an account of the kind reception of his own book; and tells of his efforts to spread Sabbath truth."

It would be nice, wouldn't it, if only we had a copy of the full text of Mr. Burnside's letter, so we could learn exactly who these "fanatical and unworthy" Sabbath-keepers were. Well, I just happen to have such a copy, as reproduced in the minutes of the 1826 General Conference sessions. Here is how that letter begins:

> "Palmers Rents, Snowsfields Borough,
> London, January 16th, 1826.
>
> "The Rev. Robert Burnside, Pastor of the Seventh-day Particular Baptist Church, London, to the Rev. Eli S. Bailey, Corresponding Secretary to the Seventh-day Baptist General Conference, sendeth Christian salutations:"

Property of W. & P. Joyce, C/O A. Yelkovski

The letter then goes on to describe the "fanatical and unworthy" Sabbath-keepers:

> "Some years ago there lived in London, an infamous female impostor, of the name of Joanna Southcott. The woman, though dead, seems to have left numerous followers behind her, who are dispersed in bodies through various parts of England. A small body of them has been settled about five years, eight miles west of Manchester. They not only keep the Seventh-day, (how I know not) but wear beards of extraordinary length, and circumcise their children. They call themselves, "True Israelites." One of the children happening to die soon after circumcision, occasioned a trial at Lancaster last summer, and it is thought to have given rise to the fabrication in question. Nothing, however, transpired at the trial in any wise answering to the description of the Sabbatans: the leader of these people, whose name I do not know, is variously represented; one account declares him to be a profligate of the most cruel kind, the other says nothing

> bad of him. It is stated, that the great support of these people, is the Head of a Factory, who attempted to walk upon the water, in imitation of our Saviour; but showed his wisdom on the occasion in nothing, except in choosing the summer for making the experiment....
>
> "There is another set of people situated some miles distant north of Torbay in Devonshire, devoted to a woman, who, under the direction of one Field, a kind of prime minister to the late Joanna Southcott, seems to be a good deal like her. She holds her assemblies at her own house on the seventh day, but I have heard of no religious worship performed in them. At first she ordered her followers to work publicly on Sundays; but some of them having been prosecuted and punished for doing so, she has since told them to work only privately. There are several particulars of these people contained in the "Christian Intelligencer," (a high church Magazine) for May, which was not a little amusing, if impious fraud and the love of gain on one side, and the most abject and servile credulity on the other, could be amusing."

Having read the above account, if you still feel you wish to claim such people as your spiritual forefathers, that is of course your privilege; I myself, however, prefer to accept the Seventh Day Baptist assessment of them.

* * * * * *

Having looked at this matter from the Seventh Day Baptist side, let us now turn to Seventh-day Adventist sources and pose the question: What was the connection, if any, between the Seventh Day Baptists and the adventist movement of 1844 and onwards? We know, of course, that it was through the efforts of a Seventh Day Baptist lady, Rachel Oakes (later Preston), that the adventist church in Washington, New Hampshire accepted the Sabbath truth. We also know that Mrs. Preston accepted the advent teaching and became an adventist. But, the question arises, Were there any other Seventh Day Baptist Sabbath-keepers, whether affiliated with the General Conference or not, who became adventists? If so, how many were there? And did <u>these people</u> later separate from the adventists to become the Church of God (Seventh Day)?

Adventist sources indicate that there were a <u>few</u> such Seventh Day Baptists who joined the early advent movement, but not many. One such individual was Roswell F. Cottrell who, after following the advent teaching for several years, joined the Sabbath-keeping adventists in 1851 (see p. 255 of <u>The Sabbath in Scripture and History</u>, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C., 1982). Mr. Cottrell, however, <u>remained</u> with the Adventists for the next forty years (same reference), and <u>never</u> affiliated with the denomination now known as the Church of God (Seventh Day). Again, in the years <u>after</u> 1860, there are numerous accounts of Seventh Day Baptist churches disbanding and becoming adventists--the South Fork of Hughes River church in West Virginia comes to mind in this regard--but (a) these defections came <u>too late</u> to fit the Dugger-Dodd thesis, and (b) they never became part of the Church of God in any event.

* * * * * *

Property of W. A. Voyce, Old Amesbury

Let us now turn our attention to the Church of God (Seventh Day) itself; how it originated, where it originated, and why it originated. According to Mr. Dugger's theory, the Church of God was the original church, and the Seventh-day Adventists merely an off-shoot. After all, had not James White, a prominent adventist leader, publicly advocated the name "Church of God"? Was not the first adventist songbook dedicated to "the Church of God scattered abroad"? And when the name "Seventh-day Adventist" was finally chosen, did not the Ohio brethren write to the "Review and Herald" objecting vehemently to this "new" name, contending instead for the "advancement and extension of the truth and church of God"? (See Dugger and Dodd, A History of the True Church, pp. 289-294).

All of the above is true--as far as it goes. (1) James White, in 1860, did suggest that the adventists adopt the name "Church of God." But in making this suggestion he clearly implied that they had not yet adopted the name. (2) The first adventist songbook, in its preface, does mention--not once but twice--the phrase "Church of God." (3) The Ohio Conference of advent believers did object to the name "Seventh-day Adventist," contending rather for the name "Church of God." (See the Review and Herald for April 9, 1861.) However, this last point has no bearing on the denomination known today as the Church of God (Seventh Day) for at least two reasons; (a) Ohio was not one of the states in which the Church of God began; and (b) the name "Church of God" was not a factor in the early development of this denomination, as it was not adopted until a number of years after the church was founded.

According to Church of God sources, the earliest congregations of what is now the Church of God (Seventh Day) were established in Michigan in the years following 1858 by an Elder Gilbert Cranmer. Mr. Cranmer, born in Newfield, New York on January 18, 1814, had participated in the advent movement of 1844 and shared in the October 22 disappointment. However, it was not until 1852, while living in Michigan, that he began to observe the Sabbath, having been convinced of this truth by the preaching of Joseph Bates who, along with James and Ellen White, is usually regarded as one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In 1858 Cranmer sought authorization from the Whites to preach among adventists, but was refused on the grounds of his alleged use of tobacco, plus some other personal problems. Undaunted, however, he went out preaching on his own, denouncing the visions of Mrs. White; and within a few years he had established several independent Sabbath-keeping congregations in Michigan, all taking the collective name "Church of Christ."

Meanwhile, another convert of Joseph Bates, a young adventist preacher named M. E. Cornell, had raised up a small Sabbath-keeping church in Marion, Iowa. On June 10, 1860, they adopted the following covenant:

> "We the undersigned, do hereby express our wish to be associated together in Christian fellowship as a Church of Jesus Christ, at Marion, whose covenant obligation is briefly expressed in keeping the commandments of God and faith of Jesus, taking the Bible and the Bible alone, as the rule of our faith and discipline" (Coulter, The Story of the Church of God (Seventh Day), p. 15).

All went well in this little church until Cornell began to put forth the writings of Ellen G. White as having equal authority with Scripture. The church was split down the middle, with one part accepting Mrs. White's visions and the other part renouncing them. This latter group soon learned of the churches in Michigan and eventually united with them.

In 1866--six years after its founding--this Marion, Iowa church for the first time adopted the name "Church of God," while the Michigan churches continued to call themselves "Churches of Christ." And in 1874, the churches in Missouri--having been established through the efforts of the Church in Iowa--organized what they called the "Sabbatarian Adventist Conference of Missouri." It was not until 1884--the year the General Conference was organized--that all branches of the church, including Michigan, finally accepted the name "Church of God." (See Coulter, pp. 34-35.)

All this and more could be cited to show that the Church of God did not simply continue to use a name that had been in use "long before" 1860, but rather gradually adopted this name over a period of almost thirty years after its inception as a church. These facts also show that, far from being the original Sabbath-keeping Church, the Church of God (Seventh Day) is what adventists and others have always contended that it is--an off-shoot from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Both Gilbert Cranmer and M.E. Cornell--founders of the churches in Michigan and Iowa respectively--were converts of Joseph Bates, one of the pioneers of the Adventist movement.

I realize that these facts conflict rather sharply with certain long-cherished theories. But whenever something like this happens, it is the theory that should be discarded--not the facts!

* * * * * *

In summary, it would appear that there were many factors that led Dugger and Dodd to develop their "true church" thesis, but when all is said and done it boils down to one root cause--a wrong interpretation of early Seventh Day Baptist history. That is too bad, because a proper study of Seventh Day Baptist history can be a rewarding experience. It can and does show God's hand in human affairs in a wonderful way. However, there is one cardinal rule, or prerequisite, to a right understanding of Seventh Day Baptist history. It is a marvelously simple rule, yet one that is sometimes forgotten or ignored, often with disastrous results. That rule is this: Seventh Day Baptist history is the history of Seventh Day Baptists. It is their history. Not yours, not that of the Church of God (Seventh Day), not that of the Adventists. Once this fact is acknowledged, Seventh Day Baptist history falls into place very well.

In view of all this, and in closing, I would suggest that from now on you use something other than history to support your "true church" doctrine; for the denomination of which your group is an off-shoot--the Church of God (Seventh Day)--cannot honestly trace its roots earlier than 1858. That is the year Gilbert Cranmer, on his own, without membership in or authorization from any previously existing Sabbath-keeping group, first began to raise up

Property of W & P Office, Old Pendleton

Sabbath-keeping congregations in the state of Michigan.

Yours truly,

William T. Voyce

P.S. One more point: In your article you mention a monthly paper, supposedly begun in 1861 by the Church of God, called The Remnant of Israel. Apparently your source for this is p. 296 of Mr. Dugger's book, although you do not mention it. However, you should be informed that the Church of God has never had a publication known as the Remnant of Israel. It was known as the Hope of Israel, being named after Paul's words in Acts 28:20. It was not begun in 1861 but 1863, its first issue being that of August 10 of that year; and it was semi-monthly, not monthly. It was published in Michigan until October 1865; revived in May of 1866 when the press was moved to Marion, Iowa; and moved again in 1888 to Stanberry, Missouri.

In 1872 the name was changed to Advent and Sabbath Advocate and Hope of Israel; two years later this was shortened to simply Advent and Sabbath Advocate. Still later (1888), it was renamed Sabbath Advocate and Herald of the Advent, and finally in 1900 the name was changed to Bible Advocate and Herald of the Coming Kingdom. (See Coulter, The Story of the Church of God (Seventh Day), pp. 19-21). (Also I can send you a copy of page one of the very first issue if you like).

Inasmuch as Mr. Dugger was both General Conference President and editor of the Advocate for a number of years, having full access to the file copies kept at Stanberry (which I myself have had the privilege in years gone by to examine in great detail), it is difficult to comprehend how he could have made such blatant and obvious errors concerning the name of the publication, the date of its founding, and the frequency of its issue. But then again the book which he and Mr. Dodd co-authored seems to be more or less riddled with that sort of careless, sloppy research.

cc: The Religion Editor, Los Angeles Times