

Macedonian Call

and

Spiritual Call

1-26 (1926-1952)

edited by Daniel Austen Sommer

Daniel Austen Sommer, evangelist, editor, author, and controversialist among Churches of Christ, entered life on 28 March 1878 in Kelton, Pennsylvania, the fourth son in a family rich in intellect, firm in spirit, absolute in conviction. Daniel Sommer (1850-1940), an alumnus of Bethany College, had come to Kelton as an evangelist of the Disciples of Christ. Traveling incessantly, the elder Sommer established himself as an unrelenting opponent of parachurch organizations, instrumental music in worship, and "church colleges," and an advocate of "mutual edification" in local congregations instead of preaching and teaching by a professional clergy. By 1886, in Richwood, Ohio, Daniel Sommer had purchased the *American Christian Review*, changing its title to *Octographic Review* and extending his ministry in editorials, articles, pamphlets, and books. The family moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1894, and from that base, at 904 Udell Street, Katherine Way Sommer (1850-1924) edited the *Octographic* and, after 1914, the *Apostolic Review* as her husband taught, preached, and debated among that segment of the Disciples that had become Churches of Christ. Bible study, evangelism, and publishing were the family enterprises, and all of the Sommer children—Fred (1873-1952), Edgar Franklin (1874-1932), Chester Way (1875-1950), Daniel Austen, Bessie Kate (1880-1975), and Allen Rea (1885-1977) were enlisted in them. Daniel Austen Sommer—named for his father and his father's great friend, mentor, and benefactor, George Austen (d. 1879)—sought to emulate his father and to serve his mother in ways that drew their doting attention. His youngest brother would remember Daniel Austen as the favored child, "different," not as "rough and ready" as his brothers, an apt typesetter and printer, given to books, and to close study of the Bible and biblical languages.

Daniel Austen Sommer—often called "Austen"; more often, "D. A."—learned his lessons well. Alvin Marion Morris (1861-1940) baptized Austen and his brother Chester on the same day in 1894. By 1897 Austen, 19 years old, was traveling as an evangelist. In 1905 he made a tour of Europe and the "Bible lands" of the Middle East, preaching wherever he could and reporting his pilgrimage in the *Octographic Review*. That journey would inspire his first book, *Meditations in Bible Lands* (1910). In 1907 he married Pearle Grider of the Sand Creek Church of Christ near Windsor, Illinois. That union would last 45 years and issue in a son, Daniel Paul (1908-1992), and five daughters. Before her death, in 1924, Katherine Way Sommer had designated Austen to succeed her as publisher and editor of *Apostolic Review*, but Austen soon saw that arguments with his siblings, Chester and Bessie, who for years had been employed in the management of the *Review*, would multiply and become endless, and that he would become responsible for any debts that they had incurred. He chose to return his interest in the journal to his mother; on her death it passed to his siblings, Chester, Bessie, and Allen. Yet he appreciated what the *Review*

had done for the ministry of his father, and he would not waste his years of writing, editing, typesetting, and presswork in the family business.

In 1926 Daniel Austen Sommer began publishing *Macedonian Call* as a mimeographed "missionary letter" of four legal-size pages. For years preachers had remarked Acts 16:10—"Come over into Macedonia and help us"—as a "call" to missionary labors, and this was the summons that Sommer also hoped to convey. Churches of Christ, North and South, had eschewed "missionary societies" as proper vehicles for the mission work of the church, but they had not recovered and redirected the passion for missions and evangelism that had led to the founding of the societies. Sommer aimed to revive missionary zeal with a strict concern for biblical authority. Those who are called to preach should seek to be evangelists, traveling and seeking the lost, while elders should guide and strengthen, through "mutual edification," the churches that would support and sustain the traveling evangelists. The ministry of elders, employment of "pastors," and mutual edification had been principal concerns of the elder Sommers for decades in their engines of controversy, first among Disciples of Christ and later among the Churches of Christ that had been called out from among them. By January 1928 Sommer's veiled criticism of his siblings who had taken over the *Review* after their mother's death had become open and direct: the *Review* was "slipping." More and more mimeographed pages would document and censure the lassitude of the *Review* and correct the slippage of various authors. By 1929 Sommer was able to print three issues of the *Call* as a four-page quarterly, and thereafter only four issues would appear as mimeographed sheets.

Relations in the Sommer family and the movement they had fostered among Churches of Christ changed dramatically and profoundly in 1932, when the publishers of the *Review* issued a "rough draft" of an appeal for unity—"Can't We Agree on Something?" *Apostolic Review* 76 (21 June 1932): 1-2—searching for agreement on 15 "necessary" items that had caused dissension in the past. Their solutions held to the line that the *Review* had previously drawn on most issues, but offered some sort of compromise—an agreement to disagree, preferring fellowship to open schism—on others. The "Rough Draft" struck a nerve, and the *Review* published many positive letters and articles commending and emending it. Daniel Sommer weighed in with an unqualified endorsement (Daniel Sommer, "Hearken, Critics," *Apostolic Review* 76 [6 December 1932]: 1; see also Daniel Sommer, "A Statement of Facts," *Apostolic Review* 77 [3 January 1933]: 6-8). Others would have none of it, perhaps chief among them Daniel Austen Sommer, who now found himself at odds not only with his siblings but also, for the first time in his life, with his father. Early in 1933 Austen Sommer printed a four-page broadside condemning the "Rough Draft," its authors, and its supporters, signed by 16 prominent preachers, including himself, William Grant Roberts (1868-1952), Edward Michael Zerr (1877-1960), and the young William Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989). For Sommer the "Rough Draft" no longer represented "slipping" but outright "apostasy." The counterattack was equally vehement, and toward the end of 1934 Sommer printed "A Defense" of Ketcherside and himself. Both of these broadside supplements to the *Macedonian Call* are included in this microfilm record. Already, in September 1934, Sommer had withdrawn his membership from the Northside Church of Christ in Indianapolis, which his family had built up since 1894. From January 1935 onward the *Call* appeared in print monthly; from 1936 in eight and, occasionally, 12 pages. Into the early 1940s Sommer published articles by Ketcherside, Roberts, and Zerr in almost every issue; the *Call* presents some of the

earliest extant works by Carl Ketcherside in print, including his moving eulogy for his father (see W Carl Ketcherside, "In Memoriam," *Macedonian Call* 15 [December 1941]: 1-3).

Ketcherside's last article in *Macedonian Call* appeared in November 1944; after that, he continued to be mentioned, favorably but ever more sparingly, until October 1946, when Sommer printed a brief but pungent criticism of an unnamed preacher who lacked "experience, judgment, humility" (see "Suppose," *Macedonian Call* 20 [October 1946]: 7). Ketcherside recognized himself in the portrait, which betrayed many confidences, and, caught off-guard, remonstrated with Sommer in private letters. From that point the rift between the two men deepened irrevocably. Late in 1946 Sommer and his wife withdrew their membership from the church in New Castle, Indiana (see "Last Year," *Macedonian Call* 21 [February 1947]: 6). The elders—including E M Zerr—responded first by excommunicating or "disfellowshipping" the Sommers, and then by disfellowshipping their daughter and her husband. Sommer launched a crusade against officious elders, whom he claimed were abusing their power, first reprinting an article by Ketcherside from *Missouri Mission Messenger*, interspersed with his own editorial comments (W Carl Ketcherside and Daniel Austen Sommer, "Studies in Church Government," *Macedonian Call* 21 [February 1947]: 1-2).

Sommer, his family, and his closest associates of years past were now deeply alienated from one another and gravely wounded. As he continued to explore the abuses of "church government" he was also reflecting on the difficulties of church life and discipline, with the need for "devotion and purity of life." These ruminations led Sommer, in August 1947, to change the title of his periodical to *Spiritual Call*, with epigraphs from Romans 8:6 and Ephesians 4:1. "In fact," he remarked in announcing the change, "we have had this in mind for several years" ("Comments by the M. C. Editor," *Macedonian Call* 21 [July 1947]: 7). As his estrangement from others deepened, Sommer wrote most of the new *Call* by himself, calling on few other authors and printing far fewer messages and responses from others. In June 1950 a heart attack brought him to a hospital as a patient, seriously ill for the first time in his life (see "Looking 'Square' into the Face of God from a Hospital Bed," *Spiritual Call* 24 [July 1950.]: 1-2). Sommer received "dozens" of responses to that event, but printed few of them; he continued to write with firm resolve, however weakened his heart, with a renewed emphasis on "conversion" rather than "church government." Through 1951 he was traveling again among the churches and printing many more responses from readers. Influenza and bronchitis confined him to his bed in February and March 1952. Toward the end of an evangelistic meeting in early July 1952, Daniel Austen Sommer "experienced some heart difficulty," but was able to return to his home in Indianapolis, where he died of another heart attack on 8 July 1952. His *Spiritual Call* died with him. It was always his "personal ministry."

Through the efforts of Enos E Dowling, the founding Librarian of the Butler University School of Religion (now Christian Theological Seminary), the Library of Christian Theological Seminary possesses the most nearly complete collection of Austen Sommer's *Call*. Three issues and two broadsides from the private collection of Terry John Gardner, Esq, have completed this microfilm record. We have benefited from Mr Gardner's extensive research into the life and work of Austen Sommer and other members of his family. Once more James and Annetta Pike of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, have worked to produce a microfilm record of the highest quality.

For information about how to obtain
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