
The Baptist Pietist CLARION

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Edited by G. WILLIAM CARLSON, Professor of History and Political Science at Bethel University; RON SAARI, Senior Pastor at Central Baptist Church.

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Edited by:

G. WILLIAM CARLSON | Professor of History at Bethel University

3900 Bethel Drive p.o. 60,
St. Paul, Minnesota 55112
(carwil@bethel.edu)

and

RON SAARI | Senior Pastor at Central Baptist Church 420 N. Roy St.

St. Paul, Minnesota 55104
(rsaari@centralbaptistchurch.com)

A Brief History of Theological Struggles within the Baptist General Conference.



DR. VIRGIL OLSON
*Professor Emeritus
of Church History
and Global Missions,
Bethel University and
Seminary, St Paul,
Minnesota*

tribution, and harassment and persecution by the State and the Established Church.

Swedish pietism found its way to southern Sweden from Germany in the 18th century, through the influence of students and leaders from the University of Halle. This University had become the source of pietistic missionary movements under the creative leadership of August Herman Francke. Also, northern Sweden was influenced by soldiers who had become war prisoners in the extended struggle over the Baltic region between Russia and Sweden (1700-21). When the Swedish soldiers were taken captive by the Russians they came into contact with people who practiced the pietistic life style. Many of the

I. UNDERSTANDING THE BACKGROUND OF EARLY SWEDISH BAPTIST HISTORY

The Baptist General Conference has its historical roots in the Swedish immigrant movement of the nineteenth century. The formation of the Baptists in Sweden was molded by several influences: pietistic revivals, Anglo-American Tract and Bible distri-

~ continued on p. 4

Swedish Baptist Women in America, 1850-1914: the "High Calling" of Serving Christ in the Life of the Church



DR. DIANA MAGNUSON
*Professor of History,
Bethel University*

Baptist women in the United States remains to be written.

The work of Swedish Baptist women during the second half of the nineteenth century took on a variety of forms parallel to those of other Protestant denominations in America. The range of female service fell into three general categories: women who devoted their lives to serving with their missionary husbands; women who enthusiastically organized and participated in women's groups within their church; and women who eschewed marriage to accept a "call" to home or foreign missions.

Swedish Baptists that chose to emigrate to the United States in the mid-nineteenth

~ continued on p. 15

Inside this Issue of the Baptist Pietist Clarion



G. WILLIAM CARLSON, Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University | This is the ninth issue of the *Baptist Pietist Clarion*. The first issue emerged

in March 2002. Earlier issues focused on the theological vision of John Alexis Edgren, the challenge of the civil rights movement, history of Bethel College and Seminary, Baptist pietist spirituality as expressed in the life and witness of Carl H. Lundquist, Baptists commitments, religious liberty and the separation of church and state (exploring the contributions of Dr. Walfred H. Peterson and Dr. C. Emanuel Carlson), Baptists living as forgiven and forgiving people and several articles on the history of the Baptist General Conference and its pietist heritage.

Previous issues of the Baptist Pietist Clarion can be found at: http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/history/Baptist_Pietist_Clarion. The Clarion cannot be published without the assistance of the Baptist General Conference History Center. The History Center is wonderfully administered by Dr. Diana Magnuson, Professor of History at Bethel University. Further information can be found at: <http://www.bethel.edu/bgc-archives/>.



1. The first theme of this issue of the Baptist Pietist Clarion explores the value of the irenic spirit during the theological conflicts throughout the history of the Baptist General Conference.

Dr. Virgil Olson, Professor Emeritus of Church History and Global Missions, Bethel Seminary, has contributed several major articles to the *Baptist Pietist Clarion*. In his 90s, he is still effectively chronicling the historical traditions of the Baptist General Conference.

This essay, first penned in 1999, is a careful reflection on the theological controversies in the BGC and a careful analysis of the significance of the *Affirmation of Faith*.

2. The second theme analyzes the significance of women in the early history of the Baptist General Conference (1850-1914) especially in the areas of church development, missions and outreach programming.

Dr. Diana Magnuson, the BGC History Center archivist, has developed several presentations on the changing roles of women in the BGC. She has particularly focused on women in missions including a presentation on Johanna Anderson at the BGC History Center breakfast in the Fall 2004.

3. We welcome to this issue of the Baptist Pietist Clarion the work of Dr. Glen Scorgie, Professor of Theology at Bethel Seminary, San Diego.

Scorgie's book, *A Little Guide to Christian Spirituality* (Zondervan, 2007) is reviewed by Terri Hansen. After receiving a copy of the last issue of the *Baptist Pietist Clarion* Glen wrote an e-mail expressing his thanks that the "pietist" tradition is still being championed and that it was one of the reasons that he had accepted a position at Bethel Seminary. He was delighted that there were people within the BGC that would care "to preserve the best of their distinctive spiritual and theological heritage."

4. My inclusion of "Signe's" poetry on Olivia Johnson is an expression of her support for a variety of women in ministry in the BGC. Her poetry is a regular section of the Baptist Pietist Clarion.

Rev. E. B. and Signe Peterson served the Lord Jesus Christ as leaders in the Baptist Churches of Fish Lake, Eveleth and Kerkhoven, Minnesota. They had relationships with several Baptist women leaders including Ethel Ruff, Anna Swedberg, Alma Reiber and Irene Murray. Anna Swedberg considered Signe as "our well-beloved Signe" when she lists the significant Swedish writers and poets.

The Little Guide to Christian Spirituality



The Little Guide to Christian Spirituality, by Glen G. Scorgie, Zondervan, 2007.

Book review prepared by TERRI L. HANSEN | I am always a tad bit skeptical when a "little book" takes on

a big subject. Christian spirituality is a life long pursuit. Could it really be summarized in just 175 pages? Amazingly and much to my reading pleasure, Glen G. Scorgie proves up for the task. He deftly guides his readers to a basic, yet profound understanding of

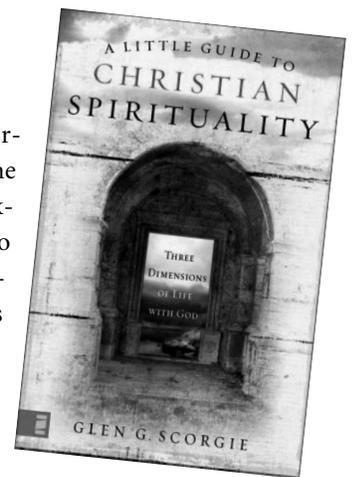
the Christian journey in his book, *A Little Guide to Christian Spirituality*. Scorgie is professor of theology at Bethel Seminary San Diego and an author of several helpful works *A Call for Continuity* and *The Journey Back to Eden*.

Self-described as not a devotional book, but a "little theology on an immense subject," it does not attempt so much to be definitive as it is another way of seeing. It resonates well with Scripture and incorporates important recurring themes in Christian literature, thus becoming "a companion to the rest."

The structure and content of *The Little Guide to Christian Spirituality* are clear and

logical. Scorgie breaks the Christian experience into three essential dynamics which "mix and move together as a single living thing". The rela-

tional dynamic he describes as Christ *with* us, the transformational takes the form of Christ *in* us, and the vocational is Christ *through* us. Scorgie admits that other writers have similar



continued on p. 3

structures in their writings on this subject, but all attempt to describe in different ways and from different perspectives, the same reality.

He brings into his main thesis the wonderful image of Samuel Rutherford, one of Scotland's greatest theologians, who was described as "St. Thomas and St. Francis under one hood." Rutherford believed in and embodied the idea that the academic work of theology is necessary as a framework for ecstatic spirituality. Heart and mind must be held in balance, combining scholastic rigor and mystical piety in holistic integration. That is the aim that Scorgie so masterfully achieves in this concise volume.

Scorgie very carefully makes a case that in a time when organized religion is out and spirituality is in, many are looking for a transforming encounter with God. The contemporary church has often proved ineffective in providing such a transcendent experience. By defining spirituality as an encounter with the transcendent that is life-changing, Scorgie presents a distinctively Christian version of this definition where the transcendent reality we encounter is the triune God and the resultant transformation is our growing in Christlikeness and participating in the higher purposes of God. This is

THE GOAL OF CHRISTLIKENESS

For Christians, the ultimate goal of sanctification is Christlikeness. The apostle Paul wrote: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29). It is God's purpose that the character of Jesus Christ will be replicated many times over among those who follow him.

The goal, then, toward which human transformation properly moves, is enshrined not only in written guidelines and lofty ethical ideals. Perfection has been embodied in a historical person - the Holy one. Jesus Christ became the prototype and model of a brand-new line of humanity. Paul described him as the second Adam - human character in a whole new mold.

Meditation on the Gospel portrayals of Christ can be very profitable. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, who is also "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9), can help us become more faithful to the timeless likeness of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) is a rather striking portrait of Jesus as described in the New Testament. And it is this portrait the Spirit seeks to replicate in the lives of believers in every culture and epoch.

(Glen Scorgie *A Little Guide to Christian Spirituality* p. 76.)

what the Christian church should strive for and what we as individuals need to fill our hollowed out souls.

Scorgie does a masterful job of incorporating personal stories and integrating the rich contributions of the mothers and fathers of the Church. He provides excellent bibliographical information in the form of three "helpful guides" offered at the end of each chapter. Chapter summaries are also

provided, as well as a section entitled, "Questions for Individual and Group Reflection" included at the end of the book.

Most appreciated in this very well-written theology is the cautionary advice Scorgie provides in his chapter entitled "An Integrated Spirituality." Reminding us once again of the three dynamics of Christian spirituality that he has laid out, he warns against the effects of leaving the Holy Spirit out of all three. Without the Holy Spirit, the mystical pursuit can become self-serving and even narcissistic, the call to holiness can become legalism, and the focus on mission can lead to worldliness. We must keep all three in balance, and in tune with the leading of the Holy Spirit as our priority. Spiritual pursuit should not become just compulsive busyness that depletes us or values quantity over quality.

This valuable little resource will find a permanent place in my library and most likely become an oft recommended read for those I encounter who have questions or need a push in the right direction on their faith journey. I am grateful for this thorough, readable, and thoughtful treatment of a subject near and dear to me. I found it profound and full of truth. To quote Scorgie once more, truths of the spiritual life must be "pressed down hard into our hearts in such a way that things really do become new and different. Otherwise, our experience will become thin and weak, barely changed at all, and lacking the telltale aroma of God." (p. 156.)

THE CLASSIC SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual disciplines are time-honored practices that help us create space for God, internalize his truth, and obey him with courage and consistency. The disciplines are not self-improvement techniques. Rather, they are ways in which we try to cooperate with the movement of the Spirit in our lives. Perhaps a tiny bit of pastoral advice is appropriate here. We must each find out which disciplines work best for us as unique individuals. This is not the same as saying that everyone should gravitate to what they find easiest. Often God challenges us at the points of our weakness. But we should be attentive to which disciplines seem to be most satisfying and fruitful for us as individuals.

And secondly, we should not be so ambitious as to set ourselves up for failure. It is better to attempt baby steps than giant leaps forward. And try not to be too hard on yourself when your mortality shows. Remember, as a follower of Jesus you were invited to join a religion totally marinated by grace.

Many outstanding resources dealing with the spiritual disciplines - a lavish number, really - are available to us today. Even if it were desirable, it would be impossible to summarize here all the insights they contain. It will be enough to note that they start with a firm resolve to take advantage of the "means of grace" - by engaging in consistent prayer, meditating on Scripture, listening to the Word preached with integrity, accessing the ordinances (or, sacraments) of the church, regularly confessing one's sins, singing edifying songs and hymns, and joining regularly with others in worship, fellowship, and service.

(Glen Scorgie *A Little Guide to Christian Spirituality* pp. 165-166.)

Swedish soldiers were converted. They returned with the fire of pietistic revivalism.

Because the State Church had become very sterile in form and doctrine, these Läsare groups found new life in the Bible and in the reading of pietistic literature. The Läsare held that the Body of Christ must be made up of true born-again believers. This was a radical break from the State Church which claimed that the masses of the citizenry were members of the Lutheran State Church.

The Läsare insisted that they had the right to gather together for their own edification and spiritual nurture. And they stated that they were not dependent upon ordained pastors to lead their meetings. Each person who is converted and is a believer can read and interpret the Holy Scriptures for himself and herself. They insisted that the Bible is superior to all human interpretations, even above the confessions of the State Church. Much emphasis was laid on maintaining communion with God and demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit in the life of faith.

In the pietistic groups there were Methodists (Arminian) as well as leaders with Lutheran and Calvinist convictions. They were theologically eclectic. Their big stress was, "Vad säger Ordet?" (What saith the Scriptures?)

Literature from evangelical leaders in America and England was translated into Swedish. Several colporteurs traveled throughout Sweden selling and distributing Bibles and tracts which prepared the soil for the development of Baptist churches. Among them was Fredrick Olaus Nilsson, the pioneer, persecuted Baptist in Sweden, who for some time was an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Most of this tract literature was of a mild form of Calvinism. Spurgeon's sermons were very popular.

Because the Church bishops and priests led a campaign to try to destroy the dissenters, the free church people, the newly formed Baptist groups would have nothing to do with Lutheran style liturgical forms of worship and a clergy with ecclesiastical power who exercised superior religious authority over the people. Further, they believed that the creeds of the church, especially the statements approving baptismal regeneration of infants,

to which they could not subscribe, were the cause of much of their persecution.

These pietistic Baptists maintained that the Bible and the Bible alone was the sufficient rule for faith and practice. They also believed in the Baptist emphasis on soul liberty and competency. This principle maintains that each person has the right and ability to determine the revelation of God as the Holy Spirit reveals it to his or her own conscience.

When the Baptist General Conference *Affirmation of Faith* was adopted in 1951, it was stated clearly that this *Statement* is not a Creed. It is primarily an "Affirmative" witness, a missionary statement, a consensus agreement of what Conference Baptists most generally consider as being fundamental to the understanding of the Christian faith and testimony. It was not, when formed, considered to be a measuring rod to define the orthodoxy of fellow BGC personnel. It was not to be used as a disciplinary device, but as a teaching method for new churches joining the BGC fellowship, that they may understand the form of evangelical convictions most commonly held by the BGC constituency.

II. THEOLOGICAL STRUGGLES OF THE SWEDISH BAPTISTS IN AMERICA, 1852-1927

The early conflicts were not so much within the fellowship of the Swedish Baptists as they were with other denominations, particularly the Lutherans. The Lutherans considered the Baptists as being heretics, because they were not true to the Confessions and Creeds of the Church, and the Baptists considered the Lutherans as not really being fully Christian because of their belief in infant baptismal regeneration. Many debates took place between the early Baptist leaders

and Lutheran pastors and theologians.

A classic debate over baptism was held in March of 1898 at the Fish Lake Baptist Church, near Harris, MN. Professor Eric Sandell of Bethel Seminary debated with the Lutherans through the evening and all through the night. Finally, one of the Lutheran debaters said, "It was Luther who put life into the Bible." To which Sandell replied, "How foolish can you be. It was the Bible that put life into Luther." The Lutherans respected Sandell's learning and understanding of the Scriptures and his spirit of generosity in discussion so much so that in 1902 Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, conferred on Sandell the Doctor of Divinity degree.

The pioneer Baptist preacher, Fredrick Olaus Nilsson, who was banished from Sweden because of his views on believer's baptism, was instrumental in starting Swedish Baptist Churches in Houston, MN, and the Scandia Baptist Church located close to Waconia, MN. Nilsson kept a diary of his life during his pastorate at the Scandia church.

The first meeting of the early Swedish Baptist churches in Minnesota was at the Scandia church, September 20-21, 1858. The Minnesota Baptist Conference dates its history back to these meetings. In his diary telling about these meetings, Nilsson makes an interesting entry.

September 21st. We met at 9 o'clock A.M. and spent the whole time in discussion of various questions until 12 o'clock when the third session of the conference adjourned. Notable was the discussion of the Trinity, to which E. stubbornly took his stand in opposition. In this he got support from S. M., and to a certain extent from brother M. P. All the others seemed



*F. O. Nilsson conducts baptism celebrations
by Tom Foty*

to take a position against him and held fast to the Trinitarian view.

The interesting point is that at this first conference of Swedish Baptists in Minnesota, while there evidently was vigorous discussion regarding the doctrine of the Trinity and other doctrines as well, the group of pastors did not vote to excommunicate the erring brothers. This session was evidently looked upon as a teaching time for these pioneer pastors. And consequently, they felt at liberty to disagree openly with one another, even about various views concerning such a major doctrine as the Trinity. The pastors were without formal training. Their libraries consisted primarily of a Bible and a hymn book. Their sermons were rough and crude, mainly aimed at winning sinners to Christ. Most of these pastors lacked a formal understanding of orthodox theology. So this first conference in Minnesota, and others that followed, was a training session to help the brethren in their understanding of the cardinal doctrines of the faith.

There was also disagreement about the doctrine of predestination and election among the early leaders. F. O. Nilsson was rebuked by his members for his strong views on predestination. One of the first leaders of the early Swedish Baptists, Anders Wiberg, was strongly influenced in this thinking by Reform theology. However, Gustav Palmquist, the pastor of the first Swedish Baptist Church, which was organized in 1852 in Rock Island, IL, was not able to go all the way with Wiberg's theology. Palmquist contended that it was possible for a saved person to lose his salvation, though, he said, that may be very rare. While these leaders did not agree on Reformed theology, they still worked together in evangelism and in planting Swedish Baptist churches.

J. A. Edgren's Theological Convictions

John Alexis Edgren, the founder of Bethel College and Seminary, had strong theologi-

cal opinions. During the early years Edgren's small Scandinavian seminary was incorporated into the Baptist Union Theological Seminary on the south side of Chicago. For a number of years Edgren's seminary was sheltered and supported by this American seminary. But Edgren came into conflict with many American Baptist ministers, whom he accused of belonging to secret orders, includ-



John Alexis Edgren

ing the Free Masons, which he claimed was not right for members and leaders of Baptist churches. The ministers were offended and accused Edgren of being Anti-American and unorthodox.

In the course of this disagreement, Edgren also came into conflict with the leader of the Baptist Union Seminary, Dr. G. W. Northrup, who threatened to remove Edgren from his position in the school if he went ahead and published his manuscript, "Epiphania," a book which advocated a premillennial view in eschatology. The Baptist Union Seminary advocated the post-millennial interpretation of the End Times. Edgren published his book. He resigned from the seminary, and in 1884 he moved his Swedish seminary to St. Paul, MN.

The Stromsburg Controversy

The interpretation of the atonement was another theological "hot issue" for Edgren. Pastor Ekman, a successful pastor and a former student of Edgren, together with the members of the Baptist Church in Stromsburg, Nebraska, made a great effort to provide land and a building for Edgren's seminary. In 1885 Edgren accepted the generous invitation and moved the small seminary to Stromsburg. It was now called the Central Baptist Seminary.

This seemed like an ideal situation. However, Ekman, since leaving Edgren's seminary, had developed, according to Edgren, some heretical views regarding the atonement.

It all came to a head one Sunday morning, after Pastor Ekman had preached a sermon on the atonement, at which time he stressed the moral influence aspect of the atonement. This was a view held by the leader of the Mission Covenant churches in Sweden, Peter Waldenström. Edgren felt that this interpretation placed too much emphasis on God's love, and did not give primary attention to God's Holiness. Edgren held to the forensic view of the atonement, that Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins to satisfy the demands of a holy God.

After the service Edgren stood up and invited anyone who wanted to come to the Seminary hall in the afternoon to listen to a "discourse on the Atonement." Several came. The result was that the Stromsburg church was divided over the question of the interpretation of the atonement. A Council was called to deal with the division. Pastor Ekman was censored for "disseminating unsound teachings on the doctrine of the Atonement." During the debates charges and counter charges flew back and forth. In the end, however, Ekman did state he believed in the satisfaction view of the atonement. However, he maintained, that his preaching in Stromsburg was aimed at ultra-fundamentalist members who took satisfaction in being saved by the blood of Jesus but did not raise a finger to show the love of Jesus to the needy.

The atonement controversy became a major dispute at the time of the first World War. The Swedish Baptist denomination had two papers, one privately owned, *Nya Vecko-Posten* (New Weekly Mail), and the denominationally owned *Svenska Standaret* (Swedish Standard). The two Eric editors, Eric Wingren of the *Posten* and Eric Sjöstrand of the *Standaret*, carried on a debate over the interpretation of the atonement. Wingren promoted the Satisfaction view of the atonement, and Sjöstrand reacted, stating that Wingren's view was a Catholic view of the atonement. Sjöstrand was promoting through the *Svenska Standaret* a "Representative View of the Atonement." The editor said that God was not the object of the atonement, but that Christ was the great representative of God on one hand and the representative of humankind



Swedish Baptist Newspapers

on the other, coordinating with humanity to bear the sins of the world. It was a sympathy suffering rather than penalty suffering. The outcome of the polemical writings was that Sjöstrand felt he had to resign as editor of the *Svenska Standaret*.

Another controversy at the turn of the century centered around the teaching and practice of the infilling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. For several years Eric Wingren gave wide space in the *Nya Wecko Posten* about the "New Movement" (*Nya Rörelsen*).

This "New Movement" had its beginning in the Second Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago. For several weeks in 1906 the pastor of the church reported that every Monday evening people would gather to experience the infilling of the Holy Spirit. A Spiritual Life Conference was held at the church in February 1909. People came from far and wide to attend the meetings at the Second Church. Among them, as one of the speakers, was Arvid Gordh, who then was principal of Bethel Academy in St. Paul. After these meetings, when Gordh returned to the school, students, among them my father, witnessed a decided change in Gordh. My father wrote that it seemed that the principal had been on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, for his face shone like an angel.

From the meetings in Chicago the movement of being filled with the Holy Spirit blessings spread among the Swedish Baptist Churches across the nation. From 1905-10 much was written in the denominational papers seeking to clarify the teachings concerning the Spirit filled lives. Several books were written. Among the most popular were two books by A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, and a companion volume, *The Two-Fold Life*.

At the same time the Pentecostal movement, which began in Los Angeles, was sweeping the nation, with its stress on speaking in tongues as a sign of being baptized in the Spirit. Controversy in the denomination and in the churches developed over the importance of speaking in tongues. A number of people left the Baptist churches and joined with Pentecostal Assemblies. Instead of drawing people together in love, this movement tended to degenerate into spiritual pride. Those baptized in the Spirit began to accuse the non-spirit-baptized believers, saying that they were carnal, not yielded to the Spirit. A similar time of tension arose in the 50's, during the rise of the charismatic movement. Charismatics, who claimed to have the "spirit of discernment," were quite critical of the non-charismatics. The charismatic movement was not as wide spread among the Conference churches as the earlier "New Movement."

Lagergren Brings Doctrinal Peace and Diversity

The Swedish Baptist Seminary returned to Chicago in 1888, after residing in St. Paul for one year and at Stromsburg for three years. Now the University of Chicago had come into being, absorbing the former Baptist Union Theological Seminary. The Swedish Baptist Seminary was invited again to join the Scandinavian department of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. The school resided, as it did under Edgren, in buildings located in

Morgan Park, which at that time was a suburb on the south side of Chicago.

The new leader of the Swedish Baptist Seminary was Carl Gustav Lagergren. Lagergren, who was trained at the University of Uppsala, was a successful pastor in Sweden. He had been a leader in pietistic circles and was best known for his *Svardet och Mursleven* (*The Sword and the Trowel*). In the publications Lagergren carried on a polemical debate with Waldenström, the leader of the Mission Covenant, over the interpretation of the atonement.

Lagergren, when he began to teach theology at the Scandinavian Seminary at the Divinity School of the U of Chicago, like Edgren held to the substitutionary, forensic view of the atonement. But unlike Edgren, he maintained a post-millennial view in eschatology. Eric Sandell and Olaf Hadeen, the other faculty members, were pre-



Carl Gustav Lagergren

millennialists. And while Lagergren and Sandell were Calvinists, Hadeen was Arminian, leaning toward Pentecostalism. All during Lagergren's tenure as dean, both in Chicago and in St. Paul, there never was a serious division over the different views of eschatology or over the Calvinist and Arminian positions. The faculty respected each other's positions, believing that each had come to

his convictions through serious study of the Scriptures. There was room for differences on these interpretations.

III. THEOLOGICAL STRUGGLES AMONG THE CONFERENCE BAPTISTS, 1927-1952

In June 1927 the Swedish Baptists celebrated their Seventy-fifth Anniversary in Chicago. The meetings were held in the newly constructed Moody Memorial Church. As a lad of eleven years, attending these meetings, I was initiated into Swedish Baptist history. I still remember with interest the story of the sacrificial Swedish Baptist pioneers which

was dramatically told by Dr. Frank Peterson. It was a great celebration.

This was a time of uncertainty for the Swedish Baptists. Several pastors and a number of denominational leaders felt that the Swedish Baptists had completed their mission in ministering as a Swedish, ethnic fellowship. The flow of immigrants coming from Sweden had just about dried up. The future mission of the Swedish churches was seriously questioned. A second generation of Swedish young people in the churches now were demanding English rather than Swedish in the services.

The language question was very difficult to resolve in some of the churches. Because some of the churches refused to make accommodations to the demand for more services in English, there was a sizable exodus from these churches to American Baptist churches and other evangelical groups.

In fact during this period it appeared that the people in the Swedish churches could tolerate differences in theology much easier than they could make concessions over their cultural heritage, especially in giving up the Swedish language. In a heated debate in one of the St. Paul churches, whether or not English should be introduced into the Sunday morning worship services, one saintly Swedish lady spoke up and declared with a kind of divine authority, "Have you ever heard of any one being converted in English?" To this dear saint God seemed to speak in a special way in Swedish to move people's hearts to salvation.

Dispensationalism Becomes an Issue

During the thirties, dispensationalism became increasingly popular in the Conference churches. The popular Bible was the Scofield Reference Bible. Scofield's notes were nearly considered as infallible as the Bible itself. Bible Schools patterned after Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary taught that dispensationalism was the "true interpretation of the Bible." A number of Conference pastors from these schools encouraged Bethel Seminary and the Conference to adopt a dispensational position.

Bethel Seminary professors never were committed to the Scofield type of dispensational

teaching, although there were some teachers who did give dispensationalism a hearing and an explanation. While many pastors did not accept a full measure of dispensationalism as their theology, there were two ideas from dispensationalism which were important. These two points were eternal security and pre-millennial eschatology. There was an avid interest in prophecy, with particular attention to the Jews and their return to Israel. Bible conferences with dispensational charts that covered the front of the sanctuary of the church became popular. During the 30's there were many prophetic announcements declaring who was the Antichrist. Mussolini, Hitler and the Roman Catholic Church were among the designees.

The Conference leaders refused to be drawn into a single dispensational position, believing that there is room for more than one position in understanding the flow of Biblical history. Consequently, when the *Affirmation of Faith* was formed, the statement on eschatology was purposely written to be wide enough to include a variety of interpretations. When I was ordained at the Dalton Baptist Church in the summer of 1942, the council did not even blink when I stated that I was interested in exploring the a-millennial view. However, I was questioned at length of why I did not take a positive dispensational view on eternal security. Eternal security was the test question of orthodoxy in those days.

The Foreign Mission Controversy

In the late 30's and early 40's the big issue that captured the attention of the Baptist General Conference was whether or not the Conference should have its own foreign mission program. Since 1888 the Conference (Swedish) Baptists had sent its young men and women to foreign fields through the aus-

pices and support of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS), a part of the Northern Baptist Convention, later called the American Baptist Convention. The first missionary from the Swedish Bap-

tists was a woman, Johanna Anderson, who went to Burma in 1888 under the Women's Board of the ABFMS. Up to 1945 there were 122 Swedish Baptist missionaries who went out under the ABFMS or the WABFMS.

There were a number of attempts by the Swedish Baptists to have their own foreign mission program. As early as 1890 Eric Wingren, editor of *Nya Wecko Posten*, began promoting the cause for an independent foreign mission pro-

gram for the Swedish Baptists. At the annual meeting of the Swedish Baptists in September of 1890 in Boston, an independent mission program was proposed. But Dr. Frank Peterson opposed the idea, stating that the Swedish Baptists were not strong enough, nor were they well organized enough to maintain an independent mission program. Peterson's ideas won the delegates votes.

In 1914 there was a Swedish Baptist, G. Theofil Wickman, who decided that he and his family would go to Spain as missionaries. Eric Wingren, through his paper, *Nya Wecko Posten*, asked for support for the Wickman endeavor. A few years later, 1917, the Swedish Baptists did form an independent mission society. Missionaries were sent to Russia. And in 1922 the independent society was incorporated into the mission programs of the Swedish Baptist Conference.

All during this time young people from Swedish Baptist churches were going out under the ABFMS and other "Faith" boards. However in the 1930's there was increasing dissatisfaction with the Conference's relationship with the American Baptist Foreign



Johanna Anderson
by Tom Foty

Mission Society. ABFMS board was accused of appointing missionaries who did not believe in the Scriptural accounts of miracles, the resurrection, the virgin birth of Jesus and the blood bought salvation at Calvary. The board maintained an "Inclusive Policy," including both theologically liberal and conservative missionaries.

The younger men who were graduating from Bethel Seminary in the late 30's and early 40's began to clamor for a BGC independent mission society, separating from the NBC and the ABFMS. Articles appeared in *The Standard*, the *Baptist Evangel* and other publications recommended that the Conference separate from the NBC and the ABFMS and establish its own foreign mission program.

Some of the older leaders did not want to lose the relationship with the NBC, many of whom had retirement benefits with the NBC Missionaries and Ministers Benefit Board.

The basic incentive in the struggle for a foreign mission program of the BGC was theological. However, having "our own" programs was a very powerful motive in the drive for an independent foreign mission program. My father, Adolf Olson, who taught missions in the Seminary during the 1930's, kept encouraging the students to think about an independent mission program. Not surprising, then, that several of the seminary theses written in the early 40's, dealt with issues of BGC independence, including an independent foreign mission program. Because of this struggle, an important question at ordination councils was the doctrine of the virgin birth.

A decade later, in 1951, when the completed



Virgil Olson and his father Adolf

Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible came out, the question of the virgin birth again came to the fore. The RSV was labeled as a liberal document because in Isaiah 7:14 the word "virgin" was translated, "A young woman shall conceive." At the Seminary we were questioned at length about whether or not we accepted the King James Version (KJV) of Isaiah 7:14 or the RSV translation. Several pastors became suspicious of the Professor of Old Testament, Anton Pearson, because he upheld the translation of the RSV. I made it a practice to carry the KJV and RSV Bibles with me when I went out preaching. If the pastor and the people in the church had problems with the RSV I would use the KJV. It was a rather tense time for some of us.

Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation, Post Tribulation and Pre-Millennial Controversies

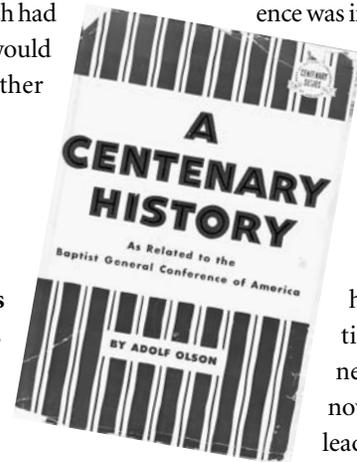
In the 1940's, perhaps because of the nation's involvement in World War II, pastors and churches became nearly obsessed with sorting out the Biblical view of "Last Things." Bible conferences concentrated on the teachings of when the tribulation and the rapture of the Church will take place. Fundamentalists and the New Evangelicals were divided as to when the rapture will take place, i.e. before the tribulation, in the midst of the tribulation, or at the end of the tribulation.

Coupled with this tribulation discussion were the various interpretations of the Kingdom. Is the Kingdom now? Is it future? If so, is it a part of the millennium? Some ultra-dispensationalists, followers of Pastor J. C. O'Hare in Chicago, believed that the Kingdom is all in the future. Thus the sermon on the mount is for the future Kingdom. O'Hare also believed that baptism is not for this age, but for the future Kingdom. Some vocal pastors felt that the Seminary

professors were leaning towards liberalism because they did not subscribe to the dispensational, pre-tribulation, pre-millennial position.

IV. THEOLOGICAL STRUGGLES AMONG THE CONFERENCE BAPTISTS, 1952-1990's

In 1952 the Baptist General Conference celebrated its one hundredth anniversary. The annual meetings of the Conference were held at the Hippodrome at the Minnesota State Fair Grounds in St. Paul. Adolf Olson's Centenary History of the Baptist General Conference was introduced to the delegates. This



well written history helped Conference Baptists to appreciate their roots. Fredrick Faber's stirring hymn, "Faith of our Fathers," was sung with enthusiasm.

Now Conference Baptists had every reason to feel optimistic about the future. The new Foreign Mission program now was well organized under the leadership of Walfred Danielson. BGC missionaries were in India,

Japan, Philippines, Ethiopia and Mexico. New Conference churches were being started at the rate of one every ten days. Articles were written in religious journals claiming that the Baptist General Conference was the fastest growing evangelical group in America. And this surge of new churches joining the Conference was one of the main reasons that the *Affirmation of Faith* was written and approved by the Conference in 1951. It was an approved document, a witness of faith that would list the basic doctrines held by the BGC as an evangelical Baptist fellowship.

The Inerrancy Controversy.

In the midst of this social, political environment, the question of Biblical inerrancy arose. Prior to this time, the question of inerrancy of the Biblical text was considered a peripheral topic. Candidates at ordinations were questioned on their view of inspiration. When the topic of inerrancy became the key question, no one at the council questioned the candidate about his view of inspiration.

It was not enough to say that he or she believed that the Bible is fully inspired, that it is a reliable source for truth and a trusted guide for this life and the after life. The watchdogs of conservative evangelicalism judged Christian leaders, professors and seminaries on this topic: "Do they hold to the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible?"

Some pastors felt that the professors at Bethel Seminary were weak in their views on inerrancy. They contended that the statement in the *Affirmation of Faith* was not strong enough. They wanted a very strict interpretation of inerrancy. Three pastors in California led the charge against the Bethel Seminary teachers. So they presented a proposal that in their minds clarified the first statement in the *Affirmation*. Then they requested (demanded?) that all of the Conference elected personnel at the BGC headquarters in Evanston and the Seminary professors together with the Conference elected administrators at Bethel College and Seminary sign the amended statement.

It was reported that all signed except two. I know one of the persons who refused to sign. Nothing was done after the signing. The two non signers were not singled out, nor were they asked to resign from their positions. The reform had been accomplished as far as the three California pastors were concerned.

A Conversation on Inerrancy

One personal experience, I believe, in the context of this inerrancy debate is worth telling. When I was dean and vice president of Bethel College I made a trip to California to speak for Bethel. I was scheduled to speak at a Conference church in southern California one Sunday morning. I arrived early, before the Sunday School had been dismissed. It was a nice day and I was enjoying the California sunshine when a man from the church approached me and asked if I was a visitor. I told him that I was from Bethel College and Seminary and that I was supposed to preach at the morning worship. He looked at me with surprise and stated, "I hear that at Bethel they no longer believe in the Bible." I was kind of stunned. I said, "You know something that I don't know, for when I left on Friday Bethel faculty and staff believed

in the Bible as the Word of God." "Well," he said, rather confused, "What I meant to say is that at Bethel they no longer believe that the Bible is inerrant in the original manuscripts." "That's news to me," I said, "for on Friday the *Affirmation of Faith*, which is part of the BGC confession, was still a part of the Seminary and College foundation. And the first article states that 'We believe that the Bible is inerrant in the original manuscripts.' And all teachers are asked if they can agree to and work in harmony with this statement." Well, the man wasn't going to be put off, so he said, "What I mean to say, do you people at Bethel believe in inerrancy the way that Dr. Harold Lindsell does?" I tried to be kind, but I said to him, "If you can tell me Lindsell's interpretation of inerrancy, I will let you know if we hold that particular interpretation of inerrancy." Then the man walked off, thinking, I suppose, that I was hopeless.

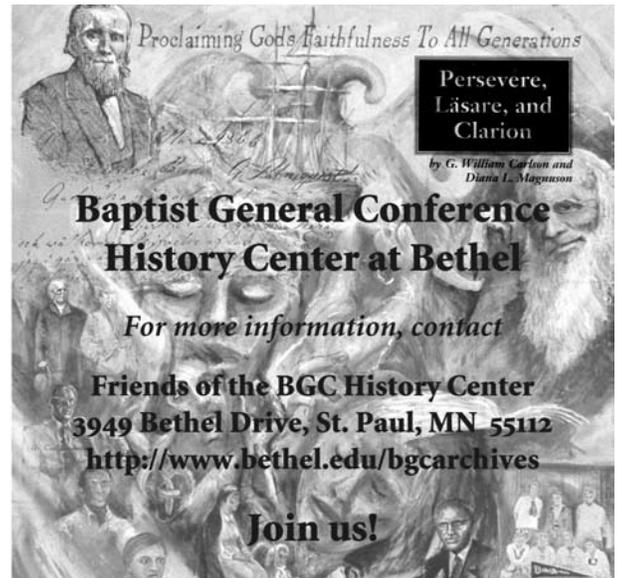
The climate of suspicion was so high in those days that if you did not hold to one particular view of inerrancy, you were considered as one who was not firm in the faith. All kinds of papers were being passed around between pastors, some decrying that Bethel was not firm on inerrancy. President Lundquist and some of the faculty traveled back and forth across the Conference areas, meeting with pastors, explaining, defending and encouraging.

Today I doubt this amended statement can be found without doing a lot of searching through files and papers. I do not think it has ever been used in interviewing new candidates for teaching positions at the Seminary, and I am certain that it has never been presented to Conference leadership as they have taken office during the past twenty years.

The Controversy Over the Equality of Women in the Ministry

During the eighties another issue arose among Conference Baptists. That was the

understanding of the equality of women in the church. Should women be given equality with men in the church, including in the offices of elder, deacon, and the pastor?



Historical mural for Bethel's 125th anniversary celebration by Dale Johnson, professor of art at Bethel University

A series of articles written by Professor Berkeley Mickelsen of Bethel Theological Seminary and Pastor John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, appeared in *The Standard*. They presented two interpretations of Scriptural texts dealing with the place and role of women, especially in the ministry of the church. Mickelsen was pro gender equality, Piper pro male headship and leadership.

Now, for the first time, the Baptist General Conference, which had for years celebrated women pastors, preachers, evangelists, teachers and missionaries, was being seriously challenged about the legitimate role of women in the ministries of the church. Many articles in *The Standard* have been written about this issue. Berkely and Alvera Mickelsen became leaders of the new movement, Christians for Biblical Equality, and John Piper became a leading voice in the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

Most recently the role of a woman teaching at Bethel Seminary has been questioned. A woman, Dr. Carla Dahl, was called and confirmed by the Conference in an annual session, to teach in the area of Marriage and Family. Her position has been challenged,

Esther Sabel: The Bible and Missionary Training School

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | In 1924 Esther Sabel joined the faculty of Bethel Academy and became the head of the Bible and Missionary Training School. During the fifteen-year existence of the school, enrollment remained fairly constant (between 27 and 43). In 1930 President G. Arvid Hagstrom expressed that “its growth has been so rapid it would not be a surprise to see it develop the need of its own building in the near future.”

Esther was born in Chicago in 1893 to immigrant parents. After graduating from 8th grade in 1907, for family financial reasons, she took a course in shorthand from Watson’s Business College and went to work. In 1909 she was converted, baptized and joined the Englewood Swedish Baptist Church. She wanted to search out a missionary career but was unable to do so because she lacked a high school degree.

Esther graduated from high school as class valedictorian in 1916. While working in the Chicago stockyards Esther completed her college education, with honors and an emphasis of Greek and English at the University of Chicago. Unable to pass a physical exam to be a missionary, she prepared to seek further education at Moody Bible School and Newton Theological Seminary. Eventually

she became an English teacher and Principal at Parker’s Prairie Minnesota High School.

The Bible and Missionary Training School commenced in the fall of 1922. Its purpose was to “strengthen and deepen the spiritual life of young Christians and to give them a larger understanding of the Word of God and theoretical and practical knowledge of the most effective methods of religious work.” The organization of the school “came upon us perhaps rather sudden” and Dean G. Arvid Gordh was forced to scramble for teachers, courses, classroom space, and housing. The first several quarters of study offered courses in Bible, church history, pedagogy, evangelism, and first aid, with some of the classes held in the seminary and others in the academy. The school was originally organized around a two-year curriculum.

The program was the dream of President G. Arvid Hagstrom who waited until the retirement of Dr. Carl Lagergren before implementing the program. Lagergren was concerned about the academic commit-

ments of the new program, had reservations about the switch from Swedish to English for classroom instruction and opposed a program that would include women. He stated that “nothing should give the suggestion that we were having a matrimonial bureau instead of a mission school. Under any circumstances the feminine influence would be a hindrance to our brethren in their studies and work. This influence has already



Esther Sabel

been noticeable, although it has come from the academy.” The program would last until 1931 when it was transferred to Bethel Junior College (begun in 1931) and renamed the Christian Worker’s Course. Under this arrangement it was reduced from a two-year program to a one-year program and the academic standards were raised, requiring high school graduation for admission.

When Esther finally realized that she was not going to be able to go to a mission field she prayed that “I might be placed somewhere where I could encourage other young people to go.” When Sabel struggled with not going to the mission field one of her students, Esther Ehnbohm walked into her office and announced that she was going to the foreign field in her place. Sabel knew she “was where the Lord had intended all along...” She realized that the courses she had taken at the University of Chicago, Moody Institute and Newton Seminary had prepared her for a new vocation.

Esther championed the work of prior missionaries such as Olivia Johnson, a graduate of Bethel Academy. She helped to promote the Olivia Johnson Memorial fund that raised funds to “buy books for a library established in the Philippines as a memorial, and for many years, her memory was kept alive by recounting the story of her life in Chapel.”

However, Sabel was best known for her encouragement of young men and women to use the program to gain the skills to engage in home or foreign missions. In her reminiscences Sabel recounts the stories of

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ *continued on p. 11*

THINK ON THESE THINGS

By Esther Sabel

“Surely the Lord is in this place: and I knew it not.” (Genesis 28:16)

Homeless, alone, in a strange country. Fleeing from the wrath of a brother whom he had wronged, weary and sick at heart, Jacob had been privileged a vision of God. He did not deserve it: he had sinned - against his brother, against his aged father - against God. No, Jacob did not deserve it, but God’s mercy is greater than our deserts and His love follows us into the most unlikely places.

The story is told of a deep-sea diver who wanted to have nothing to do with God. He avoided every mention of religion, he never went near a church. The Bible was a forbidden book as far as he was concerned. But one day when he was diving he came upon a mollusk with a bit of paper clamped to its shell. Curious, he managed to pull the slip of paper out. It contained just one word - “God!” The diver was so impressed with the consciousness that it was impossible for him to get away from the spirit of God, that he surrendered there on the floor of the sea to the Love that had followed him even into this most unexpected situation.

You may avoid mention of God, you may stay away from every place where people meet to worship Him, but you cannot get away from His presence. For this grace is greater than your sin, and His mercy seeks to show you to Him, that He may bless you.

(*The Bethel Clarion* April 19, 1933, p.2.)

Linda Erickson who accepted the call to go to Africa, Doris Skoglund who along with her husband Eric Frykenberg went to South India, Signe Erickson who became the first BGC missionary martyr when she was “beheaded by the Japanese in the invasion of the Philippines, Viola Steve who went to Africa, George Christian and Olga Weiss who spent time in Morocco and Bill Tapper who would later be the first General Secretary of the Baptist General Conference.

In a letter to Dr. Carl Lundquist a friend of Esther Sabel suggested that “most of her life was spent at Bethel. I know that she was well regarded, both as a fine Christian, as well as a very competent instructor. Today, the opportunities for women in all pursuits is pretty much accepted and an open field. Going to college and university is more or less customary. What I am saying, or attempting to state, is that Esther Sabel was a pioneer in a very real sense and that she made her way regardless of obstacles and difficulties, many of which were formidable.”

Esther Sabel retired from teaching at Bethel in 1958. She taught in all four of Bethel’s schools: Bible and Missionary Training School, Bethel Academy, Bethel College and Bethel Seminary. She taught a wide variety of courses but was best known for Greek, Bible, hermeneutics and Christian education. She regularly wrote articles in *The Standard*, *The Bethel Clarion* and *The Bethel Seminary Quarterly*. Four themes permeate her essays which reflect her commitment to a Baptist pietist heritage.

First, Esther valued her “born again” experience and recognition that she was a child of God. In an essay which reflects on the various stages of “aging” and identification of the major traits of each decade, Sabel began to wrestle with what it means to be “elderly.” At the age of 95 she found a way to understand “that what I was at 40, at 58, at 76, and what I am at 95, and will be if I live to be 100 is simply - a child!” She added that this is what the “very old, old big Book calls me, and that Book was written by God. He says I am a child of God. I have a Father who is eternal, and One who loves me so much and so far back - ‘before the foundations of the world were laid’ that he calls me ‘His child.’ As the

songwriter says, ‘His child and forever I am.’”

Second, Sabel was committed to Christian outreach to those in need. In an essay she tells the story of a four year old who engaged a table discussion by blurting out “I love everybody.” Do we love only those who the same as we are? Can we love those who may seem obnoxious or mischievous. Looking at how Jesus treated his disciples, Sabel concluded that the foremost commandments were that we were to love God and that we love one another as God has loved us. (John 13:34) Jesus was concerned that the disciples did not have the love for each other as Christ desired them to have.

Sabel isolated that flamboyant request that the mother of James and John had in demanding that her sons have a privileged status. She reflected on the love that Jesus showed to Matthew even though his status in society was one that was not well liked. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and in his last prayer to His Father asked that “the love wherewith Thou has loved Me may be in them.” (John 17:26) Sabel’s love for others was featured in her support for those in missions that engaged in evangelism and social outreach. She honored those who served the needs of children and responded to the work of the church in urban communities.

Third, Sabel had a strong sense of the call of being a disciple of Christ. Using Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians she emphasized that the new life we have in Christ demanded that we live as if we were “mature in Christ.” We are to live a life that is pleasing to Christ, bearing “fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” There should be a correspondence between the “conduct of the Christian and the character of God.” We need to put on the traits of compassion, kindness, cheerful generosity, humility and patience. These are the traits that communicate to the larger world the

REJOICE WITH ME

(Words by Esther Sabel/ Music by Marji Hamrin)

Rejoice with me, for I am with my Savior,
My Lord who bled upon the cross for me.
His love and mercy, wondrous grace and favor,
Have saved my soul and set my spirit free.

Rejoice! Rejoice! My friends make jubilation
I’m home with God forever more to be.
I’ve left the world with all it’s tribulation;
I’m safe with Him and now have victory.

Rejoice with me, my earthly life brought blessings
And joys untold as with my precious Lord.
I walked and talked and knew his love unceasing,
But here, as then on earth, He is adored.

Rejoice with me, His blessed face before me
My raptured soul, it sings without alloy.
I’m singing now triumphant songs in glory,
To magnify His holy name with joy.

Rejoice with me, I’ll look for you to join me;
To walk with me on heaven’s glorious streets,
To join with me in singing praises of His glory
And cast our crowns at Jesus’ hallowed feet.

Rejoice! Rejoice! My friends make jubilation
I’m home with God for all eternity.
I’ve left the world with all it’s tribulation;
Rejoice with me, for now His face I see.

realities of our life in Christ and encourage others to value it as well by becoming a member of the kingdom of God.

We are to put away racial and ethnic differences that often divide mankind. We are to be agents of reconciliation. The cross has removed all barriers. The Christian is to “continue steadfastly in prayer,” characterized by “right conduct,” and develop a “wholesome speech.” These characteristics and traits are to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Word of Christ must dwell in each of us richly and be the basis of worship and community.

Fourth, Sabel’s life expressed a strong commitment to the reading of the Bible and prayer. In an interesting essay entitled “The Prayer That Wasn’t Needed” she discussed the impact of prayer on our lives. After eating breakfast with the family that she was staying with a three year old Millicent offered a prayer which asked for God’s blessing on the family and expressed concern that children abroad would “know about Jesus.” Millicent,

in Swedish, added “Dear Father, protect Esther and Folke so they won’t drive into the ditch.” Just before Sable left the young girl once again asked for God’s protection.

On the way to Bethel Esther and Folke were stranded on the railroad tracks as the gates were lowered. The old Ford was unable to budge and they were hopelessly stuck. The train stopped within ten inches of the car. The Engineer stated that that was the closest he had ever been to an accident.

After the car was removed from the track, Esther thought about her inability to pray during the crises. She then commented that “perhaps our prayers weren’t needed... God had already answered the prayer of a three-year-old child.”

Esther Sable was an important contributor to the witness of the BGC. She offered an example of the reality that God’s gifts are not gender defined. In Christ we all have the same obligations of evangelism, social

outreach and holy living. Her life contributed much to encouraging both women and men to serve the church as “children of the Most High.” She died in December 1993 two months shy of 101. Her commitment to learning, Christian discipleship, and encouragement of both men and women to missions and church ministry is an example that remains relevant to today’s church.

The Pietist Poetry of Signe Olson Peterson: Celebrating Swedish Baptist Women

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | In recent issues of the *Baptist Pietist Clarion* we have published the poetry of Signe Olson Peterson. She wrote, under the name “Signe,” around 300 poems and essays which were published in at least eight Swedish newspapers and journals from Port Arthur, Canada, to Chicago, to New Britain, Connecticut. Signe immigrated from Varmland Sweden to Port Arthur, Canada in May 1911. Signe worked as a domestic for a widow in one of Port Arthur’s grand homes.

After moving to Minnesota she married Rev. E. B. Peterson, raised six children, and ministered to churches in Fish Lake, Eveleth and Kerkhoven, Minnesota. Signe’s poetry

often reflected her commitment to a Christian pietist heritage. Major themes included a need for a born again experience, a delight in prayer and Bible study, a celebration of the community of faith, a desire for holy living and an anticipation of heaven.

There was also, for Signe, a sense that life was hard and that only God could provide strength and support in times of need. In a letter from Signe to Rev. John Klingberg in 1918, a pastor in New Britain, Connecticut and a major champion of her poetry, she wrote:

“I have been and am continually completely alone out here. I have worked in families the whole time. I worked in the same family for five years. There did I write the greatest number of my poems. Some are written under so tragic conditions. Monday mornings, when I was alone down in the basement and did laundry, my thoughts used to work the best... The poetry has helped me overcome so much and has been such a great blessing to me.”

Signe was a strong supporter of Swedish Baptist women in ministry. She communicated in writing with Ethel Ruff. Ruff was the first woman to be ordained in the Baptist General Conference. She was known to be a powerful preacher and served as pastor in several churches in both the United States and Canada. One story was told about a

young man who was concerned about being married by a woman because he “wouldn’t feel that the knot was tied right.” Ruff replied

“Don’t worry, the kind I tie is a slip knot - the harder you tug, the tighter it pulls.”

The Swedish Baptist Churches went through a language transition during the 1920’s and 1930’s. The changeover to English was often difficult. When Rev. E. B. Peterson and Signe arrived from Eveleth to pastor the First Baptist Church of



Rev. Ethel Ruff

Kerkhoven Minnesota in 1927. The announcement in the *Kerkhoven Banner* read: “last Sunday Rev. Peterson delivered his first sermon in the English language and Mrs. Peterson delivered a sermon in the Swedish language.”

Signe was also impressed with the missionary work of Olivia Johnson. She had heard her testimony at a Conference meeting. Having emigrated from Sweden in 1904, Olivia early on developed an interest in missions. In 1911 she attended Bethel Academy to equip for work as a missionary. She actively participated in the life of First Baptist Church of Minneapolis. In spring 1913 Johnson became Bethel Academy’s first foreign missionary as she traveled to serve Christ in the Philippines.

After five years as a missionary she returned home and traveled throughout the church communities to advocate for



Signe Olson Peterson

foreign missions. While she was in St. Paul she contracted influenza and died from its complications. Her final words expressed her commitment to the gospel ministry. "I am going home to Jesus, but you must send at least three sisters to the work in the Philippines; it must not be neglected any longer." In 1920 the Olivia Johnson Memorial Missionary Movement was advanced in her honor. One of its tasks was to build a library in the Philippines. Signe was moved by Olivia Johnson's testimony and wrote the following poem in her honor.

A FLOWER BY OLIVIA JOHNSON'S GRAVE
(*Svenska Standardet*, Vol. XIII, No. 6, February 11, 1919, p. 1) (translated by Tom Coleman)

In the "Standard" of yesterday,
Which brought us news from the south and north

I saw there an announcement say,
You had, o sister, from us gone forth.

You sang in praise at conference last,
I heard your voice, I pressed your hand,
Who thought that then in fall just past,
You stood so close to the border land?

Your voice melodious and deep,
A holy zeal within was ringing,
It for the Master you would keep,
His love resounded in your singing.

You were not only with your voice,
Concerned with those bound in pagan lands,
For you had early made your choice,
You would go and help them break their bands.

For a short time you did delay,
So that you better prepared would be,
Then to the battle go to stay,
Be ready whatever task you see.

But the Lord willed it not be so,
He quietly loosed your earthly bands,
He took you home. You need not go,
To battle again in pagan lands.

Your work complete, your time run out,
But in my memory you will stay,
The seed you sowed without a doubt,
Will bring a harvest some future day.

There is a seed that cannot die,
That in eternity we shall see,
God's word no man should dare deny
For true it will stand eternally.

Silent and cold on snow decked hill,
A flower for your grave I've brought,
Your bright memory always will,
Encourage me with every thought.

As an immigrant she often felt lonely and abused. However, she always found the memory of her mother's prayer as a necessary security for her efforts to find meaning

and celebrate the Christian faith.

I KNEW MY MOTHER PRAYED
(*Såningsmannen*, Vol. VI, No. 7, July 1918, p. 53) (translated by Tom Coleman)

When the road seemed too hard for me,
When I but sorrow's face could see,
When my deep wounds for long had stayed,
I knew then that my mother prayed.

When I in sorrows grip am held,
And many bitter tears I've felled,
I know my joy will not be gone,
Because my mother's prayers go on.

When fear all courage took away,
For battle no one could allay,
Still to continue strength I found,
For mother's life to prayer was bound.

When dangers on my path might be,
When separating them and me,
Was but a single step between,
Prayer a sheltering wall has been.

When in the sunshine, gentle, bright,
My peace immune to any fright,
It was because prayers had been made,
For mother faithfully had prayed.

I mothers prayers for certain know,
Could not by God unanswered go.
I will at last God's city see,
For mothers prayers have followed me.

Irene Murray and Alma Reiber: Baptist Evangelists

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | Reverend E. B. Peterson, my grandfather, was a Baptist General Conference minister in North Dakota, Michigan and Minnesota from 1913-1934. E. B. was a graduate of Bethel Seminary in Chicago and pastored the Baptist church in Eveleth. His second church was in Drayton, North Dakota where he lost his first wife, Gertie, in child birth.



Reverend E.B. and Signe Peterson

Eventually E. B. began an assignment as

a missionary in Northern Michigan. His best friend, Joseph Tanquist, told him about Signe who was a cultured woman from Sweden who was learning the English language and serving as a cook in the Seminary. They married in 1920 and together would serve churches in Fish Lake, Eveleth and Kerkhoven. In 1934 he retired from the ministry to create one of the first rural Minnesota telephone companies and championed the writings of Signe Olson Peterson.

In the mid 1920's Reverend Peterson wrote a series of letters to the Minnesota Baptist Conference concerning evangelistic efforts in the Iron Range, Minnesota. He asked for \$50.00 to conduct a revival campaign to gain more Christian adherents so that a church could be built in the Ellsburg area. For E. B. Peterson, gender was irrelevant, but being Baptist was important. He wrote the following:

"I received your letter yesterday concerning Ellsburg. This Miss Murray is a Baptist. She has worked with me in North Dakota for a year.

"My plan is to get some one to hold revival meetings down there after the Church is ready, either Miss Murray or some evan-

gical or pastor. But since they have been working so hard building the church, I am afraid it would be hard to get much in collections and the fact is they would not call any one because of the money question. So I thought that if we could get a man in there for a two week series of meetings (or a woman) we would see a revival. And I want to see a Baptist in there before some other denomination comes in after the church is ready.”

Alma Reiber and Irene Murray, graduates of William Bell Riley’s Northwestern Bible School, were frequently used in the Midwest for about thirty years beginning in the 1910s. Historian William Trollinger writes the following about their ministry:

“Northwestern also prepared women to serve as traveling evangelists. Perhaps the most renowned evangelistic team to come out of Northwestern, male or female, was the twosome of Alma Reiber and Irene Murray.

Beginning in the 1910s, Reiber the preacher and Murray the song leader spent at least thirty years touring churches in the upper Midwest, at times staying in one church as long as six months. Their work in country and city churches often received rave reviews; for example, in 1923 the *Antigo* (Wisconsin) *Journal* reported: “The Misses Reiber and Murray, who have been the human instruments in this work, leave Antigo for other fields of labor carrying with them the highest endorsement of the pastor and people... (Through) these consecrated young women God has bestowed upon First Baptist Church the greatest spiritual blessing that it has ever received.” (Trollinger, *God’s Empire: William B. Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism*, p. 105)

Northwestern leaders until the 1930’s honored the role of women in leadership positions in the church. However, they changed their positions and their teachers instructed women that they “were not to serve as preachers, evangelists, or even (some argued) missionaries. For the Baptist General Conference this was not true.



You Are Invited
to attend the Evangelistic Meetings in the
BAPTIST CHURCH
Kerkhoven, Minnesota
Conducted by the
Misses Alma Reiber and Irene Murray
Which started Sunday, May 1, and lasts
for two weeks.
Sunday Services at 11 a. m.
Sunday Services at 8 p. m.
Week Nights at 8 p. m.
A place where the whole Gospel is presented
in its beauty, simplicity and power.

and there are some who will not give up until they see that there are no female professors in the Seminary. However, the Seminary has a long history of women professors, the most prominent being Professor Esther Sabel, who taught many years in the Seminary. It is reported that some churches have left the Conference fellowship because women are given a place of equality with men in the church. This is far from a dead issue.

The Baptism Controversy

Another controversy arose in the mid-nineties, namely the place and mode of baptism. Some BGC churches have begun to relax the Baptist requirements of baptism by immersion and baptism as a prerequisite for church membership. Several sessions, especially in Minnesota, were held to discuss the issues. However, I do not believe that the *Affirmation of Faith* was used as a creedal statement to force churches to conform or else get out of the Conference fellowship.

V. SHOULD THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

BECOME A CREED?

Most recently the BGC was caught in a significant debate on the interpretation of a Biblical/theological understanding of God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and/or of God’s openness and preferences of the future. There were differences of interpretation among the fellowship. The question appeared to be whether or not one interpretation should be written into the *Affirmation of Faith*, excluding any other interpretation.

In the center of this controversy there was a challenge of a basic Baptist principle. It was the principle of soul competency. Should the *Affirmation of Faith* be used as a legalistic creed for discipline and dismissal of believers who cannot consent to every point of the law? Or should the *Affirmation* be left alone in its present form, requiring consent on the essentials and giving latitude on the less essential doctrines, especially when Bible texts are not clear or give two or three possible interpretations? I was pleased that the BGC maintained its tradition by not changing the *Affirmation*.

There is always a place for debate, argument and discussion. This has been true throughout Baptist General Conference history. There is still more to be learned about our understanding of God’s revealed Truth. On many doctrines we can agree without reservation. But there are considerable areas of Biblical understanding over which conscientious students of the Bible differ. And Baptists have differed through the ages, including Conference Baptists.

Are the Conference Baptists ready to give up their pietistic Baptist heritage and become a creedal church after the reformed tradition? If this becomes the case, it should be remembered that it was the enforcement of the legalistic creeds of the institutional State Church of Sweden that forced the Baptists of Sweden to become nonconformists, separatists, free church people. And this heritage, this gift from the past should be constantly reaffirmed. The old Swedish Baptist’s final authority was not in creeds or councils, but “Vad säger Ordet?” (What saith the Scriptures?) This remains relevant.

century were part of a larger mass of Swedish religious dissenters that fled persecution for countries with greater religious tolerance. The spiritual climate in Sweden during this period was marked by the cold despotism of the State church and an undercurrent of a small but growing number of lay people and clergy called *läsare* (Bible readers), who were seeking alternative forms of spiritual nourishment. Fostered by a remarkable series of spiritual “awakenings,” akin to the concurrent revivals in the United States, evangelical revival put its participants in the inevitable position of religious persecution from the government and the State Church.

The intense pressure to conform to the State Church did not deter the resolve of the small Swedish band of *läsare*. Preferring to meet together for Bible study, prayer, and “mutual support and edification,” rather than attend the services of what they perceived to be a despotic and highly impersonal State Church, the *läsare* drew the attention of State and Church authorities. Many of this group of Swedish dissenters eventually left for friendlier surroundings.

II. ULRIKA OLSSON NILSSON AND CAROLINE LINTEMUTH WIBERG: DESIRING TO PROMOTE THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

Ulrika Olsson Nilsson was one woman who chose to follow her husband along the path of conversion, persecution, exile, and emigration. Ulrika married Fredrik Olaus (“F.O.”) Nilsson in Sweden in 1845. The course of Ulrika’s life was largely dictated by her adventurous husband. Nilsson’s conversion took place in 1827 after a particularly turbulent sea voyage to America in which he experienced what he considered a great spiritual crisis. Upon his safe arrival to American shores, a shaken F.O. visited the Baptist Mariners’ Church in New York and during a “personal conference with the pastor . . . he found peace for his soul.” From this day forward he became driven in his effort to win and convert other “lost” souls to his new found peace. In 1839 F. O. returned to Sweden to fulfill his dream of spreading the glad tidings among his fellow people.

Although there are virtually no records on

the personal life of Ulrika and F.O. Nilsson, it is known through F.O.’s formal journal that one of the first major issues the couple faced together was that of baptism. While Ulrika left no personal account of her feelings on the issue of baptism, F.O. confessed in his journal that he was in a “mental struggle” and never mentioned his doubts about infant baptism to anyone except Ulrika, and “she got sooner to a clear apprehension on the subject than I myself.” F.O.’s baptism in September of 1848 near Gothenburg made F.O. the first preacher of the Baptist faith in Sweden. His use of the nominative plural “we” in his journal attests to the fact that the decisions to be baptized, to remain in Sweden despite the inevitable persecution, and the eventual emigration to the United States were arrived at mutually.

The severe persecution the Nilssons had anticipated would follow their confession of faith began on January 1, 1850 when F.O. Nilsson was thrown into prison. A distraught Ulrika “went outside the prison into the open street weeping and wringing her hands not knowing what to do and without hope for the release of her husband.” A passerby inquired about her distress and advised her

to take her case to the District Governor. Ulrika followed the man’s counsel and was able to secure her husband’s release. A month after F.O.’s arrest he was summoned to appear before the low court of appeal where he was condemned to “perpetual banishment from the kingdom.”

Ulrika followed her husband into exile.

They went to Denmark for a period of two years and then to the United States. The Nilssons landed in New York City on June 24, 1853 along with twenty-one other Swedish Baptists. For the rest of F.O.’s life he traveled almost constantly, never seeming to find contentment in any location.

The life of Caroline Lintemuth Wiberg more clearly demonstrates what the sketchy records of Ulrika Olsson Nilsson’s life



Ulrika and F. O. Nilsson

seems to suggest: that wives of prominent ministers and missionaries led subordinate, highly domestic, and often lonely lives. She met and married her husband, Anders Wiberg, in her forty-fourth year. As an educated single woman, Caroline lived as a companion and nurse to an elderly woman for most of her adult life. Extremely active in her Philadelphia Baptist church, Caroline taught Sunday School for fifteen years, and

INGA ANDERSON: A HANDMAID OF THE LORD

Unsought but merited prominence among the early members of the Moline church was given Inga Anderson. Her cheerful boarding house was a Bethany for God’s servants and other fellow Christians. And for every visiting minister she had an extra five-dollar bill!

Inga Anderson was among the twenty-one persecuted Baptists who accompanied Rev. and Mrs. F. O. Nilsson from Sweden to this country in 1853. At the age of 17, in 1840, she had been led to Christ by Nilsson. More than once she assisted in hiding him from his enemies. She used to relate how deeply it hurt her to see him ill treated by persecutors. Her baptism, in 1849, brought greater hardships to herself. Together with many other emigrants, therefore, she cherished the freedom of America.

(Martin Erickson *Centenary Glimpses: Baptist General Conference of America, 1852-1952*), Chicago: Baptist Conference Press, 1952, p. 31)



no doubt participated in church oriented women's groups as well. Within two weeks of her marriage to Anders Wiberg, Caroline was on a boat bound for Sweden.

The life Caroline Lintemuth Wiberg faced upon her arrival in Sweden typified the experience of the wives of missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. Upon her arrival in Sweden, Caroline was faced with a foreign culture, a foreign language, an often absent husband, and the increased domestic responsibilities



Caroline Lintemuth Wiberg

associated with hosting an endless stream of guests. Yet Caroline persisted. She "rose at five o'clock, spent one hour with language studies" and "tried with more diligence to study the difficult Swedish language." Caroline blamed herself for her lack of proficiency with the language and her uselessness to what she considered "their" missionary work. In response to her troubles, Caroline turned to God to find comfort in her situation. After meditation and prayer Caroline wrote that she found renewed strength in her situation.

That Caroline was determined to "be of use" is evidenced in her initiative in organizing a women's group called the Dorcas Society. In December of 1856 Caroline invited fifteen women to her home to organize "a Dorcas Society to help the poor, especially poor Sunday School children." The women who assembled at the Wiberg home elected Caroline to be the chairwoman of the society. The honor Caroline felt at being chosen chairwoman of the Dorcas Society was tempered by her inability to communicate effectively with the women. "If only I could speak [Swedish]," she wrote that evening, "I would be willing to do anything just to promote the cause of Christ."

The lives of Ulrika Olsson Nilsson and Caroline Lintemuth Wiberg are illustrative not only of married Swedish Baptist women missionaries serving during the middle period of the nineteenth century, but also of women in other denominations who served with husbands. First, each derived

her status through the station of her husband. Second, although less is known about Ulrika, Caroline found it extremely difficult to be a missionary in her own right and still maintain the high level of domestic responsibility which fell to her. The role these women filled was first to provide a home for their families, and if time permitted, to engage in missionizing activity, which in essence was an extension of their domestic role.

While the roles of married missionary women were slow to change throughout the nineteenth century, the effects of the Second Great Awakening were being felt by lay women in evangelical churches across the United States. That many more women than men experienced conversion in the first half of the nineteenth century in the evangelical church did little to realign the imbalance in church leadership: men continued to dominate decision making and positions of authority within the evangelical church. For women, the rise of the laity in church life manifested itself in enthusiastic organization and participation in women's associations.

Although there are notable exceptions, Swedish Baptist women were like thousands of other women in evangelical churches; they did not preach and they were not in the church hierarchies. It thus can be argued that evangelical women turned to church associations to compensate for their almost complete exclusion from church hierarchies. Within these associations women controlled authority in a sphere they fully acknowledged as their own. For Swedish Baptist women, women's societies were an acceptable avenue for women to organize, to be leaders, and to put their faith into action.

III. THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S SOCIETIES IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Many of the women's societies in Swedish Baptist churches had modest beginnings: usually a group of women organized a small sewing circle or missionary society and began to meet regularly for a time of devotion, study and practical work. A women's society was almost always organized within a few months of the church's beginning, and in not a few cases the women's society preceded and paved the way for a formally organized congregation.

The history of the First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago provides a good example of this phenomenon. The women who later became charter members of the First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago came together on 22 May 1866 and organized *De Aldre Systrarnas Syfornening* (Senior Women's Sewing Society.) The women set their membership fee at twenty-five cents per month. They probably met weekly for Bible Study, prayer and sewing. When the church was formally organized in August of 1866, the society decided to donate all its proceeds "to the new work."

The beginnings of the Elim Baptist Church



Women of First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago came together in May 1866 and organized *De Aldre Systrarnas Syfornening*



Englewood Dorcus Society

in Minneapolis revolved even more overtly around a women's society. In May of 1884 "the first steps were taken toward carrying on systematic religious work among the Swedish people of northeast Minneapolis." At this time there was only one Swedish Baptist Church in Minneapolis, the First Swedish Baptist Church [Bethlehem Baptist] which had been organized in 1871, and it was located on the south side of Minneapolis. Members of the First Swedish Baptist Church who resided in the northeast part of the city met with the pastor and "conferred as to the advisability of taking initial steps toward an independent effort in this part of Minneapolis." The chief concern of these northeast residents was transportation to the First Swedish Baptist Church. In the 1880s, the only way to get to the church by public transportation was the mule-propelled streetcar. During the winter and on rainy days it was almost impossible for church-goers to travel south to First Swedish Baptist Church.

For these reasons it was thought advisable to make a beginning by "organizing a sewing society in northeast Minneapolis." Six women attended the meeting on May 2, 1884. "Such was the humble beginning" the church history concluded, "and it was the women who were at the forefront." At the encouragement of Miss Anna Sandberg, home missionary in the First Baptist Church (in Minneapolis), the society (later named the *Ebenezer Soci-*



Englewood Missions Circle

ety) set aside money not only for the future church but for missions and "an inspirational program" as well. The women of the sewing society followed the advice of Anna Sandberg and continued to meet, sew and set aside the proceeds until the Elim Swedish Baptist Church (later renamed Elim Baptist Church) was organized on February 21, 1888. *The Ebenezer Society* was later referred to as "the mother organization" of the Elim Baptist Church and its members saluted for their "profound faith and ministry."

Although the names varied (Ebenezer, Dorcas or Sewing Circle), the most common women's societies in Swedish Baptist churches were oriented towards sewing (for church auctions as well as for donations to the poor in the community), home missions and foreign missions. In the beginning, if a society did not already exist, women in a newly formed church organized a women's society within a few months of the church's charter. The purpose of these societies was "to serve as a handmaiden to the church," which included "collecting funds for its local programs, assisting members in need, and raising funds for missions at home and abroad." Thus as "handmaidens" these women served a vital role in the church within an accepted female sphere.

As these early societies fulfilled their goals to raise money for church property and building funds, the women began to focus their attention on home and foreign missionary projects. In the east, in the mid-west and on the west coast, Swedish Baptist women formally organized home and foreign missionary groups to aid and support women missionaries.

The First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois, for example, was perhaps the

most prolific of the Swedish Baptist churches. Established in 1866, the First Swedish Baptist church gave birth to nine daughter churches by 1891. If the work done by women at the mother church is any indication of the activities carried on by women at the daughter churches, their collective effort is indeed impressive. While the First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago is an excellent example of women's activities, the histories of the First Swedish Baptist Church in San Francisco, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Moline, as well as Englewood Baptist Church in Chicago and Elim Baptist Church in Northeast Minneapolis, can all show similar accomplishments.

On April 20, 1884 twenty-five women were present at a meeting in the First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago to organize a women's foreign mission society. Pastor Eric Wingren spoke on the topic, "The Significance of Women in Missionary Work." The twenty-five women who were present signed their names as members of the "*Qvinnornas Utlandska Missions Cirkel*" (The Women's Foreign Mission Circle), and agreed as to the purpose of the group: "By means of gifts, at least ten cents a month, together with above all else, prayer for God's blessing, contribute to the support of native missionaries in the heathen world." It was further decided that men could also "gain entrance as members" but that "in the leadership only women are elected." Five men signed up to be members of the society shortly after its organization. Twenty-two years later the Women's Foreign Missionary Circle reported that the society had "collected and distributed for missionary purposes" over \$4,500. For the first five years the Women's Foreign Missionary Circle supported a woman missionary among the Telugu people in India. By 1906 the women were supporting two male missionaries in India as well as a Bible woman.

In addition to the Women's Foreign Missionary Circle and the Senior Women's Sewing Circle, First Swedish Baptist Church in Chicago had active volunteers from young women as well. In March 1881 ten "unclaimed jewels" (unmarried women) came together to organize the "*Jungfruforeningen Arbetsmyran*" (the Young Women's Society). Only young or unmarried women were al-

lowed in this society and membership was forfeited upon marriage. The twenty-fifth anniversary report of this society attests to the hard work and dedication of the many young women who participated in the society since its inception. The women raised over \$9,200 which was contributed to the church building fund, home and foreign missions, "the poor and charitable causes," a home for the aged, and the founding of a rest home for young women.

IV. SWEDISH BAPTIST WOMEN AND THE MISSION FIELD

Another important thread in the Swedish Baptist story is that of the impact of single women on the home and foreign mission field. In the second half of the nineteenth century women began to move from being financial, material, and spiritual supporters of missions to being missionaries themselves in the field. Women's associations played a significant role in this shift.

The only accepted role for women within home and foreign missions before the second half of the nineteenth century was that of a missionary wife. To be the wife of a missionary was to be "a member of an elite corps" with an elevation in status, a conception which was indicative of nineteenth century attitudes toward marriage. Single women who felt "called" to the mission field were firmly refused appointments. Missionary boards of all evangelical denominations explained to the hopeful candidates that if God wanted them on the mission field, he would send them a husband.

As Protestant missionary zeal increased in the nineteenth century in countries with cultures far different than Euro-American culture, missionary boards began to weaken in their position regarding single women in the mission field. This change in position was almost completely tactical. Missionary boards and their missionaries concluded that "pagan" women of other cultures wielded great power and influence over their husbands and families, and because many cultures forbid male contact with women, missionizing was impossible under the traditional system. The consensus of the Presbyterian board in 1881 was that "women

everywhere represent the stronger element in the religious faith of the community whether that faith be true or false." Thus in cultures where men were not allowed to speak to women, and where the missionary wives were too busy with domestic duties to leave the home, single women became an important means by which the gospel could be brought to "pagan" peoples.

The first female Swedish Baptist foreign missionary was a woman from Minnesota named Johanna Anderson who was appointed by the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. Johanna Anderson was the epitome of a Protestant single woman missionary in late nineteenth century America. Born in Sweden in 1856, Johanna had emigrated to the United States as a young woman with her family. Johanna

attended school and received a teaching certificate enabling her to teach in the small Minnesota communities of Clear Lake, Becker, Snake River and St. Cloud.

As an active church member and participant in the women's foreign missionary society, Johanna came to believe God was calling



Johanna Anderson

her to the foreign mission field. She believed that "the heathen world needed well-prepared young women": and she independently "studied with the distant land in sight" and prayed that "God would open the door when the time was right." Johanna Anderson did receive her call and on September 29, 1888 she set sail for Toungoo, Burma, to fill a teaching position at the

mission school. Johanna's involvement in a women's mission society, her response to a "call," and even her untimely death in the

SELMA LAGERGREN: SUPPORTER OF MISSIONARY AND PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITIES

From a prominent family and well-educated, Selma Lagergren was a popular school teacher when, in 1867, she had a profound encounter with her Lord and began affiliating herself with the growing young Baptist movement in Sweden. This not only dismayed her family, but cost Selma her teaching position. Fortunately, she soon found a place on the faculty of a small school the Baptists maintained in northeastern Sweden, and its tall and handsome principal was understandably attracted to the lovely, talented, and devout young teacher. Carl and Selma were married in 1873.

After several years pursuing educational, pastoral, editorial, and missionary activities in Sweden, Carl and Selma accepted a call to head up the Swedish Baptist Seminary Edgren had begun nearly two decades earlier. For almost a year, Selma managed their growing family alone while her husband visited the American churches and began his work as dean of the seminary.

Selma participated in various missionary and philanthropic activities. In addition to working to support missionary projects in India and the Philippines, she helped at the Fridhem Home for the Aged, the Klingberg Children's Home, and the Shelter Home in Minneapolis. She was one of the organizers

of the Morgan Park Mission Circle in 1906, a group of women united to help both needy seminary students and the residents of the nearby Fridhem Home. The circle met in the Lagergren home for the last time in 1911, only days before Selma's failing health confined her to bed for the final weeks of her life.

(*Heart and Mind*, Volume 10, No. 3, Summer 1996, p. 14.)



Selma and Carl Lagergren and family

field, typify her in her role as a single woman missionary of the late nineteenth century. While she stepped out of the traditional role for women in exchange for the adventure and freedom of missionary life, she did so in an acceptable female role, that of teacher.

The relative freedom sanctioned by Protestant churches for single women within the context of missionary life did not stray far from accepted societal norms. While single women in the mission field were lauded for their commitment, witness, and indispensability, the May 1882 issue of *Missionary Review* revealed just how far women had yet to travel. The author of one article instructed single women missionaries to exercise no direct influence but to hold “the same relation to man in the mission fields of heathendom that she holds in the most happy homes and churches of Christendom, where her work is accomplished with a grace that disarms opposition, her views and plans are adopted because none better can be devised, and her influence is all the more potent because unconscious.”

The women who engaged in foreign missionary work dutifully wrote long letters home that helped develop a following as well as support in prayers and money. Adele M. Field was a Swedish Baptist missionary in China who was especially successful in winning the support of her Scandinavian sisters. Her long letters to her “dear sisters” in Minnesota were published in *Evangelisk Tidskrift*, a paper that, in its time, was lauded as “an effective denomination voice” and a “most influential unofficial organ” for Swedish Baptists in the United States. Widely read among Swedish Baptists, the letters from Adele Fielde and other women like her served to develop a sense of responsibility for foreign missionaries among the women who stayed home. Thus those who stayed at home not only experienced vicariously the lives of the foreign missionaries they supported but also participated by extension in the work of missionizing the world.

The many articles in *Evangelisk Tidskrift* attest to the significance of women missionaries for Swedish Baptist women. Their actions and their writings bear witness to their understanding of their mission as

ANNA EDGREN: SERVING WITH JOHN ALEXIS AT BETHEL SEMINARY

Anna Abbot Chapman was of Pilgrim ancestry, and second cousin to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. When this talented young woman of prestigious background married John Alexis Edgren in 1866, she left loved ones and American comforts behind to go to her husband’s homeland of Sweden. After a few years, they returned to the United States and together they began the long struggle to establish both a seminary and an effective denominational press for the scattered and impoverished Swedish immigrant churches.

Due to poverty and deeply ingrained suspicions of educated clergy, the young



Anna and John Alexis Edgren and family

churches were reluctant to lend support to Edgren’s school. For the Edgrens, this meant great hardship. After only a few months, in fact, John’s health had declined significantly. He sailed to Sweden to rest and upon returning many months later found that his daughter had died and that his wife had taken a nursing job to ease her distress and poverty.

Anna assumed extensive responsibilities at the seminary. Experience as an Army nurse during the Civil War served her in good stead from the day the first student arrived sick and penniless. Besides functioning as school nurse, Anna was librarian, occasional fund solicitor, and “mother” to many students.

Despite their discouragement, the Edgrens’ faith that God had called them kept them in their work. By 1887, when John’s poor health finally forced his premature retirement, he and Anna could rejoice in the great progress that had been made in the school. (*Heart and Mind*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Summer 1996, pp. 12-13.)

women “on the home front.” As women they believed they had a special calling or sanction to aid the helpless and the oppressed. They reasoned that in following this “high calling,” others would surely follow their lead.

The women who gave their lives to the mission field garnered strength from the women in the mission societies who supported them. For Adele Fielde, the commitment and sacrifice that her Swedish sisters in Minnesota demonstrated on her behalf both impressed and humbled the Swedish missionary. Her work took on more importance with the unwavering devotion of her sisters still at home. Adele served as a model to broaden the sphere in which women expressed their own commitment to the church. She also proved that single women could successfully and effectively bring the “gospel of light” into the “heathen world of darkness.”

V. WOMEN AND HOME MISSIONS WORK

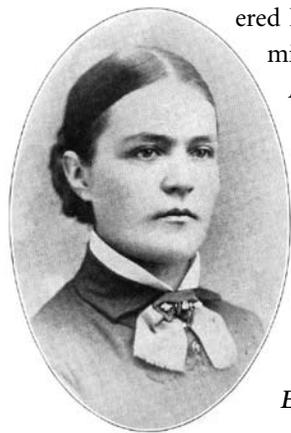
In the United States, single women mis-

sionaries and their supporters were as busy as their foreign mission counterparts. In 1877 American Baptist women organized the Women’s Baptist Home Mission Society in Chicago and Boston, and in 1881 the Home Mission Society established the Baptist Missionary Training School in Chicago.

Like those involved with foreign missionaries, women supporting home missions had heroes similar to Johanna Anderson and Adele Fielde. In the 1880s and 1890s, Anna B. Nilsson was virtually a household name in the Swedish Baptist community. The eighteen year home missionary career of Anna Nilsson began in March of 1880 when “the longing of her life” was at last realized. Anna served among the Swedes in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri at a variety of tasks. Her list of accomplishments during her years of home mission work are indeed impressive, and they also exemplify the ways in which her activities pushed the boundaries of women’s spheres within the church.

The first four months of Anna Nilsson's service were spent in Illinois visiting churches and speaking on behalf of the Women's Baptist Home Mission Society. According to Anna, the last eight months of service were spent in Iowa where she spoke at a dozen congregations. Anna referred to the experience as her "voice [being] heard in twelve different churches." The specific work of "Baptist women possessing qualifications of body, mind, and spirit calculated to insure successful service, and these natural gifts further developed by a course of special training" was laid out in the Women's Baptist Home Mission Society as "distinctively by, for, and with women and children."

The efforts of Anna Nilsson to spread the gospel went far beyond the parameters of women and children, although they remained her priority throughout her eighteen years of service. In 1881, at the request of several pastors, Anna was sent to work in various Swedish communities in Illinois and later in Kansas City, Missouri. Anna's work was so successful that at the end of the year it was declared that "no department of the work of the society bore richer fruit during this year." In the same year Anna reported conversions during nine months out of the twelve and outside observers considered her to be in the midst of a revival.



Anna Sandberg and the Elim Ebenezer Society

According to Mary Burdette, chronicler of missionary activities for the

Women's Home Mission Society, the labors of Anna Nilsson and other women like her were "greatly appreciated by pastors," who appealed for more women missionaries by saying "they are doing a greatly need work, which can be done only by Christian women, who gain access to people who could not otherwise be reached."

During Anna Nilsson's second year of service in 1881-82, she divided her time between Minneapolis and St. Paul, where she continued to have success on the home mission field working among unconverted Swedes. In the first few years of her service Anna traveled to Evanston, Pullman and Joliet where she aided in establishing missions or churches, and always the results of her efforts were the same; "many souls had been converted and many others were inquiring the way of life." One student minister, in the Scandinavian department of the Theological Seminary at Morgan Park, Illinois, commented that "Miss Nilsson gets the converts and sends for me to come and baptize them." According to Mary Burdette, "This is a common experience with the missionaries of the Society, but they are quite content to win souls, let who will, baptize them."

Anna Nilsson is but one of many women who chose to devote their lives to the home mission field during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. These women were responsible for ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of "lost Swedes." After persons were converted the women missionaries worked to organize a sewing society or other women's group which functioned as an arena of prayer, fellowship, and mutual encouragement. Out of these early women's groups many Swedish Baptist churches were born.

The work of Anna Sandberg resulted in the birth of Bethel and Elim Swedish Baptist Churches in Minneapolis through the formation of groups for women. During 1886 Anna Sandberg visited a section of Minneapolis where she found a large Scandinavian population but no churches. After visiting in the homes for some time, and "winning the confidence of many mothers, she succeeded in organizing an industrial school in one of the little homes." She then organized a sewing school and a Sunday School, which had an opening attendance of thirty-five. According to the records, at the close of the first month the number had increased to sixty-eight. It was said of Anna that two churches in Minneapolis "stand to-day as monuments to the efficiency of Miss Sandberg's womanly ministry during seven years of unwearied service in that city. They bear abundant testimony to the value of personal labor in homes, and intelligent, soulful work with children." According to Anna's contemporaries, her success in converting men and women to Christianity was directly related to her qualities as a woman.

VI. CONCLUSION: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

What we see in the lives of these Swedish Baptist women typified the work done by many others like them both within and outside the Swedish Baptist tradition. Women's groups and societies were organized for the purpose of starting churches, fostering church growth, and supporting missionaries (particularly women) both at home and abroad. Within the confines of the roles set by society and the church for these women, they were immensely successful in raising funds for various purposes, in missionary activities, in ministering to the needs of those in their communities, and in pushing the boundaries of their influence within their churches and society.

This essay is drafted from a larger presentation entitled *Swedish Baptist Women in America, 1850-1990*.

Copies of the larger essay and full citations can be gained from Diana Magnuson at d-magnuson@bethel.edu.

