
The Baptist Pietist CLARION

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Previous issues can be found at http://www.bethel.edu/cas/dept/history/Baptist_Pietist_Clarion

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There is No Fear in Love: A Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King



JONATHAN BERRY,
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Mt. Olivet Baptist
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tral Baptist Church,
January 20, 2013

love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

SERMON TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:18-21

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not

TO GOD BE ALL THE HONOR, ALL THE GLORY, AND ALL THE PRAISE

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus who has blessed us on this cold winter morning to be in His house of worship once again. I was glad when they said unto me "Let us go into the house of the Lord," and so it was with great pleasure that I accepted the offer to be here this morning on this celebratory Sunday honoring the life and

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Honoring Virgil Olson's Commitment to Christ: An Imaginary Journey



JONATHAN LARSON,
Virgil Olson Memo-
rial (revised) First
Baptist Church
Cambridge, Min-
nesota, June 8, 2013

THE WHITE PINE

The first slide this morning is of this magnificent white pine. Some of you will recognize it, as it stands at the edge of the Jaloszynski pasture, across the field south from the N. Isanti parsonage. I suppose it is about 80 feet tall and undoubtedly more than a hundred years old. It's not perfectly shaped—it's lost some major branches—but it is a beautiful part of God's creation. I believe there may be an eagle's nest in one of the top branches. I begin with this picture today, because as one of the few old pines remaining in this area, it represents for me Virgil Olson—one of the last survivors of his generation.

I want to honor Virgil's memory today by using a speaking technique that he utilized well, and that is to illustrate my message with a series of slides. The only problem is that technology today has moved on beyond slides, and I did not attempt to connect my Kodak carousel projector to the wonderful system here at first Baptist; so I'm going to have to ask you to use your imagination.

He was not a perfect man (let's get that out of the way, right from the start), but a truly

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Inside this Issue of the *Baptist Pietist Clarion*



G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science* | This is the twelfth issue of the *Baptist Pietist Clarion*. In March 2002 Ron

Saari and I began to publish the *Baptist Pietist Clarion*. The basic purpose of the *Clarion* was to define and articulate the essence of our Baptist Pietist heritage. Past issues can be found at the following website: http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/history/Baptist_Pietist_Clarion

The *Baptist Pietist Clarion* could not be published without the assistance of the Baptist General Conference History Center, the outstanding layout work of Darin Jones and the archival assistance of Dr. Diana Magnuson. This issue will explore five major themes.

The first theme is Jonathan Berry's sermon

"There is No Fear in Love: A Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Rev. Berry is a graduate of Bethel Seminary and on the pastoral staff at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. Within the article are several inserts one of which explores John Alexis Edgren's participation in the American civil war significantly because of his opposition to slavery.

The second theme is an effort to define the successful aspects of urban ministry by my co-editor Pastor Ron Saari. It was one of his last sermons as a pastor of

Central Baptist Church. He retired from 23 years of ministry at Central at the end of February 2013. Mike Widen's painting entitled "My Name is Not 'Those People'" based on a poem by Julia Dinsmore is also included. Dr. Joel Lawrence, professor of theology at Bethel Seminary has been installed as Central's Senior Pastor.

The third theme is Vic Winquist's review of Jim and Carole Spickelmier's new book on BGC history entitled *New Century/New Directions*. The review explores some of the major issues raised in the book and the diverse perspectives on how to resolve them.

The fourth theme is a review of Emilie Griffin's book *Green Leaves for Later Years* by Pastor Terri Hansen. Griffin has been active in the Renovare community and was a contributor to the Pietist Conference that was held at Bethel in 2009.

The fifth theme is a continuation of this magazine's effort to promote the poetry of Signe Peterson. She is a distinguished Swedish Baptist poet whose work challenges us to take our Christian faith seriously.

Finally, we are thankful to Rev. Jonathan Larson for his Memorial sermon given at the June 8th funeral of Dr. Virgil Olson. It is a gifted reflection on Dr. Olson's life and many at the service wished to see it in a printed format.



Tribute to Dr. Virgil Olson

On Saturday, June 8, 2013 I had the opportunity to attend a memorial service for Dr. Virgil Olson at First Baptist Church in Cambridge, Minnesota. He died on June 4, 2013 at the age of 96. This Memorial service was a marvelous experience. It began by defining the major characteristic of Dr. Olson's life. This was his belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ is "one story worth telling."

As a preacher, professor, dean and missions administrator his desire was to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. In a recent article

on pietism he wanted to revive the value of experiential Christianity, which included "an emphasis on the born again experience, holy living and Läsare spirituality. It became part of the warp and woof of the pioneer Swedish Baptist immigrants. All of us today, he argued, still need to learn how to 'truly walk with God.'"

One of the most significant aspects of Virgil Olson's life was that he was "a walking encyclopedia of Conference history." As Jim Spickelmier expressed it: He knew all the Deans of Bethel Seminary but Edgren. He taught most of the BGC pastors of the second half of the 20th century. He served at Bethel and he served in the Chicago offices of the Baptist General Conference. He continues to help all of us remember our core faith commitments and to praise God for the way He has blessed Bethel and the ministries of the Baptist General Conference.

Virgil Olson has played a major role in the Baptist General Conference (now Converge Worldwide) over the past 60 years. After serving in several pastorates he became a professor of church history at Bethel Seminary (1951-1968), Dean of Bethel College (1968-1975), Executive Secretary of World Mission Board of the Baptist General Conference (1975-1981), and President of William Carey International University (1981-1986).

Dr. Virgil Olson was a major contributor the *Baptist Pietist Clarion* since its inception. He helped us define what it means to be a Baptist, understand the history and relevance of Pietism, explore the value of the "irenic spirit," encourage missions and evangelism and define the importance of Bethel's commitment to Christian education.



times of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. We solicit your prayers as we speak this morning, we believe that there is no power in the pulpit if there is no prayer in the pews. So if I say something you think might be right or if I touch a nerve somebody say Amen.

RELATIONSHIP OF GOD'S PERFECT LOVE AND FEAR

During my time with you today I want to focus on verse 18 where it says that "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

In the NIV version of the Bible the word fear appears 263 times, 212 times in the Old Testament and 51 times in the New Testament. How do I know? I went through and counted them myself. God feels the need to address mankind's fear and fear has the potential to keep you from being all that God has designed you to be. God has destined His children to do great things through His might and according to His master plan. But fear, whether rational or irrational, stands in the way of many a person's rise to a level beyond where they currently stand.

We often fear the unknown, we fear the consequences of certain actions, we fear what other people will say, and we are just consumed by our fears. To go one step further our fears can potentially be taken to another level and become a terror to us. I don't know about you but when you speak of terror I get the mental image of extreme fright, all consuming panic, and a complete and total breakdown of being able to control one's emotions and thought processes. Mankind has been possessed by fear since the beginning. It has been like this for a long time.

The Bible says in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve hid from God in the Garden of Eden once they had eaten from the forbidden fruit. Why were they hiding? Might they have feared the response of God for their disobedience? I guess it never crossed their minds that God knew where they were. In their defense they came up with this plan on the fly, there wasn't a lot of forethought put into this escape plan. Ever since then our fears have been that dark hiding place where we often justify to ourselves doing that which

is not right in the eyes of God.

What do you mean by that preacher? I mean despite numerous references in the scriptures that we should look out for widows, orphans and the poor we will not extend a helping hand to someone in obvious need because of our fears. What is it that

you fear? Well, that person doesn't look like me, or they live in a certain part of town or even, and this is for my church people, they aren't Baptist, they are those other people. You know "those people."

I John 4:16 states that "God is love and whoever lives in love lives in God and God

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King Delivers Invocation at Billy Graham Evangelical Association Crusade: "Brotherhood That Transcends Race and Color"

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science* | In May 1957, Billy Graham began an evangelistic crusade at Madison Square Garden in New York City. I had the privilege of attending several of the meetings. After a telephone conversation between King and Graham, Leighton Ford extended an invitation for King to pray at the July 18 session. Graham clearly signaled that his crusades would not be segregated and delivered an uncompromising statement that "racial prejudice was

an abomination of God."

King had already established himself as a leader of the civil rights movement after the successful Montgomery bus boycott. Graham however, chose not to actively associate with King's leadership of the civil rights movement. Graham did not ask him to participate in future crusades, chose not to participate in the 1963 march on Washington and did not attend King's funeral in Atlanta in 1968.

Let us pray. O God, our Heavenly Father, out of whose mind this great cosmic universe has been created, toward whom the weary and perplexed of all generations turn for consolation and direction, we come before Thy presence this evening thanking Thee for the many blessings of life. We come recognizing our dependence on Thee. We also come, O God, with an awareness. The fact that we have not always given our lives to that which is high and noble.

In the midst of all of the high and noble aspects of justice, we followed injustice. We stand amid the forces of truth and yet we deliberately lie. We stand amid the compelling urgency of the Lord of Love, as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, and yet we live our lives so often in the dungeons of hate. For all of these sins, O God forgive.

And in these days of emotional tension, when the problems of the world are gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail, give us penetrating vision, broad understanding, power of endurance and abiding faith, and save us from the paralysis of crippling fear. And O God, we ask Thee to help us to work with renewed vigor for a warless world and for a brotherhood that transcends race or color.

We thank Thee this evening for the marvelous things which have been done in this city, and through the dynamic preachings of this great evangelist. And we ask Thee, O God, to continue blessing him. Give him continued power and authority. And as we look into him tonight, grant that our hearts and spirit will be opened to the divine inflow. All of these things we ask, in the name of him who taught us to pray. Our Father [audience also begins to pray], who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . . .

Source:

Baldwin, Lewis V. (Editor) "Thou, Dear God." *Prayers That Open Hearts and Spirits: The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2011.

in him.” Then John tells us that there is no fear in that love. That perfect love which is God’s love drives out fear. There are no dark places in God’s love, there is no need to hide from God’s all encompassing love. Because of the love of God we don’t have to live in fear, rational or irrational. The other side to this statement is the one who does still fear has not been made perfect in love. Fear is still his constant companion even as God has done everything necessary to release him from the shackles that bind his spirit.

Let me share a personal story about when

my wife and I found out that she was experiencing kidney failure and that she would have to go on dialysis. There were some very anxious moments as we struggled to wrap our minds around what is going to happen next. There was this cloud looming over our home. We experienced the fear of the unknown, but we soon came to the realization that turning everything over to the Lord was the best course of action. It was the only course of action. From that point on we looked prayerfully to God for whatever his will might be for us. I am so pleased to

say my wife is doing great. Thank God and Hallelujah. But we had to get past our fears to fully embrace the will of God.

FEAR OFTEN PARALYZES THE CHURCH AND KEEPS US FROM DOING GOD’S CALLING

It is important that the church address a “paralyzing” fear that keeps us dead in our tracks. It is one of the causes of indecision. It will make you turn your back on what you know to be right and will even make you pretend not to hear the voice of God calling

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John Alexis Edgren: Founder of Bethel Seminary, A Naval Officer Opposed to Slavery

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science* | John Alexis Edgren is best known for his leadership in the establishment of Bethel Seminary in 1871, his gifts as a painter, linguist, and writer of a number of significant books about the Bible and Theology. Bethel Seminary was originally developed to provide educated pastors for the increasing Swedish immigrant communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

What is not so well known is that he, like many early Baptist General Conference leaders, were people of the sea. In 1859 Edgren was commissioned sea captain first class which allowed him to command steam vessels. Some thought he was destined to establish a maritime career. L. J. Ahlstrom’s biography of Edgren wants to establish the idea that John Alexis Edgren and his brother Hjalmar Edgren fought for the north in the American Civil significantly because they were opposed to slavery.

For Hjalmar the “existence or non-existence of slavery became the question of vital importance in the American Civil War, and the battle was primarily a battle between light and darkness.” Hjalmar

became significantly ill during the Civil War. After he thanked the gentlemen who had housed him during his illness, the gentlemen stated: “Don’t thank me. It is your attendant, George, whom you must thank. He learned that you were ill and hunted you up, and he has been outside your door day and night, and he has seen to it that you lacked nothing.”

George was a Negro runaway slave whom Hjalmar had found dancing and singing to the point of exhaustion beside a Union army campfire before a group of harassing and jeering Union soldiers. Hjalmar Edgren, a young officer, rescued the young Negro from the harassment and eventually selected the runaway slave as his attendant.



The story is the same for John Alexis Edgren. After coming to Christ, Edgren came across a reality that significantly troubled him. He noticed that a cargo ship was being unloaded by black slaves. He had not been acquainted with slavery issues back in Sweden. The slave

master was quite harsh and Edgren was appalled at what he saw, seeking to understand the issue much further. There was an overwhelming compassion for the oppressed.

One year Edgren found himself in Charleston, South Carolina observing the

realities of the slave system. He was secretly warned by staff to not get involved in aiding the slaves or showing sympathy for them. There was a fear that he might be mobbed or even killed.

However as he observed more closely the issues of slavery he observed some acts of kindness toward the enslaved blacks. He followed his natural impulse of sympathy and aided an old mother in getting aboard a schooner that was to carry her away somewhere. She mourned over the loss of her sons who had been sold into slavery. Ultimately the captain of his ship commended Edgren for the excellent service he had performed.

However, the experiences the Edgren brothers had were never to be forgotten. Later in a sermon John Alexis Edgren compared the liberation of Negroes from slavery with Christ’s liberation of people from sin. Edgren had concluded that the American Civil War was a just and righteous war because it had removed the “shackles of four million slaves.” Although many wanted him to continue his service in the Navy he stated “Woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel.” He ministered to the new immigrant Swedes who were often experiencing difficult economic environments in American cities and rural communities.

Martin Luther King: The Kitchen Prayer: There is No Fear in Love

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science* | Coretta Scott King suggested that for Martin Luther King, Jr. “prayer was a daily source of courage and strength that gave him the ability to carry on in even the darkest hours of struggle.” This was especially true during the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956. King was not, at first, desirous of leading the civil rights movement. He came to Montgomery to pastor the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and enjoy the art of preaching and congregational relationships. He was cajoled to play a role in the bus boycott and was finding this task one that was exhausting and challenging.

In January, after one month had passed, he had fallen into despair and wondered whether he was sufficiently skilled to carry out this leadership task. One evening he was concerned about the safety of his family, Coretta and his little girl Yoki. He described the experience in his work *Stride Toward Freedom*.

“One night toward the end of January I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. Coretta had already fallen asleep and just as I was about to dose off the telephone rang. An angry voice said, ‘Listen, nigger, we’ve taken all we want from you; before next week you’ll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.’ I hung up, but I couldn’t sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point.

I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally I went to the kitchen and heated

a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God.

With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. ‘I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.’

At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: ‘Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.’ Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.”

Charles Marsh, a distinguished American historian on the relationship of faith to the civil rights movement, analyzed the role of prayer in King’s life. Three nights after this midnight encounter with God King, after addressing a crowd at the First Baptist Church, learned that his home had been bombed. After he returned home and found out that his family was not harmed, he communicated the message of assurance that God had communicated to him in the kitchen prayer.

King stated to the crowd that “let’s not become panicky... If you have weapons, take

them home; if you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with nonviolence. Remember the words of Jesus: ‘He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword.’ Remember that is what God said.

We must love our white brothers no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: ‘Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you.’ This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love.”

We in America, must retain a sense of thanks that the essential leadership of the civil rights movement was drawn from the church community, committed to nonviolence and seeking the “beloved community.” This task is not finished and the church must play a significant role in promoting a public discipleship that suggests that the kingdom of God transcends tribe, race, class and nation. The “beloved community” remains to be created.

Sources:

Carson, Clyborne and Peter Holloran (editors) *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration From the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Warner Books, 1998.

King, Jr. Martin Luther *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

Marsh, Charles “Dr. King’s Kitchen” *Christian Ethics Today* December 27, 2010.

There is No Fear in Love, from p. 4

you to greater things. Notice I said pretend to not hear God. You heard Him, but what He is calling you to do will require that you change your ways. It will require that you do something that you don’t want to do. It will necessitate you to be submissive and obedient. Therefore I’ll pretend like I don’t hear Him and maybe God will change His mind.

Another personal story. While I was talk-

ing to Pastor John Anderson I told him of a personal situation where I had a fear of going into correctional facilities for whatever purpose. I didn’t visit people there preferring to wait until they were released to reestablish ties with them. My fear stemmed from my freedom loving nature. I like to come and go as I please and the bars in the correctional facility represent a barrier to my freedom.

I had to complete a practicum for a couple of my Bethel Seminary classes and the correctional facility was the most likely place to do this. I was led by the spirit to read and meditate on Romans 8:15 which says that “we did not receive a spirit that makes us a slave again to fear, but we received the spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry Abba, Father.” This passage helped me get past the fears I

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personally had of correctional facilities.

When I entered into the Ramsey County Correctional Facility, the bars which I had so dreaded were not there. If I had given in to the irrational fear that I had, I would never have realized God's intent in the area that he wanted me to serve in. I now head up the prison ministry at my church and sometimes I'm in the facility two to three nights a week. Anyone who really knows me knows that only God could have made that transformation in me. It is the relationship between God's perfect love and us that conquers all fear and it's God's desire that we do great things in His power that keeps us pressing toward the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

shoulder to shoulder with in the marches and rallies. I'm sure that ever present on his mind was the possibility of facing extremely hostile resistance to the movement and the probability of being physically abused at the hands of the police as well as being verbally threatened constantly. Being fearful of any one or more of these things in addition many things I've neglected to include would have been ample reason to shrink from the spotlight, deny God's calling upon your life. I am not attempting to deify the man, but I just stopped by to show the heights that one can attain through the love of God.

Dr. King chose to answer the Lord's call to help bring about a whole new paradigm

a moment of apprehension or anxiety over what could happen during the movement as they faced police dogs and the firemen's hose, but Dr. King didn't allow them to keep him from the will of God. I submit to you that Dr. King overcame his fears and anxieties through the love of God so that loving his brother, even the ones that wanted to do him harm, were paramount in his press toward the mark of Christ Jesus.

There is a challenge in the scripture text and in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King for the believer. In the life of Dr. King we are challenged to continue on with the work of presenting God to all people and working towards a society that is mindful of the love God has for all of His people, red, black, white, brown, yellow and any color in between. We have not yet arrived at God's intended state of perfection, but we must keep reaching for that perfection. Our means of doing this is the challenge of the scripture text, our fears must be extinguished through God's perfect love and then and only then will we attain the fullness of God's intent for each and every one of us.

Dr. King spoke prophetically less than 24 hours before his assassination. He departed this earthly realm on April 4, 1968. However, only one day earlier in his last public speech Dr. King said "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

Let us this Martin Luther King Sunday celebration join Dr. King in claiming the message of I John 4. There "is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear..." God's love frees us from the fears of mankind so that we may do great things according to the will of God. Amen and God Bless You.

King: Give Us the Courage to Do Thy Will

O thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being. We humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive, we love our friends and hate our enemies, we go the first mile but dare not travel the second, we forgive but dare not forget. And so as we look within ourselves we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against thee. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be. Give us the intelligence to know thy will. Give us the courage to do thy will. Give us the devotion to love thy will. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen

Source: Ebenezer Baptist Church radio broadcasts July 5, 1953-September 6, 1953

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING CHOSE TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL

That brings me to the ministry of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. If ever there were a person who in spite of the circumstances continued to press toward the mark, I would say that Dr. King personified that love of God which allowed him to face some dire circumstances so that he might please God's will. What else would make a man stand up against innumerable odds, stand in the face of certain danger seen and unseen and forego the relative comfort of allowing someone else to take the point in the civil rights struggle.

Most assuredly Dr. King could have cited his anxiety over the well being of his family and being away from them for weeks at a time. He could have hid behind the concern for his own safety and safety of the others he stood

in race and human relations. Unfortunately he did not live to see the fruit of his labor and just like Moses he glimpsed the promise land but was not allowed to cross over into it. I maintain that God's love was the motivating factor because God loved us first and the believer's reciprocal action is to love God back, but as scripture tells us we can't love a God we haven't seen if we don't love the brother we have seen and it goes as far as to command that we love our brother.

In the command to love our brother my Bible does not say that it is alright not to love your brother because you have some fears. It doesn't say that fear is a proper rationalization for disobedience to God's commands. It doesn't say that fear is a proper justification for the believer to act like the unsaved and unchurched. I won't say that there was never

remarkable person of amazing contrasts. Who knew more about the history of the Swedish Baptists, and yet who was a more forward-looking person, even in his tenth decade of life? He was genial and personable and generous, and yet at the same time he



was able to confront others when needed. He was a public figure in our movement; in his era everyone knew Virgil. Yet he was very private in some ways as well.

He was remarkable also in the way he successfully transitioned from pastor to professor to dean to mission's leader to university president to active retiree—plus being husband, father, grandfather, and friend. Virgil was unique, just like the great white pine that you see in the picture. And the caption below the photo is from Jeremiah 17 (vv.7, 8ab): "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and rests his confidence upon Him. He shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, that stretches its roots along the stream. When the heat comes it has nothing to fear; its spreading foliage stays green."

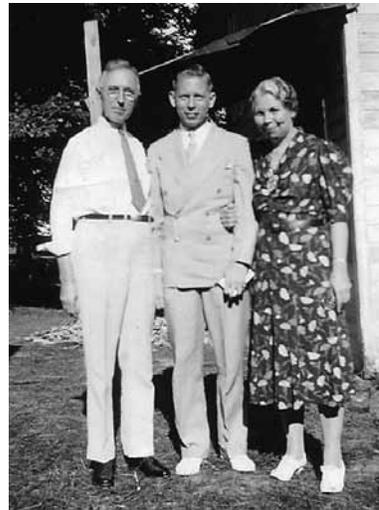
THE RACE

As I share other slides today, I need to explain that they illustrate the journey, the course, of this man's life. Hebrews 12 begins, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Virgil was very aware of the cloud of witnesses—not only the Biblical characters, but also the giants of church history, and his

own personal heritage, beginning with his parents, Adolf and Esther Olson. The slides today picture key moments from the race that was his life.

AGE 9 AT BETHANY

Here's an interesting slide: it's Virgil as a nearly-nine-year old, in front of the congregation of the Bethany Baptist church in St. Paul, and Virgil looks pretty nervous. He had prayed for Jesus to come into his heart, and had told his parents, "jag ar fralst" (I am saved"), but now he was being examined by the deacons as a candidate for baptism. "Do you read your Bible every day?" "Do you ever tell lies?" "Is it wrong to go to movies?" "Should you skip Sunday School and prayer meeting?" Virgil was the pastor's son, but he was not getting any special treatment. However, the church voted unanimously that he should be baptized on Easter Sunday evening 1925. The caption under the photo is "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that god raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom. 10:9)



SINGING LIKE VIRGIL

The next slide is about ten years later. Some of you have been where this picture was taken, i.e. the second floor of the college building on the old Bethel campus. Virgil looks really nervous in this photo, taken in a corner of the hallway. The man talking to him is professor George Hultgren, who is about to lead an all-school choir at Bethel Junior College in a performance of Handel's messiah, and who has asked Virgil to be the tenor soloist. The other soloists are all ringers, brought in from the outside—experienced, capable, and intimidating to 19-year-old Virgil, who despite his conscientious rehearsing is scared stiff, and who asks Hultgren, "Why did you ask me to sing this evening?"

Hultgren's reply was so significant that in many ways it changed Virgil's life. Hultgren

basically said that some people sing better and some people sing not as well, but no one sings just like Virgil. He said, "Virgil, you go out and sing just like Virgil. You will do just fine." And he did. The caption on this slide is Romans 12:3b, "do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

AGE 21 AT SANDY LAKE

We move now to a slide taken about two years later in 1937. Virgil is standing at the back of the little Sandy Lake Baptist church near Barnum. The older gentleman in the photo is Swan Naslund, one of the leaders in the church. I should explain that Virgil didn't really expect to be at Sandy Lake; despite his background, he didn't want to be a preacher. He had become somewhat disillusioned with the church, after a split in his home congregation, and he had other career ambitions, but he received an invitation to

be a summer student pastor at Sandy Lake, and Bethel dean K. J. Karlson said, "you go!" Virgil's dad gave him three sermon books by George W. Truett of First Baptist, Dallas, Texas and every week at Sandy Lake Virgil would essentially memorize one of Truett's sermons, practice it on the cows in Naslund's pasture, and preach it on Sunday morning.



The Sunday when this photo was taken, Mr. Naslund came to Virgil after the service, thanked him, and then said, "I have a book at home that has every word you spoke this morning... Webster's dictionary!" Actually, at

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the beginning of that summer Virgil told the Lord that three things would convince him he should be a preacher, i.e. a full church, adult conversions, and baptisms. By the end of the summer all of this had happened. As we know, Virgil went on to be a preacher, and then for 17 years a trainer of pastors at Bethel Seminary. The caption under this photo is Ephesians 4:11,12a, "...he...gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare god's people for works of service."

HOWARD JOHNSON'S

As we move to a later part of Virgil's race, there is a different photo. This is not a church—this is a Howard Johnson restaurant. It is May 1968, and the men at the table with Virgil are Jerry Healy, Dalphy Fagerstrom, and Eugene Johnson. Virgil appears to be laughing. You see, these three Bethel College faculty members have just told Virgil that they wanted him to meet with the college faculty later that week to be considered for Dean of the college. Well, as we know, he did become Dean, and helped lead Bethel through a rather difficult time. Perhaps you have noticed in Virgil a pattern of hesitance and reluctance that might be surprising to some of us, who have seen only his successes in a wide range of ministries. Virgil liked the story of the young woman on a cruise who fell overboard, but was immediately rescued by an 80-year-old man who went in after her.

That night a banquet was given in honor of the unlikely white-haired hero, who, when asked for a few words said, "first of all, I'd like to know who pushed me!" Virgil would say that was his story—that at every stage of his life, he felt pushed by God and circumstances to accept a new challenge.

One challenge in those Bethel college years was a theological controversy over inerrancy. Conference leadership developed a more explicit statement than the 1951 affirmation of faith. Virgil was one of two who refused to

sign it. Virgil's views theologically and politically were not always in agreement with the majority. He resisted labels, and once called himself a "Calminian," but at the core he remained a pietist, for whom the last word was "what does the Bible say—what does the Word say?" He would not, however, be "put in a box." To the end of his life he felt that there was always more to learn and understand. Maybe that's why the caption on this slide is Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out."

A WEDDING

Well, here's an interesting slide, because as you can probably see, it is taken right here in this sanctuary. That's Virgil on the right, and Dale Bjork on the left, and the young couple heading down the aisle is my wife Lois and me. We just got married, and it's June 13, 1970. This picture is a reminder of Virgil's many meaningful family connections over the years. He was an only child, and although he had many cousins, his family involvements, after he married Carol, often involved her Nelson clan. He was often the "marry-er" or the "bury-er;" and for sure he was often a wise counselor, or someone you turned to in a crisis. This photo is interesting, though, because you will notice that Virgil is taking the arm of my wife's father—typical, spontaneity on Virgil's part—and if this had been a video, you could hear the chuckles in the room.

What's interesting is that five years later, Virgil became Dale's boss at world missions; and thirty-four years later, after Dale's death and Carol's passing, Virgil took Alma's arm, and they shared wedding vows. It was nine years ago last Thursday. There's no caption under this picture, but if there were a verse that summed up Virgil's attitude toward both Carol and Alma, I suppose it could be proverbs 31:10, "a wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies."



Virgil and Alma

DANCING

Here's another family snapshot—a family Christmas from his Bethel days. That is Virgil with the big fake nose and horn-rimmed glasses and greatcoat and funny hat; and the woman with whom he is, yes, dancing is his mother-in-law, Della Nelson, who spent her last years here in Cambridge. Della appears to be just slightly embarrassed, but smiling and having a good time. I show this not to suggest that Virgil had forgotten his pietistic roots, but simply as an illustration of his good humor—that he could be a "ham." He was creative, fun, and down-to-earth. His humor helped him a lot.

I remember a Sunday evening when I arrived for church at Bethany Baptist. Virgil had some car trouble, and was parked right by the main entrance to the church. Carol's brother, Lorimer Nelson, heard about the problem, so, of course, Lorimer popped the hood on Virgil's car, and he was up to his elbows into the motor as the worshipers filed by Virgil's car. Virgil said, "this is the ox that fell into the pit; we're getting it out!"

Humor made Virgil an interesting speaker, and in fact, he said, "make sure you tell some jokes at my funeral" So—did you hear about the old gentleman who could still play golf quite well, but he couldn't see where the ball went, and it was frustrating. His wife said, "well, why don't you ask Ralph to go with you; he's got great eyesight?" So the old gentleman hit the ball and it felt like it really went well, and he said to Ralph, "did you see where my ball went?" and Ralph said, "yes!" "Well, where is it?" Ralph said, "I can't remember!" (I usually explain that my 90+-year-old uncle told me that story!) The caption is Proverbs 17:22a, "a cheerful heart is good medicine."

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A BURMA VIDEO

Well, I don't have many more slides, but here's a short video. I know some of you have seen it. I think it was done by Bethlehem Baptist to tell the story of pioneer missionary Ola Hanson in Burma. Virgil was interviewed for this video, and he talks about Hanson's dedication. I especially like the part of the video where Virgil describes how Hanson in learning the Kachin language would get right in the face of the beetle-nut-chewing informants, whose percussive consonants would splatter Hanson's glasses with juice.

But this video is most of all a reminder to us of Virgil's life-long commitment to missions and the evangelization of the nations. He was chairman of the Board of World Missions; he was Executive Secretary of BGC world missions; he was president of William Carey University, and for years a speaker in the perspectives course; and in his late eighties, he pastored a Chinese church in



Ola and Minnie Hanson

Minneapolis. Matthew 24:14 says, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

THE HISTORY COMMITTEE

I have just a couple more slides of Virgil. Here's one taken in the second-floor of the Conference room of the Bethel office center just off N. Hamline. It's a meeting of the BGC history center steering committee. Some of you are in the picture. Virgil is a member and is sitting along the north side of the table. This was one of Virgil's last official positions. I had known Virgil for many years through family connections, but for several years late in his life, I served along with him on this committee; and two memories stand out. One was that Virgil is a great storyteller. He had personal knowledge of so many people and events in our history. But my other memory was his ideas; he always was thinking of new things and fresh approaches to make the history center more effective. And it wasn't just that setting. His family tells me that even when

he moved to the commons here in Cambridge at age 95, he was thinking of ways to bring helpful change to that setting.

So there are two captions for this photo. One is Psalm 78:4b, "we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the lord, his power, and the wonders he has done." But the other caption is Philippians 3:13b,14, "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which god has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

THE COMMONS

The last slide of Virgil was taken fairly recently in his studio apartment at the commons. He is sitting near his desk, looking toward the window; and he is obviously very old. The contrast with the slides of the young soloist or Sandy Lake preacher, or even the Bethel Dean is pretty striking. He has been talking to me about getting old, and about some of the indignities of aging, and speech itself is difficult for this man who preached all over the world. But he tells me simply, "I talk to Jesus." Virgil aged well, and even in his last years he continued to learn new lessons about following Jesus. His church had an emphasis called "just walk across the room,"

in which believers were encouraged to take simple steps to share their faith. Virgil had appreciated Carol's sensitivity and ministry

in prayer, and now Virgil was inspired by Alma's ability to bring a gospel witness into virtually any situation.

Virgil was in a restaurant, and the waitress asked, "How are you?" and Virgil gave a standard response, and then he called her back, and said, "I'm happy, because Jesus loves me." Virgil was still learning about sharing Jesus. Here's the caption of



Dick Turnwall, John Anderson and Virgil Olson at the grave of F. O. Nilsson.

this final photo, "since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come." (Psalm. 71:17,18)

THE TREE OF LIFE

I have a final slide; it's really a photo of a sketch or painting, I guess. There's a tree in the middle of the picture, but it's not the tree from the first slide. This tree is perfectly formed; and there is a river connected somehow with the tree. For me the first tree represents Virgil's life in this world, but the second tree represents Virgil's life in the world to come. I guess the caption explains it, "on each side of the river stood the tree

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Virgil Olson and the Baptist Pietist Clarion.

- Olson, Dan "Tribute to My Father: Speech in Honor of Virgil Olson on the Occasion of his 84th Birthday" *Baptist Pietist Clarion* Vol. 10, No. 1, June 2011, pp 1, 17-18.
- Olson, Virgil "Baptist Pietist Marks: The BGC as a Pietist Influenced Community of Believers" *Baptist Pietist Clarion* Vol. 6, No 1, June 2007, pp. 3,4-5, 20.
- Olson, Virgil "A Brief History of Theological Struggles within the Baptist General Conference" *Baptist Pietist Clarion* Vol. 8, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 1,4-9, 14.
- Olson Virgil "History of Swedish Baptist Pietism: A Significant Influence on Early Leaders of the Baptist General Conference" *Baptist Pietist Clarion* Vol. 6, No. 1, June 2007, pp. 1, 8-11.
- Olson, Virgil "One Step from Extinction" *Baptist Pietist Clarion* No. 1, No. 2, June 2002, pp. 1, 2, 8-10.
- Olson, Virgil "Why I'm a Baptist" *Baptist Pietist Clarion* Vol. 2, No. 1, July 2003, p. 4.

of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations...there will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever...blessed are those who...have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” (Rev. 22:2bc,5,14) So of Virgil we say today in the words of the apostle Paul, “I have fought the

good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown...” (II Tim. 4:7,8a)

You and I cannot be Virgil, but you can, like Virgil, pray to repent of your sins and to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and lord; and when God pushes you, you can, like Virgil, respond with faith and trust. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” (and now one more witness), “let us throw off everything that hinders, and

the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of god.” And when you see that great white pine on county route 43, thank God for Virgil, and for the tree of life.

“Love Our Neighbor as Ourselves” Anton Pearson’s Civil Rights Speech of 1963

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | After debunking the use of the Old Testament to legitimize slavery and segregation, Dr. Anton Pearson writes that the Biblical basis to the problem of integration is the commandment, “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Leviticus 19:18). He goes on to say “lest someone feel very choosy as to his neighbor, verse 34 reads, “The stranger (or foreigner) that sojourneth with you shall be as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself, for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt; I am Jehovah thy God.” Jesus ranked the commandment of love of neighbor as ourselves next to the commandment to love God.

Pearson argues that “this command speaks of a love that seeks to understand and is concerned for our neighbor. Just as I am an American citizen and want life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for myself, want the right to work, to study, to play, to worship, to use public transportation, to go to public places, so I should desire the same rights for my Negro neighbor.”

Pearson concluded that the “Christian life is by faith...If by an act of faith and because of love to God and our fellowmen, we recognize the full rights of the Negro

in America, even though we may tremble before the unknown, God will honor this faith and love...”

Dr. Anton Pearson was Professor of Old Testament at Bethel Seminary from 1945-1966. Born in St. Paul in 1910 as a son of Swedish immigrants, he graduated from Macalaster College (B.A.) in 1932, Bethel Seminary (B.D.) in 1936, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1948 (Th.D.).



Anton Pearson and Carl Lundquist
Seminary groundbreaking 1964

He joined the faculty at Bethel Seminary in 1945, published a commentary on Ezekiel, and wrote numerous articles.

In St. Paul he became active in the civil rights movement, hosted one of the first African American students at Bethel and gave several major addresses on race issues including his 1963 address. Americans in the 1950s

and 1960s experienced great turmoil as challenges were made to segregation in education, public accommodations, voting, and transportation.

Pearson was disturbed that few Evangelicals supported King’s 1963 March on Washington. He recognized that although there was a small African-American community in St. Paul, they experienced discrimination in housing, work and education. He remembered his family’s immigrant experience and used that to reflect on issues of civil

rights for African-Americans. We need, Pearson observed, to be thankful to those who helped our families and be willing to respond likewise to current civil rights issues. This includes:

- 1) Providing legislation which would encourage jobs and social equality;
- 2) Examining our understanding of race issues by reading books like John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me*;
- 3) Encouraging intentional contacts with African-American friends, pastors and groups;
- 4) Integrating church and religious camp experiences;
- and 5) Challenging bigotry and oppression wherever it is found.

Christians, stated Pearson, need to resurrect their “prophetic” witness against luxurious living, greed and covetousness, drunkenness and irresponsible sexuality, and oppression of the poor. Above all, the spirit of the Old and New Testament is against racial discrimination and ministers have a duty to “educate their people to a Christian consideration of this vexed problem reminding them that the phrase “with liberty and justice for all” is only a sounding brass in many parts of the country.”

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New Century/New Directions

EDITED BY JAMES AND CAROLE SPICKELMIER

St. Paul, Minnesota: Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harvest Press, 2012.



REVIEWED BY VIC WINQUIST *Retired Baptist General Conference Pastor* | Kudos to Jim and Carole Spickelmier for writing and editing the latest addition to

books preserving the history of the Baptist General Conference now doing business as Converge Worldwide. Their dedication to preserving our history and Baptist pietistic heritage is welcome in a day when an increasing number of Converge Worldwide members neither know of nor care about our rich heritage.

Their latest book, *New Century New Directions*, is a follow up to the book, *50 Decades of Growth and Change*, which is a history of the Baptist General Conference from 1952- 2002, also edited by James and Carole Spickelmier. *New Century New Directions* reviews the first critical ten years of history of our denomination in the new century, 2001-2010.

It follows the same pattern of *50 Decades of Growth and Change* which was written by a wide variety of authors who were involved in various areas of conference ministry. Most of the individual essays and reflections in *New Century New Directions* were similarly written by those involved in the ministries of Converge. Most of the individual essays relate the history of the decade in clear terms, describing both the successes and the struggles and shortcomings. A few seemed to be more like public relations releases than historical reflections.

The book is very thorough covering all areas of Converge Worldwide ministries including the national, international and district ministries, all with the stress on church planting. It includes a closing essay reflecting on the future. The use of statistics and charts help to clarify trends in growth and finances.

The overall theme of the book is change. In the first decade of the twenty-first century the denomination experienced a change of

leaders, a change of focus, a change of location for our national office, a change in the annual meeting schedule, a change in the configuration of our national staff and an attempt to more clearly involve the leadership of the districts of Converge in the national decisions. This was clearly an enormous amount of change in ten years. Some of the changes were met with resistance by BGC/Converge members but the resistance was ineffective. One innovation in *New Century New Directions* is the inclusion of responses by pastors, missionaries, office personnel and laypersons to these changes. This allows a richer, fuller picture than relying solely on the response of leadership.



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A NEW MISSIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

BY JERRY SHEVELAND



“When I became the president of the Baptist General Conference in 2002. I inherited a strong team, a healthy organization, and

a wonderful family of churches. Three primary challenges stood out in my thinking as we desired to build on our rich history as a Conference.

The first challenge was to sustain theological integrity and fan the flame of spiritual vibrancy. I believed that our Affirmation of Faith and our pietistic legacy of biblical, experiential faith were both essential to the future of our movement. I wanted to champion the spiritual dynamics of glorifying God by trusting his Son, his Spirit, his Word, and his delight in prevailing prayer.

A second challenge was the need to maximize the unity of our fellowship for the sake of honoring Christ and advancing his gospel. Our irenic spirit and cooperative ethos were a God-given blessing. As denominational loyalty ebbed

across America, and the old glue of our Swedish heritage subsided, we needed to unite autonomous churches and districts around the centrality of the gospel and an aggressive missional vision.

Third, we faced the very positive challenge of mobilizing our resources for greater missional effectiveness both nationally and globally. I was convinced that the missional dynamics of our church planting effort, TeAmerica, should infuse the whole organization. So I championed the notion that we should act less like a denomination and more like a movement.

These would included ten transitions: a transition in the BGC President's Office, a growing unity around one mission, a 2000-2005 church-planting and missionary-sending surge, a new resource for mobilizing churches for health and effectiveness, a growing emphasis on multicultural synergy, *Fire & Reign* became a Conference-wide call to seek the fire of God's Spirit for the reign of God's Son, Bethel College and Seminary became Bethel University, BGC districts consolidated under the leadership of gifted Executive Ministers, a new movement name and a new ministry center in Orlando. (*New Century New Directions*, pp. 16-19)

There were many personnel changes in the national office with the most important being a change in the position of President of BGC/Converge. Robert Ricker retired at the end of his term in 2002 and was replaced by Jerry Sheveland.

With this change in Presidents came a change in vision or focus. Dr. Sheveland perceived, along with many others, that denominational loyalty was on the decline. And so, he wanted to change our identity and focus. He stated that he wanted us to be “less like a denomination and more like a movement”. This desire provided the focus for many of the other changes.

The next step was a change of the denomination’s name. While it legally continued to be the Baptist General Conference, it now was to do business as Converge Worldwide. Converge Worldwide is the public face on the web, in printed publications and in public gatherings and presentations. The elimination of the term Baptist from public view followed the trend in the churches and was followed by name changes in most of the districts of Converge.

The editors sent out a poll to pastors, missionaries, office personnel and laypersons asking their response to the change. While many supported the change, the majority of those who responded to the poll opposed the name change, some did not like the elimination of “Baptist” from the name. Others accepted the idea of a name change but did not like the choice of Converge feeling it did not really identify who we were.

The next major change was the decision to relocate the national ministry officers to Orlando, Florida while leaving the business office, Harvest Publications, the Minister Retirement Fund and Cornerstone Fund in Chicago. Converge entered into an agreement with Campus Crusade to share a facility called the Bill and Vonette Bright Collaboration Center at a cost of 2 million dollars. This, it was felt, would strengthen the focus of being a mission agency rather than a denomination.

The move precipitated a reduction of staff at the national office, a move already being considered for financial reasons. Some se-

CONVERGE WORLDWIDE: REFLECTING ON THE NEW NAME

BY JAMES AND CAROLE SPICKELMIER

“Will the new name help us or hurt us? The jury is still out. Among long term conference supporters there is still quite a bit of complaining about a name that they don’t think makes much sense and about the way it was implemented. Some feel that there should have been a vote. Others feel that the name change was presented as a somewhat minor change and that the true ramifications of how extensive it would be only became clear afterwards. Of course, some in the Conference really don’t care what we are called. And some, particularly among younger leaders, are excited about the change.

Without the word Baptist in our name, will we begin to drift theologically? Though we have not changed our historic conference statement of faith, already some would say there has been drift from our historic commitments in the issues of congregational governance and separation of church and state. Some churches already have given indications that they have a weaker position on baptism by immersion than would be our historic stance. Conference leadership has strongly supported our historic Biblical and theological positions. But as we continue to grow and become more diverse and don’t have a name to root us in a Baptist theological tradition, will we recognize ourselves theologically a decade or two down the way?” (*New Century New Directions*, p. 178)

lected staff was invited to relocate to Florida. Some accepted and some declined. Others were not invited to relocate and they as well as their ministries, such as Prayer and Women’s Ministries were terminated. This highlighted a shift from a denominational service agency to a mission agency.

The uncertainty of employment for some and the prospect of relocating for others affected staff morale. The staff was reduced from 78 to 60, a reduction of 23%. Many who were terminated had a long history with BGC/Converge ministries. Forty-four of the 78 who had been working at the headquarters were no longer a part of the staff. This, as the editors pointed out represented a loss of “institutional memory.” Many of the new hires had no knowledge of the history and “soul” of Converge.

The reactions to the move by those responding to the editor’s poll were mixed, with the majority either being neutral or supportive. Many said that it made no difference to them or their churches because they had little interest in the national office.

This lack of interest in the national office was also a contributing factor in the next change, a change from an annual meeting of Converge to a biennial meeting. The decline in attendance at the annual meeting was a long term trend. Another study conducted by

this reviewer revealed that delegate numbers had decreased from 1,220 in 1979 at the annual meeting to 498 delegates in 2004. The drop in attendance revealed a lack of interest, but it also was due to the understanding that decisions were no longer made at the annual meeting, but by the national board with little or no input from the conference at large. Both the name change and the relocation were made with no input from the delegates, but merely announced at the annual meeting.

How will these changes and challenges affect our mission effectiveness? The editors in their conclusion state, “A key issue for the future of our ministry is how in an age of waning commitments we might forge a fellowship of men and women who will have a passion for sharing the Gospel, building strong churches and sending people to the ends of the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ”. Have these changes contributed to this purpose or have these changes further lowered commitment on the part of some to Converge ministries?

Time will tell. I pray we will be on the right path.

Each Day is a Gift from God: The Pietist Poetry of Signe Olson Peterson

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | Several issues of the Baptist Pietist Clarion have included poetry of Signe Olson Peterson. She was a major Swedish poet during the first half of the twentieth century and was featured in such Swedish Baptist magazines and newspapers as *Svenska Standaret*, *Midvinter*, *Sondagsskolan och Hemmet* and *Sanningsens Van*. Many of her English poems were found in *The Standard*, *Advance* and local community newspapers and magazines.

Signe was born in Varmland, Sweden. She immigrated to Port Arthur, Canada in 1911 where she worked as a housekeeper. Her poems often reflected a commitment to pietist themes of Swedish Baptist faith. They included the need for a born again experience, a desire for intentional Christian discipleship, a commitment to holy living and a rejoicing in the promise of heaven. The poems also reflected the oppressiveness of the immigrant experience and the need for the church to be a haven of refuge. Until the 1930's most of her poems were in Swedish. However she soon learned to be articulate in both English and Swedish.

Signe came to St. Paul in 1918 where she worked as a cook at Bethel Seminary and stayed in a home for young women immigrants. Eventually she would marry E. B. Peterson who would pastor churches in Fish Lake, Eveleth, and Kerkhoven, Minnesota. Signe became an adamant supporter of women in ministry, encouraged the work of Klingberg's Children's Home,

articulated the economic and social needs of new immigrants, supported the value of poetry as a form of spiritual discourse and championed the Swedish Baptist ministry. John Klingberg became one of Signe's strongest advocates and was able to advance her poetry into a number of Swedish magazines and newspapers.

In 1934 Rev. E. B. Peterson retired as pastor of the Kerkhoven Baptist Church. It was during the Great Depression that life was hard in a small, rural Baptist church community. Payment often came in church members providing products from the farm. Signe reflected the difficulties of this time in her poem "Take No Thought."

TODAY

Kerkhoven Banner October 4, 1955, p. 3.

Svenska Standaret Vol. XXV, No. 48, November 26, 1955, p. 3.

*Today is your gift,
God is bringing each morn,
As night turns to dawn,
And a new day is born.
A gift you receive,
From the Master alone,
And just for a day
To regard as your own.*

*It binds in its flight,
To the past, that is o'er,
The future unknown,
That lies hidden before.
Eternity thus,
Is united in time,
It only returns
To its origin sublime.*

*Today is a gate,
That's prepared for each soul.
Through which he comes in,
And goes back to his goal.
To those who remain,
It reveals the unseen,
With only a short,
Fleeting moment between.*

*Today is the day,
Of salvation for men.
It bids farewell,
Not to enter again.
Today is your gift,
From God's almighty hand.
Tomorrow perhaps,
You before Him shall stand.*

TAKE NO THOUGHT

Svenska Standaret Vol. XXII, No. 49,
December 6, 1932, p. 3.

*What did our loving Savior mean
When, to friends his truth revealing
And calling them on him to lean
With words of grace and touch of healing –*

*What did he mean by "Take no thought"
For food or raiment or for drinking;
But be disturbed, my friends, for naught,
Untroubled be in all your thinking.*

*It does not mean our hands to fold
And wait in idle contemplation,
But lay our plans with courage bold
And work for their realization.*

*For it is not the work we do,
That robs our strength and causes failing;
It is the worry we go through,
Which causes all our woe and ailing.*

*We waste so much God-given power,
When he gives tasks, and bids us do them
That when we meet the trying hour,
We have not strength to battle through them.*

*The greatest struggles we go through
Are often caused by grief we borrow,
With visions magnified, anew,
From the unknown, unseen tomorrow.*

*God's promise stands, that on our way
He gladly grants us strength from Heaven,
And as our needs are for the day,
So shall His help to us be given.*

*But, if we add tomorrows care
Together with our daily calling
We are not promised help to bear
It safely through, without failing.*

*For all our needs He will provide
And asks that we, but will believe it.
By His eternal Word abide,
And ever trustingly receive it.*

continued on p. 14

Her poems in this era also explored themes related to World War II and struggles of Christian discipleship. After almost twenty years of ministry E. B. helped to create one of the first rural Minnesota telephone companies and championed Signe's poetry.

During the 1950's and 1960's the Baptist General Conference began to expand its ministry beyond a commitment to educate and provide Christian opportunities to the Swedish community and their descendants. These ministries were seen in such activities as the significant advance of foreign missions into new areas of ministry, development of Bethel College as a four year Christian Liberal Arts institutions, engagement in such Baptist institutions as the Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Joint Committee and support for such evangelical ministries as the Billy Graham crusades and activities of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Signe's poetry reflects several themes of these movements. There is a need, she wrote, to express honor to those who have recently died and have been faithful in carrying out the mandate of the Christian gospel. However, a thanks needs to include a commitment to carry on. Signe also wants each of us to honor each day as if it were a gift from God. Her poems "Today" and "Another Year" develop these themes. These challenges were ones that permeated the work of the Baptist General Conference during the 1950's and remain important for today's Christian church.

ANOTHER YEAR

Advance 1950

*The twilight rays of passing of a year are blending
Along the sharply drawn horizon line,
And all that it contained approach the ending
That bears the mark of nineteen-forty-nine.
The western gate through which it now is journeying
Is never swinging outward on its frame.
And from the other side is no returning,
It enters realms eternal whence it came.*

*Another year has brought its yield before us,
The fruit of ardent labor for the good.
And in the evening glow that hovers o'er us
We see the aim for which our forebears stood.
Perhaps this passing year has terminated
Some task of love which they had just begun,
And with opposing forces they abated
But were not granted time to see it done.*

*Now their unfinished work relates the story,
How they endured, who ventured to begin,
And as they challenge from their sacred glory
In holy, loyal strength to enter in.
And share the strife of God's soldiers are enduring
For right and truth wherever they appear.
Thus conquering strength from God we'll be securing
Until our victory's won – from year to year.*

Green Leaves for Later Years by Emilie Griffin

A BOOK REVIEW BY TERRI HANSEN



As the years fly by and away, it is a hopeful thought knowing we have a present Savior spanning the breadth of our lives and beyond—a limitless expanse of love and consolation. Em-

ilie Griffin's opening poem in *Green Leaves for Later Years* ends this way:

"Heart of Christ
extending pole to pole
and still farther
into the limitless future
of God's love."

No matter what stage of life we find ourselves, reflection on the past, living fully in the present, and joyfully anticipating the future make for joyful consolation as we age.

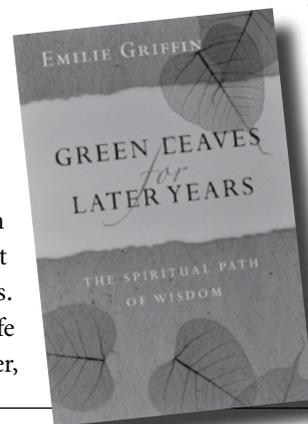
This thoughtful book, part memoir, part handbook, explores the slipping away of the years leading us to discover, as the poem states, that our future is limitless. Anyone who sees life in general, and the spiritual life in particular, as journey, will appreciate the flow of this little book as the author weaves personal anecdote, insight from scripture, historical biography, and well-earned wisdom into a hope filled, joyful anticipation of the later years.

Ms. Griffin struggles daily with the pain and limitations brought on by her rheumatoid arthritis. Having lived a full and successful life as business woman, author, speaker,

Emilie Griffin Prayer:

"Lord, give me a sense of purpose in my later years. Help me to change course when necessary and learn ways to contribute to the world. May I continue with whatever work you desire for me at this time, and may I enjoy the business of living well." (p. 94)

mother, and wife, invalid is a hard pill to swallow. Rather than dwell on the disease and its painful limitations, she introduces us to the many "mentors" she has come to know in the Bible, in history, and in her personal life, who speak to living beyond the limits and impositions of aging. Abraham and Sarah are the thread she weaves throughout her biographical insertions as she recounts example



continued on p. 15

after example of folks who have finished well. We meet Ruth Bell Graham and Amy Carmichael, Renoir and Matisse, Peter Drucker and Nelson Mandela, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, and countless others in a jaunting exploration of aging.

Along with the anecdotal sections, Ms. Griffin intersperses her own thoughtful insight and wisdom. She brings a richness and depth to the reader, leading us in our own opportunity to reflect. Each passing stage is a new beginning – a moment, and that moment is really all we have. Age 75 is time to rise and shine - like spring after winter! Her words: “When you teach the spiritual life you believe you are living it. What you sometimes don’t realize is that you, like all those in your audience, need to live each day as a new beginning. In the spiritual life there are no time-outs, no free passes. Everyone has to begin and begin again.” (p. 14)

Our faith informs us in the life journey, especially in later years. She likes best words like “transcendence” and “adaptation.” We are on a quest to live deeply and well, and to raise good questions. Later life is more meaningful because of this quest. The Lord continues to tell the story



Emilie Griffin

of encouragement, hope, and love even as all earthly comforts and consolations fall away. The point of a spiritual life is to be in dialogue with God, to see the world as governed by his love. To know this is to be open to a full and creative life. This life of spiritual formation strengthens us for the later years. God is with us. Who can be against us?

Humorously, she debates whether to refer to herself as retired, semi-retired, or self-employed, as she has never intended to retire

Gratitude:

Thankfulness puts us in touch with God’s grace. That’s the sustaining energy of the spiritual life, holding us up and holding us together in the later years. Often we think we must actively work in the world, practicing discipline and making things change for the better. But gratitude - that is, waiting on the grace of God, letting the grace of Christ fall upon us - that is the essential value.” (p. 40)

Where does the Good Way Lie? We are “all in service” Dr. King said.

Every now and then the Lord seems to give me a new burst of grace. Sometimes it’s a meeting with someone, sometimes it’s a seemingly chance remark that gives me a sense of the nearness of God.

This time it was a high summer. The temperature was close to 108. It had hovered there for quite a while, and all of us were praying for rain. I pulled into the gas station on my way to Shreveport for a hood check. The gas attendant was friendly as always, “Mighty hot,” he said.

It’s the usual topic of conversation about this time of year. “We had a drop yesterday,” I told him.

“Must’ve been a little bitty drop,” he replied, mopping his brow. “Rained just around your car? You must be a miracle lady.”

“No, no,” I said. “It rained all over the Kroger parking lot. It’s only yards from here. Just a hop, skip and a jump. When I went into the store, it was dry around my car, and when I came out, it was pooling up all around. I got my sneakers wet getting in on the driver’s side.

I don’t know why I gave him such a long explanation. Maybe I hardly believed it myself, the part about the rain. I could see he was still skeptical.

I thanked him when he snapped back the hood. “Glad I could be of service,” he said. Then, after a little pause, “Sometimes I think that’s what I do the best.”

“Well, you know,” I answered, “that’s what Dr. King said. We’re all in service.”

His face lighted up. “That was a good saying,” he said. “I tell that to people around here all the time.

We grinned. “Have a nice evening,” I said and drove away.

Why did this encounter affect me so?... There was a sense of kinship... Somehow the mere reference to Dr. King forged a bond. We were neighbors, brother and sister in a shared sense of meaning. (pp. 123-124)

but to continue writing and consulting. We adapt to the slowing of our physical bodies, but we continue creatively to grow and become through intellectual and personal endeavors. We should also expect to be happier! Even as the later years bring us into constant contact with grief and loss, even regret, the perspective of years of blessing and even mere survival carry us through and allow us to be filled with gratitude and contentment. We hang on to humor and irony to soften the blow, so to speak, of our eminent decrepitness.

Ms. Griffin’s lovely poetry is sprinkled throughout the book, as well as an

honest and open prayer to end each chapter. I appreciate her total intermingling of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and personal stuff. All of these elements are contained inside each of us and life is much about making sense, blending together all of our many facets, colors, and moods into and under the heading we call “Our Life.” At the close, as an appendix, she encourages the reader to consider recording their own spiritual autobiography. She uses her own life as an example, inspiring a broad brushstroke summary of the highs and lows of this thing called Life. I might just have to take the challenge – when I get old enough, that is.

A New Identity: Bridging the Divide



DR. RONALD SAAARI, *retired Pastor of Central Baptist Church*, February, 2013 | Have you ever made a first impression about someone that

turned out to be different than you first thought? My aunt had been a long-time member of a church and found herself in conflict with the pastor. As time went on more and more issues that divided them began to surface. The two of them represented opposing sides. Eventually their division became a church conflict. The intensity was so great that the pastor's side voted my aunt's side out of the membership. You get the picture.

When my aunt shared her views with me, I told her she didn't need this heartache. I told her all this heartache would do is send her to an early grave. Her son was so angry

about what was happening to his mom that he informed me if he ever met the pastor on the street there is no telling what he might do.

Guess what? Years later I was on a committee with this so-called evil pastor. I had all kinds of expectations about what this experience was going to be like. This pastor didn't know who I was or my connection to my aunt. It turns out that he wasn't the evil vermin he was portrayed to be. He was quite helpful and knowledgeable on the committee. I was surprised how pleasant he was. I don't think he had had a personality makeover. As it turned out, he was not whom I expected.

In our study on the book Ephesians, Paul deals with the issue of how enemies within the church can get along. His teaching was a pre-emptive strike against the possibility of a conflict. His teaching is found in this morning's text. This morning I am indebted to Dr. Tim Keller's reflections on the book of Ephesians and Dr. Ray Bakke's *A Theology as Big as the City*.

SERMON TEXT: EPHESIANS 2:11-18

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through

— continued on p. 17

Central Baptist Church in the Midway



The Committee charged with planning the events surrounding Ron and Priscilla's retirement asked me to make a painting to give Ron from the church. It was to have as subject the church building and other Midway scenery. I took some photos of the area to use in painting including homes, businesses, roads and traffic around Central Baptist Church. The signage was selected if it included words familiar to people in Jesus' time, such as, "fish", "one way", "create", "book", and "light". C. S. Lewis used the lamppost in his Narnia series and there is a lamppost in my contrived scene as well. The time is winter and it is the winter

of Ron's pastoral time with us. Marcia suggested that an empty area of the canvas needed something, so some bundled-up preschool kids were added to the painting. Wayne Roberts made the frame. The painting is meant to be a meaningful reminder for Ron and Priscilla of their time with us.

Doug Carlson, February 2013

Doug Carlson is a 1970 graduate of Bethel College with a degree in Philosophy and Art History. His paintings have been exhibited in a number of art galleries and fine art stores.

him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

THE APOSTLE PAUL DEFINES THE PROBLEM

In the life of the early church some are Jews and some are Gentiles. Some are in and some are out. Some are included and some are excluded. What is the cause of this division? In this case the barrier is the purity code given to Israel. Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles and the purity code was meant to give Israel a sense of identity. But what was meant to be an asset became a liability. What was meant to be a blessing turned out to be a divider. The Jewish people despised the Gentiles for their ungodly ways. The Gentiles despised the Jews for despising the Gentiles. Jesus Christ, Paul says, is our peace, *“who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace...”* (v. 14-15)

The universal principle here is that we all have strengths. Our tendency is to elevate those strengths because they give us a sense of worth and identity. The dark side of our strengths is that we tend to despise those who don't have the same strengths that we have. We take what is good and use it to evaluate those who are different and thus look down on them.

Do you remember the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-12? The text says: *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”* (v. 10-11) This Pharisee used his strength to compare himself to others and then looked down on those who were not like him.

There is something in the human heart that seeks to get our own identity by lifting up our strengths and looking down on those who don't have the same strengths. We take comfort from the fact that using a curve as a grading system, we are on the higher end and others are on the lower end.

PAUL REMINDS US THAT GOD IS AT WORK MAKING A NEW HUMANITY OUT OF ALL RACES

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” (v. 14) These two groups are the circumcised and the uncircumcised. They are the Jews and the Gentiles. In reality these two groups represent all of the races. The Jews are one group and the Gentiles are everyone else.

I haven't been a part of that many clubs over the span of my life. For a while I was part of a tennis club. While in Iowa, my wife was part of a music club. When we join a club like a tennis club or a chess club or a flower club or a bridge club, we make a connection around one or two traits. Usually our connections are made in the same culture or in the same race. There are perhaps thousands of such group connections.

When we become a Christian we make a connection at a much deeper and more extensive level. To know that we can travel across this country or across this world and find other Christ followers whom we can call brothers and sisters is much more significant than the connections we make by joining a club. Our connections are beyond race or culture. Paul describes it here as a new nation, a new people.

The story is told of Addison Leach who was driving to one of his professional meetings of college professors. Culturally each professor shared a lot in common with him. While driving he was listening on the radio to a preacher who was not like him. He had a very simplistic view of the world. He took every verse of the Bible literally without considering the first century context of the text. He was ready to dismiss his viewpoint when God laid on his heart the thought that this is my brother. It changed the way he listened to this preacher.

Listen to this: We are Christians first and college-educated second. We are Christians first and white or black or red second. We are Christians first and Americans second. Christianity crosses all divisions. Why is that true? It is true because the gospel goes after our heart and transforms it.

Racism is a horrible thing. Prejudice is a

horrible thing. But the Bible addresses the subjects of racism and prejudice. In Genesis 12 Abraham was called to be a blessing to all the nations not just some. Moses when he married, he married a woman from another culture. (Numbers 12:1) In Acts 10 Peter gets a revelation from God about other cultures.

A NEW IDENTITY: THE CHALLENGE OF 9/11 REMAINS AS PART OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

A test for today's church on the issue of the “the new identity” came after the tragic events of 9/11. How should the Christian community respond? Are there relevant examples from the life of the early church?

The life of the early church gives us significant guidance on how the early church dealt with the issues of conflict and diversity. One of the first experiences is found in Acts 2:5-8: *Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?’*

God did a miracle when the early church began. People were gathered in Jerusalem from every nation. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit all the languages of the nations were used in worship. The church began in the city as a multilingual outreach. The curse of Babel had been broken. People fractured by language were reunited in Christ. This unity, however, was short-lived. The journey from multilingual to multicultural is a difficult journey.

The first problem involved deception concerning Ananias and Sapphira. The second problem involved potential discrimination. (Acts 6:1-5) Jews had a history of not liking Gentiles. Was it an oversight or intentional that the Greek speaking widows were neglected in the distribution of food? We don't know. We do know that the Apostles wisely suggested a task force of Greeks to address the problem. The church took a step forward towards being multicultural.

Third, the Apostle Stephen, a Greek, had to preach to the Jews about their cultural



My Name is Not “Those People”

JULIA DINSMORE

My name is not “Those People”.
I am a loving woman, a mother in pain,
Giving birth to the future, where my babies
Have the same chance to thrive as anyone.

My name is not “Inadequate”.
I did not make my husband leave us -
He chose to, and chooses not to pay child support.
Truth is though; there isn't a job base
For all fathers to support their families.
While society turns its head, my children pay the price.

My name is not “Problem and Case to Be Managed”.
I am a capable human being and citizen, not just a client.
The social service system can never replace
the compassion and concern of loving grandparents, aunts,
uncles, fathers, cousins, community -
all the bonded people who need to be
But are not present to bring children forward to their potential.

My name is not “Lazy, Dependent Welfare Mother”.
If the unwaged work of parenting,
homemaking and community building was factored
into the gross domestic product,
My work would have untold value. And why is it that mothers whose
Husbands support them to stay home and raise children
Are glorified? And why they don't get called lazy or dependent?

My name is not “Ignorant, Dumb or Uneducated”.
I got my PhD from the university of life, school of hard everything,
I live with an income of \$621 with \$169 in food stamps for three kids.
Rent is \$585...That leaves \$36 a month to live on.
I am such a genius at surviving,
I could balance the state budget in an hour.
Never mind that there's a lack of living-wage jobs.
Never mind that it's impossible to be the sole emotional, social,
Spiritual, and economic support to a family.
Never mind that parents are losing their children
to gangs, drugs, stealing, prostitution, the poverty industry,
social workers, kidnapping, the streets, the predator.
Forget about putting money into schools...
just build more prisons!

My name is not “Lay Down and Die Quietly”.
My love is powerful, and the urge to keep my children alive will never stop.
All children need homes and people who love them.
All children need safety
And the chance to be the people they were born to be.
The wind will stop before I allow my sons to become a statistic.
Before you give in to the urge to blame me,
the blames that lets us go blind and unknowing
into the isolation that disconnects
your humanity from mine,
Take another look. Don't go away.
For I am not the problem, but the solution.
And...my name is not “Those People”.

Mike Widen is a 2002 studio arts graduate from Bethel University. He is a gifted artist and is extremely active promoting and developing Central Baptist Church's annual spring art show.

Mike met Julia Dinsmore at the CCDA conference in Minneapolis in September 2012. CCDA (Christian Community Development Association) was inspired by Dr. John Perkins who wanted to develop a multi-cultural, urban ministry organization committed to bear witness to the Kingdom of God by “reclaiming and restoring under-resourced communities.” The statement of faith includes the belief that the “Bible is God's Word and through it we are called to live out justice, reconciliation and redemption.”

Julia Dinsmore is a “street scholar.” She grew up in poverty and has found herself living below the poverty line as an adult. Her work exhibits a personal and provocative look at poverty in America. She is a wonderful storyteller and gifted poet. Her writings are found in her recently published book entitled “*My Name is a Child of God...Not "Those People"*” (Augsburg Press, 2007). Danny Glover has done an effective reading of her poem and it can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQWbkVqZKeo>

The September 2012 CCDA conference in Minneapolis was well attended by Bethel University students, staff and faculty. Members of Central Baptist Church were actively involved in the development and implementation of the Conference program. Julia Dinsmore's seminar at the CCDA conference was well received and inspirational. It provoked Mike Widen to develop a mural for the 2013 Central Baptist Church art show. The mural and poem are included in this issue of the Baptist Pietist Clarion.

chauvinism. (Acts 7) The Jews believed being Jewish was superior to other ethnic groups because God lives in Solomon's temple. Stephen pointed out that the great acts of God happened outside Palestine and not within Palestine. He messed with their nationalistic worldview. They killed Stephen. Cultural chauvinism does not die easily.

Fourth, the church needed to expand their ministry to new groups of people and frame a commitment to multicultural Christianity. (Acts 8) Philip preached to Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race people and a product of Assyrian conquerors and the Jewish captives. They were a reminder of a past occupation. Imagine offering "good news" and forgiveness to your enemies. Some Samaritans responded and joined the early church. Not only did the church embrace the Samaritans, it also welcomed the Africans. An Ethiopian Eunuch responded to Christ. Now an African was part of the early church. Eventually a Jewish super zealot, named Paul, was converted. He spent three years in an Arab desert learning about ministry.

Fifth, the Antioch church was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. (Acts 11) The church at Antioch was multicultural. On their pastoral team was Simon, a Black from Africa; Lucius of Cyrene, a north African; Manean, a slave in Herod's household; Saul of Tarsus, a Jew; and Barnabus, a Cypriote. A multilingual church at the beginning had become a multicultural church. It was a hard journey. It was a heroic journey. It takes a heroic journey to bridge the racial divide.

Finally, it is helpful to look at the life and ministry of the Apostle Peter. Peter became a spokesperson addressing cultural chauvinism. Cultural elitism and ethnocentric standards had infected the First Century Church. Jews were to have no relationship with Gentiles. God, however, used Peter's dream to teach Peter that anything God made clean was not unclean. So Peter is converted to ministry across the cultural chasm. He leads the way as a bridge across the cultural divide.

Cornelius emphasized that he is ready to hear what Peter has to say. There is an important word study in this text that car-

PETER AND CORNELIUS: THE GOOD NEWS OF PEACE (ACTS 10: 27-36)

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ... Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

ries the weight of meaning for this text. It is the word "favoritism." It is the derivative of two words. The first word "prosopon" means "face." The second word is "lambano" meaning "lift." Lambano is frequently used with other words. "Proslambano" means "to lift toward you" or "to welcome you." "Prosopon lambano" means to lift your face in a certain way. It means to hold your face one way for one person and another way for others.

So what is Peter saying? God does not lift His face for the rich and lower His face for the poor. God does not lift His face for the Jews and lower His face for the Gentiles. God does not lift His face for the young and lower His face for the elderly. God does not lift His face for one cultural group and lower His face for another. God does not lift His face for white people and lower his face for people of color.

THE BIBLICAL RECORD IS CLEAR

God wants us to bridge the racial divide. Love and the power of the Spirit can build a bridge to span the racial divide. Why should we be concerned? It was easy to be angry about 9-11. It was easy to label a people group as evil. It was easy to make Muslims our enemies.

On Sunday, September 23, 2001, the Letters to the Editor carried this narrative: I hear stories of Muslims getting harassed. It is not right. I am a Native American, Lakota, and I really want to share with all of you what happened to me recently:

My daughter and I were at the grocery store. I was going down the aisle when I had

to stop. There was a man on one side, and his cart was on the other. I waited patiently, then said, "Excuse me." He looked at me and said, "What's wrong? Can't you get through?"

I suppose I could have been rude and bumped into the gentleman, but my reply was simply, "No." He then proceeded to call me nasty names, and also called me a foreigner, and that I should get the "heck" out of his country.

I am not a foreigner. I am indigenious to this land! We are all equal. The pigment of one's skin does not define what is in one's heart. Those of us with "darker skin" have the same feelings and emotions as everyone else. Racism hurts, plain and simple.

WHAT IS OUR ROLE AS CHRIST FOLLOWERS?

After 9/11 it was essential that we look for opportunities to build bridges in love to Arabs and Muslims, speak out against statements of racism wherever they surface, and affirm that immigrants from Arab nations are no different than immigrants from Sweden or Norway. Over a decade later it is necessary to rethink our Christian identity as it relates to the challenge of bridging the racial divide. Let me conclude with three recommendations.

The Gospel destroys a system of hierarchical positioning. In the temple there was a dividing wall. By virtue of being in the inner court as opposed to the outer court, certain folks were closer to God than others. There were those who were far and those who were near. By virtue of one's position with God, some were more important than others. In

the Gospel those who were far and those who were near are accounted for. Both need the Gospel. Both are self-centered and arrogant. Both are lost. All of us are sinners and need grace. We are equal at the foot of the cross. No one has an advantage.

The Gospel redefines our identity as part of a new nation, a new people. Notice verse fifteen: *His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace...* It is not our ethnic group, nor our education, nor our career that defines our identity. God receives us and welcomes us because we trust in Jesus and not because of our own merit.

One of the things I like about our CCDA connections is that it is a multi-ethnic organization. I recall when the national conference was in New York and we met at a Korean Presbyterian Church. Most of our meetings recently have been led by an African American worship team. Our identity is in Christ and not in the color of our skin.

The Gospel reconciles all people groups. There is an amazing truth in verse sixteen. *His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

The Bible tells us that God made Him, Jesus, to be sin, who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God. By the substitutionary death of Jesus, hostility itself was slain. Hostility itself has been defeated. There is no reason for hostility. The color of our skin doesn't matter. What does matter is whether the Gospel has transformed our heart.

The question of the hour is: Are we a church that reflects this transforming work of the Gospel? How do we stretch and show that God's power in us is at work in us and has brought about this change?

Reflections on His 23 Years as Pastor of Central Baptist Church

The Apostle Paul was bullish on the church and I am as well. As I retire from being pastor at Central Baptist Church I want to tell you what I like about this church and the joy of ministering here for 23 years. (Delivered as part of his sermon on February 10, 2013)

WE ARE NOT MONOLITHIC

We are not hewn out of the same stone. We are diverse. We are diverse in our political viewpoints. We are diverse in our ages. We are diverse in our economic standing. A few years ago at a high school reunion, I shared with a classmate that we are a congregation of both Republicans and Democrats. His response was to say that he wished he was part of a church like that. Another friend upon hearing that we were headed to Central asked, "Why would you want to go there? They have a bunch of wild stallions." My response was to say, "Stallions headed in the same direction can easily pull a coach." We are not monolithic.



WE ARE MISSIONAL

We believe in the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. We believe every Christ-follower is part of the team. God has given each of us gifts to be used in His kingdom work. Yes, we give permission for ideas to bubble up and that is a strength not a weakness.

We believe in the whole Gospel. The gospel is both word and deed. The gospel is both good news and good deeds. And we believe in the gospel to the whole world. It is the reason we are committed to support and we encourage the sending of missionaries around the world. It is also the reason we have supported ethnic congregations within our building. Since I have been pastor we have housed and helped a Hmong congregation, a Vietnamese congregation, a Nigerian congregation and now an Eritrean congregation. We are missional.

WE BELIEVE IN A GOD OF SECOND CHANCES

We believe in forgiveness. We believe in fresh starts and new beginnings and have practiced our theology with those who have come through our doors. We believe in a God of second chances.

WE ARE RISK TAKERS FOR THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

We took a risk and concluded that both men and women could be deacons. We took a risk by not moving to the suburbs as other congregations were doing and committed to stay in the city. We took a risk to ordain women in ministry because we believe ministry is based on giftedness not gender. We took a risk when we offered a support group for parents of gay children. We took a risk in expanding our preschool program to an all day child care because the demographic of our country was changing. We took a risk to allow pastoral engagement in a debate on open theism in order to protect core values of our denomination and defend our peitistic heritage. Risk-taking is in our DNA as a church.

For these reasons I love being a part of Central Baptist Church.