

May the Grace of Christ Our Savior

John Newton (1725–1807)

May the grace of Christ our Savior
and the Father's boundless love,
with the Holy Spirit's favor,
rest upon us from above.

Thus may we abide in union
with each other and the Lord,
and possess in sweet communion
joys which earth cannot afford.

February 16, 2024

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Man Who Loved Both Doc And Cedar

Jon Pratt

Not many people could say that they had a close personal relationship with and were mentored by R. V. Clearwaters *and* B. Myron Cedarholm, but Gerry Carlson could.

Gerald Bruce Carlson was born August 17, 1941 to Dr. George and Evelyn Carlson in Chicago where his father pastored Tabernacle Baptist Church, the very church where the Conservative Baptist Movement held its organizing meeting in 1943. When Gerry was five years old, his family moved to Minneapolis so that his father could assume the pastorate at Lake Harriet Baptist Church and also teach part-time at Northwestern Theological Seminary alongside the seminary dean, R. V. Clearwaters. George Carlson and R. V. Clearwaters were close allies in the first decade of the fledgling Conservative Baptist movement as they served together on various local and national boards and committees. George served as the president of the Minnesota Baptist Convention and as Vice-President of the Conservative Baptist Association.

Gerry loved living in beautiful southwest Minneapolis, and it was quite a jolt to the serenity he enjoyed there when his father accepted a call to the Marquette Manor Baptist Church on the southwest side of Chicago in 1954. But an even greater shock to Gerry, his mother, and his three sisters came three years later in 1957 when his dad was killed in a plane crash as he was headed to Canada on a hunting trip. A man Gerry affectionally called "Uncle Myron" broke the tragic news to Gerry in the living room of his family's parsonage.

Myron Cedarholm would also preach at George Carlson's funeral in what Gerry refers to as "the greatest gospel service I have ever known" (unpublished paper, "Doc and Cedar," 7, March 2017). Gerry's relationship with the Cedarholms began early in his life as his family would stay with them every summer at their cabin on Lake Nebagamon in northwest Wisconsin, and "Cedar" (as Gerry would refer to him in his adult years) became "somewhat of a surrogate father" to Gerry in the years following his dad's untimely death.



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After Gerry graduated from high school in Chicago, he attended Pillsbury Baptist Bible College where he earned a bachelor's degree in Bible and Pastology in 1963. During his college years he served as a youth leader at Fourth Baptist Church in Minneapolis, and it was here that Gerry met his future wife, Connie. They were married in 1965, and their wedding ceremony was conducted by their pastor, Doc Clearwaters. The Lord would bless Gerry and Connie with three children and four grandchildren during their 58 years together.

Upon graduation from Pillsbury, Gerry and many of the other future pastors who had commenced with him traveled north 65 miles to attend Central Seminary. After receiving his M.Div. degree from Central Seminary in 1967, Gerry accepted a call to serve as youth pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Normal, Illinois, where his friend, Bud Weniger, was pastor.

Gerry's time in Normal was anything but normal in the wider world of northern Baptist fundamentalism as the Conservative Baptist movement splintered and as different views of educational leadership strategy affected schools like Pillsbury College. Gerry was on the Pillsbury campus for College Days with his youth group in May 1968, just three days after Myron Cedarholm had resigned, and he stayed in the Cedarholm's Presidential House (where Cedar had been confined by the board in "house arrest," as some referred to it). Four weeks later, Myron Cedarholm participated in Gerry's ordination service in Normal, and Cedarholm took the occasion to make the first public announcement that Maranatha Baptist Bible College would be starting up that fall (personal email to author, July 17, 2009).

Gerry would minister in Normal for three years before returning to Minnesota in 1970 to take the pastorate at the newly planted Faith Baptist Church of St. Paul. He spent eight years there and then moved on to work for the American Association of Christian Schools from 1978–1988. He served as both Field Director and Executive Director. Two items of note occurred during these years: 1) Gerry received the honorary Doctor of Divinity from Maranatha in 1983, and 2) Gerry was invited to speak at Central chapel in 1986 with Doc Clearwaters in attendance from whom he received a warm welcome. Commenting on this last point, Gerry later wrote that "time can heal wounds and I was glad for that" ("Doc and Cedar," 17).

God's next appointment for Gerry was the position of Vice President at Maranatha Baptist Bible College, where he served from 1988–1994. It is likely due to his 16 years of educational experience with AACS and Maranatha that led the board of Pillsbury Baptist Bible College to appoint Gerry as the sixth president of the institution in 1994. But his tenure at his alma mater would last only one year.

In a short book Gerry wrote about his stint at Pillsbury (*What Happened at Pillsbury?* [Nystrom, 1996]), he explained why he experienced great frustra-

tion with the faculty who did not want to head in the same philosophical direction that he (and the board) felt the school should go. In an email to me, Gerry described his one-year presidency as "my suicide mission" (email to author, July 1, 2009). I think it is fair to say the knot of difficulties Carlson experienced in that one-year stint were many years in the making and far too complex for anyone to untie in the short amount of time the board and faculty desired.

Leaving Minnesota for good, Gerry joined the staff at Positive Action for Christ in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He would work with this ministry longer than any other in his life while serving as Director of Marketing and Development from 1996–2014.

In 2014 the Carlsons moved to Maranatha Village in Sebring, Florida, where Gerry helped with marketing and development for the retirement community up until the Lord took him home on January 30, 2024.

The Lord used Gerry Carlson in pastoral ministry (13 years) and Christian education (35 years). His labors in Christian education included serving on the administrations of two Bible colleges, providing assistance to Christian schools and colleges in his work for AACS, and promoting the publication and distribution of Bible curriculum for churches and Christian schools. His mentors included significant figures in the Conservative Baptist movement. These men included his father, George, his father's ally and friend, Doc Clearwaters, and his "surrogate father," Uncle Myron. I believe all three men would be greatly encouraged by who their mentee became: a faithful and kind friend to many, a loving husband and father to his family, and a fruitful and diligent servant in the Lord's harvest field.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
