

Clarence Jordan

Collection

AR. 39



Prepared by: Summer Wilson
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I. Biographical Sketch

Southern Baptist advocate for racial equality, Clarence Jordan, was born in Talbotton, Georgia on July 29, 1912. He graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Agriculture in 1933. He then went on to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and graduated with a Ph.D. in 1939. While in Seminary he married Florence Kroger in 1936. They had four children. Jordan founded Koinonia Farms near Americus, Georgia in 1942. The farms purpose was to teach agriculture to poor rural farmers, and in doing this, demonstrate brotherhood and peace through community. Jordan is also known for “Cotton Patch” translations of Paul’s Epistles, Luke, and Acts. These were published in 1968 and 1969. Jordan died in Sumter County, Georgia on October 29, 1969.

Jordan grew up in the Baptist church in a Christian family. He was the 7th of 10 children. When he was 12 years old, he made a profession of faith after a revival at his church. His parents wanted him to be a lawyer and Jordan soon conformed to this idea with the intention of coming back to the South and bringing legal justice to the area. However, Jordan soon realized that that the people were not having legal issues, they were hungry and oppressed.

Jordan went to college and got a degree in Agriculture. He attended the University of Georgia. While a student there he was very successful and participated in many extracurricular activities including serving in 1932 as the state wide President of the Georgia Baptist Student Union. He was also involved in the R.O.T.C. program. One summer while attending the R.O.T.C camp, Jordan was convicted that he could not kill. He was doing an exercise where he had to “kill” a straw dummy. He decided he could not do something that went against everything that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. So he resigned the R.O.T.C. program and chose to go to Seminary.

He decided he would become a minister of reconciliation. He attended the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. There he got his degree in Greek New Testament. He wanted to be able to look at the original text and translate for himself what the scriptures said. While in seminary, Jordan taught English New Testament at a Negro University, Simmons University. In 1939, the Long Run Baptist Association asked him to be the director of the Sunshine Center located in the west end of Louisville in the ghetto. He eventually changed the name to The Fellowship Center. He worked there from 1939 to 1941. He worked with Negroes that had moved to the city from farms in search of a better life. It was here that he realized that their problems did not start in the ghetto, but on the farm. They were poor farmers and did not know much about the scientific things about farming.

In 1942, The Jordans along with Martin and Mable England, American Baptist Missionaries, bought a 440-acre rundown farm in Americus, Georgia that they named Koinonia Farms. Their idea was to create a witness and community for

reconciliation between races and between the rich and the poor. The community grew and became very successful in its mission. The Jordans joined the Rehoboth Baptist church, but in 1948, the church told them their presence was no longer welcome at their church due to their racial views. More hostility came later when Jordan agreed to help two Negroes enroll in the Georgia Business College.

The Americus community decided they no longer wanted Koinonia Farms in their area. Every local business began to boycott the farm. The farm was barely getting by. While the farm was struggling to make ends meet because of the boycott, numerous charges were put against it. There were also violent attacks on the farm. Their roadside market, where they made a large percentage of their profit, was bombed. There were guns fired at the market and at the homes of the people living on the farm, some bullets nearly missing children's heads as they slept. Eventually all the families but two left the farm in fear of their lives.

In his time on the farm Jordan was writing his own version of the New Testament. It was called the Cotton Patch Version. Profits from the publication of these Cotton Patch Versions helped the farm tremendously and with the addition of new families to Koinonia Farms, the establishment began to rebuild. During this time, the name changed to Koinonia Partners. They started doing mail orders for pecans and holiday candies and cakes. From this two new organizations were formed: Fund for Humanity and Habitat for Humanity.

Clarence Jordan died at age 57 in his writing shack behind his house while he was translating the gospel of John. He was buried in his work clothes in a cedar coffin on Koinonia Farms. The funeral was small, with the members of the farm attending. When Clarence Jordan was asked what he has hoped to achieve he said, "to have been faithful."

II. Collection Description

The Clarence Jordan collection is an artificial archival collection that had previously been maintained as part of the files in the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives. The collection consists primarily of articles, clippings, correspondence, and newsletters from various organizations related to Clarence Jordan and Koinonia Farms. The material in the collection discusses the impact on racial views and on the Spiritual community that the life of Clarence Jordan had. Information on Koinonia Farms and the struggles as well as the successes it had is included as well. The collection includes information of Clarence Jordan from the time he was a child to his death. The majority of the collection supports the idea that Clarence Jordan was an advocate for racial equality.

The material in the collection dates from 1939 to 1987. The collection includes 1 linear ft. of material, which is arranged alphabetically by folder title. There are 25 folders included in the collection.

III. Folder Listing

Box 1

- 1-1 Articles by Clarence Jordan
- 1-2 Articles: Clarence Jordan
- 1-3 Articles: Clarence Jordan's Death
- 1-4 Articles: Koinonia Farm
- 1-5 Baptist Fellowship Center: The Hand of Fellowship 1941
- 1-6 Baptist Fellowship Center: Miss Lucile Lynch
- 1-7 Baptist Fellowship Center: Negro Baptist Night 1940
- 1-8 Biographical Information: Clarence Jordan
- 1-9 The Christian Century
- 1-10 Christian Community in the South by Clarence Jordan
- 1-11 Correspondence
- 1-12 "Cotton Patch Version"
- 1-13 Interview: Clarence Jordan
- 1-14 Interview: Landon Sheats
- 1-15 Jordan, Jan: "Why I Missed My Graduation"
- 1-16 Kendrick, Timothy S. - Clarence Jordan's Racial Views as Reflected in His Scripture Translations, other writings, and his life
- 1-17 Koinonia Community: Newsletters
- 1-18 Koinonia Partners
- 1-19 Koinonia Products from the farm
- 1-20 Memorabilia: Louisville Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
- 1-21 Negro Books
- 1-22 References
- 1-23 Sojourners: The Legacy of Clarence Jordan
- 1-24 Statement of Koinonia Farm In Response to Sumter County Grand Jury Presentments
- 1-25 Translations: Records, Books, and Pamphlets