



B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

S P R I N G 2 0 0 1 — V o l u m e 1 , N o . 3

Betty Shipley Fund Established

Preserving Free Methodist history was a life-long concern for Betty Shipley. She served the church in many ways, and was a faithful worker in the Free Methodist Church from 1960 until her death in 2000. She served at Seattle Pacific University, as a VISA missionary in Africa, at the Southern California Conference Office, in several departments at the World Ministries Center, and most recently at the Deaconess Foundation.

Friends of Betty have now established the Betty Shipley Memorial Fund through the Free Methodist Foundation to honor her life and faith-

fulness to the church, and to extend the ministry of the Marston Memorial Historical Center.

If you wish to contribute to the Betty Shipley Memorial Fund, please make checks payable to the Free Methodist Foundation and mail to the Foundation c/o the Betty Shipley Memorial Fund at PO Box 580, Spring Arbor, MI 49283. For further information please contact Sylvia Fox or Cathy Fortner at the World Ministries Center, or the Free Methodist Foundation (800-325-8975). The Foundation offers this and several other ways to contribute tax efficiently to the work of the Historical Center.

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Agreement with Asbury Seminary Special Collections

The Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives has worked out an agreement with the library at Asbury Theological Seminary for the processing of the records of Free Methodist bishops and other leaders.

Through the initiative of Bill Kostlevy, Special Collections Librarian at Asbury Seminary, the papers of Bishop Leslie R. Marston were catalogued and archived some years ago. The original papers are housed at the Marston Memorial Historical Center, while Asbury Seminary's Special Collections retains a copy for its use in exchange for processing the papers.

This arrangement has now been extended to cover the papers of other Free Methodist bishops as they become available, as well as papers and records of FM leaders who have had some relationship with the seminary (for instance, faculty, administrators, or trustees). From now on, the Special Collections Department at the Asbury library will work cooperatively with the Free Methodist archivist for the professional and secure processing of such important additions to our denominational historical collection.

Historical Center Appoints Archivist

Kate McGinn, M.L.S., has been appointed archivist at the Marston Memorial Historical Center. She began her assignment on January 22, working half-time.

Kate completed a Master of Library Science degree at the University of North Carolina, an M.A. in history at Louisiana State University, and a B.A. in history at Georgia State University. From 1994 to 2000 she served as archivist at the David du Plessis Archive at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Kate's appointment allows the Historical Center to begin developing a professional-quality denominational archive, as envisioned by Bishop L. R. Marston. She has begun evaluating the Center's current holdings as she develops policies and procedures to ensure that important church records are safely preserved but also made available for research. (Meet Kate McGinn in her own words, page four.)

The Mission of the Free Methodist Historical Society is to preserve Free Methodist heritage and transmit it faithfully to each generation in order to assist the Free Methodist Church in fulfilling its mission.



Seeker Sensitive

According to
B. T. Roberts

by Howard Snyder

*The Gospel
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“Seeker sensitive” has become a popular term in church life and strategy. Its influence comes largely from the remarkable success of Willow Creek Community Church west of Chicago, which has mushroomed in size partly through its “seeker-sensitive” approach.

The basic idea is that the church exists for the unchurched, not for itself, and therefore should structure its Sunday services (and other activities) to be as seeker-friendly as possible. Music, architecture, dress, the whole worship experience should be arranged to eliminate unnecessary barriers that would keep non-Christians from coming to Christ.

This idea has caught on across North America today, but it is not really new. In Free Methodism, it was there from the beginning. However, B. T. Roberts gave a twist to “seeker sensitivity” that actually runs counter to what many today mean by it.

Here is B. T. Roberts in his own voice. The following is an abridged version of Roberts’ lead article, “Gospel to the Poor,” in *The Earnest Christian*, March, 1864.

1. The Gospel is the method which God has devised for the salvation of man. In his fallen condition he is the slave of sin; but the Gospel opens up a way in which he may have the victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. Every human being, then, needs the Gospel. It should be proclaimed to all. It must be preached to men as *creatures*—as beings standing on the same platform of entire equality before God—of complete and utter dependence upon Him. It must not be preached to the honored, or rich, or noble as such, but as CREATURES, on a level in the sight of God with the poorest and most despised. The Gospel utterly abhors all caste. It is thoroughly democratic. It brings all down to one common platform. The brotherhood which it establishes is one of the most perfect equality. “God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth.” The Gospel, then [because of this human unity and equality] should be preached to the poor. They are a part of the human family, and they constitute a large part—a vast majority.

2. *The preaching of the Gospel to the poor is the standing miracle which attests to its Divine origin.* It is placed by our Saviour in the same class with raising the dead, and

cleansing lepers—something which no man acting from the mere promptings of nature ever did, or ever will do. It requires no heaven-born motive to lead one of a literary and serious turn of mind to read, for a good salary, nicely written essays on moral or religious topics, to an audience whose gentility is secured by the high price needed to pay for a sitting; but to go out, without purse or scrip, among the poor and the outcast, and proclaim the Gospel of God in all fidelity, is a course of life, which one will not be very likely to pursue until the end of his days, unless he has been sent by God. He who does this, is in the true succession. He walks as Christ walked.

“By their fruits ye shall know them.” To John the Baptist’s inquiry of Christ as to whether he was the Messiah, the Saviour answered by referring him to his works. “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dear are raised up, and THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PRACHED TO THEM.”

3. In all ages the Gospel has won its greatest trophies among the poor. God has distributed his natural gifts quite equally among all classes. The richest pearls are often found in the roughest shells. Minds of the highest order are frequently buried in the



lowest walks of society.

A true religious experience not only gives a right direction to native talent, but it gives new life and energy. Latent powers are called out and put in action.

4. *The poor, as a class most readily embrace the gospel. They are always the first to come to Christ.*

In the poor, pride, the mother-sin of all sin, has not been so strongly developed, nor so deeply rooted. They are more willing to humble themselves. From this class the ranks of the church are most readily recruited. He who is really after souls will

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go where most souls can, in all probability, be saved.

In modern times, churches that have bent their energies mainly for the salvation of the poor have invariably met with the greatest success. The mission of Methodism was to preach the Gospel to the poor. As she kept to this work she prospered. As she abandons it she declines in spirituality and power and in the numbers saved through her instrumentality. It is her care for the masses that gives [the Roman Catholic Church] such amazing vitality and strength.

5. If it is the duty of the Church of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to the poor, then all the arrangements of the Church must be made with a view to the accomplishment of this end. No incidental provision will answer. It must be aimed at directly. Every thing, in the adoption of prudential regulations, that has a tendency to defeat this, must be thrown out. If the Gospel is placed within the reach of the poor it is placed within the reach of all. Preaching that awakens the attention of the poor, and leads them to Jesus, will interest all classes.

Finally, the poor must be made to feel that they are welcome to all places where the Gospel is preached. Pew doors must be taken off. [Any barrier to the poor in the church's practice] robs the poor—the representatives of Jesus—of the dearest of

all rights—the right to hear the Gospel.

Nor is the requirement met by reserving seats for the poor. Such a course is an insult to the poor—it is an insult to the Saviour. As a matter of fact do we find the poor thronging such churches? They know that they are not wanted.

Let us come back to the spirit of the Gospel. Let us get down so low at the feet of Jesus as to forget all our pride and dignity, and be willing to worship with the lowest of our kind, remembering that we are the followers of Him “who had not where to lay his head.” “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE HATH ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Quite clearly, Roberts tells us here how he would define “seeker sensitive” as a model for the church. The faithful church does whatever it can to make it as easy as possible for the poor to come to Christ. “If the Gospel is placed within the reach of the poor it is placed within the reach of all.”

To preach the Gospel to the poor, Roberts argues, is to be “in the true succession.” Here is the meaning of apostolic

ministry, in other words, and of apostolic churches. They bring the poor to Jesus. Roberts implies here (as he does elsewhere) that true apostolicity—an essential mark of the church—means preaching the Gospel to the poor.

Bibliographic Note: The full article, “Gospel to the Poor,” is found in *The Earnest Christian and Golden Rule*, 7:3 (March, 1864), 69-73. Roberts addressed this theme often, including in the first issue of *The Earnest Christian* in 1860 when he argued against pew rental in part because it barred the poor. Roberts included in the first *Disciplines* the statement that Free Methodists “believe that their mission is twofold—to maintain the Bible standard of Christianity, and to preach the Gospel to the poor.” See, for example, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* (Rochester, NY: Published by the General Conference, 1870), p. ix. Contemporary discussions of this theme include William Kostlevy, “Benjamin Titus Roberts and the ‘Preferential Option for the Poor’ in the Early Free Methodist Church,” in Anthony L. Dunnivant, ed., *Poverty and Ecclesiology: Nineteenth-Century Evangelicals in the Light of Liberation Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 51-67, and Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 102-12.

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- **HELP BUILD OUR COLLECTION!** The Historical Center welcomes clippings and other materials related to Free Methodist persons and places, past or present. We keep a clippings file and are always glad to receive additions.
- **FM SOURCES ONLINE** — Rick Swartzentrover of the Los Angeles Hermon Free Methodist Church has posted a number of FM sources on the Internet. They can be accessed at: www.thechurchpage.com/E_Books/FreeMeth/.
- **EXTRA COPIES** of the Newsletter free of charge are available upon request (up to ten copies to one address). If you wish to hand out the current or back issues to friends or family, you can make your request by email at History@fmcna.org.
- **In COMING ISSUES:** Profiles of J. W. Haley, Mary Schlosser, Harmon A. Baldwin, and William C. Kendall. Also: Rev. Archibald Howard McElrath Zahniser's diary at Asbury Seminary.

Book Review

A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland, edited by John A. Vickers (London: Epworth Press, 2000). x, 438 pages. ISBN: 07162-0534-3.

Review a dictionary? Contrary to what it may seem, a rational decision was made to tell you about this work. No, it is not a solution to insomnia. This volume is of interest to Free Methodists for two reasons. Firstly, there is the fact of a Free Methodist presence in Great Britain and Ireland. Secondly, there are the sometimes uncomfortable Free Methodist connections to World Methodism. The primary (and easiest) connection is to founders and the founding values of the tradition. This has always served as a challenge and guide to Free Methodists in their efforts to be a witness for Christ and the life worthy of that calling characterized by radical personal and radical social holiness. The other question is the role of Free Methodists in the definition of "world Methodism." What does it mean to claim the name "Methodist?" While the insights for both of these aspects of Free Methodist life are obliquely addressed, this dictionary may be one of the few of the genre worth reading as well as consulting!

The editor, John A. Vickers is widely known for his research on Methodist history and spirituality, especially the work on Thomas Coke, one of the organizers of American

Methodism and the "one man band" of early Methodist missions. The volume reflects the erudition of a lifetime of faithful scholarship. It also reflects the organizational acumen of the editor. More than one hundred fifty contributors provided signed articles for the *Dictionary*. These articles cover nearly every aspect of Methodist spirituality, worship, history and biography of crucial significance for understanding the developments in Britain and Ireland. It presents without prejudice the daughter churches of Methodism in Britain, although one always wishes for more coverage of these small Holiness Churches. An extensive bibliography is appended.

William Parkes contributed the article on the Free Methodists. The only bibliographical reference is to L. W. Northrup, *Ambassadors for Christ* (Indianapolis, 1988). The entry describes the union of the Free Methodist Church and the (Canadian) Holiness Movement Church that provided a basis for the developments in England. It is pointed out that some of the individuals who became Free Methodist withdrew from the (British) Wesleyan Methodist Church during the ecumenical (merger) discussions with other denominations.

The *Dictionary* provides a significant "user friendly" resource for Free Methodists to understand the larger tradition of which Free Methodists are part, and a challenge to promote the best values of the tradition in today's world.

- David Bundy

Meet Kate McGinn Our New Archivist

In December, under a hot Pasadena sun, my husband and I packed up the cat, the cello and the bonsai tree and headed east. After crossing a treacherously icy Midwest, we arrived in Indianapolis, where Philip has taken a wonderful job at IUPUI. But knowing I had left behind a wonderful job as archivist at Fuller Theological Seminary, I thought it would be months before I found a job as challenging and satisfying. I entertained visions of pounding the pavement, discouraged and alone, dodging snowflakes!

Within a week, though, Providence intervened. I had an interview with members of the Committee on Free Methodist Church History and Archives, a stroll through the Marston Historical Center, and a meeting with the Center's able Director, Cathy Fortner.

I am delighted with the position of archivist of the Free Methodist Church. The breadth of material as well as its depth appeals to both the historian and librarian in

me. My first week on the job confirmed what I had dared not hope – that sometimes one gets more than one deserves.

While there is much work to be done, my task is an enviable one. Who wouldn't want to process and promote such rich and diverse material as nineteenth-century missionary diaries, exquisitely ancient Chinese tiles, and minutes and photographs that document not only the growth of a movement but also its birth? I come to work each day intrigued by the prospect of what I may find.

I look forward to working with the Free Methodist Church and the larger archival and academic communities to advertise and open the collection. I suppose, thus far, my only regret is that my schedule prevents me from spending more than twenty hours a week at the Center.

- Kate McGinn, Archivist

