

B. T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

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Historic North Chili Inn to be Demolished

Local volunteers in North Chili, New York, have organized to save a historic building with ties to the early days of Free Methodism. Known today as the Stagecoach Inn, the building was the tavern (built sometime before 1819) that B. T. Roberts purchased and closed in 1866 as he was founding



Chili Seminary (now Roberts Wesleyan College). The school temporarily used the tavern for classrooms. Local historian Arch Merrill notes, "The first Free Methodist educational institution in America was born in a tavern."

According to Neil Pfouts in his *History of Roberts Wesleyan College*, the inn was bought by Levi Campbell in 1819. Pfouts writes, "Levi Campbell's red brick tavern at that corner of Buffalo Road and Union Street became the most important single establishment for miles around."

Over the years before Roberts purchased it the building served variously as a hotel, country store, bank, post office, "a political focal point and an intermittent church meeting place."

The inn is located just a block west of the current Roberts Wesleyan campus. It is now scheduled for demolition to make way for a new Walgreens drugstore. Although the building has long been a candidate for the National Register of Historic Places and is recognized as a significant historic site by the National Trust and the Preservation League of New York, it has never been officially designated for protection.

The Friends of the Stagecoach Inn, a volunteer group organized in response to the proposed demolition, has filed a lawsuit against the Town of Chili in an effort to stop or delay the demolition. As the new owners of the property, however,

Walgreens may have the final say in determining the historic building's fate. The Friends of the Stagecoach Inn are urging Free Methodists and any others who may be interested in historic preservation to contact Walgreens and voice support for preserving the inn. Members of the group who have seen the plans argue that the new store can be built without destroying the Inn, if Walgreens is willing to adjust its plans slightly. The Friends of the Stagecoach Inn hope that Walgreens can be persuaded to help preserve the Stagecoach Inn in the interests of good relations with the community.

Amie Alscheff, representing the Friends of the Stagecoach Inn, states, "Ultimately, public opinion may determine whether this building, with its unique link to the birth of the Free Methodist denomination, will be preserved or lost forever. Those wanting more information or wishing to contribute to help cover legal expenses may write to Priscilla Beeman, 81 Ramblewood Dr., North Chili, NY 14514, or contact Amie Alscheff by email at aalscheff@yahoo.com."

A Reasonable Faith

The Bible does not speak of reason as something that we should give up. . . . But the Holy Spirit, by removing prejudice, by rooting out the selfishness of the heart, makes reason more reliable. . . .

One can be led by the *Spirit*, and at the same time exercise the strongest good sense, the soundest judgment. "The meek will he guide in judgment" (Ps. 25:9).

— B. T. Roberts, "Led by the Spirit," *The Earnest Christian* (Mar. 1883), 70.

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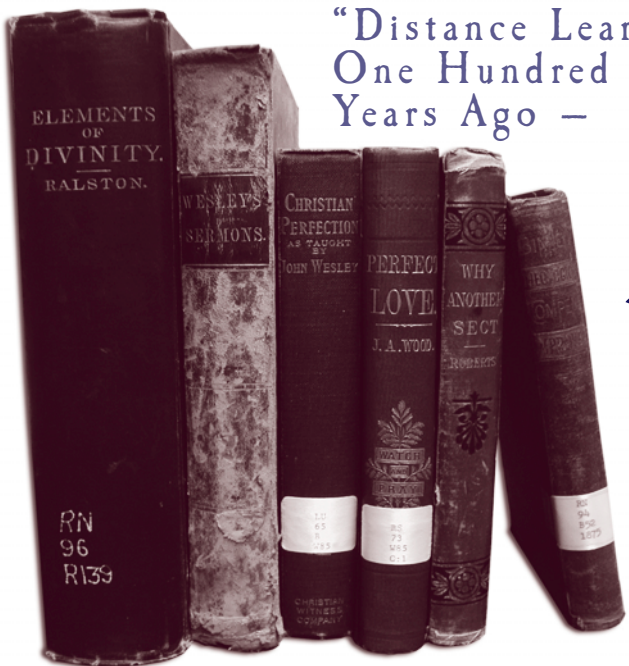
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“Distance Learning”
One Hundred
Years Ago –

Grandpa DOES THE HOME STUDY



BY MIRIAM OLVER

Long distance learning may seem like a modern invention, but in fact it was very much alive as a vigorous and rigorous educational method in the last half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Without telephones, email, and the Internet, such distance learning was not easy. It required self-motivation and discipline. Yet it opened the way for prospective young pastors to acquire a good theological education at home.

In the Free Methodist Church, such pastoral preparation was accomplished through the Home Course of Study. The course required students to develop their thinking and wrestle with the big ideas of the Christian faith with similar scope and rigor to that required for earning a bachelor's degree at an established educational institution. My grandfather, Arthur K. Lindsley, provides a good example.

Although the Course of Study focused on the specialized preparation needed for pastors and other church leaders, the curriculum did not neglect the liberal arts considered fundamental for professionals everywhere. As an educator, I see the Course of Study as a fascinating picture of pastoral preparation in the years before college and seminary education were commonly accessible.

The Free Methodist Course of Study

The earliest Free Methodist Discipline (*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist*

Church, dated August 23, 1860, the founding date of the church), contained a section entitled “Course of Study: For those who wish to join the Traveling Connection on probation.” In 1860 and for decades thereafter, “traveling preacher” meant any pastor appointed to a church and included anyone at all levels of ordination. A prospective pastor could join an annual conference on probation upon proper examination, including the completion of a rigorous list of studies. Two years of concurrent studies and full-time ministry followed. Normally the candidate would develop and preach well over a hundred sermons annually and carry out all the duties of pastoring a church.

Upon recommendation from the Board of Examiners, the candidate would then be ordained deacon, the first level of ordination. The process continued for two more years, then again upon recommendation from the Board of Examiners, the pastor would be ordained elder, the highest ordination in the denomination. Bishops and district elders (superintendents) were required to be ordained elders.

Early Free Methodists thus took the preparation of pastors seriously. Although the 1860 *Discipline* had just three pages listing the studies required of prospective pastors, the number had grown to eight pages by 1911, with subsections for local preachers, missionaries in Africa, deaconesses and class leaders, as well as traveling preachers. Before a pastor could be accepted as a member of the conference on trial, an extensive program of liberal arts subjects had to be mastered: English grammar, spelling, composition, math, and geography. Candidates had to pass examinations on a theological textbook and one of John Wesley's sermons.

The curriculum for the four years of study following admission to con-

ference specified a lengthy list of doctrines to be studied and thought through, along with required readings. Many of these readings would have been rather difficult to comprehend even in a class setting with a teacher present and discussions with colleagues; studying alone must have been trying and painful for some.

Arthur K. Lindsley

Such was the case with my grandfather, Arthur K. Lindsley of the New York Conference. The minutes of the September 18-21, 1912, session, held at Trucksville, Pennsylvania, record that Lindsley was “admitted on trial” along with three others. The terminology of “probation” and “trial” underscores the great interest our early leaders had in making sure pastors were united in communicating the same message. The members of the Board of Examiners that year included C. Adam Kress, the board's secretary. Kress was one of several leaders in the New York Conference at that time who had considerable educational background, including master's degrees. Kress was well able to mentor young pastors intellectually and practically, as well as spiritually.

I imagine that on many days during good weather Grandpa Lindsley rode along in the buggy behind good old Dexter, his faithful horse, on the weekly circuit from Big Hollow, New York, to North Settlement to Ashland and back home, plodding through some heavy theological study as he went. Considering that this 1912 circuit was nearly thirty miles round trip and would have taken a day's travel between each point, Pastor Lindsley probably had quite a bit of time for reading, pondering, and mentally processing his studies.

Grandpa Lindsley's studies were a family affair. Grandma Lindsley used to tell of his studying *Binney's*

COURSE

Theological Compend Improved while rocking baby Grace (my mother) in the cradle with his foot. Grace herself recalled sitting on his lap at age four or five while her father read aloud from John Wesley's *Sermons*.

John Wesley insisted on preaching sermons that the least educated and youngest hearers could understand, and his sermons might not have been much over the head of a smart youngster in early twentieth century days. Binney's dense *Compend* was a different matter. The Preface to Binney's *Compend* says it was intended to present a collection of contemporary thinking about theology in brief and concise form with "short, clear, and distinct sentences." The purpose was to provide an effective tool "for the instruction of youth, best calculated to assist their memories, to make strong and durable impressions on their understandings, and to render the important truths of religion most easy to be comprehended and retained in their minds." The author (and the reviser, Daniel Steele) seems to have done a better job on brevity than on understandability, for the text is basically an elaborated outline. Chapters consist mostly of collections of statements on various doctrines without the benefit of examples or much elaboration. Most paragraphs are just one sentence long. For example, the chapter on the Doctrines of Christianity begins:

The Divine authority of the Scriptures having been established, we will next examine them in reference to the doctrines they contain.

The doctrine which the first sentence of the Bible unfolds is, that THERE IS A GOD, THE CREATOR of all things. Gen. i, 1.

The belief of this doctrine is the first and fundamental principle of all true religion, and therefore demands our earliest consideration. Heb. xi, 6.

Each page had questions at the bottom for which students were to

write out answers—an excellent learning strategy, especially since many of the questions were of the type today's educators call critical thinking. However, this also must have taxed many students rather heavily since the text contained such a thin discussion of the profound concepts. Clearly the success of this educational program depended in large part on the personnel of the Board of Examiners in Course of Study.

Doctrine and Practical Ministry

My father, Rev. Herbert Olver, remembers slogging through another of the favorite textbooks of those days. He was studying for the pastoral ministry in the 1930s at Chesbrough Seminary (now Roberts Wesleyan College). Thomas Ralston's *Elements of Divinity* claimed in the subtitle to be a "concise and comprehensive view," but today's readers would surely find it (at over 1,000 pages) much more comprehensive than concise. Dad Olver reports that working through this book with a class of other students and with a teacher to guide the learning was tough enough—I can't imagine doing it on one's own. However the ideas are well developed, so the text provides much for students studying on their own to work with, and there are helpful illustrations and examples.

Dad Olver says that Ralston really came alive for him when, during his third and fourth years as a pastor, he dug into the text again and worked at processing those rich concepts in sermon preparation. One of the strengths of the home Course of Study was that students were simultaneously struggling through those dense tomes while also dealing with the weekly practicalities of preparing to spiritually nurture, inspire, and challenge real people who were often ready and eager to engage them in dialogue about what the young pastors had preached.

Grandpa Lindsley's *Yearly Pastoral Record* shows that he often preached as many as a hundred original sermons annually during the time he was working on courses for ordination. Often a pastor probably had little choice but to feed the congregation what he was processing in his studies through the week.

Though a high school dropout, Arthur Lindsley gained a quality education through self-discipline and hard work, despite formidable

obstacles. Course of Study students who completed the curriculum earned a good basic education. Those who completed the whole four-year course under the supervision of a competent mentor would have earned the equivalent of a bachelor's degree with a major in religion. In fact the Course of Study student received a far more focused background in Wesleyan theology and Free Methodist perspectives than many may receive today.

In A. K. Lindsley's case, the Course of Study served him well and earned him the confidence and respect of his peers who elected him to leadership positions among them.

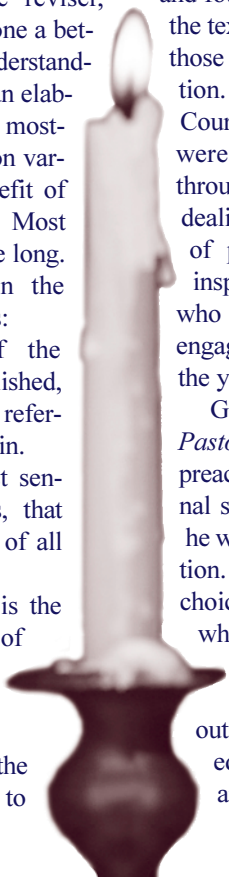
Note: This article is based on a chapter written by Miriam Olver from a book she has been helping her father, Herbert Olver, write about his father-in-law, Arthur Lindsley. Both were pastors and superintendents in the New York Conference—Rev. Olver: 1940 until the present, and Rev. Lindsley: 1912–1942.

B. T. Roberts' theological education was done partly through the Methodist Course of Study system, and when the FM Church was organized this system was adapted for Free Methodist use. Daniel Steele, Amos Binney's son-in-law (and Roberts' classmate at Wesleyan University), revised Binney's *Compend* in 1874 and at that point this "improved compend" became part of the FM Course of Study. In his revision Steele put more emphasis on Christian holiness and endorsed women's preaching. See Douglas R. Cullum, "Gospel Simplicity: Rhythms of Faith and Life among Free Methodists in Victorian America" (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 2002), 114–42.

News

O & **t** **e** **s** **S** ▷ The new GENE R. ALSTON MUSEUM at the Spencerville (Maryland) Campground will be dedicated on July 16. This museum is the result of the hard work of Marti and Donald Theune and coincides with Spencerville's 75th anniversary. Anyone having material that might be of interest is encouraged to consider donating it to Spencerville at the following address: Marti Theune, 310 Barksdale Ave., Waldorf, MD 20602.

▷ PASTORS' SABBATICAL PROGRAM applications are now available. Contact the Historical Center for information on scholarships and scheduling.



Book Reviews

No Longer Servants, but Friends: A Theology of Ordained Ministry, by Edward C. Zaragoza (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999). 111 pp. ISBN 0687081637 (paper).

This book proposes a theology of ordained ministry based not on servanthood but on friendship. Jesus said, “I no longer call you servants. ... Instead, I have called you friends” (John 15:12–15 NIV).

Zaragoza examines recent trends that view ordained ministers as servants or “servant leaders.” He argues that servanthood modeled on Jesus’ self-sacrifice perpetuates task-oriented ministry that values pastors for what they do, not who they are. This model can lead to a focus on maintaining power and control in order to achieve one’s ministry goals. Zaragoza says a new paradigm is needed that is based on a theology of the Trinity.

Servanthood takes Jesus’ earthly ministry as the model. But this neglects a broader Trinitarian understanding, Zaragoza believes. Servanthood focuses too much on the suffering Jesus and neglects the risen Christ. Further, it views the master/slave dichotomy as normative, perpetuating an image of servant that diminishes people’s worth.

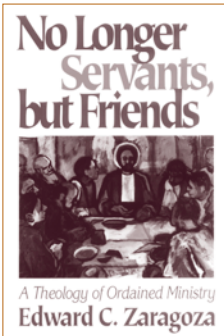
The “servant leader” model traces to Robert K. Greenleaf’s 1977 book, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Greenleaf worked in management at AT&T and did not start with a biblical approach, Zaragoza

notes. The servant leader is a CEO who sets goals, then through “creative process” seeks to realize them. The focus is on self, not God, and people are seen as means to an end. Servanthood neglects the priesthood of all believers by focusing on tasks only pastors can do, thus separating the pastor from the people as one having a special “closeness” to God.

Zaragoza bases his friendship model in Trinitarian theology. God as Mother/Father, Holy Spirit, and Son is the prime example of community through friendship. The whole person is seen in the context of community, not in terms of tasks or the self. In this view, ordained ministers vulnerably come alongside others relationally, not to use them or fix them. Zaragoza suggests that as there are three in the Trinity, so when we come together in community we are to “seek a third” by reaching out to others.

Zaragoza’s argument is helpful in shaping a more effective future for 21st-century churches. Friendship as a model for ordained ministry is consistent with Wesleyan theology and with examples of ministry left us by many early Free Methodist leaders. One issue Zaragoza did not address however is the fact that a pastor can’t be a close friend to everyone. Jesus chose his twelve, and as a youth pastor I have found that I have to focus on a core group to avoid spreading myself too thin. However this book strengthens my resolve to build friendships and to focus on being friends first with my leaders. This book helps by providing a theological basis for what I believe and seek to practice.

— Howard J. Snyder, Youth Pastor
Milan, Michigan, Free Methodist Church



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