

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_whs_01.php

Proceedings

OF THE

Wesley Historical Society

Editor: E. ALAN ROSE, B.A.

Volume 51

October 1998

JOSEPH AGAR BEET AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CRISIS

The Wesley Historical Society Lecture for 1998

Joseph Agar Beet is one of the forgotten theological giants of Wesleyan Methodism. Methodism has a strange capacity for neglecting its great theologians of yesteryear other than the Wesleys themselves. Such neglect is ecclesialogically irresponsible since it obscures the essential connectedness of our tradition.

One occasionally encounters the name of W. B. Pope, often regarded as the last of the great Wesleyan systematic theologians. That honour should rather belong to Beet, who wrote his own *Manual of Theology*, the first such major general work since that of Pope, as well as a trilogy on trinitarian theology and eschatology, a short book on ecclesiology and sacramental theology, and an invaluable short work on holiness¹. Beet's works are lucid and easily accessible to the painstaking reader. His interweaving of trinitarian and christological themes in his little book on holiness is impressive². In sacramental theology, he anticipated elements of the later ecumenical consensus on the eucharistic memorial. He was the first Wesleyan theologian to show a markedly more eirenic understanding of the 'catholic' tradition³. Yet, today, Beet is largely forgotten, partly due to the regrettable Methodist tradition of theological amnesia, but also, perhaps, to the damage his reputation

¹ The works referred to are *Holiness, Symbolic and Real* (1880, 2nd edition, 1910) *Through Christ to God*, (1892, 2nd edition, 1897), *The New Life in Christ* (1895, 2nd edition, 1895), *The Last Things*, (1897, 2nd edition, 1905) *The Church and the Sacraments*, (1907) and the *Manual of Theology*, (1906).

² See *Holiness*. op cit, esp 56-8, 62-3, 94-5.

³ Rather than just repudiating it as eg. had Benjamin Gregory. See *The Church and The Sacraments*, op cit, pp 85-6, 90, 98ff.

suffered as a result of controversy between 1897 and 1905. He was not blameless in the events of these years. Certain traits in his character, generally sterling in themselves, prevented him from playing his cards in the most politically astute manner. However, the heat of the reaction to an extremely cautious piece of eschatological revisionism by an essentially conservative scholar, reveals such about the self-understanding and relatively isolated nature of late nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism.

First, let us look briefly at his life and character⁴. He was born in 1840, into a prominent York Methodist family. He entered the ministry in 1864, spending twenty one years in circuit. Concurrently, he established a formidable reputation as a scholar, publishing a major commentary on Romans in 1877. In 1885, he was appointed to Richmond College, remaining there for the rest of his active ministry. Appreciated for the clarity of his teaching, he was affectionately regarded by the students as something of a character. He commanded considerable loyalty; during the crisis of 1902 over his alleged unorthodoxy in eschatology, 116 of his former students, all in the active work, signed a letter to the Conference not endorsing his views⁵, but commending him as a teacher and pointing out that no student had ever lapsed into agnosticism or left the ministry on his account. His acknowledged strengths were independence of mind and moral courage; his weaknesses a degree, perhaps largely unconscious, of self-satisfaction with his own opinions and a rather prosaic cast of mind. His pupil, Sheldon Knapp, acutely summed up his positive and negative qualities when he talked of Beet's 'perfectly

⁴ He was the son of W. J. Beet, a prominent manufacturer. His uncle, Joseph Agar, had been a minister from 1810-1830. Beet was educated at Wesley College, Sheffield. He trained as a mining engineer before entering the ministry. In 1876, he applied for and was granted leave to superannuate for a year in order to write his commentary, later esteemed by Peake and the modern Jesuit commentator on Romans, Fitzmyer.

Beet never wrote an autobiography. No one later remedied this deficiency. *WM Mag*, May 1924, pp 593-4, carried a valuable short article of reminiscences by several of his former pupils, giving interesting insights into his character, particularly as a teacher. See also *Minutes of the Wesleyan Conference*, 1924, p134 for official obituary, *WM Mag*, 1887, pp308-9 for short account of activities and Cumbers, Frank. H. (ed) *Richmond College, 1843-1943*, pp79-80, 110-111 for his Richmond activities. *Methodist Recorder* (hereinafter cited as *MR*), 29-5-24/5.6.24 for obituary and tributes by former students (including Knapp, cited below). A few personal papers survive, including a cache of letters to a close ministerial friend, Rev Thomas Rippon. They are in the possession of his grandson's widow, Mrs M. Beet of Oxshott, Surrey. There is also an MSS typescript summary of his life by Mrs Beet and her son Tony, which gives more family details and impressions.

⁵ *Methodist Times*, 29 May 1902.

logical teaching', but went on to observe that Beet always talked of 'sanctification' rather than 'perfect love', and that, consequently, he, Knapp, had left Richmond 'a stranger to the deep mystical element in Methodism'. All acknowledged Beet's moral courage, which was to the fore in the ensuing crisis. Behind his apparent austerity lay a sensitive soul.

For Beet, spiritual life and theology were intimately related. Deeply influenced in his youth by Boardman's *The Higher Christian Life* he developed a distinctive doctrine of 'sanctification by faith', commitment to which was shown in the strenuousness of his life⁶.

In his first twelve years at Richmond, Beet attracted little attention in the wider life of the Connexion. To comprehend what now followed, we must look at the contemporary self-understanding of the Wesleyan Connexion and the wider theological scene in later Victorian Britain. Wesleyan Methodism was, arguably, the most cohesive force in Victorian English Christianity. It prided itself on the way in which the strength of its discipline and its interlocking fellowship and common ethos, preserved both evangelical orthodoxy and activism. It had remained theologically very conservative, particularly on the traditional doctrine of the everlasting punishment of the finally impenitent.

In 1869, an article 'Our doctrinal unity; its secret and safeguard' attributed Methodism's ability to withstand the blandishments of theological revisionism elsewhere to the experimental approach of Methodism. 'The exigencies of the times have pressed upon us no less heavily than other sections of the Church, but we have no disposition to yield to the ..clamour of the age.. our creed varies not a hairsbreadth from the exposition given in 1744⁷'. Wesleyans, lay and ministerial, knew that the truths of evangelical religion were proved in their own experience, and thus they had neither desire nor reason to abandon or modify them. Such sentiments were frequently repeated over the next three decades. At the time of the 'Downgrade' controversy amongst the Baptists, a rather smug *Methodist Recorder* leader gave thanks that such a development was

⁶ Boardman, W. E. *The Higher Christian Life*, (1860). This rather curious book, of American provenance, had a wide influence within the Holiness Movement of the late nineteenth century. It combines anecdotalism with some strikingly perceptive theologoumena. It is interesting, in view of Beet's great concern with holiness, that he was not, as far as I can trace, ever involved in the distinctively Wesleyan 'Southport Conventions' of the late 80's and 90's. Perhaps his somewhat drily austere approach to religion gave him scant sympathy with much of the ethos of this movement.

⁷ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1869, p19.

unthinkable in Methodism, precisely because of the strength of the Connexional ethos and discipline⁸. In 1892, a proposed service for the reception of new members was severely criticised, specifically because it did not mention 'fleeing from the wrath to come' as a condition of joining the Society⁹.

In such a culture, the leading Wesleyan theologians were naturally conservative. Benjamin Gregory, (1820-1901), the Connexional Editor from 1868-93, deeply distrusted 'higher' criticism¹⁰. W. B. Pope and J. H. Rigg were also very conservative. In a review of recent eschatological works in 1878, the *Wesleyan Magazine*, stated, 'nevertheless, the Methodist churches see no reason to abandon the ground on which their standards are planted'. Just a little later it proclaimed its conservative function, 'Our purpose is to repel attacks on what we are still bold to call a cardinal doctrine of Scripture', the reference being to the doctrine of eternal punishment¹¹.

Nevertheless, Wesleyan Methodism could not isolate itself totally from the questioning of traditional eschatology that was already rife in the Anglican Church and in the other Free Churches. Geoffrey Rowell, in his general study of Victorian eschatology, quotes Gladstone as saying, in the 1890s, that the doctrine of hell had been 'relegated..to the far off corners of the Christian mind..there to sleep in the deep shadows as a thing needless in our enlightened and progressive age'¹². Probably many Methodists were content with such a development but for the honest and clear mind of Beet, such equivocation was unsatisfactory.

Beet was not the only Wesleyan to criticise traditional teaching. In 1878, G. W. Olver gave the Fernley Lecture, 'Life and death, the sanctions of the law of love'. The *Wesleyan Magazine* praised his criticism of universalism and annihilationism, but pounced on the suggestion that the bodies of the impenitent might be destroyed, leaving them to suffer only the spiritual agony of separation from God and not the traditional physical torments¹³. The Fernley trustees refused to publish his lecture. Over the next twenty years, many leading Wesleyans repudiated any eschatological revisionism. When, in 1904, the most hardline Wesleyan of all on eschatology,

⁸ MR. 22 Sept 1887.

⁹ MR. 28 July 1892.

¹⁰ For Gregory's views, see Benjamin Gregory, *'Autobiographical recollections, (1903) pp439-42.*

¹¹ WM Mag. 1878, pp373, 873.

¹² G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians, (1974) p212.*

¹³ WM Mag, p119, pp947-953.

Marshall Randles, died, W. L. Watkinson praised him:

Amidst such shallow optimism, we can feel only gratitude to courageous divines like Dr Randles, who vindicate the awful severity of divine law..we are debtors of the men, who, in an age of sentiment, unflinchingly remind us of the awful infinite issues of unrighteousness.¹⁴

In 1897, Beet produced a sober and carefully documented study, entitled, *The Last Things*. By the standards of much contemporary Anglican and Free Church eschatological revisionism, it was exceedingly cautious. It questioned belief in 'everlasting' punishment, suggesting the Bible did not compel such belief. At the same time, Beet vigorously repudiated both the universalism and the annihilationism widely accepted elsewhere¹⁵. He regarded them as devoid of any clear Scriptural basis.

Contrary to the image of him propagated by some of his conservative detractors, Beet's intentions were conservative. He was deeply committed to the authority of Scripture, and to the most reverently painstakingly possible exegesis of it. He argued his case for agnosticism on the exact fate of the lost on very precise biblical grounds¹⁶. He also argued that retribution for sin was part of 'natural theology', evidenced in almost every known system of belief¹⁷. He wanted to maintain the traditional sense of the awfulness of final impenitence and rejection of salvation. He did not doubt the finality of the doom of the lost. 'They will perish in the darkness of everlasting night'¹⁸. This granted, he did not, however, believe that Scripture taught that they would necessarily suffer everlastingly. Central to his exegesis were his interpretations of the two Greek words, *aionios*, which, in common with many, he took to mean 'agelong' rather than 'everlasting' and *ollumi* the verb indicating 'lostness'¹⁹. His exegesis was certainly to be trenchantly criticised. Several people argued that Beet could not logically argue that *aionios*

¹⁴ MR 14 July 1904.

¹⁵ With trenchant exegesis of the passages usually advanced by universalists. 1 Cor 15 v22 (LT, 145-8), Rom 5 v18 (LT, 152), Col 1 v19-20 (LT 156).

¹⁶ Eg LT p142-3 in exegesis of 2 Cor 5 v10 'Beyond his assertion of their utter ruin, **and our inference that of this ruin they will be conscious** (my emphasis), Paul teaches nothing about the state of the lost. He does not assert or suggest that they will ever sink into unconsciousness... on the other hand, Paul does not teach the endless consciousness of those who will be destroyed'.

¹⁷ LT, p3.

¹⁸ LT, p240 'under the impenetrable gloom, their fate lies hidden and that is all we know and need to know'.

¹⁹ LT, p132, 133-40.

meant 'age-long' where punishment was concerned and 'everlasting' where bliss was involved. Beet's riposte to this was to accept that, in both cases, the word literally meant 'age-long', but that it was inconceivable that God should set any limit, in his love, to the bliss of the redeemed, whereas, in his mercy, it was conceivable that he should limit suffering²⁰. Above all, Beet wanted to maintain what he regarded as the true Scriptural position against both extreme conservatives whom, on the doctrine of everlasting physical punishment, he regarded as reading into Scripture what was not clearly and unambiguously there²¹, and against liberals whom he, in common with his own conservative opponents, regarded as minimising the awful consequences of sin.²² He argued that the concern of Christ and his apostles had been to warn of the dangers of final impenitence, not to satisfy eschatological curiosity. He argued that Scripture veiled the precise fate of the impenitent in obscurity²³. We should be quite clear about this last point. Beet was as firm in repudiating annihilationism as he was in arguing that Scripture did not unambiguously teach the everlasting conscious suffering of the impenitent. His opponents misunderstood him when they accused him of teaching annihilationism. Beet did no such thing. He merely argued that Scripture did not unambiguously teach the eternal conscious punishment of the lost. It was silent as to their exact fate. To teach the certain annihilation of the impenitent as dogma would be to exceed the bounds of Scripture just as much as to teach their external physical punishment.

Beet's opponents alleged that he exalted the authority of moral consciousness above the authority of Scripture²⁴, an accusation that the Conference of 1902 found to be partially warranted, while also accepting that Beet had not intended to give such an impression. His response to such criticisms was to assert that Scripture itself, especially in Romans 2 vv14-16 and 2 Cor 4 v2, asserts the value of universal moral consciousness. Though he constantly argued that human moral consciousness found the concept of everlasting conscious punishment impossible to accept, he also argued that it

²⁰ *LT*, p108.

²¹ In contravention of Rev. 22. v18, as Beet pointed out.

²² *LT*, p240.

²³ *LT*, p230.

²⁴ e.g. Randles, M. *Doctrines Old and New: Observations on the 'Last Things, of the Rev. J. A. Beet. DD, (1898), pp16-17.*

²⁵ See interview with *Christian World*, 1 May 1902. For general views on the authority of the universal moral sense, and the quotation at the end of this para, see *LT*, pp267-9.

was wrong to dogmatise either way on what Scripture left uncertain.²⁵ It would thus be wrong to argue, simplistically, that Beet exalted moral consciousness above Scripture. He accepted that there was a tension between the authority of Scripture and the moral consciousness which could not easily be resolved 'Sometimes these authorities appear to be in conflict. In such cases, we must seek, by patient and reverent attention to each voice, for the harmony which underlies the whole and which comes from God'²⁶.

If his conservative detractors accused him of being insufficiently biblical, some 'liberals' accused him of being too tied to Scripture, particularly in his rejection of such ideas as 'probation' after death. Despite his stated caution, Beet was prepared to indulge in some speculation, asserting that, though there was no biblical warrant for his belief, he found it inconceivable that children and imbeciles should not be admitted to eternal life.²⁷

Today this seems innocuous enough. Then, it outraged many Wesleyan traditionalists. The President of the Conference, W. L. Watkinson, called a meeting of the ex-Presidents to discuss the matter. He then held a meeting of the Committee of the General Institution, (i.e. the Theological College) to discuss the matter. The way he acted rankled with Beet, who later, argued that the President had acted as both judge and prosecuting counsel. Beet agreed to make some modifications to his work. A resolution was thereupon passed to the effect that any further action would be 'undesirable'. Beet's own Synod concurred²⁸.

For the veteran conservative, Marshall Randles, this was insufficient. In his spirited riposte to Beet, *Doctrine Old and New*, he argued that Beet's teaching did not just, as Beet admitted, contravene traditional Wesleyan standards in minor ways, but went against its general tenor²⁹. He quoted copiously from Wesley's sermons and the *Notes on the New Testament*, to argue that Wesley had seen the

²⁶ See eg. *Literary World*, 29 Nov 1901, *Christian World*, 10 Oct 1901. On another occasion, in a private letter to his friend Thomas Rippon, date 30 Jan 1906, Beet referred to 'the inborn moral sense, its great importance for theology. It is not infallible. It is no rival to the Bible, but it demands a hearing'. It is clear from this differently nuanced statement, that Beet never fully resolved the problem of the relative authority of Scripture and the 'moral sense'. Letter cited in private possession of Mrs M. Beet.

²⁷ This remained a continuing difficulty for Beet, see eg. his last work, *The Last Things in a Few Words*, (1913), pp34-35.

²⁸ See eg. Beet's letter to the *Methodist Times* (hereinafter MT), 8 May 1902, rehearsing the details of the wrangles of the previous five years.

²⁹ Randles, op cit, pp 6-7, 9-10.

doctrine of eternal punishment as central, and that it had continued to be so seen in Methodism up to his own time. He took issue with Beet's exegesis of the word *aionios*. He argued that Beet's position was inconsistent, especially when he argued against annihilationism and yet implied it by saying that the suffering of the wicked was not eternal. He especially accused Beet of exalting 'moral consciousness' over the authority of Scripture, and argued that Beet along with other modernists was presuming to judge the mind of God by our limited standards of understanding. Randles was particularly concerned for the future integrity of Methodist preaching and doctrine, a concern subsequently echoed by other 'conservatives' in the course of the controversy. 'A still more serious consequence will be that all our *other* doctrines will be liable to be treated in the same way'. The rot would spread from pulpit to Sunday School and throughout Methodism, extending, in all probability to moral teaching as well as doctrinal and infecting Methodism with a worldly spirit that would totally destroy it as vital religion'. The coherence of Wesleyan Methodism was at stake. A significant difference between Beet and some of his opponents was in their understanding of the relative importance of different doctrines, or, as modern Roman Catholics would put it, their position within the 'hierarchy of truths'. Beet regarded eschatological doctrines as being of 'the second order' and not fundamental to the degree that was the case with the divinity of Christ or the doctrine of the Trinity. Watkinson clearly regarded both the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of eternal punishment of the impenitent as equally fundamental.

Other conservative opponents of Beet were to prove less extreme than Randles. J. R. Gregory accepted Beet's case that imbeciles and children could not suffer everlasting punishment. He also accepted that the warnings of it could not apply to those heathen who had not had the chance to hear and respond to the Gospel. At one point, discussing certain Johannine texts, he accepted that none of the texts, taken by themselves, explicitly taught endless punishment, though they did teach an irreversible doom. The latter was, of course, precisely Beet's point. At least one of Beet's doughty conservative opponents had to concede one of his points! Gregory, however, almost immediately tried to take this back by asserting, only a few pages later in the same book, 'How The Scriptures do assert THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL'. Some of Beet's detractors shared the confusion they ascribed to him³⁰.

Randles' criticisms were trenchant and well put, though, in emphasising the objective claims of the holiness and justice of God, especially as independent of his love, he was falling into the trap of which he accused Beet, of making concepts, in his case of the alleged demands of divine holiness, independent arbiters and controllers of the divine nature and activity³¹. The whole debate between Beet and Randles would seem to indicate the impossibility of being 'biblical' in isolation from any other presuppositions, whether derived from tradition, reason or moral instincts.

Here, however, matters did not rest. Hugh Price Hughes, whose presidential year followed, wanted Beet to withdraw the book. Hughes was not worried by the 'heresy', for which he had some sympathy. Rather, he feared dividing the Connexion and diverting its energies from the immense task of raising the Centenary Fund. Beet only agreed with extreme reluctance and out of loyalty to an old friend whose personal support he valued. 'Equivocation is utterly alien to me..the chief blame rests with those who created the difficulty' recorded Beet³². It is clear Beet was unhappy with the situation, and it is noteworthy that at least one critic accused Beet of moral cowardice in giving way at this stage³³. At Conference in 1898, the resolutions of his Synod and the General Committee of the Theological Institution were read. Conference confirmed its acceptance of Beet's undertaking that he would not publish another edition of his book, nor would he teach his views in the Lecture Room or pulpit. Beet certainly seems to have been loyal to this promise, emphasising in his lectures that 'in the Bible we have no hint that the conscious existence of body and soul will ever cease', and emphasising his own uncertainty about the construction of 'destruction' in the New Testament. 'Destruction does not mean annihilation, but utter ruin with or without annihilation'. In the classroom Beet was painstakingly cautious, behaviour which

³⁰ For Watkinson's views, see the unpublished paper on the pastoral session of 1902 Conference by W. H. Oliver Lake, 'The Last Heresy Trial in the Wesleyan Conference, described after 50 years by an eyewitness (paper in private possession of Mrs M. Beet), p7. J. R. Gregory, *The Theological Student*, (1896), pp 241, 252, 263. In respect of children, Gregory actually went beyond what Beet was prepared to say in terms of definiteness. Compare *LT*, p17.

³¹ Randles, p9, p19, talks of 'justice as an end in itself' and asserts, 'justice or righteousness are necessary attributes which may have their own ends as distinct from those of love.

³² For Hughes' motives and his own 'equivocation', see Beet's letter to *MT*, 9 May 1902.

³³ *Preachers' Magazine*, Nov 1901. 'he returns to the contest from which he retired, neither very wisely nor very courageously, a few years ago'.

accorded both with his deep reverence for Scripture and with his sense of responsibility as a Wesleyan theologian³⁴.

Beet's undertaking about publication was to be the subject of controversy in 1901-2, when he wrote his *Immortality of the Soul*, a book that went over much of the same ground as *The Last Things* thereby reopening the arguments of 1897-8. In response to accusations that he had broken his pledge of 1898 concerning republication, he argued that he was only bound by the strict grammatical sense of the 1898 promise, viz- not to republish *The Last Things*. He argued that he was not precluded from writing another book on the same general theme. Many, however, regarded this as a clear breach of the commonly accepted understanding of his promise at the time³⁵.

Why did Beet, who must have been aware of the delicacy of such matters, decide to raise them in 1897 and again in 1901-2? He argued throughout the controversy that his actions were motivated by pastoral concern and that his views merely reflected a silent but unacknowledged trend that had developed within Methodism. He argued that the existing Wesleyan catechisms, revised twenty years beforehand, were silent on the details of eternal punishment³⁶. He contended, with some justification, that belief in eternal punishment was not as central to Wesleyan theology as had been claimed. Wesley had omitted his two main sermons on the matter from the Collection of 53 that was meant to be standard for ministers and local preachers. Others supported Beet in claiming that Methodism never had taken a fundamentalist view of Wesley's teaching; baptismal regeneration was a Wesleyan teaching but one with which late nineteenth-century Wesleyanism had no truck. Beet's most telling point, however was that opinion had changed and that modern consciousness found the old doctrine difficult to accept. The change had, however, largely been swept under the carpet, and a restatement of belief was necessary if Methodism was to be honest to itself. Beet claimed to have evidence of many ministers whose consciences were worried by their commitment to believe in something they could no longer accept, let alone preach. He put it thus,

³⁴ Conference acceptance of Beet's pledge 1898. *Conference Journal*, 1898, p32. For evidence of Beet's teaching, see the MSS lecture notes in the Rylands Library, pp223ff. These are undated, and one cannot be sure whether they predate the 1897-8 controversy, but they do give an insight into his actual classroom teaching.

³⁵ *Methodist Weekly* 26 July 1902. Watkinson accused Beet of 'violation of a solemn compact with the Conference' and 'Jesuitry in interpretation'.

³⁶ *MT* 8 May 1902.

This change of opinion has been carefully ignored. Many scholarly and godly ministers have raised doubts in silence, until the need for silence became an humiliating bondage. In some cases, men have dared not to think...of all this I have abundant and pathetic proof, some of which I am able to produce³⁷.

Beet believed that someone with the necessary scholarship had to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy on eternal punishment and so free those who conscientiously wished to be good Methodists, while repudiating unnecessarily harsh doctrines, from the incubus of their situation. He wanted moreover, to do so in a manner that preserved the essentials of the Wesleyan witness to the necessity of holiness and the awfulness of sin. He was determined, as befitted a theologian of sanctification, to safeguard its centrality³⁸.

He also believed that he was fighting for free speech and open discussion of issues. His honest soul abhorred any brushing of awkward questions under the carpet, 'This is a scandal, a great scandal, because we are pretending to believe what we no longer believe'. His logical soul abhorred the theological vacuum that he felt existed in Methodism as the old teaching died without any clear replacement. One can argue that his approach was a highly responsible one. Moreover, it was one that aimed to preserve the essence of the old teaching on the awful seriousness of decision for or against Christ, and to do so in a manner which made its continued emphasis and acceptance in the Church more likely.

There is, however, also evidence of a non-theological factor in the situation, of tension between Beet and the hierarchy of Methodism. Beet referred to some of his opponents as 'administrators' who, for all their technical skill, were out of touch with the changing ethos in the Connexion. He added, no doubt woundingly, 'Of course, the real attitude of my opponents is that if they can stop me, they will terrify everybody else'. There was also an element of political antagonism about the quarrel. He referred to the elderly conservatives, 'who follow Salisbury's line on the Education Bill, even though there has been a 3-1 vote against it in the Conference.' Beet seems, in the main, to have been an apolitical animal, but, clearly, his sympathies, at least on the contemporary education question, were on the side of the liberal majority in Methodism.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Beet also uttered very similar sentiments on the republication of LT in 1905. See *Richmond and Twickenham Herald* obituary, 31 May 1924, quoting an earlier interview with the *Daily News* in 1905.

³⁸ *Holiness*, op cit, ch 8, pp77-8. See also his sentiments on such matters as remembered by former students. *WM Mag*, 1924, pp593-4.

Beet's distrust of the instincts of the more conservative members of the Wesleyan hierarchy seems to have been paralleled by a degree of distrust, on their part, of his reliability as a connexional team player; he was altogether rather dangerously independently minded.³⁹

Not everyone accepted Beet's bona fides. Some felt that in withdrawing one book and publishing another, technically different, but essentially the same, he had been guilty of sharp practice. One correspondent deplored what he regarded as Beet's intellectually arrogant attitude⁴⁰. Some felt he was arrogantly setting himself up against the collective *esprit de corps* of the ministry. W. H. Holburn argued that Beet's allegation that many of his fellow ministers had ceased to believe in 'eternal' punishment was more serious than his original 'heresy'. An outside observer later felt that, in the controversy, Beet had failed to emphasise sufficiently 'the solemn and salutary nature' of his teaching, thereby missing an important trick⁴¹.

Out of this second controversy came a proposal, emanating from the Committee of the Theological Institution, not to reappoint Beet to his post at Richmond. Beet was apparently not appraised of this until he read the report of the appropriate committee in the *Methodist Recorder*. Not surprisingly, he was stung by this and corresponded not just with the Methodist, but also with the secular press, most notably the *Daily Telegraph*, and that of some other churches, a move that some Wesleyans considered highly improper, since the matter

³⁹ Beet's interview with *South Wales Daily News*, 14 May 1902. He refers to people 'groping about helplessly in search of a safe place in which they could rest' also *Christian World* 1 May 1902, which quoted Beet as saying 'My good faith is shown by my imperilling my own position' (ie at Richmond). The reference to those who 'follow Salisbury's line' etc is in the context of contemporary controversy over educational legislation. Only a minority of Wesleyans, however, dissented from the general Free Church line of strong opposition to the Education Bill and it is to this minority that Beet was referring. For the last statement about Beet's reliability, see the review by Nehemiah Curnock of the 1905 edition of his *Last Things*, 29 Sept 1905, in which Curnock refers to the fact that in 1885, he had voted against Beet's appointment to Richmond on the grounds that his cast of mind was too speculative and independent, and that he was not, therefore, a suitable person to form future ministers.

⁴⁰ James Rowe in *MR* 19 June 1902.

⁴¹ *MT* 29 May 1902.

⁴² *MT* 5 Aug 1902. See also J. Richards in *MT* 29 May 1902. 'Is such a step as that (ie condemning traditional Wesleyan teaching) not rather too bold for a Wesleyan minister to take at his own discretion and by his own judgement? An independent minister could do this, but not a Wesleyan'. This sums up, as neatly as anything, the widespread contemporary conviction about the behaviour of Wesleyan ministers in such a situation.

was still *sub judice* as far as the Conference was concerned. No doubt it was also felt to be an offence against the whole ethos of the brotherhood of the Wesleyan ministry⁴².

A prominent member of the Committee defended its action. He pointed out that it was not penal, and that no Wesleyan minister, whatever his opinions or record in his current sphere of labour had any 'right', *per se*, to renomination. However, this overlooked his own statement, no doubt regarded by Beet as a 'give away', to the effect that it would deprive him of 'further honour and influence, by means of which he would propagate beliefs which many of us hold to be false and pernicious'⁴³.

It is interesting to note the extent to which this became a *cause célèbre*. At least one Indian and one American Christian paper commented on it⁴⁴. Beet had plenty of supporters in other churches. These included the Bishop of Derry, the Baptist John Clifford, the reformer, Josephine Butler and Dean Farrar. The Bishop felt the Conference should discriminate carefully between legitimate diversity of opinion and real heresy that harmed the faithful; he was convinced Beet was innocent of the latter. Clifford thought persecution would only spread Beet's ideas more widely. Quite a few seem to have taken this view⁴⁵. Many dissociated themselves from Beet's exact views, while arguing that his departure from Richmond would penalise one of the best Biblical scholars in the country. It was pointed out that other churches had dealt more leniently with their heretics eg. the Free Church of Scotland with G. Adam Smith. Interestingly, the American Methodist *Christian Advocate* took a strongly negative line, once the final decision of the 1902 Conference became known. It believed the Conference had been inconsistent. It accused it of 'dangerous opportunism' in not requiring Beet to retract his opinions as such, and alleged that there was no precedent elsewhere in world Methodism for such a fudge⁴⁶.

To return to the Conference. The whole matter duly came before it. The Representative Session voted narrowly in favour of not reappointing Beet, but left the final decision to be taken by the Pastoral session which, after a long debate, voted to reinstate him. The arguments given in the Representative Session throw interesting light on the views of contemporary Wesleyan Methodism on the

⁴³ MT 29 May 1902. Some conservatives thought, by contrast, that Beet had been extremely leniently dealt with. See eg. *The Echo* 13 May 1902.

⁴⁴ *Indian Witness*, 24 Oct 1901; *Christian Advocate*, 4 Sept 1902 *et al.*

⁴⁵ *Christian Commonwealth*. 7 Aug 1902.

⁴⁶ *Christian Advocate*, 4/11 Sept 1902.

question of orthodoxy, and in particular, that required of ministers in college appointments.

Hugh Price Hughes led for the defence, so to speak. He deprecated Beet's raising of such questions, though he accepted the pastoral motive behind his action, and stated his personal empathy with those who had difficulties with the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment. He stressed the moderation of Beet's views and their tentativeness. Beet was not a universalist, or even a believer in conditional immortality; it was merely a matter of his refusing to dogmatise on the question of the eternal consciousness of the lost. According to Hughes even the highly conservative Dr Osborn had refused to dogmatise on such questions. Hughes argued that the substantive question of Beet's loyalty to Wesleyan doctrine had already been settled in his Synod, and that there was no need to take the question any further. To fail to reappoint Beet would be to impose on him a penalty only short of actual expulsion from the ministry. To reappoint him would signify tolerance but not necessary approval of his views, which, in any case, he did not claim the right to teach 'ex cathedra', but only to hold as his own opinions. Beet had been loyal to his pledge not to teach his views in the classroom. Beet, himself, regarded the key issue as being whether ministers should have liberty to disagree on minor points of doctrine. Hughes also made the telling point that Beet's intentions were to remain within the mainstream of traditional Methodist teaching. No-one, he maintained, was clearer on divine displeasure at sin than Dr Beet. Hughes' general line was supported by the veteran W. F. Slater. He argued that the retention of Beet in the Richmond Chair would not commit the Connexion to all of his teaching, whereas his replacement would signify the commitment of Methodism to a rigid doctrinal stance that Slater regarded as contrary to the overall spirit of Wesley.

Inevitably, Watkinson and Randles dissented. The former was needled by Beet's attacks on his conduct in the original crisis during his presidential year. He regarded Beet's accusation that he had been 'judge and jury' as an 'odious imputation'. He accused Beet of 'violating' his 'distinct and solemn' compact with the Conference of 1898. Randles saw the crisis as the most serious in his ministry, and the reinstatement of Beet as likely to lead to a flood of doctrinal challenges⁴⁷.

It is clear that substantial numbers of laymen as well as ministers

⁴⁷ MR. 31 July 1902; MW 26 July 1902.

were unhappy with the situation. The *Recorder* implied that it had received far more letters opposed to Beet's stance than in favour of it. Wesleyan conservatism was still very much alive. Two laymen argued that they had a right to expect Methodist doctrine from Methodist pulpits and that Beet had overstepped the mark. When the debate was closed, the vote on the Richmond Chair was taken. Lockyer got 238 votes, Beet 228, Platt 13 and Isaiah Parker 1⁴⁸. Outsiders had expected trouble as a result of Beet's *Immortality*. In October 1901, the *Christian World* commented that eschatology was no longer what it had been; that 'increased human sensitivity and improved exegesis' had changed the atmosphere, even if 'the doctrine of eternal punishment is still preached, perhaps more than most people still imagine'. However, it also commented, 'his Wesleyan brethren will..for the most part, not read his latest book with equanimity'⁴⁹.

The final decision, however, was a modified triumph for Beet. The Pastoral Session reversed the vote and reinstated Beet in his Chair by 329 votes to 235 and 3, respectively, for the other two candidates. It was recommended that 'in view of the dread solemnity and admitted mystery of the subject, and the necessity of allowing some freedom on it, and out of regard for the general fidelity of Dr Beet to our general system of Doctrine, that the Conference will take no further action on condition that Dr Beet will not teach in our pulpits the doctrine of his book'. Beet also offered two other conditions, that he would not publish again on the subject without the approval of the Conference and that he would not teach his particular views in his classes. There the matter was allowed to rest⁵⁰.

The overall result was, in a very real sense, a draw. Beet had been rapped over the knuckles in that the Conference had also recorded his use of 'unguarded language' and that he had given teaching that 'falls short of and contravenes the doctrines universally held and taught in our Church'. (The use of the word 'universally' was challenged by some in the Pastoral session). On the other hand, the essential faithfulness of Beet to Methodism had been vindicated. The highly nuanced statement about the 'admitted mystery of the subject and the necessity of allowing some freedom of opinion upon it' went

⁴⁸ MR. 31 July 1902. Randles saw this as the biggest issue of his career, *MW* 26 July 1902.

⁴⁹ *Christian World*, 10 Oct 1901.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Hughes, D. *Life of Hugh Price Hughes*, (1904) pp602-3; also in the Journals of the Conference, 1902 p87.

a long way towards conceding Beet's case for reverent agnosticism on it.

The debate in the Pastoral Session was held in camera, and only the bare bones of its decisions communicated to the Press. An eyewitness account, typed up fifty years later from notes taken at the time by the Rev. W. H. Oliver Lake, survives. It reveals an extremely passionate pastoral session, described by one minister as the most extraordinary Conference he had ever been to⁵¹. The President was clearly anxious from the beginning that decorum might fall below the acceptable standard, and, indeed, he had repeatedly to appeal for order. There was uproar when Hugh Price Hughes referred slightly to Marshall Randles's writings. There was also wrangling when Hughes suggested that Beet should not publish in future except with the agreement of the other Richmond tutors. Beet seems to have given a rather curious reply to this proposal, saying first that he could not accept such a limitation, but then, a little later, proposing he should only publish with the agreement of the Conference, a proposal that was accepted unanimously⁵². Hughes, to whose guidance many younger ministers looked, played the decisive role in obtaining the reversal of the vote from the Representative session. Political considerations weighed heavily with Hughes. He was aware of the changing atmosphere in Methodism. He feared the effect on liberal opinion outside the Connexion and believed that the prestige of Methodism would be damaged if it sacrificed a scholar of Beet's calibre⁵³.

Lake points out that Wilson who brought the charge against Beet was an ardent evangelist of the old school, to whom the threat of hell was an essential part of his armoury. He and others felt Beet's teaching threatened their evangelistic approach.⁵⁴

Writing between the two votes, when it temporarily appeared that Beet had lost his Chair by the narrowest of margins, the *Methodist Weekly* commented that the matter had ended in an honourable draw. The Conservative faction had won a narrow victory, but the margin meant that the more liberal element could not fear a backlash. On the other hand, 'the party of tolerance must see that they are a large one but that they must be modest and tolerant and make haste slowly'⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Lake, W. H. Oliver, op cit.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Hughes, op cit, pp 601-5.

⁵⁴ Lake, op cit.

⁵⁵ MW 26 July.1902.

That attitudes were changing in Methodism, and Beet's essential point was being recognised, is clear from a short book written by George Jackson in 1903. Jackson wanted to show that biblical criticism, of a particular type, deeply distrusted by such veterans as Benjamin Gregory, was fully compatible with the traditional Methodist emphasis on the supreme authority of Scripture. He also alluded to shifting emphases in eschatology:

that we have been greatly influenced by the general modification of belief it is impossible to deny, though how far the change has gone it is impossible to say...So far as I am able to judge, dogmatic universalism has no place amongst us. A few, especially since Beet, are looking to conditional immortality. But the overwhelming majority have come to no definite conclusion. I am told that the late Dr Moulton, (who held an unrivalled position in Methodism as a saintly scholar) was wont in private, to describe his attitude as 'reverent agnosticism'. This phrase describes multitudes of the younger brethren today.

They can't accept Universal restoration or conditional immortality.. they are resolved to be loyal to the New Testament and do not find them there. They dare not speak as did their fathers of the doom of the lost, for they find no warrant in the words of Christ or the apostles. Therefore, they are agnostics. Yet this does not mean that they doubt the reality of future penalty, or are silent concerning it. Their aim is to be loyal to Christ. Christ warned of the consequences of sin and they do so⁵⁶.

Jackson's words seem to sum up the changing atmosphere in Methodism to which Beet was trying to respond. Jackson was himself to be the subject of controversy in 1913, managing to shake off his opponents more easily than had Beet a decade earlier, this in itself being testimony to the speed with which the predominant Methodist consensus was changing⁵⁷. Beet had more faithfully reflected the developing mind of the Church than his adversaries. He had provided a basis for eschatological thought that preserved the Wesleyan concern to take both the Bible and the possible consequences of sin with as due a solemnity as they had ever been taken, while arguing that there were reasons to shift from the harsh certainties of the old tradition. He had been very careful not to endorse popular theories such as annihilationism or universalism, since he realised the weakness of the biblical case for them. As recently as 1990 the Methodist Faith and Order Committee looked at

⁵⁶ Jackson, G. *The Old Methodism and the New*, London, (1903).

⁵⁷ Bebbington, D. W. 'The Persecution of George Jackson - a British Fundamentalist Controversy', in W. J. Shiels (ed) *Persecution and Toleration* (Studies in Church History, 21), (1984).

these issues again and came up with a statement that would not have displeased Beet.

In 1904 Beet decided he could not hold back from reissuing *The Last Things* in a second edition. He hoped that the Conference would agree to republication, but he found considerable opposition. This convinced him that he must resign the Chair at Richmond. He did so and the Conference released him from his promises about publication.

Beet felt that his opponents had been unable to answer his theses. He accepted that it was reasonable to inhibit him from preaching views that remained controversial in the Connexion, but he believed that theologians were bound, in the interests of the whole Church, to publish; only thus, could the Church advance in its understanding of the truth and make progress. He argued,

Our only safety, in this age of transition, is an unreserved straightforwardness as to both what we believe and do not believe.

It is utterly vain to try, in these days of intelligent research, to defend the faith by suppressing contrary opinion. The apostolic direction is, 'Test all things: hold fast the good'.

Beet also believed that a restrictive regime for Methodist theological teachers would deprive the Church of its best servants. He had felt the pain and humiliation of the past eight years and the compromises to which he had been forced to submit. He clearly thought others would be less accommodating. 'To such humiliation the best teachers will not submit, and their submission would make progressive theological thought impossible'⁵⁸.

In the course of the crisis most, on both sides of the debate, lost sight of the wider achievements of Beet's eschatology. He was concerned to present a total eschatological vision that should inspire and encourage the Church in its earthly pilgrimage. He gave one of the most lucidly integrated interpretations of the Second Coming and the Apocatastasis that have ever been presented. It warrants our claiming Beet as one of the great succession of theologian-visionaries of the Consummation, standing in the same line as St John the Divine, St Gregory of Nyssa, and, alongside Beet in modern times, Teilhard de Chardin. Beet took as his key texts, 1 Cor 1 v7 and 2 Thess 1 v 7, and treated the 'revelation' of Jesus Christ as referring to the manifestation of his final eschatological significance in terms of the inauguration of the 'new heaven and new earth'.

⁵⁸ *LT* (1905 edn), pp xiv, xv.

In his vision of the new heaven and new earth, Beet integrated insights from Trinitarian theology and his understanding of contemporary science, a subject that had always interested him. He argued that the teaching of the New Testament concerning the destined supersession of the present physical order is confirmed by modern science. He also argued that it was appropriate that it should pass away, since, in the present order 'matter fetters mind in a thousand ways' in a manner that was incompatible with God's design that the bodies of intelligent beings should be controlled entirely by their minds.

Beet saw the inauguration of the final order as the consummation of the salvific work initiated in the Incarnation. He argued that 'the Incarnation brought to matter a new and infinite dignity'. In the resurrection, Christ took 'a handful of dust' from earth to heaven. Nevertheless, the victory of Easter is incomplete. In its fullness, it transforms only Christ, though in those who receive Him, He at once rescues through the Spirit, in some measure, from bondage...but only partially, since, as Paul teaches, we continue to groan in bondage (Rom 8 vv19-23). It will only be when Christ returns and all the redeemed receive the spiritual bodies described in 1 Cor 15, that the work of redemption, and the final purposes of God will be fulfilled. Beet maintains a reverent agnosticism as to the exact nature of this ineffable mystery, but he does assert that it essentially represents the 'bursting in upon His Universe, of the great Invisible, beyond and above it, that the Invisible may transform and glorify the visible'. In the lyricism of his eschatological vision, the austerity of the lucid and rational theologian of holiness melts into a doxological awe⁵⁹.

Even in 1905 Beet had partisans keen to renominate him to his Richmond chair, though others made it clear that the Conference was not, in view of Beet's pledge of 1902, 'to be trifled with'. Beet, himself, wanted no further trouble and promptly resigned from Richmond⁶⁰. He recorded his great sense of relief that he was now free to propagate his views in an unfettered way. Possibly, after all the developments, he felt sure that history would vindicate his stance. At the time of the Downgrade controversy, prior to his own notoriety, he had apparently observed that the views of the once persecuted Anglican, Bishop Colenso, had won increasing acceptance in the churches.

⁵⁹ *LT*, Lecture 9, pp103-113.

⁶⁰ eg. Rev. James Lewis rose to nominate Beet again. 'The Conference could not afford to lose such a mind as Dr Beet's' 'They are bound to give some liberty of speculation'. *MR* 27 July 1905.

In fact the tide of events was considerably more rapid than ever Beet might have conceived, even in 1905. Considering the storm that had arisen around him, he was, in fact, rather rapidly forgotten. In 1924, when Beet died, George Jackson recorded that his books were rarely to be seen except on the shelves of his former students or in second-hand bookshops⁶¹. His relegation to oblivion was, in part, a sign of the very rapid change that came over Wesleyan Methodism at this time. Wesleyan Methodism had advanced to a degree of general liberalism rather beyond that at which Beet had aimed.

In terms of Methodist history, the significance of the Beet crisis of 1897-1905 is that it illuminates the transition from a relatively isolated and self-contained Wesleyan Methodism to a more liberal Wesleyanism, more at home with contemporary theological development, closer in ethos to the rest of Methodism and the other Free Churches, and therefore riper for the union of 1932.

In conclusion, I see Beet as a highly responsible theologian, an exemplar of that 'generous orthodoxy' which Geoffrey Wainwright sees as central to the Wesleyan theological tradition. He aimed simultaneously to preserve the deposit of faith in dialogue with the concerns of his day. He was, arguably, a wiser conservative than his more reactionary detractors. In an ecumenical age, when we seek to be faithful in creative and fruitful reinterpretation of the apostolic tradition, we should be proud of him. He should be remembered and his thought reappropriated in dialogue with the insights of this generation, an approach with which, I venture to argue, he would have been in profound sympathy.

DAVID CARTER

Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of Mrs M. Beet and Mr Tony Beet in granting me access to valuable materials in their private possession relating to Beet's life and especially, to the eschatological controversy. I acknowledge help and encouragement from Rev. J. Munsey Turner and Dr Dorothy Graham. I dedicate this lecture to the memory of the late Dr. John Gibbs of Penarth in gratitude for innumerable acts of kindness and encouragement so generously given over the last thirty five years by himself, his wife Sheila, and other members of his family.

⁶¹ *Richmond Times*, 29 May 1924. Jackson in *Manchester Guardian*, 4 June 1924.

CONVERSION AMONGST FEMALE METHODISTS, 1825-75

The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* of 1850 contains an account of Hannah Wright, a servant in Alkborough, Lincolnshire, who in 1827 was influenced by Primitive Methodist preaching. She was invited to a prayer meeting by friends but was unable to go as she had to look after the house for her master and mistress. As the meeting was nearby, however, she could hear it, and whilst a friend was praying for her 'the power of God smote her to the ground'. She was still there at the time the family returned, when she got up and explained that all her sins were now forgiven.¹

This unusually dramatic example of conversion contains several of the elements commonly found in such accounts. Hannah had listened to preaching, and was starting to think about responding. She was converted on a specific occasion, and her experience involved the realisation both of sin, and of forgiveness. Wider questions are raised by this and other accounts of female conversion. Was the nature of it usually sudden or gradual? To what extent was female conversion different from male conversion? How far was their experience shaped by the denomination they were a part of, and were other factors involved?

In an attempt to add to our understanding of female conversion, I have studied a number of obituaries from denominational magazines. Sixty Wesleyan Methodist, and sixty Primitive Methodist accounts were used, from the *Methodist Magazine* and the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* respectively, half from 1850 and half from 1870, to provide some variation over time. These have been compared with a similar number of male obituaries, and with examples from Congregational and Baptist churches. Thus it was possible to make some assessments as to the various influences on female conversion, and especially how much was due to gender, and how much to denominational influence.

Although there are potential problems in the use of obituaries they are a valuable source in the study of conversion. One of the disadvantages is that they were mostly written by men. Another is their tendency to be stereotypical, and to use standard phrases to

This article is taken from material in 'Female spirituality amongst Nonconformists, 1825-75', unpublished PhD thesis, Wilson, L., Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Further Education (through Bristol University), 1997.

¹ *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, (hereafter referred to as PMM) 1850, p. 124.

portray an ideal life and death. Women's own voices can be heard through them, however, in diaries, reported speech, and the words of their friends who compiled the accounts. Despite their limitations, they provide insight into the lives of women who would otherwise remain completely unknown. Not all accounts are stereotypes, and even those which are can be useful. Other historians have recognised their value. James Obelkevich, Kenneth Brown, David Bebbington, and Michael Watts,² have all used them for studies of conversion. An investigation of obituaries can therefore be valuable in gaining understanding of female spirituality.³

A large percentage of the obituaries studied contained a reference to, and on occasions a narrative of, an individual's conversion experience. Eighty-eight per cent of female Wesleyan Methodist accounts, and 98% of Primitive ones, contained such a reference. These extremely high percentages demonstrate the vital place of this experience in women's lives. Comparison with the Baptist and Congregational samples reveals that although still prominent in those denominations, at 68% and 65% respectively, the experience was not quite so significant as within Methodism. Male accounts show slightly lower percentages, 83% in the Wesleyan, 92% in the Primitive Methodists, and 57% and 53% respectively in the Baptist and Congregational equivalents. Although fewer conversion accounts were recorded for men, the substantial variation between denominations highlights that the influences of the latter were stronger than gender differences.

Virginia Lieson Brereton has investigated accounts of female conversion in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, and her work makes a useful point of comparison with English women.⁴ Brereton suggested that the process consisted of five stages: a woman's previous life; the development of an awareness of sinfulness; the event itself when the sense of guilt was lifted and the

² Obelkevich, J., *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-75*, (1976), p. 2ff. Brown, K. D., *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800-1930*, (1988), pp. 49-55. Bebbington, D., *Evangelical Conversion c.1740-1850*, North Atlantic Missiology Project, Position Paper No. 21, 1997. Watts, M., *The Dissenters*, Vol 2, (1995), pp. 56-80.

³ For a more detailed investigation of the use of obituaries for women's history, see Wilson, L., 'Nonconformist obituaries: how stereotyped was their view of women?' in Hogan, A., and Bradstock, A., *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing 'The Angel in the House'* (in press, 1998).

⁴ Brereton, V. L., *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present*, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1991).

subject knew or hoped that she was saved; changes as a result; and lastly an account of low periods and the renewal of commitment at a later stage.⁵ Her analysis thus constructed the whole of a woman's spiritual experience, except the deathbed, as part of a conversion narrative. An alternative view is to regard it as one stage in a life story. Obelkevich, discussing Primitive Methodist obituaries, suggested this when he argued that members were expected to have a spiritual career, consisting of conversion, 'entire sanctification' and a pious death.⁶ This analysis put equal emphasis on later events, rather than making regeneration the sole focal point. Although it played a major part in women's spirituality, it was only the beginning, and Brereton's scheme tends to be biased in favour of all spirituality being centred on one aspect. Given this qualification, it is still a useful tool for the purpose of analysis.

The obituary of Elizabeth Batty of Barnsley illustrates the first three stages suggested by Brereton. She was already teaching at a Primitive Methodist Sunday school when in 1829 she became 'convinced... of her guilt and danger; she sought the Lord in tears, and by prayer and faith; and he filled her soul with joy unspeakable'.⁷ Her previous life was mentioned, and she experienced a sense of sin which caused her to seek for salvation, leading to the third part of the process, an encounter with God. In just a few lines, a major change is encapsulated. Another example demonstrates four out of the five stages. In 1849, at the age of fourteen, Elizabeth Follows was converted in her home town of Barnstaple as a result of a sermon preached by Samuel Beard. She had been brought up in a Wesleyan home, where her father's teaching had strongly influenced her, but it was this sermon which 'produced deep convictions of sinfulness, and led her to the Lord Jesus for pardon and eternal life'. After her conversion, she joined a Wesleyan Methodist class and 'steadily grew in grace'.⁸ Her previous life, an awareness of sin, and the conversion event were followed by progress in her Christian life. These are just a few of many examples in which the stages can be identified. This article deals mainly with the second and third stages, the awareness of sin and the experience of conversion.

Brereton's second stage, realisation of personal sin, was an essential feature of new birth. Boyd Hilton referred to depravity as

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ Obelkevich, J., *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-75*, (1976) p. 230.

⁷ *PMM*, 1850, p. 125.

⁸ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, (hereafter referred to as *WMM*) 1870, p. 761.

integral to the evangelical world view and Bebbington noted that an awareness of guilt was part of the conversion process.⁹ People who had no understanding of their own sin would not see the need for salvation. This realisation of guilt could be quite emotional within the Methodist tradition. When Margaret Dargue, for instance, attended a Wesleyan church in Barnard Castle in 1825, she recalled that 'I could do little else than weep and pray, pray and weep, during the time of worship, and thought that of all persons I was the most miserable'.¹⁰ This was a deeply felt experience, and by no means unique: thirty per cent of Primitive Methodist and twenty-seven per cent of Wesleyan Methodist accounts include allusions to a sense of guilt.

This link between realisation of sin and conversion decreased over time in the Primitive connexion but not within Wesleyanism. A comparison with men complicates the situation rather than shedding light on it. Whilst the explanations behind these figures is not always clear, they do show that there was no consistently gender-based experience of guilt or non-guilt, but there was variety both within the denominations and across the period.

Conviction of sin, and conversion itself, Brereton's third stage, were often provoked by specific catalysts. Watts has suggested that these triggers included family influence, Sunday schools, and the fear of hell.¹¹ By contrast, Bebbington found that sermons were the most frequent stimulus to the great change.¹² The catalysts affecting the women in this study can be divided into five categories: preaching, the influence of family and friends, experience of illness and bereavement, the Bible, and other miscellaneous items. Several accounts mentioned a combination of influences, as in the case of Elizabeth Saunders, who died at Cawsand, in the Devonport Wesleyan circuit in 1834. She was spurred on to seek God by illness and bereavement, was convicted of sin through a sermon, and found salvation in a Wesleyan prayer meeting.¹³ Three different triggers were involved in her journey to faith.

Obelkevich noted that within Wesleyan Methodism in South Lindsey, the preachers aimed for conversion.¹⁴ Analysis of the obituaries demonstrates that, as in Bebbington's sample, more

⁹ Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p. 8, and Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *WMM*, 1871, p. 477.

¹¹ Watts, *Dissenters*, 2, pp. 56, 58-64, 78-80.

¹² Bebbington, *Evangelical Conversion*, p. 12.

¹³ *WMM*, 1850, p. 92.

¹⁴ Obelkevich, *Religion*, p. 187.

women were converted through sermons than by other means. By far the largest number of references to conversion through preaching were within Primitive Methodism, where in 77% of the accounts it was a major factor. Some women were affected when Primitive preachers first came to a neighbourhood. For instance Mary Bandy was converted at Padbury, in the Buckingham area, around 1838, 'under the ministry of brothers Steel and Agnew, the first Primitive Methodist missionaries who visited that locality'.¹⁵ Some came to a change of heart through a specific sermon, others by exposure to preaching over a period of time. Sarah Bullock was converted in Bollington, Cheshire, about 1864 where she heard a sermon which caused her to feel she was a sinner. She immediately 'sought and obtained redemption'.¹⁶ In her case two stages of the process took place on one occasion. Another teenager, Caroline Wordsworth, born in 1820, was converted in Leeds through 'attending the religious services conducted by Ann Carr', a preacher who later left the Primitives and formed the Female Revivalists.¹⁷ Here the process took longer, as chapel attendance had an effect over a period of time, but in both cases preaching was the main instrument involved.

Several accounts of Primitive Methodist conversions mentioned that women had already attended other churches or chapels, but either did not understand the gospel, or did not respond to it, until they heard the Primitive preachers. This in itself implies that a definite experience was being aimed at. The nature of Primitive preaching was probably part of the reason for the number of converts gained through it. Werner commented that in the early stages it often consisted of a simple gospel appeal.¹⁸ The message was more single-mindedly aimed at conversion than in other churches, and the numbers who attributed their experience to sermons indicates that this was in some measure a successful tactic.

More women than men were recorded as having been converted through preaching. This is most noticeable in Primitive Methodism, where only 52% of men were convicted or converted through preaching compared with 77% of women, but is also true in Wesleyan Methodism, where 38% women were converted through preaching, but only 30% men. Similar differences appeared when Congregational and Baptist were analysed. One possible

¹⁵ *PMM*, 1850, p. 61.

¹⁶ *PMM*, 1870, p. 180.

¹⁷ *PMM*, 1870, p. 428. Dews, D. C., 'Ann Carr and the Female Revivalists of Leeds', in Malmgreen, G., *Religion in the Lives of English Women*, (1986.)

¹⁸ Werner, J., *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (Madison, Wisconsin, 1984) p. 150.

explanation is that women were more easily influenced by male preachers, but there is little evidence to substantiate this. In Primitive Methodism (where sometimes the preachers were female) it could also be argued that the more emotional nature of the preaching was especially suited to eliciting a female response. Another possible reason is that Primitive preaching was aimed more directly at conversion. Whatever the explanation, the tendency is clear.

Watts has suggested that the influence of the family, and especially of mothers, was instrumental in shaping the direction of many lives, and often led to conversion.¹⁹ In this analysis the directly attributable influence of family and friends was the second most frequent stimulus to female conversion, occurring in a total of 10% of cases. Seven per cent of Baptist, 13% of Congregationalist, 15% of Primitive Methodist, and 3% of Wesleyan Methodist obituaries noted such a trigger. When it came to family influence, men were more responsive than women: 19% of men were converted through family and friends compared to 10% of women. The difference was most marked in Wesleyanism, where for 23% of men friends and family provided a catalyst, compared with only 3% of women. This category included both parents, other relatives such as a brother, cousin, or aunt, wives, and friends, or the family that a man lodged with. Although by no means all of those involved were women, this male tendency to be influenced by family members does seem to support the idea that families provided a strong positive influence over men, and women were at least to some extent the spiritual backbone of families. Watts has suggested that the expansion of Nonconformity in the early years of the century was largely due to such female influence.²⁰ It was taught as an ideal by several people, amongst others Sarah Ellis, through her books such as *Women of England*, and John Angell James, in his series of sermons on female piety.²¹ It was also found outside the church, for instance in Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House', and the writings of John Ruskin. These findings suggest such teachings were reflected in reality. Here is an instance where ideas other than those within the connexions influenced the conversion experience.

The majority of Methodist conversions were sudden, in the sense that they apparently occurred at a specific point in time, even if it took months or years to lead up to it. Ninety-three per cent of female

¹⁹ Watts *Dissenters*, 2, pp. 53-56.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 54.

²¹ Ellis, S., *Women of England*, (1839) p. 53. James, J., A., *Female Piety*, (1852) p. 56.

Primitive obituaries referred to a crisis conversion, and only 2% were gradual, leaving the rest unclear or unrecorded. At 75% the Wesleyan Methodists were not far behind. By contrast, a large percentage of Old Dissent appeared to have had gradual conversions: only 35% of Congregationalists and 28% of Baptists were recorded as having a dateable experience. As one Baptist teenager told her elders when applying for membership: 'I do not know when I was converted or if I ever was'.²² Often baptism or joining the church were recorded as the significant events rather than conversion. This was clearly a denominational matter, probably to do with the nature of preaching in the different churches.

At what age did these Methodist women experience conversion? Patricia Crawford has noted that for women in the period 1500-1720 it usually took place during adolescence.²³ Watts found that half of his sample was converted between the ages of fourteen and twenty, and nearly 75% before the age of twenty-six.²⁴ Bebbington's analysis from a different denominational background produced similar results. Thus in the nineteenth century, too, the majority of conversions were during or just after adolescence. In this study, also, the majority of women for whom evidence was available were converted between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. Thirty-seven per cent of Primitive Methodists and 42% of Wesleyan Methodists from the female samples were converted during those ten years. A significant minority, 30% of the Wesleyans and 20% of the Primitives, made a commitment even earlier, in late childhood or early teens. The figures for the Primitives are surprising in view of Obelkevich's study which suggested that female Primitives were generally converted later, especially in the earlier part of the century.²⁵ A possible explanation is that some of the women, at least, appear to have been linked with a Primitive Sunday school. Primitive Methodist ages at conversion were, however, more widely spread than in Wesleyanism, including middle age, and in this respect, this study mirrors Obelkevich's.

A study of male conversion indicates that the pattern of youthful conversion was common to both sexes. Here there was a peak in the same age range, sixteen to twenty-five, with 48% of Primitive Methodists, and 42% of Wesleyans making a commitment in this age band. There was a similar parallel in the under-sixteens, with 12% of

²² Farningham, M., *A Working Woman's Life*, (1907) pp. 12-13.

²³ Crawford, P., *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720*, (1993), p. 76.

²⁴ Watts, *Dissenters*, 2 p. 57.

²⁵ Obelkevich, *Religion*, pp. 241-242.

Primitives, and a high 25% of Wesleyan men, a fairly close match with the female results. Others who have studied conversion from obituaries have come to similar conclusions. Brown's observations of ministers' ages at conversion led to comparable results regarding age distribution.²⁶ Watts and Bebbington, using quite different samples, have both found that patterns of age at conversion were not affected by gender.²⁷ This was also the conclusion of this study.

The stages suggested by Brereton provide a helpful structural framework for a study of the conversion process. Most narratives referred to the realisation of guilt, followed by the experience of forgiveness and new birth which removed that sense of guilt. The process of seeking and of conversion itself was not sharply differentiated by gender, but the factors which triggered the experience do show some gender differences. In both denominations and both sexes, preaching was the most frequent cause both of a sense of guilt and the experience of redemption, reinforcing observations made by Bebbington and Obelkevich. Women, however, especially Primitive Methodists, were more likely than men to respond to such preaching. In contrast, men tended to be more influenced by family and friends than women were. Whilst the former statistic tends to support the idea that women were more easily influenced by male preachers, the latter indicates that men were more affected by their home environment, supporting the idea that women were a strong influence on men. This suggests that women had appropriated to at least some extent their assigned role of spiritual guardians of the family.

For the most part, however, the experience of conversion followed a denominational rather than a gendered pattern. Seeking tended to culminate in a crisis point in both denominations, a notably Methodist characteristic not shared by Congregational and Baptist women where the proportion of gradual experiences, with no clear date of change, was greater. When the issue of age at conversion was considered, there was a trend for the experience to take place at an earlier date as the century progressed, which reinforced observations by other historians such as Brown and Bebbington. In both these aspects of conversion gender was not a factor. There was very little room in these experiences for the concept of a woman who was already spiritual, and did not need godly intervention for her transformation. Female Methodist conversion, therefore, with a few

²⁶ Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, pp. 49-55.

²⁷ Watts, *Dissenters*, 2 p. 57, Bebbington, *Evangelical Conversion*, p.9.

minor exceptions, was not shaped by contemporary concepts of ideal womanhood, but by the traditions and teaching of the connexions, and of evangelicalism generally. It was contemporary Methodist culture, rather than gender distinction, which was the dominant influence in women's experience of conversion.

LINDA WILSON

(Dr Linda Wilson is Associate Tutor at Wesley College, Bristol)

The Revd. A. Raymond George 1912-1998

The Revd. Raymond George was a lifelong member of the Wesley Historical Society, and its President from 1980 to 1996. He was born in Gloucester on 26 November 1912 and died in Bristol on 22 June 1998, in the 62nd year of his ministry.

He was educated at the Crypt School, Gloucester; Balliol College, Oxford; Wesley House, Cambridge; and the University of Marburg, Germany. He gained First Class Honours both at Oxford (in Classical Greats) and at Cambridge (in Theology), and to his gifts of scholarship added those of a superb teacher. For almost his entire ministry he taught in the theological colleges of Methodism, and left an indelible impression on his students, many of whom remained his friends for life. He began as Assistant Tutor, first at Handsworth College, Birmingham (1938-40), and then at Hartley-Victoria College, Manchester (1940-42). His first and only circuit appointment was at Great Western Street, Manchester (1942-46). Then began his long period of service at Wesley College, Headingley (1946-67), from 1961 as Principal. In 1967, following the closure of Headingley, Raymond was appointed Acting Head of the Department of Theology in the University of Leeds, while Professor John Tinsley was away on sabbatical. In 1968, he became Principal of Richmond College and taught there until 1972, when, as part of a major reorganisation of the colleges, Richmond also was closed. He was then appointed as Senior Tutor at Wesley College, Bristol, where he taught until his retirement in 1981, and for another fifteen years - part-time - after that.

At different times he taught all the major theological disciplines, but his special field was Liturgy and Worship, where he had an international reputation. He was a member of the Joint Liturgical Group from its inception in 1963, and its Chairman from 1984 to 1989. He was chief architect of the 4-year ecumenical lectionary, and was largely responsible for the *Methodist Service Book* of 1975. In the field of historical studies, he made a major contribution as one of the General Editors - together with Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp - of the *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (4 vols. 1965-1988). His Fernley-Hartley Lecture, *Communion with God*

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY — FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, 1997

Income and Expenditure Account for the Year ended 31st December 1997

INCOME.	£
Subscriptions (Note 1)	5,876
Donations	2
Irish Branch	641
Sales of <i>Proceedings</i> (back numbers)	366
" other Publications, etc. ...	28
Library—Tickets, Donations, Sales	5
Annual Lecture Collection	73
Advertisements	306
Bank and Building Society Interest	254
War Stock Dividend	8
	7,559
EXPENDITURE.	£
<i>Proceedings</i> and distribution	4,274
Other Printing	145
Library	1,513
Annual Lecture	98
World Methodist Historical Soc.	77
Administration Expenses	761
Advertising	25
Bank Charges (Foreign Chqs.)	159
Subscriptions and Donations	13
	7,065
Excess of Income over Expenditure	£494

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 1997

ASSETS EMPLOYED (Note 2)		£
£225 3¼% War Stock (at cost) (Note 3)		225
Current Assets—		£
Sundry Debtors		—
Income Tax recoverable	1,282	
Leeds & Holbeck Bld. Soc.	9,288	
T.S.B.—Conference Sec.	1,475	
Midland Bank (Current A/c)	1,390	
Cash in hand	92	
	13,527	
Current Liabilities—		
Sundry Creditors	230	
Subscript'ns paid in advance	7,461	
Conf'nce Fees	320	
	8,011	
Net Current Assets		5,516
		£5,741
REPRESENTED BY		
Balance at 1st January 1997 ...	4,013	
Add Excess Income over Expenditure	494	
	4,507	
Conference Fund Surplus	1,155	
Library Appeal Fund	79	
(Signed) RALPH WILKINSON,	£5,741	
<i>Honorary Treasurer.</i>		

Notes to the Accounts

1—SUBSCRIPTIONS	£	£
Unexpired Subscriptions at 1st January 1997—		
Ordinary Members	6,507	
Life Members (estimated)	160	
	6,667	
Received during year*		6,420
Income Tax recoverable		250
		13,337
<i>Less</i> Unexpired Subscriptions at 31st December—		
Ordinary Members	7,321	
Life Members (estimated)	140	
	7,461	
		£5,876

*No account has been taken of subscriptions in arrears at 31st December 1996, whether or not recovered since, but any previous arrears received during the year are included in the above figures.

2—ASSETS EMPLOYED
The Library and stocks of Publications have not been valued, and are not included in these financial statements.

3—WAR STOCK
Market value at Balance Sheet date ... £124

AUDITOR'S REPORT—I have audited the financial statements in accordance with approved auditing standards. The amount of subscriptions paid in advance by members includes estimates based upon a reasonable interpretation of the available data. No account has been taken of possible arrears of subscriptions. Other assets and liabilities have been independently verified.

Subject to the matters mentioned above, in my opinion the financial statements give a true and fair view on an historical cost basis of the state of affairs of the Society as at 31st December 1997, and of its overall surplus for the year then ended.

(Signed) J. R. L. HUDSON,
Chartered Accountant.

BOOK REVIEWS

John Bennet and the Origins of Methodism and the Evangelical Revival in England by Simon Ross Valentine. Pietist and Methodist Studies No. 9. (Scarecrow Press. Lanham Md and London 1997. pp 369. £76.50. ISBN 0 8108 3326 3)

Halifax and Bolton recently celebrated 250 years of Methodism - 'John Wesley' rode his horse into the eighteenth-century Halifax Piece Hall! - but John Nelson and John Bennet were featured, too, for without them, William Darney and later Christopher Hopper - 'patriarch of Bolton' - there might have been no early Methodism there. In the case of Bennet, when he left Wesley's Connexion, he pioneered Duke's Alley Chapel Bolton, an ancestor of the still flourishing St. Andrew and St. George URC.

To many Methodists Bennet is the man who married Grace Murray, Wesley's 'last love'. 'John Wesley was a dupe, Grace Murray was a flirt, John Bennet was a cheat' wrote the formidable Luke Tyerman. That *very* complex psychological and legal story, out of which Charles Wesley and Hopper emerge as interfering snobbish busybodies and Whitefield as a mediator, is told again here, but there is much more to the Bennet story than that. Lawrence Stone's thesis about the changes around 1750 from 'arranged marriages' to 'love matches' is well illustrated by the experience of Wesley and Grace Murray.

Following up Henry Rack's important article on Bennet in the *festschrift* for W. R. Ward, *Protestant Evangelicalism* (1990), which shows the complex patterns of Dissent in the Derbyshire Peak District, East Cheshire and South East Lancashire, we now have Dr. Valentine's full scale study of Bennet, a first rate and readable piece of work based on the remaining primary sources.

John Bennet (1714-1759), reared in Chinley, was influenced by the Presbyterian pastor James Clegg. He studied at the Dissenting Academy at Findern, later working as a clerk and a 'carrier'. His conversion in 1742 was under the influence of David Taylor, another evangelical itinerant. Benjamin Ingham comes into the picture, too. Bennet came into Wesley's circle in 1743 still living at Chinley, creating his large 'round' which extended to Yorkshire, of which he was 'Assistant' from 1749. He was soon in the inner circle, attending and writing the *Minutes* of the first Conferences from 1744 to 1748 with the first agenda - 'What to teach, how to teach and what to do - i.e. how to regulate our Doctrine, Discipline and Practice'. Later (here was Quaker influence) the first Quarterly Meeting at Todmorden Edge on 18 October, 1748 was pioneered by Bennet for the 'Darney Societies' and later applied by Wesley everywhere. So Bennet not only 'gave Wesley a ready made network in a sizeable area', he gave him key ideas on organization.

The drama of Grace Murray, whom Valentine claims had manic depressive tendencies, then gets a full survey. In the end she bore five boys, meeting Wesley finally in 1788, and lived until 1803, her funeral conducted

by young Jabez Bunting. Bennet stayed in 'connexion' with Wesley formally until 1752 though he called Wesley 'popish' from the pulpit in Bolton in 1751 and the furious disputes of the next year even involved Mrs John Wesley acting like a Hogarthian virago in Bolton. The disputes were doctrinal and legal involving trust deeds with Bennet clearly moving to a Calvinist position which was incompatible with continuing as one of Wesley's preachers, even if Wesley's behaviour was authoritarian. Duke's Alley was a consequence, taking members from both the Methodist Society and Bank Street which still exists as a Unitarian Chapel. Later Bennet was ordained as an Independent but still 'rambled' around his 'round' while acting as pastor at Warburton near Warrington, keeping a baptismal register confirming the 'rambling'. Wesley said some itinerants were 'hiding under a bushel in a little obscure Dissenting Meeting House'. This partly true of Bennet, but in his case failing health ended his life prematurely in 1759.

Valentine uses the Bennet autobiographical material and sermon notes giving a full analysis of his theology and preaching which is an interesting mix of Puritanism and eighteenth-century Evangelicalism, a complex style which G. F. Nuttall, in other contexts, has shown as the survival of older styles.

The stereotype of Wesley storming all over the country on his horse is still trotted out in popular history. We need studies like this showing the role of those who produced 'rounds' which Wesley could 'cannibalize' and also ways in which disputes were so frequent, with not a few eccentrics, who infuriated not only Anglican moderates but Dissenters like Clegg at Chinley. In the end as Michael Watts has shown, it was Dissent not the Church of England which reaped the ultimate benefit.

This book is well produced, with good illustrations including portraits of both Bennet and the aged 'widow Bennet'. The notes to each chapter enable further exploration, though Valentine's work will not need to be done again! We welcome this series but the price is, alas, typical of scholarship of this kind.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER

William Grimshaw of Haworth, by Faith Cook. (Banner of Truth Trust, 1997, pp. xv, 342, £18.95. ISBN 0 85151 732 3).

Although Grimshaw figures in all accounts of the English revival of the eighteenth century, he has perhaps never quite had his due, in part because he left only a scanty legacy of manuscripts. This left a gap filled by well-worn anecdotes, further embroidered in transmission, and focussed on his real or alleged eccentricities. James Everett, though best known for his role in the Wesleyan splits of the first half of the nineteenth century, prepared a biography of Grimshaw but never published it, though happily the manuscript has survived. As Everett was a pioneer local historian of

Methodism, whose unfinished histories of Methodism in the Sheffield and Manchester areas show a distinct talent for collecting and judiciously assessing traditions of the early days still surviving in the 1820s, his materials for Grimshaw's life remain of value. Of several published biographies of Grimshaw, the first and only one so far to give him scholarly treatment, based on a wide range of sources, was that by Professor Frank Baker in 1963, which remains probably the best biography of any of the first generation of evangelical parish clergy.

But Grimshaw was in fact not just an evangelical parish clergyman. He was in a very practical sense a 'Methodist' in that he undertook not only a very active parochial role but also functioned as Wesley's chief clerical assistant in wide stretches of the north of England and used Methodist methods. Had he lived longer his role might have been even more significant, for in the Methodist model deeds for preaching which developed between 1750 and 1763 he was designated as the Wesleys' successor to control their pulpits and so maintain 'connexional' values. Here was the potential clerical head of the connexion for which Wesley periodically sought in vain. It is intriguing to speculate what might have happened to Methodism had the Wesleys died in the 1760s and Grimshaw lived until 1791, so long as one remembers that Grimshaw was still wedded to the parish system, unlike John Wesley, though also less critical of lay helpers than Charles.

It is no discredit to Mrs Cook to say that she does not rival or replace Frank Baker's detailed scholarship but her biography is the next best thing for those without access to Baker's book. It is solidly based on the sources and brings Grimshaw alive with great affection. She does not seem to have made any new discoveries and perhaps no more are now likely, but she has sifted the extant material effectively to bring out the character of the man. She is more sceptical than Frank Baker about some of the old stories, notably that of whipping absent parishioners into church; but, like Baker, she accepts the substance of many of the other stories about Grimshaw in disguise harrying the misbehaving. She rightly dismisses contemporary charges that he was more or less mad but perhaps too readily rejects the picture of him as an eccentric and latter-day Puritan. His rough vernacular ways are well brought out. She is also perceptive on the much-maligned William Darney, noting the competence of his *Fundamental Doctrines* book and his special appeal to rustic audiences. (Darney has been too often judged simply in the light of John Wesley's dislike of his Calvinism and both Wesley brothers' distaste for his doggerel hymns). Grimshaw seems to have been even more tolerant than John Wesley of rough but effective preachers and much more so than Charles.

Grimshaw was a lonely and troubled man, whose psychology Frank Baker probed rather more deeply than Mrs Cook, but he was also an affectionate and lovable man and a reconciling force between the warring parties of the revival. It is interesting to see that he distrusted the perfectionist claims of the Otley people in 1760, people he knew far better (as

Mrs Cook remarks) than John Wesley did. His own memorable definition of perfection was 'my perfection is to see my imperfection'. He tried to reconcile Calvinism and Arminianism by saying that God elects some to eternal life but allows the rest to accept or reject salvation - a position held for a time also by John Wesley until he felt it allowed too much to the Calvinists. By the respect and affection he won from the emerging societies in his wide sphere of influence he helped to hold them together while Wesley's system of supervision was being consolidated. He was something of a bridge between the more parish-bound evangelical clergy and the free itinerancy of the Wesleys and Whitefield; and as much of a peacemaker as anyone could be between the Calvinists and Arminian wings of the revival. Mrs Cook's book is a deserved and readable tribute to a significant figure. She includes appendices containing a few of the more informative Grimshaw letters; his 1760 covenant; and his 1762 'creed'. Some extremely attractive illustrations of Haworth and, as always, excellent book production by Banner of Truth at a reasonable price make this a pleasing introduction to Haworth's less famous son - and provides some essential background to its more famous daughters.

HENRY D. RACK

1851 Religious Census: West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, transcribed and edited by John C. C. Probert ([1998], pp. 4, [20], £2.50 plus p&p, from the editor, 1 Penventon Terrace, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 3AD, ISBN: 0 9503700 5 3.)

Cornwall is the thirteenth English county for which an edition of the original enumeration returns of the 1851 ecclesiastical census has been published, but the only one to have been issued in fascicule form. This first fascicule covers the twenty-nine parishes in the Penzance and Isles of Scilly registration districts. Fifteen of its pages are taken up by the transcript of the returns, including two copies each of seven Methodist returns for St Just in Penwith, the originals having been wrongly filed by the Census Office with St Just in Roseland (in the Truro registration district) and new ones made some nine months after the census. All told, there are 154 returns: 68 Wesleyan (including 8 duplicates), 22 Bible Christian (4 duplicates), 11 Primitive Methodist (1 duplicate), 9 Teetotal Wesleyan (1 duplicate), 2 Wesleyan Methodist Association, 28 Anglican (1 duplicate), and 14 other denominations. Chapel membership figures are added from contemporary sources, where available. The raw statistics are supplemented by occasional comments by respondents, several, for example, pointing out the variability of churchgoing according to the state of the weather (in remote parishes) or sailors and fishermen being at sea (in coastal ones). Five further pages are taken up by tables, two showing attendances (from the original returns) in 1851 by denomination by parish (the index of attendance varying by parish

from 34 to 111), one reproducing population figures for each ecclesiastical parish for each civil census between 1801 and 1991, one recording occupations by sex by parish in 1851, and one reprinting the summary tables for these two districts from the published report of the religious census. The whole is preceded by a succinct four-page introduction to the series and to West Cornwall which highlights some methodological issues (including a list of 11 places of worship, 8 of them Methodist, believed to have been open in these districts at the time of the census but for which no return was made); and analyses the Cornish results, with special reference to Methodism (which accounted for some two thirds of worshippers in the county), also including comparisons with and reflections on the late twentieth-century ecclesiastical scene. A number of factors are identified which influenced attendance levels in 1851, for instance geographical isolation (which seems to have increased them) and mining and greater parochial size (which reduced them). Regrettably, for obvious reasons of economy, the booklet is reproduced in landscape format with the actual returns appearing as a 675-line spreadsheet; as a consequence, the publication is neither aesthetically pleasing nor particularly user-friendly for any protracted study. As such, it does not really bear comparison with most other county editions of the religious census, which have generally been produced to a high standard of both typography and scholarship by county record societies. What a pity that a more permanent volume could not have been produced, as a more fitting testimony to John Vobert's editorial and interpretative skills and encyclopaedic knowledge of Cornish Methodism. Is it too late, before another fascicule is released, to seek some alternative publishing outlet?

CLIVE D. FIELD

Some Diaries of Thomas Brocas, Salopian. Transcribed and annotated by Doreen E Woodford (1995 pp iv, 150 A4 spiral bound £9.50 from the author 7 King St, Much Wenlock, Shropshire TF13 6EL)

Thomas Brocas was described by John Wesley as 'the father of Methodism in Shrewsbury'. Wesley did this because he recognized the success that this relatively young and ill-educated local preacher (born 1756) had had in building up the society there. He was much more successful than either John himself in his regular visits, or the itinerant preachers he sent, even such choice ones as Alexander Mather or Samuel Bradburn. A memoir based on these diaries was printed at City Road in 1821, following Brocas's death in 1818. The *Methodist Magazine* of 1821 also has a version of his life. These diaries as now printed however are much more complete than either, and also differ on a number of points, some important. They begin in 1785 and, with a gap from 1787 to 1804, finish in 1814. The editor has added some aids including a map and the 1813 Shrewsbury circuit plan.

Brocas, a gardener, became a Methodist as a result of hearing Captain Jonathan Scott. His religious behaviour led to his sacking from his job and his eventual removal to Shrewsbury where he joined the small Wesleyan society. He had already become friendly with the Harris family of Moreton Corbet, leading Methodists in the neighbourhood, and whose son his daughter was to marry. Eventually he set up in business in Shrewsbury as a dealer in china, glass and cheese. He was successful as a businessman, was elected churchwarden, and travelled widely. As a preacher he was prepared to shock and challenge, and as a result was much sought after, preaching not only throughout Shropshire but also in such places as Burslem, Birmingham, Bristol, and Liverpool.

Brocas's diaries give us an insight into the life of an unusual man who was on close terms with the itinerants stationed at Shrewsbury and with leading ministers such as John Gaultier. He was frank about himself, his family (his son was later a leader of the Methodist New Connexion) and his neighbours. He reminds the reviewer of a character from the Old Testament in his attitude to problems, a late eighteenth-century version of Job perhaps. His account includes local elections, the weather, national politics - he was a strong support of Fox - as well as reflections on the 'dangers of putting young men too soon into the ministry'. There is also much on his business, including his annual summary of his accounts, and much of local Shropshire interest, eg the flood of 1811, local gentry such as the Hills, or local Methodists, all with Brocas's somewhat wry comments.

The editor, Miss Woodford, is the Secretary of the Shropshire branch of the WHS who has enjoyed tracing the hymnic and Shropshire references. She should be congratulated on her determination in transcribing and getting it printed for the wider audience it deserves. Salopians and Methodists should both be interested.

JOHN H. LENTON

S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline, Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp. xiv, 426. £45.00 ISBN: 0 521 56153 1)

This book provides an important study of religion in three industrial communities - Halifax, Keighley and Denholme - during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It invites the view that this was a golden age of institutional religion, though one which has bequeathed a considerable burden to the present day. As the churches expanded to match the growth of suburbia, so new places of worship were put up, complete with ancillary buildings to house a plethora of activities. This was an age of 'associationalism' when Christianity came to consist of apparently endless rounds of meetings, religious and secular, which incorporated the whole life of the committed individual. But committed to what? Church competed

with church for the best choir or largest Sunday school. Religion was becoming secularised in its values, but when it attempted to compete with secular leisure for the time of its adherents, it was found wanting. Organisations fell off and congregations, always too small for the gothic ambitions of the church builders, began to rattle under their cavernous roofs. The modern church was born. This thesis will interest Methodists, though its sociological analysis may to some readers seem lacking in an understanding of the religious faith that drove people's actions. There will also be some disappointment that, working from surviving church and chapel (including circuit) records, Dr Green has not really been able to give Methodism due weight in proportion to its numerical importance in this part of West Yorkshire. Nevertheless, there is much in Dr Green's work to attract the Methodist reader, not least his sobering conclusion about the all-too-familiar state of the institutional churches in the twentieth century.

EDWARD ROYLE

LOCAL HISTORIES

Mission Accomplished: The story of the first 100 years of the Bolton Methodist Mission, by Daniel Tomkins (143pp). Copies, £6.00 plus post, from the Victoria Hall, Knowlsey Street, Bolton, BL1 2AS.

Wilmslow Methodist Church: The First 200 Years by Alan Rose and Eric Smith (64pp). Copies, £3.50 post free, from Wilmslow Methodist Church, King's Close, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AJ.

Bellingham Methodist/UIRC Church 1997 (48pp). Copies, £3.00 post free from the Rev Eleanor Reddington, Woodville, Redesmouth Road, Bellingham NE48 2EH.

Burstock East Yorkshire Village and Chapel by Rev Arnold Johnson. Copies, £2.95 post free, from the author at 53 Churchill Avenue, Burstock, Hull, HU12 9HP.

Need Not Creed - A Century of Caring 1898-1998 (Newtonabbey Methodist Mission) by Duncan Alderdice. Copies, £4.60 post free from the mission office at 35a Rathcoole Drive, Newtonabbey, Co Antrim, BT37 0SA.

The Faith House, A diary of Chessington Methodist Church 1948-1997 by Peter Roe (294pp). Copies £12.50. ISBN: 0 95332 48 0 X.

Westfield Methodist Church Centenary 1898-1998 (36pp). Copies £2.00 from Clarence Ashman, 14 Highfields, Radstock, Bath, BA3 3UH.

The Church on the Corner: A history of Earlsdon Methodist Church by Mary Montes 1998 (47pp). Copies, £3.00 from the Rev Peter Mortlock, The Central Hall, Warwick Lane, Coventry CV1 2HA.

A Journey of Faith: some research into the Methodists of Bishopsteignton by Gillian M. James 1998 (68pp). Copies, £2.00 from the author at 12 Brookfield Drive, Teignmouth TQ14 8QQ.

A Journey in Faith, Greenhill [Sheffield] Methodism 1797-1997 (95pp). Copies, £4.20 post free, from Mrs Shirley Ellins, 33 Greenhill Main Road, Sheffield, S8 7RB.

NOTES AND QUERIES

1520 RECORDING WELSH CHAPELS

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, through arrangements with individuals, with Capel and with other professional organisations, is co-ordinating the recording of the Nonconformist chapels and meeting houses of Wales. We are at present carrying out a search for old photographs, drawn plans and specifications relating to 19th and early-20th century chapel buildings and meeting houses. Old photographs of chapel buildings are sometimes retained in chapel vestries, and original architect's or builder's proposal/working drawings and specifications are also occasionally held by the Churches themselves or amongst Monthly Meeting or Presbytery records; these may relate to present or to previous chapel buildings, but all such documents are invaluable in building up a picture of the approaches of previous generations to chapel planning, to architectural design and to building construction. We would be most interested to hear of any such documents and to note their existence and whereabouts on our Welsh chapels database. Perhaps, at a later stage in the project, we might ask to copy selected materials for our public archive. We shall be delighted to hear from any Ministers, or Chapel Secretaries who can help us in our search.

O. M. JENKINS

Chapels Recording Project, Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical
Monuments of Wales, Plas Crug, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 1NJ
Telephone: (01970) 621212