

Beet, Joseph Agar

1840-1924; e.m. 1864



A leading WM exegete and systematic theologian, he was born at [Sheffield](#) on 27 September 1840, the son of Ann [Agar](#). From 1885 to 1905 he was tutor at [Richmond College](#), in succession to [George Osborn](#). His first major work, a commentary on Romans (1877), was followed by a trilogy on Trinitarian theology and eschatology. After the publication of his *The Last Things* (1897) the orthodoxy of his views on [eternal punishment](#) was challenged in Conference in 1898. It was followed by *The Immortality of the Soul* (1901) and in 1902 he narrowly avoided losing his chair at Richmond College. Though deeply loyal to WM, he was determined to adapt the tradition to modern insights, and under the influence of the late nineteenth-century [Holiness Movement](#), he produced an updating of Wesley's teaching on [Christian perfection](#). A strong individualist, he was a member of the [Legal Hundred](#), but was never elected President of the Conference. Revered by many of his students, he is perhaps the greatest 'forgotten' theologian of British Methodism. He died on 25 May 1924.

Quotations

'It was a privilege of the first order to spend three years with a man who was so great a saint and a genius - a child too. His mind was amazingly clear and logical - mathematics was his strong point. His moral courage and scrupulous fairness made him contemptuous of anything that savoured of finesse or obscurantism, and all lack of transparency and frankness. He was a man that "lived and spoke out", as Jowett of Balliol said men should. In learning, devotion, and friendship he was a scholar, a saint, and a brother, and in each kind among the first.'

Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 1924, p.594

'He endeared himself to generations of students by his intellectual honesty, his illuminating scholarship, and his inspiring exposition.'

W. Bardsley Brash, *The Story of our Colleges* (1935), p.75

'Beet had little of Davison's geius as a teacher. Compared with him, indeed, he must sometimes have seemed little more than an awkward and clumsy amateur. He had, moreover, certain little and oft-repeated oddities of speech... But the transparent sincerity and goodness of the man, his high courage and devotion to duty... triumphed over everything and won for him a way to the hearts of all who came really to know him.'

Frank H. Cumbers (ed.), *Richmond College 1843-1943* (1944), p.70

'For twenty years he charmed and delighted his students by his rare clarity of mind, his vigorous teaching, his utter contempt for all that was obscure and unfair, by the painstaking manner in which he explained and illustrated.

'Older readers will remember the controversy which gathered round his name in 1902, when Conference debated his reappointment to his Chair. Many sought to replace him: there was a suggestion that George Findlay be invited to take his position, but he refused to supplant a lifelong friend. A second volume on Immortality was considered to break an engagement entered into after the appearance of the first. But the findings of the Conference Committee did credit to its members when, after declaring that Beet's teaching fell short of our doctrines and contravened them, they continued: "In regard to the whole case, the Committee recommends, in view of the dread solemnity and mystery of the subject, and the necessity of allowing some freedom of opinion upon it, and out of regard to the fidelity of Dr. Beet to our general system of doctrine, that the Conference take no further action in the matter on condition that Dr. Beet will not teach in our pulpits the doctrine of the book." Upon acceptance of these conditions, he was reappointed.'

Ibid, pp.110-11

Sources

- ▶ *Methodist Recorder*, 7 Aug 1902; 29 May 1924

Occupations

- ▶ [Biblical scholars](#)
- ▶ [Theologians](#)

See also

- ▶ [Christian Perfection](#)
- ▶ [Holiness Movement](#)
- ▶ [Legal Hundred](#)
- ▶ [Osborn, Dr George](#)
- ▶ [Sheffield](#)

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