HERO OR HERETIC?

THE LIBERAL THEOLOGY OF JAMES ERNEST DAVEY

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Abstract

This thesis is arguably the first extensive academic study of the controversial Northern Irish Presbyterian theologian James Ernest Davey (1890-1960). The thesis begins by introducing the reader to the biography of Davey and indicating why he is a significant figure in the Northern Irish context, before examining the limited literature that is available and exposing its weaknesses.

After the Introduction the dissertation falls into two main parts, the first examining Davey’s Trial for heresy (Chapters Three to Seven), the second considering Davey’s theology apart from the Trial and as it appears in his writings, published and unpublished, (Chapter Eight).

Part One opens, in Chapter Two, with a consideration of the context of the Heresy Trial, while Chapters Three to Seven discuss the individual charges of heresy levelled against Davey. In each of these chapters we examine the theological doctrine that was the subject of dispute between Davey and his theological adversaries, namely, Imputation, Person of Christ, Scripture, God and Sin, and Trinity. Our discussion of the individual charges enables us to come to a preliminary conclusion concerning to what extent, if any, the charges against Davey were justified, but it also provides us with the basis upon which we can begin to identify Davey’s own distinctive theological position.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to a close reading of the central principle of Davey’s theology, namely Christology, which we will take as a case-study to help us illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Davey’s theology and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the charges of heresy that were laid against him. Christology has been chosen because it is the link between the various charges levelled against Davey at the Heresy Trial. Part Two of the thesis will enable us to answer the question whether Davey was a theological hero in the Northern Ireland context or a heretic, as his opponents claimed him to be. The conclusion of the thesis is that Davey played an important role in introducing a much needed liberal strand into Northern Irish Presbyterianism, but recognizes the way he sometimes formulated this theology laid him open to misunderstanding. The thesis ends with a reflection on the continued significance of Davey’s theology today.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction

James Ernest Davey (1890-1960) was a controversial figure. On the one hand he evoked respect and admiration. He has been described by his admirers as an outstanding man and a great scholar, orthodox and a champion of theological freedom.¹ Some of his contemporaries, such as Austin Fulton and T. A. B. Smyth, hailed him as a prophet and saw him as a theological hero standing up for a new way of doing theology in the Northern Ireland context.² On the other hand, his opponents condemned him as a heretic and a threat to the integrity of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.³ Hero or heretic? That is the question this thesis aims to answer.

Davey was clearly a person who elicited extremes of response. For this reason Davey can function as a prism for viewing the political and theological tensions that were present in the Presbyterian Church, particularly in Northern Ireland, in the first part of the twentieth century. These tensions played a role in the events that led up to the Troubles. In Davey we have an important witness to these crucial events. So who was this enigmatic man and what was it about his theology that caused such controversy in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland? What resources does his theology provide for addressing the current challenges facing Northern Irish Presbyterianism? This study is an attempt to answer these questions. The first step in addressing these questions is to provide a brief sketch of

¹ J. L.M. Haire, Foreword to Austin Fulton, J. Ernest Davey, Belfast, 1970, xi. (Initials are used to distinguish this Haire from his father, Professor James Haire.); Robert Allen, The Presbyterian College, Belfast 1853-1953, Belfast 1954, 261; Fulton, Davey, 167-168, 169.
³ The Complainants in the Heresy Trial, as we shall see, may be taken as representative of the opposition to Davey.
Davey’s life and career. This will allow a preliminary sketch of Davey’s importance, which will be substantiated in subsequent chapters, before going on to consider the limited secondary literature available on Davey.

B. Davey’s Life and Career

James Ernest Davey was born in 1890. His father was a well-known evangelical minister in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. After leaving school, Davey entered King’s College, Cambridge in 1909, where he read Classics and then theology. He also spent a short time studying theology in Heidelberg University. He was awarded a Fellowship at King’s College in 1916. From 1914 to 1917 he studied theology at Edinburgh, where he gained his B.D. in 1917. He was licensed in May 1916 and at the General Assembly of 1917 appointed professor in the Presbyterian College, Belfast, where he taught until his death. During his career he occupied several of the chairs of the College, but, surprisingly, not that of systematic theology. He was Professor of Church History (1917–22), Biblical Literature and Hellenistic Greek (1922–30), Hebrew and Old Testament (1930–33), and New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology (1933–60). He was appointed Principal in 1952.

In 1927 Davey was tried for heresy. His opponents alleged that his teaching was contrary to Scripture and the Subordinate Standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The General Assembly found that his teaching was not heretical.


5 ‘The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is…the supreme standard of the Church.’ ‘The Confession of Faith (as approved by the Church of Scotland in her Act of 1647), and the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechisms, prepared by the Westminster
Davey was an influential member of several committees and boards of the General Assembly. He served the wider church as Moderator of the General Assembly from 1953 to 1954. He died in December 1960.

C. Davey’s Importance

Austin Fulton, who has written the only book on Davey to appear so far, claims to be convinced of the significance of Davey’s theology, which he sees as important for its own sake. He declares, ‘What does matter is to have Professor Davey’s statement of his own theology, his thinking on certain important points of doctrine.’ Furthermore, Fulton argues that an appreciation of Davey is essential for understanding how Presbyterian theology developed.

Consistency with the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) is a third reason why Fulton considers Davey important. He states,

[Davey’s theology] is also important because the General Assembly allowed that this thinking is in harmony with the Scriptures and not contrary to the essential import of the Westminster Standards received as founded on and agreeable to the Word of God.

What is significant for Fulton is that the General Assembly’s decision regarded Davey’s theology as a permissible form of theological thinking that contravened neither Scripture nor the Confession. As such, Davey’s theology contains resources for modern Northern Irish Presbyterianism.

A further reason for Davey’s importance is that he is a significant witness to events in the first half of the twentieth century, a momentous period in the history of Ireland.

Assembly of Divines, are the subordinate standards of the Church.’ The Code. The Book of The Constitution and Government of The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Published by the Authority of the General Assembly, Church House, Belfast, 1912, paras. 16, 18-19. References to the Westminster Confession will be expressed as follows: WC 1.1, i.e. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Section 1.

6 Fulton, Davey, 5.
7 Fulton, Davey, 6.
8 Fulton, Davey, 5.
Irish Presbyterianism. J. L. M. Haire writes, ‘Ernest Davey was I believe the most influential minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in his time and both directly and indirectly in the whole life of Northern Ireland.’\(^9\) This is supported by Fulton’s comment, ‘...the work of Ernest Davey must be appreciated if theological development in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland over the past half a century is to be seen and understood’.\(^{10}\) Davey’s importance for Presbyterianism is seen in the Heresy Trial, which threatened to split the unity of the Presbyterian Church. Indeed one result of the decision in Davey’s favour was that a small group, including Davey’s main opponents, left the Presbyterian Church to form what later became the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.\(^{11}\) Therefore in the light of the Heresy Trial and its aftermath Davey can be viewed as a controversial figure. Indeed with the rise of the Reverend Ian Paisley he was again vituperated by Paisley as a representative figure of Modernism.\(^{12}\) One obituary in a local newspaper described Davey as ‘one of the most controversial figures in the Church in recent years’.\(^{13}\)

Another reason for Davey’s importance is as a source for subsequent Presbyterian debate. This is shown by one of Fulton’s reasons for writing, namely the tensions emerging in the 1960’s after Davey’s death. Fulton held that Davey could provide a way of opposing some of the developments in Irish Presbyterianism towards the more Fundamentalist direction as epitomized by the influence of the Rev. Ian Paisley. Fulton declares, ‘This book is written in the conviction that a grasp and understanding of the work of Ernest Davey is of very great importance for our Church at the present time.’\(^{14}\) A very different estimate of Davey is presented by John Thompson.\(^{15}\) He declares, ‘His theology

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9 Fulton, *Davey*, xiii.
10 Fulton, *Davey*, vii.
11 At first known as the Irish Evangelical Church. See W. J. Grier, *The Origin and Witness of the Irish Evangelical Church*, Evangelical Bookshop, Belfast. No date. Preface dated 1945.
14 A. Fulton, *Davey*, ix.
is a much more dubious affair and taken as a whole can scarcely be a guide to the present or the future. That it is little read or quoted today is adequate commentary upon it.\textsuperscript{16}

So we are confronted with two very different estimates of Davey. On the one hand we have Fulton’s hagiographical biography and on the other Thompson’s scathing critique. The fact that there are these different estimates of his theology is evidence that Davey was certainly a controversial and significant figure in 1960. It is the intention of this dissertation to reassert his continuing significance for contemporary Presbyterian debate. These contrasting views of Fulton and Thompson, along with others, have to be dealt with, if it is to be shown, as I also hope to do, that there are further areas where Davey’s thought is of importance, namely, his significance for today in the broader Irish context and in the broader theological context. This preliminary consideration of Davey’s life and importance provides a basis for the research questions which we will be addressing in the dissertation.

**D. Research Questions**

1. How is Davey’s theology to be evaluated in the context of both Irish Presbyterianism and the wider theological setting of his time?

2. What is the significance of the Heresy Trial? How is the theological nature of the opposition to Davey evidenced by the Trial? What effect did the Trial have on Davey? Were there any significant changes in Davey’s theological position after the Trial? What effect did it have on the continuing theological debate within Irish Presbyterianism?

3. What kind of theology does Davey espouse? How might his theology be classified? Where can we place Davey in the context of the spectrum of contemporary British Theology (i.e. contemporary to Davey)? What particular theological elements are

\textsuperscript{16} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 24.
distinctive to him? How do the resources on which Davey drew influence and shape his theological thinking? To what degree did Davey draw on contemporary theological themes? To what degree did he go beyond them?

4. Is Davey’s theology relevant for today? In what ways can Davey’s theological position be developed to provide a positive contribution to the contemporary theological debate?

E. Methodology

Our method will be a close reading of the Trial documents and a close reading of Davey’s works. The examination of the Trial will produce a template of key concepts that will be used to think through the questions raised by Davey’s theology. As will become clear in the main body of the dissertation the central issue is Christological in character. For that reason in Part Two of the dissertation, for reasons of limitation of space, we will focus on Davey’s Christology as a case-study for approaching the issues raised by the Trial.

Part One of the dissertation will be devoted to a detailed study of the Heresy Trial to which Davey was subjected. The method we shall employ in analysing Davey’s theology is to take the charges of the Heresy Trial as the basis of our conceptual framework. An analysis of the five charges levelled against him will allow us to identify the leading features of Davey’s theology and how these were (mis-)interpreted by his opponents. Part Two of the dissertation will examine Davey’s Christology, which is arguably the centre of his theological thinking and the cause of the controversial character of his theology. Finally, in the Conclusion we shall assess Davey’s significance both in the Northern Irish context and beyond.
F. The Scholarly Evaluation of Davey’s Theology

We have already seen how Davey is an important figure on the Irish theological scene. That fact is affirmed by both his supporters and his detractors. We shall now proceed to consider in more detail how both his supporters and opponents viewed him. There is widespread agreement within the Presbyterian Church that Davey was an important theological figure. J. L. M. Haire, who succeeded Davey as Principal of the Presbyterian College, Belfast, considers him a scholar of high standing. He comments, ‘I have always maintained that he might be, in fact, the man with the highest intelligent quotient of anyone who ever taught in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.’ Haire contrasts Davey favourably with Samuel Davidson the Old Testament scholar, who also taught in the College for some years before going to England. R. Buick Knox notes his recognition by those universities that awarded him honorary degrees (St Andrews, Dublin, Edinburgh and Queen’s, Belfast). The above quotation from Haire might be regarded as extravagant. However, Davey’s theological acumen was also highly regarded by H.R. Mackintosh and A.M. Hunter. He is also mentioned by C.K. Barrett and J.A.T. Robinson. Indeed R.McL. Wilson, in his review of The Historicity of the Fourth Gospel by A. J. B. Higgins, writes, ‘…many scholars in recent years, including C. H. Dodd, J. A. T. Robinson and J. E. Davey, to name no others, have urged that concentration upon the Synoptics to the neglect of John must deprive us of important evidence.’

In our consideration of the limited secondary literature we shall examine firstly the views of W.J. Grier, as representative of the opposition to Davey, and then the views of

17 J.L.M. Haire, Letter to A. Fulton, 4 September 1968.
18 J.L.M. Haire, Foreword to Fulton, Davey, vii.
Fulton, who is a strong supporter of Davey, and Thompson, who, as we have seen, thinks that Davey’s theology is of no contemporary relevance. We shall also consider the views of R.N. Cross, who writes from outside the Irish Presbyterian tradition. Other writers who have contributed to the secondary literature will be mentioned where relevant.

1. W.J. Grier

There are three main works emanating from Davey’s opponents: J. Edgar *Presbyterianism on its Trial*; Leloumenos, *Faith in an Unchanging Vesture*; W J. Grier, *The Origin and Witness of the Irish Evangelical Church.* Although the latest in publication, I have chosen Grier’s book as representative of Davey’s critics, as it has a more balanced perspective than the other two, which are more polemical and laced with invective. The brevity of *Origin* belies its significance for a study of Davey. Its author was a leading opponent of Davey and a witness at his Trial for heresy in 1927. So in this book we have an account written from the perspective of one of Davey’s opponents. For this reason it provides an alternative perspective to Fulton.

In this book Grier traces the story of the Irish Evangelical Church, now known as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. This came into being after the Heresy Trial and as a result of the verdicts given at it. Grier states that to understand the story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church it must be set in its context. He writes, ‘I have gone back some fifty years to trace the rise and progress of the Modernism which today holds such sway in the Irish Presbyterian Church.’ Grier gives the title ‘Heretical Publications’ to his sixth chapter, in which he denounces the Modernistic views of Davey, making specific reference

23 W. J. Grier, *The Origin and Witness of the Irish Evangelical Church*. Belfast: Evangelical Bookshop, 1945. This is a short book with only sixty-four pages in total, consisting of a brief Preface, thirteen chapters and an Epilogue. On 54 Grier reveals Leloumenos as Dr. James Hunter Gillespie and cites his work with approval.
24 Edgar was also a leading figure in the campaign against Davey and a Complainant at the Heresy Trial. However, his work is polemical in the extreme.
to Davey’s two books *Our Faith In God Through Jesus Christ: Four Apologetic Addresses* and *The Changing Vesture Of The Faith: Studies In The Origins And Development of Christian Forms of Belief, Institution And Observance.* In Chapter Eight further criticisms are made about Modernist teaching in the Presbyterian College. Davey is included here, although the bulk of the chapter is taken up with the teaching of Professor James Haire. Chapter Nine is an account of the Heresy Trial and Chapter Ten contains elements of Davey’s teaching, which, Grier believes, the General Assembly endorsed by their verdicts. The secession of Davey’s opponents from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and their establishing the Irish Evangelical Church are recorded in Chapter Eleven. The last chapter, Chapter Thirteen, is entitled ‘Justification’. In this Grier gives reasons ‘justifying’ the actions of those who seceded from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1927, including the bringing of heresy charges against Davey.

Grier’s political agenda must be taken into account in assessing his comments on the history of the period and also the interpretation he gives to Davey’s writings. It is evident that it is Grier’s strong antipathy to Modernism that is the driving power of his opposition to Davey. As is evident from a perusal of the contents of his book, his work from beginning to end is an attack on Modernism and on what he considers to be its pernicious influence on the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

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27 It is surprising that Grier makes no reference to Robert Watts, who would seem to be a perfect theologian to cite in support of his case against Davey and Modernism. Watts, Professor of Theology at the Presbyterian College from 1866 until 1895, had studied under Charles Hodge, was recognized as a theologian of stature, and had published works which would have provided strong arguments for Grier’s position. In his writings he had specifically criticized Robertson Smith, A.M. Fairbairn, A.B. Bruce, Henry Drummond and Marcus Dods, all of whom, according to some of their critics, showed elements of Modernism in their writings. Indeed during Watt’s time the College was regarded as ‘a citadel of Calvinism’, the title of R. Allen, *College*, chapter 8. This makes Grier’s omission even more surprising. It could be reasonably assumed that Grie
‘Surely, dear reader, you should not remain, content or discontent, in a Church where Modernist unbelief is in control.’ This appeal, written in 1945, shows that Grier’s attitude to Modernism had not changed since the time of Davey’s Trial. It is reasonable to argue that, after the Trial, it was Grier’s firm belief that not only was Davey espousing his own Modernistic views but also that he was representative of the leadership of a church, not merely where Modernism had reared its ugly head, but where it was ‘in control’. In the light of the sequence of the struggle with Modernism, starting with the decision of the General Assembly to offer congratulations to the Free Church of Scotland in 1900 on its forthcoming union with the United Presbyterian Church, Grier sees Davey as the last straw which breaks the camel’s back. In one sense the verdicts in the Heresy Trial gave rise directly to the secession of Grier, Hunter and others from the Irish Presbyterian Church. However, when the sequence of events is viewed as a whole, each incident in the chain of events made separation more likely. This is also the view of other Presbyterian historians who, unlike Grier, would not be antagonistic towards Davey.

Grier argues that a further indication of the holding of Modernist views by Davey and other Professors in the Presbyterian College is seen in the text-books recommended by them. Grier claims all nine books recommended by Davey in the year 1944-1945 are by Modernist writers. However, he gives the title of only one, Scott’s *Christianity According to St Paul*. Grier writes that Scott ‘denies that St. Paul taught that Jesus was God and denies that He made an expiatory sacrifice for sin’. These are points that indicate a lack of orthodoxy to Grier. Grier also claims that Davey and other named ministers of

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28 Grier, *Origin*, 64. See also 63.
29 Grier recounts this sequence in *Origin*, chapters 3-11. This sequence is followed by: Allen, *College*, Fulton ‘Church in Tension’ and Knox, ‘Bible’.
Modernist outlook felt that their theological views had the support of the majority within the church.\footnote{Grier, \textit{Origin}, 27.} This conclusion is justified to the extent that in each encounter of opposition between Modernists and their opponents the latter were on the losing side. And clearly the overwhelming decisions in favour of Davey reaffirmed Grier’s opinion on this point. He speaks about ‘the huge Modernist majority in the Irish Presbyterian Assembly’.\footnote{Grier, \textit{Origin}, 49.} This study argues for a different conclusion on this point than the one propounded by Grier. It is suggested in this thesis that the majority in favour of Davey supported him in his stance for theological freedom rather than agreeing with all his theological views.

Grier also believes that Davey’s Trial resulted in theological expression of freedom. However, this was for him something to be regretted rather than celebrated. He speaks about, ‘…a Church which had put the seal of its approval on Prof. Davey’s teaching, and in which any of its ministers could now teach these heresies and claim for them the approval of the Church’s highest court.’\footnote{Grier, \textit{Origin}, 51.} For Grier the decision of the Assembly gave not only Davey but all ministers licence to preach heretical views with impunity.

What clearly emerges from Grier’s chapter on the Heresy Trial, and is seen at other points in his book, is his sense of unfair treatment at the hands of the Presbyterian Church. He asserts

\begin{quote}
The Presbytery was determined to stop the mouths of those bearing witness against the Modernism in the College and Church. We shall see later what provision they made for stopping the mouths of the chief accusers after the Appeals had been heard by the Assembly.\footnote{Grier, \textit{Origin}, 41.}
\end{quote}

This comment reveals a deep sense of injustice and is a strong criticism alleging lack of fairness in the way Davey’s opponents were treated.\footnote{Grier also expresses similar sentiments in relating previous episodes in the sequence of the Modernist- Fundamentalist struggle within Irish Presbyterianism. See his complaints about the way he was treated by a Subcommittee of the College Committee with reference to} Allied to this sense of injustice is
Grier’s allegation that this unfair treatment was partly due to the fact that power within the Irish Presbyterian Church was in the hands of a small group of influential Modernists. He refers to their influence several times throughout the book. He sees evidence of this influence in the fact that several in this influential group were appointed Moderator. He states, ‘Others to whose Modernist pronouncements we have already referred found their way to the Moderator’s chair – Dr. Wm. Corkey, Dr. F. W. S. O’Neill, Prof. J. Haire, Dr. John Waddell.’ The Trial, as we shall later see, showed Corkey, Haire and Waddell to be strong supporters of Davey.

While Grier accuses these prominent ministers of Modernism, he also implies that the majority of ministers and elders in the General Assembly were, if not Modernists themselves, willing to be influenced by these prominent ministers. He comments

It was often alleged in the days of the Assembly’s huge vote of approval that Prof. Davey had gained many votes by his references (before Presbytery and Assembly) to ‘the second blessing’ he received at Keswick and like pious affirmations. There was no need, however, for any of the Fathers and Brethren to be misled. The lack was not of evidence, but rather of theological discernment and of backbone – in a word, of loyalty to Christ and His holy Word.

Here Grier seems to be attributing blame to those who gave support to what he considered to be a Modernist leadership.

In Chapter Thirteen Grier refers to writings Davey produced after the Trial and sees in them too evidence of heretical views. Grier states, ‘Prof. J. E. Davey in the autumn of 1928 gave the opening lecture of the College session on the subject of Conversion.’ In this lecture Davey mentioned Tolstoy, Middleton Murray, H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw and described them as ‘certainly converted’, ‘Christians’ and ‘men of God’. Grier

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the truth of his notes on Professor Haire’s lectures, *Origin*, 34-37. Edgar, *Presbyterianism on its Trial*, 81, also complains of unfair treatment at the hands of Davey’s supporters.

comments, ‘Yet all of the four were anti-Christian, denying the distinctive tenets of the Christian faith.’ Grier takes this point further by indicating references Davey made to some who, unlike the afore-mentioned, were not even from a nominally Christian culture. He declares, ‘…he [Davey] claimed the heathen Socrates and the purely rationalistic philosopher Spinoza and the Moslem Algazel as “belonging to the kingdom of God”.’ These attacks by Grier on Davey’s orthodoxy relate to the question of the finality of Christ and his relationship to other faiths. In our case-study in Part Two we will consider whether there is any justification for Grier’s conclusions that such comments are evidence that Davey’s views were heterodox.

2. R. N. Cross

Davey’s importance is further indicated by the fact that his theology attracted the attention of theologians outside Irish Presbyterianism. In his article ‘The Blessed Trinity’ R. N. Cross, writing from a Unitarian perspective, makes critical comments on the doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that he is writing from outside Irish Presbyterianism shows that Davey was significant enough theologically for others within the wider scholarly community to consider it worthwhile to engage in theological discussion with him. Cross divides his comments into three sections – theological, historical and philosophical. In the theological section he argues that discussion of the Trinity gets ‘lost in a mass of illogicality’ because we are dealing with a reality, namely the being of God, which ultimately transcends our experience. In dealing with the historical development of the doctrine he claims that the New Testament evidence does not entail the conclusion that

41 Grier, Origin, 58.
42 Grier, Origin, 59, referring to an article in The Missionary Herald, January 1936, a magazine published by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
Jesus is the Son in the sense of a second Person in the Godhead. Nor is there any need to affirm the Spirit as a separate hypostasis.

The third section, the philosophical, is important, because Cross devotes it to a critique of Davey’s view of the Trinity in ‘Lines of Approach to a Trinitarian Ontology’. Although he does not agree with Davey, Cross takes a positive view of his ‘empirical approach in place of an acrobatic display with a priori concepts’. Cross notes Davey’s view that there are two separate but related components of God or reality, differentiation and integration. Along with these there is a third, the life proceeding from these two, giving a Trinitarian structure to reality. Cross questions Davey’s assumption that the unity of life expresses itself in a plurality of three. He claims there is no reason why it should not express itself in a plurality of two. Cross asserts that there are two ways of understanding the relationship between God and the world, firstly the Organic, in which the world is ‘the derivative and subordinate constituent’, and the second is that of God as Creator of the world. Cross claims, ‘You cannot argue without reservation, even on the organic conception, from the structure of the temporal world or of man as a special part of it to the structure of the transcendent God.’

Again he questions the inevitability of Davey’s triplicities in human experience. For example he queries whether the triplicity of truth, goodness and beauty covers all ‘our human ends and values’. It does not in his view cover for example freedom, or happiness or holiness. He emphasizes that one could point to dualities in experience, for example birth and death, material and spiritual. These would give as much justification for the claim that the nature of ultimate reality is essentially a duality.

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A further point at which Cross finds weakness in Davey’s argumentation is if one considers the idea of a human person creating something. He states that an artist or an author or a thinker can create a work. This might take a triadic form. But even if the creator is especially given to this form in his work, it does not follow that the personality of the creator is essentially triadic. The creator remains one personality. He states, ‘It may be objected that such an analogy is a reduction of serious argument to triviality, a case of *parvis componere magna*, but it may illustrate the lack of validity in Dr. Davey’s argument nevertheless.’

Cross asserts that if evolution is taken seriously ‘the old biblical dogma that man came on the terrestrial scene as a distinct specific creation by God in his own image’ has to be abandoned. He sees the Pauline view of salvation of Christ as the second Adam being responsible for the continuance of that dogma in the church. And he accuses Davey of being bound to this outmoded dogma when he writes, ‘Yet Dr. Davey makes use of this dogma’. This accusation needs to be considered later because Davey is continually protesting against a formal dogmatism that is not connected to a living faith.

Cross reveals his presuppositions in the closing paragraphs when he insists that ‘man’ in the generic sense does not exist, but only ‘men’ and that ‘no historical figure can possibly represent finality in this process [of evolution]’. This is also an area where Davey’s thought requires examination, because Cross goes on to affirm belief in ideas that are also found in Davey. He mentions with approval Julian Huxley, Samuel Alexander and Berdyaev. To all of these Davey gives some measure of approval. Cross affirms

One thing is certain, that man makes and must make God in his own image, incorporating in him the values that man has learned most to appreciate, but it does not yet appear what we shall be and so we cannot discern what the

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49 Cross, ‘Trinity’, 239.
nature and structure of Godhead eternally is.\textsuperscript{52}

While this article criticises Davey’s Trinitarianism, there are considerable areas of agreement between Cross and Davey, who would endorse all but the last fourteen words of this quotation. To what extent Cross’s assessment of Davey’s theology has any validity will become apparent when we examine Davey’s theology in detail later in the thesis.

3. Austin Fulton

Of the secondary literature on Davey by far the most important is Austin Fulton’s \textit{J. Ernest Davey}, which thus far is the only full-scale work to have been published on Davey. Because of the importance of this book we shall devote the bulk of this chapter to its discussion. Friends of Davey and some of those taught by him felt that his contributions both to the life of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and to theological thought should be acknowledged. This end was achieved to a degree by the posthumous publication in 1963 of part of his manuscript on religious experience. However, Austin Fulton felt that a book about this pivotal figure in Irish Presbyterianism in the first half of the twentieth century would provide a more permanent record of his influence. He comments ‘I hope this study may make some contribution towards this understanding.’\textsuperscript{53} His biography \textit{Davey} appeared in 1970, ten years after Davey’s death. The fact that it was published by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland gives some idea of Davey’s status in the Church.

\textsuperscript{52} Cross, ‘Trinity’, 240.
\textsuperscript{53} Fulton, \textit{Davey}, vii.
(i) The Structure of Fulton’s Book


The main body of the book is prefaced by a page with epigraphs, a Note to the Reader and Acknowledgements, a Foreword by the Rev Principal J. L. M. Haire, Principal of the Presbyterian College, Belfast, and a Credo by Davey.54 The last is compiled from a lecture of Davey’s, ‘A Theologian’s View of Christianity’, and includes some of the themes that are central to his thought such as progress, Incarnation, Atonement, the Trinity and ‘Christ’s thought of God as the integrating thought of Christianity’.55 In the Note to the Reader and Acknowledgements (p vii-ix) Fulton mentions Davey’s gifts as a theologian and cites H.R. Mackintosh’s commendation of the statements of Davey’s theological position summarized in the Pleas of Justification at the Heresy Trial. He also draws attention to the fact that Davey was not greatly influenced by Karl Barth or Rudolf Bultmann, and regards this as evidence of ‘Davey’s characteristic independence’.56

54 For epigraphs see Appendix 1.
55 This lecture was published in ‘The Witness’, March 3rd, 1933. See Fulton, Davey, 172.
56 Fulton, Davey, vii.
Fulton sees his task as reporting.\(^{57}\) Despite this claim to be merely reporting, there is an element of interpretation as can be seen in his further comment that he is attempting ‘a brief exposition of Ernest Davey’s thought’.\(^{58}\) This interpretative element is evident in his belief that theological freedom was of central importance for Davey. He states, ‘It was Ernest Davey’s conviction that his work and witness were strivings in the cause of faith and freedom’.\(^{59}\) This statement brings us to the heart of Fulton’s own conviction that Davey’s importance lay in his significance as a symbol of theological freedom within Irish Presbyterianism. We shall see how theological freedom is one of the interpretative keys of Fulton’s book. While he claims to be merely reporting, he has a set of interpretative principles by which that reporting is organized.

Fulton provides a brief summary of Davey’s academic achievements, drawing attention to the recognition given to Davey’s scholarship throughout his career, and he considers that this establishes him as a scholar of repute.\(^{60}\) Fulton notes A. M. Hunter’s recognition of Davey’s emphasis on the dependence of the Son in the Fourth Gospel.\(^{61}\) This emphasis is at the heart of Davey’s understanding of John and also the reason why, according to Fulton, Davey is critical of C. H. Dodd, despite being in agreement with him about historical elements underlying the Gospel.\(^{62}\) Dodd’s rejection of the mystical element in Jesus’ relationship to the Father runs counter to Davey’s understanding of Jesus’ dependence. For Davey this is a mystical relationship between the Father and the Son. Fulton writes that Davey succeeded in pointing out the ‘unexpected consistency of the picture of Jesus, its close parallels with the Synoptic material and its close relation with

\(^{57}\) Fulton, *Davey*, viii.
\(^{58}\) Fulton, *Davey*, 4.
\(^{59}\) Fulton, *Davey*, viii.
\(^{60}\) Fulton, *Davey*, ch. 1
\(^{61}\) Fulton, *Davey*, 91.
\(^{62}\) Fulton, *Davey*, 92.
human experience at its highest in its ethical and mystical quality’. 63 This shows that he is in agreement with Davey’s view of the relationship between Jesus and the Father being essentially mystical and ethical, themes we shall discuss later in the dissertation.

The heading of the final chapter, ‘Conservative Radical’, gives Fulton’s estimation of Davey’s significance and continuing relevance. He asserts

...the enduring significance of Davey’s work does not lie primarily in his advocacy of this or that position in theological scholarship. Davey’s judgments on these and other such issues may be enduring or passing. But they all have within them an abiding quality in so far as they were the vehicle for the affirmation, implicit or explicit of the Christian scholar’s freedom in particular, and more generally of the freedom of the Christian man. 64

This quotation makes clear what has been argued already, that Davey’s primary and continuing significance for Fulton is as a figure who embodies and represents theological freedom.

Fulton has structured the book, as we have seen, according to these ten chapters divided into a biographical and theological section. The reason he does this is that it facilitates his presentation of Davey’s theological thinking under the headings apologist, historian, scholar, theologian, ecclesiologist, and prophet. While this structure is helpful to an extent, it entails both a certain separation of ideas and themes and some repetition. 65 To give us a deeper understanding of the structure of the book we will now turn to look at the major themes that underlie Fulton’s understanding of Davey and his organization of the material. These themes are freedom, the Fundamentalist/Modernist issue and truth. Davey is important not only for understanding past developments in Irish Presbyterianism but also for the situation in which Fulton was writing. 66 This reflects Fulton’s own concerns about the threats of Fundamentalism and the lack of theological freedom in his own time. The

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63 Fulton, *Davey*, 92.
66 Fulton, *Davey*, ix.
two main motives underlying Fulton’s book will be considered at this point as awareness of them will help the reader to understand the critical comments made about Fulton’s presentation.

(ii) Major Themes in Fulton’s Book

1. Freedom

Freedom is a major theme of Fulton’s book. It could be strongly argued that Fulton’s support and advocacy of Davey’s position is motivated by his need for a weapon in his own arsenal for his role as the opponent of what he regarded as an increasing lack of freedom of thought and lack of tolerance of differing theological opinions within Irish Presbyterianism. He saw evidence for this in the disputes which led eventually to the withdrawal from the World Council of Churches. This view finds confirmation in his summing up of Davey’s importance in the final chapter of his book - Chapter 10 The Conservative Radical. He writes

However deeply we agree, or however widely we disagree, with the approaches and attitudes, the emphasis and the teachings which Ernest Davey represented, or however often we feel constrained to hold judgment in suspense, it is, I am convinced, the moral responsibility of us all to resist any whittling down of the freedom sponsored by the General Assembly in 1927. One hopes such a caveat is superfluous, but fears that it is not entirely so.

In Chapter 10 Fulton also stresses the link of freedom with truth. This is something that needs to be explored further when considering Davey’s thought. All this shows that Fulton was aware of the tensions within Irish Presbyterianism to which the Heresy Trial drew attention, and that these were increasing in the contemporary scene.

67 Similar attitudes were present in the much later decision in 1989 not to join the replacement inter-church body for the British Council of Churches.
68 Fulton, Davey, 170.
In Chapter 8, ‘Ecclesiologist’, the topics covered include God and Freedom, Man and Sin, the Presbyterian view of the Church and Ministry and the Sacraments. Fulton is primarily descriptive and apparently presents Davey’s views with no comment of his own, and certainly no disagreement. It is significant that the first two topics deal with the theological understanding of freedom, which is discussed in the context of the sovereignty of God related to predestination and free will.

As has already been noted, while Fulton claims to be reporting, he is by no means a neutral reporter. Writing about the Trial, as well as other aspects of Davey’s theology, Fulton deliberately uses Davey’s own words, sometimes without comment. For instance, pages 106-120 of his book are direct quotation. This section gives Davey’s Plea of Justification to the charge of teaching about Scripture contrary to the Westminster Standards. Also Fulton admits that in places he may have been using Davey’s words without realizing the fact. He comments

A friend wrote to me that in this chapter I had not only reproduced Dr. Davey’s thought but also his way of expressing it. That my style should have been affected by Dr. Davey’s is very likely. Doubtless not only this but other chapters echo his words as well as his thought. At the same time I was not aware of this until my friend pointed it out.70

Because of Fulton’s presentation it is not always easy to distinguish his comments from his exposition of Davey’s thought. He writes, ‘Wherever it seemed to me that paraphrasing and condensing would detract from the forcefulness of Professor Davey’s argument I have quoted at length, particularly in chapter seven.’71 At other times he presents Davey in a way that coheres with his [Fulton’s] two main motives. All this points to a lack of critical approach. But it arguably points to something more subtle in Fulton’s presentation, suggesting that he wishes to portray Davey in as favourable a light as possible.

69 The meaning and significance of a Plea of Justification will be discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
70 Fulton, Davey, 174.
71 Fulton, Davey, 5.
possible. At other times, however, he seems to want to distance himself from Davey’s theological position, while at the same time defend the theological freedom of expression which the Davey case secured.

2. The Fundamentalist/Modernist Issue

This theme constantly recurs in Fulton’s book and it is important to consider its significance at this point. One reason for its importance is that it will give a better understanding of Fulton’s own theological agenda and will shed light on why he has structured the book as he has done. A further reason is that it provides us with necessary background when other issues are being discussed. For example it helps us to understand the necessary background for the Trial. It is often in the background when other issues are being addressed by the author and therefore to understand Fulton’s treatment of Davey it is necessary to see how this theme influences Fulton’s interpretation of Davey’s theology and historical significance. Some knowledge of Fulton’s own experiences helps us understand why this theme is so important in the way he tells Davey’s story and interprets his theology.

Austin Fulton was born in 1901, eleven years after Davey. He obtained all his degrees from Trinity College, Dublin, apart from an honorary doctorate awarded by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty in Ireland on his election as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1960. At the time of the Heresy Trial (1927) he was twenty-six and studying at Princeton. In 1930 he was ordained as a missionary to China, where he served until 1941. From 1944-1954 he was minister in St Enoch’s in Belfast, where Davey’s father had exercised a strong evangelical ministry and where Davey himself had grown up. He was appointed Convener of the Foreign Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in
1954 and served in that position until he retired in 1967. In 1960 he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly. He died in 1986.\textsuperscript{72}

So, as a young man, because of his time at Princeton Fulton would have had first-hand experience of the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. It was twenty-six years later that he became embroiled in a dispute with the Reverend Ian Paisley in defence of Davey in 1953 when Davey was Moderator of the General Assembly. Paisley alleged that Davey had expressed the view that Jesus may have been illegitimate. In correspondence Fulton challenged Paisley to provide evidence for his allegations.\textsuperscript{73} When Fulton himself became Moderator in 1960, he and Paisley became involved in an argument at a lecture given in Ballymoney, County Antrim, by the Rev. George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community. Ed Moloney and Andy Pollak, two journalists who wrote a book about Paisley, describe the altercation as follows

Fulton, referring to Paisley, warned of the development of a ‘Fascist-type’ movement in Northern Ireland led by ‘manipulators whose interest is power, and who are skilled in rousing passion and inculcating hatred in the name of religion’... He [Paisley] challenged Fulton to go to court to substantiate his allegations.\textsuperscript{74}

Thus Fulton’s clash with Paisley in 1953 and 1960, and Davey’s experience of opposition from those who attacked his theological position in the 1920’s show that from early in the twentieth century up to the 1960’s and beyond, the threat of Fundamentalism was ever-present in the context of the Irish Presbyterian Church. In Davey’s time it centred on allegations of Modernistic teachings, whereas with the emergence of Paisley, both as a religious and political force, the Fundamentalist opposition had two main thrusts, namely anti-Modernism and anti-ecumenism, the latter often based on anti-Roman Catholicism.

\textsuperscript{72} Information in this paragraph is taken in part from W. Desmond Baillie, Chairman of Editorial Committee, \textit{A History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1610-1982}, Belfast, 1982, and Courtney, \textit{Dissenting Voices}, 328.
\textsuperscript{73} See Appendix for exchange of letters between Fulton and Paisley.
\textsuperscript{74} Moloney and Pollak, \textit{Paisley}, 107; also 109 ‘Austin Fulton was picketed and interrupted in Coleraine [County Londonderry], during an address on the WCC’.
Ecumenism was not an issue at the time of the Heresy Trial. Although the areas of disagreement with Roman Catholicism had become politicized, this aspect did not have a great bearing on the accusations brought against Davey.

All this had a significant influence on Fulton’s interpretation and understanding of Davey. It is our contention that Fulton filters everything through this Fundamentalist/Modernist motif. That this is a legitimate reading of his book is corroborated by his essay ‘Church in Tension’. In this essay it becomes clearer that he sees everything in the light of the Fundamentalist/Modernist issue. It seems to be an ever-present force with him, an ever-present threat. It colours his thinking. Arguably it regulates how he considers and presents issues.

Both Davy and Fulton had to contend with Fundamentalist opposition, and both were ever-alert to the danger it represented of stifling scholarship and freedom within the Presbyterian Church. This common experience helps one understand why Fulton may have been reluctant to be critical of Davy’s theology. Even when he is writing about the Fundamentalism that posed a threat to Davey, one can sense his suspicion of the Fundamentalism of his own time.

It needs to be stressed that Fundamentalism is one of the themes that organizes Fulton’s treatment of Davey. His perspective is governed by the Fundamentalist/Modernist threat. Indeed his understanding of the whole Northern Irish scene and Davey in particular is filtered through his concern with Fundamentalism. This is why he brings up the campaigns of W. Nicholson, although his judgment is not entirely negative. He does have a nuanced view. It is not crudely black and white. At the time of the Davey controversy, Nicholson was conducting evangelical meetings. He was...

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75 Austin Fulton, ‘Church in Tension - in the Twentieth Century – Mainly’, 149-188, in J. L. M. Haire, Challenge and Conflict.
originally from Northern Ireland but had gone to the United States where he had been ordained.\footnote{76 See Fulton, \textit{Davey}, 172.} Writing about W. Nicholson, Fulton declares

... it was a common opinion that the Nicholson campaigns had saved us from the escalation of civil strife. This was well-symbolized by a remark attributed to a Falls Road Roman Catholic that there must be something in the preaching of this man because fellows who had been trying to shoot him were now trying to convert him! Some subsequent preachers seem to have had the opposite effect!\footnote{77 Fulton, \textit{Davey}, 32-33. Emphasis added.}

Regarding the effectiveness of the evangelical campaigns of the Rev. W. Nicholson, Fulton’s judgment is not entirely negative. However, he believes that his Fundamentalism exerted a strong influence on Davey’s opponents. He writes

Some have conjectured that if had not been for the Nicholson campaigns the trial would not have got off the ground at all. However this may be in the event he did kindle much of the inspiration which gave encouragement to the plaintiffs in the case, and, possibly, caused them to think that their backing was more determined than it proved to be.\footnote{78 Fulton, \textit{Davey}, 32.}

Fulton recognizes the importance of the Princeton theology as a factor in helping to shape Irish Presbyterianism. However it has to be given a proper interpretation which, he believes, Davey provides. His belief here is supported by the verdict of the General Assembly in favour of Davey. At his Trial Davey argued that his theology on certain points was in fact supported by the Hodges. His opponents claimed that they had the Hodges on their side. The verdict in Davey’s favour meant that Fulton could use that to affirm that Davey’s interpretation on theological issues was a correct one, over against his opponents, who had misinterpreted the Hodges. We will deal with the nature of this interpretation when we examine the Trial. Fulton sees the threat of ‘intransigent fundamentalism’ underlying the Trial charges, arising from both those who were conversant with the theological issues and those ‘who had, for the most part, little qualification, if any, for forming theological opinions and less for pronouncing theological
judgments’. This is a further indication of Fulton’s fear of what he regarded as the irrationality of Fundamentalism.

As will be seen below, Fulton compares the Davey case to that of Robertson Smith, who was removed from his chair in Scotland in 1881, because he had adopted Higher Critical views. In his Plea of Justification, which Fulton cites at length, Davey mentions Robertson Smith and the fact that his views were now widely accepted. Davey then goes on to be critical of the Princeton Theology. At this point Fulton puts an extended note dealing with J. G. Machen. It is significant that he does not include the possible influence Machen had on Davey’s opponents in the main body of his text. For Machen would have appealed to those who would not have been persuaded by the blunt anti-intellectual approach of Nicholson. The note reveals that Fulton himself had spoken with Machen.

He states

Machen had been invited to lecture in Belfast and Londonderry. When considering this invitation he told the writer that while he was prepared to give lectures on controversial theological issues, he was also concerned that he should not seem to enter into a domestic debate in a denomination other than his own. The lectures...made no reference to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; but the weight of their general emphasis was doubtless considered to support Dr. Davey’s accusers.

It is strange that Fulton does not include Machen in the main text to add support to what is said about Nicholson providing support to Davey’s accusers. Here again Fulton is playing down the significance of some of the figures contemporary with Davey, as he did with the Rev. James Hunter, a leading opponent of Davey. He is minimizing the prominence of Davey’s opponents. These should be given more prominence in a biography of Davey than Fulton has done. Machen’s status was that of a scholarly theologian, although of a literalist type. That there might have been more difficulty in

79 Fulton, Davey, 33.
80 Fulton, Davey, 117.
81 Fulton, Davey, 174.
82 Grier, Origin, 57 regards Machen, along with Henry Cooke (1788-1888), as a significant figure in Irish Presbyterianism) and James Hunter as ‘champions of orthodoxy’.
refuting a person of Machen’s capability rather than simply dismissing the Fundamentalism of Nicholson, raises the question whether Fulton is ignoring the more theologically astute of Davey’s opponents. The bias of Fulton is evident in that he focuses on the less theologically astute opponents of Davey and does not do justice to those who could put forward a strong case that could challenge Davey. Either Fulton is naively ignoring the points where Davey could be challenged or it is a deliberate ploy to write his opponents out of history, or, at least, Davey’s history. Whatever the motives are, naivety or subtlety, Fulton is not doing justice to certain key figures that would present a genuine theological challenge to Davey’s views.

This fear of the Fundamentalist threat influenced Fulton in his deliberate decision not to name any of Davey’s opponents. This is indicative of him not wanting to give prominence to them, whether he thought not naming them would take away from their power and influence by depriving them of the oxygen of publicity, and allow him to focus on Davey as the hero.

Some of Davey’s opponents would have regarded revivalism, a second influence from America, as evidence of a sound faith. Here again Fulton would add the proviso of a proper evaluation, which he asserts Davey can supply. Writing about Davey’s view of the 1859 Revival, an Irish not American phenomenon, Fulton accepts his opinion. He comments, ‘Professor Davey’s judgment is certainly better informed than most and likely to be more justly balanced than some. He recognised both strength and weakness in the movement...’83 Here again Fulton does not provide reasons to support his claim. This is further evidence of the uncritical character of Fulton’s treatment of Davey.

In Chapter 4 Fulton highlights Davey’s ambivalence towards evangelism and certain types of religious experience associated with conversion and revivals. He does this,

83 Fulton, *Davey*, 72.
because it reflects his own suspicions of phenomena that often had a close connection with Fundamentalism. However this seems to be a subjective judgment both on the part of Davey and of Fulton. This is evident from his reference to Charles Davey’s experience and influence on his son. In regard to this Fulton states

This experience of high quality evangelism made him [Ernest Davey] sensitive to and critical of anything that cheapened the Gospel, substituted psychological techniques for spiritual power, and mechanized something which is no longer itself unless it is free...revival he welcomed. But much that is understood by revivalism today filled him with dismay.84

We have seen how the two main themes of freedom and the Fundamentalist/Modernist issue run throughout Fulton’s book and govern both his method of presentation and his selection of material. They are connected by a third major concern, namely, the quest for truth, to which we shall now turn.

3. Truth

These two themes of freedom and Fundamentalism versus Modernism are linked by both Davey and Fulton to the concept of truth. This thesis will argue that truth is in fact what connects the two themes of freedom and the Fundamentalist/Modernist issue. Fulton draws attention to the link between truth and freedom by quoting from the Gospel of John in the epigraph to his book. There he writes, ‘If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free...if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed.’85

This connection is brought out clearly in the concluding chapter of Fulton’s book. Moreover, truth is an issue in the Fundamentalist/Modernist debate, where the question is, ‘To what degree are we free to develop our theological ideas in pursuit of truth?’ This study will argue that the reason why the Fundamentalist/Modernist issue is so important

84 Fulton, Davey, 53.
85 Fulton, Davey, vi.
for both Davey and Fulton is that it ties in with the concern of theological freedom, freedom to pursue the truth and the idea of the truth being liberating. Furthermore, the main reason why Fulton is opposed to Fundamentalism is that it restricts theological freedom and consequently freedom to seek truth. This is why in his book he portrays Davey as someone who is similarly both opposed to Fundamentalism and is a champion of theological freedom. This study will argue that Fulton’s portrayal is a correct interpretation on this point. However, one of the problems here is that Fulton does not examine the concept of truth, but assumes that truth is self-evident. Investigation of Davey’s position will reveal whether this is also true in his case.

(iii) Strengths and Weaknesses of Fulton’s ‘J. Ernest Davey’

In Davey Fulton provides biographical material and an anthology of the main areas of Davey’s thinking, along with what the author considers to be Davey’s contributions to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. However, Fulton’s importance lies in the fact that, as his is the only published book on Davey, he is the main secondary source for Davey’s life and thought. Any assessment of Davey has to take account of this book.

Although Fulton does not offer a critical academic study, his account is not a purely subjective work. While compiling the book he corresponded with the Rev. Professor J. L. M. Haire, who was a colleague of Davey for a time and himself Principal of the College, sending parts of the work to him and seeking his opinion. Also he sought the opinions of Davey’s family, others who knew Davey or were taught by him, and included many of these in his book. Nevertheless, a weakness of the work is it is heavily hagiographic.

Moreover, it is possible to see an indication of the influence of his own individual agenda in his presentation of Davey. Therefore it is not true to claim, as Fulton does, that

86 See sample letters in Appendix.
his approach is neutral and objective. Where Fulton provides an analysis of Davey’s position that goes beyond mere description, he does so for apologetic reasons. Davey made a controversial statement about the finality of Christ, which could be interpreted in a way contrary to belief in Christ’s uniqueness as expressed in the Westminster Confession. He stated, ‘I know of no way of accepting truly the Christian faith which does not rest upon a willingness to change it any day for a better, if the other faith in question could be proved really more satisfactory, and more entitled to our acceptance.’ Fulton recognizes the ambiguity of this expression and gives an interpretation of it which he believes is in-keeping with Davey’s theological position. He argues that Davey is saying that because progress is ongoing, there can be no final expression of theological formulation. However he denies that Davey is saying that through progress a fuller revelation than Christ himself would be given. This would be contrary to the Westminster Standards. In conformity with this view Fulton in Chapter 8, which deals with Presbyterian ecclesiology, presents Davey in this area as orthodox. Here his acceptance of Davey’s views is arguably deliberate - dealing with what is distinctively Presbyterian orthodoxy, Fulton would be mindful of those of his own day who would be of a similar mind as Davey’s opponents.

Fulton’s claim that Davey’s main theological views were formed early to a degree contradicts what he says about Davey always re-examining and developing his theology by his adopting a Hegelian method and by his emphasis on the dynamic rather than the static nature of theology. Here we can see that there is an internal inconsistency in Fulton’s approach.

Lack of critical distance has resulted in a book where the author has been reluctant to be critical of his subject. As a result the finished work has a deeply hagiographical character. It does not provide a critical examination of Davey’s theology and its relevance,

87 Fulton, Davey, 64. He is citing Davey, Faith, 111.
88 Fulton, Davey, 64-65.
if any, for today. For example, Fulton states without comment Davey’s assertion that
music is a divine revelation. In dealing with Vesture he chooses not to comment but give
brief summaries of various sections of the book. See comments above on his presentation
of the Trial. Fulton disagrees with the view that Davey’s defence at the Trial was more
‘orthodox’ than expected. However, he does not give specific instances of any who took
this view. Therefore it is a superficial account of the Trial at this point. It is more in the
way of a general assertion. However, he points out that a series of public sermons in the
form of a dialogue between Davey and the Rev. Frazer-Hurst, another Presbyterian
minister, in 1929 belies this view as the series dealt with matters which had been
considered at the Trial. Fulton uses this to support his belief that Davey’s theology did
not become more ‘orthodox’ after the Trial.

There is also incompleteness of exposition. Fulton does not consider whether
Davey’s opponents had genuine reasons for bringing the charges in the first place. Here he
certainly lacks critical distance because of his own involvement in defending his position
from Fundamentalism. On the controversial subject of universalism Fulton mentions it in
relation to Davey’s interpretation of Paul but not in relation to Davey’s own theological
position. Here we have a further indication of Fulton’s selective process at work. He
feels free to mention universalism in relation to Davey’s study on Paul but does not inquire
what view Davey had on the topic in contemporary theology. The former as it is dealing
with Scripture could be regarded as orthodox expression of Scriptural exegesis and within
the bounds of the Westminster Confession. Discussion of universalism in contemporary
theology would have been much more controversial, as it would have been opposed by
those who held orthodox views and who were not necessarily Fundamentalists. Again we

89 Fulton, Davey, 3.
90 Fulton, Davey, 12.
91 Fulton, Davey, 85.
see here Fulton’s agenda driving his presentation of Davey’s thought. To discuss universalism in the context of Irish Presbyterianism would have been to invite trouble certainly from Fundamentalists and most likely others.

Fulton considers the Davey Heresy Trial as the Irish Presbyterian counterpart of the Robertson Smith case in Scotland. This raises the question, ‘Why has Fulton made this comparison?’ The comparison could be counter-productive if the more fundamentalist of Fulton’s contemporaries still considered Smith a heretic. As Smith had propounded views similar to those which Davey was advocating, this was likely. It is suggested that the answer lies more in the fact that the views of Smith, once considered heretical in Scotland, were now widely accepted and were now considered mainstream. Fulton expects Davey to be regarded similarly – that his views would become mainstream in Irish Presbyterianism.

At this point there is another aspect of Fulton’s presentation of Davey that needs to be considered as it might seem to conflict with his hagiographical approach and his sometimes uncritical approach. This is the fact that Fulton at times shows a hesitancy or reluctance to accept wholeheartedly Davey’s theological position. While he is sympathetic to Davey he does not always fully embrace his theology. He almost suspends judgment on it. The reason for this is that what is important for Fulton is that Davey should have the freedom to express his theology in his own way, whether or not Fulton himself agrees with how that theology is expressed. There is an explanation for this apparent contradiction of the statement that Fulton is both hagiographical and uncritical at times in his approach to Davey. This is an unusual tension – Fulton presenting a hagiography of Davey and yet not being fully committed to Davey’s theology. Its explanation lies precisely in the symbolic role that Davey has for Fulton rather than in his significance residing in the character of his theology. This also accounts for why the theological aspects of Fulton’s exposition of

92 Fulton, Davey, 32.
Davey’s theology sometimes get downplayed for that is not what is important to Fulton. What is important for him is Davey as a symbol rather than Davey as a theologian. This brings us to the heart of Fulton’s understanding of Davey. He is not really interested in him primarily for his theological insights but for what he represents. He is a figurehead or icon or symbol of theological freedom of expression.

A major problem that Fulton has to overcome in dealing with the Trial is that Davey makes no reference to it in his book, *1840-1940 The Story of a Hundred Years: An Account of the Irish Presbyterian Church from the Formation of the General Assembly to the Present Time*.93 This is problematic, because it would have been useful to Fulton’s own agenda if Davey had made something of the Trial in his book. Because of Fulton’s own concerns with parallel issues in the church of his time, it could be argued that for Davey to ignore the Trial undermines in part his significance. In other words one could argue that Fulton is disappointed at such an omission for he is promoting Davey as the icon of theological freedom in Irish Presbyterianism. And this is possible only because of the verdict in the Trial. Fulton is looking for ammunition to fight similar battles as Davey fought for theological freedom against anti-intellectualism, and here Davey is not providing any. Rather Davey is doing the cause a disservice by smoothing out the differences, where at this point it is necessary to know what the differences are in order to overcome them. Despite this omission on Davey’s part, Fulton is still able to claim, ‘The Heresy trial was the most dramatic episode in Ernest Davey’s career. The General Assembly’s action was one of the most important in our Church’s history’.94 This quotation shows Fulton’s determination to press his point that Davey’s importance lay in his being a representative figure of theological freedom.

94 Fulton, *Davey*, 170.
Of necessity both Fulton and Davey have to acknowledge the success of the united church in overcoming past divisions and tensions. However, Fulton is more realistic than Davey, because he realizes the continuing threat of past tensions. Thus there is an apparent contradiction in Fulton’s view of the success of the union which resulted in the present Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He agrees with Davey that it was a success. However, an earlier comment runs counter to this view and Fulton acknowledges that the old causes of division had again reared their heads at the Trial. He states

In spite of the widespread preparatory propaganda, in spite of the injection into the situation of features recalling the ’59 [Revival] or the Arian controversy, in spite of the personal popularity and standing of at least some of those arrayed against Professor Davey...the defence offered by Professor Davey in itself or in union with his character and personality won the day.  

Arguably, as both are leaders in the Presbyterian Church, it is incumbent on them to praise the union. Neither wished to revert to the old oppositions and so both had to put a positive gloss on the united church. There are tensions that will at some point need deeper reflection. On the one hand, Fulton wishes to follow Davey and stress the success of the union. On the other hand, he does not want to accept the argument precisely because of what happened to Davey.

(iv) Proposed Advances on Fulton’s Work

Having pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of Fulton’s book, it is necessary to state how this thesis will go beyond him. As has been shown, Fulton at many points and for various reasons is not critical. This thesis, while acknowledging the work Fulton has done, will go beyond it in a critical consideration of the arguments Davey uses. It will indicate areas where Fulton could be taken further and points of disagreement. For example, he considers Jesus a development of Davey’s unpublished dissertation ‘Johannine

95 Fulton, Davey, 35. Emphasis added.
Presentation’. Similarly he regards Davey’s article ‘Lines of Approach to a Trinitarian Ontology’ as a development, whereas I regard both of these as substantially the same with minor modifications. Furthermore, Fulton claims that the reason why Davey did not publish much after the Trial was his heavy teaching duties. It will be contended as part of this thesis that by the time of the Trial Davey had formulated the main theological positions which he continued to hold for the rest of his life, and subsequent changes were more in the nature of fine-tuning modifications.

One important area where, as we have seen, Fulton accepts Davey’s judgment with some reservation is the Second Non-Subscription or Arian Controversy in Irish Presbyterianism (1821-1830). Davey’s assessment was that it strengthened the evangelical witness of the Church. On the negative side it did entail the loss of some who espoused a more liberal spirit typified in the person Henry Montgomery, the leader of the Non-Subscribers. Positively the loss of the Non-Subscribers enabled the Synod of Ulster and the Secession Synod to unite to form the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1840. In his 1840-1940 Davey asserts that the united church, that is, after 1840, had never shown signs of dividing along the kind of views that existed before the union. It is my contention that the strong anti-Liberal strain that pre-dated the formation of the united church was not eliminated by the union, and that the Davey case provided a prime example of what Davey himself had claimed to be a thing of the past.

There are significant influences on Davey that Fulton has not dealt with in sufficient detail and are crucial to any critical examination of his theology. This is the case with regard to Davey’s general appeal to Hegel’s dialectic of thesis, antithesis and

96 Fulton, Davey, 87.
97 Fulton, Davey, 2-3.
98 For an account of this controversy see, e.g., R. G. Crawford, ‘The Second Subscription Controversy and the Personalities of the Non-Subscribers’, 96-115 in J. L. M. Haire, Challenge and Conflict.
99 Davey, Hundred Years, 21-22.
synthesis, and his not engaging to a great degree with Barth and Bultmann. Also, while recognizing the importance of religious experience in Davey’s thinking, Fulton does not explore the influences of Schleiermacher, William James or Lotze. Nor does he evaluate Davey’s indebtedness to such pioneering figures as Freud, Jung and Starbuck, Coe and Pratt.

Another singular omission on Fulton’s part is that, while he accepts Davey’s claim that the Hodges support his position and not his opponents, he does not draw attention to the fact that Davey only claims support from Hodge and other Princeton theologians at the Trial. In his writings Davey would normally be critical of such ‘traditional orthodoxy’ as espoused by the Princeton Theologians. Davey tends to treat the Reformers in a similar way, often in his writing being critical of their views. But he does also use them in a positive way when they support the point he is making.

Fulton does not connect the disparate aspects of Davey into a coherent whole. This thesis will attempt to show the coherence of Davey’s thought over the various subjects on which he wrote and its continuing relevance to contemporary theological issues. We have seen that Fulton’s work is important, but also that it is hagiographical and has weaknesses.

Fulton’s exposition has also been criticized by John Thompson, whose views on Davey we shall consider next. The highlighting of these inadequacies of Fulton’s book is another reason why a study of Davey is needed. Turning to Thompson’s review of Fulton’s book, we find an appraisal of Davey that is far from hagiographical. On the face of it he views Fulton’s book positively. He describes it as ‘well written’ and a ‘full and valuable account of the life, work and thought’ of Davey. He also recognizes the importance of the theme of freedom in Fulton’s presentation. However, in the same

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100 Fulton, *Davey*, 68: Hegel; vii: Barth and Bultmann.
paragraph he goes on to state, ‘...it leaves one with few clues as to the understanding and appraisal of the theology of Davey – the matter which was most at issue in the heresy trial and afterwards’. One of the aims of this Thesis is to determine the nature of Davey’s theology.

4. John Thompson

John Thompson uses his review article ‘The Theology of J. E. Davey. An Evaluation’ to present a strong critique of Davey’s theological position. He notes that his assessment of Davey is supported by his own personal reminiscences of him. From the tone of his article it is reasonable to conclude that this convinces Thompson that his conclusions and argumentation about Davey are thereby strengthened. He agrees with Fulton’s estimate of Davey – ‘a radical with a conservative element in his make-up and thinking’. But argues that Davey does not always succeed in holding together the conservative and radical aspects of his theology. Indeed these create irreconcilable contradictions. He goes on to raise questions about Davey’s theology and concludes it is based on certain unacknowledged presuppositions. One of Thompson’s merits is that he draws attention to the way that Davey’s preconceptions conditioned his thinking.

Thompson claims that Fulton does not deal fully with the nature of Davey’s theology. In Thompson’s opinion ‘the key to Davey’s theological thought lies in the combination of a mild Hegelianism with psychology and a radical, critical approach to the Biblical testimony’. Following this interpretative key Thompson considers specific aspects of Davey’s theology, namely his doctrine of God, the Trinity and the person of Christ. Under the doctrine of God, Thompson is critical of the idea of God being enriched

by humanity. He understands Davey’s doctrine of the Trinity as an Hegelian construct ‘and not a statement of the Biblical testimony or the Church’s traditional teaching’. In his Christology Davey emphasizes the humanity of Christ and Thompson declares that he is unsure how Davey understands Christ’s divinity, although he recognizes the importance of the concept of Kenosis for Davey’s Christology. Thompson goes on to assert his own strong opposition to Hegelianism, which according to him is incapable of reconciling opposites. Because of this presupposition on Thompson’s part it is inevitable that he pronounces Davey’s attempt to reconcile the conservative and radical aspects of his theology a failure.

Thompson concludes his evaluation by mentioning the positive contribution Davey made to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. However, he writes, ‘His theology is a much more dubious affair and taken as a whole can scarcely be a guide to the present or the future. That it is little read or quoted today is adequate commentary upon it.’ Thus for Thompson, Davey’s theology has no contemporary relevance or significance.

We now turn to consider more closely what Thompson says about Davey’s theology. He recognizes that any evaluation of Davey’s theology is problematic and he sees the reason for this in the two areas mentioned above, namely Davey’s Hegelianism and the apparently contradictory conservative and radical elements of his theology. Thompson considers this a fundamental flaw because, in his view, Davey’s approach is trying to impose a pre-existing philosophical system on theological thought. He cites Bultmann’s Existentialism and Pittenger’s Process Philosophy as two other types of

approach that involve imposing particular philosophical systems on to any theologizing.\textsuperscript{113} Davey’s approach exhibits a similar fatal flaw.

In Davey’s doctrine of God Thompson claims that it is Davey’s Hegelian philosophical preconceptions that lead him to not making a sufficient separation between the Creator and his creation.\textsuperscript{114} The result is that his doctrine of God is inevitably pantheistic, although Thompson describes it as ‘an incipient pantheism’.\textsuperscript{115}

It is the same Hegelian philosophical preconceptions that detract from Davey’s understanding of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{116} Thompson considers this results in a defective understanding of the Godhead. He writes, ‘...in Davey’s view the three persons are not each wholly, essentially divine but are elements which together go to make up the Godhead’.\textsuperscript{117} This is not in keeping with the definition of the Trinity in the Shorter Catechism.\textsuperscript{118} Thompson claims Davey’s thinking on the Trinity is ‘vague and unclear as is much of Davey’s theology’.\textsuperscript{119} He also questions how far the Trinity, understood in this way, can be regarded as personal.\textsuperscript{120}

Regarding Christology Davey not only lays emphasis on the human but, according to Thompson, ‘nowhere does he affirm that Christ is the eternal Son of God’.\textsuperscript{121} Thompson strongly criticizes Davey’s assertion of the kinship between the human and divine and claims Barth’s support for this criticism.\textsuperscript{122} He claims Barth recognized this as ‘the central misunderstanding’ of ‘liberal, radical and Roman theories’.\textsuperscript{123} In opposition to this kind of thinking stood the Reformation affirmation that the incarnation was all of God,
'an act of sheer grace'. Here Thompson shows his own theological agenda when he boldly declares his allegiance to Barth and follows this up by claiming that Davey is wrong in refusing to recognize the Chalcedonian definition as normative for faith. Here again Thompson claims Barth’s dynamic interpretation of Chalcedon is correct. Furthermore, he asserts that Davey contradicts himself in his study of John when he ‘appears to reject the Kenotic theory’, but then immediately speaks of limitation as inevitable. Thompson is equally critical of Davey’s understanding of Christ’s humanity. He describes it as ‘a peculiar and difficult metaphysical theory...almost impossible to understand’.

Thompson draws attention to the radical nature of Davey’s theology. He finds this expressed, for example, in his strong opposition to a Barthian approach, his not believing in infant baptism and the elements of the Credo which Fulton presents as the core of his faith. All these do not cohere with any claims he may have made to be consistent with orthodox Christianity.

An important point of difference between Thompson and Fulton in their estimate of Davey is the nature of Davey’s defence at the Trial. Both claim that there are conservative and radical elements in Davey’s thought. Thompson, on the one hand, ascribes Davey’s position at the Trial to Davey’s desire to appear to be orthodox. He argues that Davey’s ‘exposition’ of his theology at the Trial is conservative and not the more radical position contained in his writings. Fulton, on the other hand, who believes Davey to be orthodox, attributes the position adopted by Davey at the Trial not to expediency, but to views that Davey had held much earlier in his teaching career. Thus for Fulton Davey’s defence at the

124 Thompson, ‘Davey’, 22.
125 Thompson, ‘Davey’, 22.
126 Thompson, ‘Davey’, 22.
127 Thompson, ‘Davey’, 22-23.
128 Thompson, ‘Davey’, 23.
Trial is in no way incompatible with the theology he expressed before the Trial. We shall attempt to resolve this disagreement, when we examine the Heresy Trial.

Thompson does acknowledge that Fulton saw his task as reporting with ‘the minimum of evaluation and criticism’. 131 But obviously Thompson thinks this insufficient, as is revealed by the criticism he makes of the specific areas of Davey’s theology considered above. This defect is hinted at throughout the review and is repeated forcefully near the end. There Thompson writes, ‘...one would get the impression from it [Fulton’s book] that Davey simply and wholeheartedly accepted the Church’s traditional position [on infant baptism] – which he certainly did not.’ 132

It is difficult to read Thompson’s review and come to the conclusion that he considered Fulton’s book to have dealt with the primary issue of the nature of Davey’s theology. He considers Fulton to be glossing over the controversial aspects of Davey’s theology.

However, there are areas where Thompson does agree with Fulton. Both assert the integrity of Davey and the gifts that he brought to the church. Both recognize his indebtedness, to some degree, to an Hegelian approach. Both are aware of his opposition to Barth. Both agree that there was both a conservative side and a radical side to his thinking. Both recognize the importance of the theme of freedom in relation to Davey.

A main criticism Thompson makes of Davey is that he approaches the theological task with pre-conceived Hegelian philosophical suppositions. However, Thompson himself is guilty of a similar crime. He also has an agenda and is influenced by his own assumptions that motivate the way he does theology. His acknowledged reliance on Barth means that he is accepting a Barthian approach to theology, which claims to be based solely on Scripture. This shows in his rejection of Liberal Theology, Existentialism,
Process Theology and the *Analogia Entis* all of which, according to Thompson, rely on sources, namely philosophies, outside Scripture.\textsuperscript{133} It is reasonable to conclude from the above that Thompson’s understanding of Davey is distorted by his own theological bias, which influences him in coming to the conclusion he reaches, namely, that Davey’s theology is no longer relevant.

The strength and importance of Thompson’s review is that in the short space of five pages he makes a harsh critique of Davey and, by implication, also of Fulton, whom he damns with faint praise. An example of this is when he expresses amazement at Fulton’s use of the category ‘Prophet’ to describe Davey. He comments, ‘One hesitates to apply this word [prophet] to someone who expressed in the year before Hitler came to power his naive belief in progress’.\textsuperscript{134} This last comment is indicative of Thompson’s assessment of Davey’s theology as a whole and, along with the views expressed by Fulton and others, indicates the need for a reassessment of Davey.

**G. Conclusion**

There is no full critical study of Davey. Yet Davey is a significant thinker, who is acknowledged to be such by his contemporaries. He is also an important witness to significant events in Northern Irish Presbyterian history. Secondary literature which has been written on him is ambivalent and contradictory in its assessment, so there is need for a fresh assessment of this figure, which our study will provide.

While Grier’s book helps shed light on the position of those who opposed Davey, it is written, as we have seen, from the perspective of those who left the Irish Presbyterian Church in 1927 because of their opposition to Davey’s theology. Although Fulton’s book is helpful and provides much information about Davey, it is an ecclesiastical book and

\textsuperscript{133} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{134} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 24.
hagiographical in character. Thompson’s article is critical but, because it is so short, it can only touch on some of the issues that need to be addressed in attempting an academic evaluation of Davey’s theology. Also Thompson is approaching Davey with his own agenda as a Barthian. Thus he is coming from a particular point of view which may lead him to be unfair to Davey at times. Nevertheless he has identified some of the real issues that anyone engaging with Davey has to consider, namely Davey’s understanding of God, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. Due to lack of space this Thesis will focus on Davey’s Christology as a case-study to provide a fuller and more critical account of Davey’s theology than has hitherto been given. The article by Cross is much more sympathetic to Davey’s position. But this in itself is problematic, as Cross is writing from a Unitarian perspective and his support for Davey raises the question of whether Davey is in fact heterodox, as his opponents, and also Thompson, have claimed.

The question of Davey’s orthodoxy is, as we have seen, one of the primary issues in relation to his theology. Grier argues that Davey’s position is unorthodox.135 He claims, ‘…the members of the 1927 Assembly had sufficient information in their hands to show the Professor’s unorthodoxy.’136 Thompson also, as we have seen, considers Davey to be unorthodox. He claims that Davey’s theology does not agree with Chalcedon, and for that reason would be counter to the faith expressed in the Westminster Confession, which acknowledges Chalcedon as authoritative. Both Allen and Fulton, however, claim that Davey is orthodox. Fulton argues that one reason why Davey is important is his consistency with the Westminster Confession and therefore, for that reason, he is a useful statement of Presbyterian doctrine. Thus in his evaluation of Davey’s theology Thompson contradicts Fulton at a number of points, consequently raising some interesting questions.

135 Grier, Origin, 42-46.
136 Grier, Origin, 42.
At this point our research is going to follow Thompson, not so much in his conclusions, but in his approach in trying to work out what the theological underpinnings of Davey’s thinking are. This is particularly important, because this is the major area where Fulton falls down. He does not sufficiently consider this. Fulton provides exposition. However, he organizes the material according to particular theological agenda. But some of the key questions concerning Davey’s theological orthodoxy and concerning his theological significance are simply glossed over by Fulton. We have argued that there is an inadequate representation of Davey’s thought, because of Fulton’s concern with Fundamentalism. This thesis will improve on Fulton in various important ways, one of which is to rectify Fulton’s failure to do justice to the many-layered aspects of Davey’s theology, precisely because he has this agenda that is driven by his concern with Fundamentalism on the one hand and his concern with freedom on the other. In Fulton both these concerns influence and feed upon each other.

For Fulton Davey’s iconic status consists in his championing of theological freedom, which was established by the verdict of the Heresy Trial. Nonetheless, Fulton recognizes that theology has developed since the time of Davey’s Trial and, by inference, that for him theological freedom is the enduring legacy of Davey rather than Davey’s actual theology.137

Likewise Allen in *The Presbyterian College, Belfast 1853-1953* does not mention specific aspects of Davey’s theology. It is natural for Allen for ecclesiastical reasons to wish not to stir up negative memories engendered by the Trial. Indeed he emphasizes that ‘it is …peculiarly appropriate’ that Davey is the person to oversee the centenary celebrations of the College in his dual role as Principal and Moderator of the General

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137 Fulton, ‘Church in Tension’, written eleven years after *Davey*. While Fulton’s support of Davey has not diminished in that time, his presentation in this essay is less hagiographical than in his biography.
However, a further possible reason for Allen not making reference to the views Davey espoused is that for Allen, as for Fulton, Davey is primarily a symbol of freedom of theological expression.

Linked to Fulton’s concern for theological freedom is a fear of Fundamentalism. He does not take seriously the reasons Davey’s opponents put forward for attacking his position. He perceives them as attacks on theological freedom. However, his major concern of combating Fundamentalism results in him developing blind spots in certain areas. He is unable to see Davey’s weaknesses, because his concern to oppose Fundamentalism is prompting him to give a more positive view of Davey than perhaps the facts warrant and to downplay some of the justified criticisms of his opponents. Without being in total agreement with their theological position, one can recognize that they have put their finger on certain weaknesses in Davey’s position.

Our examination of the secondary literature reveals a further contradiction in the estimate of Davey’s significance, which is linked to the issue of theological freedom. For Grier, and also for Fulton, Davey both encapsulates and represents the struggle between Modernism and Traditional Orthodoxy in the Irish Presbyterian Church. For the latter the theological freedom entailed is a positive feature, whereas for the former this same freedom is a negative feature, because it symbolizes the heresies of Modernism.

We would further argue that the connection with Princeton has a significant impact, although in diametrically opposed ways, on the manner both Fulton and Grier interpret Davey’s works. Fulton’s time at Princeton and his coming into contact with the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy there arguably engendered his two major concerns, namely, a fear of Fundamentalism and his support for theological freedom. It is reasonable to regard both of these factors as underpinning his view of Davey and his opponents, and

having a strong influence on how he shaped his book. Similarly, in the case of Grier, it can be argued that his time at Princeton had a very strong influence on the shaping of his theological outlook and his consequent role in the accusations of heresy against Davey. Grier was at Princeton for two years (1923-1925) and returned to the Presbyterian College in Belfast to finish his theological course in 1925. It is clear from the tenor of his book that he was firmly convinced of the correctness of the type of theology espoused at Princeton and of its faithfulness to the Westminster Confession of Faith. He states, ‘I had heard of Princeton’s reputation for orthodoxy and so I applied in the summer of 1923’. While Grier and Davey’s other opponents champion Traditional Orthodoxy, they interpret it in terms of contemporary argumentation, namely in terms of the standpoint of the Princeton Theology. Although they appeal to Calvin and the Reformers, they do not always go back to them to support their theological position. In this they are similar to Davey, despite taking a different theological perspective. However, they regard the Princeton Theology, of which the most representative work is arguably Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*, as the best interpretation exposition of the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

One further criticism can be made of both Thompson and Fulton. In considering Fulton’s book it was seen that often he made assertions without providing evidence to support them. Thompson also does this. For example, we have already seen his generalizing reminiscence about Davey normally rejecting the conservative view. A further inadequacy of Thompson is that he rather narrowly conceives the notion of prophet as one who can predict with accuracy future events. That is not in line with the biblical

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notion of prophecy. It only touches on one aspect of biblical prophecy. The biblical prophet has a deeper and wider calling - the prophet is a spokesperson for God’s word, a spokesperson who mediates between God and his people. Thus Thompson’s view of Davey is also distorted. It is reasonable to conclude that Thompson himself is influenced by his theological agenda, as Fulton was influenced by his own ecclesiastical and political agenda. In our research we shall seek for evidence which will confirm or deny such generalizations and shall address the validity of Thompson’s conclusions after our examination of Davey’s theology in Part Two of this Thesis.

So while Thompson’s article is much shorter than Fulton’s book, it is of no less importance, primarily because he takes a view of the significance of Davey’s theology which is diametrically opposed to that of Fulton. This Dissertation will seek to discover which view is nearer the truth by attempting to give a comprehensive account of Davey’s thinking. Furthermore, Thompson is important, because he raises specific questions about Davey’s theology, which Fulton, pleading his alleged role as a reporter, skirts around or glosses over. The criticisms levelled at Davey’s theology by Thompson need to be addressed. This dissertation will attempt to do so for the reason, which Thompson himself holds, that Davey’s theology cannot be left unexplained. However, unlike Thompson, this study will dispute the claim that it should be relegated to the dustbin of history. It will be arguing for the continuing relevance of the approach to theology articulated by Davey.

The secondary literature further reveals differences of opinion regarding how Davey’s defence at the Heresy Trial is to be understood. On the one hand, Fulton holds that Davey did not present a conservative defence, while in fact holding heterodox views. He argues that Davey’s position at the Trial reflected views Davey gave in his lectures at the Presbyterian College in 1917-1918.143 He states, ‘The Trial statements differ from the

lectures not in approach nor in major emphasis, but mainly in the more extensive and detailed treatment they present.\textsuperscript{144}

On the other hand, Thompson argues that there is a difference between Davey’s defence at the Trial and the expression of his theology apart from the Trial.\textsuperscript{145} Thompson claims that this difference is the result of the incompatible elements of conservatism and radicalism in Davey’s thought.\textsuperscript{146} He concludes, ‘The conservative exposition that the Assembly accepted would now be regarded as the norm by which other views should be judged. In the light of this Davey’s radical views cannot be contemplated.’\textsuperscript{147} Thompson supports this opinion by recalling that in his classroom teaching Davey usually rejected the more conservative interpretation.\textsuperscript{148}

That again will be one of the themes of this dissertation. We will be able to answer this question by examining the Trial in some detail and then comparing it with Davey’s writings apart from the Trial.

Another area of difference shown in the secondary literature relates to the reasons why Davey had such great support within the Irish Presbyterian Church. Grier and Fulton disagree about this. Grier attributes the support Davey was given to the fact that members of the General Assembly had insufficient ‘loyalty to Christ and His holy Word’.\textsuperscript{149} However, there is an inconsistency here, as Grier also accuses Assembly members of having a ‘lack…of theological discernment’. Here Grier takes a different line from Fulton. He is less sympathetic than Fulton and would seem to be attributing blame to those who gave support to what he considered to be a Modernist leadership. Fulton, on the other

\begin{flushright}
Inheritance of the Christian Church. II The Church’s Interpretation of Jesus Christ.’ No date.
From Foreword, ‘…The first of the Two was delivered at the opening of the College Session on 23rd October, 1917, and the second at its close on 11th April, 1918.’
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{144} Fulton, \textit{Davey}, 13.
\textsuperscript{145} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 23.
\textsuperscript{146} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 23.
\textsuperscript{147} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 23.
\textsuperscript{148} Thompson, ‘Davey’, 23.
\textsuperscript{149} Grier, \textit{Origin}, 59.
hand, expresses more uncertainty concerning the motivation of those who gave their support to Davey. He does, however, indicate that the nature of the opposition of Grier, Hunter and the other accusers and the methods they adopted did not sit comfortably with the majority of the Assembly. Allen in his assessment uncritically attributes the support given to Davey to the naivete of the Elders who were members of the Court.\footnote{Allen, \textit{College}, 260-261.}

If one is going to work with Davey’s kind of theological approach, one has to think through how it might be adapted and adjusted to meet some of the justified criticism of his opponents. And precisely because Fulton has this ecclesiastical and political agenda, driven by his notion of freedom and his opposition to Fundamentalism, he is unable to see this. Consequently, he is not presenting us with a sufficiently nuanced approach that does justice to the range of theological positions that were present in contemporary Northern Ireland. While this study acknowledges Fulton’s contribution, it claims that he has not made it in a way that does justice to the different parties involved in the debate in Davey’s time.

Although we have already mentioned Cross in connection with Davey’s orthodoxy, Cross also raises important questions about other aspects of Davey’s theology, which need to be considered. Leaving aside the question of the doctrine of the Trinity, which Cross as a Unitarian does not accept, these centre on three areas, namely, the relationship between God and the world, the nature of God as ultimate or transcendent reality, and evolution and development.\footnote{Cross, ‘Trinity’, 237-240.} Cross is critical of Davey because Davey transfers his view of the relationship between God and the world to his thinking about the essence of God as transcendent or ultimate reality.\footnote{Cross, ‘Trinity’, 237.} Cross regards this as an illegitimate transference. He argues against Davey that there are no grounds for holding that ultimate reality is triplex.
rather than pluralist, dual or monistic. Finally, Cross holds that an acceptance of evolution entails the rejection of the Pauline doctrine of Christ as the Second Adam as outmoded dogmatism. Yet he claims that Davey’s acceptance of evolution has not resulted in him jettisoning this outmoded doctrine. In our examination of Davey’s theology we must address these issues and further ask how our answers help us to understand Davey’s view of the finality of Christ.

What the contrasting views of the secondary literature show is that Davey is undoubtedly an important figure who does not seem to be properly understood. Confronted with these divergent views it is hoped that this study will throw light on which is nearer the truth of Davey’s position. One thing it will do is to give the reader a much deeper knowledge of the theology of Davey than has been done up to the present and it will try to resolve some of the tensions in the commentators’ opinions of his thought.

A further aim of this dissertation is to consider Davey’s significance for doing theology today. I believe that there are theological resources in Davey that are still significant for contemporary theological discussion. He has important things to say, for example, about the doctrine of God and Christology. We shall set about our task of discerning Davey’s theology and its underpinnings by firstly examining the issues revealed by the Heresy Trial. This will be followed in Part Two of this thesis by an examination of his Christology, which can be regarded as a case-study for his theology as a whole. The limited secondary literature on Davey presents us with a confused assessment of this controversial figure. On the one hand, he is condemned as a heretic. On the other hand, he is regarded as a defender of the faith. The confused and contradictory assessment of Davey generates the research questions to be addressed in this dissertation.

PART ONE: THE HERESY TRIAL

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT OF THE TRIAL

A. The Core Issue of the Heresy Trial

In considering the theology of J. E. Davey the *Record of the Trial of the Rev. Prof. J. E. Davey By the Belfast Presbytery And of the Hearing of Appeals By the General Assembly, 1927* is an important evidential source in determining his theological views. However, the nature of the evidence this document provides needs to be borne in mind. The context of a trial for heresy means that Davey was defending himself against specific accusations rather than giving a comprehensive presentation of his theology. The main issue raised by the Trial was whether Davey’s theology was compatible with that of the Irish Presbyterian Church as expressed in its Standards, namely Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its accompanying Catechisms, the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism.

B. The Perceptions of the Different Parties

The Complainants brought five specific charges against Davey. It is clear, however, that they were motivated by their opposition to the whole ethos of his theology, which they regarded as Liberal, Modernist, and Rationalistic. Mr S. G. Montgomery declares, ‘Professor Davey avowed himself on the side of the higher critics, a liberal, or Modernist, and prefers these teachings or views to the old orthodox doctrines of our Presbyterian

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156 *Record of the Trial of the Rev. Prof. J. E. Davey By the Belfast Presbytery And of the Hearing of Appeals by the General Assembly, 1927*. Published by the Authority of the General Assembly, Belfast, 1927.
Davey embodied a threat to the continuing orthodoxy of Irish Presbyterianism. To have his Liberal opinion condemned as heretical would halt Irish Presbyterianism’s departure from orthodoxy.

Here we come to an area which Fulton does not consider in his book on Davey. He regards Davey’s opponents as traditionalists both holding back the legitimate development of theological thinking within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and impinging upon the right to theological freedom. He does not ask the question, ‘How much justification was there in the charges the complainants brought?’ In his efforts to establish Davey as an icon of theological freedom he ignores this fundamental question. It is a question that this research will address.

The Complainants viewed their position differently. Their understanding is clearly brought out by Mr Snoddy. In his speech at the Presbytery Trial he asserts that there are two conflicting and incompatible theological positions within Irish Presbyterianism. One is the ‘Calvinistic system’, adhered to by the complainants, which is compatible with both Scripture and the Westminster documents. The other is the ‘Modernistic’, ‘Rationalistic’ position advocated by Davey, which is compatible with neither Scripture nor the Westminster documents. The Complainants believed a clash between the two positions was inevitable and indeed believed it was their Christian duty to bring about such a clash to clear the Church of erroneous views. The attempt to draw attention to the fact of these incompatible theological positions is part of the Complainants’ strategy. Snoddy emphasizes that this is a danger of which many within the Church are unaware. He states

The evidence, I believe, only makes it clearer that the line of differentiation as regards the theological position in the Church is far deeper than some of you really believe, and the evidence, to my mind, cannot establish a strong enough bridge on which to rest confidently the view either that all is right with Professor

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157 Trial, 163-164.
158 Trial, 63-66.
Davey, or that all is right with the Assembly’s College.\textsuperscript{159}

This quotation also indicates that the attack on Davey was part of the wider attack on Liberalism within the Presbyterian College and the Presbyterian Church as a whole.

The timing of the accusations is a further indication that the Complainants’ ultimate goal was the preservation of traditional orthodox Presbyterianism. The charges against Davey were brought at a time when the General Assembly was considering amending the terms of subscription to the Westminster Confession. During the Trial Professor Paul, Principal of the College, directed a question to Snoddy about the reason for bringing the charges against Davey at this time, four years after the publication of his book \textit{The Changing Vesture of the Faith}. On being asked why he had not come forward sooner, Snoddy answered, ‘Because you did not begin to alter the formula sooner’, shows that the Complainants regarded such possible amendments to the Westminster Confession \textit{per se} as an erosion of orthodoxy, because they provided an entry for more Liberal approaches to theology.\textsuperscript{160}

Fulton declares

\begin{quote}
I have endeavoured to present the positive content of the Principal’s teaching and have removed, so far as this seemed possible, the marks of the trial on the treatment and the presentation. I have not entirely succeeded in this, but the reader will find no references to accusers or defenders by name nor emphasis upon the verbal skirmishes which at times enlivened the course of the trial.\textsuperscript{161}
\end{quote}

A possible reason for his refusal to name them in his text. Fulton does not wish to detract the reader from the validity of Davey’s position by considering that the Complainants’ claims might warrant closer consideration than he is willing to admit. When such a comment is taken in conjunction with Fulton’s remarks that ‘doubtless the principal movers were sincere enough men who believed themselves thus called to be defenders of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{159} Trial, 65. \\
\textsuperscript{160} Trial, 34. \\
\textsuperscript{161} Fulton, Davey, 4. 
\end{flushleft}
the faith’ and his accusation that the leaders were not exonerated from blame because of
‘the ignorance of the rank and file of many of the followers’, it reveals his determination to
show Davey’s opponents in as negative a light as possible. In his remark about the
Complainants’ sincerity he is ‘damning them with faint praise’.

Thus far references have been to Davey’s accusers as a group. We shall now
consider some of the individuals who comprised that group and the importance of their role
in the process against Davey as representing the theologically Liberal aspect of Irish
Presbyterianism. The leading Complainant was the Rev. James Hunter, who had been
licensed to preach in 1887 by the Presbytery of Belfast. He became Minister of Knock
Congregation in Belfast in 1889 and retired from the active ministry on 9 July 1924. The
record of his opposition to Liberalism within Irish Presbyterianism goes back to 1905,
when he appealed to the General Assembly against a decision of the Belfast Presbytery
expressing its sympathy to the United Free Church of Scotland on the loss of its property to
the Free Church of Scotland in consequence of the decision of the House of Lords in
favour of the Free Church. The General Assembly dismissed his appeal. In 1906 the
Assembly also rejected a resolution to maintain friendly relations with the Free Church.

Allen comments

These decisions were regarded by Mr Hunter as tantamount to an implicit
acceptance of the views of United Free Church scholars such as George Adam
Smith and Marcus Dods; and, for the next twenty years, he was to hold a
watching brief for orthodoxy in the Irish Presbyterian Church.

At his Trial Davey claims support from these very scholars Smith and Marcus Dods, who
advocated views to which Hunter was implacably opposed.

162 Fulton, Davey, 33.
163 W. D. Baillie, A History of Congregations, 677. Licensing in Irish Presbyterianism is the stage
in ministry prior to ordination. On being licensed the person is classified as a licentiate.
164 Grier, Origin, 30-32.
165 Allen, College, 256.
In the light of what is written on the preceding page it is interesting to observe that by the time of the publication of his essay ‘Church in Tension – In the Twentieth Century – Mainly’, Fulton takes a more sympathetic view of Hunter’s sincerity. He comments, ‘Hunter had the courage of his convictions and must have suffered much because of the actions he felt compelled to take, then and later.’ This is not because he had changed his thinking in any major way about the events leading up to Davey’s Trial, but because of the difference between his biography and the nature of his essay, ‘Church in Tension’. The former was published just ten years after Davey’s death and is strongly hagiographical. The essay, on the other hand, while still maintaining the significance of Davey for understanding Irish Presbyterianism in the twentieth century, was published twenty-one years after Davey’s death and is less hagiographical. Also in the biography Fulton not only refrained from giving the names of Davey’s accusers but did not put the Trial in its historical context by avoiding mention of the incidents which led to it. In his essay, however, he is compelled in the interests of scholarship to mention the events which culminated in the Trial, as these provide the historical context essential for his attempt to provide a survey of the acceptance of higher criticism within the Irish Presbyterianism and the subsequent tensions between Fundamentalism and more moderate views over the period with which the essay is concerned. An important point comes to light in Fulton’s essay. It has been claimed in Chapter One of this thesis that Fulton, while strongly supporting Davey as a symbol of theological freedom, sometimes appears reluctant to wholeheartedly adopt Davey’s Liberal Theology. In ‘Church in Tension’ the reason for this becomes apparent. Davey did not adopt a Barthian stance, whereas, for Fulton, Barth’s theology is a positive advance.

Fulton asserts

166 Fulton, ‘Church in Tension’, 163.
The theology evolved in the Presbyterian Faculty as of today is less speculative than at the beginning of the century, more exclusively Biblically based though not refusing light from any quarter, and more Christocentric in its balance and emphasis than in the past.\textsuperscript{167}

Fulton clearly approves of the Barthian emphasis in the Presbyterian College through the teaching of J. L. M. Haire for a period of twenty years and subsequently by J. Thompson. This approval explains why he does not fully endorse Davey’s approach to theology, as he regards it as superseded by that of Barth. It is in fact an implied criticism of the kind of theology espoused by Davey.

In ‘Church in Tension’ Fulton considers Hunter’s role in the events leading up to the Trial, starting with his opposition to the General Assembly’s expression of sympathy to the United Church in 1905 mentioned on the previous page.\textsuperscript{168} The next incident in which Hunter intervened to protect the orthodoxy of the Presbyterian Church was his attempt in 1915 to have the views of the Rev. F. W. S. O’Neill, a missionary to Manchuria, rejected as modernistic. This met with no success. Nine years later in 1924 the Presbyterian College became the focus of Hunter’s attention when some students sent a letter to the General Assembly’s College Committee, of which Hunter was a member, asking about the implications of the General Assembly’s subscription to the Westminster Confession. R. Buick Knox comments

Some able candidates for the ministry and some potential elders were refusing to subscribe to the Westminster Confession in the required form. They saw these terms as an acceptance of the doctrine of election which they held was not in accord with the main thrust of biblical teaching. They wanted a relaxing rather than a stiffening of the terms of subscription.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{167} Fulton, ‘Church in Tension’, 159.
\textsuperscript{168} Fulton, ‘Church in Tension’, 163-166.
\textsuperscript{169} Buick Knox, ‘Bible’, 27. In Irish Presbyterianism both ministers and elders have to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith as prescribed by the law of the Church. Knox uses ‘potential’ in relation to elders because they only become elders when they have actually subscribed to the Confession.
From this it is evident that Davey was not a solitary figure in his questioning approach to theology as it reveals an unwillingness to accept the doctrine of election, traditionally regarded as an essential part of Presbyterian teaching. Moreover this is a significant piece of evidence confirming the view expressed in Chapter One of this thesis, that the divisions that existed in Irish Presbyterianism before the union of the two Synods in 1840 were not resolved by the union. The ‘Arian Controversy’ in Irish Presbyterianism involved the issue of subscription to the Westminster Confession. The letter from the students resulted in the Assembly appointing a committee, under Principal Paul, to examine whether any changes needed to be made in this regard.\textsuperscript{170}

Hunter and his supporters naturally regarded this letter as evidence of a further erosion of traditional standards. They reacted by forming, in May 1926, a Presbyterian Bible Standards League was formed to maintain orthodoxy within the Presbyterian Church. It needs to be stressed that, despite the use of the word ‘Presbyterian’ in its title, this was not an official organization under the control of the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{171}

Hunter himself did not escape criticism for his attacks on the College and its professors. After writing a circular ‘which cast serious reflections on Professor Haire’s teaching’ he was censured by the Belfast Presbytery ‘for failing to use the procedures laid down in the Code of Discipline’ and had his appeal to the General Assembly rejected.\textsuperscript{172}

Despite this rebuff the College Committee appointed a sub-committee to question students about the teaching they received from the professor, ‘particularly in reference to the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures, the infallibility of our Lord, and the doctrine of the Trinity’. As these are topics that were raised in Davey’s Trial, it is helpful to quote at

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{170} Knox ‘Bible’, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Allen, \textit{College}, 257; Holmes, \textit{Presbyterian Heritage}, 153; Fulton, \textit{Davey}, 172; \textit{Church in Tension}, 165. When referring to this organization Fulton does not use the word ‘Presbyterian’ in the title, indicating his opposition to what he regards as a fundamentalist organization. Also in \textit{Trial} it is referred to as the Bible Standards League. That will be the name used in this thesis.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Allen, \textit{College}, 257.
\end{itemize}
length from the findings of the sub-committee, which were accepted by the College Committee. The sub-committee reported

It appeared that Professor Haire taught

(1) that the Bible is a progressive revelation culminating in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, of the character and will of God; and sets forth with infallible truth all things necessary for our salvation.

(2) That Christ being the Son of God, and Himself truly God, became man; and that, though in His human nature He subjected Himself to certain limitations, He was in His person and teaching full and perfect revelation of God. And

(3) that though the doctrine of the Trinity did not specifically fall within the scope of last session’s teaching, no doubt was left in any student’s mind of Professor Haire’s firm belief in the Deity of Jesus Christ, and in the Personality of the Holy Spirit.173

The fact that Professor Haire was thus criticized emphasizes that the subsequent charges of heresy against Davey were part of a wider strategy of attack on what were deemed ‘legitimate targets’ by Hunter and his fellow-travellers. These topics which Hunter and others saw as areas where orthodox standards were not being maintained came to have a fuller airing when he and his fellow-complainants brought their accusations of heresy against Davey.

Mr William H. Snoddy, the leader of the Bible Standards League, was another main Complainant.174 At the Trial he and Hunter addressed the Presbytery on behalf of the Complainants. Four representatives of the Complainants spoke to the General Assembly on appeal, namely, Mr S. G. Montgomery, Mr Joseph Goligher, Mr W. H. Snoddy and the

173 Allen, College, 258.
Rev. James Hunter. Only four Complainants were ministers – the Rev. James Hunter, the Rev. Samuel Hanna, the Rev James Edgar and the Rev. John Ross. There were two licentiates who signed the charges as witnesses to what Davey had purportedly said while lecturing – Mr W. J. Grier and Mr J. B. Wallace. One of the representatives of the Belfast Presbytery to address the General Assembly during the appeal was the Rev. William Corkey. He declared

> Out of 610 ministers on the roll of the Assembly, only four signed these charges, and two of these are men who were not educated for the ministry of the Irish Presbyterian Church, and never attended either of our theological colleges. Three of these four ministers were members of the Belfast Presbytery, and it would be an interesting thing to consult the records with regard to their attendance at Presbytery meetings. Personally, I have rarely had the pleasure of seeing them in our midst until they appeared in this case as defenders of the welfare of the Church.

This shows the very small number of ministers who were willing to support the Complainants. Of course it would be naive to assume that all those who did not sign the charges were in agreement with Davey's theology. That will become clear as the charges are considered in detail. The above quotation displays, at least on the part of the speaker, a definite bias against those ministers who had not been subject to the influences of Irish Presbyterianism and its theological education system. We shall now investigate whether the Trial procedure contributed to this bias.

C. The Trial Procedure

The different proposals recorded in Trial as to how the Presbytery should conduct the proceedings show that there was not unanimity of opinion beforehand on this question. It was not found to be acceptable that the case should be heard by a commission of twelve members plus the Moderator and Clerk of Presbytery, and this commission would have

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175 Trial, 195.
176 Trial, 197.
power to determine the case; nor was it acceptable that a commission would hear evidence and report back to the Presbytery, which would then make its decision. The final proposal, which was accepted, was that the case should be heard by the entire Presbytery. It had already been agreed that all persons not party to the case would be excluded from the hearings. Mr. J.C. Graham, on behalf of the Complainants, protested against holding the hearings in private.\(^{177}\) The preliminary discussions and decisions on procedure could be described as pre-trial tactical manoeuvres. It is not stated in Trial, but it could be argued that the implication is there that the first two proposals were suggested on the basis that it would be less cumbersome for a small group of people to deal with the detail rather than the whole Presbytery. That this is a reasonable inference is shown by the fact that after Charge One was heard, Presbytery followed a different method of dealing with the Charges Two to Five, namely, allowing Davey, as defendant, to enter a Plea of Justification.\(^{178}\)

Davey himself claimed the privilege of an accused person not to be called as a witness ‘on the ground that an accused person could not be compelled to give evidence in a charge brought against himself’.\(^{179}\) It is understandable why the Complainants objected to this. It meant that they had no opportunity to question Davey himself as to what his views were, while Davey could question them if they were called as witnesses. And this is what Davey proceeded to do – to call his accusers as witnesses. This indicates a tactical awareness on Davey’s part. The Court overruled the objections of those Complainants called as witnesses.\(^{180}\)

Both those who supported Davey and those who opposed him tried to gain advantage for their particular group. There was an attempt by a supporter of Davey to get the case quashed on the technicality that certain quotations from Scripture and the

\(^{177}\) Trial, 11.  
\(^{178}\) Trial, 93-94, 111, 141, 147.  
\(^{179}\) Trial, 13.  
\(^{180}\) Trial, 13.
Confession in the charges were not accurate. This failed. One opponent of Davey tried to get the minister and representative elder from Fisherwick Congregation debanned because the Fisherwick Kirk Session had passed a resolution which allegedly pre-judged the case.

One Complainant, having written a letter of regret that he had signed the charges, was allowed to have his name removed from the case.

In the polity of the Irish Presbyterian Church, Presbytery was regarded as a court of the Church. The Moderator of Presbytery in judicial hearings, such as a trial for heresy, was in a position somewhat analogous to the position of a judge in a court of law. Due to the potential complexities involved in hearing charges of heresy the Presbytery of Belfast decided to appoint a legal assessor to give advice to the Moderator ‘in points of law’. They proceeded to appoint a King’s Counsel, Mr. R. D. Megaw. Several complainants expressed their objections to this appointment. Indeed it is arguable that this and other aspects of the Trial procedure could be regarded as not in keeping with justice.

Davey’s Trial before the Belfast Presbytery was held over 14 sessions beginning on Tuesday 15 February 1927 and ending on Tuesday 29 March 1927. He was indicted on five separate charges of ‘holding and teaching doctrines contrary to the Word of God and the subordinate standards of the Church’. Although the charges take up several pages of Trial, a useful summary is given at the beginning of the hearing of the appeals by the General Assembly. It reads

1. The first charge alleges that Professor Davey denies that ‘God pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.’

181 Trial, 14.
182 Trial, 13-14.
183 Trial, 14.
184 Trial, 11, 13.
185 Trial, 14.
186 Trial, 1.
187 Trial, 159.
2. The second charge alleges that Professor Davey taught what is contrary to Holy Scripture concerning the absolute perfection of our Lord’s character.

3. The third charge alleges that Professor Davey taught what is contrary to the Word of God and the Westminster Confession of Faith regarding the inspiration, infallibility, and Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures.

4. The fourth charge alleges that Professor Davey held and taught what is contrary to the doctrine that ‘the sinfulness of all sins proceedeth only from the creature and not from God.’

5. The fifth charge alleges that Professor Davey held and taught that the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in the Word of God.

In support of the charges his accusers cited quotations from two of his books *Vesture* and *Faith*, and statements from his College lectures.

Under Charge One witnesses were called to give evidence and Davey submitted his defence. However, even after all the witnesses had been examined there was still a conflict of evidence over some of the things that were actually said in lectures to students. Also, at certain crucial points, witnesses did not answer or refused to elaborate on answers that they had already given. In addition there is considerable discussion on matters which would have been more properly raised under Charges Two and Three. For these reasons in considering Charge One it is necessary to examine the evidence of the various witnesses to clarify the areas of agreement and disagreement in their statements.

If Charges Two to Five had been dealt with in the same manner as Charge One, the Trial would have been very long indeed. But this was not the case. The Presbytery Trial lasted for fourteen sessions. Of these nine were devoted to Charge One, two to Charge Two, two to Charge Three, and one to Charges Four and Five together. The reason for the Trial not going on for a very long time was that the law of the Church provided an alternative procedure for establishing facts other than by the calling and examination of witnesses. Section 448 of the Code of the Presbyterian Church allowed an accused person to submit a Plea of Justification. The Court agreed to adopt this alternative procedure, by which Davey acknowledged the substantial accuracy of the wording of the quotations.

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188 This point is made by Davey, Professor James Haire and others.
submitted by his accusers and in his statements of justification gave his reasons why they did not contravene the Church’s Standards.

Using a Plea of Justification produced several advantages. Firstly, it shortened the duration of the Trial. Secondly, it simplified the Trial process. Davey’s acknowledging that he had written or spoken what was claimed in the charges avoided the necessity of calling witnesses to establish what he had actually said and written. Thirdly, it clarified the areas of disagreement between Davey and the Complainants. Fourthly, it also allowed a more comprehensible presentation of the views of both Davey and his accusers. This can be seen in comparing the account of Charge One with the accounts of the other charges. In Charge One the evidence of the witnesses takes up forty-one pages.189

A Plea of Justification may have enabled a more comprehensible airing of the disputed issues between the Complainants and Davey, but to what extent it allowed full discussion of all the points raised in the charges is debatable. After Davey had submitted his Plea of Justification for Charge Two the Complainants had the right to reply. Hunter spoke on their behalf and Davey was allowed to respond to Hunter’s speech. After these two speeches the Presbytery proceeded to vote on Charge Two. However, these two speeches were not included in the report of the Trial circulated to members of the General Assembly. The significance of this is that the next occasion on which the views of the Complainants on Charge Two are noted in this official record is when they are speaking in the General Assembly, requesting that body to allow their appeal against the decision of the Belfast Presbytery in favour of Davey. Consequently the Presbytery’s agreeing to accept a Plea of Justification in effect disadvantaged the Complainants, because if they objected to anything that Davey said in his Plea, the only opportunity they had to voice their objection was in their speech in reply to Davey. Thus support is given to the

189 Trial, 23-63.
Complainants’ grievance that they were not being treated fairly and that the procedure was weighted against them. And, as has been noted above, this speech was not included in the official record. This was also the case in the hearing of the remaining charges, where Davey was allowed to enter pleas of justification.190

When Charge Three came to be considered by the Presbytery, Davey, as he had done with Charge Two, asked to be allowed to present a Plea of Justification.191 The Record of the Trial reads at this point, ‘Mr. Orr made an objection on behalf of the accusers, but it was overruled’.192 This could be a significant sentence. While the Record does not give any indication of the grounds of the objection, it is the view of this Thesis that the process of a Plea of Justification gave Davey a strategic advantage. On that basis it could be reasonably argued that the Complainants raised objections to the same process being allowed in the case of Charge Three, because the process had proved disadvantageous to them when Charge Two was considered. So Davey is considerably helped by the Court allowing him to proceed with a Plea of Justification for the reasons already given. As we now consider the individual charges, we will examine whether the procedural advantages Davey had help him in dealing with the substance of the charges.

190 Trial, 19, 20, 21, 22.
191 Trial, 111.
192 Trial, 111.
CHAPTER THREE

IMPUTATION

A. Introduction

Underlying all of the Charges is the Complainants’ conception of the substance of Davey’s theology. While it is the argument of this thesis that this is relevant to all the Charges, it will be considered here under Charge One.

Charge One itself centres on Davey’s understanding of the doctrine of imputation and the wider concept of justification which provides the context for this doctrine. The Complainants were convinced that Davey’s views violated the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith. We will examine Charge One by looking at the following headings, because these are the points of criticism levelled at Davey by the Complainants. These are Substitution, Christ Had Let God Down, Paul’s Philosophy of Sin and his Psychology, The Transferability of Guilt, The Irrationality of Imputation, The Necessity of Identification for Justification, Forgiveness of Future Sins, Quantitative Satisfaction, Forgiveness Associated Only with Death of Christ, Socinianism and Arianism, and The Fundamentals. These headings are an attempt to summarize the points discussed at the Trial, covering not only the charges levelled against Davey by the Complainants but also some of the counter-arguments he developed to draw attention to the problematic theological position they had adopted.

Analysing Charge One is complicated by the fact that the Complainants were bringing in other accusations under this charge which would be dealt with later on in the Trial. The reason why the Complainants do not stick rigidly to the charge but bring in what they regard as related theological issues is that they want to explore Charge One by posing a cluster of what they think are related problems. As we shall see shortly, Snoddy makes it evident that the Complainants think that the case will go against them at
Presbytery. For the sake of clarity we will postpone the discussion of these other accusations until later on in this dissertation. Here we will focus on the main indictment contained in Charge One, namely the doctrine of imputation and the question of justification. The Complainants formulated their Charge as follows

WHEREAS it is in accordance with the Word of God that He ‘pardoneth all our sin and accepteth us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us’ (Shorter Catechism), inasmuch as ‘He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him’ (2 Cor. v. 21), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine…we charge the Rev. Professor Davey, of the Assembly’s College, with holding and teaching what is contrary to this doctrine.  

The first part of Charge One alleges that Davey’s teaching on imputation contravened both the Westminster Standards and Scripture. The Complainants believed that Davey’s teaching was defective both in its understanding of how justification effected righteousness in the believer and how Christ dealt with sin.

The Complainants supported their charge with statements from *The Changing Vesture of the Faith* and from one of Davey’s lectures. As evidence they cited

Salvation is usually connected with the historic fact of Christ’s death rather than with the Divine-human character which it reveals… and we get such extreme statements as the notorious reply of an orthodox Protestant to a supposed legalist: ‘Your religion is all doing, mine is all done.’… In its relation to the forgiveness of sin this view is usually expressed in such terms as the following: ‘My sins past, present, and to come, were laid upon Christ.’… The Apostle Paul was greatly troubled about the ethical deductions from such a theory…”,

Perhaps the weakest spot in the Protestant theory was the specific doctrine of imputation which underlay its theory of Justification…,

…The centre of its orthodox system is a doctrine of atonement resting upon a theory of imputation which is only another form of transubstantiation…,

… each of these two branches of Christendom ‘[Protestantism and Roman

193 Trial, 1-2.
194 Davey, *Vesture*, 73.
195 Davey, *Vesture*, 76.
196 Davey, *Vesture*, 78.
Catholicism] positing the same irrationality at the very centre of its system of salvation.\textsuperscript{197}

Paul’s philosophy of sin is different from ours… – physical taint – an impersonal thing which can be transferred…\textsuperscript{198}

This partial catena of quotations reveals areas of Davey’s thought where the Complainants considered his teaching not in line with the Confession.

In summary, they were concerned that Davey did not give the death of Christ as prominent a place as he should in interpreting the atonement and that he criticized the doctrine of imputation, which they held to be a central doctrine, for being irrational. Furthermore, they objected to Davey claiming that unethical deductions relating to personal responsibility for sin could be made from Paul’s doctrine. These quotations will be considered at the relevant points in our examination of the various accusations the Complainants brought against Davey. The arguments in support of the first charge, using the headings mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, will be considered after examining what we have claimed to be a fundamental issue between the Complainants and Davey, which underlies all the charges which they brought against him, namely their opposition to his theology as a whole. To this we now turn.

B. The Complainants’ Conception of Davey’s Views

While specific points relating to the doctrine of justification were raised under Charge One, the fact comes through in the giving of evidence and in comments made by the Complainants that they objected to the substance of Davey’s theology. This is indicative of their belief that his whole method of theologizing was not only different from theirs, but also fundamentally inimical to the type of theological interpretation presented by the Westminster Confession of Faith. Support for this is found in Snoddy’s contention that

\textsuperscript{197} Davey, Vesture, 80.
\textsuperscript{198} Lecture delivered 9 January, 1926.
there were two distinct types of theology in the Irish Presbyterian Church namely ‘the unquestionable Biblical accuracy of the Calvinistic system’ and the ‘Rationalist system of theology’ to which he claimed Davey adhered.\textsuperscript{199} The Calvinistic system was based on a belief in the infallibility of Scripture as interpreted by Calvin and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The ‘Rationalist system of theology’ did not accept the infallibility of Scripture in the way the Complainants did and fully endorsed Higher Criticism. Snoddy, reflecting the view of the Complainants in general, insisted that it was the Church’s duty to opt for the former, because his opponents believed Davey’s modern approach would result in the abandonment of orthodoxy. Snoddy declared

\begin{quote}
…the line of differentiation as regards the theological position in the Church is far deeper than some of you really believe…but we all know…that the matter does not finish here [Presbytery]…It is bound to go to a higher place [General Assembly], and it may not even finish there.\textsuperscript{200}
\end{quote}

Here we have a clear indication that the Complainants not only anticipated an adverse verdict at the Presbytery Trial but had even contemplated withdrawal from the Irish Presbyterian Church to ensure the maintenance of orthodoxy. This schism, as we have already seen, is what eventually occurred.

Allied to this general suspicion of Davey’s teaching was the impression the Complainants had from his writings. For example the witness Shiels said that, after reading Davey’s views, he was left with the impression that he would be free to commit sin. The evidence at the Trial at this point indicates that Shiels had this impression, because he could not reconcile what Davey had written with his own understanding of the atonement. He also claimed that Davey’s manner of expressing the doctrine of the atonement did not give it the central place he [Shiels] thought it should have.\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{199} Trial, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{200} Trial, 65.
\textsuperscript{201} Trial, 39-41.
Two further criticisms were made against Davey. The first was that he did not deal sympathetically with Paul’s understanding of the atonement and the second that he did not ‘affirm the constitution of our Irish Presbyterian Church’ in relation to the atonement.\(^{202}\) These two points are mentioned separately because they originated, in the first instance, not from the Complainants, but from Davey himself. Davey had called several of the Complainants as witnesses. In doing so he was well aware that they would be hostile witnesses, whose aim was to prove that he had departed from Westminster orthodoxy. For this reason it is surprising that Davey himself raises these issues. Firstly, regarding Davey’s treatment of Paul’s understanding of the atonement, he asks the witness W. J. Grier, a student in the Presbyterian College, whether he, as a professor, interpreted the Pauline doctrine of the atonement ‘sympathetically’. As the witness was a hostile one, a negative response would be expected and was in fact given. In his defence Davey claimed that he believed in the Church’s teaching on imputation, justification and sanctification and that, while these were separable as concepts, they were not separable in experience. Davey defined Paul’s doctrine of justification as ‘justification by an act of acceptance of Christ and identification with Christ and consequential salvation’.\(^{203}\) In this reply Davey is drawing out the difference in emphasis between the Complainants’ view on justification and his own view. On the one hand the Complainants were stressing justification as a forensic acquittal creating a new status before God which leads to sanctification. Davey, on the other hand, wanted to leave no doubt that justification was not just an external change in how God reckoned the believer’s standing, but an act in which the believer is brought into a living contact with God. Hence his emphasis on identification. Davey’s response to the Complainants here is evidence for his concern that they were both

\(^{202}\) These points were raised by Davey in the examination of witness Grier, who was a student at the Presbyterian College. *Trial*, 26.

\(^{203}\) *Trial*, 25.
externalizing justification and making too separate a distinction among the component parts of the Christian experience of salvation. He asserted that this definition along with his views of justification did not contradict the Church’s teaching. On the contrary he stated that they were

of the nature of legitimate discussion of certain common notions or specific forms of the doctrines of justification and imputation which, in the opinion of most competent theologians, are inadequate in statement, however true to experience. 204

In this reply Davey is claiming both that he was fulfilling his role as a theological teacher in discussing the composite elements of justification and imputation. He is also implying that he would be failing in his calling as a teacher, if he did not draw attention to weaknesses in the ways the doctrine of the atonement was expressed. In relation to the second point, that his teaching did not conform to the Church’s teaching on the atonement, Davey asked Grier whether, in his lectures, he affirmed the constitution of the Church as found in *The Code. The Book of The Constitution and Government of The Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. 205 Again the witness replied in the negative.

Furthermore, Davey asserted that the Complainants misrepresented him by taking quotations from his writings out of context. 206 He regards these inaccuracies as a deliberate attempt to influence people against his views. He claims this was part of the Complainants’ strategy at the Trial and also in the sustained campaign against himself and the College which culminated in his Trial for heresy. 207

The main charge was broken down into a discussion over the following areas of Davey’s thought which were considered inadequate by his opponents.

204 *Trial*, 73.
205 *Trial*, 26.
206 For example *Trial*, 80.
207 *Trial*, 186-188.
C. The Alleged Inadequate Areas of Davey’s Thought

1. Substitution

Substitution is considered first despite the fact that the word substitution, or substitute, does not appear in the charge. Therefore its consideration here needs to be justified. Adequate justification is found in Hunter’s speech to the Belfast Presbytery.

There he claims, quoting Spurgeon,

‘…I believe it [the Gospel] to be wrapped up in one word – Substitution. I have always considered with Luther and Calvin that the sum and substance of the Gospel lies in that word substitution, Christ standing in the stead of man…Christ was punished in my stead…I think that the whole substance of salvation lies in the thought that Christ stood in the place of man…’

and

The doctrine of substitution is involved in it [the doctrine of imputation], and you cannot have one without the other.

Thus for the complainants the concept of substitution is central to the Gospel.

The first quotation shows the Complainants believe substitution means Christ taking our place and taking the punishment we deserve. As a consequence of Christ’s substitution for us they regarded guilt as being transferred from us to Christ, righteousness being transferred from Christ to us and all our sins, including future sins, forgiven. Later sections will consider these points. The second quotation shows that the Complainants understood the doctrines of substitution and imputation to be inextricably linked. Hunter adduces evidence for this from the Westminster Confession and from Scripture. One of the scripture verses he cites is He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5.21). This verse comes at the beginning of

208 Trial, 66.
209 Trial, 67.
210 Hunter supports this by citing Westminster Confession 11 and the following verses of Scripture: Rom 3.18-19, 2 Cor 5.21, Gal 3.13, Eph 5.2, 1 Jn 1.7, 1 Jn 2.2, 1 Pet 2.24. Trial, 68. Shiels, another Complainant, stated, ‘Personally I don’t believe Christ was a criminal. He was a substitute. I was the criminal and he bore my punishment’ Trial, 39, and cites Isa.53.5 ‘He was wounded for our iniquities…and with his stripes we are healed’ …It is the great central point of salvation’, Trial, 43.
Charge One and expresses the teaching of the Presbyterian Church, which teaching Davey is alleged to have violated.

The Complainants believed Davey’s views of substitution affected his understanding of the atonement. In his lecture Davey had mentioned substitution as an essential part of the atonement. However the line of questioning at the Trial indicates that the Complainants did not think that Davey’s view of substitution was compatible with their understanding of atonement. This is seen in the question put to Grier by Hunter near the beginning of the hearing on Charge One. Hunter asked, ‘Did Professor Davey speak of the acceptance of Christ as our ideal [as] being the equivalent of a doctrine of substitution?’ It was acknowledged that he did and that he affirmed that ‘substitution has real value’.

Grier stated that in a lecture Davey said, ‘The substitution is the substitution of an ideal person. We are accepted not for what we are but for what we intend to be; and our ideal being is the being of the Lord Jesus Christ to which we are to approximate’. There is a problem here with Davey’s terminology as there is no clear indication of what he means by an ideal person or being. He does not specifically identify the ideal being with either divinity or humanity. In much of the discussion about justification and imputation Davey stresses the need for a recognition of the true humanity of Jesus and that would make sense here, Jesus being the ideal human being who is the model for our lives. However, that interpretation would mean that the Complainants’ suspicions mentioned in the next paragraph would be well founded. But, taking account of Davey’s understanding of Jesus Christ as the God-man, it can be argued that his meaning here is that the ideal person/being is both divine and human. There is terminological inexactitude here, but this can be cleared up by taking account of Davey’s understanding of Jesus Christ as the God-man and it can be argued that his meaning here is that the ideal person/being is both divine

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211 *Trial*, 23. The context shows that Hunter means the acceptance of Christ by God.  
212 *Trial*, 24.
and human. This means that the divine righteousness of the substitute can be imputed to sinful men and women. However, because of this ambiguity in Davey’s use of the phrase ‘ideal being’ the Complainants have some justification for their concerns.

Grier had been asked whether Davey taught that Jesus was both God and man. Underlying this was the Complainants’ suspicion that Davey’s teaching on substitution meant that Christ was not a competent Saviour who could effectively achieve atonement for human sin. They reasoned that if Christ took the place of sinful humanity, he had to be fully God to effect an atonement. It is reasonable to conclude that the Complainants were suspicious of Davey’s concept of the substitution of an ideal being, because the ideal being would not necessarily have to be God. If Christ was less than God, then there could not be atonement, because only the righteousness of one who was truly God could effect atonement for sinful humanity. On the basis of the preceding section, which dealt with the Complainants’ perception of Davey’s theology, it is reasonable to see in their suspicions about his views on substitution another way in that fundamental opposition to Davey’s theology is revealed. The Complainants were so tied to the terms and language of the Confession and had such a rigid doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture that Davey’s attempts to investigate and criticize traditional formulations appeared to them as deviating from both Scripture and the Confession and therefore from the truth.

There are problems with Davey’s formulations which he was able to correct in the Trial and those corrections enable us to see that his position was not guilty of the charges labelled against him.
2. Christ Had Let God Down

The Complainants objected to Davey’s interpretation of Christ’s experiences in Gethsemane on the ground that he gave the impression that Jesus was not fully God. He did this by describing Jesus as being perplexed and feeling that he had let God down. 213 The Complainants believed that Davey should have taught that Christ, because he was divine, was omniscient and therefore, knowing that God would vindicate him, would not have felt that he was letting God down. The corollary of Christ not being omniscient is that he would not be divine. And if he was not divine he would not be able to make a full and proper atonement for sin. This raises several Christological questions, which we will address when we look at the chapter on Christology later on in the thesis.

Davey replied to this accusation by claiming that, while Christ had felt that he had let God down, in fact he had not. Davey’s defence against the Complainants’ accusation that his Christology was inadequate on this point consisted in his rebutting the idea that he should have taught that Jesus was omniscient. Again this raises Christological issues with which we shall deal later.

3. Paul’s Philosophy of Sin and his Psychology

In Charge One the Complainants cited what Davey said in one of his lectures as evidence of his teaching being contrary to the Church’s Standards. Their objection is given in the form of notes from the lecture. The notes stated, ‘Paul’s philosophy of sin is different from ours – physical taint – an impersonal thing which can be transferred – can be lifted off, an impossible thing. Treats it as impersonal and transferable. Sin cannot be transferable.’ 214

213 Trial, 24.
214 Trial, 3. During Charge One there is considerable debate as to the accuracy of these notes. However it does not affect the point discussed here that Paul’s view was that sin was transferable and that Davey taught that Paul’s views of sin and psychology were not necessarily the same as those of contemporary theologians.
The Complainants objected to this because it was part of their understanding of justification and imputation that sin was transferable.\textsuperscript{215}

Davey’s accusers argued that Paul’s philosophical and psychological views in connection with his understanding of the atonement were still to be upheld in the present age. If this was not done, it would derogate from the authority Paul’s writings had as the Word of God. So here we have a link between the doctrine of scripture and the doctrine of the atonement – what is believed about one of these doctrines affects what one believes about the other. It was for this reason that Grier declared that Paul’s statements on psychology and the form in which the apostle expressed them should be regarded as final for today.\textsuperscript{216} If Grier had acknowledged that they should not be adhered to, because knowledge in the spheres of both philosophy and psychology had increased since Paul’s time, he would have been weakening the rigid view of the infallibility of Scripture advocated by the Westminster Confession and held by the Complainants.

Davey contended that his comments on Paul’s philosophy of sin did not deny the truth of either the Scriptural or the Pauline doctrine of sin.\textsuperscript{217} Paul’s teaching included his views on psychology and in these he was limited to the thinking and experiences of his own particular time. To use advances in psychology or science or other fields of knowledge to draw out the truth of Paul’s religious thinking was an example of development in theology and did not invalidate his essential religious message.\textsuperscript{218} Again Davey claimed that the views of both Charles Hodge and James Denney on this point supported his approach to explicating religious truth not only in Paul but in Scripture

\textsuperscript{215} However, during the course of Charge One the Complainants had to recognize that guilt was a personal quality which could not be transferable.
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Trial}, 26-7.
\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Trial}, 82.
\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Trial}, 84.
generally.²¹⁹ Davey finds support in Hodge’s view of the nature of language used in the Bible.²²⁰

Davey emphasized that his comment about Paul’s philosophy of sin was merely a cautionary remark referring to Paul’s philosophy and psychology, and not a denial of Paul’s doctrine of justification, which his lectures actually affirmed.²²¹ His comment was cautionary in the sense that it was an aside made in a lecture on justification and Davey did not elaborate the point in his lecture.²²² In affirming Paul’s doctrine of justification Davey insisted on the concept of identification as being vital to understanding the doctrine.²²³

Davey defined Paul’s doctrine of justification as ‘justification by an act of acceptance of Christ and identification with Christ and consequential salvation’.²²⁴ An expanded summary of the Pauline doctrine, which helps to clarify other references to acceptance and identification, is stated thus,

The word ‘imputation’ in particular…I regard as inadequate satisfactorily to describe the full facts of the Christian experience of forgiveness through Christ…I cordially welcome it as a partial description of the facts, but unfortunately it is too external and legal in its meaning…in common with many theologians of standing I should like to add to it as even more essential the word ‘identification’ – identification in will, purpose and life with the Lord Jesus Christ…I hold then that it is through our conscious self-identification with Christ in faith and purpose that we receive God’s forgiveness, are reckoned and treated as righteous in His sight through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord, and are then enabled by this newly-formed contact to grow into conformity with Christ in the process of sanctification or growth in character.²²⁵

This definition shows that Davey still views justification as forensic to an extent – God pronounces the sinner not guilty. However, it needs to be regarded as more than this, if it

²¹⁹ Trial, 36-37, 45, 75-80.  
²²⁰ Trial, 84.  
²²¹ Trial, 26.  
²²² Trial, 47. This is clear from the evidence of the students who had attended Davey’s lectures.  
²²³ Trial, 47.  
²²⁴ Trial, 25.  
²²⁵ Trial, 73-74. I should like to add to it as even more essential the word ‘identification’ – identification in will, purpose and life with the Lord Jesus Christ. Emphasis added; the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord. Original emphasis.
is not to be external to the believer. This is why Davey insists on the believer identifying himself with Christ through faith. It is this identification that creates the living contact between Christ and the believer through faith. Forgiveness and reconciliation to God are the result of God’s action in Christ. This is the experience of the one who is justified. Justification means that salvation is a present experience as the power of sin is broken and a new quality of life is possible through Christ dwelling in the believer and the believer dwelling in Christ.

The discussion on Paul’s psychology in the Trial reveals again that the Complainants and Davey take opposing positions on the issue of development in theology and the way in which Scripture should be used in theology. Development means change. The Complainants are unwilling to countenance any change in the way the classic texts of Scripture and the Confession are handled and used as a resource for theology. Davey, on the other hand, welcomes change and progress in all areas of knowledge, such as psychology and philosophy, to draw out the contents of the faith in more adequate ways.

4. The Transferability of Guilt

The general view of the Complainants was that the guilt of sinners, including their moral obloquy, was transferable to Christ to effect justification. Their reasoning was that, if this was not transferred, there would remain in the individual person something sinful that had not been dealt with by the righteousness of Christ. They strongly opposed Davey voicing objections to the view that satisfaction for sin ‘was found in a definitive transfer of man’s guilt from his own shoulders to other shoulders, i. e., Christ’s, which could bear it and take it away’. Their opposition was based on their understanding that imputation

226 Trial, 32.
227 Trial, 2. Quoting J. E. Davey, Vesture, 76. Another quotation from Vesture, 73 is cited as part of Charge One: ‘…and we get such extreme statements as the notorious reply of an orthodox
included a transference of the sinners’ guilt.\(^{228}\) Davey gives his definition of guilt and righteousness. He writes

Guilt and righteousness are relative terms, which refer to the personal will and cannot be dissociated from it…Guilt is our obligation to have done otherwise than we did, righteousness is our voluntary acceptance of, and abiding in, the will of God. These words simply represent states of the consciousness, and are in no sense transferable. The effects of sin may, or might, be cancelled…\(^{229}\)

Here Davey is insistent that guilt and righteousness adhere to the personal will and cannot be separated from it. While guilt and righteousness cannot be transferred, the above quotation points to what is central to the concept of atonement, namely, the possibility of God’s forgiveness of sin – ‘the effects of sin may, or might be cancelled…’.

Davey claimed that in his writings he was opposing a popular view of imputation in which sin and guilt were in some way transferred to Christ.\(^{230}\) This at times seemed to be the view of some of his opponents. Snoddy had stated this view and it appeared to underlie some of the comments of the Rev. Hunter.\(^{231}\)

Davey asserted that the belief that guilt was transferable was part of what he described as a ‘popular’ but erroneous belief, which was widely held. He regarded this popular belief as erroneous because it asserted both the transferability of guilt and the forgiveness of future sins. Moreover he stated that he himself had held this popular belief until he had come to see that it was in fact misleading and detrimental to an understanding of what happened in the atonement because it absolved human beings from responsibility

\(^{228}\) For example Trial, 26.
\(^{229}\) Trial, 2-3, quoting from J. E. Davey, Vesture, 78.
\(^{230}\) Trial, 32, 77.
\(^{231}\) Trial, 33-34, 76-77.
and guilt for their actions. He went on to claim that it was part of his task to eradicate the spread of this popular but harmful belief.232

Snoddy, one of the Complainants, had maintained that the guilt of sinners, including their moral obloquy, was transferable to Christ.233 However, at the following session of the Trial he stated that his meaning was that ‘the guilt of sinners is reckoned to be transferable to our Lord’ but ‘…it was not conveyed in the sense that it made him sinful. He remained holy’.234 Davey pointed out that this was the position he had in fact adopted in The Changing Vesture of Faith. He asked

Do you recognise that in my book the penalty is transferable but not the criminality? From page 79 – “God may forgive our sins against himself, that is the suffering we have caused him, he may overrule the effects of our sins for good, but he cannot take from our personalities the fact of our having done them in which consists our guilt; this guilt he may overlook, but he cannot change it. Our sins may be of no account for present and future, but they cannot be removed from the past as historical events.235

The whole thrust of Davey’s criticism was to clarify that righteousness was reckoned to sinners and guilt reckoned to Christ without actual transference. He affirmed that it was true to Scripture to say that Christ did in some sense bear our sin but the truth of that experience had not been satisfactorily stated in doctrinal statements. Indeed the truth of experience was always greater than human ability to express it in adequate form. Nevertheless, it was the task of theology to express Christian experience in the most satisfying form possible. Davey declared that his main purpose had been to make the Scriptures live and Christ real for others. This had priority over forms of intellectual statement, although these were far from unimportant.

Davey’s argument that guilt and righteousness cannot be transferred because these adhere to the person helps him to refute what he considers to be the incorrect

232 Trial, 76.
233 Trial, 32.
234 Trial, 35.
235 Trial, 35-36, quoting from J.E. Davey, Vesture, 76.
understanding of his opponents. However, his argument is not free from difficulty in considering how the sinner becomes righteous. He attempts to resolve this by insisting on the idea of identification as a necessary component of justification to bring us into a contact with the righteousness of Christ. There is an indication that this is a problem that Davey has not overlooked. He writes, ‘All good is from God, and in that sense our righteousness must be his, but man’s guilt cannot become God’s.’ 236 This excludes our guilt attaching to God. And coupled with the actual impartation of righteousness included in identification it shows Davey’s way of understanding how the believer can share in the righteousness of God.

As we have already seen in Davey’s definition of justification, our identifying by faith with Christ results in our being reckoned as righteous. But for Davey this reckoning also includes an impartation of righteousness. Thus Christ’s righteousness does not remain as something that is external to us. He states

Justification is a means of sanctification, not an isolated forensic judgment, but containing an experience which Calvin calls ‘being made partakers with Christ’, or Denney ‘inspiration’ – the forming of a basis that is the necessary basis for sanctification. 237

In writing in this way we see Davey wanting to affirm that in justification there is more than an external acquittal, and for him this more consists in the presence of Christ which makes the ongoing process of sanctification possible. However, he also wishes to affirm that justification is separate in thought, but not in experience, from the concept of sanctification. 238

236 J. E. Davey, Vesture, 79.
237 Trial, 74.
238 Trial, 73.
5. The Irrationality of Imputation

The comments that provoked the strongest reaction from the Complainants were Davey’s allegations that at the heart of what were arguably the central beliefs of Protestantism, namely justification and the atonement, there was a doctrine of imputation which he described as irrational. Moreover he went further in his criticism by comparing it with the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.\textsuperscript{239} Hunter claims, ‘Professor Davey repudiates it [the doctrine of imputation] because he characterises it as an absurd theory, as an irrationality. And he compares it at length to transubstantiation.’\textsuperscript{240} Here we have evidence of the Complainants’ views that not only did Davey not wholeheartedly accept the doctrine of imputation but also by using such dismissive language would seem not to consider the doctrine of imputation to have the central place in theology that they believed was its due.

Davey argued that his references to transubstantiation were misunderstood. The view that he had been opposing by his comments in \textit{The Changing Vesture of Faith} was commonly found in popular Protestantism. The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was incorrect because it made an unreal distinction between substance and accidents – accidents were not separable from their substances. In transubstantiation it was claimed that the bread acquired the substance of Christ’s body but retained the accidents of bread, and the wine acquired the substance of Christ’s blood but retained the accidents of wine. A similar mistake was made by those who considered that guilt and righteousness, which were personal qualities, could be separated from the personality in which they originally inhered. The popular view which Davey opposed claimed that the sinfulness of the believer could be transferred to Christ and the righteousness of Christ could be transferred to the believer. This is seen in a misapplication of Christ’s parable of

\textsuperscript{239} Trial, 38.
\textsuperscript{240} Trial, 67.
The Wedding Garment in Matthew 22.1-14 with reference to transference and not a reckoning of guilt and righteousness. Davey stated

According to this view we are righteous with a righteousness not our own, nor organically related to our wills, and Christ is sinful with a guilt which is not His own nor organically related to His will. But there is no righteousness and no guilt apart from will, choice, character, and personality.  

Using Davey’s transubstantiation analogy the ‘accidents’ of the believer’s sinfulness were transferred to Christ’s ‘righteous substance’ and the ‘accidents’ of Christ’s righteousness were transferred to the believer’s ‘sinful substance’. The point Davey is reaffirming is that the popular view is incorrect because it is based on an inappropriate philosophical distinction. It is a view of imputation which is based on the separation of a substance from its accidents, and ascribing the accidents of one substance to another to which those accidents do not belong. Davey is rightly critical of the theory of transubstantiation and the analogous way it is applied to imputation. But then Davey makes a second critical point in which he relies upon the view of a person being comprised of substance and accidents. He writes

Apart from the impossibility of thus dividing between substance and accidents, it is important to remember that it is the substance here that matters, and not the accidents. It is my nature, not my guilt for past sins, which most needs attention, not my sins, but my sin, for sins are but expressions of sin.

Davey’s understanding here that it is human nature, the nature of the person, that is the focus of forgiveness coheres well with his theological emphasis on personality and recognition of the insights that psychology can provide for theology in the whole area of atonement.

241 Trial, 81.
242 Davey, Vesture, 79.
6. The Necessity of Identification for Justification

The Complainants objected to Davey’s claiming that there was a view of imputation that could be too external or solely external and could be regarded as a legal fiction and which was impersonal. They stressed the fact that justification was a forensic acquittal. Davey, however, in his criticism of an external understanding of justification insisted on including in his understanding of the doctrine the element of identification or impartation. He did this to emphasize the fact that there was a change in the person justified beyond the change in status which was the consequence of a forensic acquittal. The forensic acquittal was the pronouncing by God of the verdict ‘Not guilty’. There was a change of status - Christ’s righteousness was reckoned to the person justified. But Davey believed that Scripture required something more. While the doctrine of imputation was of value it needed to be associated with the consequence of a living contact with Christ’s righteousness. Thus ‘identification’ or ‘union’ or some such term was necessary to avoid imputation being regarded as a purely external action.243

It is through identification, not transference, that we are put into a vital contact with Christ which ‘guarantees infection with His righteousness.’ And Christ’s atonement consists in His identification with us in bearing the ‘consequences, not the essential substance,’ of human sins.244 In his speech Hunter expresses views on identification similar to those espoused by Davey and Davey acknowledges this.245 Here is an indication that the differences between Davey and the Complainants on this matter were not as great as the Complainants thought.

243 Trial, 74.
244 Trial, 81.
245 Trial, 85.
Davey’s definition of justification in insisting on the union of the believer with Christ is close to the views of two scholars he relies on and whose views he commends during the Trial, namely H. R. Mackintosh and W. P. Paterson.\textsuperscript{246}

7. Forgiveness of Future Sins

A second element in this popular view of the atonement, which Davey strove to eradicate was the belief that at the moment of justification future sins were already forgiven. This was another area where Davey appeared to the Complainants to be belittling the importance of justification and the consequences of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, namely his opposition to the view that justification does not deal with future sins. As we have already seen, they believed there was something lacking in a justification that dealt only with the sins of the past and present sins. It seemed to them that confining the effects of justification to past and present sins diminished the completeness of God’s acceptance of the sinner.

Davey stated that, regarding future sins, a person was assured that God would deal with him or her as he had already, that is the person would be assured of God’s forgiveness. To say, as the Complainants did, that future sins are forgiven before they are committed, is a misleading way of stating the case. If an individual knew that his sins were forgiven before he had even committed them, it could encourage him to take a lax view of sin and not regard sin with seriousness as something which continued to cause hurt to God. To avoid this Davey agreed with Charles Hodge that it was more correct to say: ‘…in justification the believer receives the promise that God will not deal with him

\textsuperscript{246} Trial, 78.
according to his transgressions than to say that sins are forgiven before they are committed’.247

Hodge’s reserve on this point was due to his realization that to do so could be ethically problematic.248 Davey pointed out that the Apostle Paul was concerned that people would be less concerned about morality and good ethical behaviour if they knew that their sins were forgiven in advance.249

Despite the fact that the Complainants relied heavily on Hodge to provide support for their charges against Davey, one of them, Shiels, even seemed reluctant to accept Hodge’s judgement on this point. On the other hand, it made Davey’s argument stronger as he was able to show his opponents that one of their chief supports in this instance agreed with him.

8. Quantitative Satisfaction

Both the Westminster Confession and the Complainants use the concept of satisfaction. For the unrighteous sinner to be justified God’s justice had to be satisfied. This was effected through Christ’s ‘perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God’ (WC 8.5). WC 11.1 speaks of God ‘imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ’ to those whom he justifies and WC 11.3 further speaks of ‘a proper, real, and full satisfaction’, meaning that sin had to be dealt with in a way that was appropriate to its nature as being contrary to the righteousness of God, namely ‘that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners’ (WC 11.3).

Davey’s accusers affirmed the necessity of a ‘quantitative’ satisfaction on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and claimed this was in accordance with ‘a proper, real, and full

247 Trial, 76.
248 C. Hodge, Systematic Theology, Volume 2, 440.
249 Trial, 67.
satisfaction’. The quantitative element was in the amount of suffering Christ had to endure. This was commonly regarded as bearing all the sin of the world. Anything less was insufficient to achieve justification.

Davey countered this claim by saying that ‘satisfactory’ was a sufficient explanation of ‘full’ in the Confession. He asked, “Does ‘full’ not mean that which is accepted by God as satisfactory?” He also cited Charles Hodge as rejecting the concept of a quantitative satisfaction. Hodge had written, ‘He [Christ] rendered it consistent with the justice of God that the sinner should be justified. But he did not suffer in kind or degree what sinners would have suffered.’ Hodge is writing here of the satisfaction of divine justice in the context of a ‘penal satisfaction’. He explains this satisfaction as consisting in Christ’s sufferings regarded as ‘a real adequate compensation for the penalty remitted and the benefits conferred’.

Immediately after the above quotation cited by Davey are the words ‘In value, his sufferings infinitely transcended theirs.’ This thought could be used to move beyond the discussion of whether Christ’s sufferings were quantitative or qualitative. Davey is attempting to do this by his interpretation of The Confession’s ‘full’ as ‘satisfactory’. Even so this is a loose part of Davey’s argument. He wishes to reject the concept ‘quantitative’, and states why he disagrees with it. However he does not proceed to give reasons why ‘qualitative’ is correct. So here is an area where Davey’s theology is somewhat strained and for that reason we can understand why certain charges were levelled against him because there is a degree of uncleanness, a degree of ambiguity, in certain parts of his theology.

Davey went on to assert that both forgiveness by free grace and a doctrine of satisfaction are essential to the Christian experience of forgiveness, although it was not

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250 Trial, 36.
251 Trial, 36.
252 Trial, 37, quoting Hodge, Systematic Theology, Volume 2, 471.
253 Hodge, Systematic Theology, Volume 2, 471.
clear how the two are related. However Davey was adamant that the relationship did not entail a quantitative satisfaction, and here again he claimed support from Hodge.²⁵⁴

9. Forgiveness Associated Only with the Death of Christ

Because the death of Christ is central to the notion of forgiveness and justification, it was natural for the Complainants to think that forgiveness and justification were connected solely to the death of Christ. Thus they objected to Davey apparently moving the focus of attention from the death. Davey’s change of focus indicated both a minimizing of the atonement and his Modernistic tendencies. They used what he had written in The Changing Vesture of the Faith to support their accusation. There Davey claimed, ‘Salvation is usually connected with the historic fact of Christ’s death rather than with the Divine-human character which it reveals…’ ²⁵⁵

This shows Davey drawing attention to Christ’s life and moral character as having a role in forgiveness. Davey declared that it was Christ’s will and character that gave meaning and value to his death.²⁵⁶ In other words he is claiming that the personal element cannot be divorced from an understanding of the Atonement. Davey easily refuted the accusation that he was expressing views contrary to Presbyterian Church teaching by stating that the phrases’ by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself’ and ‘by His obedience and death’ in the Confession clearly implied that forgiveness is associated with both the life and the death of Christ.²⁵⁷

As already seen a view that places total emphasis on the death and combines it with a purely external concept of imputation is ethically dangerous, because it can encourage a

²⁵⁴ ‘…while I accept satisfaction as a truth, I do not accept a quantitative satisfaction. Charles Hodge is quite clear in repudiating this view in the passage I read when examining Mr Snoddy.’ Trial, 76.
²⁵⁵ Trial, 2.
²⁵⁶ Trial, 75.
²⁵⁷ WC 8.5; 11.3.
person to treat sin lightly. This is an element in the popular view of Christianity to which Davey was opposed.

Davey emphasizes the moral character of Christ’s death because his opponents were in danger of not giving it sufficient emphasis, or, in some instances, of ignoring it. However, Davey realizes that both the historical and the moral elements are important in giving a rounded understanding of the atonement. For this reason Davey does not minimize the historical death. He regards it as a ‘transaction’ and not only as a ‘revelation’. ²⁵⁸ He asserted that by his death ‘Christ [was] accomplishing something which changed the world’s situation’. ²⁵⁹ This is supported by what Davey describes as being at the ‘heart of the Atonement. He writes

   By His creative venture of faith Christ shifted life to new levels of power, and the heart of the Atonement lies, not in what He said, or even in what He was, but in what He did at that moment in human history by bearing and destroying human sin through the identification of God with men, and the victory won over sin in human life and limitations. ²⁶⁰

While emphasizing that Christ’s death effected a dramatic change in human circumstances, this quotation of Davey does not take us much further than he already has. Also it is somewhat rhetorical, for he has been insisting that the various aspects of Atonement, such as the divine and the human, have to be kept in balance. The danger of the Complainants’ position is that they are overemphasizing the divinity at the expense of Christ’s humanity. Furthermore by focusing on the one particular aspect here they have requested at the particular moment of his death on the Cross, there is a danger of a loss of perspective with regard to the reality of Jesus’ humanity.

²⁵⁸ Trial, 75.
²⁵⁹ Trial, 53. Trial, 57 makes the same point – ‘revelation and achievement’.
²⁶⁰ Trial, 108.
10. Socinianism and Arianism

Charges of Socinianism and Arianism were probably the worst accusations that could be made by those who considered themselves orthodox defenders of the Westminster Standards. Both terms implied a belief that Christ was not divine in the fullest sense and a denial of the doctrine of the Trinity. Hunter accused Davey of adopting a Socinian position on three points, asserting that in each of these three areas Davey’s position was similar to that of Henry Montgomery in the Arian controversy in Irish Presbyterianism.

The first point is that God forgives by grace and no atonement is necessary. Hunter claims that this is the implication of Davey’s criticism that the doctrine of imputation presupposes that ‘God cannot forgive by grace upon change of heart without some quantitative satisfaction.’ Montgomery had claimed that imputation “robs God of his mercy and free grace.” The basis of this comparison is the belief of both Montgomery and Davey that it is presumptuous to claim that the grace of God requires anything in addition to it. One can reasonably argue that Hunter, along with the other Complainants, would have interpreted this as a derogation from the Westminster Standards, for which the doctrine of imputation was a necessary element in the theological interpretation of the Atonement. Taken to extremes the criticism of imputation that Davey is here making could lead to the Atonement not being considered necessary. However in the Trial one of the Complainants put a direct question to a student on this point. He asked, ‘Did Professor Davey convey to you it was necessary Jesus must first die on the Cross before we could be identified with Him by an act of faith?’ The positive response of the student shows that in his teaching Davey confirmed the necessity of the Atonement and cannot be regarded as Socinian on this point.

261 Trial, 69-71.
262 Trial, 70. See also see Trial, 2.
263 Trial, 60.
The second point of alleged Socinianism is that Davey, like Montgomery, claims that ‘guilt is personal and cannot be transferable.’ This accusation of the Complainants has already been dealt with.

Finally the third area where Davey allegedly reveals his Socinianism is his claim, that the evangelical doctrine encourages people to sin by viewing it lightly and because they are assured of continual forgiveness.264

Davey denied that his theological position was open to the accusations of Socinianism made by his opponents. His teaching was that sin was something to be treated with the utmost seriousness and that its forgiveness through the Atonement was costly. However he recognized that some Socinian criticisms had an element of truth and this has been acknowledged by ‘orthodox Calvinists’.265 Yet again, Davey does not expand on this point. He is careful to declare where he is not Socinian, but wary of expanding on areas where there is a similarity of views with them. In his comments at the Trial the area of agreement seems to be confined to the criticism of the potentially unethical consequence of imputation. Yet Davey affirms that he takes sin seriously. In his opinion the Socinians are ‘superficial idealists’ in theology, whereas he views himself as a ‘realist’.266 From the context Davey means by this term that the Socinian position that he is criticizing is an idealist philosophical one based on deductive reasoning.267 This reflects his criticism in other places of philosophy and metaphysics.268 In contrast, his description of himself as a realist implies that he is basing his views on religious experience rather on deductive reasoning and therefore is closer to considering the doctrine of the atonement in terms of personality, for which he is arguing. Elsewhere he speaks of the ‘experience of men

264 Trial, 70.
265 Trial, 86.
266 Trial, 86.
267 Davey, Vesture, 81.
268 For example, Davey, Vesture, 242-247.
seeking a continually more adequate expression of the great truths which have been tested and proved again and again’.  

The Complainants objected to Davey saying that God in some sense takes responsibility for our sins. To them this would have an effect on the holiness of God with the implication that God would in some way be tainted by taking responsibility for human sin.

In *Vesture* Davey wrote

God does actually take responsibility for all things past, present and to come, but imputation is not only an unsuitable word in virtue of its commercial derivation, but it stands for an absurd theory of what actually happens in practice.  

His meaning becomes clearer if the context is taken into account. He is discussing how the desire for self-assurance has influenced the form of both Protestant and Roman Catholic theological views of how forgiveness is mediated. In the former it is through the doctrine of imputation and in the latter through the sacrament of the mass with its doctrine of transubstantiation. In the light of this context it is reasonable to take ‘God does actually take responsibility for all things past, present and to come’ to refer to the reality of God’s forgiveness or the reality of God’s restoring fellowship with himself by overcoming the alienation caused by human sin. In his defence before the Belfast Presbytery Davey asserts that for him this means neither that God's holiness is impaired nor that we are encouraged to view sin lightly. On the contrary, he claims that God’s taking responsibility in this sense confirms the teaching of WC 3.1 regarding ‘the doctrine of the eternal decrees whereby for His own glory He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass’. This last accusation that Davey’s views contradicted ‘the doctrine that the sinfulness of all sins

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269 Davey, *Vesture*, 81.
270 *Trial*, 3.
271 *Trial*, 86.
proceedeth only from the creature and not from God’. will be considered later under Charge Four.

Davey called as his final witnesses three of his students to testify to what he had actually said in his lectures and how they had interpreted what he had said. Their evidence can be considered together as it covers much common ground and tells in favour of what Davey claimed he actually said in his lectures. All three agreed that the reference to Paul’s philosophy of sin was merely a caution, that stress was laid on both the historic fact of Christ’s death and the divine-human character it revealed, and on Davey’s definition of Paul’s doctrine of justification.272 There was general agreement that in his lectures Davey did not expound his own views. However occasionally he did so and gave examples.273 By ‘not expounding his own views’ it is reasonable to take the students’ evidence to mean that Davey attempted to give an objective account of the development of the doctrine of justification. On this last point it should be pointed out that even in expounding the views of others there is an element of interpretation. This seems to be a tactic Davey uses at the Trial either to avoid being accountable for some things he has said or to leave his own position open. For example, he comments, ‘I also wish to make it clear once more that my chair is not in Systematic Theology nor in the Confession and Catechisms.274 The implication of this is that, because it was not part of his duties to teach the Westminster Confession, his statements on it should not be regarded as part of what he taught.

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272 Trial: Paul’s philosophy of sin, 47, 52, 58 – 59; Christ’s death, 48, 53, 57; Paul’s doctrine of justification, 47, 53, 58.
273 Trial, 50.
274 Trial, 85.
11. The Fundamentals

The Complainants accused Davey of not holding the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Alluding to Hunter’s use of ‘the fundamentals’ in relation to doctrines, Davey stated the most important was ‘God manifest in Christ making atonement for the sin of the world.’ Here again there is an elusive element in his words. He prefaces his acknowledgement of the centrality of the Atonement with the comment, ‘Mr Hunter asks “What are the fundamentals?” This is no place to spend time enumerating them, but the chief is certainly God manifest…’ It could be argued that this indicates that Davey does not want to be pinned down as to what the other fundamental doctrines are. This reflects his more open approach to theology in contrast with the more rigid approach of his opponents.

It is significant that the basis for his beliefs was the reality of the Christian experience of salvation. He claimed, ‘My trust and sincerest reason must be because they are true for me in my own experience as tested and proved.’ The significance of the reality of the Christian experience for Davey lies in the way he attempts to relate theology to experience and in the way in which he draws on the emerging experiential science of psychology to illuminate his theological investigations.

The two issues mentioned in this section, namely the fundamentals and experience, are good indicators of the issues that divided Davey from his opponents and caused them to view him with such hostility and suspicion. Their significance lies in the fact that how they are handled by Davey and his opponents will, it is hoped, be part of the process which leads to an understanding of Davey and his opponents that will be a contribution to theological inquiry today.

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275 Trial, 86.
276 Trial, 86
277 Trial, 86.
Davey is seeking to discern what the doctrine of imputation means. He is attempting to convey what its underlying thrust is. This involves, as we shall see, a consideration of the language used to expound and interpret the insights of the doctrine in a way that allows us to appreciate the importance of the doctrine but which does not lead us into some of the problematic ways in which the doctrine can be expressed, such as the transference of guilt to Christ. Davey is seeking to shed light on a complex problem.

Davey is more subtle and nuanced in his approach than his opponents. He is examining the resources of Irish Presbyterianism, his faith community, and reflecting on its traditions so that the core meaning of those traditions becomes apparent. His opponents on the other hand are taking a more simplistic approach. They do not seem to be aware that their approach creates problems. Nor do they seem to be aware of the theological inadequacies of their own position. They cannot distinguish the conceptual issues underlying the linguistic formulations and, as we shall see, find it difficult, if not impossible, to move beyond the linguistic level.

Davey's responses to the accusations levelled in the First Charge raise a whole series of theological questions. We will attempt to examine these in our theological study of his works in later chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE PERSON OF CHRIST

A. Introduction

Charge Two stated

…it is in accordance with the Word of God that the character of our Lord was absolutely perfect, “all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily” (Col. 2:9), “doing always those things which please the Father” (John 8:29), “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), of Whom the Father witnessed “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 17:5), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine.\textsuperscript{278}

The Complainants alleged that Davey had contravened this doctrine. In support of their accusations they cited passages from two of Davey’s books, *The Changing Vesture of the Faith* and *Our Faith in God*, and from lectures he had given to students at the Presbyterian College. A summary of the passages they relied on were as follows:

Most of us have had our moments on the mountain top, moments of certainty, of exaltation, of self-forgetfulness, of mystery, of adoration, deep peace, or triumphant joy. But they do not stay; not even Paul, not even Christ Himself, had an unbroken sense of their abiding…;\textsuperscript{279}

Whatever finality there may be about the revelation given us in Christ, it is not a finality of personality or of truth in toto…;\textsuperscript{280}

It is not the Galilean Jew who is final, but something which tabernacled in Him, and expressed itself in the forms of its time, both in thought and practice;\textsuperscript{281}

In Christ we have a perfect spirit, a perfect life, a final faith, in the imperfect vestments, social, historical, and intellectual, of a provincial Judaism, and an apocalyptic peasant piety… This finality lies in the moral finality of His Spirit;\textsuperscript{282}

The innocent suffering for the guilty. Christ would not have put it that way. He would not regard himself as innocent any more than good.\textsuperscript{283}

\textsuperscript{278} Trial, 4.
\textsuperscript{279} J. E. Davey, *Vesture*, 134.
\textsuperscript{280} J. E. Davey, *Our Faith*, 115.
\textsuperscript{281} J. E. Davey, *Our Faith*, 116.
\textsuperscript{282} J. E. Davey, *Our Faith*, 125.
\textsuperscript{283} Lecture, 28th November 1925.
On the cross… He tasted death in the fullest sense because He felt that He had let down God. He had made the wrong choice. Christ knew He may have been mistaken… He knew that He had been mistaken and God had departed. The wording in the charge states that Davey had contravened the teaching of Scripture on the perfection of Christ’s character. Of the evidence from Davey’s publications given to support the charge one quotation claimed that Christ was subject to ‘doubt, depression, stress’. One quotation from Davey’s lectures made a similar point, namely that ‘Jesus was subject to variations of nervous system’. The other quotations from his books dealt with the finality of Christ for faith. The remaining evidence from Davey’s lectures asserted that in the final days of his life Christ knew that he had been mistaken and on the Cross he knew that God had deserted him. In all these citations the Complainants perceived a Christ who was not divine because of the limitations implied by these statements. Furthermore, a Christ who was so limited could not be regarded as final for Christian faith.

In Charge Two the Complainants do not refer specifically to the divinity of Christ but to his ‘absolutely perfect’ character. However the scriptural citations chosen by the Complainants indicate that their concern in this charge is about the divine status of Christ. Moreover, we shall see in our detailed examination of the charge that it is Davey’s perceived non-recognition of Christ’s divinity that is the underlying reason for their opposition to his understanding of Jesus Christ and the strength of their objections to his Christology. While the belief that Christ was divine is the substance of Charge Two, it also underlies Charges One and Five, the latter two dealing respectively with the atonement and the Trinity.

In his Plea of Justification Davey deals with all the passages mentioned in this charge. Under Charge One the Complainants had raised matters which related to Charge Two. These will be considered in this chapter, as well as issues relevant to Christology.

284 Lecture, 5th December 1925.
arising under Charges Three to Five. Davey accepted that the citations given in Charge Two were his, although he objected to certain omissions and was insistent that his position would be clear if the contexts of the citations were given. He went on to assert that the contexts would show that his teaching was in conformity not only with Scripture but also with the Subordinate Standards of the Irish Presbyterian Church.

We shall now see how Davey believed he had refuted these allegations in his presentation of his Christological views in his plea of justification. This will involve looking at his whole presentation rather than firstly considering the specific points which the Complainants highlighted in their accusations. Davey’s Plea of Justification is structured as follows: a presentation of his views on Christology that, in his opinion, shows that his teaching is not ‘contrary to the Scriptural and Presbyterian doctrine’; an explanation of the passages from his books cited in the charge; an explanation of the passages from students’ lecture notes cited in the charge; an outline of Davey’s lecture on the Agony of Gethsemane and Calvary; and finally a summary of Davey’s position. We will examine these aspects of Davey’s Plea in turn.

**B. Davey’s Presentation of his Christology**

Davey begins by affirming his belief in Christ’s Divinity as being the divinity of God himself, ‘in the full sense of Deity as set forth in the Trinitarian Doctrine’. He claimed the course of Charge One had established this as his belief.

Davey also affirmed that a doctrine of incarnation required that the true humanity of Christ be held along with his divinity. On this point he endorsed the Westminster Confession’s phraseology emphasizing that Christ’s human nature had ‘all the essential

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285 A *Trial*, 94-98; B 98-101; C 101-105; D 105-109; E 109-110. It is unclear where the summary of the lecture ends. It is here taken as finishing at the conclusion of the first paragraph of *Trial*, 109.

286 *Trial*, 94.
properties and common infirmities thereof’. However, he stated, ‘The unity of the person must be maintained. Christ was not two persons, but one in two natures – i.e. as a person he had the essential qualities of the Divine and of the human.’

He claimed that it was his opponents who held a heretical Christology because they divided the person. Some of their views were Nestorian, some Apollinarian, some Docetist. The most common mistake of Fundamentalists was to adopt an Eutychian or Monophysite position where the human is lost in the divine. The Incarnation was possible because ‘human and divine are fundamentally akin’ and here Davey referred to man being made in the image of God.

Davey argued that Scripture provides adequate evidence for the true humanity of Christ. This is seen in his being thirsty (on the Cross: John 19.28) and hungry (the cursing of the fig tree: Matthew 21.18-19) and in his suffering (crying over Lazarus: John 11.35). Also in Scripture Christ is reported as asking questions and declaring lack of knowledge. An example of the former is ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mark 15.34) and of the latter is his declaration of not knowing when the return of the Son of Man would occur (Matthew 24.36).

Davey claimed that in emphasizing the reality of the human nature of Christ he was following in the footsteps of John Calvin, who, in describing the agony in Gethsemane,

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287 Trial, 94. WC 8.2, from which Davey cites, reads:
‘The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof; yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man’.

288 Trial, 96.
289 Trial, 97.
290 Trial, 96.
291 Trial, 96.
292 Trial, 96.
used such words as ‘perplexity’, ‘darkness’ and ‘fear’ to describe Christ’s feelings.\(^{293}\) Davey insisted that for Calvin these were indicative of real emotions experienced by Christ and were not in any sense ‘play acting’.\(^{294}\)

Davey appeals to the concept of Kenosis to help understand the person of Christ. Indeed he describes Kenosis as ‘the chief help, for our stage of human thought’.\(^{295}\) The term Kenosis is derived from εκενώσεν in Philippians 2.7, where Paul speaks about Christ having *emptied himself* and taking the form of a servant and being made in the likeness of man.

Davey was aware of the need to explain how true divinity and true humanity could coexist in one human being. His way of doing this was to assert as a premise a voluntary self-limitation on the part of God. He stated

> I believe Incarnation as taught in Scripture implies a voluntary self-limitation of God. Limitation in time and place seem obvious, and I believe limitation in power and knowledge are no less certainly demanded by the records of the New Testament.\(^{296}\)

Thus his premise is based on what he considered to be an implication of Scripture, and not on any explicit reference to the limitation of the divinity in the incarnate Christ.\(^{297}\) Correlative to this voluntary self-limitation of divinity is a development, growth and conflict in the humanity of the incarnate Christ. Davey claims Scripture is explicit on this point. Among the texts to which he refers are Jesus growing in favour with God and man, and Christ learning obedience through his suffering and being perfected by them.\(^{298}\) The Kenotic theory has helped our understanding not only of the incarnation but of the way in

\(^{293}\) *Trial*, 95.
\(^{294}\) *Trial*, 96.
\(^{295}\) *Trial*, 97. For Kenosis see David R. Law, ‘Kenotic Christology’ in David A. Fergusson (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, Oxford, 2010, 251-279. Also the last five words of this brief quotation from Davey indicate the importance of the concept of development for Davey.
\(^{296}\) *Trial*, 94.
\(^{297}\) Davey’s understanding of divine self-limitation will be considered later.
\(^{298}\) *Trial*, 95-96. Lk 2.52; Heb 5.8; Heb 2.10.
which incarnation meant very real limitations in the incarnate Christ. It helps us understand references in Scripture to Christ feeling human emotions and not having knowledge of everything and particularly the reality of his sufferings in Gethsemane and on the cross. It was Davey’s view that the Kenotic theory was not an innovation but rather a rediscovery of what was in Scripture and in the teaching of some of the early Church Fathers about the reality of both the human and the divine in Christ’s personality.299

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD provided what has come to be regarded as the classical expression of the relationship of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. Chalcedon described Christ as being ‘… in two natures [φυσεις], without confusion, without change, without division, without separation’.300 Davey describes the Chalcedonian definition as a ‘puzzle’.301 From this it could be inferred that he regards it as not adequately holding together the divine and the human in Christ. However he considers that the puzzle is not insoluble and that theologians were now in a position to better understand Chalcedon and ‘the temptations and moral conflict of Christ through which our human nature has been redeemed’.302 This helps us understand why Davey has so strongly emphasized Christ’s humanity. He believes that if Christ had not taken our humanity we would not have been saved, and Davey actually quotes here the saying of Gregory of Nazianzus that the unassumed is the unhealed.303 In other words, if Christ had not been truly human, he would not have been a competent Saviour.

Although Christ was fully human, the one characteristic he did not share was human sinfulness.304 However Davey believes that Christ could have sinned. It was the fact that he did not, despite temptation and conflict, that gave credence to his ability to save

299 Trial, 110.
301 Trial, 95.
302 Trial, 95.
303 Trial, 95. See also Trial, 96: ‘Christ’s humanity is God’s point of saving contact with us’.
304 Trial, 95.
his fellow human beings. On this point Davey claims support from Hodge.\textsuperscript{305} Christ was able not to sin, not unable to sin – ‘able to overcome our failures in our very nature’.\textsuperscript{306} This expressed in traditional terminology would be the claim \textit{posse non peccare} rather than \textit{non posse peccare}.

It has already been seen that Davey’s use of Kenotic theology in his premise of divine self-limitation is necessary for his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. It has also been seen how this gives a natural understanding of passages in Scripture that speak about growth, development and lack of complete knowledge in Christ.

Davey’s understanding of divinity in Christ coheres with his view of the nature of Christ’s humanity. He further relates the divine in Christ to the divine in the Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son. Davey’s Trinitarian views are the subject of Charge Five and will be dealt with when we are considering that charge. However, to explain his Christology something needs to be said at this point about his doctrine of the Trinity because it influences his thinking on the person of Christ. The divinity in Jesus is of the same kind that exists in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Davey claims that this is a relationship of subordination but not a relationship of inequality. The relationship of the eternal Son to God the Father is one of eternal generation or eternal derivation and ‘has some reference to the Father’s purpose at any particular moment’.\textsuperscript{307} Thus Davey argues, ‘Christ’s life is divine in quality, in source, in substance, but it is not a replica of the Father or the Spirit.’\textsuperscript{308} Davey points out that it is a mistake to assume that divinity must necessarily include the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. He argues that these are the attributes of God the Father.

\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Trial}, 96. Although Davey appeals to Hodge, he does not give a specific reference in Hodge’s works.\textsuperscript{306} \textit{Trial}, 96.\textsuperscript{307} \textit{Trial}, 96.\textsuperscript{308} \textit{Trial}, 96.
Father. Davey maintains that this needs to be reflected in the nature of the Son’s divinity in his incarnate state. He concludes

While omnipotence and omniscience, flowing from Father to Son (and all that the Son has is given Him, according to Scripture, on earth at least, it is not His own), might be characteristic of the eternal Son in heaven there is no need to think of them as essential on earth where the purpose and meaning of his work is different.  

The Complainants do not accept Davey’s views on this point and this is one of the things that lies at the centre of their accusations against him in this charge. For Davey, however, the divinity of Christ is seen in his humanity, in the gifts that the Father gave him as they were appropriate to, and necessary for, Christ’s work, which was the fulfilling of the Father’s will. Davey in turn accuses some of his opponents of propounding a Christ who has two persons rather than one person. Insofar as they do this they are following, unwittingly, the heresy of Nestorius. A consequence of Christ’s humanity was that attributes normally associated with divinity, such as omnipresence and omniscience, were not manifest in the incarnate Christ.

C. Davey’s Explanation of the Passages from his Books Cited in the Charge

1. Vesture, 134.

Most of us have had our moments on the mountain top, moments of certainty, of exaltation, of self-forgetfulness, of mystery, of adoration, deep peace, or triumphant joy. But they do not stay; not even Paul, not even Christ Himself, had an unbroken sense of their abiding. The Gospels and the Epistles are full of the doubt, the depression, the stress, which are contrary to the human love of ease, but which make life great and heroic.

309 Trial, 96.
310 Trial, 97.
311 Trial, 97.
312 This point will be examined considered later.
Davey justifies this passage by saying, ‘In the accounts of Christ’s life, as in that of Paul’s, conflict and human feelings are of the essence of the story’.\textsuperscript{313} He claims that this is seen in Hebrews and also in John’s Gospel. Moreover, John’s teaching of Christ’s dependence on the Father and Christ’s limitation by a voluntary acceptance of the Father’s will is the equivalent of Paul’ teaching of Christ’s self-emptying.\textsuperscript{314} This interpretation of the New Testament finds confirmation in the way that Calvin and the Larger Catechism stress the reality of Christ’s humanity.\textsuperscript{315}

2. *Faith, 115.*

Whatever finality there may be about the revelation given us in Christ, it is not a finality of personality or of truth \textit{in toto}...

Davey claimed that the quotations in the charge from *Faith* did not deny the divinity of Christ, if they were taken in the context of the whole chapter in which they occur. One sentence was omitted from the first extract which would have changed the context. This stated that Christ’s finality did not reside in the aesthetic and intellectual aspects of His character; his purpose was not to foreclose science or knowledge but was primarily religious and spiritual.\textsuperscript{316} The final wording in the quotation of this passage from the charge actually gives force to the point Davey is making. It states, ‘Even on the moral side finality must be sought in the spirit, not always or necessarily in the historical forms of Christ’s teaching.’\textsuperscript{317}


It is not the Galilean Jew who is final, but something which tabernacle in Him, and expressed itself in the forms of its time, both in thought...

\textsuperscript{313} *Trial*, 98.
\textsuperscript{314} *Trial*, 98.
\textsuperscript{315} *Trial*, 98.
\textsuperscript{316} *Trial*, 99.
\textsuperscript{317} *Trial*, 4.
and practice.

4. Faith, 125.

In Christ we have a perfect spirit, a perfect life, a final faith, in the imperfect vestments, social, historical, and intellectual, of a provincial Judaism, and an apocalyptic peasant piety… This finality lies in the moral finality of His Spirit.

Davey justifies these three passages from Faith by taking them together and saying that they convey similar ideas about the nature of Christ’s humanity, the important point being that the temporal aspects are not what are final. He insists, ‘forms belong to their time and place; the things which are final are the realities which lie below them, which create them and express themselves in them.’ 318 What was final in Christ and is final for us is ‘the eternal spirit which manifests itself in Him’. 319 He pointed out that even those who had brought the charges recognised this when they did not take all Christ’s teachings literally but sought to be obedient to the spirit that lay behind them. 320 In his attempt to show that his teaching, as cited by his opponents, did not constitute heresy, Davey appeals to the transience of form and the finality of the underlying spirit. This is significant, because it is a form of argumentation that is prevalent in his whole theology. And as we shall see, when considering his theology as a whole, it is also the theme of Vesture.

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318 Trial, 100.
319 Trial, 100.
320 Trial, 100.
D. Davey’s Explanation of the Passages from Students’ Lecture Notes cited in the Charge

Davey explained that the context of all these quotations came from his lecture on the agony of Christ in Gethsemane and at Calvary. He claimed that this lecture was part of a series dealing with Christ’s understanding of his death. Davey claimed

…the passages of the Agony…indirectly teach the same view of the centrality of Christ’s death for His own consciousness as the pivot of a new world and as the price of the Kingdom of God being established among men.\(^{321}\)

So Christ understood that God’s Kingdom would be brought about by his death.

Davey allegedly said in his lecture, ‘The innocent suffering for the guilty. Christ would not have put it that way. He would not regard himself as innocent any more than good.’\(^{322}\) Davey asserted, and other students stated, that his actual words were ‘He would not ‘have called’ [not ‘regard’ as in charge] Himself innocent any more than good’.\(^{323}\) This was in no way a denial of Christ’s goodness or innocence. It merely referred to the way Jesus would have expressed Himself. This is supported by the incident when Jesus was addressed as ‘Good Master’. On that occasion Jesus pointed away from himself to God, the source of all goodness.\(^{324}\)

For Davey the question of context was of extreme importance in considering the sets of quotations about Gethsemane and Calvary which were made from the same lecture. Yet one set of notes about Gethsemane was in the form of statements and the other in the form of questions. Davey said both forms of presentation were accurate to a degree. He explained this difference in presentation by saying that he had spoken of questions which

\(^{321}\) Trial, 103.  
\(^{322}\) Trial, 101.  
\(^{323}\) Trial, 101.  
\(^{324}\) Trial, 102.
were present in the mind of Christ. However the impression given by the notes in the form of statements was that Davey had taught that Christ had let God down. He strenuously denied this and asserted that he had in fact taught the exact opposite.\textsuperscript{325} What Davey was emphasizing was that in the deepest darkness Christ had still trusted God, and his Father had not deserted him, despite Christ’s cry of dereliction on the cross. Davey writes

\begin{quote}
The words chiefly objected to are the voice of the tempter, not statements of fact, the feelings or temptations of Christ in the moment of desolation when, as Calvin says, Christ felt the wrath of God upon sin, though even then God did not hate but loved Him.\textsuperscript{326}
\end{quote}

Here he is explaining that his words do not justify the interpretation the Complainants persistently put upon them. Davey further claimed that the word ‘knew’ in the sentence ‘He knew that He had been mistaken and God had departed’ should be replaced by the word ‘felt’.\textsuperscript{327} This is a further indication that Davey in his lecture was in fact speaking about the temptations that presented themselves to Christ on the cross.

**E. Outline of Davey’s Lecture on the Agony of Gethsemane and Calvary**

At his Trial Davey felt it necessary to give an account of the lecture in order to clarify what he had said on the subject.\textsuperscript{328} While he stressed that this was his individual opinion, he obviously believed it was in keeping with the Scriptural evidence and the Westminster Confession as interpreted earlier in this charge. Although the outline Davey gives extends almost over four pages, it is not necessary to consider its contents in detail, as there is much repetition of what has already been stated by Davey earlier in this Plea of

\begin{flushleft}\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{325} Trial, 103. \\
\textsuperscript{326} Trial, 104. \\
\textsuperscript{327} Trial, 104. \\
\textsuperscript{328} It is not clear where the outline of the lecture begins and ends. It is here taken as beginning at Trial, 105, starting with the words, ‘But to come to an outline of the lecture in question’ and ending at the conclusion of the first paragraph of 109, ‘…a heroism that we cannot but love and worship’.
\end{flushleft}
Justification. However, it is evident that Davey’s stress is on the humanity of Christ. He writes

By His creative venture of faith Christ shifted life to new levels of power, and the heart of the Atonement lies, not in what He said or even in what He was, but in what He did at that moment in human history by bearing and destroying human sin through the identification of God with man, and the victory won over sin in human life and limitations.  

This could be taken to mean that the heart of the Atonement was concentrated in the historical death of Christ. However, in the light of all that Davey has said in reply to the Second Charge, it is not unreasonable to argue that in this quotation there is a degree of rhetoric. On the face of it the words ‘not…even in what he was’ indicate that the person of Christ is not as relevant to the Atonement as the fact of Christ’s death. But this cannot be what Davey means, and the words in italics show this. They reveal that in fact Davey is emphasizing both the divinity and the humanity of Christ. But he is insistent that the divinity can only be seen in the humanity and this is why at this point in his lecture he draws attention to the concept of Kenosis as a help in understanding the relation of the human to the divine in Christ’s person.

F. Summary of Davey’s position as Stated in his Plea

In conclusion Davey argued that there was development in revelation, doctrine, in the character and person of Christ according to the Scriptures and in our understanding and experience. The Kenotic theory helped to understand the reality of the incarnation and the present emphasis on Christ’s humanity helped people to see the Divinity more clearly. Here Davey is advocating a Christology ‘from below’.

329 Trial, 108. Emphasis added.
330 Trial, 108.
331 Trial, 110.
G. Conclusion

One sentence, spoken by one of Complainants during the Appeal, could be regarded as an accurate summary of their opposition to Davey’s Christology. Mr Joseph Goligher asserted, ‘I want a Saviour who is divine and so able to save to the uttermost, and I feel that no other Saviour can give me that peace that the world can never disturb.’ This indicates that Davey’s opponents did not accept that the divinity of Christ was given sufficient place in his Christology. This view underlies many of the comments made before the General Assembly. For example, it underlies not only the suspicion that Davey’s alleged Modernism views Christ as an ideal man, but also the continuing opposition to Davey’s understanding of the finality of Christ. In both instances the Complainants consider that Davey’s Christ is not the divine Saviour of humanity. The same could be said about the Complainants’ continuing insistence that Davey’s theology was Adoptionist and hence heretical. Hunter stated, ‘Very intellectual men have maintained that it is quite impossible to teach that Christ was God, and that His human nature also became adopted in to the Godhead, without holding that in Christ there were two personalities.’ These words imply that Hunter regards Davey’s views as Adoptionist, because in his opinion Davey could not hold together the divine and human elements in Christ.

An underlying issue in Charge Two is the problem of portraying a competent Saviour. From their different starting points and consequent emphases both Davey and his opponents saw serious defects in the other’s Christology. Davey is insistent on a Christology from below. He writes

‘my humanity,’ said the old mystic Suso of Christ, ‘is the road by which

332 Trial, 168.
333 See S.G. Montgomery’s comments Trial, 165; Goligher’s comments Trial, 169-170; Snoddy’s comments Trial, 174-175.
334 Trial, 184.
mankind must travel;’ it was so with the first apostles, and for those who have known the full power of the Gospel it has always been so; but it is as we look upon the human Jesus that our confession of His Divinity grows from more to more…

Here we have Davey making it clear that a proper understanding of Christ’s person begins with his humanity. It is not sufficient to say that the humanity was the starting point for the first disciples but not for people today. This is what is implied in the views of the Complainants in their insistence on arguing for a theology from above, starting with Christ’s divinity.

In his Christology, as in his Soteriology, Davey condemns what he considers to be the erroneous ‘popular view’ of Fundamentalists. He does not expressly use the phrase in Charge Two. However, it is implicit in a criticism he makes of some Fundamentalists. He writes, ‘…many fundamentalists really seem to believe that there is one God and His name is Jesus.’ Davey regards this heretical belief as a consequence both of a ‘dehumanising’ of Christ and a ‘wrong-headed idealization of Christ as a kind of God’. Moreover he regards himself as part of ‘a providential reaction’ against such wrong views.

A further issue that underlies the dispute about Christology between Davey and his opponents is the issue of development of doctrine. This is apparent at several points in Charge Two and needs further consideration.

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335 Trial, 110. Compare John Macquarrie, ‘…we should begin from that aspect of his [the God-man’s] being which is closest to us…historically this is the way by which the first Christians entered into a faithful relation to Jesus Christ and that the approach to Christology from the human side is the one that fits best with the idea of incarnation, God meeting us where we are. ‘Christology from Below?’, 144 in Stubborn Theological Questions, London, 2003.
336 Trial, 109.
337 Trial, 109.
338 See for example Trial, 101, 110.
CHAPTER FIVE

SCRIPTURE

A. Introduction

Charge Three stated

it is in accordance with the Word of God that the Holy Scriptures are
‘immediately inspired of God,’ and are ‘of infallible truth and of Divine
authority’ (Westminster Confession), and it is a heinous offence to hold
and teach what is contrary to this doctrine… 339

Thus the nature of the charge was an accusation that Davey had expressed views on
Scripture that were not in accordance with the teaching of the Confession. It raised
questions about what it meant to say that the Scriptures were inspired, about the nature of
biblical authority and how one could regard Scripture as a source of infallible truth. The
Complainants had lodged nineteen quotations from Davey’s books and college lectures.
There were five from Vesture, six from Faith and eight from lectures. 340

One of the passages cited in Charge Three was also cited in Charge Two. It stated,

‘It is not the Galilean Jew who is final, but something which tabernacled in Him and
expressed itself in the form of its time, both in thought and practice’. 341 Although only this
one passage is cited in both charges, the other passages relating to the finality of Christ are
also relevant to aspects of understanding Scripture. 342 In Charge Two the focus was on
Christology and how there were elements in Christ’s person which had permanent
relevance for humankind and other aspects which had not, but which were culturally and
historically conditioned. In other words, the problem was in what sense the concept of

339 Trial, 6.
340 The quotations in the order in which they are cited in the Charge: Vesture, p 49, 50, 224, 230,
83; Davey, Faith, p 99, 111, 114, 116, 120,127; Lectures, 9 January 1926, 13 March 1926,
23 January 1926, 14 November 1925, 22 October 1925, three citations from lectures not dated.
341 Davey, Faith, 116.
342 The other passages in Charge Two about the finality of Christ are Davey, Faith, 115 and
125.
finality could be applied to Christ. We saw that what underlay differences in understanding Christ’s finality was due to Davey and the Complainants having different understandings of the divine and the human in Christ. Davey’s emphasis was on a true humanity of Christ, whereas his opponents firmly believed that the divinity had pre-eminence in Christ’s person. For the Complainants Davey’s views resulted in an inadequate Saviour. The relation of the divine and human in Christ is also relevant for our consideration of Charge Three. For Davey’s Christological views in part pose the question in what sense Christ’s view of Scripture and statements about Scripture are final for people today. Also there is a parallel in the relation of the divine to the human. Charge Two deals with the relationship of the divine to the human in the person of Christ. Charge Three deals with the relationship of the divine to the human in the Biblical writings.

In his Plea of Justification Davey, as expected by the nature of the subject matter, speaks about the inspiration, infallibility, authority and finality of Scripture. All of these are interwoven at various points in Davey’s Plea. However, we shall not evaluate Davey’s view of Scripture by examining each of these concepts separately. Rather we shall be guided by the structure Davey himself has presented, taking this as an indication of those areas which he thought crucial. Thus, focussing on the way Davey has arranged his Plea but introducing our own headings, the seven topics that we shall use in our appraisal are Davey’s Interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter One – Of the Holy Scripture, Love and Grace, The Holy Spirit and Experience, The Divine and Human in Scripture, The Princeton Theology and Fundamentalism, The Sufficiency of Scripture, and Jesus and the Finality of Scripture.
B. Davey’s Interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter One – Of the Holy Scripture

At the beginning of his Plea of Justification Davey fires a broadside against the position of his opponents. In the opening two sentences he claims that the doctrine of Scripture in the Confession has been greatly misunderstood and that it does not preclude the use of higher criticism.  

Furthermore, he emphasizes that the Charge against him pertains to his allegedly contravening the Westminster Confession. However, the Complainants are basing their case not on the Confession but on the interpretation of the Confession put forward by the Princeton Theologians. It is for this reason that Davey pointedly reminds Presbytery that he is not being tried for his disagreement with the interpretation of the Confession advocated by the Princeton Theology. As we shall shortly see, the interpretation of the Confession put forward by Davey conflicts with the Princeton understanding of this document on important points, for example, on the understanding of how Scripture is infallibly true. He also reaffirms his opposition to what he terms the popular view. This view was hostile to historical criticism and regarded the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. As will be seen from the way that Davey presents his Plea with regard to Charge Three, it is clear that, in his opinion, this was the position of the Complainants, and that they formulated their view in reliance on the Princeton Theology. In respect of this popular but incorrect view Davey declares, ‘…the Scriptures and the standards of our Church …have been greatly misinterpreted and misconceived in popular thinking’. As Davey pointed out in previous charges, this view is based on popular misconceptions. He applies his view of the popular misconception of ideas, this time to the doctrine of Scripture, whereas, in previous

343 Trial, 112.
344 Trial, 112. Also ‘What the Westminster divines said is not what the Princeton Theologians have taught, and it is by the Westminster standards that I am to be judged’. Trial, 119.
345 For popular view see Thesis Charge One p 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and Charge Two, 10.
346 Trial, 112.
chapters, we have seen it applied to the doctrines of salvation and the person of Christ. In claiming in his defence on this Charge, as in the two preceding Charges, that his views are a corrective of an erroneous popular understanding, he is preparing his listeners’ minds for a correct understanding of the Confession’s view of Scripture. This is what he proceeds to deliver in his précis of the ten sections of the first chapter of that document. Here Davey is making use of rhetorical devices but backs them up with what he considers to be convincing theological arguments. This becomes apparent, as he unfolds his defence, in his appealing to a chain of authorities starting with Luther and the Reformers.

Davey asserts that it is clear from WC 1.1 of the Confession that, because God’s revelation of himself preceded the writing of Scripture, Scripture itself is not the revelation but the record of the revelation. While stating that God’s revelation is consummated in Christ, Davey also argues that God’s revelation continues in ‘the life of the Christian Church’. He also claims that the first section of the Confession makes a distinction between Christ as the living Word of God and the Scripture as the written Word of God. The implication of this is that it is legitimate to describe Scripture as the Word of God without claiming that the Bible itself is revelation.

WC 1.2 lists ‘with a minimum of critical opinion’ the books which comprise Scripture. The names of the first five books of the Old Testament are listed without any reference to Moses. Davey claims that this fact does not commit one to an acceptance of their authorship by Moses. This is one of the tactics Davey employs to try to create some room for accepting a non-literalist reading of the Bible as not ruled out by the Confession. The Confession does not categorically state that there is only one way of reading Scripture, namely the literalist way. Davey uses this to affirm that there is

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347 Trial, p 112-113.
348 Trial, 112.
349 The phrase ‘Word of God written’ is not used until Chapter 1.2 where it is synonymous with ‘Holy Scripture’.
350 Trial, 112.
sufficient flexibility in the Confession to allow non-literalist readings of the Bible. However, he makes no comment on the fact that the first four books in the New Testament list are prefaced by the phrase ‘The Gospels according to’. Following the reasoning he has used for the Confession not compelling acceptance of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, it would be reasonable to conclude that the authors of the first four books of the New Testament were in fact Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. However, Davey does not draw this conclusion, nor does he draw attention to the way the Confession describes the four Gospels. His opponents seem unaware of his inconsistency on this point. This is something that the Complainants could have used to their advantage, for Davey does not think that the Fourth Gospel necessarily comes from John the son of Zebedee.\(^{351}\) The Confession’s description of the Pastoral Epistles, ‘Paul’s Epistles…To Timothy I, To Timothy II, To Titus’, could be regarded in the same way. Yet, as with the Gospels, Davey makes no reference to these in support of his contention that the Confession allows a non-literalist approach to Scripture. At least this is evidence of inconsistency in Davey’s interpretation of the Confession on these points of authorship of Biblical books. It could be further contended that these omissions were not unintentional but indicate a manipulation of the evidence by Davey on grounds of expediency. However, this would be based on an argument from silence, namely, the fact that Davey does not refer to the Gospels or the Pastorals in this context. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable, allowing for the subtlety of Davey’s approach in presenting his case, to conclude that his omissions here are not an accidental oversight but a decision adopted on grounds of expediency. To have applied to the Gospels and the Pastoral Epistles the principle of interpretation which he had applied to the Pentateuch would have played into the Claimants’ hands, because Davey

\(^{351}\) Davey, *Jesus*, 18-21.
would in fact have been providing them with further confirmation of the literalist reading of Scripture, which they were asserting was the meaning of the Confession.

WC 1.2 claims that the Biblical books were ‘given by inspiration of God for the rule of faith and life’. Davey asserted that this indicates the kind of inspiration which the Bible has – ‘the scope of inspiration and the purpose of the Scriptures is as a rule of faith and life, not as a book of final truth in science and history and geography’. He argues that this precludes the interpretation put forward by Charles Hodge, for example, who claimed that the inspiration did extend to matters of science and history. WC 1.3 excludes the Apocrypha from Scripture, because its books are not inspired. WC 1.4 states that the authority of Scripture depends wholly on God, whom it regards as ‘the author’ of Scripture. At this point Davey does not expand his understanding of the Confession’s use of this phrase. This will become clearer as we look at his view of Scripture in more detail. However, in the broader context of understanding the inspiration of Scripture and in the light of what has been said so far about literalist and non-literalist readings of Scripture, it is possible to comment without going into the details of the respective positions of Davey and his opponents. In the broader debate on the status of Scripture these two positions represent two different ways of viewing the inspiration of the Bible. On the one hand the Claimants adopt a conservative or deductive view of Scripture, assuming that it is divine, and then trying to correlate the evidence to this primary assumption. Associated with this view is the claim that the Bible is inerrant. Davey, on the other hand, takes a non-literalist view. He interprets the scope of the Bible’s authority as being the same as the scope of Biblical inspiration mentioned in WC 1.2, namely an authority for ‘faith and life’.

352 Trial, 112.
353 For examples of the different types of understanding the authority and inspiration of Scripture see Avery Dulles, Models of Revelation, Dublin, 1983; David R. Law, Inspiration, London and New York, 2001.
According to Chapter 1.5 the Bible itself presents evidences which help establish that it has its source in God. These include ‘the consent of all the parts’ and ‘the testimony of the Church’. But all such arguments are insufficient. We are convinced of the divine nature of Scripture only through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Here Davey cites the words of the Confession, ‘…our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness with and by the word in our hearts’.\(^{354}\) It will be seen as the views of Davey and the Complainants are considered later that underlying their arguments is a fundamental difference as to where the inspiration of Scripture is to be located. Although both Davey and his opponents stress the need for the inner witness of the Holy Spirit for recognizing Scripture as God’s Word, the latter regard the location of Scripture as primarily in the text. Davey, on the other hand, lays more emphasis on the relation of the reader to the text and the reader’s experience of the Holy Spirit. In the course of examining the arguments we shall see that one reason the Claimants attack Davey’s position on Scripture is that his emphasis on experience appears to them as a derogation of the literal inerrancy of Scripture as something that has been given by God and is true whether the individual experiences its truth or not.

WC 1.5 is the first occasion on which the Scriptures are described as possessing infallibility.\(^{355}\) Davey claims that the scope of such infallibility is identical to the scope of that which he claims the Confession attributes to the inspiration and authority of scripture. All three concepts - authority, inspiration and infallibility – relate to Scripture in the same sense, namely as pertaining to faith and life. This interpretation finds confirmation, according to Davey, in the following section, WC 1.6. It states that Scripture contains

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354 There is a minor misquotation here. WC has ‘bearing witness by and with the word’, compared with Davey’s ‘bearing witness with and by the word’.
355 The only other use of ‘infallible’ in WC 1 is in WC 1.9, which speaks of ‘the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture’.
'The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life…'\textsuperscript{356} The interpretation of these words is an important factor in the disagreement between Davey and the Complainants. It will be shown later that the words ‘faith and life’ include history and science for Davey’s opponents, but not for Davey himself. Indeed commenting on this section Davey specifically states that ‘scientific investigation and literary criticism’ are not within its scope. He asserts that this is ‘the one statement of the infallibility of Scripture given us’.\textsuperscript{357}

Davey claims that WC 1.7 recognizes that some parts of Scripture are obscure and he goes on to assert that it lays down the consent of Scripture as a rule of interpretation. He describes this hermeneutical principle as ‘congruity with God’s revelation as a whole’.\textsuperscript{358} This is an instance of Davey appealing to a principle of interpretation that is not apparent in the words the Confession uses. In WC 1.5 the Confession does speak about ‘the consent of all the parts [of scripture]’ as an argument ‘whereby it [scripture] doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God’. However the Confession does not seem to be referring to that argument here in WC 1.7. Davey is not contradicting the apparent meaning of this section. However, he is extending it to cover the hermeneutical principle of consent of Scripture. This is an understanding of Scripture that he will use in his defence against his opponents. Acknowledging the obscurity of some parts of Scripture, a more natural reading of this section would be that the Confession is merely stating that some parts of Scripture are more clearly understood than others and different readers bring different levels of understanding to the text. In spite of this Scripture is clear to both ‘the learned’ and ‘the unlearned’ on what is necessary for salvation. At this point it would be helpful to draw on the later work of G. S. Hendry to articulate some of the theological

\textsuperscript{356} WC 1.6 cited Trial, 113.
\textsuperscript{357} Trial, 113.
\textsuperscript{358} Trial, 113. WC 1.5 speaks about ‘the consent of all the parts [of scripture]’ as an argument ‘whereby it [scripture] doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God’.
questions involved in this debate. His interpretation of this section confirms the understanding given above. He writes,

It [the Confession] affirms that the deliverances of the Bible on its main theme (here described as ‘those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation’) are clear enough to be understood by any person of normal intelligence; the inference is that the obscurities are found in matters of secondary or peripheral importance.\footnote{359 George S. Hendry, \textit{The Westminster Confession for Today. A Contemporary Interpretation}, London, 1960, 36.}

Hendry does not give any indication that WC 1.7 relates to the hermeneutical principle of the consent of Scripture. Rather his interpretation supports the view given above that here Davey is reading into the Confession more than the document can bear in the ordinary sense of the words. This is arguably another instance of Davey’s interpretation being based on expediency, in the sense that he is laying the ground for his later attack on the Complainants with his understanding of the consent or congruity of Scripture.

The last part of Hendry’s quotation, ‘the inference is that the obscurities are found in matters of secondary or peripheral importance’, indicates that he supports the notion of the gradation of Scripture. We shall see that this is also the position adopted by Davey. Gradation of Scripture holds that while all Scripture is inspired, it is not all inspired on the same level.\footnote{360 On gradation of inspiration see Law, \textit{Inspiration}, 62, 66, 69, 106, 112-114, 126, 201-202.} It will be seen that part of the argument between Davey and his opponents is about the question whether the inspiration of Scripture is complete and uniform throughout all Scripture, in other words plenary inspiration, or whether there are degrees of inspiration, some passages having a higher level of inspiration than others. Here again underlying their differences are two opposing views of inspiration. It will be seen that Davey’s opponents hold to a view of plenary inspiration which allows no degrees of inspiration. Davey, on the other hand, will be seen to use the concept of gradation of inspiration to account for discrepancies and inconsistencies in Scripture.
The word ‘sufficient’ occurs in WC 1.7 in reference to ‘a sufficient understanding’ ‘of those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation’. Davey asserts that this indicates a doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture rather than a doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture.\(^{361}\) This indicates another instance of underlying assumptions about the nature of Scripture determining how each of the parties to the Trial interpret the Confession’s statements about Scripture. Both would agree that the Confession is sufficient for salvation. But, as we shall see, each appeals to opposing underlying concepts. The Complainants appeal to the inerrancy and plenary inspiration of Scripture, whereas Davey proposes a doctrine of inspiration that requires neither inerrancy nor plenary inspiration.

WC 1.8 declares, ‘The Old Testament in Hebrew… and the New Testament in Greek…are immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical’. Davey accuses his opponents of misquoting the Confession in the words used in Charge Three. They cite the Holy Scriptures as ‘being immediately inspired of God’, whereas, as Davey correctly points out, the Confession refers to the two Testaments in their original languages. He states that the phrase ‘immediately inspired by God’ is to distinguish the Protestant position from the Roman position. The latter acknowledges the Vulgate, which is a translation, as a final authority, whereas the former insists that final authority inheres in the original languages in which the Scriptures were written, rather than in versions or translations.\(^{362}\) Having clarified the Confession’s meaning of ‘being immediately inspired of God’, Davey criticizes Warfield’s interpretation of ‘immediately inspired’. Davey claims that Warfield’s assertion that the phrase in this

\(^{361}\) *Trial*, 113.
\(^{362}\) *Trial*, 113.
section of the Confession means ‘verbally inspired’ is an instance of special pleading.\textsuperscript{363} He writes

If we could get an absolutely pure text we should have the original Scripture in Hebrew and Greek, as God originally gave them to our race; but in any case in Hebrew and Greek we get back beyond versions, translations and interpretations, as nearly as possible to what the original writers said and meant.\textsuperscript{364}

Davey’s interpretation here appears to agree with that of A. A. Hodge. Seeing that Hodge is an authority figure for the Claimants, then clearly it was going to be to Davey’s advantage if he could show that his position was in line with somebody recognized as an authority by his opponents.\textsuperscript{365} It is also helpful to draw on Hendry’s later book here to interpret the issues involved.\textsuperscript{366} As we continue to examine Davey’s understanding of Scripture it will be shown that, although the language of Davey and Hodge is similar on this matter, his agreement with Hodge is more apparent than real.

WC 1.9 lays down two important rules. The first is the hermeneutical principle that Scripture should be interpreted by Scripture (\textit{Scriptura sui ipsius interpres}). The second is the claim, in contradiction of the view that there are multiple or ‘manifold’ senses of Scripture, that there is only one. Davey describes this one sense as the ‘literal’ sense.\textsuperscript{367} However, the conclusion should not be drawn from this that Davey was literalistic in his interpretation of Scripture. Even a cursory examination of his view of Scripture expressed at the Trial would reveal that he was not a literalist.\textsuperscript{368}

\textsuperscript{363} \textit{Trial}, 113.
\textsuperscript{364} \textit{Trial}, 113.
\textsuperscript{365} ‘...the original sacred text has come down to us in a state of essential purity’, A. A. Hodge, \textit{The Confession of Faith. A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession}, (First published 1869), Edinburgh 1983, 41.
\textsuperscript{366} ‘The most that can be said is the text which can be reconstructed from the oldest surviving manuscripts is nearer authentic than any other.’ Hendry, \textit{Confession}, 37.
\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Trial}, 113.
\textsuperscript{368} For example he does not accept ‘the literal interpretation of the sun standing still in the book of Joshua, \textit{Trial}, 136; nor does he accept a miraculous crossing of the River Jordan in the time of Joshua, \textit{Trial}, p 137-139.
WC 1.10 reaffirms that the final arbiter in interpreting Scripture and settling disputes of doctrine and determining individual and corporate behaviour is the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. Davey emphasizes

it is that Spirit which matters, and which is the foundation of our Protestantism, which, as W. Paterson says, in its doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, affirms ‘the inspiration of the individual’ with its corollaries of access to God and private judgment.\(^{369}\)

In WC 1.10 emphasis is laid on the decisive role of the Holy Spirit. Davey agrees with the primacy of the Spirit in Scripture but gives it an individualistic slant, which chimes in with his views on Scripture that he develops later on in his Plea of Justification.

This summary of how Davey understands the Confession is important, because it lays the ground both for Davey’s understanding of Scripture and for those areas of disagreement with his opponents which are considered in detail in the remainder of Davey’s Plea of Justification. In support of his contention that there is nothing in his interpretation of the Confession that is contrary to the Confession, Davey claims the support of two ‘recognised historians’, C. G. McCrie and A. F. Mitchell.\(^{370}\) He emphasizes that both scholars stress the point that he is making, namely that the compilers of the Confession did not wish to produce a document that left no room for legitimate differences of theological opinion. Davey comments that McCrie affirms that some scholars, to whose opinions Davey refers, did not go beyond the Confession’s teaching regarding the inspiration and authority of the Bible.\(^{371}\) These included Alexander Geddes, Robertson Smith, A. B. Bruce and A. B. Davidson, all of whom espoused in differing degrees critical views regarding the study of Scripture.

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\(^{369}\) Trial, 113. W. Paterson (1860-1939) see DSCHT. Paterson was a former teacher of Davey and was one of those to whom Davey dedicated Vesture.

\(^{370}\) Trial, 113-114. For C. G. McCrie (1836-1910) and A. A. Mitchell (1822-1899) see DSCHT. Davey quotes from Mitchell’s introduction to A. A. Mitchell and J. Struthers (Editors), The Minutes … the Westminster Assembly, Edinburgh, 1874.

\(^{371}\) Trial, 114.
The later comment of Thompson on Davey’s estimate of one of McCrie’s books may throw some light in assessing Davey’s strategy at the Trial. Thompson claimed that Davey ‘found the book *The Catholicity of Protestantism* – an exposition of reformed theology and close in many ways to his own statements in 1927 – quite unacceptable’.\(^{372}\) This would support the view already expressed that there was an element of expediency in Davey’s choice of sources. It could also give some support to the following hypothesis. While Davey appeals to McCrie, he does not explain how McCrie justifies his inclusion of Robertson Smith’s name in the list of scholars he mentions. Certainly the Claimants would not have agreed that Robertson Smith did not contravene the Confession’s teaching on Scripture. Indeed some of the accusations they brought against Davey were objections to views that Robertson Smith had argued for in his claim that historical criticism of Scripture should be accepted. It could be argued that Davey’s mention of Robertson Smith is part of the strategy he is using to build up his case and to make a favourable impression on his hearers, in the sense of the Court hearing his plea. Obviously his opponents would not be favourably impressed. However, the rest of the Court may have been influenced towards not accepting the picture of Robertson Smith as an arch heretic, when Davey informed them that, according to McCrie, his views did not go beyond the teaching of the Confession.

Finally, Davey, having presented his interpretation of the Confession’s teaching on Scripture, section by section, states what he understands to be a summary of that teaching. He writes, ‘…the Westminster divines have given us a doctrine of inspiration of Scripture limited to its purposes of being an infallible or trustworthy rule of faith and conduct’.\(^{373}\) This understanding of Scripture he claims to be common to nearly all the Protestant

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\(^{372}\) Thompson, ‘Davey’, 22.

\(^{373}\) *Trial*, 114.
Confessions. It is significant that the element in the Confession’s teaching that Davey focuses on in this summary is that the inspiration of Scripture is limited to ‘faith and conduct’, or ‘faith and life’, which he uses as a synonym. This is precisely the major area of disagreement between himself and his opponents and this shall become apparent as our examination of Davey’s view of Scripture proceeds. Again it is arguable that this emphasis on Scripture’s limited inspiration and limited infallibility, is evidence of Davey’s strategy of building up his case to convince the Court that his interpretation of the Confession is the correct one and that it is his opponents who are in error.

Davey is certainly drawing a very positive picture of agreement and unanimity regarding views of Scripture at the time of the Reformation and in affirming that the Westminster Confession, as well as his interpretation of it, coheres with that positive picture. This is certainly a good tactic to follow at his Trial, because this shows that he stands within the tradition and not outside it as his opponents claim. Because of the procedure now being followed, a Plea of Justification, Davey has the freedom to present his case without interruption, which means he has the opportunity to explain his views without having to follow the agenda of his opponents. He is not being forced into the structure imposed upon him by them. This procedure thus allows Davey, in expounding his understanding of Scripture, to enlarge upon the themes, by which we shall evaluate his doctrine of Scripture and which, as we shall see later, are central to his theological viewpoint. To these themes we now turn.

374 Trial, 114.
C. Themes in Davey’s Understanding of Scripture

1. Love and Grace

In considering the general view of Scripture at the Reformation Davey refers to the First Helvetic Confession of 1536, in which Scripture is put in the forefront. He claims that this document describes the function of Scripture as the declaration of God’s love to which human beings are called to respond in faith. Davey describes this as ‘an understanding of Scripture, which is reached only by faith and which worketh by love’. Although the Westminster Confession does not specifically mention love, Davey insists that the concepts of love and grace are not absent from, but are central to, the Westminster Confession’s doctrine of Scripture. Davey underlines this point as he continues to argue that his understanding of the Bible is in line with Luther’s position.

2. The Holy Spirit, Experience, Inspiration

Central to Davey’s view of Scripture is the Reformation emphasis on experience and its relation to inspiration. He writes, ‘for Luther the Bible was a book of experience in which he found God, and inspiration meant being found of God in the reading of Scripture’. Both Luther and Calvin are at one on this point. Davey declares

Like Luther, he [Calvin] insists that the authority of Scripture depends upon the self-evidencing quality of its teaching, upon the testimony of the Spirit, and what that implies we are only beginning to learn, for in Calvin’s day the sciences of Old and New Testament Theology and Criticism had not yet really come into being and development in revelation was little thought of in our modern sense.

For Davey the inspiration of the Bible is not confined to the text, but, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, it is also legitimate to describe the reader of the text as also

*375 Trial, 115.*
*376 Trial, 115.* Davey here is quoting the latter part of Gal 5. 6.
*377 For Luther Davey draws on T. M. Lindsey’s History of the Reformation, Volume One. For Lindsay see DSCHT.*
*378 Trial, 115.*
*379 Trial, 117.*
inspired in some way. Also he refuses to equate inspiration with inerrancy. As the last quotation shows, revelation is progressive and theological and historical criticism are legitimate developments from principles established by the Reformers. Davey concludes, ‘We are reduced in the end to two things – private judgment, and the Spirit working in our hearts as the ground of our judgment that God is in Scripture’.\textsuperscript{380} He is not here advocating a completely subjective understanding of Scripture, but rather an informed judgment, taking account of the most recent findings of scholarship.

As with his understanding of inspiration, so also with his understanding of infallibility and authority, the scope of all these is restricted to what is necessary for faith and life. Davey comments, ‘infallibility has not to do with intellectual truth but with spiritual understanding’.\textsuperscript{381} His own position he considers to be rooted in Reformation principles and he cites Philip Schaff in support of his interpretation of the Reformers’ view of Scripture:

‘…when they [the Reformers] declared that the authority and infallibility (or trustworthiness) of that Word [of God] belonged to the region of faith, they made that authority and infallibility altogether independent of questions that might be raised about the human agencies through which the book [the Bible] came into its present shape…’\textsuperscript{382}

However, the force of Davey’s opposition towards what he considers erroneous views of Scripture does have the potential to conceal from the reader that he is just as concerned as his opponents to secure a position for Scripture that will enable it to withstand all adverse criticism, as the above quotation demonstrates.

\textsuperscript{380} Trial, 116.
\textsuperscript{381} Trial, 115.
\textsuperscript{382} Trial, 115-116.
3. The Divine and the Human in Scripture

Although Davey firmly believes that in one sense the Bible is no different from any other book and thus subject to the same methods of investigation used in the critical analysis of any other book. On the other hand, the Bible is in a sense different from any other book, because of its spiritual authority. In this sense it can be regarded as the Word of God ‘as a means of grace and salvation’. While Davey believes that the Bible has both divine and human elements, it is not always easy or indeed possible to differentiate the two, because the Bible is also a unity. He asserts that although there are human and divine elements in the Bible, only the latter is the Word of God. He also speaks of the letter of Scripture and the spirit of Scripture. A further way of describing the two component parts of Scripture is by invoking the distinction which he uses extensively in Vesture, namely, that between the form and the life or reality underlying the external form. However he affirms that it is only in the record of historical events that a divine purpose may be seen. In other words, the divine in Scripture is manifested in and through the historical record and not apart from the historical record. And here Davey is again affirming the unity of Scripture.

4. The Princeton Theology and Fundamentalism

While Davey’s approach to theology is opposed to that of the Princeton Theologians, he regards them with respect. However, this is arguably part of his strategy at the Trial. In a telling aside he refers to ‘that recent book of his [Machen’s] which Mr Hanna advised us

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383 Trial, 115.
384 Trial, 115.
385 Trial, 126.
386 Trial, 130.
387 Trial, 115.
388 Trial, 115-116.
all to read’. This is likely a reference to Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*, which was published in 1925. Although this is a passing remark on Davey’s part, it indicates a greater hostility than usually appears towards his theological opponents. Indeed it could be reasonably taken as a truer reflection of his opinion of the theology embodied by the Hodges, of which Machen was a more recent advocate. This conclusion finds support in Thompson’s remark on Davey’s disparaging estimate of McCrie’s book, *The Catholicity of Protestantism*. Taken together both comments hint strongly at Davey adopting a strategy at his Trial of claiming the support of theologians on whom the Complainants relied to give credence to the charges they brought against Davey. But in reality Davey’s theological ethos had little in common with the Princeton type of theology.

In Charge Three Davey refers to Fundamentalists, making it clear that he associates Fundamentalism with the development of the rigid orthodoxy of the Princeton Theology and the subsequent rise of Fundamentalism in the United States. He writes, ‘And this prejudice of the Fundamentalists has become for many of our people a prevalent misconception as to the meaning and method of inspiration’.

5. The Sufficiency of Scripture

Davey argues that a doctrine of inerrancy does not allow for a coherent doctrine of inspiration in relation to the text and canon of Scripture. Regarding the former, he draws attention to the many places both where there are variant readings and where the text itself has become corrupted and uncertain. His argument is that if God wished humankind to have an inerrant text, why did he allow it to become so uncertain. In relation to the

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389 Trial, 116.
392 Trial, 121, 123, 126.
393 Trial, 123.
394 Trial, 121.
latter, he asks what criteria are to be used to determine which books should be admitted to the canon. While recognizing that lists of books regarded as canonical had come into being by the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., these lists had no official status because they had never been confirmed by official Church decisions. Davey proceeds to argue, ‘It was the age of the Reformation which in Confessions, as in the Roman Council of Trent, finally fixed the canon or list of sacred books, and certainly not infallibly’. The Protestant acceptance of books within the canon is not based, Davey claimed, on confessional documents nor on a book’s apostolicity. Here he repeats and emphasizes that the only criterion for inspiration is God speaking to the individual and the individual responding through the working of the Holy Spirit. He cites Marcus Dods to support his argument here, and interprets Dods as meaning that that everything depends on private judgment. Davey declares

No such view[that is, one based on the experience of private judgment] is sufficient for a rigid doctrine of inerrancy, though it is sufficient for a general doctrine of inspiration as implying the sufficiency of Scripture for faith and life…

Thus, Davey is claiming that his view of inspiration, which, according to him, is the view of the Westminster Confession of Faith, does not require a doctrine of inerrancy.

The principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* has its basis in the concept of the consent of Scripture. To this latter concept Davey gives express approval and states it is ‘according to our Standards’, which includes the Westminster Confession. He comments

But our doctrine is not Pauline or Johannine but Scriptural, according to the consent of Scripture – i.e., not a doctrine of isolated parts but of a unity… Scripture is to be taken as a whole, each writer contributing his share, but

395 *Trial*, 121.
396 *Trial*, 122.
397 *Trial*, 122.
398 *Trial*, 131.
none a safe guide in isolation.\textsuperscript{399}

Davey reinforces his argument for the sufficiency of Scripture by referring to the similarity between the understanding of the nature of Scripture and the understanding of Christ’s person. He writes, ‘The humanity or human limitations of the book…like the humanity of Christ in His limitations – is part of the purpose of God, and does not detract from, but adds to the glory of the Book of books’.\textsuperscript{400} He includes the concept of development and progressive revelation as an essential part of his understanding of inspiration. He writes, ‘And human mistakes seem to be an essential and helpful part of the record…for they are part of man’s upward march’.\textsuperscript{401} One result of this belief in development is that truth is something that is being constantly rediscovered in the sense of leaving behind ideas that were formerly accepted as true, but in the light of modern knowledge are seen to be inadequate understandings of reality.

Davey may believe in progressive revelation, but he maintains that both the content of that revelation is unique and also the record in which it is given is unique.\textsuperscript{402} This raises the question of how a book which was the product of particular historical circumstances can be of final authority for humanity. We now turn to how Davey attempted to deal that issue in his Plea.

6. Jesus and the Finality of Scripture

The finality of the Christian revelation has already been addressed in considering the Person of Christ. It is an issue we will encounter again when we come to examine Davey’s theology outside the Trial.

\textsuperscript{399} Trial, 131.  
\textsuperscript{400} Trial, 122.  
\textsuperscript{401} Trial, 123.  
\textsuperscript{402} Trial, 125-126.
Davey concludes his general view of Scripture with a brief consideration of Jesus approach to Scripture. He explains, ‘In all my work I have tried to follow the example of Jesus, the great higher critic, who did not hedge but, when He met things in the Old Testament which he disapproved of, said they were not true’. Davey immediately counterbalances this claim with an affirmation of Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 5.18 that not one jot nor tittle of the law would be left unfulfilled. Again it is arguable that of the two statements Davey, as part of his strategy, chooses to put first the one which emphasizes his own focus on the freedom of approach to the interpretation of Scripture. This is supported by the fact that he describes Jesus as ‘the great higher critic’. This description, while being rejected by the Complainants, could be directed to gain the sympathy of the court at large. The meaning of the second statement refers to the spiritual aspect rather than the letter. And here Davey claims the support of John Lightfoot, one of the leading members of the Westminster Assembly. Again Davey is emphasizing that his claim for the priority of the spiritual over the literal is no innovation on his part, but finds support in one of those who was most prominent in the compilation of the Confession. This view is strengthened by a further appeal to Luther’s support of Davey’s position.

While making a distinction between the Word of God and Scripture, Davey is careful not to appear to devalue the written record. He asserts, ‘I do not mean that there are parts of Scripture which are definitely not part of God’s Word, for God may speak to us through any part of it, if we can only get it against its proper background’. This provides those who are not decidedly against his approach with an indication that he is

403 Trial, 126.
404 Trial, 126.
405 Trial, 126.
406 Trial, 126.
407 Trial, 126.
408 Trial, 126. Original emphasis.
treating Scripture with appropriate reverence and not in a high-handed manner – another example of his strategy at the Trial. It also affirms the view of progressive revelation inherent in the modern approach which Davey is adopting. He argues that the concept of progressive revelation provides help in dealing with passages which may previously have been regarded as ‘morally troublesome’, for now they can be considered in the context of their time and the state of development which humanity had reached at that time.\textsuperscript{409} Davey brings these general comments on his understanding of Scripture to a close and also to a climax by reverting to his claim for the centrality of experience and his claim that ‘the only infallibility, as our Confession teaches…is that of “the living Spirit of God.”’\textsuperscript{410} This, as we shall see in Part Two of this Thesis, brings us back to a central motif of Davey’s theology, namely that finality resides in the One who reveals, rather than in the record of what they reveal.

\textsuperscript{409} Trial, 126.
\textsuperscript{410} Trial, 126.
CHAPTER SIX

GOD AND SIN

A. Introduction

The Fourth Charge against Davey deals with accusations of the Complainants concerning the holiness of God in relation to sin. They alleged that his teaching infringed WC 5.4. This states:

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men...the sinfulness thereof [of all sins] proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God; who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin. 411

Here the Confession, in line with its emphasis on the sovereignty of God in his providence, acknowledges the reality of sin, yet at the same time strongly denies that God’s holiness is in any way tainted by sin or that sin is something that has his approval in any way. The context of WC 5 is the doctrine of providence, ‘the general theme of which is the relation of God to his creation’. 412 The scope of God’s providence has already been asserted in WC 5.1, which states:

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will...

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411 For the full text of Charge see Appendix. Again the Complainants do not cite the Confession as it stands. However, as can be seen when the Charge is compared with the text of the Confession, the slight alteration they have made is in order to explain, in words already used in the Confession, ‘thereof’ in the final part of Section 5. It is this last part that constitutes the essence of their accusation.

412 Hendry, Confession, 68.
Here again the Confession is seeking to uphold both the truth of God’s omnipotence and omniscience and the firm belief that the responsibility of sin lies solely with the creature rather than the Creator.

In support of their allegations the Complainants cite two quotations from Davey’s writings. The first is from *Vesture* – ‘God does actually take responsibility for all things past, present and to come...’ \(^{413}\) The context of this quotation is the reference to imputation and transubstantiation, which was a main focus of debate in Charge One. The second passage cited is from *Faith*. It states in part

...God is...a loving and omniscient Being, bearing Himself wittingly all the responsibility of man’s transgressions, not merely their guilt but their consequences...a man can roll the burden upon God in the faith that God has actually borne the full responsibility of his sin, its guilt, its venom and its consequences.\(^{414}\)

This quotation would seem to support the Claimants’ contention that Davey is attributing some degree of responsibility for sin to God. However, this is an assumption which is both superficial and incorrect, as Davey proceeds to demonstrate in his Plea of Justification. Also it will become apparent as our examination of Charge Four continues that, although a separate charge, it is related closely in some aspects to Charge One, in that the issues of responsibility and guilt and Atonement are raised.

At the beginning of the Plea Davey refutes any claim to have taught that human sinfulness is transferred to God by distinguishing the meanings he attaches to the word ‘guilt’.\(^{415}\)

Referring to his defence to Charge One. He states

...the word ‘guilt’ I have *normally* used in its manward sense of sinfulness, but sometimes also in its Godward sense of the *hurt* or *injury* which our sin inflicts upon Him in His love and righteousness; and that is its meaning in the second quotation [*Faith*, page 53].\(^{416}\)

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\(^{413}\) Davey, *Vesture*, 80.

\(^{414}\) Davey, *Faith*, 53. The Charge has ‘...the man’ instead of ‘...a man’.

\(^{415}\) *Trial*, 142.
Thus Davey is claiming that this second ‘Godward’ meaning of guilt, namely hurt or injury inflicted upon God by human sin, legitimizes the use of language which states that God bears our guilt, because guilt in the first sense, the manward sense of ‘sinfulness’, is not transferred to God. This is in keeping with the definition of guilt he gives in Faith, where he writes ‘Guilt is our obligation to have done otherwise than we did’. 417 Davey is as insistent here in Charge Four as he is in Charge One that guilt in the sense of ‘sinfulness’ is not transferable. He writes, ‘The one thing which is inalienably our own is the state of mind or will, the moral choice, which is evil’. 418 This shows that for him the essence of sin lies in the choice of the will, or the moral choice.

The above quotation from The Changing Vesture of the Faith continues

…righteousness is our voluntary acceptance of, and abiding in, the will of God. These words simply represent states of the consciousness and are in no way transferable. The effects of sin may, or might, be cancelled, but a man’s guilt is merely a fact of the past, which is as certain and inalienable as his birth… 419

The paragraph from which these words come was cited by the Complainants in Charge One. It confirms both Davey’s emphasis on guilt being not transferable and the need for him to have some formulation to affirm that God does deal with sin in such a way that human guilt is no longer a burden. However, in his attempt to separate what he later claimed to be two different meanings of ‘guilt’, Davey linguistically has relegated human guilt to ‘merely a fact in the past’. This seems to make light of guilt and to ignore its continuing effects into the present. Yet it is clear from reading Davey that this was not his intention, because, otherwise, there would not be a need for human beings to find relief

416 Trial, 142. Original emphasis.
417 Davey, Vesture, 78. The paragraph from which these words come was cited by the Complainants in Charge One.
418 Trial, 142.
419 Davey, Vesture, 78. Emphasis added.
from their burden of guilt. Moreover, in this quotation Davey does not ignore the effects of sin. It will be suggested shortly that this phrase is a more helpful one than having to use ‘guilt’ in what Davey describes as a ‘Godward’ sense.

The interpretation proposed in the preceding paragraph is confirmed when Davey proceeds to clarify what he means by the word ‘responsibility’ in both the quotations from his writings cited by the Complainants in Charge Four. He states

> When one could prevent a thing and does not, because he has a purpose which can be fulfilled even through it, then in some real sense he takes responsibility for what happens. ...Not all things in God’s will may be according to His mind ... With God’s foreknowledge and overruling providence sin cannot be outside the purposes of God, even though it remain evil in our free choice as moral beings ...it must rest at least upon a permissive activity of God’s mind.\(^{420}\)

It may be questioned whether by this clarification Davey has in fact resolved the tension between God allowing sin and the fact that God is not affected by sin. He claims that the sinfulness of sin lies in the human will, and presumably this would extend to the human permissive will, whereas he does not make the same claim regarding the divine mind. His argument distinguishes between guilt and responsibility. Human beings are responsible for their sins because of the choices they make. However, when Davey turns his argument to God, he argues that God is responsible for sinful decisions made by human beings to the extent that he permits such decisions on the basis of the freedom he has granted to human beings. However, Davey does not explain how God is not in some sense tainted by the sinful decisions he permits. He merely asserts that he is not, declaring, ‘I do not believe - as the Confession also denies – that the sinfulness of our sins extends to God.’\(^{421}\)

Further attention needs to be paid to the distinction Davey makes between the two senses of ‘guilt’, because it is not at all clear that this distinction has been clearly made in his writings before the Trial. If, as appears to be the case, Davey does not mention this

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\(^{420}\) Trial, 142. Emphasis added

\(^{421}\) Trial, 142.
distinction until the Trial, then it must be decided whether this differentiation in the meaning of ‘guilt’ is something that is implicit in his writings before the Trial, or whether it is something that emerges in his thought because of the issues raised by the Trial. This is a matter to be considered after examining Davey’s writings in the second part of this thesis. However, even at his Trial Davey is aware that his usage of ‘guilt’ in two senses may not be as clear to others as to himself. He writes

I regret if my two uses of the word ‘guilt,’ associated as they are, and clear enough though I thought them to be, here caused difficulties to any minds; and I must say the same regarding the word ‘bear.’ When I speak of God in Christ or otherwise, bearing our sins, I do not mean that our sins and their guilt became His, but that he endures the injury that they do to Him. ‘Bearing responsibility’ for me means ‘undertaking responsibility,’ and ‘bearing the guilt and venom of sin’ means for God enduring the hurt or injury they do to Him and his universe.\(^{422}\)

In this quotation Davey explains that he uses the word ‘bear’ in the same way that he uses the word ‘guilt’. This is a necessary consequence of the two different interpretations he applies to ‘guilt’. Similar interpretations were to be found in the writings of H. Wheeler Robinson and James Denney. The former, in his analysis of the suffering of Jeremiah both considered in its own right and as a type of the sufferings of Christ, stated, ‘…sin taken up into holiness must be transformed into suffering’.\(^{423}\) He claimed that God dealt with sin by taking it into his holiness, in which process it was transformed into divine suffering. The latter’s expression in one of his letters was verbally closer to Davey’s position. Denney wrote, ‘…the Christian doctrine of the Atonement just meant that in Christ God took the responsibility of evil upon Himself, and somehow subsumed evil under good’.\(^{424}\)

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\(^{422}\) Trial, 145.

\(^{423}\) Trial, 146. Davey does not give exact source of the quotation in Robinson’s works.

\(^{424}\) Trial, 146. Davey does not give exact source of the quotation, apart from stating this was from a letter written by Denney.
Davey comments that not only is Denney’s language similar to his own, but also he uses ‘responsibility’ in the same sense as Davey himself.\textsuperscript{425}

Another question, which is raised by these two different meanings of ‘guilt’, is whether the distinction itself is legitimate or helpful. A provisional answer is offered at this point. It is understandable why Davey makes the distinction. In Charge One Davey is at pains to show that the Complainants are in fact in error when they maintain, until he points the error out to them, that human guilt in the sense of sinfulness can be transferred to Christ.\textsuperscript{426} However Davey wishes to emphasize the truth, as does the Confession, that even sin can be taken up into God’s purposes, and that God does deal with human sin. In explaining this aspect of God’s salvation and providential activity, it is reasonable to assume that Davey uses ‘guilt’ in the second Godward sense of injury to God, because he finds it a helpful way of declaring the reality of salvation. Also it is reasonable to assume that his choice of language is additionally governed by the fact that the reality of salvation has been widely described in the Christian tradition as God bearing our sin, or the burden of our sin being taken by God or other similar phraseology. Such language, where guilt is used in this Godward sense, is fundamental to Christian belief that God in some way deals with human guilt so that it is no longer a burden to the person who has been forgiven.

While this provides an understanding for Davey making the distinction he did, it does not answer the question whether the distinction itself is helpful. I take the view that it is not helpful because of the connection that guilt has with sin and responsibility and also with human choice. It would be less confusing if the concept of guilt were confined to its connection to human being and human decision. This was the truth that was emphasised in the First Charge. To confine the meaning of ‘guilt’ to sinfulness would not detract from the reality of God’s dealing with sin. It does mean, however, that other ways of describing

\textsuperscript{425} \textit{Trial}, 146.
\textsuperscript{426} See \textit{Trial}, 76.
that reality would have to be found, such as ‘the consequences or effects of sin upon God’. To say that God deals with the consequences or effects of sin upon his relationship with human beings is arguably less confusing than Davey’s attaching two different meanings to the use of the word ‘guilt’. And it has already been indicated that Davey himself recognizes the potential confusion to which his use of ‘guilt’ may lead.

As in the other charges Davey declares that he is being attacked for views that were advocated by Calvinism.\(^{427}\) In Charge Four it is on the basis of the allegation that his teaching denied that God always remained the holy God, unaffected by sin. Davey says that the Confession explicitly provided for the maintenance of this truth in WC 1 and WC 2, which are entitled respectively *Of God and the Holy Trinity* and *Of God’s Eternal Decree*. He describes this as ‘a caution regarding God as remaining still holy’.\(^{428}\)

**B. The Changing Vesture of the Faith, page 80**

‘God does actually take responsibility for all things past, present and to come...’

Regarding the first quotation cited by the Complainants, Davey briefly refers to the passages preceding the quotation as a context for the words cited in the charge. These explain what he means by ‘guilt’.\(^{429}\) He argues

\[\ldots\text{the actual context} \ldots\text{shows clearly that God’s “responsibility” for me does not mean that God is guilty or sinful with our sin...}, \text{but that His decrees have taken it in and made a place for it in His plan, and so God takes responsibility for all things.}\] \(^{430}\)

\(^{427}\) [*Trial*, 143. There is no indication from the context whether Davey is making a distinction here between the teaching of Calvin and Calvinism in a broader sense. Later in the same paragraph he mentions Calvin’s views on the Atonement with approval, although he explicitly states that this reference is not relevant to the present charge.]

\(^{428}\) [*Trial*, 143. Davey here uses ‘Section’ to refer to what this thesis cites as ‘Chapter’, the parts of which are referred to as Sections. Davey does not cite the specific instances in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Confession which explicitly guard against God’s holiness being infringed. In Chapter 2.1 this would be covered by such words and phrases as ‘perfection’, ‘most holy’, ‘working all things according to his own immutable and most righteous will’, ‘abundant goodness and truth’ and ‘hating all sin’; and in Chapter 3.1 by ‘neither is God the author of sin’.

\(^{429}\) [*Trial*, 142-143.]

\(^{430}\) [*Trial*, 143.]}
Here Davey is expressing his view of God’s providential care that is in keeping with the Confession of Faith. He finishes by quoting part of Westminster Confession Chapter 5.1.\textsuperscript{431} The rest of the quotation in the Charge, referring to imputation and transubstantiation, Davey declares to be irrelevant to Charge Four.\textsuperscript{432}

\textbf{C. Our Faith in God, page 53.}

As with the quotation from \textit{Vesture}, page 80, Davey emphasizes the need for this quotation to be considered in its context.\textsuperscript{433} Again this shows that Davey’s teaching is that, while God can use sin for his purposes, he remains untainted by it. Davey claims that the above quotation is an affirmation of the doctrine of providence and not an assertion that God becomes guilty or sinful. He writes, ‘…nothing we can do can ultimately thwart His purposes or can lie outside that providence which takes responsibility and care for all things from the least to the greatest’.\textsuperscript{434} Thus, for Davey God’s providence covers every aspect of existence, even sin. He asserts that the quotation from \textit{Our Faith in God} is ‘simply…the doctrines of the eternal decrees and the Atonement’.\textsuperscript{435} Here he makes the link between the two doctrines, although the Atonement was specifically the subject of the First Charge.

\textsuperscript{431} \textit{Trial}, 143. Text of the part of Westminster Confession 5.1 quoted by Davey: ‘all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will...’.
\textsuperscript{432} \textit{Trial}, 143.
\textsuperscript{433} \textit{Trial}, 143-144.
\textsuperscript{434} \textit{Trial}, 144.
\textsuperscript{435} \textit{Trial}, 145.
At the beginning of his Plea Davey accuses his opponents of misunderstanding his teaching and bringing a charge that has ‘no substance’. At the close of his Plea he accuses them of inconsistency. He declares

My accusers’ use of the same passage in Charges I. and IV. in opposite senses is very strange; in Charge I. they objected to my saying guilt was not transferable and in Charge IV. they object to my saying, as they interpret the words, that it is transferable from us to God!

This is a rhetorical ploy, but also it is reasonable to view it as a tactic in Davey’s wider strategy. Throughout the Charges it is the contention of this thesis that to an extent Davey is cleverly manipulating the Trial process to his advantage. The implication of these comments about the Complainants is that these charges are a waste of time because they have no foundation.

There is a further significant point that can reasonably be argued in regard to Davey’s tactical presentation of his position. However, as it is based partly on an argument from silence, it cannot be pressed too strongly. But it gains strength when considered as part of the cumulative argument that this thesis has been advocating. This is the references to God’s eternal decree which Davey makes in his Plea of Justification to Charge Four. WC 3 is entitled Of God’s Eternal Decree. However, as Hendry points out, the question in both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms is ‘What are the decrees of God?’ And both Catechisms state that ‘God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.’ Therefore God’s decree(s) in a broader sense include(s) his providence. However, there is a narrower sense in which phrase the eternal decree is used, namely with reference to the doctrine of predestination. This narrower usage arises out of the fact that WC 3 deals with the doctrine of predestination in WC 3.3-8. In the wording of

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436 Trial, 142.
437 Hendry, Confession, 49. The reference is to Larger Catechism 12, Shorter Catechism 7. Emphasis added.
Charge Four there is no reference to God’s eternal decree, either in the quotation from the Confession of Faith or the two quotations from Davey’s writings.\textsuperscript{439} It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Complainants, in formulating this Charge, did not choose to refer to the eternal decree, because they considered they did not have sufficient evidence to have Davey found guilty of heresy in relation to the decree, either under this charge or a separate charge. Yet an accusation which referred to Chapter Three of the Confession, \textit{Of God’s Eternal Decree}, would have been reasonable, especially as Section One specifically states, ‘God from all eternity did…ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin…’.\textsuperscript{440} On the face of it they have chosen to focus on the specific point of Davey’s alleged contravention of the teaching expressed in Chapter 5.4 of the Confession, that the sinfulness of sin belongs to humankind and in no way diminishes the holiness of God.

It is Davey, and not his opponents, who emphasizes the role of the eternal decree. In the five pages of his Plea to Charge Four he uses the phrase, or a synonymous one, seven times.\textsuperscript{441} Admittedly, he does not refer explicitly to WC 3, which refers to predestination. He restricts his explicit references to WC 5.1 and 5.4, this chapter being the one cited in the charge. However, it coheres with the argument advanced in this thesis that such frequent affirmative references to the eternal decrees would have the potential of influencing Davey’s hearers to believe that he accepted all that the Confession says about this subject, including all that it says in WC 3 about predestination. When Davey’s theology as a whole is considered, it will be shown that this is certainly not the case.

\textsuperscript{439} \textit{Trial}, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{440} WC 3.1.
\textsuperscript{441} \textit{Trial}, 142 ‘the doctrine of the Eternal Decrees’, citing Westminster Confession 5.1 and 5.4; 143 ‘His decrees’, citing WC 5.1; ‘the doctrine of the eternal decrees’; 144 ‘the doctrine or truth of the eternal decrees’, giving content of the decrees; 145 ‘the doctrines of the eternal decrees and the Atonement’; ‘by His decrees’; 146 ‘the theological doctrines of God’s eternal purposes’, synonymous with God’s eternal decrees. These occurrences do not include, apart from the one instance on 146, references Davey makes to God’s purpose(s).
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TRINITY

A. Introduction

The procedure followed by the Court in the Fifth Charge, as with Charges Two, Three and Four, was that of allowing Davey to enter a plea of Justification.\(^\text{442}\) Charge Five states

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\text{WHEREAS it is accordance with the Word of God that “the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only” (The Larger Catechism), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine, we... charge the Rev Professor Davey with holding and teaching that this doctrine is not thus taught in the Word of God.} \(^\text{443}\)
\]

Here the Complainants are attacking Davey on the grounds that he denies Scripture teaches that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equally God. For evidence to substantiate the Charge the Complainants rely on statements made by Davey in lectures to students. These include comments to the effect that there is ‘no clear Trinitarian conception in the New Testament’, that ‘Trinitarian doctrine evolved’ and that ‘in the Fourth Gospel there is a conception of Binity not Trinity’.\(^\text{444}\) The Complainants are not accusing Davey of being unorthodox in the content of his teaching about the Trinity, in that he denied that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were equally God. The focus of their complaint, as the wording of the Charge shows, is that he denied that this was to be found in Scripture. This is a reminder of one of the central issues underlying the debate between Davey and his opponents, namely the understanding, and interpretation, of Scripture.

\(^{442}\) Trial, 147.
\(^{443}\) Trial, 147. The quotation is from The Larger Catechism 11.
\(^{444}\) Trial, 147.
B. The Westminster Confession of Faith

At the beginning of his Peace of Justification Davey unavowedly declares his acceptance of the Confession’s teaching on the Trinity. Chapter 2.3 states In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.445

While this is a statement of Davey’s belief, it also indicates Davey’s strategy of presenting himself as a person of impeccable orthodoxy, with the implication that his opponents are the ones not in line with the Confession’s teaching. This is something that we have seen in the earlier charges. However, there is a difference in the Fifth Charge. In the earlier charges Davey was able to point out that the position of the Complainants on some points was in fact in error, whereas on this occasion their error does not consist in theological misunderstanding, but in a refusal to acknowledge the way that the doctrine of the Trinity historically came about. This will be considered shortly.

Davey argues that his position is explicitly supported by the Westminster Confession. He refers to Chapter 1.6, which states, ‘The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture’.446 He asserts that this is a specific justification for his teaching that the doctrine of the Trinity is not found explicitly in the New Testament.

445 Trial, 147. This summary draws upon the Creed of Nicaea (325), the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) and the Chalcedonian Definition (451).
446 Trial, 147. Original emphasis. See also p 149, 150, 156.
C. The New Testament Evidence

While the doctrine of the Trinity is not stated directly in the New Testament, the New Testament writings provide revelation which led eventually to what became known as Trinitarian orthodoxy. Davey declares, “in the Scriptures we have the material out of which a doctrine of the Trinity was formed, but not a definition of the Trinity, or even a clear statement of it in popular terms.”[447] Davey is at pains to point out that this fact does not mean that the New Testament evidence is of no great importance. Rather it is the revelational datum that provides ‘a basis for future theological systematisation and development’.[448] A further point to notice is that this revelation is based on experience, as we shall see shortly. This is important because of the role that Davey gives to experience in his overall theology. This is something that will become evident when we turn to an examination of his theology in the next section of this thesis.

D. The Trinity

Davey finds in the New Testament data justification for a Trinitarian approach, rather than a Unitarian one. It is the former, and not the latter, that adequately reflects what he claims to be the nature of the divine unity portrayed in the New Testament writings. He writes, ‘Unitarianism… stands for the conception that God is one and that unity is a simple thing; Trinitarianism stands for the conception that God is one and that unity is a complex thing’.[449] Furthermore, this complex unity provides a better explanation for the ‘complex’ world in which we live than a simple unity does.[450] Davey describes the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘the key to the problem’ of the complex nature of both the unity of God and the

[448] Trial, 156.
[449] Trial, 147.
[450] Trial, 147.
Elsewhere he expresses the same thought by describing the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘no mere mystery but a key to the mystery of God and life’. He summarises the doctrine as follows:

One ultimate being or life in three hypostases – Father, Son and Spirit – revealed in and through Jesus Christ, Himself the manifestation of the Eternal Son in time, in Whom dwelt the Father, and to Whom and through Whom was and is given the Spirit without measure, or limit.

It can be seen that this is not a full representation of his view of the Trinity, because he does not proceed to describe the mutual relations of the Persons. However, it is important in that Davey here describes the relation of the Trinity to the revelation given in the Incarnation, although he does not use the word ‘Incarnation’ in the above quotation. It is arguable that Davey is reflecting the focus of attention on the Incarnation seen in such theologians as Gore. Moreover, Davey cites with approval Gore’s recognition of the Church as the sphere of the Spirit’s activity. This is in keeping with Davey’s understanding of the nature and activity of the Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity and in keeping with the nature of the Church as the community of Christ.

Davey argues that in the unfolding pattern of God’s revelation in the New Testament we see the nature of the Godhead itself. Development or progress is a key concept in Davey’s theology, as we shall see as the thesis proceeds. As noted on the preceding page, he bases his argument on experience. Firstly, on the experience of the incarnate Christ, and secondly, on the experience of the Church. He regards both of these as a ‘stage of experimental development’. (In Davey’s usage ‘experimental’ is

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451 Trial, 147.
452 Trial, 155.
453 Trial, 148.
455 Gore’s trilogy on the doctrine of God comprised Belief in God, Belief in Christ and The Holy Spirit and the Church. Published as one volume, The Reconstruction of Belief, London, 1926.
456 Trial, 148.
457 Trial, 148.
synonymous with ‘experiential’.) He claims, in the first place, that the words of Christ in Gethsemane, ‘Not My will, but Thine be done’ provide evidence for two wills, the will of the incarnate Son and the will of his heavenly Father.\textsuperscript{458} Davey continues to argue that this justifies taking the distinction back into the nature of the Godhead itself, indicating an eternal relation between the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, and the Son, the Second Person.\textsuperscript{459} Secondly, he sees the gift of the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost as the next stage of God’s continuing revelation. Davey approves of Anderson Scott’s drawing attention to the key concept of fellowship (κοίνωνία) as indicative of this stage of God’s manifestation in the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{460} The two stages of God’s progressive revelation give rise to two points for consideration in Davey’s view of the Trinity, namely his reference to subordination and the personality of the Holy Spirit, which we will now examine.

\textbf{E. Subordination}

In considering Christ’s experience in Gethsemane, Davey speaks about Christ’s will and the Father’s will being ‘in felt opposition though not hostile’ and for Christ to bring in God’s kingdom there needs to be a unity between his will and that of his heavenly Father.\textsuperscript{461} Davey writes, ‘…that harmony is achieved in agony by the subordination of Son to Father’.\textsuperscript{462} This mode of expression reflects the agony of Christ leading to his accepting his Father’s will, having struggled with the temptation to follow his own will. It also coheres with the figure of Christ portrayed, as Davey states, by ‘at least by Paul, Hebrews and John.\textsuperscript{463} However, a difficulty arises by his use of the phrase ‘a commonplace of

\addcontentsline{toc}{chapter}{Notes}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{458}] \textit{Trial}, 148. Original emphasis.
\item[\textsuperscript{459}] \textit{Trial}, 148.
\item[\textsuperscript{460}] \textit{Trial}, 148. Davey does not give a specific reference in C. A. A. Scott’s writings.
\item[\textsuperscript{461}] \textit{Trial}, 148.
\item[\textsuperscript{462}] \textit{Trial}, 148.
\item[\textsuperscript{463}] \textit{Trial}, 148.
\end{itemize}
Trinitarian doctrine’ in apposition to ‘...that harmony is achieved in agony by the subordination of Son to Father’. This raises the question whether Davey’s doctrine of the Trinity has a subordinationist element. The evidence here is not decisive one way or the other. On the one hand, Davey clearly affirms the equality of the Persons of the Godhead in his acceptance of the Westminster Confession 2.3, which speaks about the three Persons being ‘of one substance, power and eternity’. This implies an equality among the three Persons, none being subordinate to another. Thus it could be argued that, while Davey uses the term ‘subordination’, the general tenor of his thought is not subordinationist. On the other hand, he does state, ‘We cannot find permanent meaning in Christ, in personality or in morality as eternal things, without carrying back this distinction of the two wills perceived, Father’s and Son’s, to eternity and the Godhead.’ If the two wills, of Christ and the Father, are in complete harmony, it could still be claimed that Davey was not being subordinationist in his carrying this agreement back to the Father and Son within the Godhead. However, because of the stress that Davey lays on the distinction between the two wills in Gethsemane, it adds strength to the view that he has deliberately chosen to have this subordinationist understanding of the Son to the Father in the Godhead. This interpretation gains support from Davey’s comment about Hegel’s contribution to discussion about the Trinity.

This difficulty of knowing whether Davey is being subordinationist may be due to him falling into the same trap into which he accuses his opponents of having fallen. He dismisses them on the grounds that they are confusing the two wills in Christ, that is the will of the human nature and the will of the divine nature, with the will of the Father and the Son as the First and Second Persons, respectively, in the Trinity. In other words, he

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464 Trial, 148.
465 Trial, 147.
466 Trial, 148.
467 Trial, 155.
has transferred his understanding of the relation between Christ’s divine and human wills to the relation between Father and Son in the Trinity.

**F. The Personality of the Holy Spirit**

Davey describes the Holy Spirit as revealed in the New Testament as ‘that experience of many being made one in Christ’ and immediately goes on to add ‘more than an experience, nay, a personal or superpersonal entity’.\(^ {468}\) The added phrase indicates an awareness that confining himself to the description of the Holy Spirit as an ‘experience’ might convey to his opponents the impression that Davey viewed the Holy Spirit in less than personal terms. To reinforce the fact that he views the Holy Spirit as a person, Davey presents a long quotation from Denney, consisting of over one and a half pages.\(^ {469}\) In this quotation Denney is evaluating the evidence found in The New Testament. It serves a dual purpose for Davey. Firstly, it shows agreement with Davey’s understanding of the Spirit as experience. Secondly, it shows disagreement with Davey’s understanding of the Spirit as personal. On this second point Denney writes, ‘…there is no justification…for representing the Spirit as a third person in the same sense as God and Christ’.\(^ {470}\) This long quotation from Denney has a twofold benefit for Davey’s case. In connection with understanding the Spirit as experience, it provides Davey with support from a leading conservative scholar. But even the ground of disagreement between Denney and Davey, namely, the extent to which New Testament views the Holy Spirit as a Person, is used by Davey to his advantage. Davey puts himself forward as more conservative than Denney on this point, implying that, if Denney cannot be impugned on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, there is even less reason for criticizing Davey whose position is more in the direction of

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\(^ {468}\) *Trial*, 148.

\(^ {469}\) *Trial*, 152-154. Davey does not give the specific reference for this quotation.

\(^ {470}\) *Trial*, 154.
While Davey is making a valid theological point, he is also using the Denney quotation as a political and rhetorical device to bolster his own case. Here we have another instance of how cleverly Davey presents his case, so that he appears in a favourable light.

As with the question of the subordination of the Holy Spirit, raised in the preceding section, a question arises about Davey’s understanding of the personality of the Holy Spirit. Despite his strong affirmations about the Spirit’s personality, he agrees ‘that “the Spirit is not a person” in the same sense as God (i.e. the Father) and Christ, for it is a Spirit making many persons one’. Any doubt would be removed, if it could be shown that Davey is not contrasting the Father and Son on the one hand against the Spirit on the other; but rather is contrasting the Spirit with the Father and the Spirit with the Son, that is recognizing the personality of all three Persons with no hint of inequality or subordination. This would allow for a differentiation in the activity of all three Persons, without making any one subordinate or inferior in any way to one or both of the other Persons.

As with his comment about the subordination of the Son, which we considered in the previous section, this remark in the preceding paragraph could be considered either as affirming the full personhood of the Holy Spirit or as calling it into question. If the latter is the case, we can see a link with the comments made in the preceding section, because, anything less than the Spirit being fully personal, would entail an element of his subordination in relation to the Father and the Son.

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471 Trial, 154.
472 Trial, 154.
G. Evidence of Specific Texts in Scripture for the Trinity

1. The Old Testament

Davey deals with the Old Testament almost in passing. This is because he links his treatment of the Trinity with the unfolding ‘history of redemption’ in Christ and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He points out that the Old Testament documents are strongly monotheistic, but even in them there are ‘tendencies towards a more complex definition of God in terms of His attributes or His angelic agents’.

2. The New Testament

1 John 5.7, which states the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and is quoted in Chapter 2.3 of the Confession, could not be relied upon because it was a late interpolation. Nor do three other instances of the presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit give us sufficient statement of their relations to say that they provide a Trinitarian doctrine. Here Davey referred to Christ’s baptism, the Apostolic Benediction of 2 Corinthians 13.14, and Christ’s command in Matthew 28 to baptise “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The most that could be claimed was that this was a “vague [Trinitarian] form, which might be taken, as heretics took and take it, in other senses”. Here Davey is alluding to the ancient heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism, and also to Unitarianism in its contemporary modes.

Davey sees ‘in Scripture a long and gradual development from a more Adoptianist or human theology to a more Incarnationist or Divine point of view’. The New Testament attempt to explain God’s revelation in Christ began with an Adoptionist theology and its starting point of the human Jesus being made Lord and Saviour. This is

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473 Trial, 154.
474 Trial, 149.
475 Trial, 149.
476 Trial, 150.
indicated in Acts by such references as Jesus being made Lord and Christ and being anointed by God.\textsuperscript{477} It is in Paul that we find the beginnings of an Incarnation theology, which paved the way for John’s fuller Incarnation theology expressed in terms of the Logos. This concept influenced Hebrews and Paul’s later epistles also. It was taken from Philo of Alexandria, who used it to express the mediating agency between God and the world. The Christian adaptation reflected this use in that it did not distinguish between mediation by the Son and mediation by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{478}

In John the Spirit is ‘conceived…as the Spirit of the Father or of Christ’, thus producing a Binitarian rather than a Trinitarian schema.\textsuperscript{479} This is evident from both Gospel and Epistles. Reference to the Spirit as ‘not yet’ while Christ was present in the flesh supports the view that ‘for John the Spirit is chiefly the returned and spiritual presence of Jesus’.\textsuperscript{480} And, while the Spirit is mentioned in the Johannine Epistles, it is the Father and the Son who are referred to together – another pointer to John’s Binitarianism.\textsuperscript{481} Davey claims that there are traces of Binitarianism in Paul also.\textsuperscript{482} For his views on the New Testament providing evidence for a development from an Adoptionist to an Incarnationist approach Davey appeals to Denney.\textsuperscript{483} This general conclusion about the New Testament is still accepted among scholars. For example, J.N.D. Kelly writes, ‘It is a commonplace that the outlines of a dyadic and triadic pattern are clearly visible in its [the New Testament’s] pages’.\textsuperscript{484} One criticism of Davey might be made here. It could be argued that his understanding of a chronological progression from

\textsuperscript{477} Trial, 150. Davey cites Acts 2.36; 10.38, 42b.
\textsuperscript{478} Trial, 150-151.
\textsuperscript{479} Trial, 151.
\textsuperscript{480} Trial, 151.
\textsuperscript{481} Trial, 151-152.
\textsuperscript{482} Trial, 151.
\textsuperscript{483} Trial, p 152-154. See discussion in section Personality of the Holy Spirit.
an Adoptionist to an Incarnationist approach is somewhat simplistic due to his view of the development of doctrine. Maurice Wiles has commented that the evidence for both Binitarian and Trinitarian expressions of faith are present from the beginning. He states

Why, then, should Christian thought about God have taken so clear a Trinitarian form, if its content was as much Binitarian as Trinitarian? The answer appears to be that the threefold form was a basic datum for Christian thought from the very beginning. If not emphasized, it was at least present in Scripture. 485

This is a warning that the development which Davey sees taking place in a straight line may not be as strongly evidenced as he thought.

**H. The Development of Non-Scriptural Terminology**

Davey admits that the Trinitarian language that developed in the Patristic period to describe the divinity of the Son and the Spirit and inter-Trinitarian relations was not scriptural. But he claims that it was necessary to draw out the implications of the teaching of Scripture. 486

**I. The Potential for Continuing Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity**

His emphasis on development led Davey to conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity could be developed further and he felt that the time in which he lived would be an era of such development. He writes, ‘…I have great hopes that we are about to attain to a much deeper comprehension of our Trinitarian faith in the modern world than has yet been reached’. 487 Davey favours development along Hegelian lines, reflecting the complex unity of the world. 488 However, he does not say that the Hegelian concepts of thesis, antithesis

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486 *Trial*, 149-150.
487 *Trial*, 155.
488 *Trial*, 155.
and synthesis should be carried back into the Godhead in the same way that he advocates
the distinction between Father and Son is carried into the Godhead. He writes

…the Hegelian statement of the Trinity as thesis, antithesis and synthesis… [is] not
held by me at least in his abstract and superficial form, but according to Scripture
and the Christian experience of God in Christ, as a Trinity of three eternal
hypostases in the one Divine life or essence, not merely three forms or activities of
the Divine mind…

In his Plea of Justification in Charge Five Davey does not elaborate on how he envisages
the doctrine of the Trinity could be developed in a helpful way by drawing on Hegelian
thought.

The above quotation provides further evidence of Davey’s strategy at the Trial and
is an indication that it could be viewed as a rhetorical device to enable Davey to keep his
orthodoxy to the fore in the minds of the members of the Court and not to yield any ground
to the Complainants on that score. However it is also significant on a theological level
also. It reveals that Davey is not fully content with a repetition of orthodox formulae in
relation to the Trinity. At the same time it reveals that he is not willing to adopt a
completely Hegelian stance, or not explicitly willing to do so, for fear of repercussions
from the fundamentalist and even conservative elements within Irish Presbyterianism. At a
theological level the quotation reveals the inherent difficulty in Davey’s approach of
wishing to retain the traditional language of orthodoxy but yet allowing change in content
in keeping with modern theological thought. This again will be considered in the next part
of this thesis.

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489 See Trial, 155.
490 Trial, 155.
PART TWO: DAVEY’S THEOLOGY

General Introduction

In Part One we considered the issues raised at the Heresy Trial by an examination of the specific charges brought against Davey. These charges dealt with the doctrines of imputation in the wider context of justification, the Person of Christ, Scripture, the holiness of God in relation to sin, and the doctrine of the Trinity. This examination showed the fundamental differences between Davey and his opponents in these particular areas. The critical analysis of the specific charges in Part One thus discovered the theological underpinnings both of the criticisms of Davey and of Davey’s own position. It also revealed the underlying differences between the theological approach of Davey and his opponents and why Davey’s theology caused such a depth of opposition.

We have looked at the Trial – the criticisms of Davey, the accusations against him and Davey’s response to these. Having considered separately each of the charges against Davey in Part One, we shall now proceed in Part Two of the Thesis to an analysis of Davey’s theology apart from the Trial. In Part Two we are now proceeding to a deeper examination of the material to discern what really is at issue. We ask the question, ‘What are the underlying theological undercurrents that are creating this problem that emerges at the Trial?’ We will be looking at Davey’s theology more specifically for its own sake and examining the manner in which his theology developed and why he put it in the form he did. This will allow us to identify why his theology was so controversial and prompted people to raise these accusations against him and to account for his being put on trial for heresy. In the following chapter, Chapter Five, we will consider how Davey’s distinctive theological position is worked out in the specific area of Christology. This will serve as a case-study and has been chosen, not only because it is the substance of the Second Charge
at the Trial, but also because it impinges on the other charges. From this case-study we can proceed to make our conclusions about the nature of Davey’s theology and assess its value for the contemporary theological scene.
CHAPTER EIGHT
CHRISTOLOGY

A. Introduction

In Part One of this dissertation it was shown that the Complainants’ perceptions of Davey’s understanding of Christ underlay four of the five charges levelled against him at his Trial.\(^\text{491}\) They argued that his understanding of Christ was defective in that he did not teach that Christ was fully divine. This was the core issue of dispute in Charge Two, which dealt with Christology.\(^\text{492}\) It underlay Charge One, which dealt with soteriology, in that a Christ who was not fully divine could not be a competent Saviour.\(^\text{493}\) It underlay Charge Three, which dealt with Scripture, in that a Christ who was not fully divine could not give final and authoritative interpretations of Scripture.\(^\text{494}\) It underlay Charge Five, which dealt with the doctrine of the Trinity, in that a Christ who was not fully divine could not be God in the same sense as the Father and the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{495}\) To understand what was at issue between Davey and his opponents Christology must therefore be the focus of our investigations. It is now necessary to examine Davey’s writings in order to establish, firstly, what his Christology actually is and, secondly, to what extent, if any, the Complainants’ critique was justified. In this chapter of the dissertation we shall examine and assess Davey’s understanding of Christ in the light of his writings apart from the Trial.

We shall consider Davey’s Christology under five headings, namely the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith, the Dependence of Christ, the Two Natures Doctrine, Kenotic Christology, and the Finality of Christ. These themes are particularly prominent

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\(^{491}\) See Chapters 2 and 3. [check]
\(^{492}\) See Chapter 2.3.
\(^{493}\) See Chapter 2.2.
\(^{494}\) See chapter 3.1. Christology does not underlie Charge Four, which deals with the holiness of God in relation to sin. See Chapter 3.2.
\(^{495}\) See Chapter 3.3.
in Davey’s thought and could be regarded as characterizing his approach to Christology. Also they embody some of the major issues that underlie the controversy with the Complainants. Before embarking on this task, however, two preliminary discussions are necessary. Firstly, we should say something about the sources of Davey’s Christology. Secondly, it is necessary to address the problem of Davey’s terminology, because he rarely provides a clear definition of his terms.

B. The Biblical Sources for Davey’s Christology

The biblical basis of Davey’s Christology is found in John and Paul, and to a lesser extent the Epistle to the Hebrews. He examines the thought of John in ‘The Johannine Presentation of Christ in Relation to the Father’ (1915), and The Jesus of St John (1958). Davey’s perspective on the Pauline Christology is provided by ‘The Future Hope in the Writings of St Paul – A Consideration of Some of the Problems Involved’ (1915). While these are examinations of New Testament material, they also contain much theological reflection and each ends with an important section on the implications of the Biblical research carried out by Davey for doctrine. At one point Davey declares that it was his interest in the dogmatic implications of John’s portrait of Jesus which prompted him to study the Fourth Gospel. It is our intention to show that for Davey biblical exegesis and dogmatic theology are not separate compartments; rather they are complementary, each influencing, and being influenced by, the other. We hope to show that Davey’s methodology is to bring certain theological and psychological presuppositions to Scripture and interpret the text accordingly in support of his general theological outlook. We also hope to show that Davey’s main Christological ideas were formed as early as 1915, when he wrote his dissertation ‘Johannine Presentation’ and that, over the years, they did not

change greatly. Much of the material in ‘Johannine Presentation’ is found in *Jesus*, published in 1958.\(^497\) As we shall see, even what is added in the light of what others wrote on John after 1915 and before the publication of *Jesus* in 1958 is a confirmation of conclusions he had already reached. This would support the contention of this thesis that Davey’s theological thinking was shaped, and more or less crystallized, by the time of the Heresy Trial of 1927 and that he did not make any substantial changes to his theology in response to the Trial. Having considered the biblical basis for Davey’s Christology, it is necessary, in our second area of preliminary discussion, to consider how he uses certain terms.

### C. Terminological Problems in Davey’s Theology

One of the problems the interpreter of Davey’s thought has is establishing a meaning based on the way Davey uses certain terms, which is further complicated by the fact that he is not always consistent in his usage of terms. To facilitate our discussion we shall therefore provide a preliminary outline of Davey’s key concepts before going on to examine how he employs them to construct his own distinctive Christology. The problem the interpreter has with seeking to discover Davey’s meaning is that, when there are differences of meaning, Davey does not always highlight what those differences are. We are dependent on reading these terms in their context in order to understand what meaning Davey is trying to evoke. Thus, in seeking to understand and interpret Davey’s thought, the reader should be guided by the context as to the meaning of each of these terms.

There are two clusters of terms which Davey uses in contrast and opposition to each other. I refer to the distinction he makes between an ‘ethical’ or ‘historical’ or ‘mystical’ reading, on the one hand, and a ‘metaphysical’ or ‘ontological’ reading, on the

\(^{497}\) Davey, *Jesus*, 7.
other. Included in the latter reading is ‘the Logos theory’ or the ‘fiction theory’. Sometimes Davey uses the terms of each cluster as synonyms within the respective clusters. For example, he writes ‘…the two possible reconstructions of the material under discussion, viz. the Logos or fiction theory and the ethical or historical theory’. Here Davey is using the Logos theory and the fiction theory as synonyms, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ethical theory and the historical theory as synonyms. At other times Davey seems to use these words to indicate some sort of difference between the members of the respective clusters. For example, we have an instance of a sentence where all three terms ‘historical’, ‘mystical’ and ‘ethical’ are used. Davey writes, ‘…a substantially true presentation, in content, if not in form, of the historical life of Christ upon earth, viz. as a mystical and ethical fellowship with God.’ Here the terms ‘historical’, ‘mystical’ and ‘ethical’ are clearly not synonymous.

The task of determining Davey’s meaning is made more difficult by the fact that on occasion he asserts that metaphysics is derived from ethics. He argues

There is no good reason I think to doubt that some of Christ’s claims transcended the ethical (in the ordinary use of the word, that is, for I believe the metaphysical to be ultimately ethical inasmuch as God is essentially Love)…At the same time the ethical as we understand it is normal even in the Fourth gospel, and in 17.14,16 we have a clear statement to the effect that the disciples are not of this world even as Christ is not of this world i. e. a similar ethical relation.

This quotation provides a good example of the difficulty the interpreter of Davey faces in trying to determine his meaning. On the one hand, Davey is acknowledging a distinction between the ethical and the metaphysical. This is indicated, firstly, by the use of the word ‘transcended’, which implies that the ethical and the metaphysical are two categories not of the same kind, and that the ethical is subordinate to the metaphysical.

500 Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 82-83. Original emphasis.
Secondly, this acknowledgement is confirmed by Davey’s claim that, although the ethical is transcended by the metaphysical, the ethical ‘as we understand it’ is the norm in John. On the other hand, however, Davey is contending, on the basis that ‘God is essentially Love’, that the metaphysical is somehow derived from the ethical and thus implying that the metaphysical is subordinate to the ethical. Further confusion is caused by the word ‘essentially’. From Davey’s general approach I do not think that he is using the word with reference to the metaphysical essence of God, God’s ουσια. Rather, my opinion is that he is equating Love in an ethical sense with the ουσια of God.

This would be in keeping with Davey’s fundamental preference for an ethical rather than a metaphysical interpretation. Arguably, Davey is influenced by the line of Liberal theologians of whom Ritschl and Harnack are representative, and one of characteristics of these theologians is an emphasis on the ethical in contradistinction to the metaphysical. He is also arguably influenced here by J. R. Illingworth’s *Personality Human and Divine*.501 Davey refers to Ritschl’s value-judgements with approval, arguably showing his indebtedness to Ritschl’s emphasis that the love of God must be expressed in ethical terms.502 We may be able to resolve this tension between the ethical and the metaphysical in Davey’s thought by turning to H. R. Mackintosh.503 As we shall see later, Mackintosh, as well as P. T. Forsyth, comes to Davey’s aid at this point.

There are reasons why the distinction between ‘ethical’, ‘historical’ and ‘mystical’, on the one hand, and ‘metaphysical’ and ‘ontological’, on the other, needs to be made. The first, already mentioned, is that Davey himself considers this an important distinction and

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503 The reason for the choice of Mackintosh is that, firstly, he was one of Davey’s teachers when Davey was studying at Edinburgh and, secondly, he wrote a highly influential book on Christology, which Davey cites and by which he was clearly influenced. H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, 3rd edition, Edinburgh, 1914, 302-303.
crucial to his argument in many places. This will become apparent as our examination of his Christology proceeds. Indeed we shall see in Section Two on the Dependence of Christ that his conclusions on the various aspects of Christ’s dependence are always in favour of the ethical or historical reading of the text of John’s Gospel. This is only to be expected as one of the aims Davey has is to show that the ethical or historical reading fits as well as, and in many instances better than, the metaphysical reading. While at times he uses ‘mystical’ as synonymous with ethical and historical, he also uses it in a particular sense. Where Davey is not using the terms synonymously, he uses them to complement each other in order to highlight different aspects of how Christ is related to the Father. He writes, ‘…I use “mystical” not in the sense of “misty”(!), but of immediate fellowship with God and intuitive guidance by Him.’

Christ has this immediate intuition, but that does not mean that he has an ontological identity, that his essence is ontologically identical with the Father. Rather this is a very close, intimate relationship, which expresses itself in a particular type of behaviour and this explains why the term ethical should be used here. Also because that ethical behaviour and that immediate sense of divine presence in Christ’s life took place in a particular context, namely, first-century Palestine, this explains why the term historical is appropriate. Thus the three terms, ‘mystical’, ‘ethical’ and ‘historical’ can come together to express Davey’s theology without him necessarily implying them to be synonyms. However, his use can be confusing, as sometimes he just uses the one to cover the meaning of the other two terms. So, in this sense ‘mystical’ differs from ‘ethical’ and ‘historical’ in that the mystical experience is not mediated in the same way as the ethical and historical experience, in that it is more direct, reflecting the depth of Christ’s dependence on the Father. This correlation of the directness of the experience with the depth of the experience is an assumption that Davey makes. Here we have another

Davey, Jesus, 18. This comment by Davey not only tells us how he is using the word ‘mystical’, but it also reveals something of Davey’s sense of humour.
example of him asserting his view without providing evidence for it. Secondly, this distinction between the two readings, the ethical and the metaphysical, is connected with Davey’s criticism of metaphysics and what he terms ‘traditional orthodoxy’. We have come across this in Part One of this Thesis. To make for clarity and consistency, where appropriate, I shall use the term ‘ethical-historical’ where ‘ethical’ or ‘historical’ is meant in Davey’s sense of the terms.

To summarize, Davey uses the term ‘ethical’ to denote the link with the human will in the making of decisions. He cites John 5.30, ‘“my judgment is righteous, because I seek not mine own will but the will of Him that sent me” where the ethical relation is clearly stated.’ However, he associates the word ‘metaphysical’ with the view of the incarnate Christ as ‘a god or “demi-god stalking through life”’ in the sense that there is no room for the exercise of Christ’s human will. Davey is worried about the incarnation being reduced to the fusion of two distinct substances, divinity and humanity, leaving out of account the personality, the will, of the united Christ in which the two natures are embodied. Davey’s distinctive way of using the terms ‘ethical’ and ‘metaphysical’ is motivated by the role the will plays in his thinking. The will is crucial. It is upon the understanding of the will that the distinction between the ethical and the historical, on the one hand, and the metaphysical, on the other, is based, because the will is something distinctive to Christ. The will is the means whereby we make ethical decisions. These ethical decisions take place in history – we do not make them in the abstract. Therefore ethical and historical belong together. The problem Davey has with metaphysics is that metaphysics does not pay sufficient attention to the will. It reduces Christ to an abstract fusion from two abstract essences. This does not do justice either to the fact that Christ

\[\text{505 Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 61. Original emphasis.}\]

\[\text{506 Davey, } \text{Jesus}, \text{ 12. Davey attributes the phrase to A. E. Brooke, one of his tutors at Cambridge, but does not give a reference.}\]
was an historical individual situated in a particular place and time, or to the role of Christ’s will as a distinct individual personality.

This discussion of some of the terms that Davey uses frequently in discussing his Christology shows some of the underlying issues involved in Charge Two, Christology. Indeed, as we saw in Part One of this dissertation, underlying each of the specific charges brought against Davey was a hostility engendered by the strong opposition to the type of theology he espoused. It is the contention of Part Two of this dissertation that the real issue for Davey and the area where we ought to decide whether or not he is a Liberal theologian, is his Christology. We now turn to an examination of Davey’s Christology using the headings mentioned in 5.1.1, namely, the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith, the Dependence of Christ, the Two Natures Doctrine, Kenotic Christology, and the Finality of Christ.

D. The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith

The general point of view that Davey takes of the Fourth Gospel is that it is a ‘universalistic and philosophical Greek Gospel’ and ‘a homiletical and theological interpretation of Christ's significance and ministry’.\(^\text{507}\) Davey’s description of John as ‘universalistic’ is in keeping with his own view that Christianity ought to be and has the potential to be a universal religion.\(^\text{508}\) In this context ‘universalistic’ means capable of universal acceptance in all cultures and by all peoples.

However, Davey does not thereby conclude that the historical element is of little or no importance for helping to formulate a Christology. Rather the opposite is the case, he stresses, as we shall see, the historical as of great importance. He claims that the Fourth Gospel, while ‘a theological interpretation’ is ‘based in measure upon fact or early

\(^{507}\) Davey, *Jesus*, 10. See also 186, ‘a book with a universal sweep and understanding’.

\(^{508}\) See for example Davey, *Vesture*, 240-242.
tradition, and so having some elements of real value to contribute to the actual history of the life of Jesus’. It is important to examine this statement because it provides insight into both Davey’s understanding of the Fourth Gospel and his understanding of Christology, and as has already been stated, there is a mutual interaction between the biblical and the theological in Davey’s thought. The above statement emphasizes the importance of history in its relation to the Fourth Gospel and for a reconstruction, as far as is possible in the light of modern scholarship, of the history of the life of Jesus. In 1915 when Davey wrote ‘Johannine Presentation’ the historicity of the Gospel records was an important area of study. By the time Jesus was published the historical aspect was not so much to the fore, although Davey claimed that there was a renewed interest in the historical aspect of the Gospels. Davey is unrepentant that his position affirming the importance of history for the life of Christ has remained unchanged throughout his career as a scholar, as is demonstrated by the last article he wrote before his death in 1960. This was a reaffirmation of the view of history he had consistently espoused in his writings. This was a review of The So-Called Kerygma and the Historical Jesus by Paul Althaus, which is a criticism of the position taken by Bultmann. In this article Davey writes

Indeed the Christ myth is with us again in a new and dangerous form when some men can declare that the life, character and moral quality of Jesus do not really matter, but rather the sole belief that he was crucified and raised from the dead for the world’s redemption.

This statement is an expression of the distinction between the historical and the kerygmatic point of view. The latter part (‘rather the sole belief…world’s redemption’) is an expression of the kerygma, the post-Easter proclamation of the Church. Davey makes a

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509 Davey, Jesus, 10.
510 Davey, Jesus, 185.
512 Davey, ‘Althaus’, 63-64.
comment that shows his concern where history is ignored or side-lined in working out a Christology. He writes, ‘…under Bultmann’s influence one would tend to speak and think of men as saved not by faith in Jesus but by faith in the kerygma – a theory rather parallel to the Romanist claim of salvation by the Church.’ From this statement it is reasonable to deduce that for Davey it is the historical Jesus who gives content to the kerygma and the kerygma cannot be divorced from the historical Jesus. The Jesus of history is essential to explicate the Christ of faith and as a basis for Christological thought. Indeed Davey only uses the terms ‘Jesus of history’ and ‘Christ of faith’ when he is speaking about scholars who do make that distinction. Davey does not work with that disjunction in expounding his own position.

However, Davey seems to be not entirely consistent in his view of Bultmann and history. In Jesus Davey is strongly critical of Barth for neglecting the importance of history. He claims that Barth and his followers with their emphasis on faith have minimized the importance of history and it is Bultmann who has realized the importance of the historical elements in John. Two points may be made here. Firstly, it must be concluded that here we have an inconsistency in Davey’s thinking. Davey’s criticism of Bultmann’s disregard of the historical and Davey’s approval of Bultmann’s increasing recognition of the significance of history for Christology cannot, in my opinion, be reconciled. Secondly, to criticize both Barth and Bultmann for minimizing history in a way is strange, because for Davey himself the import of Christianity transcends cultural and historical limitations, as it is a universal religion. What is important is the spiritual, universal truth of Christianity. It is a key point in the argument of this thesis that Davey, in all his writings, stresses the centrality of faith and religious experience. As has been

514 Davey, Jesus, 11, 178.
515 Davey, Jesus, 11, 185.
516 Davey, Jesus, 10, 186. See also 186.
noted in the introduction to this chapter, his reason for stressing the historical in the Fourth Gospel is that it adds force to his understanding of Johannine Christology as based on the ethical-historical rather than on the ontological-metaphysical. Also it is a further manifestation of his opposition to traditional orthodoxy.

It might be inferred from his emphasis on the historical that, in relation to the Fourth Gospel, Davey stood with those who wished to maximize the historical content of John and use it as a basis for a Christology which would be safe from criticism and attack. This would be the position of the traditional orthodoxy to which Davey was so vehemently opposed. Davey is not retreating into a safe conservative position. Rather he recognizes the uncertainty inherent in his emphasis on the importance of history as a basis for a Christology. He writes approvingly of Althaus’s position

Faith, says Althaus, may seem to possess the character of absolute certainty, but history is always relative, and at the best probable; indeed the record of a past event may be drastically revised at any time in the light of new facts, and one must be prepared to follow evidence at all times.

Here Davey is affirming that the relativities of history do not provide a guarantee for faith seeking certainty and assurance. So, far from history necessarily confirming traditional orthodoxy, an acceptance of history is in itself an act of faith because history by its nature cannot provide an unchangeable certainty. Another reason why Davey’s insistence on history does not mean a reversion to a traditional orthodoxy is that, in keeping with the spirit of the above quotation, Davey also asserts that ‘historical facts and historical significance [must be] duly assessed.’ The way that Davey carries out such an assessment is seen, for example, in his attitude to miracles, which will be considered at a later point. Davey’s insistence on an historical approach to the Fourth Gospel and from

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517 For example Davey, *Jesus*, 12.
519 Davey, ‘Althaus: The So-Called Kerygma and the Historical Jesus’, 64.
there to a Christology is also seen in his review of C. H. Dodd’s *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*.\(^{520}\) He welcomes Dodd’s book, which he claims ‘breaks with the conservative tradition of British works on the Fourth Gospel’.\(^{521}\) However, he is critical in that he considers Dodd not sufficiently to hold to the historicity of John, although Davey acknowledges that Dodd leans more to emphasising the historical in the Appendix to the book.\(^{522}\) Davey expresses his own position as follows, ‘I think there is ground, then, for using the Fourth Gospel, as Goguel does, to eke out our knowledge of Christ’s actual ministry, if we do it with care and do not claim too much.’\(^{523}\) Again this quotation, together with the one immediately preceding it, indicates that Davey’s emphasis on history does not necessitate a conservative position on John. In addition, this quotation reveals Davey’s indebtedness to Maurice Goguel on this point.\(^{524}\) And elsewhere Davey states that his own efforts at historical reconstruction were carried out on lines similar to Goguel, and actually uses the word ‘homage’ in relation to the French scholar.\(^{525}\) Among others who have recognized the importance of historical elements in the Fourth Gospel Davey cites Gardner, E. F. Scott, R. H. Strachan and G. H. C. Macgregor.\(^{526}\)

Davey argues that John was probably not originally circulated alone, ‘but was an intentional and directive supplement to the Synoptic Gospels from the beginning’.\(^{527}\) Its

\(\text{521}\) Davey, ‘The Fourth Gospel: Dr Dodd’s Challenge’.
\(\text{523}\) Davey, ‘The Fourth Gospel: Dr Dodd’s Challenge’.
\(\text{525}\) Davey, *Jesus*, 178.
\(\text{526}\) Davey, *Jesus*, 175.
\(\text{527}\) Davey, *Jesus*, 12, 185. On this point Davey expresses his agreement with Goodspeed, but does not produce any evidence from Goodspeed’s work to support his position. For more on
readers would have been familiar with the other Gospels. A first impression of reading John gives a picture of a divine Christ, who is not truly human, and many still read the Gospel in this way. This is the result of an ‘unreflective acceptance of a misleading and all too naive dogmatic position’.\footnote{528} In his attempt to get behind this naive understanding Davey discerns three strands in the Fourth Gospel, which give rise to three corresponding views of Jesus. He writes

My own theory of the Gospel is that behind it lie the memoirs of a witness, on the basis of which has been written a Gospel on topical lines, i. e. grouped round great ideas like the Old and the New, Water, Bread, Light, Life …while finally a redactor (or redactors) has added a chronological scheme which does not really fit the book well…\footnote{529}

The first and most recent strand Davey calls ‘the redactor's often naive faith’.\footnote{530} In using the word ‘redactor' Davey reveals his belief in a previously existing form of the Fourth Gospel. However, he does not commit himself to any particular theory of that form and the consequent redactions of it.\footnote{531} Thus he gives no criteria for his decisions to attribute material in John to any of the three strands he claims to be present in the Gospel. In other words, he provides no criteria for distinguishing what he claims to come from the redactor and what he claims comes from the original author and what he believes is tradition earlier than both written forms. Nor does Davey provide reasons for his concluding that the redactor’s faith is naive. He states

The material of John has probably come to us from the thought and preaching of a rich, fertile and original mind in which the seeds dropped by Jesus had germinated
and grown to have a form adapted to their new Graeco-Roman environment and to a new stage in human history.\textsuperscript{532}

This is certainly a glowing endorsement of an evolutionary process in the dissemination of the Gospel. But it is difficult to reconcile such a successful evolution having been accomplished through the agency of those whose faith was naive and unreflecting. In this area there is a contradiction in Davey’s position, stemming from his not providing evidence to support his claims.

While Davey expresses his personal view for a redactor as responsible for the final shape of the Fourth Gospel, his views would not be weakened if he did not support the existence of a redactor. He writes, ‘…the present form of the Gospel represents a very considerable process of development by reflection and preaching, i. e. it is an editorial amplification of selected material from tradition.\textsuperscript{533}’ Davey’s introduction of a redactor, for whom he provides no evidence, only complicates the discussion. Moreover, it detracts from Davey’s arguments about the form and content of John, because the shadowy figure of a redactor hovers like a spectre in the background of the discussion. And a most important consequence of positing a redactor is that it has the potential of drawing the attention of the reader of Davey’s work away from the important theological issues which Davey is addressing and directing the reader’s attention to matters which do not help resolve the real theological issues with which the Gospel of John confronts us. Davey’s advocating a redactor, however, makes no major contribution to his overall argument, since, whether John is the product of a single author or multiple authors, the theology of the Gospel remains coherent. Thus, making these distinctions based on redaction does not

\textsuperscript{532} Davey, \textit{Jesus}, 17. Immediately before these words Davey cites with approval Johannes Weiss, \textit{The History of Primitive Christianity}, p 615-616: ‘…\textit{John} often takes the brief themes of his discourses from tradition in order to weave about these kernels his own views…golden grains from the words of Jesus are hammered out by the evangelist and used as a plating for his artistic cabinet’.

\textsuperscript{533} Davey, \textit{Jesus}, 10. Emphasis added.
make a significant contribution either to the development of Davey’s argument or to the development of Davey’s own Christology. In his earlier work, the ‘Johannine Presentation’ Davey himself acknowledges this point and commenting on the view which ‘seeks to find in it a redaction of earlier, possibly apostolic tradition’, he writes, ‘...the general feeling of scholars is that the gospel possesses too much of an elaborate and artificial unity of language and design to suit any such theory’.534

I think one of the reasons why Davey states his preference for the existence of a redactor is that it provides him with a neat triadic scheme for examining the structure of John. The redactor is then the person responsible for the ‘bad chronological scheme’ and the fragmentation of the original author’s thematic presentation of the Gospel in terms of ideas such as Way, Truth, Life and Light. Regarding the former, Davey does not solve the problems posed by the Johannine chronology by proposing the existence of a redactor. While the existence of a redactor would alleviate the difficulty of attributing defective chronology to the original author, it still leaves the question of why the cleansing of the temple is placed much earlier in John than in the Synoptics and why both give different dates for the crucifixion. Davey himself provides a way of resolving the difficulty posed by these questions in claiming for the original author ‘a rich, fertile and original mind’. This would allow him to attribute the deliberate changing of the dates of the cleansing of the temple and the date of the crucifixion to the original author and also to draw out the theological significance of these two events. The cleansing of the temple in chapter two could be connected with the newness brought about by Jesus, the Messiah, namely, the new wine of the gospel in chapter two, the new birth in chapter three and the new worship in chapter four. Thus we see that Davey’s understanding of the composition of John is not without implications for his own Christological understanding. Turning to the latter, again

relying on the richness and fertility of the original author’s mind, Davey could seek reasons why the original author should choose to fragment his own, according to Davey, thematic structure and incorporate it into the Gospel in the way that he does. However, Davey does not do this. It is reasonable to argue that among Davey’s reasons for not doing this is a reluctance to attribute the fragmentation to the original author. Also positing a redactor enables Davey to blame him for the framework of the Gospel, a framework which even Davey recognizes suits a Logos theory interpretation. Thus Davey can proceed to claim that it is the activity of the redactor that spoils the thematic presentation. This, in turn, adds force to Davey’s argument that the thematic presentation was one which did not portray Christ in a metaphysical way as the divine Logos. Rather the emphasis was on the word or teaching of Christ as divine. This, Davey argues, is in keeping with the view which he is expounding as a viable legitimate alternative to the metaphysical theory, namely, the ethical-historical interpretation of Christ’s person. One of the reasons why Davey is drawn to this redaction-critical approach to the Gospel of John is that it lends itself well to his aim of interpreting John in psychological terms.

Davey regards the ‘Johannine Presentation’ as his ‘theory of the nature of Christ’s consciousness’, and we shall see later, when we consider Davey’s Christology, some of the details of that theory.⁵³⁵ At this point to help us gain a better insight into Davey’s approach, which draws on the resources of psychology and personality, it is instructive to consider a comment he makes in discussing the authorship of John. He states

The external evidence [i.e. external to the Gospel of John]...is by no means on one side, and, as regards the internal the ultimate question [about the authorship of John] is, I think, psychological... The question is, I think, largely one of moral possibilities and therefore all too liable to prejudgment on purely subjective grounds. So I propose to regard the question as open – John (apostle or elder) may have written it: but I do not intend to allow this possibility of itself to prejudice the matter of historicity...⁵³⁶

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⁵³⁵ Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 1, 5.
This comment gives us valuable insights into Davey’s approach to evaluating and interpreting a text.

Firstly, regarding the subjective element in interpretation, Davey is insistent that any consideration of a text inevitably involves a subjective element on the part of the interpreter. Davey does not explain his use of the word ‘subjective’. In the quotation he is using it in the generally accepted sense of not having an objective basis. However, the whole quotation and Davey’s general approach and evident acceptance of the use of psychological data to help construct his Christology justifies me in using the word in a non-pejorative sense. Yet it is a word that must be treated with caution. As we shall see later, Davey’s approach draws on an understanding of psychology and personality and applies them to the data we have of Christ’s own consciousness. Many scholars would argue that we do not have enough data to be able to come to an understanding of Christ’s psychology. Their position is summarized by W. Weaver, who writes, ‘the psychologising and probing around in Jesus’ mind will also seem very much like unwarranted speculation and imposing more on the texts than they are able to bear’.537 I am reading Davey’s words as part of his answer to those who would accuse him of adopting an interpretative approach that was subjective and without an objective basis. A similar suspicion of Davey’s hermeneutics underlies the Claimants at the Trial accusing him of relying on religious experience rather than on the dogmatic understanding of the Westminster Confession. Secondly, Davey claims that there is nothing wrong with the

537 Weaver, *The Historical Jesus*, 168. Weaver himself does not take this position. On the contrary, he argues, ‘This thought of Jesus is more accessible than his life. We must employ psychological conjecture and even intuition. We have to have something like the spirit of Jesus in order to understand Jesus. It is also necessary to set that life in a wider context, namely, the ongoing history of the community.’ See also Wayne G. Rollins, *Soul and Psyche: The Bible in Psychological Perspective*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999, 62-65. Here Rollins gives a brief survey of the relation between biblical criticism and psychology from 1901 to 1960. He describes this relationship as an ‘uneasy’ one.
subjective element, provided that there are sufficient corrective controls over it. Thirdly, he considers that this control is present in his own work. The subjective element also underlies Davey’s understanding of the lack of proportion in the picture John gives of the historical Jesus.\textsuperscript{538} To an extent judging the ‘proportion’ of the elements which comprise the portrait of the Johannine Christ is a matter of subjective discernment. This is a further indication of the openness and flexibility that we have seen in Davey’s approach. It coheres with his stress on both the need for development and progress in theology, and a move away from the static to the dynamic. This subjective aspect in Davey’s general theological approach has the potential of making a valuable contribution to contemporary theological debate, because it encourages openness and creativity in thinking. However, on the negative side, if it is not balanced by appropriate controls, it can lead to a priority of the subjective, which would not be helpful in the construction of a balanced theological position. It has to be acknowledged that, historically, charges of subjectivity levelled against attempts to discern the contents of Christ’s consciousness resulted in less recognition being accorded to such attempts.\textsuperscript{539} A consequence of this was that there was a reluctance to recognize the contents of Christ’s consciousness as an important Christological resource.\textsuperscript{540} As we have seen in our examination of the Trial, Davey’s emphasis on the subjective element in theological thinking was a cause of concern for his opponents and a motivation for their bringing charges against him. However, Davey’s persistence over the years in the approach he adopted, which relies heavily on the contribution of, and the insights gained from, psychology, is now available as a valuable resource in the contemporary Christological debate.

\textsuperscript{538} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 17, 19.
\textsuperscript{539} Weaver \textit{The Historical Jesus}, 168-173.
\textsuperscript{540} Weaver \textit{The Historical Jesus}, 168-173.
We see a lack of evidence revealing a further weakness in a related area of his argumentation, namely Davey’s appeal to written authorities. Davey justifies his not making reference to many writers by alleging that this would detract from the purpose of his study of John, which was to examine the Gospel for evidence of genuine historical material.\footnote{Davey, Jesus, 8, 18, 174, 180, 186.} He asserts

...that I should quote or discuss books which neither hindered nor helped me in my special topic [the historical element in John] was in any case quite contrary to my aim. Yet the omission of references to many of these more recent volumes may perhaps lead to questionings, and even to false conclusions, as to my personal acquaintance with or appreciation of such more or less contemporary books upon the Johannine Gospel and problem.\footnote{Davey, Jesus, 174.}

That he should feel compelled to make such a statement shows that Davey is aware of the justifiable criticisms that could be made of him not giving sufficient evidence for his claims. And in making this assertion he is pre-empting such criticism. Nevertheless, it still appears as a case of special pleading. Also the statement could be regarded as a strategy to enable Davey to allocate material in John to a strand that suited his own theological position without providing supportive evidence. In other words, he is motivated by his own theological agenda rather than by a deep analysis of the text. The preceding criticisms emanate from what Davey has said about the redactor. Our conclusions are corroborated by the statement Davey goes on to make. He sees the ‘redactor’s often naive faith’ reflected in Davey’s age by ‘the strange unitarianism of many conservatives in which Jesus is simply confused with or substituted for God the Father’.\footnote{Davey, Jesus, 14. Davey writes ‘unitarianism’ and not ‘Unitarianism’.} This comment reflects Davey’s opposition to what at times he describes as the popular view or the view of traditional orthodoxy.\footnote{See also Davey, Jesus, 14.} This was the extreme conservative or Fundamentalist position, which Davey consistently opposed. It is reasonable to describe
Davey’s view about this position as an *idée fixe*, which he had even before the Trial. He was still waging his crusade against those whom he asserted regarded Christ as God and not truly human as late as 1960, when he delivered a public lecture entitled ‘Moral Achievement in Jesus Christ and in the Christian Life’. Davey believed that this erroneous view arose from ‘false ideas of Christ’s nature and even of our own’. The result was that ‘Christ tends to be regarded as different from us in this struggle [for moral achievement], in that as God, omnipotent, omniscient and the like, He was able to do what man could not do’. As we shall see later, this charge of Unitarianism is a general accusation he levels at those who advocate a Kenotic Christology. At times Davey appears to set up his opponents as straw men and the view he combats verges on a caricature and, once the straw man is knocked down, Davey’s victory appears more convincing.

Davey describes the second strand ‘as the evangelist’s Logos philosophy and theology’, which portrays Jesus as the visible ‘imitation…of the unseen God’. This is an imitation of ‘an ontological and even mechanical kind’ because the divinity leaves little room for the humanity. In other words, Jesus has no ability to make decisions for himself: his actions are determined automatically by the will of the Father. The third strand Davey calls ‘the more primary historical sources of the Gospel, so much less obtrusive’. It is this third strand that presents us with a human being with developing experience, entirely dependent on his heavenly Father.

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545 Davey, ‘Moral Achievement in Jesus Christ and in the Christian Life. A Public Lecture Delivered at the Presbyterian College Belfast, Typescript 1960’.
John makes no attempt to integrate these strands coherently and consistently. Yet Davey believes the conflict among them may not be as great as one might expect.

He writes

This clash can in measure often be reduced by recognizing that the word 'all', so freely used by John of Christ's powers and revelation, at times means in its context no more than 'all that is actually relevant at the time in a particular connection'.

Material in John can be claimed to present Jesus as a divine figure or as a more human figure. It is where the arguments are evenly balanced that the historical elements can be the deciding factor. Davey claims

Other considerations of historical probability and improbability are needed at times to determine whether certain material is human and mystical in significance or is divine and ontological, belonging to a life of Jesus of Nazareth, or to a theological construction and perhaps to a Christ-myth.

Davey mentions two categories in this quotation, ‘the human and mystical … belonging to a life of Jesus of Nazareth’ and the ‘divine and ontological’ belonging to ‘a theological construction and perhaps to a Christ-myth’. This raises the question of whether Davey thinks these two categories are mutually exclusive, and, if not, how they are mutually related. This quotation is indicative of Davey’s general approach. He associates the human and the mystical/ethical with the historical Jesus, whereas the divine and the ontological-metaphysical he associates with an artificial theological construction. This general approach is seen whenever he is making judgments about what can be genuinely attributed to the historical Jesus. The reason for understanding the historical Jesus is so important because it gives us historical evidence for his dependence and raises questions about the validity of the metaphysical Christ. For that reason we will turn to make that the subject of our next section, which is on the dependence of Christ. Having seen that the

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552 Davey, Jesus, 14
553 Davey, Jesus, 15.
554 Davey, Jesus, 15.
historical Jesus is associated with the notion of dependence in Davey’s mind, because it provides him with historical evidence for dependence as a characteristic feature of the historical Jesus, we are now in a position to look at the notion of dependence.

We have already seen that, according to Davey, the third strand in John, consisting of ‘the more primary historical sources’, shows Christ as a human being dependent on his heavenly Father. We have also seen how this conclusion is a result of Davey’s ethical-historical reading of John. For Davey the notion of dependence is an essential feature of the historical Jesus and it is on the basis of the notion of the dependence of the historical Jesus that Davey goes on to develop his understanding of the notion of the Christ of faith. Faith cannot ignore history. Indeed faith is dependent on history and the Christ of faith is dependent on the historical Jesus. A crucial feature of the historical Jesus is the notion of dependence. For that reason we are now going to look at the theme of dependence in order to understand firstly the character of the historical Jesus and to understand how Davey can move from the historical Jesus to the Christ of faith, we need to examine the notion of dependence, which is central to his Christology.

E The Dependence of Christ

In our consideration of the significance of this central concept of dependence we shall look at four separate sub-sections, each of which contributes to the overall theme of dependence. Our sub-headings will be The Consciousness of Christ, Sonship, Mysticism, and Miracles. At every point, Davey asserts, the dependence of Christ on the Father is central to Johannine Christology. This is a keynote of the Fourth Gospel and it is based on history rather than deduced from a doctrine of the Logos. Davey characterizes Jesus’ filial relation to the Father as ‘an attitude of trust, dependence, obedience and love’,

555 Davey, Jesus, 77-81.
dependence summarizing the whole relationship and encompassing the characteristics of trust, obedience and love.\textsuperscript{556} He claims, ‘...the idea of dependence is emphasised in it [the Fourth Gospel] as the chief constituent in Christ's consciousness of God’.\textsuperscript{557} Davey lists sixteen aspects of Christ's dependence, which he proceeds to examine in detail.\textsuperscript{558} He claims that this detailed examination corroborates his thesis on the historicity of the Gospel of John by providing evidence that in the Fourth Gospel there is a considerable quantity of historical material, which can be drawn upon to build a cumulative argument in support of the ethical-historical view of Johannine Christology, rather than in support of the Logos or metaphysical theory. As was mentioned earlier, Davey argues that there are only two alternative ways of accounting for the impression the Fourth Gospel gives of a Jesus who is always the divine protagonist, the ethical–historical reading or the Logos theory. He asserts

\begin{quote}
The so-called Johannine Christ...is a myth; a Christ I mean, who is omniscient, omnipotent, self-determining and independent. Such a picture may seem justified at first sight, or as read in the light of a long Christian tradition of interpretation; but such a view is often the error alike of the popular orthodoxy and of the “Synoptic” or liberal scholar as he turns to read John.\textsuperscript{559}
\end{quote}

Davey claims the support of the Liberal scholar J. F. Bethune-Baker for his view that there are only two viable readings of John. Davey states

I once had the privilege of Professor Bethune Baker’s judgment in a letter upon much of the latter part of the present work in an earlier form, which was to the effect that, while he

\begin{footnotes}
\item[556] Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 46, Jesus, 77.
\item[557] Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 46, Jesus, 77. In Jesus Davey substitutes the phrase ‘the chief constituent in Christ's experience of God the Father’ for ‘the chief constituent in Christ’s consciousness of God’. However, there is no significant difference in meaning between the phrases.
\item[558] On 77-78 of Jesus Davey summarizes the sections by giving their title and a key verse from the Gospel. He examines each section in detail in Chapter Five of Jesus, 90-157.
\item[559] Davey, Jesus, 77. It is surprising to find the same error ascribed both to popular orthodoxy and to Liberal scholars. It would be more natural to find these groups in opposing camps. This apparent contradiction again turns on a linguistic point, on how particular words are being used in a particular context. By ‘the “Synoptic” or liberal scholar’ Davey is not referring to that kind of Liberal theology, of which Davey himself is representative. Rather he is referring to a line of theologians who argued that it was only in the Synoptics that genuine historical material about Jesus could be found.
\end{footnotes}
did not himself accept my position of a modified historicity, the line of argument adopted was in his opinion the only possible real alternative to the fiction hypothesis.\textsuperscript{560}

This is an important quotation, because here we have a recognized leading scholar giving his support to Davey’s argument, not in the sense of expressing agreement with Davey’s views on the historical evidence provided by John towards constructing a Christology, but agreeing that Davey, in his approach, had posed the only two viable alternatives for interpreting the Johannine material. Although Davey recognizes two approaches, he would argue that there was only one correct reading, namely, the ethical-historical one. One of the ways, in which this ethical-historical approach is worked out and seen, is in what John says about the consciousness of Christ.

1. The Consciousness of Christ

While Davey argues for the centrality of a theory of Christ’s consciousness, he is reluctant to claim knowledge of the processes of Christ’s mind.\textsuperscript{561} Indeed Davey asserts that the Johannine evidence reveals ‘no real development in Christ’s consciousness’.\textsuperscript{562} He bases this claim on his acceptance of the ‘theory that the incidents and discourses recorded in John belong particularly to the last period in the life of Christ’.\textsuperscript{563} He reasons, ‘...the fact that no real development in Christ’s consciousness can be traced would be sufficiently accounted for by the fact that that development had so to speak reached its maturity when He set His face to go to Jerusalem.’\textsuperscript{564}

\textsuperscript{560} Davey, \textit{Jesus}, 153. The ‘earlier form’ is a reference to ‘Johannine Presentation’. For James Franklin Bethune-Baker (1861–1951) see article by Henry Chadwick in ODNB. Chadwick uses the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘modernist’ to describe Bethune-Baker’s theological outlook.

\textsuperscript{561} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 41–42.

\textsuperscript{562} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 17.


\textsuperscript{564} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 17.
One way Davey describes Christ’s conscious awareness is that Christ had ‘abnormal’ powers, pointing out that the abnormal can refer to something which exceeds the norm, as well as something which falls below the norm.\footnote{Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 57-58.} We shall see later that this is partly how Davey understands miracles. There is an element of reverence in his attitude, as well as a frank admission that we, as humans, are limited in what we can know of another human mind, and especially of the mind of a person we believe to be ‘divine’. Whatever meaning we attach to that word, it conveys to us something that is beyond the human mind. This produces a dilemma for Davey, because he wishes to hold to two competing assumptions, namely, the recognition by Christ of a sense of his mission and vocation as Son, and at the same time our recognition of the limitations of our ability to have an understanding of Christ’s awareness.

Regarding the latter Davey acknowledges that Christ’s subconscious has a role in our formulating a Christology, although we cannot ‘dogmatise’ about it; ‘it is our business to face the evidence and explain it as best we may’.\footnote{Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 65.} A conclusion, which Davey draws from the evidence, is that concomitant with Christ’s perfect mystic life is ‘what is almost its opposite (and lacking in the mystic writer of our gospel), a strong and free critical faculty’.\footnote{Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 66.} One implication of this, although not referred to here, is Christ’s freedom to use this faculty in his interpretation of Scripture.

Davey does not acknowledge a debt to any particular writers in the comments he makes about the subconscious of Christ. He states

All consciousness is an individualizing in varying degrees of the subconscious, and we can well believe that in Christ this individualization was much more complete than with us, or at least we may reasonably hold that for him the secrets of the subconscious were less inaccessible in that he was in full harmony with that God in whom we all live and move and have our being, and who consequently, for a true
Christian pantheism, underlies and is the bond of the subconscious in the whole human race, as He is the goal and consummation of the conscious.\textsuperscript{568}

Although Davey does not mention whence he derives his thought of the subconscious of Christ, it is clearly close to views advocated by William Sanday, who located the divine aspect of Christ in the human subconscious.\textsuperscript{569} We will make further reference later to this kind of approach, which draws on psychology and personality to reach an understanding of the person of Christ, when we are considering Davey’s criticisms of the psychology contained in the Chalcedonian Definition. At this point we shall merely raise the question whether Davey’s views as expressed in the quotation above are helpful towards constructing a Christology today.

Davey proceeds by holding that Christ’s will ‘was perfectly in harmony with the will of God’.\textsuperscript{570} He claims that along with this there was ‘a perfect mental development within the limits of course, of the actual personality’.\textsuperscript{571} The explanation for this perfect development Davey attributes to Christ’s mystic life.\textsuperscript{572} And the mystic life is one of abiding dependence. As we have already noted, Davey considers the concept of dependence, understood in an ethical-historical sense, as ‘the chief constituent in Christ’s consciousness of God’.\textsuperscript{573} This entails the recognition by Christ of a sense of his mission and vocation as Son. Thus, we need to examine the nature of the way in which that recognition by Christ of his Sonship, a recognition due to the consciousness of his dependence, is manifested.

\textsuperscript{568} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 65.
\textsuperscript{569} See William Sanday, Christology and Personality: Containing I Christologies Ancient and Modern and II Personality in Christ and in Ourselves, New York, 1911.
\textsuperscript{570} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 65.
\textsuperscript{571} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 65.
\textsuperscript{572} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 67.
\textsuperscript{573} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 46, Jesus, 77. Emphasis added.
2. Sonship

Turning to Jesus’ Sonship, again Davey emphasizes the complete dependence of Jesus on God, and, as part of his cumulative argument on dependence, he claims to show that the best way of interpreting Jesus is the ethical-historical. For Davey the Sonship of Christ began in a special way at Christ’s baptism, when the Spirit came in power. Davey is not here putting forward a view akin to the heresy of adoptionism, because he continues to speak about the incarnate Christ and the role of the incarnation. Having received the Spirit in power, it is the power of the Spirit that is given to Christ, in response to his obedience during Christ’s life. While the Son receives his power from the Spirit of God, it is God whose Son he is. This is a unique relationship, described by the adjective μονογονης, which is used four times in the Gospel and once in First John. 1 John 4.9 reads, ‘God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him’ (NRSV). Davey concludes that even verses that might have a metaphysical reading now were originally ethical-historical in intent. In a passage which may be influenced by Schleiermacher Davey argues against the ontological uniqueness of Christ and replaces it with the notion of ethical uniqueness. He claims, ‘…originally, at least for John, Christ was regarded as a man among men but as the unique man, who had attained to that perfect Sonship and perfect holiness [sinlessness] which is possible to those who have communion with the Father.’ Even here the implication is that all that is available to the Son is available to those who believe. While Davey recognizes here that Christ is considered unique, he is reluctant to understand Christ’s uniqueness in metaphysical terms, as deriving from his supposedly ontological essential identity with the

576 Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 85. Μονογονης is used in John 1.14, 18; 3.16, 18; 1 John 4.9
Father. Christ’s uniqueness stems from his dependence upon the will of the Father, which can be understood in purely ethical terms. Here is another instance of Davey wanting to assert the uniqueness of Christ, but not taking that further step of recognizing the term as indicating a metaphysical relationship. Thus in one sense Davey is acknowledging the language of the uniqueness of Christ. However, he does so in a way that is different from the sense in which people would normally understand that term. The uniqueness of Christ would normally be understood in terms of the ontological identity of Christ’s essence with that of the Father. However, Davey wants to move away from that understanding and focus primarily on the ethical uniqueness, which stems from Christ performing the Father’s will to a greater degree than any other human being, and thus expressing in his life a full relationship with the will of the Father, being completely dependent upon that will. This is a difficulty in Davey’s Christology, which will confront us again. He could be accused of arranging his exegesis to prove his case for dependence. But, from Davey’s point of view, the eisegesis lies more on the side of those who would argue for a metaphysical reading of John, rather on the side of those who would argue for an ethical-historical reading. However, those scholars, who refer to Davey’s work on the theme of dependence in John, usually in a sentence or two or in a foot-note, do not make such a criticism. Indeed, all who refer to him on this subject of dependence do so in a most positive way. The ethical basis of Christ’s uniqueness as Son is reflected in the mystical nature of his dependence on the Father.
3. Mysticism

A main point that Davey makes about the mystic element in John’s picture of Jesus is the depth or intensity of the feeling evoked in Jesus. This is not a self-induced state, but rather the result of the totality of the reception of the presence of God, due to Christ’s perfect response to and openness to the divine. These two sentences are my summary of the section of Davey’s study on John on ‘Dependence for Guidance’, comprising thirty-six and sixteen pages respectively, in which he deals with the mystic aspect of Jesus’ life.\textsuperscript{578} After dealing with many complex issues of interpretation and exegesis, Davey is able to say that the Gospel of John, which we would expect to be the Gospel that shows us Christ’s divinity, is in fact the Gospel that reveals his humanity to us.\textsuperscript{579} Whereas, the Synoptics, which would be expected to give a picture of the human Jesus, show us Jesus in his divinity.\textsuperscript{580} Davey reaches this conclusion after a long processes of exegesis, linking and comparing passages in the Gospels and other parts of the New Testament. He states, ‘The two great keynotes of Christ’s teaching in its permanent significance are love and dependence.’\textsuperscript{581} The former we see in the Synoptics, the latter in John. Davey points out that this was indicated many years previously by A. B. Bruce, who spoke of ‘God in the glory of His Majesty and Might revealed as it were behind a lowly humanity, the glory of the only begotten Son shining through the fleshly veil’.\textsuperscript{582} Bruce is linguistically nearer Davey’s use of ‘dependence’, when he says, ‘The ruling spirit of the Gospel [John] is not gnostic or speculative, but ethical.’\textsuperscript{583}

\textsuperscript{578} See Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 123-159; \textit{Jesus}, 116-131.
\textsuperscript{579} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 159; \textit{Jesus}, 131.
\textsuperscript{580} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 159; \textit{Jesus}, 131.
\textsuperscript{581} Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 159; \textit{Jesus}, 131.
\textsuperscript{582} See A.B. Bruce, \textit{Apologetics; or, Christianity Defensively Stated}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Edition, Edinburgh, 1895, 489-492.
\textsuperscript{583} Bruce, \textit{Apologetics}, 491.
4. Miracles

In the previous paragraph it was stated that Christ’s power to work miracles sprang out of his continuing conscious awareness and what Davey describes as Christ’s mystic life or dependence on his Father for all things. It might be expected that Davey would have difficulty in dealing with miracles or find it embarrassing because the miraculous did not easily accord with the modern outlook which he espoused. Yet this is not the case. At one point he affirms, ‘I believe in the gospel of miracle.’ However, this might give a misleading impression. This is not reverting to a pre-critical world-view. This is seen in his stating, ‘The gospel of miracle, properly understood, is as essential to Christianity as it is actual in the life of Christ, and it rests upon the power, knowledge, and other resources of God as inexhaustible and all-sufficient.’

The key phrase in this quotation is ‘properly understood’. The question is raised how Davey understands miracles as part of the mission of the incarnate Christ, as part of his mystic life of communion with the Father. It has been mentioned that Harnack was one of the influences on Davey and Harnack’s view was that miracles as ‘an interruption in the order of nature’ could not occur. Davey’s rejection of the supernatural understanding of miracle is in line with Harnack on this point.

Davey states

…for John there is really no ultimate division into natural and supernatural, all nature is equally the activity of God; in this I believe that John, probably following the attitude and teaching of Jesus, is philosophically correct in his view of miracle as one of the more abnormal among the activities of the deity which we know today as laws of nature.

Not only is Davey influenced by the Liberal theology of Harnack on this point, but he himself acknowledges the influence of A.G. Hogg’s *Christ’s Message of the Kingdom*,

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which he describes as a book ‘which had a considerable influence upon the formation of the views which lie at the basis of the following investigation [‘Johannine Presentation’]’.

It is from Hogg that Davey derives, in part, his own view of miracles. He expresses his debt to ‘Professor Hogg’s very interesting book…particularly in connection with the question of miracle’. When Davey is discussing the historicity of miracles, it is to Hogg that he appeals in support of his own contention that ‘...most important in this connection is the testimony of Christ’s own consciousness and teaching in relation to His works’. Unlike Harnack, Davey does not want to reject the concept of miracle, and as a resource for his own view of miracle he turns to Hogg.

In discussing miracles Davey places emphasis on the importance of ‘Christ’s own consciousness and teaching in relation to His works’, a further indication of Christ’s complete dependence on the Father. This complete dependence, with regard to miracles, is due to the fact that Christ, as Son, has the ability to perform miracles on the basis of his relationship to the Father. In other words, the Father gives the Son the ability to perform those miracles. Nonetheless, each potential miracle has to undergo rigorous historical enquiry, and, as we have seen, Davey has shown how rigorous he is on this point.

In this section we have seen the centrality of the concept of dependence for Davey’s Christology and how that concept influences his understanding of the consciousness of Christ, Sonship, mysticism and miracles. We now turn to consider how

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588 Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, iv. A. G. Hogg, *Christ’s Message of the Kingdom. A Course of Daily Study for Private Students and for Bible Circles*, Edinburgh, 1913. The Introductory Note to this was written by H. R. M. Mackintosh, who taught both Davey and Hogg at Edinburgh and who also influenced Davey. Thus in Mackintosh we have a further link between Davey and Hogg. In ‘Christian Experience’ Davey includes in the bibliography D.S. Cairns, *The Faith that Rebels. A Re-examination of the Miracles of Jesus*, 6th Edition, 1954 (1st published 1928), London. On x of the Foreword to this book Donald Baillie speaks about ‘a kinship, and a mutual influence, between Cairns’ work and that of his friend, Dr. A. G. Hogg.’ Here is yet another possible connection with Davey.


Davey deals with the Two Natures Doctrine and the role of the concept of dependence in his treatment of that doctrine.

**F. The Two Natures Doctrine**

Davey considers that John’s perspective on the person of Christ is helpful today in considering the relationship of the human and divine in Christ’s person. In this section we will be examining the Two Natures Doctrine under two headings which are prominent in Davey’s thinking. These are dissatisfaction with Chalcedon and his treatment of the humanity and divinity of Christ.

1. Dissatisfaction with Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon of 451 was an attempt to resolve the controversies that had arisen over different understandings of the person of Christ. The first part of the formula produced by the Council affirms that Christ is consubstantial (ομοοουσιος) with both God and humanity. The second part of the formula speaks about the two natures in Christ. Christ is

…to be acknowledged in two natures (φυσείς), without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into [coming together to form] one Person (προσοπον) and one subsistence (υποστασις), not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ…

The Chalcedonian Definition was the result of the Council’s determination to maintain the belief that Christ was both human and divine. It did so using the concepts and language of the time.

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592 Stevenson (ed.). *Creeds, Councils, Controversies*, 337.
Davey is critical of the Chalcedonian Definition, because it speaks of Christ having one person (προσωπον) and one subsistence (υποστασις) but two natures (φυσεις) in that one person (προσωπον) and one subsistence (υποστασις). Davey emphasizes that the Chalcedonian formula is not helpful in formulating a modern Christology, describing it as ‘psychologically a piece of nonsense’ because ‘neither the category of the divine nor even that of the human was really understood’.\(^{593}\) The latter phrase is a truism, since we never can fully understand these categories, especially the divine. However, that fact is not a reason for not attempting to understand both the human and the divine. If it were, it would bring an end to the entire theological enterprise. However, as we shall see, Davey’s claim that the Chalcedonian formula is ‘psychologically a piece of nonsense’, which has been superseded by modern psychology is one of the main reasons for his dissatisfaction with the credal formulation.\(^{594}\) The other is that its philosophical basis in Greek philosophy is defective.\(^{595}\) We shall consider the latter claim first and then, secondly, the former claim.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{(a) Dissatisfaction with the Philosophy of the Chalcedonian Definition}
\end{itemize}

Firstly, concerning the defects in the philosophical basis of Chalcedon, Davey does not provide a specific reason in the ‘Johannine Presentation’ why these defects are present in Greek philosophy.\(^{596}\) The inference is that the reason is the general criticism that Davey has made of Greek philosophy, namely, that its categories, such as φυσις, προσωπον and υποστασις, are static and abstract and incapable of explaining the modern concept of personality. We gain some insight into the content Davey attributes to the terms ‘static’

\(^{596}\) Davey, in making these references to Greek philosophy, is not reading back later concepts from the Chalcedonian era into the Christology of the Fourth Gospel. His point relates to Greek philosophy at the time of the Fourth Gospel, as will be seen in the sections of this chapter dealing with the Logos concept.
and ‘dynamic’ by his comments in ‘Moral Achievement’. In this lecture he explicitly gives ‘the value and the doctrine of theoret, or meditation’ as the reason for the ‘less active’ and ‘more static’ world-view of Greek philosophy. He claims that the New Testament writings provide two contrasting views of Christ. On the one hand, there is the ‘dynamic picture of growth by conflict’ found in Mark, Acts, Paul and Hebrews. This picture draws attention to the aspect of Christ’s striving to achieve moral goodness and relying on his Father to supply the necessary powers and gifts for him to maintain this ethical-historical and moral relationship. On the other hand, Davey claims that the emphasis in John is different. In the Fourth Gospel ‘Christ’s work is pictured more as the shining of a divine light in the darkness, saving men as they respond to that light and turn from that darkness’. This emphasizes Christ as the revelation of God. Davey concludes that, in emphasizing Christ as the revelation of God, John is much closer to the static view of Greek philosophy than he is to the dynamic view expressed in other parts of the New Testament. However, Davey recognizes the validity of both the static and dynamic interpretations of Christ’s person – ‘both have their place in fact’. Nevertheless, in his reasoning, the dynamic interpretation is the more authentic and accurate, even although in the development of Christianity, it was the more static interpretation that became prevalent in the Eastern Church. In this tension between the static and dynamic views of Christ’s person, we see again reflected what I believe to be a

597 Davey, ‘Moral Achievement’, 4-5.
598 Davey, ‘Moral Achievement’, 5. On p. 4 Davey attributes the tendency of Greek philosophy towards a static rather than dynamic view to Kaftan, but does not provide a fuller reference. As we have seen, this is a strategy that Davey frequently adopts.
605 Davey, ‘Moral Achievement’, 5.
central issue in Davey’s Christology, namely the tension between the ethical-historical and the metaphysical.

Davey’s comment on John’s presentation of Christ discussed in the last paragraph raises a hermeneutical issue. On the face of it, Davey has moved his interpretative focus from the person of Christ, emphasized in the dynamic view, to the work of Christ. However, the shift of focus, from the Christological to the soteriological, is more apparent than real. The word ‘work’ in the quotation in the previous paragraph could be replaced by the word ‘person’ and this would still be a faithful and accurate presentation of Davey’s views, for in John Christ himself is the light. Thus the statement can be interpreted Christologically as well as soteriologically. This highlights the close interrelation between Christology and soteriology.

(b) Dissatisfaction with the Psychology of the Chalcedonian Definition

Secondly, with regard to his criticism that Chalcedon has been superseded by modern psychology, Davey does not advocate the appropriateness of a particular psychological approach. Again, he is generalising and his comment is more to draw attention to the fact that, since Chalcedon, human knowledge has increased vastly and that the relatively new area of psychology can assist theologians in grappling with problems and help us understand and explain in ways that were not possible at the time of the Early Church. Thus Davey is critical not only of the terminology of Chalcedon, but the view of Christ to which it tended to lead. He describes this view as

a more or less Eutychian or Monophysite form of belief in which Christ’s ‘divinity’ has more or less swallowed up His humanity…while the ‘humanity’ of Christ has remained somewhat of an algebraic symbol, representing an unknown, for working out problems in salvation.606

606 Davey, Jesus, 166.
Underpinning Davey’s criticism of the defective terminology and the defective psychology of the Chalcedonian Definition is his belief that it tended to lead to a distorted and inaccurate Christological understanding. This manifested itself in what he describes as ‘a more or less Eutychian or Monophysite form of belief’. It is strange that Davey is critical of Chalcedonian terminology because it is outdated, and yet, in formulating his criticism of this allegedly outmoded terminology, he elects to use terms from the Chalcedonian era, namely Eutychian and Monophysite. The latter term applies to those who asserted that in Christ there was only one nature and that was divine; Eutyches was condemned as heretical because he held a Monophysite position. Thus Davey’s opposition to the Chalcedonian terminology was based on his suspicion that it led to a view of Christ in which his divinity predominated and his humanity was a mere cipher. This conclusion is confirmed by the way Davey formulates his criticism of the defective view of Christ’s humanity. His description of Christ’s humanity as ‘somewhat of an algebraic symbol, representing an unknown, for working out problems in salvation’ is redolent of his contempt for this view. An echo of this description is found in his condemnation of the phrase ‘mathematical amount of suffering’. In Davey’s opinion the Christological views he is criticizing have no validity because they do not recognize Christ’s genuine humanity, his truly human nature. According to Davey, the sole purpose of Christ’s humanity in these erroneous Christologies is to provide counters in the construction of an artificial soteriology. In the specific criticism made by Davey that we have cited, again we see the close connection between Christology and soteriology. Again there is an apparent shift in focus from the person of Christ to the work of Christ. And again, for the reason given in the similar situation which we have already considered, we are justified in drawing the same conclusion that the shift in focus from the person of Christ to the work of Christ is more

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607 See, for example, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*.
apparent than real and we can consider the whole citation given as an example to be both a Christological statement and a soteriological statement.

In his criticism of the Chalcedonian Definition Davey finds support, as was mentioned earlier, in both Mackintosh and Forsyth. Both these theologians share Davey’s opposition to the Chalcedonian Definition. Mackintosh expresses his opposition in *The Person of Jesus Christ.* A further ground where Mackintosh would add weight to Davey’s critical stance on Chalcedon is that Mackintosh also can express his views on the primacy of the ethical in ways similar to Davey. For example, Mackintosh writes, ‘Between the ethical and the metaphysical view of Christ…there is no final antagonism. The ethical, when taken as ultimately true is the metaphysical’ and he proceeds to connect the ethical, as Davey does with the will ‘as the organic centre of personality’.

Despite all in Mackintosh to which Davey could appeal here for support, he does not do so, even although Mackintosh approves of Forsyth’s demand that ‘the moralising of dogma is an essential of all modern Christian thought’. It is reasonable to conclude that the reason for Davey’s reluctance is that at this point in his argumentation he refuses to concede what Mackintosh does, namely, that it is necessary to go beyond the ethical and seek a metaphysical interpretation, even if that metaphysical interpretation is grounded in an ethical or moral understanding of Christ’s person. Here we see one of the anomalies of Davey’s position. Elsewhere, as we have seen, Davey concedes that the ethical can provide the basis for a metaphysical position. However, Davey in his Christology wishes to emphasize the opposition of metaphysics, in the sense of what he would regard as traditional dogma, to ethics and to stress the ethical in a historical and non-metaphysical sense. The distinction between the metaphysical and the ethical is crucial to Davey’s

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609 Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, 305.
610 Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, 304.
Christology. To acknowledge anything other than a radical disjunction between the metaphysical and the ethical at this point would weaken his argument considerably.

Davey also cites with approval words of T. Forsyth that are strongly critical of the Chalcedonian Definition Davey cites with approval words of T. Forsyth, ‘With the modern growth of psychology and the modern revolution of metaphysic [sic] such formulae [namely, those of Chalcedon,] were bound to dissolve’. 612 Two sentences after these words quoted by Davey, Forsyth continues, ‘But the metaphysic of history, the modern primacy of personality, and the new stress on experience, coupled with a historical criticism equally modern, have opened up a better way’. 613 Here Forsyth is affirming those precise elements of modernity, which Davey, in all his writings, insists are central to the theological task. This provides evidence that Forsyth himself, although not widely quoted by Davey, is an influence underpinning Davey’s thinking. Davey’s emphasis on an ethical rather than a metaphysical interpretation is his counterpart of Forsyth’s ‘modern revolution of metaphysic’, which Forsyth also understands in ethical or moral terms. 614 In addition Forsyth’s emphasis on history coheres with Davey’s emphasis on history and Davey’s understanding of the ethical being grounded in historical human experience.

Thus, on this matter, it could be argued that Davey appeals to Forsyth rather than Mackintosh to support his [Davey’s] claim for the contemporary relevance of the Johannine picture of Christ as a means of addressing the problems raised by the Two Natures Doctrine and also providing a basis for a psychological understanding of the doctrine. He declares, ‘John enables us to rise to a true unity of Christ’s psychological nature by making the “dependence” of Christ essential to His [human] nature and

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613 Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 217.
characteristic of His eternal being [divine nature].‘615 ‘The true unity’ of which he writes has been made possible only by the elements mentioned by Forsyth in the previous quotation, and which Davey has incorporated into his own theological programme. In regard to Davey’s Christology the nature of the dependence, in relation to both the human nature and the divine nature, is interpreted ethically and morally, rather than metaphysically.

While, as we have argued, it is more expedient for Davey to seek support from Forsyth, Mackintosh again can come to Davey’s aid in providing additional support for the importance of the will, which is characteristic of Davey’s position. Mackintosh finds the overcoming of any antagonism between the ethical and the metaphysical in the will, more precisely in the identification of the will of Jesus Christ with the will of God. He concludes, ‘In ethical terms, the highest terms available, we have affirmed His ontological unity with God in a sense generically different from that which is predicable of man as man.’616 On this point Mackintosh can give support to what Davey is attempting to do by showing how the lack of clarity, which we see in Davey’s language, may be avoided. The result of applying Mackintosh to Davey would maintain the central role of the will and help towards removing ambiguities of language.

With Davey’s choice of the concept of dependence as a hermeneutical tool we see the influence of Schleiermacher on Davey’s thinking. Davey is interpreting John using Schleiermacher’s notion of dependence as a hermeneutical key to the text of the Fourth Gospel. He applies this key to his understanding of the psychology of the person of Christ. He concludes

... for a real comprehension of the person of the historical Christ a true psychological union is a necessity, and here it is that I think John again helps us to a truer and more reasonable view of the psychological problem. John enables us to

616 Mackintosh, The Person of Jesus Christ, 304.
rise to a true unity of Christ’s psychological nature by making the ‘dependence’ of Christ essential to His nature and characteristic of His eternal being.\footnote{Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 254.}

Here Davey is attempting to apply his central Christological concept of dependence to his psychological approach to understanding the person of Christ. As we shall see in the following subsection Davey applies the notion of dependence to both the humanity and divinity of Christ. However, before we consider how he does this, this would be an appropriate point to revisit the question of how far Davey is influenced by the kind of psychological approach advocated by Sanday, because in this section we are dealing with Davey’s dissatisfaction with the psychological solution proposed by the Chalcedonian Christology. Sanday argued that the subconscious should have a major role in constructing a Christology and Davey seems to be adopting this approach in the construction of his own Christology. The objections that were raised against Sanday’s proposals could also be levelled against Davey’s. Mackintosh raised three main criticisms against an approach that located the divine aspect of Christ in the subconscious of the personality.\footnote{Mackintosh, \textit{The Person of Christ}, 487-490.} The first is that this approach claims that the subconscious state is superior to the conscious state. Secondly, if God is defined in terms of Love, it is a Love that is revealed to us through Christ, ‘a love conscious, ethical, rational’.\footnote{Mackintosh, \textit{The Person of Christ}, 489.} Thirdly, Mackintosh claims that Sanday’s approach does not resolve the dualism between the divine and human in Christ, which is a legacy of Chalcedon.\footnote{Mackintosh, \textit{The Person of Christ}, 489.} Davey does define God and Christ essentially in terms of Love, as we shall see in our consideration of Christ’s divinity and humanity.\footnote{Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 255-256.} Yet it might be too hasty to apply to Davey simpliciter Mackintosh’s strictures on Sanday. In constructing a contemporary Christology, Davey’s approach may still be a valuable one because merely reverting to the terms of the Chalcedonian Definition does not overcome the difficulties of
attempting to understand how Christ is both God and a human being. An appeal for further consideration of an approach to Christology that draws on psychology is made by Vincent Taylor who states

...it does not seem right to refuse to make a psychological approach to Christology. In the early Christian centuries psychological elements entered into the philosophical aspects of Christological discussions and helped to shape the doctrine of the Trinity. We ought not, therefore, to neglect the better understanding of human personality made possible by the psychology of today. 622

2. The Divinity and Humanity of Christ

Davey then considers the meaning of divinity and humanity in relation to how these terms are applied to Christ. Firstly, he reflects on the nature of divinity. 623

(a) The Divinity of Christ

Davey starts his argument by equating divinity and deity and then proceeds to seek a meaning for deity or God. 624 However, he proceeds by mentioning terms that speak about God either in a negative sense or in relation to human beings. 625 For example he states, ‘...in relation to human dependence and relations God is the Absolute...in relation to our weakness, He is omnipotent’. 626 This shows that the two ways of speaking are not speaking about two different entities. Rather they are speaking about the same entity from two different perspectives. Davey writes

But all these words [used to describe God] are really but negatives; they start from human experience which we know and declare that God is not to be stated in terms of it...They are material and relative categories invented to explain that which is spiritual and self-existent, and as such they do not carry us very far. They do not

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tell us anything of the essence of God; at the most they describe the relations of man to that which lies beyond him. 627

For Davey these descriptions ‘represent nothing more than human attempts to account for that Personality which transcends human thought’. 628 Yet it does not follow, as he assumes it does, that the terms ascribed to God, such as ‘the Absolute’ and ‘omnipotent’, have no reference to the reality or being of God. It is true, as Davey affirms, that such terms as ‘the Absolute’ and ‘omnipotent’ are to be understood in relation to human beings, because we are human and our understanding of anything must relate to our understanding as human beings. However, it does not follow from this that the content of what we understand relates only to our understanding and cannot also relate to that which is real. If this conclusion did follow, it would imply that reality is confined to, and understood as, that which can be understood by human beings. Davey’s argument at this point is tending towards this conclusion. Yet it is clear that this is not the conclusion that he intends, because such a conclusion would remove the basis of the reality of revelation and, in relation to Christology, make it difficult, if not impossible, to speak of the divinity of Christ in a meaningful way, because it would be equating the divinity with the humanity. Davey’s claim that such terms as ‘the Absolute’ and ‘omnipotent’ ‘…do not carry us very far. They do not tell us anything of the essence of God’ is highly debateable. 629 Also this claim expresses a view that contradicts other aspects of Davey’s theology. For instance, Davey, as we shall see, regards the concept of κενωσις as helpful in understanding how Christ can be understood to have both a divine and a human nature. If omnipotence does ‘not tell us anything’ of God as he really is, the concept of κενωσις would not help us in understanding the person of Christ, because there would be no need to account for the

attribute of omnipotence in relation to Christ. I am aware that the Kenotic view holds that Christ lay aside his omnipotence. However, this argument is still one that could be considered, because it is the relation of omnipotence to Christ that is being examined, not whether in fact Christ may be described as being omnipotent in some sense. When we examine Davey’s view of Kenotic Theology, it will be considered whether the contradiction in his thought, which I am suggesting at this point, is apparent or real. Underpinning Davey’s claim that such terms as ‘the Absolute’ and ‘omnipotent’ ‘…do not carry us very far’ is his emphasis on the priority of the ethical-historical over the metaphysical and his persistent refusal to give the latter precedence over the former. Such inconsistencies as have been indicated show some of the reasons why Davey’s theology encountered some of the problems discussed.

Having made this declaration that the terms we have been considering ‘represent nothing more than human attempts to account for that Personality which transcends human thought’, it is difficult to understand how Davey can then proceed to assert that it is John who not only provides an answer to the question, ‘What is the essence of God?’, but also provides an answer which is ‘full and final’.630 At this point Davey offers no support for his assertion, but declares, ‘I believe Love, which is for John the essence par excellence of Deity, is the true key to the divinity of Christ.’631 Davey states that although ‘Christ on earth was not…the Absolute…nor omnipotent’ his divinity was still ‘full and perfect’, because it consisted of ‘the essence of God’s being – Love’.632 Davey is able to make this claim, because, for him, Love is an ethical rather than a metaphysical concept.

We have been arguing that Davey has been critical of Kenotic approaches to Christology. However, this comment of Davey’s shows that his criticism is a qualified one,

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because he seems to be stating here that Christ on earth has renounced his omnipotence, one of the attributes we associate with God. Thus Davey here is using a Kenotic type of argument. This finds further confirmation when Davey proceeds to say Christ’s divinity was still ‘full and perfect’, because it consisted of ‘the essence of God’s being – Love’. Here Davey’s view is very similar to that of Gottfried Thomasius, who argues that Christ renounces the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, but retains the attributes of love, holiness and truth. Davey’s view of Kenotic Christology does seem ambivalent. There seems to be an appreciation of the Kenotic approach, but he does not seem to be happy with the way some Kenoticists draw out their Christologies. We have drawn attention to this at various points in our discussion and it is considered in greater detail later in this chapter. Davey has already spoken of dependence as ‘characteristic of Christ’s eternal being’ so the divine nature must be a full divinity which is dependent on the Father or the Absolute. We have already seen that the concept of dependence, for Davey, entails an element of subordination and in our discussion of Davey’s use of the word, we saw that his position presents some problematic issues. A further comment of Davey affirms his belief that Christ’s divinity was a full divinity. He writes that his divinity ‘consists in His being the embodiment, and on earth the incarnation, of Perfect Love.’ Davey is making a distinction here between the essence of Christ’s divinity on the one hand, which is the embodiment of Perfect Love, and, on the other hand, the manifestation or form of that essence in Jesus of Nazareth, namely, the incarnation of Perfect Love on earth. Thus in this subsection we have seen Davey’s firm belief in the

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634 Davey, Jesus, 163.
divinity of Christ and in the next subsection we shall see his firm insistence on the humanity of Christ.
(b) The Humanity of Christ

Davey claims that it is in John that we see that ‘the essence of Christ’s humanity...[consists] in His absolute dependence of life.’ Here again is evidence of Schleiermacher’s influence on Davey. However, in this instance Davey comments that Schleiermacher’s phrase ‘feeling’ of absolute dependence should be replaced by ‘attitude’ of absolute dependence. His stated reason for suggesting this change is that ‘feeling’ does not convey the same ‘moral’ connotation as ‘attitude’. This reason receives further clarification in Jesus, where Davey writes, ‘...the word “attitude” (or purpose, or intention), ... implies will as well as perception and condition.’ While it is true that ‘feeling’ could be taken in a non-ethical sense, it does not have to be. That aside, with this suggested change of wording we have another instance of Davey’s desire to emphasize the moral or ethical nature of Christ’s dependence. In other places Davey is arguing for the moral or ethical interpretation of Christ’s dependence over against interpreting that dependence in a metaphysical way. It is not clear why Davey suggests this change from ‘feeling’ to ‘attitude’ at this late stage in the ‘Johannine Presentation’. Up to this point he has more than adequately made out his case for the moral nature of Christ’s dependence. He has not needed to refer to the lack of suitability of the word ‘feeling’ in trying to prove the ethical or moral nature of Christ’s dependence on the Father.

When he considers what it means to be human, Davey insists that account must be taken of the spiritual aspect of human beings, which he regards as pre-eminent. He states, ‘The true humanity of man is...not the outcome of a merely biological evolution but is essentially spiritual, consisting in the actuality or potentiality of this attitude of perfect

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637 Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 256. See also Jesus, 168.
639 Davey, 168.
moral dependence upon God. Here Davey affirms his belief in the evolution and
development of human beings as part of a process that is not outside the purposes of God,
and that Christ himself, in his humanity, is subject to that same evolution and development.

Christ’s dependence on God was perfect. Indeed Christ is uniquely perfect and, as
such, is the eternal, ideal, archetypal man. In discussing this Davey displays a degree of
terminological inexactitude, which tends to obscure what is being said. Here, in fact, he
moves from speaking about the human Christ to the divine Christ. He writes

…for John Christ, the Logos, the Eternal Son, is also the archetype of man and so
of human sonship; he is ‘the light that lighteth every man’ (1:9) i.e. the Son = the
Logos = archetypal man. Thus in Christ we have the essential kinship of God and
man declared, and therewith the possibility of an incarnation.

In both instances of the use of ‘Christ’ in this quotation Davey is referring to the second
Person of the Trinity and not to the human individual in which the second person of the
Trinity became incarnate. While Davey accepts Christ as eternal man he is critical of the
traditional theological view that ‘regards Christ as having become man at the Incarnation
and as continuing now for ever as true man.’ He argues that this is not philosophically
feasible, because Christ could not take in his humanity that which he did not have in his
divine nature, ‘especially…that His eternal being could not thus alter or modify itself in
This is a further assertion, as Davey does not give any grounds for his claim that Christ could not take in his humanity that which he did not have in his divine nature. In relation to the quotation from Davey, two points can be made. Firstly, these words undermine the whole idea of incarnation, because they imply what is basic to that concept, namely, that the divinity and the humanity coexist in Christ’s person. This implies that the human nature is affected by the relationship between the two natures. Otherwise, one would have to adopt the position that the term ‘divinity’ in Christ was indistinguishable from the way in which human beings could be described as ‘divine’, that is, that the difference between Christ and other human beings is one of degree and not of kind. This is in keeping with Davey following Schleiermacher’s approach, that Christ differs from human beings only in the intensity of his God-consciousness, not that Christ experiences a God-consciousness that is different in kind from that which human beings experience. In other words, Christ is not different in kind from us, but is more of what we are and what we should be.

Secondly, Davey’s reference to Christ’s eternal being not being able to modify itself in time contradicts his earlier statement that ‘Christ on earth was not…the Absolute…nor omnipotent’ his divinity was still ‘full and perfect’. This clearly indicates that Christ’s eternal being does modify itself in time, if Christ is ceasing to be omnipotent. Davey seems not to be able to make up his mind, resulting in a tension, if not a contradiction, between the statements he makes. This is an area where we are helped in the understanding of Davey by his dependence on Schleiermacher. In his discussion of Christology Schleiermacher describes as ‘the first canon, that God must remain outside every temporal medium’. He further claims, ‘In order to avoid entangling the Eternal in

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648 Schleiermacher The Christian Faith, 401.
temporality, one may decide to make it a condition in presenting the peculiar dignity of
Christ that it must be possible to regard Him like any other person as a product of the
human nature. This language of Schleiermacher is echoed in that of Davey in the
latter’s attempt to battle with the problem of maintaining both the divinity and humanity of
Jesus Christ.

We have had an instance of how we can draw on Schleiermacher to understand
Davey’s position and in the same area we find a contrast between Davey and
Schleiermacher. In referring to Christ’s eternal being Davey makes clear that his view of
Christ’s humanity differs from those who would argue that Christ’s life began with the
incarnation and who would deny notions of pre-existence. Here he is stating opposition to
the notion of Schleiermacher, who apparently denies Christ’s pre-existence, and to those
views of Liberal Protestant theologians who regard Christ as just a human being and
basically an ethical teacher.

Davey then asserts that his understanding of Paul’s interpretation of Christ’s human
nature coheres with that of Hegel, namely, ‘the eternal counterpart of humanity in the
being of God, manifested in some measure in every man but fully and creatively in
Jesus’. Davey combines this interpretation of Christ’s humanity with John’s concept of
dependence and concludes that ‘Christ’s Sonship and His eternal humanity are at one’. Here is a further example of the tension in Davey’s thought regarding the eternal character
of Christ’s human nature. The statements which he makes here clash with those which
oppose the mutual influence of the relationship of the natures.

650 Schleiermacher The Christian Faith, 400-402. Schleiermacher is in agreement with those
who ‘rejecting the opinion that the body of Christ was completely formed in a single moment, or
that in essentials it came down from heaven with the divine, reckon the gradual formation of the
organism from the beginning of life onwards as part of the truth of the human nature of Christ’
(401-402). Emphasis added.
651 Davey, Jesus, 169.
652 Davey, Jesus, 169.
Davey claims that the view of man achieving his goal found in Romans 8.18 ff. (the adoption of the sons of God) and Ephesians 4.12 ff (the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ) supports his interpretation of the Sonship of Christ. He writes of the stature of the eternal or ideal man, in Whom, through the Spirit, the plurality of human souls will find their consummation in organic unity. Thus a perfected humanity is a plurality ending in unity, a plurality which began with a creative one; so we have a process from Christ, the first born [of creation], to Christ the goal of mankind, and, with that, of the whole universe; what is achieved by the [cosmic] process is the self-expression in concrete terms of God, i.e. of Eternal Love, such that men are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). 653

This provides a summary of Davey’s view of the role of Christ in the cosmic process.

From the way he expresses himself, it is clear that he does not consider the difference between Christ and other humans as being one merely of degree, and not of kind. In regarding Christ as the first-born of creation and the goal of mankind and the whole universe, Davey is clearly affirming a difference in kind and not merely in degree between Christ and others.

In this section dealing with Davey’s understanding of the humanity of Christ, we have seen how strongly he is influenced by Schleiermacher and how his refusal to acknowledge the reality and importance of a metaphysical aspect to Christology results in difficulties and tensions for Davey’s Christology. .

3. Davey’s Claim to have Removed Problems Arising from the Chalcedonian Approach to Christology

We have already considered Davey’s dissatisfaction with the Christological formulae proposed at Chalcedon, with its doctrine of two natures in one person. In this section we

653 Davey, Jesus, p 169-170. This is a better expression of Davey’s thought than his formulation in ‘Johannine Presentation’, 258: ‘…the eternal or ideal man, in whom the whole plurality of human souls find their consummation in unity. Thus a perfected humanity is the end, as it was the beginning, of creation, from Christ the first born of all creation to Christ the goal of mankind and of the whole created universe; what has been achieved by the cosmic process is the self-expression of God, i.e. of Eternal Love’.
will examine his claims to have overcome the tensions which were the legacy of that particular credal formulation. Davey believes that John points us to the true nature of both Christ’s divinity and his humanity. The former consists of Love, which is the essence of the God’s being, while the latter consists of Christ’s ‘absolute dependence as a man’. Davey claims that the interpretation he presents does not raise the same problems as those resulting from the Chalcedonian Definition. He writes

Thus the divinity of Christ and His humanity, i.e. His perfect love and His perfect dependence Godward, are found in a real and natural harmony which truly constitutes ‘one person in two natures’ in such a way that the elements of the two natures are perfectly present in their essential being and cohere in a true personal unity, which does not offer us the psychological puzzle of the Chalcedonian expression of the fact; Christ is both fully God and fully man, but it is as the Eternal Son that He is and can be both.

At this point I would argue that in this statement Davey is not simply equating the divinity of Christ with ‘His perfect Love’ and the humanity of Christ with ‘His perfect dependence Godward’. Rather he is asserting that Christ’s perfect love and Christ’s perfect dependence on God constitute the humanity as they constitute the divinity. Although Davey does not express his views in these terms, I hope to show by the following examination of his views that my proposed approach is both in keeping with Davey’s thinking and a legitimate extension of his views. This way of looking at the two natures provides, according to Davey, ‘a true personal unity’ which avoids the ‘psychological puzzle’ of Chalcedon. But it only does so by making ‘the Eternal Son’ the subject of both the divinity and the humanity. Having given a brief exposition of Davey’s views based on the above quotation, we shall now proceed to examine and evaluate those views.

The language in the quotation has elements relating to the main argumentation in both ‘The Johannine Presentation’ and Jesus about the concept of dependence. As has

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654 Davey, Jesus, 167-170.
655 Davey, Jesus, 167 (divinity), 168 (humanity).
656 Davey, Jesus, 170.
been clearly pointed out, the thrust of Davey’s argument is to convince the reader that his ethical-historical Christological interpretation of many parts of John’s Gospel is more valid than the usual metaphysical interpretation. Equating ‘the divinity of Christ and His humanity’ with ‘His perfect love and His perfect dependence Godward’ creates the impression that Davey is taking his stance once more on familiar ground. This gains credence from his referring to ‘a true personal unity’, which would avoid the artificiality and outmoded terminology of the Chalcedonian Definition. However, the tone and content of the quotation reflect a more metaphysical approach than Davey would normally recognize as valid. While it is possible to understand “one person in two natures” in such a way that the elements of the two natures are perfectly present in their essential being’ in an ethical sense, the metaphysical interpretation is the more likely, once reference has been made to Davey’s assertion that ‘it is as the Eternal Son that He is and can be both [fully God and fully man].’ My contention is that this is moving away from Davey’s familiar ethical-historical-moral argumentation into more metaphysical realms. Arguably, what is underpinning Davey’s argument here is a realization that Christological discussion cannot be confined to an ethical basis but requires a metaphysical or philosophical explanation. While the Son’s dependence can be viewed in an ethical-historical sense, and Davey argues his case well for this in relation to the humanity of Christ, Davey, with an explicit reliance on Paul and Hegel, moves his argument onto a more metaphysical basis.

Furthermore, Davey does not disillusion the reader, but, on the contrary, leaves the reader with the impression that he [Davey] has not shifted his ground to a more metaphysical approach. This is a further pointer to Davey’s not always making clear the basis of his arguments and the ambivalence of his approach, which can hinder the reader in discovering Davey’s intended meaning. Davey has presented what he considers to be a coherent

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657 Davey, Jesus, 170.
658 Davey, Jesus, 169; ‘Johannine Presentation’, 258.
interpretation of how the doctrine of the two natures in one person can be translated into a contemporary theological context in such a way as to avoid the difficulties encountered by adhering rigidly to the metaphysics and terms of the Chalcedonian Definition. However, we have seen that his reinterpretation does not fully achieve what he intended. Negatively, it could be regarded as not resolving the difficulties, but merely expressing them in a different way. Positively, however, Davey’s attempt at resolving the Christological problems posed by Chalcedon should be considered in the total context of what he was trying to do in his own day, namely to face the challenges posed by modern biblical criticism and historical-critical approaches to theological understanding, and to utilise the resources and insights provided by such burgeoning disciplines as psychology.

We shall now consider one specific approach which Davey utilised in his attempt to construct a Christology which could meet the challenges, which he believed modernity brought to the traditional view.

G. Kenotic Christology

The Scriptural basis for Kenotic Christology is found in Philippians 2.6-8, where, in verses six to seven, Paul states that Christ, ‘though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself [εστιν εκεινος], taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness’(NRSV). David Law provides the following definition of Kenotic Christology, ‘On the basis of the use of ekenosen in this text, “kenosis” has come to be used as a technical term to explain how divine and human natures can coexist in the one, united person of Christ’. As we have seen in the last section, Davey was dissatisfied with the solution to the nature of Christ’s person that was promulgated at Chalcedon and his Christology is an attempt to overcome what he regards

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as the defects of that solution. Law indicates that the main defect of the Chalcedonian Definition is that it does not answer the question, ‘How can the divine preexistent Logos become a human being and live a genuine human life without undermining his divine nature?’ This is the question that those who adopt a Kenotic approach seek to answer. A range of answers was provided by a pioneering group of theologians in Germany, among whom were Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875), J. H. A. Ebrard (1818-1888) and W. F. Gess (1819-1891). Common to the various expressions of Kenotic theology is the idea of the limitation, modification, or even abandonment, of the divine attributes during Christ’s life.

In discussing the divinity of Christ in the previous section of this chapter we saw that Davey’s attitude to Kenotic Christology is ambivalent. In trying to assess Davey’s views of Kenotic Christology and how he uses the concept in his own Christological thinking, we are confronted with an issue which we have met in other areas of Davey’s thinking, namely the fact that Davey does not always give the sources upon which he draws for constructing his theology. He certainly does not refer to any of the German Kenoticists, and also, apart from H. R. Mackintosh (1870-1936), there are hardly any references to native English speaking Kenotic scholars. On these grounds, it is

661 For details of their views and the views of other German Kenotic theologians see Law, p 255-268.
662 Law provides a comprehensive checklist in which he details seven specific problematic issues that arise from this basic Kenotic problem (p 254-255).
663 We saw this when we were discussing whether Davey read Hegel, or whether he acquired knowledge of Hegel’s thought through the writings of others, e.g. such as the Neo-Hegelian Edward Caird. However, on page 3 of his preface to ‘The Future Hope’ Davey states, ‘I have also made a slight use of books and articles by...Bruce, Stevens...Kant, Hegel...and various other articles in E. Bibl. and H. D. B.’ Emphasis added.
664 Mackintosh’s The Person of Jesus Christ provides a comprehensive history and survey of Christological thought, as well as the author’s own constructive Christological thinking. However, Davey does refer to A. B. Bruce’s Apologetics (1892) ‘Book III – especially chapter 9 “The Fourth Gospel” in his bibliography to ‘The Johannine Presentation’. See also preceding note. Yet he does not make any explicit reference to Bruce’s The Humiliation of Christ (1876), which Law describes as an ‘influential work in introducing the British public to kenotic theology’ (269).
reasonable to argue that Davey either obtained his knowledge of Kenotic theology through secondary sources, or, that he read more widely than is apparent from the lack of references in his writing, and often drew on ideas assimilated from his wider reading without acknowledging their source. We hope to clarify some of this uncertainty as we proceed to examine Davey’s use of Kenotic approaches in his own Christology.

Firstly, we shall consider how Davey uses the verses in Philippians chapter two which provide the rationale for the Kenotic approach. Davey draws attention to the fact that, whereas it is generally recognized that the incarnation involves a kenosis of Christ’s glory, John, on the contrary, affirms that Christ’s glory is an abiding presence throughout his earthly life. Davey argues that references to Christ’s praying for the restoration of his former glory are not central to John’s understanding of Christ. Indeed Davey claims they are due to ‘a concession [by John], perhaps unconscious, …to the earlier Christian view of Christ as having been exalted to God’s right hand as a reward for the faithful discharge of His mission’. At work here we have indications of two of Davey’s presuppositions which underlie his interpretation of John. Firstly, we see the influence of the concepts of evolution and development in his thinking, influences emanating from Hegel, reflecting the opinion that that by the time John wrote his Gospel the early Christian traditions had developed and become less literal. Secondly, we see Davey’s view that John spiritualized those aspects of the tradition which emanated from a strictly Jewish milieu and adapted them to his Hellenistic presentation of the gospel.

Citing John 1.18, ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth’, Davey asserts that during his life Christ had a ‘full divinity’. This would indicate that Davey is

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in line with Nicaea, which confirmed that Christ’s divinity was the same as that of the Father, being consubstantial with the Father. It is important to note that the preceding sentence does not mean that Davey interpreted John in terms of Nicaea, otherwise his interpretation would be anachronistic. But, as we shall shortly see, Davey imposed another interpretation on John, which is anachronistic, namely an Hegelian one.

It is at this point that Davey’s view of Kenosis takes a strange turn. Having declared that Christ had a full divinity, he proceeds to state

And as for the attributes and powers of Christ, these were certainly not laid aside in John’s view, for Christ never possessed them as His own; for all such gifts He was perpetually dependent on the Father, and received them, through His life of mystic union, as He needed them (knowledge, power, guidance etc.)

The words Davey has emphasized in this quotation are in keeping with his thesis that John presents a picture of Christ that shows his complete dependence on the Father for all things. However, the reader of Davey should note that ‘perpetually’ also is important in Davey’s concept of dependence. Here, and elsewhere, he argues that Christ’s dependence is not confined to his earthly life but also relates to the Son’s eternal relation to the Father. Davey also argues that the nature of this dependence in the relation of the Son to the Father is one of ‘subordination’ but not one of inferiority. This point is discussed elsewhere. Yet this quotation highlights Davey’s particular understanding of Kenosis. He states, ‘Thus the only Kenosis recognised in John is a Kenosis of conditions or environment, i.e. the exchange of a spiritual mode of life in heaven for the flesh and the earth, the mere necessary condition of incarnation at all.’

Another way in which Davey expresses this concept of Kenosis of conditions or environment is that ‘[…]it is external to the being of the incarnate Son who is the eternal

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669 Davey, Jesus, 163.
representative in the Godhead of the plurality of the finite in the universe of God’. The
is an Hegelian way of describing the relations between the persons of the Godhead. Davey
would restrict ‘infinite’ to the Father. When ‘humanity’ is used of the Son it relates to his
‘finitude’ within the Godhead. This is an unusual use of language, because, with its
normal connotations of temporal limitation, one does not readily associate ‘finitude’ with
the Godhead. Yet this is what Davey does and it makes his thinking in this area and in the
area of the Trinity difficult to understand.

There is a second odd use of language in this quotation. Taking the unusual phrase
‘the universe of God’ as referring to God in his totality, the above quotation could be read
as an expression of pantheism, where it is difficult to see the separation of God (including
the persons of the Godhead) from the created order. It is interesting to note that in The
Jesus of St John Davey writes

…the only Kenosis of which we can speak is the change of environment or
conditions involved in each new mission of the Son; i.e. it (the Kenosis) is external
to the being of the incarnate Son, who is the eternal representative or source in the
Godhead of the plurality of the finite, or of creative mutation, in God’s universe.671

The phrase is now ‘God’s universe’ rather than ‘the universe of God’, which is not so
obviously pantheistic, but could still be read in a pantheistic sense. Also the words
‘creative mutation’, with their clear connotations of evolution and development, show a
clear influence of both Darwin and Hegel. The phrase, however, which raises the question
of the extent of Davey’s orthodoxy, is ‘each new mission of the Son’. This is ambiguous.
Does it refer to the Son relating to individuals on every occasion he does so relate? Or
does it mean that the Son has missions other than his incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth?
Even if the latter, and speculative, alternative is rejected, as I think it should be on the basis

671 Davey, Jesus, 165.
of Davey’s not so speculating in his writings, the language here is not such that would have given his opponents at the Trial an assurance of his orthodoxy.

Davey is critical of Kenotic theology because, in his opinion, it attempts to prove that the Son is the Father and has ‘only succeeded in impairing the true divinity of Christ here upon earth’. Indeed he regards his interpretation of this aspect of Johannine Christology as more accurate than the views of Kenotic theology. Nevertheless, he is not entirely dismissive of Kenotic theology. He writes

Thus a Kenosis doctrine, though upon the right lines in some of its aspects as a criticism of unreflecting views and as line of advance or halfway house in the nineteenth century, is not a satisfactory doctrine nor as real a solution of the problem in question as the Johannine conception [kenosis of environment]…

There is an inconsistency in Davey’s opinion of Kenotic theology. In the ‘Johannine Presentation’ and Jesus he is begrudgingly sympathetic towards Kenotic theology, whereas at the Trial he is much more positive towards it. The reason for this inconsistency cannot be that Davey’s views changed over time. While the Trial took place in 1927 and Jesus was published in 1958, the ‘Johannine Presentation’ was written at the end of 1915 and therefore Davey held these reservations about Kenotic theology from his student days.

This understanding of Kenosis is distinctive of Davey and he himself distinguishes his position from that of such scholars as Mackintosh and Forsyth, who understand Kenosis as ‘a self-reduction of Christ’s divinity as explanatory of his incarnation’.

Davey claims that his interpretation of John’s view is better. His reasons for so claiming are that those who advocate a reduction in Christ’s deity do so on the basis of ‘chiefly...a philosophical misconception of Christ’s Sonship and of the real significance of

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672 Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, 251; Jesus, 164. Jesus has an additional reference to the Athanasian Creed.
673 Davey, Jesus, 165. See ‘Johannine Presentation’, 252 for a similar quote.
such words as “finite” and “infinite”. As Davey expands his position we see a very strong Hegelian influence in his thinking as he describes the Son as ‘the eternal representative of the “finite”’. This could be open to an interpretation that both acknowledges the full divinity of the Son in his non-earthly being in sharing the ousia of the Father, and understands him as the representative of the finite in the Godhead. On this view the Son does not have to be human in his essential being. But Davey himself precludes this interpretation. He insists, ‘the Son…was and continues to be, as I believe He was eternally, True Man’ and that ‘His Humanity or finitude was not incidental [but] it was essential to the nature of the eternal Son who came to call other men into a Sonship unto God’. From this statement it is difficult not to conclude that here Davey, in some way, visualizes humanity as an integral part of the Godhead. This seems to be going beyond the Hegelian idea of the Infinite Spirit manifesting itself in the finite. Davey writes, ‘The words ‘finite’ and ‘infinite’, like all the rest of these metaphysical abstractions, are but means for us in drawing distinctions in things which really elude our thought. God is not really infinite or finite; God is Love.’ Here we have an instance of Davey writing in an exaggerated way to prove his point, but, in so doing, his exaggeration weakens his argument. Underlying this comment is his extreme emphasis on the superiority of the ethical over the metaphysical, which we have discussed elsewhere. The basis for this approach is his claim that God is Love, inclusive of ‘personality in itself’. This he declares is ‘the great Johannine affirmation (1 John 4:8, 16)’. Davey’s insistence that God is Love again refers, in his opinion, to the ethical rather than the metaphysical and underlying this view is his claim that the metaphysical is

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680 Davey, Jesus, 164.
681 Davey, Jesus, 164.
ultimately based on the ethical. A further point which shows the weakness of Davey’s claim in the above quotation is that in his writings he generally uses the words ‘finite’ and ‘infinite’ in a way that shows he believes them to be more than ‘metaphysical abstractions’ and that they point to realities. The quotation also highlights an area of ambiguity in Davey’s thought relating to God.

In this section we have seen how Davey positively uses Kenotic Theology to help him in the construction of his Christology. However, his insistence on trying to interpret everything in an ethical-historical way does produce tensions. One way that a contemporary Christology would be an advance on Davey would be to consider the metaphysical implications of Christology without becoming entrenched in the metaphysical dogmatism, which, to a large extent, Davey’s approach successfully avoided. We have also seen that one area where caution needs to be exercised is in the field of terminology and language, the word ‘subordinate’ being a prime example here.

The view that Davey adopts towards metaphysics inevitably affects his understanding of the finality of Christ and it is to that topic that we now turn.

**H. The Finality of Christ**

The question of the finality of the Christian faith relates both to Christ’s person and to his work. To assume that Christ is not only unsurpassed but also unsurpassable in every respect is to misunderstand how Christ may be described as final. This assumption fails ‘to discriminate between the spiritual and vital aspects of religion and the physical and psychological limitations imposed on its expression in any age or environment’. 682 Davey’s basic premise is that Christ’s finality lies in ‘the finality of that faith in God by

which He lived’. There are ways of predicating finality of Christ which deny faith rather than confirm it. If progress is accepted as a fact, it is found in many spheres including the intellectual, the aesthetic and the moral, and in many cases cannot be directly related to Christ’s life nearly two thousand years ago. Christ’s knowledge was sufficient for the work the Father had given him, and Christ acknowledges both the limitations of his life and his dependence on the Father for all things, including knowledge.  

When account is taken of advances in biblical criticism and science Davey claims it is not wrong to modify or even reject certain of Christ’s views, such as his opinion of the authorship of Deuteronomy or his views about angels and demons. Not to recognise that progress has been made in these areas is an attempt to achieve certainty at the expense of the venture of faith. However, Christ has contributed indirectly to progress in many areas of life by his spirit of self-denial. For this spirit is the principle of progress in such areas of art and science. While Christ is not final intellectually, his spirit of self-denial in seeking God’s truth lies behind the intellect and morally conditions it. In this Davey argues that he is ‘the leader of all sincere thought, the greatest exponent of the will to believe’. This same point is made later, when he writes, ‘For as surely as the will lies behind, and conditions our external life of action and our inward life of thought, so surely does the will-transforming spirit of Christ condition all true progress’.  

It is this spirit of Christ that is most original and final for us rather than ‘its external vestments’. We cannot claim that Christ’s finality is one ‘of personality or of truth in toto’. No one would claim that Christ is for example the greatest artist or the greatest scientist ever known. Even in the moral sphere Christ’s finality ‘must be sought in the

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683 Davey, Faith, 111.
684 Davey, Faith, 118.
685 Davey, Faith, 118-119.
686 Davey, Faith, 132.
687 Davey, Faith, 114.
688 Davey, Faith, 115.
spirit, not always or necessarily in the historical forms, of Christ’s teaching or life’. To accept the reality of incarnation is to accept that God must limit himself if he is to reveal himself in human personality. Christ’s life was limited and conditioned by many factors, including history, education and environment, and no finality can be predicated by these forms of his revelation. Here again Davey is making a distinction between life or the spirit and its forms.

While recognizing that the concept of Kenoticism is helpful against the Docetists, Davey argues that the human Christ had a full divinity, which he defines in terms of the divine love. He states, ‘It is not the Galilean Jew who is final but something which tabernacled in Him, and expressed itself in the forms of its time, both in thought and in practice’. Christ and his conception of God are final in their moral and spiritual meaning for us. In a sense the finality of Christ is simple, namely his ‘absolute self-surrender to God […] the selfless or mystic life of dependence and sonship’. The corollary of this is that salvation is also simple, being ‘unity with Him in His spirit of selflessness’.

Turning again to the distinction between life and the forms in which life expresses itself Davey argues that, while the forms have advanced, we cannot claim to have advanced beyond the life which manifested itself in Jesus. It is in terms of this life that the finality of Jesus must be considered. For Davey progress and advance are essential to a living faith. He states, ‘If in points we must question the words of the historic Jesus, it is only to exalt the living and eternal Son of God, whose spirit even yet leads us on into all truth, and still takes the things of Jesus and interprets them to us’. It seems that Davey is making a dichotomy here between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Whereas he

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689 Davey, Faith, 115.
690 Davey, Faith, 116.
691 Davey, Faith, 117.
692 Davey, Faith, 120.
strongly contends for the unity of personality in Jesus and its manifestation in history, he
justifies modifying or rejecting certain views of Christ where there is apparent conflict
either with Christ’s spirit or with investigated facts. To regard Christ as a social reformer
or an apocalyptic enthusiast is only partly true. A better interpretation is Christ as a mystic. 693 Christ’s mysticism consists in his life of absolute dependence upon his unseen
Father, a selfless life devoted to God and his Kingdom. Davey interprets God and the
Kingdom as essentially one. He writes, ‘Self was denied in the service of the one true God,
unseen even to faith, but found in man and in all visible things’. 694 In other words Christ’s
absolute dependence and self-surrender was to the All. As no advance on this kind of life
is conceivable, Davey concludes, ‘It is reasonable to speak of Christ as morally or
spiritually final in his thought of God, and in the essential life built upon it’. 695

While we may speak about the finality of Christ our form of faith in Christ is not
final. Progress in theological thought includes the creation, modification, evaluation and
rejection of intellectual forms. Also our Western forms are not universal. Yet Christianity
is potentially a universal religion both intellectually and geographically. This potential lies
not in the form but in the moral finality of Christ’s spirit. Davey claims, ‘This, interpreted
or restated by the various lands of the earth in their own terms, will give us a universal and
a final gospel.’ 696 This confidence in the finality and universality of Christ is supported by
the history of Christianity. He states, ‘The faith of Christ, embodied socially in the
Church, intellectually in Christian theology and morally in the institutions of Christendom,
has shown an extraordinary power of adaptation and assimilation similar to that of all true
life.’ 697

693 Davey refers with approval to Gerhart Hauptmann’s attempt to reinterpret the story of Christ in
694 Davey, *Faith*, 121.
695 Davey, *Faith*, 121.
697 Davey, *Faith*, 125.
life, different formulations of Christian belief some of which have been truer to Christ than
others. Yet in and through them all there has been the one life of Christ’s spirit. This
finality of spirit is Christianity’s hope for the future. Yet this finality does not absolve
humanity from seeking to understand and apply its understanding in all spheres of life
including theology. Neither Christ nor the Scriptures are intellectually final. The finality
of Christianity does not mean that either the Church as it is at present or the Christian
concept of God as presently interpreted will remain unchanged. For these are forms, not
the life itself, and forms cannot give life.698 This understanding of the nature of theology
and the ways in which theological understanding finds expression is fundamental to
Davey’s theological enterprise. He continually stresses the open-ended nature of
theological discourse and development.699 It is the reiteration of such comments
throughout his writings that leads to the conclusion that his theology, which is typical of
Liberal theology, contains the potential to be developed in a radical way.

This chapter has examined the important areas involved in Davey’s Christology. We have considered how he looks at the relationship of the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith, his notion of the dependence of Christ and how he treats the Two Natures Doctrine. We have seen that he has some kenotic elements in his thinking and looked at the way he regards Christ as being final. Our examination has shown how Davey’s Christology has potential to provide a positive contribution in areas of contemporary Christology. However, our examination of his Christology has also highlighted areas where we need to treat his views with caution. Yet, this being said, it is hoped to show in our concluding chapter that Davey still provides a resource for the contemporary Christological and theological debate.

698 Davey, Faith, 127-29.
A. Introduction

At the start of our investigations into whether Davey could be regarded as a hero or a heretic we considered a range of views about him expressed in the secondary literature. The Research Questions, established in the Introduction, have guided our examination of the Heresy Trial, and of Davey’s Christology as a case-study of his theology as a whole. In this final chapter we bring together our conclusions.

Having examined Davey’s theology through the Trial and his writings, we are now in a position to identify the main principles of his theology. Our analysis of Davey’s Christology in the main body of this thesis has allowed us to identify the main features of his theology despite the relative paucity of his writings and the inexact terminology he sometimes employs. We can describe Davey’s theology as Liberal orthodox Presbyterianism. And in our next two sections, namely, Davey’s Orthodoxy and Davey’s Liberalism, we will justify this conclusion.

B. Davey’s Orthodoxy

In both his Christology and his doctrine of God Davey is clearly indebted to Hegel. The conclusion one draws about Davey’s orthodoxy is determined, in part, by the commentator’s view of Hegel and the extent to which he believes Davey’s use of Hegel leads towards heterodoxy. Fulton states the importance of Hegel for Davey, but he is guarded in what he says about the radical or potentially radical element in Davey’s

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700 J. E. Davey, ‘Johannine Presentation’, ‘Trinity’, *Jesus.* refs
Hegelianism. Thompson, on the other hand, views the influence of Hegel as threat to Davey’s orthodoxy.

We would argue that Davey finds in Hegel a particular philosophical approach, which provides both an intellectually satisfactory understanding of God and coheres with Davey’s thinking in other areas such as Christology and religious experience. While Thompson sees in Davey merely ‘an incipient pantheism’, the tone of his comments implies that the extent of Davey’s pantheism as a result of his dependence on Hegel is much more thoroughgoing.\footnote{Thompson, ‘Davey’, 21.} Contrary to Thompson we would conclude that, while there are pantheistic tendencies at times in his writings, Davey is not a pantheist, nor is he heterodox. He was certainly drawing on sources which were not usual from an Irish Presbyterian perspective, such as Hegel and other thinkers. These resources could create an impression of heterodoxy, and, in the case of Davey’s opponents, definitely did so. However, it is my opinion that Davey was using these resources from Hegel and others to articulate an orthodox theology. Moreover, Davey is not objecting to philosophy or orthodoxy \textit{per se}. He is fearful that a wrong emphasis on either would produce the static and dead theology which he vehemently opposes.

One area where our research goes beyond Fulton and the other writers who have commented on Davey is in recognizing the significance of the fact that two of Davey’s published works, \textit{Faith} and \textit{Vesture}, are for popular consumption. They are aimed at a general readership and not specifically at those with theological expertise. Davey recognizes the need for ‘befriending and giving a greater voice to the man in the street’.\footnote{Davey, ‘Church and Gospel’, 8.} This accounts for another reason why Davey was regarded as heterodox, namely that his popularization of theology led to a looseness of terminology that easily created misunderstanding on the part of some of his readers. This popularization was detrimental.
to his role of a scholarly theologian, and the consequent lack of the precision required of a scholarly theologian explains why his theology sometimes creates the wrong impression.

Davey’s popularization of his theological views was also motivated by his concern to correct what he describes as ‘the popular view’, by which he means the erroneous views popularly held, which were the consequence of an ossified dogmatic theology. Davey’s aim is to attack the erroneous popular view of traditional orthodoxy and replace it with a popular view derived from a modern theologically critical and scientific outlook. None of the secondary literature recognizes this twofold aspect to Davey’s understanding of the popular view, nor does it give adequate recognition to explaining this as part of his theological strategy. The view that Davey is heterodox arises in part from a failure to recognize the dual aim of Davey’s popular theology.

A further reason for Davey’s opponents’ suspicion of his theology is his enthusiasm for such controversial theological developments as the New Theology of R. J. Campbell. Davey’s initial support for the New Theology, which he saw as a means of popularizing his own ideas, arguably provided some grounds for his opponents’ view of Davey as heterodox. What seems to have attracted Davey to the New Theology, however, is the popularizing element, or the openness of Campbell to new approaches in theology, rather than the specific theology of Campbell himself. This is an instance where Davey’s enthusiasm at finding a popular replacement for a dead traditional orthodoxy outweighed his critical discernment in that he overlooked, wittingly or unwittingly, the theological weaknesses of Campbell’s position. Here Davey does indeed leave himself open to criticism, but it would be going too far to take his superficial support for the New Theology as indicating that Davey’s own theology was heterodox.

A. R. Holmes thinks that the term ‘believing criticism’, originating in the Scottish Free Church, is helpful in explaining the position adopted by Davey. N. M. de S. Cameron defines ‘believing criticism’ as an attempt ‘to retain both piety and substantial orthodoxy while accepting some version of the critical reconstruction of the Bible’. In his acceptance of the authority of Scripture and the Westminster Confession, whole drawing on contemporary resources for articulating their significance in a modern idiom. Davey can be regarded as an exponent of such ‘believing criticism’ rather than the heterodox theologian he opponents mistook him for.

On the basis of our discussion we can see that Davey’s use of Hegel, his support for the New Theology and the looseness of his language could create an impression of heterodoxy. Our analysis, however, reveals that his basic theology is orthodox in his views of Christology, as our case-study has shown, and that his support for the New Theology and the looseness of his language was based on his attempt to popularize new forms of theology.

C. Davey’s Liberalism

Our examination of Davey’s Christology in the previous chapter enabled us to identify what sort of Christology Davey is espousing. This is a Liberal type of Christology and dependent in part upon Schleiermacher, but also drawing on elements from Hegel, Ritschl and Harnack. None of these would have been sources that would have been particularly welcomed by his opponents.

In contrast to our understanding of Davey as a Liberal theologian both Fulton and Thompson view Davey as essentially a radical theologian but retaining conservative elements in his thought. Indeed, the title which Fulton uses for the concluding chapter of

704 Holmes ‘Biblical Authority’, 372.
705 N. M. de S. Cameron, ‘Believing Criticism’ in DSCHT.
his biography is ‘Conservative Radical’. Moreover, he strengthens his case by arguing that Davey himself preferred this classification as is evident in the latter’s lecture ‘Conservativism and Radicalism in the Church’. Thompson, on the other hand, justifies his conclusion by referring to Davey’s use of conservative and radical elements in an Hegelian fashion. This classification by both Fulton and Thompson raises an issue for the claim of this thesis that Davey’s place is firmly in the tradition of Liberal Theology. While recognizing that descriptions such as ‘Liberal’, ‘Radical’, ‘Conservative’, and ‘Fundamentalist’ reflect the opinions of the person using them, they are, nonetheless, useful in theological discussion. They allow dialogue to proceed and help the reader understand where a particular theologian lies on the theological spectrum.

Our study of Davey’s Christology has shown that his emphasis on the importance of history was to support the claims of faith that Christianity has made for Jesus. In other words, Davey saw a conjunction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. This was not the view of those who were regarded as radical at the end of the nineteenth century, such as D.F. Strauss. The general position of such scholars was that what could be discovered about the historical Jesus of Nazareth could not support the faith claims made by Christianity. In other words, contrary to Davey, they saw a disjunction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Therefore, it is historically inaccurate to describe Davey as a ‘radical’ in this sense.

However, we still must account for Davey’s use of the term ‘radical’ as a self-description. In his lecture ‘Conservativism and Radicalism in the Church’ Davey eschews Liberalism, because he claims it is ineffective. He declares, ‘True radicalism succeeds

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706 Holmes; J. T. Alderdice; Fulton, Davey, 165; Thompson, ‘Davey’, 20.
707 Fulton, Davey, 165-166.
because, unlike liberalism, it is effective by reason of enthusiasm. In this quotation Davey is drawing attention to a criticism that can be made of Liberal Theology, namely, its inherent lack of definiteness. Yet Davey’s argument that there can be no enthusiasm or effectiveness from a Liberal position is unconvincing. This is a further example of him making an assertion without providing evidence to support it.

I would argue that this stated preference for the term ‘radicalism’ rather than ‘liberalism’ is another instance of Davey’s terminological inexactitude. He is making a valid point in recognizing that a Liberal position can have disadvantages and weaknesses. And he makes the point elsewhere that a person can be critical of the position he or she holds, without repudiating the position itself. I would conclude that Davey’s choice of ‘radical’ over ‘liberal’ in this instance is not a judicious one and is atypical of the tenor of his theology as a whole. Terms that he uses elsewhere, such as ‘broad view’, are a more accurate reflection of his theology, which, as we shall now show, is essentially a Liberal Theology.

Our study of both the Heresy Trial and Davey’s writings apart from the Trial has shown that Davey’s theology can be classified as Liberal. This is evident from the fact that Davey fulfils all of the eleven criteria identified by Michael Langford in The Tradition of Liberal Theology as characteristic of Liberal Theology. These are: (1) A Use of the Bible that is not always literal, (2) Reason and Revelation in Harmony, (3) A Nonlegalist Account of Redemption, (4) The Possibility of Salvation Outside a Narrow Path, (5) Toleration, (6) Original Sin, But not Original Guilt, (7) Belief in Free Will, (8) A View of Providence that respects the Integrity of the Natural Order, (9) The Joint Need of faith and Works, (10) A minimal Number of Basic Teachings, (11) A Range of acceptable

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710 Fulton, Davey, 167, citing Davey.
711 For example, Trial, 74, with reference to being critical of, yet holding the doctrine of imputation.
Lifestyles. As we have seen in the main body of the dissertation, Davey’s emphasis on the importance of reason in theology, his attempt to adopt new methods of biblical criticism, his universalism and his toleration of other views map onto the categories Langford has identified.

All the criteria identified by Langford can be found in Davey and we shall use the term ‘Liberal cluster’ to refer to these and related ideas which can be found in Davey’s theology. This description, ‘Liberal cluster’, is being introduced because, in the course of this research, it has emerged that, underpinning Davey’s whole theological approach, there is a cluster of ideas that are central and determinative for him which can be described as liberal. While Davey has not left a large body of writing, his relatively small corpus covers the fields of the New Testament, religious experience, psychology, theology, church history and apologetics.

A further way of confirming Davey’s position within British Liberal Theology is how he himself draws upon and is influenced by British Liberal Theologians. It is interesting to compare the theologians discussed in Alan M. G. Stephenson’s study of English Modernism with those cited by Davey. Stephenson’s list of English modernists includes several scholars, such as Inge and Bethune-Baker and Streeter, on whom Davey draws to help formulate his distinctive Liberal Theology. Davey’s dissertation ‘The Nature and Value of Religious Faith’, in part, consists of a dialogue with Inge, with whom Davey has wide areas of agreement.

Another area where the Liberal character of Davey’s theology reveals itself is in its drawing upon a variety of non-theological writers such as Darwin, Einstein, Huxley, Freud and Jung. Davey acknowledges them as authorities without, however, examining their arguments in detail. What we get from reading Davey is an impressionistic treatment of

some of the authors he claims to be engaging with, but these authors are overwhelmingly liberal in character in the sense that they were either liberal theologians themselves or thinkers liberal theologians draw upon in elaborating their theologies.

A further indication of the Liberal character of Davey’s theology is his insistence that theology is dynamic and not static. This is a further area where Davey draws on Hegel. Emphasis on the dynamic nature of theology underlies Davey’s investigation of historical forms of the Christian faith in *Vesture*. It is the same life that manifests itself in the different forms of theological expression. Another feature of Davey’s thinking that enables him to think of continuing movement is the upward cosmic cycle, or better spiral, of Love. Here, as we have seen, Davey is imbibing his Hegelian notions of development and evolution through Edward Caird. He also approves of Bergson’s dynamic approach. The dynamic versus static provides a reason for Davey often being critical of both philosophy and orthodox doctrine. For him theology is not set in stone. It does not receive its final form with the interpretation of the apostles. Theology is something living and evolving in ever richer forms. Davey proceeds to use this dynamic view of reality in his understanding of the terms ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’.

Another prominent feature of Davey’s Liberalism is his optimism. This is reflected, for example, in his view of human nature, which Davey claims possesses an inherent kinship with the divine, in contrast to the more pessimistic view of traditional orthodoxy with its emphasis on human depravity. Such a view of human nature, combined with a belief in progress, resulted in an optimistic view of humanity, nature and reality. Karl Barth severely criticised the Liberal Theology in which he had been educated, because he thought its foundations were removed by the colossal suffering as a result of World War One.\footnote{Heron, *Protestant Theology*, 74-75.} It might be thought that Barth’s attack on the naïvité of Liberal
Theology would have removed the basis for Davey’s optimistic approach. However, this was not the case. Davey was not significantly influenced by the Barthian critique, nor did he change his initial and basic optimism. In this he could not be accused of shutting his eyes to reality. He himself was aware of the reality of the consequences evil and suffering and, in his personal life, had lost a brother in the war. Nevertheless, this did not deflect him from holding a theological position that was essentially optimistic.

The Liberal character of Davey’s thought is also evident in the Heresy Trial. While Davey was not the first Irish Presbyterian teacher to be attacked for his championing of Liberal theological ideas, it can be fairly claimed that, first and foremost, his significance lies here. This claim is supported by both our examination of the Heresy Trial and Davey’s own theological writings. In that sense he is both modern and Liberal. Davey can correctly be described as a modern man with a modern world-view. We have seen that the influences on him show that he has bought into a post-Enlightenment, modernist world-view, in that he takes seriously the rights of the natural sciences and the insights of Biblical criticism. Although Davey is motivated by these convictions and commitments, it does not mean that he is prepared to buy into the whole Enlightenment world-view with the secularism that is attached to it. He is prepared to recognize the insights of modern thinking, but that does not mean that he compromises his Christian faith, as charged by his opponents. On the contrary, because Christianity still speaks to the contemporary situation, Davey’s task as a theologian is to articulate his understanding of the faith to his contemporaries.

On the basis of our discussion we can see that Davey can be considered as a Liberal theologian. He draws upon non-theological thinkers and he displays characteristics typical of Liberal Theology in employing biblical criticism and adopting a modern world-view.
Nevertheless, his Liberalism manifested conservative traits, as is evident in his liking for the conservative, evangelistic hymns of Moody.

D. The Contemporary Significance of Davey’s Theology

Having pointed out Davey’s dependence on other theologians, it would be wrong to classify his theology as merely derivative. Our study has shown that Davey has made a distinctive theological contribution and can rightly be regarded as an independent thinker. He himself is at pains to point this out in the prefaces to nearly all his writings and stresses that what he is seeking to do is to make an original contribution or to consider already existing evidence from a different perspective.715

We shall now consider briefly five areas where Davey’s theology is relevant and applicable in contemporary theology, namely, The Heresy Trial, Christology, Davey’s Universalism as the Basis for Interfaith Dialogue, Fundamentalism and the Cultural Context of Theology.

I. The Heresy Trial

The Heresy Trial and its reverberations throughout Northern Irish history is the most significant feature of Davey’s contemporary relevance.

While the impact of the Trial is recognized by all, there is not universal agreement on the nature of its significance. There is a general consensus in the secondary literature on Davey that the Heresy Trial is a rerun of the Robertson Smith Trial in Scotland at the end of the nineteenth century – an Irish version of the Robertson Smith case.716 This is a correct assessment, in so far as the verdict of the Trial recognized the right to hold critical views within Irish Presbyterianism. On this point alone the Heresy Trial is of signal

715 For example, J. E. Davey, ‘Hope’, Preface, 3, 4.
716 Fulton, Davey; Alderdice; R. F. G. Holmes; A. R. Holmes et al.
importance for the Irish Presbyterian Church, and those authors who take this view are highlighting a crucial consequence of the Trial. However, we would claim that Davey’s Trial has an ongoing relevance and is not solely of historical significance. The reason for this claim is that the hope that the Irish Heresy Trial would, within time, settle the situation about higher criticism as the Robertson Smith case had done for Scotland did not become a reality in the context of Ireland. As late as 1993 Terence McCaughey wrote ‘…the Presbyterian Church is arguably still recovering from the shock, and the trial has tended to encourage self-censorship in ministers and has handed over the theological initiative to the conservative and the cautious.’\textsuperscript{717} The issues involved in Davey’s Trial are still live issues for Irish Presbyterianism and, since 1927, have influenced crucial decisions made by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, such as the decision to withdraw from the World Council of Churches and not to join the ecumenical replacement for the British Council of Churches and the Irish Council of Churches.\textsuperscript{718} Such decisions indicate that the strand of theology which Davey represents within Irish Presbyterianism has lost out to the views against which he contended. Here was another opportunity lost by Northern Irish Presbyterianism, like that of the nineteenth-century Arian Controversy involving Cooke and Montgomery, to remain an inclusive and broad Church.

2. Davey’s Christology

Davey’s Christology is characterized by an emphasis on what we have described as the ethical-historical. This emphasis allows Davey to develop his Christology along three trajectories. Firstly, he can build his Christology on morality without the constraints and

\textsuperscript{717} Terence McCaughey, \textit{Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland}, Dublin, 1993, 26-27.
limitations inherent, in his opinion, in traditional orthodoxy. Secondly, the ethical-historical emphasis enables him to emphasize the humanity of Christ. And thirdly, it provides a basis for the legitimacy of enquiry into Christ’s consciousness on the basis of the will. All of these factors contribute to Davey’s central and fundamental Christological concept of the dependence of Christ.

In our examination of Davey’s Christology we saw that he found the concept of Kenosis a valuable one in trying to understand how the divine and the human were both present in the historical individual Jesus of Nazareth. He draws on Gore as an advocate of this approach. Davey’s understanding involves an element of subordination, which is problematic in the light of the fullness of both Christ’s humanity and his divinity. It might be thought that this is an indication of heterodoxy on Davey’s part. His opponents certainly took it as such. However, this is not a necessary implication of Davey’s thought. Gore himself spoke of a subordination in relation to the Kenosis. And Gore’s orthodoxy was never questioned in the way that Davey’s was.

There is room to use Davey’s thinking to engage with contemporary Kenoticism. David Brown in *Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology* declares that Kenosis is a live issue in contemporary Christology. He comments

> …the influence of those [earlier] advocates is still to be seen indirectly in at least two ways: first, in approaches to Jesus’ consciousness quite unlike that of earlier centuries, and second, in their account of kenosis…being developed to include the life of the godhead itself.

Davey speaks about distinctions of function within the Godhead and also uses the word ‘subordinate’ referring to the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here we have a further indication of Davey’s contemporary significance, as he could provide a resource in

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the mini-renaissance that is taking place in Kenotic Christology. That Davey is still worth reading and that he still has something to contribute to the contemporary Christological debate is evident from the appearance of Davey-like ideas in the work of David Brown.

3. Davey’s Universalism as the Basis for Interfaith Dialogue

Davey died in 1960 and obviously the Church today operates in a world that is very different from that era. Davey, born in 1890, grew up in a society where the predominant ethos was Christian and not secular. Multifaith Britain was still far in the future. In 1915 Davey wrote about the relation between the Church and the Kingdom in ‘Hope’. He argued that the Church plays a vital role in the purposes of God for humanity, but at the same time it is the Kingdom of God that is sovereign. While rightly critical of some forms of the Church throughout history, Davey, nonetheless, declares the need for the Church in the proclamation of the Gospel, yet is insistent that the Church of Jesus Christ is subordinate to the Kingdom of God. Davey also believes that the Church has a universal mission, because Christianity is intended as a universal religion.

Davey is committed to the Christian faith, but there is, in his Christianity, an openness to recognize that others can be incorporated into the saving power of the Christian faith. Although Davey recognized the logic of potential further revelations beyond Christ, our view is that he did not follow this to its logical conclusion, due to the environment in which he was working. Rather, his view remained that, because Christianity had the potential for being a universal religion, it also had the potential to absorb other faiths without itself thereby being diluted. Nevertheless, Davey’s position resulted in a certain openness not only to other denominations but also to non-Christian

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722 In this dissertation we use universalism with reference to Davey to denote both (a) the mission of the Church to all, and (b) Christianity as a religion for all.
belief systems. On these grounds it is reasonable to propose that Davey’s theology can meet a need in the twenty-first century, in that it provides a basis for interfaith dialogue.

While the finality of Christ, on the one hand, and the dialogue of Christianity with non-Christian faiths and with secularism, on the other hand, are separate issues, they are closely inter-related. The view one takes of the finality of Christ has consequences for the view one takes of the relationship of Christianity to other faiths. We have seen that Davey believes that Christianity has the potential to be a universal religion, a religion acceptable to all humanity. However, he fully recognizes that this is not yet a reality, and in his work he seeks to point out both those elements and influences that are preventing this happening and those areas where Christianity still needs to open itself to others.

From our consideration of Davey’s view of the finality of Christ, he accepts the view proposed by Troeltsch, that, if a truer revelation of God than Jesus appeared, then that must be accepted on the principle that the Christian has to follow the highest revelation of God he knows. Fulton deals with this by explaining it as a possibility, because we do not know what God may, or may not, reveal to humanity. It has to be admitted that here we have a tension in Davey’s thought between what may be regarded as an orthodox position and a position the orthodoxy of which can be legitimately questioned.

One explanation of this is as follows. It could be argued on the basis of his apparent acceptance of Troeltsch that Davey has decided to agree with Troeltsch. If this is so, then Davey’s whole understanding of the Person of Jesus must be read in the light of the possibility that another greater than Jesus could appear. I would reject this explanation on the ground that it does not cohere with what our study of Davey’s Christology has led us to conclude. We found that Davey firmly links the Person of Jesus Christ with his understanding of the Second Person of the Trinity.
And so another explanation of Davey’s apparent acceptance is required. This is that Davey accepts Troeltsch’s position without realizing the implications for his Christological and Trinitarian views. If this view is accepted, the result is that we have an unresolved tension in Davey’s thought, which, in the light of our study, is not at all impossible. However, there is a third option open to us. One resource on which Davey drew in formulating his view of the Kingdom of God was the work of A. G. Hogg. Hogg’s view of the relationship between Christianity and other religions is given by Lesslie Newbigin:

In a book written much later [than the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910], but summing up the teaching which he had been giving for many years, Hogg wrote: ‘I do not see eye to eye with those who have looked for a sympathetic line of missionary approach in the conception that Christianity is the finding of that for which Hinduism has been only a seeking. Hindu faith has known of a finding as well as a seeking. Moreover, if there is within Christianity a finding which Hindu faith has not experienced, has this not been, in part, because what has been sought for is not the same? As Rudolf Otto has said, “the religion of India turns upon an altogether different axis from the religion of the bible, so that the two cannot be regarded as preparation and fulfilment”.’

This precludes considering Hinduism as a preparation and Christianity its fulfilment.

However, this does not mean that non-Christian religions have no valid experience of God. And Davey would certainly deny this. He is emphatic that the Logos is available to all. Here again he finds support from Hogg.

What we see in Davey’s theology, then, is an openness towards other faiths that is remarkable in the Northern Irish context. Davey did not develop his insights further, however, which was a missed opportunity to break down the boundaries that have bedevilled Northern Irish theology and politics.

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4. Davey and the Church in Ireland Today

Northern Ireland has been racked with political and religious tensions. R. F. G. Holmes comments, ‘…suspicion of Irish nationalism on political grounds… and the fear of Roman Catholicism on religious grounds, united to promote sectarian apartheid in Northern Ireland’, although Davey was proud of his Britishness. And Holmes goes on to comment on Davey’s attitude to the character traits perceived in Roman Catholics. He writes, ‘Even J. E. Davey, the quintessential Irish Presbyterian liberal, judged that, “the Roman Catholic harbours a love of grievance which finds imaginary grounds where real ones do not exist and exaggerates them greatly where they do”’.  

Thus there are clearly elements in Davey’s statements about Roman Catholics that can be interpreted in a negative way. However, they are not surprising because of the turbulent political events in Ireland and because they reflected real fears. But Davey recognized mutual understanding between cultures and religions is still necessary in the Irish situation. He writes

We must seek information from the other side of the political and religious frontiers, reading… [that] which represent[s] points of view alien to our own tradition and circles; attending religious services, secular lectures and other gatherings that will shew us the wealth of other approaches than our own to God and life and train us in understanding and sympathy. And we must seek, as we have opportunity, to advocate peace, reconciliation and unity of spirit by word and act.

‘Peace, reconciliation and unity of spirit’ are still qualities that are needed not only in Ireland but also in countries throughout the world. Davey’s Liberal Theology, because of its universalism and its inherent openness to other faiths, as we have seen, could provide an

727 Fulton, Davey, 45.
appropriate vehicle to use to further explore co-operation and reconciliation in a political
and religious context within Ireland, North and South.

The need exists for continuing cooperation between the Churches in Ireland. Carlisle Patterson describes Davey as a person of ‘rich experience of inter-church affairs and…deep knowledge of ecumenical theology’. Since Davey’s time the Presbyterian Church has withdrawn from the World Council of Churches (1980) and voted not to join the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (1989). On the former decision Dennis Cooke, a Methodist Minister, has commented, ‘One final impression that emerges…is that of a growing introversion within Irish Presbyterianism, an inclination to limit theological thinking within Irish Presbyterian parameters’. Davey’s openness demonstrates that this is not an intrinsic feature of Irish Presbyterianism. He provides a vision of an open, conciliatory form of Presbyterianism and witnesses to a different form of Irish Presbyterianism than the intolerant form that all too often grabbed the headlines. This openness leads us on to Davey’s next contribution to the contemporary theological scene, namely his opposition to Fundamentalism.

5. Fundamentalism

In our analysis of the Heresy Trial in Chapters Two and Three the opposition of Fundamentalists, both within and without the Irish Presbyterian Church, to Davey’s theological approach was evident and a main driving force in arraigning Davey before the courts of the Church. In Chapter One we also saw the influence of Fundamentalism both on Fulton as an interpreter of Davey and on some of those who brought charges against Davey at his Trial. Here we are seeking to discover how Davey’s theology can be applied

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to the current situation where Fundamentalism can still be regarded as a threat both in the context of Christianity and beyond in multifaith and secular societies.

In the Preface to *Fundamentalism As An Ecumenical Challenge*, Jürgen Moltmann and Hans Küng, the joint editors, state how the term ‘Fundamentalism’ has evolved in meaning.\(^{730}\) They mention the developing history of its application from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and declare, ‘Indeed, in our day the term “fundamentalism” has also been transferred to reactionary trends within Islam and Judaism’.\(^{731}\) According to M. E. Marty there are six criteria characteristic of Fundamentalism.\(^{732}\) Our study has demonstrated that Davey’s position is the opposite of Marty’s definition of Fundamentalism. Davey is a Liberal theologian, who actively promotes hermeneutics, pluralism and relativism, evolution and development and is against a literalistic interpretation of apocalyptic millennialism.

In considering how Davey’s views on Fundamentalism may be developed in the contemporary situation we actually have been provided with a concrete instance in an article by Lord Alderdice, ‘On the Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism’.\(^{733}\) He states, ‘…despite the fact that the trial took place more than 80 years ago it is important in our wider consideration of the psychology of religious fundamentalism for a number of reasons.’\(^{734}\) He further comments:

> It is worth exploring Davey’s writings in some more detail because he was one of the first eminent theologians to apply the emergent ideas of psychoanalysis.

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to religion, and one could reasonably assume from the extent of their profound reaction against this modest and shy academic, that what he wrote and said must have struck a particularly notable if dissonant chord with his fundamentalist accusers.  

Alderdice highlights the significance of the Heresy Trial and Davey’s work in *Vesture* in helping to understand the contemporary manifestations of Fundamentalism. He observes

> It is not difficult to see how Davey’s observations as a very intelligent and educated young man, soaking up the new findings of psychoanalysis and evolutionary biology before, during and after the First World War, when there was the most profound turmoil of thought, society and world order, should lead to such insights into the normal form and function of religion.

Drawing on Davey, among others, Alderdice, from his perspective as a psychoanalyst, then proceeds to develop his understanding of present-day Fundamentalism. He argues

> The idea that identity might form a useful bridge between the psychology of the individual and the group has been around for some time. The social anthropologist, John Blacking, for example, explored it in South Africa in the 1970’s using musical culture because it showed the link between individual and group feelings and action and the power of something which has affective significance, even if transitory in its performance and experience. He also showed how identity has continuity even when its external cultural expressions adapt to take account of changes in the political context and climate, especially where there is stress or conflict – a musical/cultural version of Davey’s “changing vesture” thesis in the religious aspect of large group identity.

Here is one area where Alderdice has demonstrated that Davey’s theology continues to provide a valuable resource, in this instance, for pursuing questions from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

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6. *The Cultural Context of Theology*

Davey’s work on John’s Gospel has demonstrated that theology is not formed in a vacuum but its forms at any particular time are open to, and moulded by, the philosophical ideas and cultural influences of that particular time. Davey comments:

> It is a remarkable thing, too, how the thought-currents of an age affect even the most determined of its opponents; the fourth Gospel, for example, is explicitly one of the most anti-gnostic writings in the New Testament, but it is also the most Gnostic, so inevitable is this extraneous influence. No thought ever dominated Christianity like the thought of the person of Christ; yet dressed first in Jewish clothes, within a century it had changed them almost completely for the garments of the Hellenistic philosophy, with both loss and gain.

Davey’s justification for this statement is his claim that Christianity inevitably is influenced by the thought forms of its cultural setting. In this case it is the influence of Gnosticism, which he understands to refer to ‘a movement found both within and without the early Church’. This found expression not only in heretical forms, but also influenced expression of the Christian faith, firstly in the New Testament era, especially in the Gospel of John, and later in the Apologists and the Christian Platonists of Alexandria. Davey understands this as the natural outcome of the attempt to express the Christian faith to ‘the cultured Gentile world’ and something that does not necessarily present a threat to Christianity. This process of Christianity adopting the thought forms of its age is a continuing one. Here again Davey provides a model of one way of exploring the cultural context, particularly in a Northern Ireland setting, which has been resistant to adopting new theological ideas, in order to show the contemporary relevance of Christianity.

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738 Davey, *Vesture*, 224.
739 *Trial*, 127.
740 *Trial*, 127.
E. Davey: Hero or Heretic?

This review of the areas in which Davey may be used as a resource for contemporary theological debate brings our conclusions of the study of this Liberal Irish Presbyterian theologian to an end. The motto of the Presbyterian College was chosen by Davey – ‘Buy the truth and sell it not’ (Proverbs 23.23a AV). The complete verse reads, ‘Buy the truth and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.’ This motto, and indeed the whole verse, is reflected in Davey’s own life and work. As the present day reader journeys with Davey, he or she must continually seek to enquire into the substance of his theology. Only such an approach will lead to truth, a quality that Davey is forever extolling, and, it is hoped, on to wisdom, instruction and understanding.

In answer to the question we have posed in the title of this dissertation, ‘Hero or Heretic?’, it is our conclusion that Davey can – in the Northern Ireland context – be considered to be a theological hero. He pointed the way forward to a modernized form of Irish Presbyterianism that took seriously the biblical witness and the Westminster Confession, while, at the same time, developing ways of mediating the Gospel in a modern idiom. Davey’s thought is not startlingly original. His theology has many points of contact in earlier Liberal theologians, on whom he is in many cases dependent. Having looked at the Trial and the issues arising from it, it can be clearly seen that from the perspective of his opponents Davey is a Liberal theologian. They are certainly right in that judgment. And this is why Davey is such an interesting figure. Here is someone who was trying from within the Northern Irish context, generally a conservative form of Christianity, to introduce new ideas, which he felt would help show the relevance of Christianity to the modern world.
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APPENDIX 1

THE CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST PROFESSOR DAVEY

EXTRACTS FROM MINUTES OF THE BELFAST PRESBYTERY

December 7, 1926

Inter alia, The Clerk submitted the following document, containing a series of charges against the Rev Professor J.E. Davey:-

TO THE PRESBYTERY OF BELFAST

An indictment of the Rev. Professor Davey on five several charges of teaching doctrines contrary to the Word of God and the standards of the Church.

I.

WHEREAS it is in accordance with the Word of God that He “pardoneth all our sin and accepteth us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us” (Shorter Catechism), inasmuch as “He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. v. 21), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine, we


That in publication issued by him, or by those acting under his authority and direction, entitled “The Changing Vesture of the Faith,” he makes the following statements (page 73): “Salvation is usually connected with the historic fact of Christ’s death rather than with the Divine-human character which it reveals, and we get such extreme statements as the notorious reply of an orthodox Protestant to a supposed legalist: ‘Your religion is all doing, mine is all done.’ In its relation to the forgiveness of sin this view is usually expressed in such terms as the following: ‘My sins past, present, and to come, were laid upon Christ.’ This baldly stated means that, even of my future sins, the guilt and punishment alike were expiated and borne by Christ on Calvary. The Apostle Paul was
greatly troubled about the ethical deductions from such a theory, and whatever its values in the past or present, no one at any rate could accuse is of a primary regard for Christian morality.” On page 76 of the same book he makes the statement: “Perhaps the weakest spot in the Protestant theory was the specific doctrine of imputation which underlay its theory of Justification. The theory in question rested on the assumption that God cannot forgive by grace upon change of heart, He must have some quantitative satisfaction for sin, and this was found in the positive righteousness of Christ, and in a definitive transference of man’s guilt from his own shoulders to other shoulders, i.e., Christ’s, which could bear it and bear it away.” On page 78 of the same book he makes the statement, “But Protestantism has unwittingly done exactly the same thing. The centre of its orthodox system is a doctrine of atonement resting upon a theory of imputation which is only another form of transubstantiation. Guilt and righteousness are relative terms, which refer to the personal will and cannot be dissociated from it by any mental jugglery. Guilt is our obligation to have done otherwise than we did, righteousness is our voluntary acceptance of, and abiding in, the will of God. These words simply represent states of the consciousness, and are in no sense transferable. The effects of sin may, or might, be cancelled, but a man’s guilt is merely a fact of the past which is as certain and inalienable as his birth; and again, no righteousness is of any real moral value which is not persona, appropriated, and voluntary.” On page 80 of the same book he makes the statement: “God does actually take responsibility for all things past, present and to come, but imputation is not only an unsuitable word in virtue of its commercial derivation, but it stands for an absurd theory of what actually happens in experience; and it is almost an exact parallel to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, each of these two branches of Christendom positing the same irrationality at the very centre of its system of salvation. It is surely then not for us to sneer at others till at least our own house has been set in order.”

That on the 9th day of January, 1926, when lecturing to his students, he then and there used the following words, or words to the following effect: “Paul’s philosophy of sin is different from ours – physical taint – an impersonal thing which can be transferred – can be lifted off, an impossible. Treats it as impersonal and transferable. Sin cannot be transferable.”

Witness, W.J. Grier, B.A., Licentiate, 12 Hatfield Street, Belfast.

And we respectfully ask the Presbytery of Belfast to deal with the said Professor Davey according to the laws of the Church.

Signed,
At Belfast, 8th November, 1926

II.
WHEREAS it is in accordance with the Word of God that the character of our Lord was absolutely perfect, “all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily” (Col. 2:9), “doing always those things which please the Father” (John 8:29), “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), of Whom the Father witnessed “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 17:5), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine, we


That in a publication issued by him, or by those acting under his authority and direction, entitled “The Changing Vesture of the Faith”, he makes the following statements (page 134): “Most of us have had our moments on the mountain top, moments of certainty, of exaltation, of self-forgetfulness, of mystery, of adoration, deep peace, or triumphant joy. But they do not stay; not even Paul, not even Christ Himself, had an unbroken sense of their abiding. The Gospels and the Epistles are full of the doubt, the depression, the stress, which are contrary to the human love of ease, but which make life great and heroic.”

That in a publication issued by him, or by those acting under his authority and direction, entitled “Our Faith in God,” on page 115 he makes the statement: “Whatever finality there may be about the revelation given us in Christ, it is not a finality of personality or of truth in toto. Even on the moral side of finality must be sought in the spirit, not always or necessarily in the historical forms, of Christ’s teaching or life.” On page 116 he makes the statement: “It is not the Galilean Jew who is final, but something which tabernacled in Him, and expressed itself in the forms of its time, both in thought and practice.” And on page 125 he makes the statement: “In Christ we have a perfect spirit, a perfect life, a final faith, in the imperfect vestments, social, historical, and intellectual, of a provincial Judaism, and an apocalyptic peasant piety; that is, we must penetrate beneath the clothes to the abiding reality for our final faith. This finality lies, and will lie, so far as our mind can conceive the problem and the future at all, in the moral finality of His Spirit.”
That on 5th December, 1925, when lecturing to his students, he then and there used the following words, or words to the following effect:—“Jesus was subject to the variations of nervous system—like Paul, at one time sure of the end, and at others hope that might attain to the resurrection from the dead and not be a castaway.” And on the same occasion he used words to the following effect:—“On the cross it was too late to retrace His steps, and there came the hour of physical exhaustion and nervous depression. All had gone. The kingdom had been injured, perhaps permanently, by His choice. He tasted death in the fullest sense because He felt that He had let down God. He had made the wrong choice. Christ knew He may have been mistaken. On the Cross He tasted that very experience. He knew that He had been mistaken and God had departed.” And on 28th November 1925, in lecturing to his students, he made use of words to the following effect:—“The innocent suffering for the guilty. Christ would not have put it that way. He would not regard Himself as innocent any more than good.”

Witness, W.J. Grier, B.A., Licentiate, 12 Hatfield Street, Belfast.

That in lecturing to his students he made use of words to the following effect:—“On the cross it was too late to retrace His steps. The very thing that He had feared had come. He really tasted death. Did He feel then that He had made a mistake, and had let down God?” And that, in lecturing to his students, he made use of words to the following effect:—“Gethsemane was the greatest trial. He believed in His return—was that a matter of faith? not of certainty? was His nervous system strained? was He hoping like Paul to attain to the resurrection of the dead? If He died He abandoned His work, which was important to Him, He abandoned it knowing that by His death was the way of the kingdom, but how He did not know. Was His reason in darkness?”

Witness, J.B. Wallace, M.A., Licentiate, 62 Cromwell Road, Belfast.

And we respectfully ask the Presbytery of Belfast to deal with the said Professor Davey according to the laws of the Church.

Signed,

Given at Belfast, 8th November 1926.
III.
WHEREAS it is in accordance with the Word of God that the Holy Scriptures are “immediately inspired of God,” and are “of infallible truth and of Divine authority” (Westminster Confession), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine, we, Wm J Shiels of Magherafelt, Alex Cromie, JP, of Rathfriland, SG Montgomery of Bangor, R MacDermott of Coleraine, Hugh W Murdock of Ballynahinch, Robt Mason, JP, of Portadown, Thos Johnston of Ballymena, Robt Forbes of Grange, Jas Brady of Portglenone, Jas Bryson of Portadown, Saml Saunderson of Cullybackey, Jas Edgar of Castlecaulfield, Jas Hunter of Knockbreda Road, Wm Dunn of Holywood, JC Graham of Malone Avenue, Andrew Graham, Charles Stewart, Jno J. Patterson, Jno. MacIvor, Wm. McCullough, Jno King, Wm Harbison, Alex Kerr, Maisie McCumiskey, Alfred Carson, Thos H Watson, Wm Nicholl, Minnie Shanks, Martha Shanks, Isabella Douglas, Rachel Patterson, Saml Young, Saml Hogg, Thos Orr, RW Henry, JP, all of Belfast, R Nimmon, JP, RD Gordon, Jos Goligher, JA Pollock, all of Londonderry, charge the Rev Prof Davey, of the Assembly's College, with teaching what is contrary to the said doctrine, and we specify the following facts to sustain the charge:-

That in a publication issued by him, or by those acting under his authority and direction, entitled “The Changing Vesture of the Faith,” he makes the following statement on page 49: “Infallibility is the word most used in theology in this connection, and the quest of infallibility which has proceeded without intermission or diminution, throughout the centuries in all branches of the Church, is the pursuit of the ignis fatuus, the will-o’-the-wisp of theology.” And on page 50 he makes the statement: “Faith is one of the supreme requirements in true religion, and throughout all the search of man for external infallibility the heavens are as brass; and all the infallibilities which men have laboriously pieced together crumble away at the touch of criticism, that we may learn at long last that the true way is the way of dependence and trust, and that the only infallible guide is the living Spirit of God.” On page 224 he makes the statement: “It is a remarkable thing, too, how the thought-currents of an age affect even the most determined of its opponents; the fourth Gospel, for example, is explicitly one of the most anti-gnostic writings in the New Testament, but it is also the most Gnostic, so inevitable is this extraneous influence. No thought ever dominated Christianity like the thought of the person of Christ; yet dressed first in Jewish clothes, within a century it had changed them almost completely for the garments of the Hellenistic philosophy, with both loss and gain.” And on page 230 of the same book he makes the statement: “Jewish eschatology in particular, with its programme of the ‘day of the Lord’, and its topography of the unseen world, and with all its unresolved differences of view regarding the resurrection, the intermediate state, and the like, still holds the imagination, and what is more serious, the theology of the Church in its grip. No one can deny that symbolically interpreted, the ideas have a considerable value; but as the expression of the Christian faith they are must inadequate and misleading. For example, they are full of such inconsistencies as the idea of two judgments – one at death, assigning souls to Paradise or Tartarus, and another on ‘the day of the Lord,’ when souls are apparently restored to their bodies and judged over again – such being the implication even of the Westminster Confession of Faith in its last two chapters.” And on page 83 of the same book he makes the statement: “It is surely a great pity to find men thinking that their
own safety lay in holding God to His Word rather than in a nature which is benevolence
towards all men.”

That in a publication issued by him or by those acting under his authority and direction,
entitled “Our Faith in God.” he makes the following statement on page 99: “The Old
Testament idea of God as the potentate who holds rebellious men in derision, the arbitrary
and self-centred despot who seeks His own glory, is not the conception of God which
Christ gave us, but something like its antithesis.” On page 111 of the same book he makes
the statement: “I know of no way of accepting truly the Christian faith which does not rest
upon a willingness to change it any day for a better, if the other faith in question could be
proved really more satisfactory, and more entitled to our acceptance.” On page 114 of the
same book he makes the statement: “Are Christ’s theories of the authorship of
Deuteronomy or of the 110th Psalm final for us, or His views about astronomy, or even
about angels and demons?” On page 116 of the same book he makes the statement: “It is
not the Galilean Jew who is final, but something which tabernacled in Him and expressed
itself in the form of its time, both in thought and practice.” On page 120 of the same book
he makes the statement: “We may, perhaps, in some things be driven to modify or ignore
certain views of Christ, e.g., in His theological or scientific statements, where they seem to
conflict with His Spirit, or with investigated facts. If in points we must question the words
of the historic Jesus, it is only to exalt the living and eternal Son of God, whose Spirit even
yet leads us on into all truth, and still takes of the things of Jesus and interprets them to
us.” On page 127 of the same book he makes the statement: “Intellectually and
aesthetically Christ is not our final revelation, though His Spirit is our greatest help
towards the attainment of an ever greater truth and beauty. And if in these spheres of
mental activity Christ is not a final revelation still less are our Scriptures so.”

That on the 9th January 1926, lecturing to his students, he made use of the following
words, or words to the following effect: “Pauline theology tended to one-sided emphasis.
Pauline tendency to dehumanise Christ has its outworking in the fourth Gospel, and in
many heresies which actually passed for orthodoxies till recently.” That on the 13th March,
1926, lecturing to his students, he made use of the following words, quoting Professor
Peake with approval: “The Book of Revelation is not even a purely Christian product. It
has pagan, Jewish, non-Christian elements. Sometimes the spirit of the book is not that of
Christ at all. It represents the strength of paganism rather than Christian love.”

That on 23rd January, 1926, when lecturing to his students, he made use of the following
words, or words to the following effect: “The evangelist John interprets five statements of
Christ, and every one he slightly misinterprets.”

That on 12th November 1925, he made use of the following words, or words to the
following effect: “All the arguments are against Jeroboam’s having made changes. He put
himself forward as the defender of orthodoxy.” That on 22nd October 1925, he made use
of the following words, or words to the following effect: “Abraham, the one historical
figure among the patriarchs, though I do not thing his name was Abraham.” “We have the
story of the crossing of the Jordan, a very bad imitation of the crossing of the Red Sea.”
“Joshua’s conquests not so very large. They are absurdly exaggerated in Joshua.”
Witness, WJ Grier, Licentiate, 12 Hatfield Street, Belfast.

That, lecturing to his students, he made use of words to the following effect: “The view that Jeroboam’s calves, etc. were but a reaction against the innovation of David and Solomon. These judgments against Jeroboam said to be Deuteronomic; all the northern kings thus judged.” Joshua – last part of the book said to be late. Judges more historical.” “In some places the Book of Revelations is not Christian, but pagan. So we are told, although even that has value.”

Witness, JB Wallace, MA, Licentiate, 62 Cromwell Road, Belfast.

And we respectfully ask the Presbytery of Belfast to deal with the said Professor Davey according to the laws of the Church.

Signed,

At Belfast, 8th November, 1926.

IV.

WHEREAS it is in accordance with the Word of God that the “sinfulness of the first fall and of all other sins of angels and men proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who being most holy and righteous neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin” (Westminster Confession, Chap. V) and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine, we, R MacDermott of Coleraine, HW Murdock of Ballynahinch, Robt Mason, JP of Portadown, Thos Johnston of Ballymena, Robt Forbes of Grange, Jas Brady of Portglenone, Jas Bryson of Portadown, Saml Saunderson of Cullybackey, Jas Edgar of Castlecaulfield, Jas Hunter of Belfast, Wm Dunn of Holywood, JC Graham of Malone Avenue, Jno J Patterson, Charles Stewart, Andrew Graham, Jno MacIvor, Wm McCullough, Jno King, Wm Harbison, Alex Kerr, Maisie McCumisky, Alfred Carson, Thos H Watson, Wm Nicholl, Minnie Shanks, Martha Shanks, Isabella Douglass, Rachel Patterson, Sara Crowe, Francis Parsons, Saml Young, Saml Hogg, Thos Orr, Robt Wm Henry, all of Belfast, Wm J Shiels, Alex Crome, JP, SG Montgomery, R Nimmon, RD Gordon, Jos Goligher, JA Pollock, charge the Rev Professor Davey with holding and teaching what is contrary to the said doctrine, and we specify the following facts to sustain the charge:-
That in a publication issued by him, or by those acting under authority and direction, entitled “The Changing Vesture of the Faith,” on page 80 he makes the statement: “God does actually take responsibility for all things past, present, and to come, but imputation is not only an unsuitable word in virtue of its commercial derivation, but it stands for an absurd theory of what actually happens in experience, and it is almost an exact parallel to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation.” And in a book, entitled “Our Faith in God,” issued by him or by those acting under his authority and direction, on page 53 he makes the statement: “It is here that the belief in God becomes an essential to the best life and to the healing of the soul, for the Christian conception of God is that of a loving and omniscient Being, bearing Himself wittingly all the responsibility for man’s transgressions, not merely their guilt but their consequences. Under the weight of conscious sin, I know of no sure escape for the rational, sensitive spirit of man from the burden of responsibility except the way of faith in God, whereby the man can roll the burden upon God, in the faith that God has actually borne the full responsibility of his sin, its guilt, its venom and its consequences.”

And we respectfully ask the Presbytery of Belfast to deal with the said Professor Davey according with the laws of the Church.

Signed,


At Belfast, 8th November, 1926

V.

WHEREAS it is accordance with the Word of God that “the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only” (The Larger Catechism), and it is a heinous offence to hold and teach what is contrary to this doctrine, we Wm J Shiels of Magherafelt, Alex Cromie, JP of Rathfriland, SG Montgomery of Banor, R MacDermott of Coleraine, Hugh W Murdock of Ballynahinch, Robert Mason, JP of Portadown, Thos Johnston of Ballymena, Robt Forbes of Grange, Jas Brady of Portglenone, Jas Bryson of Portadown, Saml Saunderson of Cullybackey, Jas Edgar of Castlecaulfield, Jas Hunter of Knockbreda Road, Wm Dunn of Holywood, JC Graham of Malone Avenue, Andrew Graham, Charles Stewart, Jno J Patterson, Jno MacIvor, Wm McCullough, Jno King, Wm Harbison, Alex Kerr, Maisie McCumisky, Alfred Carson, Thos H Watson, Wm Nicholl, Minnie Shanks, Martha Shanks, Saml Young, Saml Hogg, Thos Orr, RW Henry, all of Belfast, R Nimmon, JP, RD Gordon, Jos Goligher, JA Pollock, all of Londonderry, charge the Rev Professor Davey with holding and teaching that this doctrine is not thus taught in the Word of God, and we
specify the following facts to sustain the charge:—“That on the 31st October, 1925, when lecturing to his students he gave utterance to the following words or words to the following effect: “No clear Trinitarian conception in the New Testament. Only later that Trinitarian doctrine evolved.” That on January 16th, 1926, when lecturing to his students he gave utterance to the following words or words to the following effect: “In the Fourth Gospel there is a conception of Binity not Trinity. The Fourth Gospel is not Trinitarian at all.”

Witness, Wm J Grier, BA, Licentiate, 12 Hatfield Street, Belfast.

That lecturing to his students he gave utterance to the following words or words to the following effect: “Athanasius was the creator of our Trinitarian doctrine.” “We have two elements recognised, and even from the Synoptic Gospels onward we must recognise these two elements, and so we find that the Church developed along these two lines: (1) It had an adoptionist theology, (2) an Incarnation theology.” “The doctrine of the Spirit said not to be Christian till the council of Nicaea, and that in the New Testament it was a duality rather than a Trinity. The Trinitarian doctrine had to fight its way.”

Witness, JB Wallace, MA, Licentiate, 62 Cromwell Road, Belfast.

And we respectfully ask the Presbytery of Belfast to deal with the said Professor Davey according to the laws of the Church.

Signed,

At Belfast, 8th November 1926
Appendix 2

Epigraphs of Fulton’s Biography of Davey
If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free...If the Son makes you free you will be free indeed.

*St. John*

Benigne he was and wonder diligent,
And in adversitie ful patient:
Cristes lore,and his apostles twelve,
He taught, but first he followed it himselve.

*Chaucer*

He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.

*Tennyson*

Observation of the phenomena of evolution has led us to notice the method of our rational and moral development and to see that its progress is signalled by the appearance from time to time of men who give impetus to its movement. They come in the fullness of the need for them, and, by the exercise of some one excelling faculty, transcend their day, and gradually advance us toward their own level.

*Hennessy: The Coming Phase in Religion 1913.*

(Quotation supplied by Mrs. G.E. Davey).
Appendix 3

Correspondence Between Austin Fulton and Ian Paisley

The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster

Rev. Ian R. K. Paisley
Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster Central Office
12 Dongall Sq. West, Belfast.

6th July, 1953.

Dear Sir,

Owing to my being in England, I have been unable to reply earlier to yours of 23rd inst.

It is quite evident that you are not anxious to publicly defend Prof. Davey or your own insinuations concerning our statements about him.

Let me remind you that not you, but the public, are the judge and jury in this case, and it is for them to weigh the evidence, and make their decision.

In this matter the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster suffers as Dr. Henry Cooke did in his great fight, at the hands of a press subjected to pressure by an unholy amalgam of anti-evangelical force. However, we are taking steps to ventilate our repudiation of Prof. Davey’s despicable and deliberate perversion of the truth.

You say you want documentary evidence? We have invited you to come and hear the same, and if you are so unbelieving we will allow careful examination of all the documents produced, then we will give opportunity for you sir to defend your insinuation or otherwise. Nothing could be more fair to the public and nothing could be arranged better to advance the truth in this matter.

To this you will not agree. If your case is so strong, why do you fear the light of public scrutiny? Why do you shirk from public defence of your Moderator and Church? Why do you refuse this opportunity to become champion of Irish Presbyterianism? I, sir, will tell you why. You have no case. The Moderator’s words have now come home to roost and you don’t like it, but you can’t deny the facts and neither can the Professor himself. You fear the verdict of justice and truth. You tremble at what an awakened public might say. You shirk like a coward from the conflict. Failure in argument you cover up by misrepresentation in the public press. With your majority influence you think you will break the minority opposition.

In your calculations you have forgotten the God of battles. You have not reckoned that minorities with Him, Hallelujah! Are majorities. Let me remind you, sir, when Noah was building the ark he was in the minority – but he won. When Joseph was sold into Egypt by his brothers he was in the minority – but he won. When Gideon and his three hundred followers with their broken pitchers and lamps put the Midianites to flight, they were in the minority – but they won. When Elijah prayed down fire from heaven and put the prophets of Baal to shame he was in the minority – but he won. When David, ridiculed by his brothers, went out to meet Goliath he was in the minority in size - but he won. When
Martin Luther nailed his thesis on the door of the cathedral he was in the minority – but he won. When Dr. Henry Cooke declared war on Unitarianism he was in the minority – but he won.

Prof. Davey cannot publicly defend himself but when challenged cowers behind the smokescreen of the public press.

You, sir, are afraid to come and hear the evidence and defend your Moderator and champion your Church.

Thank God the cause for which I stand I am willing, publically, at any time to champion and defend.

Yours faithfully,

Ian R. K. Paisley
(Rev) Ian R. K. Paisley

Rev. Austin Fulton
Replied July 7th

Dear Mr Paisley,

Your letter has been received and contents noted.

Yours faithfully,

Austin A. Fulton
Appendix 4
Letter from J. L.M. Haire to Austin Fulton

140 Malone Road
Belfast, BT9 5LH
26 Dec.

Dear Austin,

I found this very interesting and a penetrating insight into the 2 sides of JED’s character. What he hadn’t changed when he was young – he didn’t change later – either in regard to Dialectical Theology of Church Government, and has [been] influenced neither by Barth nor Faith and Order (unlike William Temple?)

I thought you did it v. well. The radical in him SEEMED more apparent than the conservative. I don’t suggest any alterations except that on p? l 8 would you think of omitting ‘liberal’ as it is only lower down that you introduce liberalism along with conservativism’ and radicalism.

I’ve just been to see Mrs Davey – she replaced 2 ‘quotes’ in my foreword and both she and Tom Davey think one ? [to] be enough. I haven’t a copy by me so ? you adjust.

*She complained she cannot get the family to read the theological parts of your MS because they had all become pantheists or humanists.*

I hope you are feeling yourself again. We’ve 4 of our 5 home for Xmas.

I’m still interested in Ian [Paisley] & his quietness & I hope the removal of the ban on outside gatherings won’t bring him back to the front page of the Newsletter.

All good wishes for 1970,

Yours ever,

Jimmie [Haire]