

## INTO UNORTHODOX LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY OF CHARLES MAURICE DAVIES

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*By Francis Dodsworth and Sophie Watson*

THE REV. CHARLES MAURICE DAVIES (1828–1910) was a prolific author, but he is most famous for his novels, *Philip Paternoster* (1858), *Shadow Land* (1860), *Broad Church* (1875) and *'Verts* (1876), and for his journalism, written for the *Daily Telegraph* and the National Press Agency and collected and published as *Unorthodox London* (1873), *Heterodox London* (1874), *Orthodox London* (1874–75), and *Mystic London* (1875).<sup>1</sup> Through this work Davies engaged in the great mid-Victorian debate about the permissible limits to unorthodox religious practice that was taking place within the Church of England.

Early in his life Davies had been associated with the “high church,” “Puseyite,” or “Tractarian” faction of the Anglican Church which emphasised its Catholic rather than its Protestant heritage. Indeed, he was a founding member of the Society of the Holy Cross, which went on to become a key organisation in the Anglo-Catholic movement. However, by the end of the 1850s he had turned against the factionalism of the Tractarians and he used his novels to position himself as a “broad churchman,” arguing that the vitality of the Church of England depended upon comprehension, opening the church to many different modes of worship and elements of belief, rather than establishing a strict doctrinal position and expelling those who refused to conform to these principles to other churches, outside the state religion.<sup>2</sup>

Davies first articulated this position in *Philip Paternoster*, which Robert L. Wolff identifies as one of a body of “anti-Tractarian” texts that emerged around this time (191). This anti-Tractarianism was something that persisted through Davies’s later works, in which he mobilised the device of satire to undermine any romantic narrative of fulfilment or transcendence simply by embracing the “higher” ideals held out by Tractarianism, but these later texts contained additional and singular features which prompted some consternation, not only in contemporaries, but also in his late twentieth century reader Wolff.

Davies’s *Broad Church* was described by the *Athenaeum* as containing “Vulgarity and slovenliness,” while the characters the reader was meant to identify with were “despicable.” The *Spectator* thought the work “clever and readable” but also “distinctly offensive to good

taste” (qtd. in Wolff 322). The reason for this concern, as Wolff details at length, was the religious and moral conduct of the main character, Vallance. Vallance professed broad church principles and encouraged individual exploration of religion, emphasising that the greatest of all Christian duties was to love the dead and hope for reunion with them. Wolff is probably right to suspect that these sentiments were Davies’s own (318–19). At the same time, however, in his personal life Vallance not only illegally married one woman, before leaving her to transact a genuine marriage with another, he ultimately abandoned this legitimate wife to return to live, albeit Platonically, with the first. To compound this he also engaged in a variety of religious practice and experiment, going so far as to concoct his own form of communion service (Wolff 319–22). Clearly this level of individual experiment was too “broad” for some readers.

If his contemporaries were critical and uncomprehending, Davies has not fared much better with the modern critic. Wolff does concede that there was undoubtedly a purpose underlying the “broad church” novels, and that their authors took seriously the tangled and difficult lives that people led in real life, but in his commentary on Davies’s final novel, *Verts*, which dealt with the topical issue of conversion to Catholicism, he argued that it did so in a way so frivolous, and with such shocking details, that “Its lack of all restraint suggests either that Davies had no control over his material and did not realise what he was doing, or that his cynicism was matched by his determination to outrage his readers and show up the entire religious world of the mid-seventies as a joke and a sham” (322).

Davies’s journalism did not fare much better amongst contemporary critics than his novels. Early reviewers for the *Pall Mall Gazette* noted Davies’s “broad” views, but their chief criticism was the lightness of the work, which was seen as entertainment rather than a serious social study. Their reviews of *Orthodox* and *Unorthodox London* criticised the journalistic tone of his work, his use of slang, sensationalism, and attention to human interest and incidental detail, particularly in dress and appearance. His work was described as being “extremely superficial” in terms of its public worth, “just the kind of book to attract readers who like to be religiously amused, and are glad to learn how much wiser and better they are than their neighbours,” and was condemned as likely to be read at the circulating libraries (“Unorthodox” 1620; “Orthodox” 1708).

Later reviewers were more damning still, with the reviewer of *Heterodox London* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* describing the work as “vulgar,” “offensive,” “pious,” and “buffoonery,” being all the more offensive because it claimed to be written out of a sense of duty. Significantly, although they claim that this was not their main reason for disliking the book, they point out that his work “gathers together into a book the attacks that are made from many sides upon the orthodox faith” (“Heterodox” 2411). This vein continued in the review of *Mystic London*. In *Heterodox London* Davies had argued that “I felt it right to let those whom I reported speak for themselves. Free Thought, or Advanced Thought, has been too often condemned without a hearing. It is not for me to say whether those whom I chronicle are right or wrong; but I may, without undue advocacy, state my conviction that they are thoroughly honest, and intensely in earnest” (*Heterodox* xi). Further, he felt that it was impossible to suppress unpalatable arguments: “In these days of cheap literature and out-spoken journalism, it is quite hopeless to think of concealing Heterodoxy. The very best method is to be outspoken too, and show a belief in the principle that Truth is great and will prevail” (*Heterodox* xv). What this really meant, remarked the reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was that “whenever he hears that a coarse, vulgar attack is to be made upon

Christianity on a Sunday afternoon he goes to hear it, makes a note of the lecture, and publishes it" ("Heterodox" 588). The charge is not only that Davies was using the trope of duty to disguise his pursuit of profit, but that he was using the cloak of impartiality to actively engage in the critique of orthodoxy.

Clearly Davies's journalistic works attracted as much criticism as his novels, but they have not been subject to the same kind of recent critical analysis. This is not to say that they have been ignored, because they are frequently utilised by historians to illustrate elements of Victorian religious culture. However, the *Unorthodox London* series has not been analysed on its own terms, with a view to explaining what Davies was trying to achieve with these texts, or how they relate to his other published output. In this article our aim is to illuminate this dimension of Davies's work.

As David Nash points out the *Unorthodox London* series constitutes an amalgam of the genres of social investigation and sensational journalism, acting as a guidebook to the religious unorthodoxy of the city (110–11). We argue that this dimension of Davies's texts provides an important indication of their wider strategy. We might view this as what Hayden White calls "the content of the form" of Davies's work. These discourses point in two directions at the same time: towards the specific content of the religious practices being described and at the same time towards the kind of discourse being produced about them, urban ethnography, creating meaning through the process of analogy (*Tropics* 88). As detailed below, like other famous urban ethnographers of the period, or as James Buzard describes them, "auto-ethnographers" of their own culture, Davies was seeking not only to establish his own capacity to speak impartially on the subject, but he was also indicating that these religious groups were a distinct culture, already living a way of life beyond reach of the Established church. His work seeks to illustrate the futility of attempting to impose from above any particular vision of order for religious practice, and that this circumstance had perhaps developed because the church had largely ignored the needs of many people in their own communities by focusing on ritual and theology not on the social life of the religious.

In this sense, then, Davies is certainly undermining the attempts of the Anglican Church to circumscribe particular forms of worship, but his reasons for doing so are far from the cynicism asserted by his critics. Davies's significant efforts in this regard, publishing eight substantial works on the subject, were in fact motivated by a profound personal engagement with religious experiment in the form of his own spiritualist explorations. Davies's interaction with spiritualism is evident from Janet Oppenheim's classic study of the relationship between spiritualism, science, and religion in Victorian London, in which Davies appears as a classic example of the ways in which science and religion could be reconciled, particularly around the subject of spiritualism (3–4, 74–76). Davies was just one of several Anglican clergymen who were interested in the relationship between Christianity and the occult, particularly because it appeared to offer empirical proof of the existence of an afterlife. Oppenheim's work is important because she underlines the centrality of Davies's personal experience of spiritualism in his literary and religious life. Drawing upon his anonymous autobiography *The Great Secret* (1895), Oppenheim emphasises that Davies considered himself a spiritualist first and a clergyman second (74). From the 1850s right through the 1870s Davies was actively engaged in spiritualist research and a member of spiritualist circles to an extent that is never acknowledged in his writing, even in his exploration of *Mystic London*, about which, as Wolff, says, he "told much less than he knew" (317); nonetheless the final chapter of this text did detail several of his spiritualist experiences and affiliations, and debated the pros

and cons of the subject, with support for those elements he considered to be genuine (*Mystic* 362–406). In fact, it is clear that not only did Davies's spiritualist activities prompt him to have a degree of sympathy with the subjects of his research, but that the process of influence was also a reciprocal one. Perhaps drawing on the inspiration of the unorthodox religious practices he encountered, Davies himself engaged in a novel form of religious experiment in which he attempted to marry Christianity and the occult in the form of a combined service and séance under the title of the Guild of the Holy Spirit.

*Davies's Urban Ethnography*

IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT DAVIES'S work was journalistic in tone, given that it was written for publication in the press. However, as his lengthy novels illustrate, he had the time and capacity to write in other forms of prose, and therefore he could have re-written these texts, but chose not to do so. Clearly he felt that the texts fulfilled his purpose as they stood. This purpose was ostensibly to offer “a faithful picture of Religious London in 1875, divided still by the arbitrary line of the Establishment into Orthodox and Unorthodox. I desire emphatically to repeat that this division is purely technical, and implies not the smallest expression of opinion as to the truth or value of any doctrine or practice” (*Unorthodox* 6). Davies defined this journalistic detachment as central to his method: “I have never seen occasion to lay aside the excellent method prescribed by the proprietors of the journal by whose commission I first began these investigation – viz., that I should simply describe, and express no opinion pro or con” (*Unorthodox* 6).

However, in practice, not only did Davies offer explicit arguments underlining his broad church position, the whole thrust of the text, the content of its form, worked to reinforce his basic argument that attempts to enforce a rigid distinction between the “orthodox” and “unorthodox” were illogical, because the various parts of the established church were as different from one another as they were from those labelled “heterodox,” while some of those labelled as “unorthodox” seemed to be little different from those labelled “orthodox.” He quotes one reviewer's analysis from *The Annual Register* as perceptive of his enterprise:

Dr Davies . . . finds differences as great among the “orthodox” divines themselves as among some of the “unorthodox” and those on the other side of the border. It is even so; and the discovery need not shake faith in the Church of England as by Law Established; rather the reverse, suggesting Tennyson's words: – “Not like to like, but *like in difference*.” (*Orthodox*, Introduction, no pagination)

As such, vigorous defence of the boundaries of orthodoxy made little sense, given how blurred and illogical these distinctions often were.

In making this point, the journalistic style of social investigation that Davies adopted made perfect sense, because it enabled him to intermingle social observation of the minute details of daily life, dress, social status, gender, and so on, with the specifics of the location and decoration of the religious premises concerned, along with the theology of their ministers. These minute details of social observation were heavily criticised by reviewers. For example the *Western Mail* thought they rendered the work frivolous (“A Clerical ‘Casual’ Reviewed”). It may well be, of course, that these general descriptions of daily religious life in the Metropolis caused concern to reviewers because by illustrating the ordinary and everyday nature of the congregations and practices concerned, Davies's texts opened up a space for

people to identify themselves with the people described in them, rendering the unorthodox more familiar and less threatening, and perhaps prompting others to try similar experiments. But more importantly, this criticism of the superficiality of such descriptions misses the point that these were not incidental elements of the work, but central to the points Davies was trying to make, aligning his religious explorations with the social investigations of Mayhew and others.

Urban exploration, in the form of guides to the city, journalism and social inquiry, has a long and interlocking history. The “reading” of the city, its characters and neighbourhoods, either for entertainment, or to provide a “survival guide” for the new arrival unaccustomed to the ways of the big city, dates back at least into the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> Publications such as *The Honest London Spy* promised to warn visitors of the arts and intrigues by which the unwary visitor would be seduced or tricked into a life of vice.<sup>4</sup> The urban guide or “streetology” persisted into the nineteenth century in publications such as the *City Lantern* and *City Jackdaw*, and has been defined by Patrick Joyce as central to the development of liberalism, enabling the generation of knowledge that does not come from a single, authorised source, such as the church or crown, but is dispersed across, and produced from within the social body itself (195–205). It is through such acts of self-knowledge and consequent self-government that economic and efficient liberal government is made possible.

By the early Victorian period such writings were complemented by a body of literature with the aim of reform as well as instruction, highlighting the plight of the urban poor (Nord, “City as Theatre”). This literature on social investigation took two principal forms: there were the more formal studies directly connected to specific political or policy agendas, such as James Phillips Kay’s *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes . . . in Manchester* (1832) or Edwin Chadwick’s *Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns* (1842), and there were more sensational and journalistic studies like Charles Dickens’s *Sketches by Boz* (1836, originally serialised in the *Morning Chronicle* from 1833) and Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861–62, originally serialised in the *Morning Chronicle* between 1849 and 1850).<sup>5</sup> This concern to understand the social life of the people of London through empirical investigation perhaps reached its peak in the 1880s with Andrew Mearns’s *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883), George Sims’s *How the Poor Live* (1883), William Booth’s *Into Darkest England* (1890) and Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889–1903). Students of Victorian culture have found these modes of urban investigation fertile ground for analysis, drawing on them to illuminate attitudes to work, poverty and gender (Englander and O’Day, Walkowitz 18–20), and arguing that they cast light on the development of social anthropology and ethnography (Buzard, Herbert, Nord, “Social Explorer”), and even the concept of “the social” itself (Joyce, Poovey 55–97).

As the title of William Booth’s *Into Darkest England* makes clear, these works were often styled as ethnographies or anthropologies of the poor, who were configured as a race apart from the rest of the nation. *Into Darkest England* was published after Henry Morton Stanley’s *In Darkest Africa* and it refers directly to this text, not only through its title but explicitly in the introduction (Nord, “Social Explorer” 125). This was not a new metaphor, dating at least from the work of Mayhew, and it clearly signified the extent to which social investigators styled themselves as urban explorers, penetrating areas of the English city hidden from the middle classes by their flight from central urban areas to the new suburbs in the same way as colonial missionaries and explorers entered unknown regions of Africa,

Asia, and the Americas.<sup>6</sup> Davies himself employs such metaphors frequently; for example he states his intention as being to “seek the great ecclesiastical unwashed, the Pariahs of the religious caste-system” (*Heterodox* 20). The exploratory metaphors begin at once: Davies’s aim in chronicling his “wanderings” “beyond the church” as established by law, involves passing from the “North Pole of Nonconformity to the most torrid regions of Romanism,” intending to begin at the extreme edge of the subject and work backwards closer towards orthodoxy (*Unorthodox* 2). At other points he defines his intention as illuminating the darkest corners of “unorthodoxy” and “heterodoxy” in the freethinking city, contrasting these to the world of “orthodoxy” as he understood it. Davies saw himself as a journalist of religion in an almost exotic field; as he put it: “not only did I meet with strange outlying sects, such as Christadelphians, Sandemanians etc, of which the very names sounded foreign, but within Protestantism themselves I still found that marvellous complication” (*Orthodox* 2).

Nord (“Social Explorer” 124) has argued that Sims, for example, deployed the ethnographic or anthropological metaphor not only as a device to tap into the enormous enthusiasm for travel literature, but also to question why, if people could raise sympathy for the condition of far off foreign tribes, could they not do the same for the poor in their own country? At the same time this metaphor also functioned as a device to emphasise the “scientific objectivity” of the observer (132). Buzard’s work on Victorian autoethnography also emphasises the role of the ethnographic dimension in establishing an objectifying viewpoint (13). For Buzard, by practicing on their own people as if they were a culture, troping their space as ethnographic space, and describing the passage to and from this other world, Victorian writers were able to define themselves as participant observers, outside enough to be able to describe the shape of the culture, but inside enough to be knowledgeable about it and able to speak from an informed position, beyond pure theory (12). He notes, for example, that in William Blake’s early nineteenth-century wanderings his ability to move in and out of the world of the people he is observing not only establishes a distinction between his mobility and their incarceration in one locality, but also establishes his ability to generalise about them (28). Invoking the case of Malinowski he demonstrates that the movement of the explorer’s text between description and commentary demonstrates both the embeddedness of the explorer, and thereby their ability to discourse in an informed way on the culture under study, while emphasising that they have not lost their distance from it, and are thus able to analyse it (34). This was crucial for Davies who was discoursing on other religions and illustrating their sincerity, while continually emphasising that he remained a Church of England clergyman.

For Davies, treating these different religious groups in an ethnographic manner defined them as a culture. In doing so he defined them as a complete world or way of life that was entirely distinct from that of orthodox Anglicanism. It was not simply that they chose, either regularly or occasionally, to go to a different church, but that there were whole patterns of life and belief that were not simply occasional deviations from orthodoxy. This implied the impossibility of comprehension by the Anglican church, the extent to which any attempt to impose standard religious practice was faced with huge obstacles that related to far more than an hour’s specific behaviour on a Sunday, and the degree to which the complete, sufficient and discrete nature of these patterns of religious life meant that the unorthodox in religion had no need for Anglicanism. For most people the debates about the proper form of worship taking place within the church were simply irrelevant. At the same time, like Sims, Davies is implying that those in the Anglican church who were concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy

and practice should be paying more attention to addressing the spiritual needs of the vast mass of people whose faith they were neglecting. Just describing the theology of these groups would miss the fact that for them religion was a way of life and a social practice as well as a matter of faith and ritual.

The attention paid by Davies to the sartorial, social, and personal details of the congregations and their ministers, along with the nature and décor of the sites of worship themselves, is therefore not only amongst the most useful resources for the modern reader looking for a window onto Victorian culture, but it is also vital to Davies's discourses, because these are the devices he uses to make connections between the social and religious life of the city. These observations emphasise the variety and universality of unorthodox practice, and, equally importantly, they operate as a form of criticism of the more "Ritualist" and exclusive elements of the established church, which, he argues, tend to ignore the lived experience and practice of faith.

### *Class and Conformity*

OF COURSE, THE COMPOSITION OF congregations and the relationship between social stratification and religious geography and allegiance has been the subject of considerable historical analysis and debate. The period of Davies's explorations witnessed the relative growth and vitality of non-conformist and unorthodox religious populations both in London and worldwide. David Martin shows that the "free" churches, those outside the control of the Church of England, if not expanding in absolute numbers, were at least coming to hold a greater share in the overall proportion of worship, as they held their ground in relation to the growing population, while attendance in the Church of England declined sharply across all classes (Martin 27). Thus, by the early twentieth century a survey of religious attendance found 1 ¼ million people out of the London population of 6 ¼ million attended church or chapel, of which ½ million were non-conformist and ½ million Church of England, with Roman Catholics constituting the majority of the remainder (Martin 26).

The success of nonconformity in this period was clearly marked by the sheer size of some of the congregations Davies encountered. Perhaps most notable in this regard were the Metropolitan Tabernacle at Elephant and Castle and the City Temple on Holborn Viaduct. Both churches owed their considerable success to their charismatic and popular preachers. In 1859 the vast Metropolitan Tabernacle building was constructed to house the growing congregation attracted to the preaching of Charles Spurgeon, whose commitment to Calvinistic Baptism and renowned oratory skills drew unprecedented numbers of followers: on one occasion he preached at Crystal Palace to an audience of 27,000 (Spurgeon 77). By 1875 the church had a membership of almost 5000 and the building could house 6000 (82). This was a congregation which saw themselves as "the purest part of the sect which of old was everywhere spoken against, and we are convinced that they have, beyond their brethren, preserved the ordinances of the Lord Jesus as they were delivered unto the saints" (9). Indeed Spurgeon argued that this was the original form of Christianity (10).

The City Temple shared the presence of a renowned and powerful preacher in the figure of Joseph Parker whose arrival prompted the building of the Temple on Holborn Viaduct in 1873 (Bateman 71). It was Parker's preaching which initially marked the church out as distinctive, to such an extent that Charles Bateman claims "His name and fame had worldwide significance. No intelligent Colonial or American saw the sights of London if he did

not visit the City Temple. It was Spurgeon and Parker who drew the largest congregations in the Metropolis, and when the great Baptist passed away the pastor of the City Temple stood first and foremost" (69–70).

The reach of both churches also extended beyond their immediate congregations. City Temple saw itself as the "Cathedral of non-conformity" where a diversity of denominations were welcomed, and at which the other "free churches" held their general meetings (70). From its earliest days it thus established itself as a space where different cultures mingled to debate the religious and political questions of the day. The Metropolitan Tabernacle did not extend itself out in quite the same way, but it was nonetheless active in society, with philanthropic organisations which included seventeen almshouses open to women over sixty in need of assistance and a school room (Spurgeon 93–94), and an orphanage with an associated infirmary, and a pastors' college for training ministers (Pike 149–79). The Tabernacle was also involved in the Colportage Association, established in 1866, which was a non-sectarian organisation which distributed religious literature throughout the towns and cities across England (Spurgeon 114–15). The Tabernacle also lent support to other chapels via a building fund and a book fund, and was involved in missionary activity in London, particularly the East End, but also in Hamburg and Templin in Germany (117–19). It was this outreach that distinguished Spurgeon in Davies's eyes: "the immediate effects of his oratory are even less striking than the numerous works of beneficence (for example, an orphanage at Stockwell for 220 boys) and elaborate ecclesiastical system, which, around the Metropolitan Tabernacle as their centre, have grown up as the indirect results of his preaching and personal influence" (*Unorthodox* 37).

These churches were not isolated cases. In Mr Varley's Free Tabernacle in St James's Square, Notting Hill, the church was reputedly nearly always full with 1,200 worshippers and according to Davies was successful at attracting the poor due to the free and un-appropriated seats (*Unorthodox* 59).<sup>7</sup> In this period costs associated with attendance, such as the tipping of pew openers in the established churches, mediated class differences in religious practice. The Tabernacle at Newington had an abundance of unreserved seats and this was one reason it was filled "in every nook and corner" each week for the services held by Spurgeon, referred to by Martin as the high priest of non-conformity (463).

Another dimension of the class element to religious practice was the inclusion or exclusion of poor people, particularly those seen as disruptive, from religious sites, usually effected by the physical presence of men at the entrance. Just around the corner from Spurgeon's Tabernacle, at the primitive meeting place of the Walworth Jumpers under a railway arch, Davies notes that a doorman scrutinised arrivals at the door and rigidly barred "Young Walworth, in the shape of ragged shock-headed boys and draggle-tailed girls," while a section of "New Cut sweldom got in only by dint of considerable manoeuvring and no little physical persuasion" (*Unorthodox* 90). Once they had entered the space these young men, at least during Davies's visit, talked loudly and whistled with their hats on, having apparently come only for a "lark." Here too the practice of charging three pence from those who were not members of the church was deployed to deter a "rough element." However, many churches were keen to attract the "respectable" working class into their congregations: attendance at Surrey Chapel, where temperance was advocated, was seen at the time to offer a useful counter attraction to the gin shop for local artisans (226).

In his study of non conformist ministries Kenneth Brown suggests that the more marginal sects such as the Primitive Methodists were more likely to attract the poor, while their



ministers were recruited from the mines and workshops, until the late nineteenth century when shops and schools became a more popular recruiting ground (qtd. in McLeod *Piety* 325). Hugh McLeod, however, contends that the picture was less clear, with little consensus at the time as to the relation between the churches and the working class, with writers such as Friedrich Engels suggesting that cities were the stronghold of irreligion, on the one hand, and others suggesting that urbanisation stimulated religious pluralism (*Piety* xix–xxii). The religious census of 1886–87 revealed clear class differences nevertheless, with 37% attendance in wealthy districts, 24% in middle-class districts, 18% in lower-middle-class districts, 16% in upper-working-class districts, 13% in middle-working-class districts, and 12% in poor districts (*Piety* 32). McLeod sees poor living conditions as providing one explanation for working class alienation from religion, combined with growing class consciousness and the failure of the church to meet working class needs (*Piety* xxiii).

Susan Budd takes a different line and argues that both middle- and working-class Victorians were drawn away from organised religion and towards radical religion and politics, but that class background tended to influence the direction they took on leaving the established church. For Budd, the ethical movement, the Positivists, liberal Judaism, and the Theistic churches drew their congregations from largely middle-class attendance, while the labour churches and the secular movement were largely working class in constitution (274).<sup>8</sup>

The link between radical religion and politics is a constant theme of Davies's explorations. Davies noted that where orthodox preachers skirted religious questions, "that prejudice gradually dies away as we descend through the strata of Nonconformity, and finally disappears altogether when we reach the abysmal region of pure Theism" (*Unorthodox* 12).<sup>9</sup> His explanation for this was that once one had abandoned dogma, one cannot pretend to give spiritual direction, therefore the sermon must engage with the "religion of humanity." But the evidence contained in his work also suggests deeper reasons for this, taking the form of both the lived nature of radical religion, whereby religious conviction necessarily implied social action, and also of the established nature of the Church of England, which often necessitated that political critique involved engagement with the position of the church.

Perhaps the most notable site Davies visited at which religion and politics intersected was South Place Chapel, Finsbury, which was built by its first minister William Fox in 1817 for a society of members established in 1787 in rebellion against the doctrine of eternal hell. Under his ministry South Place was established as a place of "advanced thought" and progressive activity. For example, amongst the causes supported by Fox were those for the spread of popular education and the repeal of the Corn Laws (Ratcliff). Under the stewardship of Moncure Conway, a well-known advocate of anti slavery from the USA, South Place evolved into a place which Davies found advertising itself as "a free Theistic society" which practised a "liberated Unitarianism" (*Unorthodox* 3, 9). This was the "north pole of nonconformity" Davies described above, and it is striking that he began his book with this notable institution. Here he encountered a service that took the form of a series of discourses punctuated by hymns, which were sung only by a choir, without congregational participation. There follow, during the course of the service, several other hymns and an anthem, their aim appearing to be "to foster a devotional spirit in those present by bringing them together to listen to spiritual music" (4–5).

The spoken parts of the service were more conventional in form, if not in content. There were three readings, one from the Old Testament, one from the New, and one from a more

modern religious work, such as Theodore Parker or Bunyan (5). The “sermon” itself, the content of which was advertised in advance in the Saturday press, could engage with a wide range of subjects. Conway’s sources were diverse and he published his sermons in 1873 under the title *The Sacred Anthology*, which contained passages drawn from various classics of spiritual literature from across the globe (Smith 113). Davies gives various examples. In one sermon the immaculate conception was described as “an insult to maternity” and the logical extension of the Protestant doctrine of incarnation, when it should, in fact, be seen simply as the deification of the female principle in nature (*Unorthodox* 3). Another sermon on “Christ and Herod Today” saw the nativity as a legend whose purpose was to illuminate the conception of truth in the human soul and the operation of the Divine Spirit on the heart, while Herod stood for the actions of the world in attempting to crush the Christ principle (3–4). There was also a discourse on Voltaire and the value of scepticism as a religious practice (7–9). Davies pointed out that there was nothing here which could be called a prayer in this service, although this was relatively unusual and most of such events did have prayers of some kind. However, the nature of the “religious” discourses on display here was quite characteristic of “freethought” as applied to religion, with the emphasis on reason, the opposition to organised religion and dogma, and attempts at naturalistic or symbolic readings of biblical material. In 1888 the South Place Religious Society, as it was known, became the South Place Ethical Society.

There is a clear link at several points in Davies’s texts between radical religion and radical politics, and this particular combination is often linked to class. However, the overall role of class in Davies’s discourses is less clear. He certainly considered the location and class of his subjects important enough to discourse on repeatedly, but the overall effect of his work is to emphasise the difficulty in straightforward attempts to map social and religious affiliations according to class or locality. His meticulous observation and his keen eye for detail pervade the texts, and his confident assertions of the class position occupied by the people he meets are highly calibrated and nuanced, but also definitive. Davies categorises his subjects through markers of class such as dress codes, mode of transport to the church or chapel – the string of carriages at Little Portland street Unitarian chapel being evidence of an entirely upper class congregation – are mobilised to explain his class categorisation (*Unorthodox* 33). At Spurgeon’s Tabernacle, for example, he describes a congregation which is exclusively middle class with “no symptom of the very poor, or, to judge by outward appearance, of the very rich” (67).

However, the heterogeneity of congregations and their cultural practices across and within both orthodox and unorthodox congregations described by Davies make any generalisations about class patterns on church or chapel going difficult to propose from these texts. The diversity and sheer vibrancy of the different unorthodox religious sites explored by Davies and their links with the intellectual and political world is difficult to fully capture here, however in his description of “the exuberance of religious life in London,” he details all the different kinds of religious services available over Easter, a task which takes him two full pages of text (4–5). This diversity is described by Davies as follows: “At no point of history, probably, since the schools of religion and philosophy jostled one another in the streets of Alexandria, have the forms of religious life been more exuberant and diversified than in London at the present time. . . . We have the strangest spectacles of groups of religionists gathering round a single teacher, or linked together by a common sentiment” (260).

*Culture and Geography*

THERE WAS, THEN, CONSIDERABLE differentiation in religious practice across London, which has been linked in various ways to class, a feature drawn out by Davies in his own analyses. Equally, however, it is clear that Davies did not see class as determining religious practice in any particular way, focusing instead on the charismatic influence of the teacher or the presence of “common sentiment.” Historians and critics have also come to similar conclusions, with Sarah Williams arguing that, rather than deploying class as a category to explain religious affiliation, historians of religion need to follow the lead of social historians more generally and explore the ways in which classes and other social groupings do not exist outside of their enactment and figuration, rather they are formed and differentiated through designation and representation.<sup>10</sup> Davies’s work is ideal for the kind of work Williams has in mind, precisely because his texts played a key role in the figuration of Victorian religion for the general public, and because he seems to proceed on the assumption that other elements of culture were equally significant as class, either in drawing people together for worship, or holding them together as they emerged from this communal activity.

Addressing the history of urban religion in cultural terms, as Williams suggests, also draws our attention to elements of the social world beyond class, into concerns with gender and aesthetics, which were as central to the Victorians as class, and as important in Davies’s discourse as they are to cultural historians. For example, Davies is clearly attuned to the appropriate appearance for ministers during this period. Moncure Conway, of South Place, is described as a “by no means clerical looking gentleman,” directing the service “in the garb of every-day life,” no doubt dispensing with the distinction between speaker and audience in line with his distaste for “priestcraft” (*Unorthodox* 4, 7). The Jumpers’s minister, Mrs Girling, a thick set middle-aged Suffolk peasant woman with piercing eyes and high cheek bones, is described as not very clerical with her red merino gown and “somewhat jaunty black bonnet,” and together with her assistant is criticised by Davies for wearing clothes of the most unecclesiastical character (92). As Deborah Valenze suggests, however, it was not uncommon for female preachers in this period to overturn conventional standards of privacy and propriety (10). This, though, was a woman who stood up for herself and who was not discombobulated by the New Cut swells, who reputedly got as good as they gave from her.

Davies, then, certainly had clear notions concerning appropriately clerical appearance at the time, but he also presents a rather critical account of the conservative views of Broad Churchmanship at an earlier moment when the Reverend Llewellyn Davies had scandalised two women in the parish while sporting a beard, “that hirsute adornment of manhood,” who passed their horror on to the Bishop of London, who thereby refused to officiate at a service where the Reverend was present unless he shaved (*Orthodox* 43). On hearing this anecdote Davies ruminates with amusement how a man’s orthodoxy in the church is almost measured by the length of his beard and “none but fashionable Evangelicals nurse shoulder-of-mutton whiskers,” while Reverend Davies’s clerical brethren have “now outstripped him, both in hirsute adornments and in the doctrines they are supposed to symbolise” (44–45).<sup>11</sup> As noted above, such anecdotes drew considerable criticism from reviewers, signifying the journalistic tone of the work and Davies’s aim to entertain rather than instruct. But this misses the point Davies was trying to make with a degree of seriousness, one repeated throughout his explorations, about the culture of religious practice in the heterodox world.

Alongside class and appearance, gender is a subject to which Davies pays considerable attention. At various points in the text Davies draws attention to women preachers whom he encounters, like Mrs Girling of the Jumpers. Davies highlights women's activity in discussing the pressing issues facing Victorian society. The presence of women in the religious sphere was not, in and of itself, particularly controversial: not only was religion concerned with the salvation of humanity as a whole, but care of the soul could easily be aligned with the nurturing role of the wife and mother, although as Megan Doolittle has shown, provision for religious upbringing and the transmission of moral and religious orthodoxy was also something inscribed in the duty of fatherhood. What was more controversial was the exposure of women to – and participation of women in – the radical political and social critique that accompanied heterodox religion. Nonetheless, despite Coventry Patmore's popular poem "Angel in the House" (1854) which extolled female domesticity and which embodied a strong sense of Christian morality and sexual purity and placed women firmly in the home, or Booth's comment that gender differences in religious matters were most appropriate, the church was an important space for women.<sup>12</sup> If workplaces and social clubs were predominantly (if not exclusively) men's spaces, albeit something being challenged by the huge rise in women's clerical positions, many non-conformist churches and chapels provided significant opportunities for women's public activity, alongside the philanthropic and missionary activity that was such a feature of Victorian women's public work.<sup>13</sup>

However, women's role within the church was not entirely liberating. Despite regarding women as equal before God, Spurgeon strongly believed in women's role as home-based and supportive.<sup>14</sup> Evangelicalism and low and broad church Anglicanism were strongly connected to a culture of Victorian manliness through the figure of the muscular Christian. Donald Hall suggests that a "central, even defining characteristic of muscular Christianity [was] an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself" (*Muscular* 7). For Andrew Bradstock, Spurgeon was a powerful exponent of a distinct non-conformist brand of Christian manliness, although for him manliness was to be lived, arguing as he did against the celibacy of the Tractarians, which he saw as unnatural and elitist (218–21). Interestingly, this figure does not occur too frequently in Davies's writings, surfacing only at St George's Hall, Langham Place, where the muscular Christian who takes his dip in the Serpentine represents the "crème de la crème" of orthodoxy (*Orthodox* 75).

Davies is clearly aware of gender differences and in most of the sites he visits he records the proportion of men to women in the congregation, where his observations concur with the broader picture of a greater or equal number of women across many of the churches and chapels. This concurs with McLeod's study which finds that Women dominated church attendance: by 1902–03 women constituted from 57% (Congregationalists) to 66% (Anglicans) of the church and chapel going public (*Piety* 159).

Davies is also alert to gendered variations in religious cultural practices. Thus, he remarks on the separation of the sexes in the Moravian church and the similarity of this practice with that of the Ritualistic churches. At the Benedictine Monastery in Brunswick Square he finds himself to be the "Jack amongst maidens" in the front row of a congregation occupied by a dozen women dressed in "quasi-religious costume of dark gown and white cap" with an age range from girlhood to forty, and who "warbled like nightingales" but who, like Davies, seemed not to have had the faintest idea of what was going on in the service (*Unorthodox* 261). In pursuit of an Evangelical church Davies takes himself off to the "outskirts of civilisation"

in the market gardens of West London, where at St Jude's he finds a large upper-middle-class population with an "excess of women" whom he deemed neither fashionable nor intellectual. Indeed, on the contrary, these women were described as devout spinsters dressed in the garb of every day life (*Orthodox* 28).

This figure of the spinster is mobilised on several occasions, presumably easy to define by her lack of a male companion, and often rather pejoratively presented. For example, at St James Piccadilly Davies reports finding himself amongst a "large number of ladies and inflexible spinsters occupying two or three chairs," or the Evangelical spinsters at St George's Hall, whom he found to be in a "flutter of excitement" on his visit (75). These spinsters stand in stark contrast to the pretty ladies' maids who accompany the Evangelical ladies to the Portman chapel on Baker Street (93). In a typical church of the Establishment, St Peter's church Kensington Park, which he describes as set within an excruciatingly genteel area, Davies finds a huge congregation where during the Litany the ladies criticise each other's millinery (106). Interestingly women are not required to dress so formally during weekday services as he discovers when he visits the Church of St Matthew at Bayswater where the women were dressed in their best bonnets (115). At All Saints St Margarets "there are two well defined types of young ladyhood – handsome, dashing girls and pretty frumpish ones" (160).

There is little sense of ethnic or racial difference in Davies's texts, aside from a more detailed description of the West London Synagogue, where Jewish dissenters from Orthodoxy congregated in large numbers. No doubt this can largely be explained by his failure to engage in any depth with the eastern parts of London. On one rare such visit to the south east, to the Plumstead Peculiars who met in the "unromantic suburb" of Woolwich, Davies found a very poor congregation in a grimy looking chapel where a "certain coloured gentleman" was the "only shining light amongst them" (*Unorthodox* 295, 299). On another occasion at Spurgeon's Tabernacle he comes upon the American Jubilee Singers who have in their midst nine emancipated slaves whom Davies describes as being of "pure African type" and "real African tint" and who sung old slave tunes to a large audience (334–35).

In addition to the social composition of the congregations, Davies's concern with the aesthetics of religion extends to consideration of the location and nature of the churches and meeting halls themselves. Like other elements of his account, there is a clear link to class here, but it is not exhaustive or determining. There has long been an attempt to establish a link between class and the geography of London religion. According to Martin, contemporaries were very clear about the connections between geographies of socio-economic class and church or chapel attendance (26–27). Where there were enclaves of tradesmen or the middle classes, churchgoing was more prevalent, although this level of attendance was under threat with the middle-class flight to the suburbs; where there was a concentration of those living in poverty and miserable surroundings, alienation from the churches was widespread. Martin identifies, on the one hand, a scarcity of dissenters in the richest part of Greater London, and on the other, a strong presence of trades people amongst the nonconformists, a group he found to be socially mobile (21–24). McLeod highlights the predominance of high Anglicanism in Westminster, and of religious Dissent in the City of London, while Islington and Clapham were famous for the prevalence of evangelical Anglicanism within the upper-middle classes (*Piety* 30). Once again, however, there is no obvious correlation in Davies's work between particular sets of religious practices and particular locations: the subjects of Davies's interest are widely dispersed throughout the city, with the singular qualification that he rarely ventures

into the East End. However, there are nonetheless some significant distinctions to be drawn out between sites.

Differences across orthodox and unorthodox churches and chapels are inscribed not only in the location and exteriors of religious sites, but also in the internal furniture and layout of the building. Typically, as McLeod points out, unorthodox sites were barer, simpler, and less adorned than the orthodox churches, with the deliberate intention of attracting people who would feel out of place in the more exalted surroundings of traditional churches (4). For example, South Place chapel in 1874 was described by Davies as “of course, plain in the extreme and contains none of the paraphernalia of worship except a pulpit” (*Unorthodox* 4). By 1876 the interior had been entirely repaired with the old pews replaced by cushioned benches and a modern desk on a platform in the place of the pulpit (10). The Plymouth Brethren’s democratic practices in worship were also reflected in the lack of a pulpit or reading desk (179). Portman Chapel at Baker Street was described as looking more like a county court than a religious building with a huge pulpit and reading desk. The Quaker church was similarly referred to as an unpretentious and very plain building with seats around the four walls, and benches running laterally across the centre, with two rows facing the entrance raised on a dais (193).

Many of the unorthodox sites were described in rather more negative terms, for example the chapel of the Particular Baptists was to be found “in a dingy ill-favoured slum” south of Notting Hill high street and was a “low, beetle-browed edifice, bearing on its front the outward and visible signs of the strictest sect of Calvinism” as though what should be written on the door is “all hope abandon, ye who enter here” (130). Others were hard to find, like the chapel of the Seventh Day Adventists in Mill Yard, Goodman’s Fields, an unlikely-looking unsavoury place, which reminded Davies of Dickens’s Old Curiosity Shop and which felt like passing into the region of Dreamland (228).

At the extreme end of the unorthodox spectrum we also find the most unorthodox of religious spaces. Thus, the Walworth Jumpers met in a roughly boarded-in site within a railway arch of the London Chatham and Dover Railway on the Walworth Road. Davies describes it as “lighted with sundry old window-sashes, of which the broken window panes too suggestively recalled the missiles of the Walworth Gentiles” (90). The seats for the congregation were extemporised from rough planks, the pulpit was a carpenter’s table covered with green baize, and a single gas pipe ran down the archway supporting two burners shedding a dim light. In Davies’s account this place eventually became too hot to hold the large numbers who attended with the result that they moved away and re-emerged “jumping” in a back slum of Chelsea at College Place. Here the only visible sign demarcating the site was “a sweep’s broom projecting above the door of the next house, where the sweep smokes his pipe at the front gate and indulges in rude remarks as the Jumpers draw up in their neat phaetons.” Inside he found three benches placed in an open square like an orchestra for the “jumping saints to practise their devotions.” This place was apparently a cathedral compared to their former site, spacious and well lit and newly white washed. His visits to the Walworth Jumpers led Davies to conclude that “chapels of this class are generally more whitewashed in proportion to the peculiarity of the doctrines preached in them- the whiter the wash the stranger the creed” (103).

At the other end of the spectrum of unorthodoxy there seemed to be little architectural distinction between these sites and those of the more orthodox Anglican churches. For example, at the Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square, where Irvingism was practised,

Davies found a cathedral-like edifice whose resemblance to a Church of England building, and indeed its service, forced the question: why the separation? (152). Similarly there was nothing material to define the New Jerusalem Church of the Swedenborgians as different from the Church of England, with its large and handsome building and chancel occupied by a communion table, flanked by a reading desk and pulpit (161). At the same time, Davies describes some of the orthodox sites as being more similar to unorthodox sites in their plainness. Thus, the Church of St Matthew at Bayswater looked like a railway station, while York Chapel in St James' was said to be ugly, old fashioned and drab looking, like a Quaker chapel (*Orthodox* 114).

*Conclusion: Davies's Unorthodoxy*

THESE DETAILED ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS of religious communities across London were mobilised by Davies in order to illuminate the variety of people and places involved in religious practice across the city. By developing his discourse in the form of an urban ethnography, Davies was not only making a claim to be able to act as an impartial, but informed observer, he was emphasising the extent to which the religious groups he encountered were a culture apart, living a distinct religious life which was entirely self-sufficient and had no need of the Church of England, indeed they were entirely insulated from the parochial debates internal to the church about the permitted degree of unorthodoxy in ritual and theology. His message to those seeking to impose a rigid set of criteria on membership of the national church was clear: English religion was already beyond their control. Their focus on ritual and theology to the exclusion of the reality of the religious life of the city meant that not only were they failing in their duty to the people, they were in danger of becoming an irrelevance.

If this was an unpalatable message, equally disconcerting was the fact that many of the characters in Davies's descriptions of unorthodox and heterodox life were clearly ordinary people of all classes, just the sort of people, indeed, who might be reading the books themselves, and who might therefore identify with people in the texts and feel able to perform their own religious exploration. Certainly there seems to have been some anxiety amongst reviewers that Davies's texts made the heterodox and the experimental in religion less threatening, less alien. Through their descriptions of ordinary people in familiar places practicing unorthodox faith, Davies's texts threatened to domesticate unorthodox and heterodox religion, undermining the conceptual and social division that some members of the Church of England were working so hard to construct, a division that relied upon configuring the unorthodox as strange, improper and slightly suspect.

Davies expended considerable energy in pursuit of his goal of demystifying unorthodox religion. In the final part of this conclusion we want to return to the question raised in the introduction about the relationship between this journalistic work and his novels, and their broader significance for his own religious life. Beyond serving as a vehicle with which to amuse his audience, and to chide the Tractarians and Ritualists, the process of compiling these texts seems to have had a profound effect on Davies himself, prompting him to engage in some religious unorthodoxy of his own. At this point Davies's journey from orthodoxy to heterodoxy and mysticism becomes a personal journey as well as a literary one.

In *Unorthodox London* Davies set out to explore those churches that officially stood outside the Church of England, albeit some of them actually claimed membership of it,

while *Orthodox London* explored the beliefs and practices of those considered to be within the church. Davies began his research from a position where the term “unbelief” implied those outside the standard of belief of the Church of England (*Heterodox* xii, xiv). The idea of an established national church to which all full members of the social body should belong remained fundamental to his mindset. These volumes, implicitly or explicitly, engaged with the core of the issue of what it meant to be a member of this church and how far its comprehension could extend. Davies’s message in these books was that the desire of the established church to enforce a particular vision of orthodoxy and to police its boundaries was doomed, because the reality of religious practice within the established church itself already exceeded these bounds. Attempts to define the orthodox simply depended upon one’s personal perspective: as Davies put it himself: “I name it unorthodox” London simply on the principle that “orthodoxy is one’s own doxy, and heterodoxy everybody else’s doxy” (*Unorthodox* 2). Attempts to control and manage religious opinion and practice according to a prescribed set of beliefs were not simply misguided, but often irrelevant, as the vast body of ordinary (and often extraordinary) people in metropolitan London was engaged in a variety of religious experience, practice, and discourse which either ignored these debates about orthodoxy and unorthodoxy entirely, or claimed, used, disputed, and complicated these categories in ways which greatly exceeded the bounds of the imagination and authority of those seeking to shape national religious life according to a set pattern.

At the same time, the unorthodox churches were not immune from criticism. The service which the members of the South Place congregation heard is described as “cold” because the congregation did not actively participate in the service, particularly the hymns, although this is something Davies recognises also happens in the Anglican church (4–5). But Davies is also keen to disturb the stereotypical view of the Church of England as colourless and uninteresting, in contrast to the particularity and variation associated with the various sects (*Orthodox* 62). It might be argued that his purpose here was not only to defend the established church against accusations that it was failing to supply spiritual needs better attended to by the free churches, for he ultimately remained a member of the Church of England, but also that he was attempting to get readers to look more closely at the nature of the “orthodoxy” many were defending against the “assault” from dissent. From his observations there was less apparent difference between orthodox and non orthodox congregations than might have been expected, the boundary between the Protestant Dissenters and those of the very Low Anglican church being hard to distinguish where each in his view had “become important agencies for leavening the masses” (*Unorthodox* 58). The varied nature of the Church of England itself implied that many fears of the “unorthodox” are unfounded, given that much unorthodoxy already coexists happily within the church itself. Nevertheless he does refer to the “hauteur” of the Church of England and the need for this to be laid aside if the church is not to leave the masses to irreligion and nonconformity (*Orthodox* 373). In this he is particularly critical of the prevalent idea amongst the advanced Ritualists that religion is a luxury of the upper classes to which the poor should only be admitted as “raw material.”

By the time he extended his investigations deeper into *Heterodox London* Davies had moved into slightly different territory. Those he investigated for this volume “asserted no lot or inheritance even in the larger Church of England, yet most . . . were, in their own sense of the word, religious” (*Heterodox* ix). Here he had moved beyond the realm of the nature of doxy and sought to engage with the issue of the nature of religious thought and activity more generally. In *Heterodox London* he was engaging with the world of “free” or “advanced”



thought, a subject he freely admitted was not clearly defined in his own mind at the outset of his journey: "I spoke and thought vaguely of 'Infidelity,' 'Free Thought,' 'Secularism,' and 'Atheism.' I scarcely realised the lines of demarcation between them, or how they met and blended imperceptibly the one in the other" (xi).

This engagement brought him renewed respect for the subjects of his enquiry who, with a couple of notable exceptions, he saw as entirely in good faith and of spiritual inclination. Davies generally goes to great lengths to detail their doctrine and liturgy, with emphasis being laid on the sincerity of their beliefs, describing the freethinkers as "thoroughly honest and intensely in earnest" (xi). Equally, they are not entirely discounted as cranks or the easily misled: the congregation at South Place chapel in Finsbury is described as hearing a variety of radical discourses, accounted in detail, which denied the immaculate conception, the factuality of the Bible and the desire of Christ to establish a church (*Unorthodox* 3–9). However the audience are nonetheless described as a "very small but evidently earnest and intelligent congregation" (*Unorthodox* 4). But what is more significant from the point of understanding Davies's work of the 1870s is the fact that by the end of his journey, not only had Davies discovered new respect for his subjects, he had himself joined the ranks of the unorthodox with his own religious experiment, just like Vallance in *Broad Church*.

In fact, religious experiment was nothing new to Davies: since 1856 he had been involved in a variety of spiritualist practices, encompassing séances, automatic writing, table rapping, vocal and physical manifestations and apparitions. He remarks that he had never stopped to consider that occultism might be "wrong" from a religious perspective, but he found that he had become considered a "dangerous man": "You have to be a parson, or in parsonic set, to know exactly what that means" (*Great Secret* 159). This gives us an additional perspective on his campaign for comprehension within the established church.

For Davies, the manifestations of spiritualism, which proclaimed themselves to him as "the spirits of the departed," were physical proof of the existence of an afterlife. This was the explanation he attested the spirits themselves gave for their appearance at his first séance as a young journalist in Paris: "It may make men believe in God" (34–35). He accepted occultism as a demonstration of what was otherwise a manner of faith (254). This was something that he felt should form the basis of religious faith, religious practice and which should be subject to systematic and scientific investigation. At once, then, Davies's newfound subject of study transgressed the two great boundaries that the orthodox wished to set up between the established church and its outsides: unorthodox religious practice and science. Davies was converted to spiritualism at a séance where the spirits apparently gave correct answers to a series of questions that no one else in the room could have anticipated, or known the answer to (33–36). His faith was further strengthened, and its character somewhat changed, by the loss of his child Johnny to scarlet fever in 1865, when he found spiritualism a great support. It appears it was not long after this that Davies discovered his talent for "magnetism," what we would now term hypnotism, which, along with his wife's long-standing capacity for automatic writing, again gave him considerable personal interest in the subject (57–62, 66). Davies, then, was involved in séances, hypnotism, and an array of occult practices in his own right throughout this period, long before the investigations which appeared in *Heterodox* and *Mystic London*.

However, the zenith of his attempt to link religion and the occult seems to have occurred shortly after the time that he was engaged in the *Unorthodox London* series. It is impossible to decipher precisely whether the interest in and experience of spiritualism generated the

idea for the *Heterodox* and *Mystic London* volumes, or if these experiences prompted him to try his own experiment, or indeed whether the interests were sparked reciprocally. Regardless, Davies's personal experiment came in the fusion of an oratory service and a séance under the title of the Guild of the Holy Spirit, first for six months in Great Russell Street, above the rooms of the British Association of Spiritualism, where the audience was largely private. These sessions took place on Mondays and Thursdays, because he was at this time still an active clergyman. The format was an oratory service, where he officiated "exactly as if I had been in church," with a séance in an adjoining room (254–55). The private nature of this service did not escape notice or criticism, with Davies's "new era in spiritualism" being described by the *North Wales Chronicle* as "a Spiritualistic imitation of the Masonic lodge system," with the "new secret society" having "mystic rites of initiation peculiar to itself, with a system of signs and passwords for its brotherhood" ("Business Announcements"). However, despite this apparent criticism, Davies saw these meetings as a success and they continued for six months until he was forced to leave London for a time.

On his return, no doubt emboldened by his initial success, Davies tried a "semi-public" version of the same kind of event, hiring a larger hall and holding services on a Sunday. However, this was unsuccessful, only lasting two or three months because the spiritualists, who by and large focused on spiritualism for its own sake and not necessarily as an element in religious worship, did not like the Church of England element, while orthodox Christians did not appreciate the spiritualism (*Great Secret* 258–59). Davies tried again in a rented house in "a Western suburb," where he had fitted out the front room as a little chapel containing both an altar (complete with Madonna and Child picture, highlighting an element of his High Church heritage) and also a table at the back for a séance. Upstairs was a room properly set aside for the occult. Once again, there were services on Sundays, with a lecture, and on Thursdays, with a séance. He had assistance from two occultists and another clergyman, but generally did most things himself. Sometimes the group allowed a few outsiders in, but there was no attempt to engage with the wider public "who had persistently refused to cross our threshold." Ultimately, then, this was not a large group, nor was it successful. It was particularly unsuccessful in what appears to have been its main purpose, attracting the participation of "the departed," who, it seems, never took up the chairs in the audience left vacant for them. Ultimately, then, when his tenancy expired, the group broke up and this seems to have been the end of his personal experiment in blending occultism and religion, and the end of his involvement in spiritualist circles (264–87).

The abandonment of spiritualism is surprising, given that Davies described himself as "a spiritualist first and a Church of England clergyman afterwards" (262). However, if in frustration he was prepared to abandon the spiritualist explorations that were so important to him, it is perhaps less surprising that he was also able to leave behind his conventional religious calling to pursue new interests; this was not, after all, particularly out of keeping in a life which is characterised by great variety of employment. His description of himself as "a spiritualist first" is significant, because it forms part of an attempt to distinguish himself from the other great spiritualist, clergyman Haweis, who brought spiritualism into his church, preaching it from the pulpit, and as such, for Davies, remained a clergyman first, a spiritualist second. Davies did things the other way: "I took my churchmanship out of church and located it, for the time being, in a mystic oratory" (261–62). This is important because it emphasises not only the degree of Davies's commitment to spiritualism, but also the radical

nature of his departure from standard religious practice. It seems, then, that the experience of investigating *Unorthodox* and *Heterodox London* was not a linear one for Davies. Not only was he undoubtedly driven to promote a broad church through these publications by his personal inclinations to spiritualism, and perhaps a desire to render his occult experiments respectable, but it seems that in the course of these investigations, he was also inspired to religious experiment of his own, an experiment which took a form as unusual and remarkable as anything he encountered in his journey into *Unorthodox London*.

Ultimately, however, the failure of this experiment, and the course of his research, had a profound effect on Davies, which not only gave him considerable personal investment in the question of unorthodoxy within the church, but which may, as Oppenheim suggests, ultimately have driven him beyond its bounds (74–76). In the first half of 1881 Davies is reported in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* as leaving England and is recorded as being “better known as the author of some works on religious and irreligious life in London” and, according to the spiritualist publication *Light*, having “for some years been doing good work for spiritualism in this country, notably through the instrumentality of the Guild of the Holy Spirit” (“Latest Intelligence”). In fact, on leaving the *Daily Telegraph* Davies moved to Natal to work with the controversial Bishop Colenso, whom Davies no doubt expected to be a sympathetic if not inspirational figure, being famous for questioning the literal truth of the Bible in his research on the Pentateuch, which led to his being branded a heretic by conservative clergy. The critical, if not sceptical environment around Colenso seems to have encouraged Davies entirely to abandon both holy orders and spiritualism after 1882.<sup>15</sup> It seems that his explorations of unorthodoxy, constant exposure to critiques of the truths of orthodox Christianity, and largely unsuccessful personal religious experiments propelled him beyond his initial intent to promote breadth and comprehension in the established church and led him outside its compass entirely.

*The Open University*

## NOTES

1. He also published sermons, classical translations, humour, poetry, a history of Holland, a spiritual autobiography, and may have written *Maud Blount, Medium* (1876). See the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; *The Times*, 9 Sept. 1910, 11.
2. His position is made particularly clear in his sermon *Religious Differences*.
3. See Brand and Byrd for some detail on the prehistory of this form.
4. See *The Honest London Spy, Discovering the Base and Subtle Intrigues of the Town* (London, 1725?); E. Ward, *The London-Spy Compleat, in Eighteen Parts* (2 vols., London, 1709); *A View of London and Westminster: Or, The Town Spy* (London, 1725); *London Unmask'd: or the New Town Spy* (London, 1784). We might easily include the *Spectator* and its ilk as part of this new genre of urban investigation and presentation.
5. Both were originally serialised in *The Morning Chronicle*, from 1833 and 1849 respectively.
6. In addition to Nord and Walkowitz 18–20, see Herbert. The link between missionary exploration and imperialism is explored in Etherington and in C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.
7. Varley was himself a butcher.
8. This subject is debated in the work of Hempton, McLeod (“Varieties”), Nash, Royle, and Smith.
9. By abysmal, he means low-lying, extending the common metaphor for nonconformity as the “low church” in contrast to the “high church” of Anglo-Catholicism.

10. Williams, "The language" and "Victorian Religion."
11. On beards and Victorian masculinity, see Oldstone-Moore.
12. Hogan and Bradstock 1; McLeod 150.
13. For women philanthropists, see Walkowitz and Vicinus.
14. Wilson, 150–54; Bradstock.
15. See the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; his abandonment of spiritualism for many years is attested in *The Great Secret*, particularly the postscript, 311 onwards. It is worth noting, however, that he identifies himself in the title as a Church of England clergyman, even if he no longer held a position.

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