CHAPTER TWO
SCOPE, CRITERIA AND METHODS

1. Introduction

Chapter 2 has the primary aim of indicating and justifying the scope, criteria and methods this book will employ in its theological appraisal of JDS teaching. In the process, and by way of comparison, it also aims to demonstrate what the criteria and methods are of those who have already propounded or debated JDS teaching. This comparison will clarify ways in which this book both furthers the employment of criteria and methods already in use, and introduces some that have so far been neglected.

The rest of the chapter is arranged in six sections. First, the scope and limits of the research are briefly set out (section 2). Thereafter, the three criteria which the project employs for evaluating JDS doctrine are presented (section 3). Each of these raises methodological concerns, and the following three sections discuss these with respect to each criterion: faithfulness to the biblical witness (section 4); influence on Kenyon of his various possible contemporary sources (section 5); and conformity to the major conclusions of historical theology (section 6). In each of these three sections, presentation of this book’s methods is preceded by discussion of the methods employed by JDS teachers, and those who have debated their doctrine. Finally, section 7 concludes the chapter.

2. Scope and limits

The appraisal which this work offers is theological, not social. No attempt is made to offer a significant contribution to the social study of the Word-faith movement. It does not seek to cover similar ground, for example, to that discussed by Harrison in his Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion. It is much more similar in scope, though not in subject matter, to Kinnebrew’s The Charismatic Doctrine of Positive Confession: A Historical, Exegetical, and
Theological Critique. In other words, by studying the teaching concerning Christ’s ‘inner’ suffering in his dying and death that was prevalent among Kenyon’s putative influences, both ‘orthodox’ and ‘heterodox’, and by setting out both how Kenyon understood Christ’s ‘spiritual death’ and how Hagin and Copeland have developed that understanding, the work builds a picture of the historical evolution of JDS teaching to the present day. Furthermore, by examining the extent to which JDS teaching stands within or departs from, on the one hand, traditional ‘orthodox’ Christian formulations found in and built on the Bible and the creeds, and on the other hand, the thinking of New Thought and Christian Science, this project, to quote Kinnebrew, offers a ‘historical, exegetical and theological critique’ of JDS doctrine.

The aim of this book, in appraising JDS doctrine theologically, is to consider the doctrine as one possible answer to the question, “What happened ‘inwardly’ to Jesus in his dying and death?” It is not the intention of this book to evaluate JDS teaching more broadly as a theory of the atonement, nor indeed to examine the idea of atonement itself. Neither is it an aim to consider penal substitution, of which JDS teaching is clearly a form. Therefore, similarly, the project’s conclusions will offer their own contribution towards answering the question concerning Christ’s dying and death, but will not attempt to develop a theory of atonement, substitutionary or otherwise.

In order to prevent the ramifications of the project’s enquiry from spreading too far, it is necessary to make certain theological assumptions. For the purposes of discussion, then, it is assumed that God is the all-powerful trinitarian creator, and is loving and just in his dealings with creation. It is also assumed that humans are in need of salvation from their sin, and that God wants to offer this salvation to them. Christ, understood in traditional incarnational terms, is God’s answer to a world in need. Furthermore, the existence of Satan, or the devil, is assumed, as it is by JDS teachers, and by the main contributors to JDS debate. It is further assumed that Satan is personal, evil, at enmity with humanity, and in some way defeated (at least proleptically) through God’s work in Christ.

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¹ The use of the masculine pronoun, here and elsewhere, though kept to a minimum, is in line with Christ’s designation of God as his ‘Father’. It is not intended to indicate that God is male. Similarly, use of a masculine pronoun with reference to Satan is not meant to imply gender.