

Conclusions

A. Overview

Thomas Erskine was born in 1788 and died peacefully in his bed at Linlathen in 1870 aged 82. His last words were, “O, Lord my God ... Jesus ... Lord Jesus.”⁷¹⁸ His entire life was one of comparative leisure. His early years were spent in country estates and castles such as Airth and Cardross. He was surrounded mostly by women. His father had died when he was three years old. His grandmother, his mother, his sisters, his only brother (just a year older), his many cousins (mostly female) were his companions. He was known for his gentleness. He sought an understanding of God chiefly as a loving Father. Erskine spent his teenage years in the affluent New Town in Edinburgh which was a leader in the Europe of the day. He began his own search of the scriptures after a temporary lapse in confidence in the spiritual teaching of his childhood. After this study he was stronger than ever in his confidence in the scriptures. He was proficient at law and became Laird of Linlathen at the age of 28 with the death of his brother and beloved companion James. His last male companion of childhood was gone. In time Erskine’s dislike for the abuses of theology and his search for the loving heavenly Father effected his life and teaching profoundly.

⁷¹⁸ Hart Trevor, *The Teaching Father*, Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1993, 16.

The Intellectual and Cultural Context of Erskine's time were influenced by Romanticism in Europe and The Great Disruption and the West Coast Revival in Scotland. Romanticism was a long and massive movement that is difficult to localize. It looked to nature and to the inner life of human beings. The Great Disruption changed Scotland forever because its ultimate failure broke the power of the Kirk and left Scotland even more vulnerable to Westminster's influences. The West Country revival which began in 1829 captivated Erskine. He strongly affirmed the manifestations of the Spirit in his writings, but soon recanted of these views due to the lack of fruit that he observed among the participants of the revival.

The theological context of Erskine's Europe was largely shaped by the Pietism of Schleiermacher. The call to inwardness emphasized an individual faith that was not controlled by an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The human conscience was awakened as "the candle of the Lord."⁷¹⁹ Feelings were important in the spiritual life and a dependence upon God was primary. Erskine believed in a "dependent reciprocity" upon God by the believer accompanied by faith and a belief in the eternal Sonship of Christ. Erskine agreed with Schleiermacher regarding the ultimate salvation of every human being. However, before Schleiermacher Erskine's Scotland was influenced by the Marrow men of the previous century. Thomas Boston was the most published and the most prominent of the Marrow men. The Marrow men confirmed a federal theology and softened the harsher Calvinism of the day. The believer's spiritual union

⁷¹⁹ Pelikan, Jaroslav, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, 162.

with God was important to the Marrow men and to Thomas Erskine. Erskine agreed with his long time friend and correspondent F. D. Maurice on many things. For Maurice, as well as for Erskine, a gospel based on fear was not good news.⁷²⁰

In order to examine Erskine's pneumatology it was necessary to adopt some sort of taxonomy to use as a screening device for Erskine's writings. The categories outlined by Professor John McIntyre of Edinburgh in his book *The Shape Of Pneumatology* were decided upon. McIntyre presents eleven models or patterns for pneumatology.⁷²¹ The first model, the Biblical model, is too broad to describe particular pneumatologies. Of the six Trinitarian patterns Erskine's writings do not reflect enough developed Trinitarian traits regarding the Holy Spirit to qualify. McIntyre defines a dynamic pneumatology as one which stresses the actions of the Holy Spirit and is not based on a traditional analysis and comparison of the Persons within the Godhead.

Of the four dynamic patterns Erskine's pneumatology qualifies strongly as a relational pneumatology particularly in the third sub-pattern in which the Holy Spirit identifies himself with human thoughts, feelings and actions. Erskine's pneumatology, particularly in his post-revival writings, also qualifies strongly as a dynamic ecclesial polarities pattern which stresses the Holy Spirit's actions within the church as the informal body of Christ. This is closely related to the fourth sub-pattern of the

⁷²⁰ Winslow, Donald F., *Thomas Erskine: Advocate for the Character of God*, New York: University Press of America, 1993, 104.

⁷²¹ McIntyre, John, *The Shape of Pneumatology, Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1997.

relational pattern in which the Holy Spirit is God relating his people to one another in fellowship and communion. The decision to include Erskine's pneumatology under these categories is based on the extensive research and analysis of Erskine's writings as found in this thesis. This research illustrates a strong dynamic pneumatology by Erskine's use of verbs associated with the Holy Spirit in his writings. In his six major books and in his letters Erskine refers to the Holy Spirit 1,371 times. In 519 of these times he attributes an action word, a verb, to the Holy Spirit using a total of 156 different verbs. Our research shows that Erskine consistently saw the Holy Spirit as much more active in his post-revival writings. Verbs such as "speaks, births, quickens, witnesses, grieves, breathes, manifests, teaches, indwells, operates gives, leads, works, acts" and "comes"⁷²² are all prominent and display a marked dynamic pneumatology.

Compared to Irving Erskine's Pneumatology is not as clear. Irving approaches his pneumatology structurally from a clear Trinitarian position. Although Irving and Erskine are in essential agreement on most of their Christology and Pneumatology, they differ in their approach and clarity. Irving believes in "universal reconciliation" or a free "door of entrance" to salvation as does Erskine.⁷²³ However, after universal reconciliation Irving believes in particular election and he makes a convincing case that the true humanity and the atoning life and sacrifice of Christ is the basis for both

⁷²² See Appendix section H.

⁷²³ Irving, Edward, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving in Five Volumes*, London: Alexander Strahan, 1865, *The Doctrine of The Incarnation Opened*, 248.

doctrines.

Erskine and Irving are not in agreement on one vital issue which is universalism. Irving calls universalism “a most damnable heresy” and says that election is no hindrance to the “freeness of our door of entrance.”⁷²⁴ Erskine goes along with Schleiermacher in affirming a softer conclusion and believing in a continuing chance for salvation after death.⁷²⁵

B. The Relationship Of The Role Of Conscience And Of The Word To The “First Bond” In The Writings Of Thomas Erskine: Analyzed With Critical Commentary

Erskine seeks to clarify the mysterious implantation of the “First Bond” in *The Doctrine Of Election* as a part of his federal theology when he says, “the Word made flesh, who though not personally manifested for four thousand years, yet entered into the nature immediately after the fall, and commenced his great work of the new creation.”⁷²⁶ This is his version of a federal theology. The implantation is made in the race once-for-all four thousand years prior to its consummation in the incarnation. The result of this implantation is to bring “his Spirit close to every individual of the nature, striving in their consciences, and enabling them to join themselves to him, and

⁷²⁴ Irving, *Collected Writings: The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened*, 248.

⁷²⁵ Schleiermacher, Friedrich, *The Christian Faith*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, [1830] 1999, 721.

⁷²⁶ Erskine, Thomas, *The Doctrine of Election and Its Connection with the General Tenor of Christianity Illustrated Especially from the Epistle To The Romans*, 2nd edition, Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878, 173.

in his strength to accept their punishment, and to sacrifice their self-will to the will of God.”⁷²⁷ Therefore, it eventually results in an individual application for each member of the race. We really cannot determine exactly what this “bringing . . . close” actually is but it would seem to indicate a certain availability of the Spirit which is stronger than it would have been without the “First Bond” thus enabling the person to join with God, etc. However, it does seem clear that the establishment of the “First Bond” is a federal issue and that the consequences of it are individual.

Since Erskine develops his teaching of the “First” and “Second Bond” in his *The Brazen Serpent* while the development of the True Light is found in his *The Doctrine of Election*, in the final analysis we must combine these two factors and other developments in order to attempt to understand the totality of Erskine’s thinking on the matter. Chapter Seven above gives an explanation of the “First Bond” and in Chapter Eight the concept of conscience is discussed. What follows is a summary and final analysis of the several issues involved.

In *The Brazen Serpent* Erskine says,

And here is a remarkable thing. Those who are connected with Christ by the Spirit are living members, and they shall be raised to the resurrection of life, which is the first resurrection *by the Spirit that dwelleth in them*, see Rom. viii. 11, Rev. xx. 6. And those who are not connected with Christ by the Spirit, shall be raised also, but not to the resurrection of life, nor by the Spirit, for they have it not, but, it would seem, simply by their connexion with his flesh, to be judged for their contempt of all that was contained in that connexion.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁷ Erskine, *Election*, 173.

⁷²⁸ Erskine, Erskine, Thomas, *The Brazen Serpent; Or, Life Coming Through Death*, 2nd edition, Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1831, 99.

Erskine attributes the power of the “First Bond” as the reason for the general resurrection of unbelievers. A belief in the resurrection of unbelievers is not unusual. However, Erskine believes that this resurrection is possible, even inevitable, because of the “First Bond” of the flesh which every person has with God.

The actual individual recognition of the closeness which is given in this “First Bond” is a free act of the human will, through the entrance or door of the conscience, which establishes the ongoing never-ending second or spiritual bond. He even refers to the “preaching of the gospel” as being part of the “First Bond.”

And we have farther seen that the knowledge of this bond produces the second bond, namely, that of the Spirit, which is life everlasting. The preaching, therefore, of this first bond of the flesh, is, in fact, the preaching of the gospel—it is the preaching of that provision, by the knowledge of which the creature becomes the habitation of God through the Spirit, and it is in the knowledge of this provision that the only true knowledge of God consists, for we can only know God aright when we know Him who came in our flesh to declare the Father.⁷²⁹

In addition to the Light, the conscience and the Word are integral to Erskine’s concept of the “First Bond.” Erskine recognizes the Word in its three forms as the Logos, the Word Incarnate, and the written Word. In his preface to the first edition of *The Doctrine Of Election* Erskine says that he has not entered into any “striking speculations” but has kept the place of the “commentator or expositor” and

⁷²⁹ Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent*, 100.

“confining myself entirely within the range of the written word and human consciousness.”⁷³⁰ Erskine believes that he has taken a strictly scriptural approach to the subject of election. He says, “I have never forgotten that the Scriptures were given, not to supersede or stand in place of the rational conscience, but to awaken and enlighten it.” Erskine does not believe in submitting to human authority unless it is confirmed by the conscience. For Erskine it is a matter of “the views which I bring from Scripture, in the light of the rational conscience, that is, to show the relation which they bear to it.”⁷³¹ He also says, “But if men were called on by Jesus to try what he himself personally taught them by a light within them, we are surely bound to try by the same light the things which have come down to us through the written Word. And those who would teach the things which are contained in the written word ought to remember, that their teaching is really of no use unless they make them clear to the consciences of the learners, showing in the things taught a righteousness of God which the consciences of the learners can apprehend and approve.”⁷³²

Erskine sees conscience as more than a part of human nature; it has a “semblance of faithfulness” to a higher reality.

Men are prone to act on the supposition that the voice in their conscience is a faculty of their own nature, like their feelings of benevolence or compassion, and thus even when they follow it, they are not brought to a sense of dependence on a divine authority, which is their true creaturely condition, nor led to seek acquaintance with the speaker. They do not understand the honour, and thus lose the blessing,

⁷³⁰ Erskine, *Election*, xi-xii.

⁷³¹ Erskine, *Election*, xi-xii.

⁷³² Erskine, *Election*, xv-xvi.

even when there is a certain semblance of faithfulness to the voice. But it is only a semblance, for every one may know that the voice in his conscience is of a different order from the faculties or feelings of his own mind, *because* he knows that, however weakly it sounds, he sins, unless he humbles before it the highest and strongest movements of his spirit.⁷³³

For Erskine, the conscience is more than a moral arbiter and the living Word is indispensable in completing the process.

Even to those who do, in a certain way, acknowledge the oneness of God with the voice in conscience, there is a danger of so identifying him with this voice, as to bring him down to the level of a mere intimation of right and wrong, instead of rising up through the voice to an acquaintance with himself from whom the voice comes, and who sends it forth for the express purpose of leading man up to himself. Conscience is the link between flesh and spirit, the *entrance* by which the voice of the Word of God enters into man, calling for the submission of his heart and will, and through which he would communicate himself personally and consciously, if man would submit his heart and will, and seek His manifestation. It is the voice of the living Word not only giving direction as to what ought to be done, but also, in those who yield to it, working in them, not to will only, but to do, of his good pleasure.⁷³⁴

Therefore, Erskine holds a very high regard for the conscience and ultimately sees it as the entrance or door through which the living Word can enter the heart. For Erskine neither the conscience nor the will is bound as the will is bound in Calvinistic teaching. Man has free choice. Erskine differs from the Arminian in this regard because it is his “First Bond” which enables the choice.

⁷³³ Erskine, *Election*, 40.

⁷³⁴ Erskine, *Election*, 40.

Erskine says that his goal was to present a biblical view on the subject of election. He says that he has, “entered largely into the subject of Conscience, and the adaptation of the Scriptures to it, and into the consideration of those general and elementary views of the condition of man, as a moral and responsible being, which the Scriptures . . . expressly set forth.” He is also careful to state that he is “scarcely attempting to touch the metaphysical questions relating to Free Will and Necessity.” This would necessarily exclude much commentary on the actions of the Holy Spirit upon the human will or conscience.⁷³⁵

Erskine still sees the Spirit as active, but he is not the initiator that he is in Calvinism. Since Erskine believes that there is a “condemning light within” each man, the conscience, there is a “retribution which is continually going on in man's life.” Each man has a “capacity to take part with” this light and to decide whether to “yield himself either to the Spirit of God, or to the spirit of darkness.”⁷³⁶

Erskine sees the nearness of the Word as actually being resident with every man and, in fact, as a necessary precondition of conversion, providing the capacity for response. This contributes to an under-developed pneumatology in his theology as the Holy Spirit’s convicting power to draw people to Christ and the nearness of the Word are one and the same.

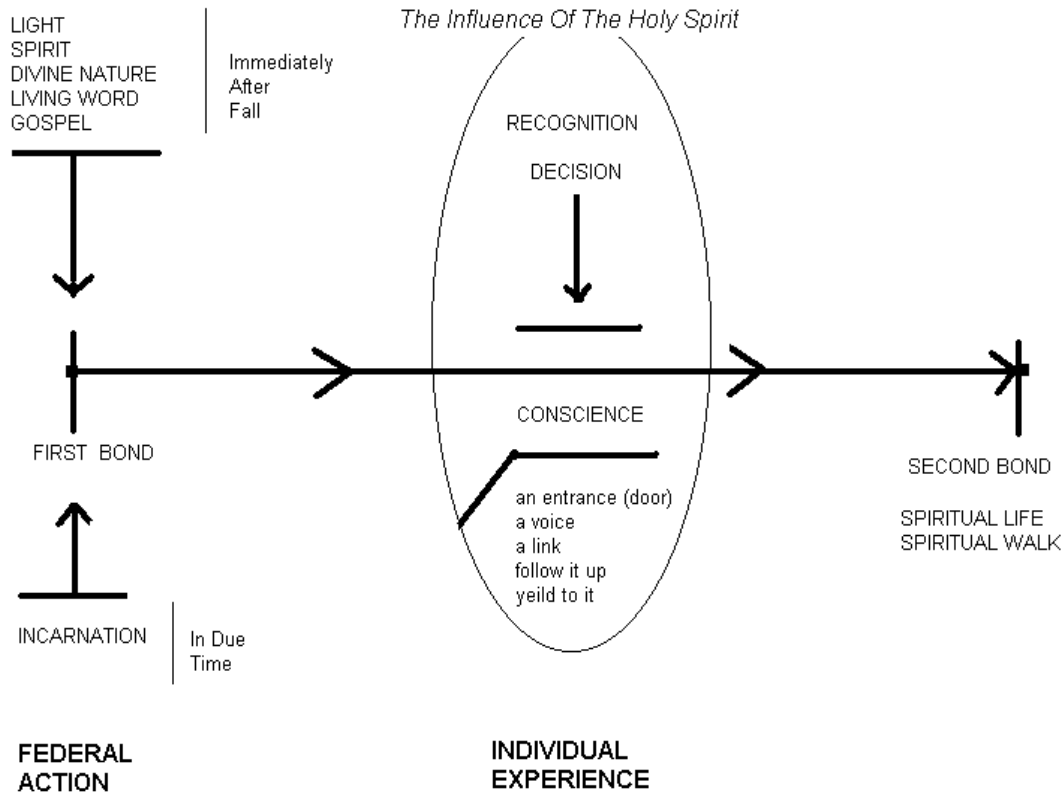
It is also clear at this point that Erskine does not consider the conscience to be identical with the Spirit of God or the living Word. If it is a door by which they can

⁷³⁵ Erskine, *Election*, xii.

⁷³⁶ Erskine, *Election*, 42.

enter, then it can not be the living Word or the Spirit himself which are themselves virtually identical. Indeed nineteenth century theology can tend to blur the distinction between “conscience” and the “voice of God” within us. However, Erskine will maintain a distinction, if not for the sake of the Spirit alone, at least for the sake of the living Word.

In a final analysis a graphical representation of the factors in this entire process may be helpful.



As represented in the above figure the following appear to be identical as included in the Godhead; the Light, the Spirit, the Divine Nature and the Living Word. The Gospel is the printed or verbal form of the Word. These form the federal “First Bond” which is affirmed, in due time, by the Incarnation. The conscience is the door, which having been influenced by the “First Bond,” enables the individual under the influence of the Holy Spirit to accept salvation. The conscience is explained as an entrance or door and a voice or a link which one follows up or yields to in order to

experience individual salvation which results in a spiritual life or a spiritual walk. It is the opinion of this writer that in Erskine's thinking the human conscience is already there but it is activated by the presence of the Word as a result of the "First Bond" so that it operates at a deeper and much more important and powerful level. It is not the mere umpire of morality, it is the door to a great salvation which will create a righteous being.

Erskine himself admits to creating some confusion in his writings when he says,

In looking over the book since it has been finished, I see that I have not always kept to the same meaning of the word *conscience*, that I have used it sometimes to signify the Spirit of God in man, and sometimes to signify the man's own apprehension of the mind of the Spirit in him, which is often a very different thing. But though this is a fault in point of accuracy, I do not think that it produces any confusion in the meaning, as the context always shows which of these senses is intended.⁷³⁷

This writer can not agree that the context always makes the meaning clear. However, the explanation above sorts out much of the ambiguity and helps clarify Erskine's thinking.

What then are Erskine's primary faults in his unique soteriology and resulting pneumatology? The biggest fault is his use of different words for the same concepts or influences which produce the "First Bond." Other theologians might see these words as describing very different things. The second fault is

⁷³⁷ Erskine, *Election*, xiii.

his unsubstantiated concept of what this writer calls “the mysterious implantation.” Since this is unique to Erskine, he should have made his reasons for it clearer. Instead, he merely presumes its veracity and continues on.

Thirdly, the conscience as an entrance or door is not clearly substantiated; it too is Erskine’s own and not adequately supported in the reasoning process found in his writings.

Erskine’s “First Bond” does not put the creative miracle of regeneration of the New Testament era just previous to the point of the individual’s conversion as we find it in Calvinism. Man is not entirely dead to God before conversion as the Calvinist maintains. For Erskine God is at work in us and in the world prior to conversion and it is the dynamic of the “First Bond” which enables man to recognize the calling of God and to accept what has already been placed there in order to form the “Second Bond.” If there is a creative miracle in Erskine’s soteriology, it is the mysterious implantation in mankind just after the fall. Therefore, Erskine’s pneumatology is significantly “lower” than in a Calvinistic pneumatology.

This is not the salvation of the Arminian in which the individual heart and mind is capable of recognizing the truth of the gospel when it is presented, without the “First Bond,” and then does or does not freely choose to allow the renewing power of God to operate in one’s life.

Still, with Erskine our salvation is not inevitable; there is still a need for God to work in us. Uniquely even though Erskine leaves a place for the work of the Holy

Spirit at the moment of faith he does make the establishment of the “First Bond” in a federal sense the more important factor. This makes regeneration at the moment of faith possible by individual choice in the process as illustrated above with the aid of the Spirit of God. In other words, his emphasis shifts the center of regenerative gravity from the moment of faith to that moment at which the “First Bond” was established with the race.

We must remember, as McLeod Campbell pointed out, Erskine has a tendency to “bend everything . . . to the thoughts that for the time absorbed him.” Because, “so strong was the heat of his cherished convictions, that before them the toughest, most obdurate text gave way, melted and fused into the mould which his bias had framed for it.”⁷³⁸ So strong was Erskine’s conviction of the “Bonds” that, in his mind, everything must be made to agree with it.

C. The Shape Of Erskine’s Theology

Erskine’s doctrine of God is Binitarian instead of Trinitarian. He recognizes fully the personhood of the Father and the Son in the Godhead, but he does not fully recognize the Holy Spirit as a co-equal member of the Godhead. To begin to understand this we shall look first at Erskine’s “The Divine Son.” Erskine makes several very telling statements in this work. He begins his argument when he says,

⁷³⁸ Erskine, Thomas, *Letters of Thomas Erskine Of Linlathen From 1840 Till 1870*, William Hanna, Ed., Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877, 363.

“I am persuaded that the highest and truest reason will adhere to the principle that there can be no goodness of which God is not the proper fountain. And if so, we must also admit that for every active form of goodness in God there is a corresponding recipient form; consequently that there must be in the divine nature distinct personalities representing these two forms, otherwise there could be no possibility either of their exercise or of their manifestation, in Himself apart from the creature.⁷³⁹

His starting place here is goodness. This is a moral argument not a theological one, which Erskine shares with the romantic movement and the moderates in the Church of Scotland. He acknowledges God as the fountain of goodness. He then constructs a form in which there must be in God both an active and a passive form of this fountain of goodness in order for God to function as the fountain of goodness in and of himself apart from the creation. If there is to be a “corresponding recipient form” of God, then “there must be in the divine nature distinct personalities representing these two forms.” Erskine assigns personalities to both the giving and receiving attributes of God which he equates to the Father and the Son. In doing this the personhood of the Father and the Son is confirmed in his theology. However, there is no corresponding personhood of the Spirit in Erskine’s theology. Furthermore, in doing this Erskine incipiently denies the true divinity of the Son by making the Son the receiver. This belies the title of the work, “The Divine Son.” If the Son can only be the receiver of this goodness, then he is not Himself the fountain of life. But, we shall put this aside

⁷³⁹ Erskine, Thomas, *The Spiritual Order And Other Papers; Selected From The Manuscripts Of The Late Thomas Erskine Of Linlathen*, Second Edition, “The Divine Son,” Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1876, 34-35.

in order to see the end of Erskine's argument and how it reflects on the Spirit. The next stage in Erskine's argument is this.

But if we were intended to know God and to live in relations with Him (and that we are, the history of the race, as well as each man's consciousness, abundantly testifies), it is impossible to arrive otherwise at any idea whatever of God. ⁷⁴⁰

In referring to the history of the race he echoes the influence of the "First Bond" which, according to him, was planted in man just after the fall. He is so confident that he states that no other conclusions are possible. In considering Erskine's approach to the Godhead we should remember John McLeod Campbell's words when he said that once Erskine's thoughts were fixed, he would "bend everything to them." Campbell added that this was especially true regarding Erskine's interpretation of the scriptures. ⁷⁴¹

In a further development of Erskine's Giver-Receiver concept of God Erskine says,

The only goodness and the only intelligence that we can conceive of are human goodness and intelligence, and we are obliged just to expand these into infinity when we would form to ourselves an idea of God. And seeing that we are constrained by reason to acknowledge that all goodness must be in God, we ought not to refuse the suggestion that there must be, as it were, *two hemispheres* in the Divine nature,—upper and under, active and passive, Giver and Receiver, Father and Son. Unity is not singleness but rather completeness, and love can only, by

⁷⁴⁰ Erskine, "Divine Son," 36.

⁷⁴¹ Erskine, *Letters*, 1840-1870, 363.

minds like ours, be considered complete when it has sympathy.⁷⁴²

For Erskine our concept of divine goodness is built on our understanding of human goodness which is expanded “into infinity.” This is a reasonable argument and it proceeds from the natural to the spiritual. It does, however, continue to rely on man’s ability to extrapolate God instead of relying on revelation. This emphasis as to the reasonableness of the truth is a characteristic of Erskine’s time. Erskine accepts the powers attributed to reason by those around him. From this he derives the “two hemispheres in the Divine nature,” not three equal parts, but two, which are the Father and the Son. Here again, Erskine appears to allow for no third reality within God.

Figures 1-3 following offer a graphical representation of three possible views of the Godhead. Suppose we consider Figure 1 as a representation of a traditional Western or lineal representation with the Father on the top and the Son and the Spirit lined up below the Father. Furthermore, suppose we consider Figure 2 as representative of a more Eastern concept which is a less linear and more fluid representation of the Godhead. Here each person is co-equal and interactive. There are advantages to both the Western and Eastern concepts. Most importantly each of them finds a place for the Spirit. Figure 3 represents a model of the Godhead intimated by Thomas Erskine in “The Divine Son”. In this conception the Father and the Son constitute the upper and under “two hemispheres” in the Divine nature with the Spirit as more of a substance than a person uniting them.

⁷⁴² Erskine, “Divine Son,” *Italics mine*, 36.

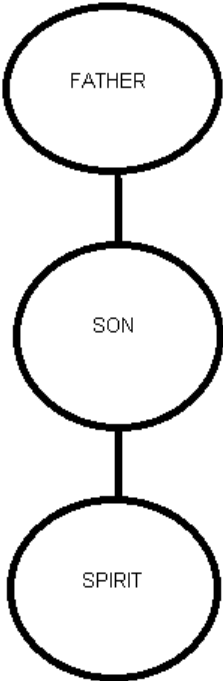


FIG. 1

THE WESTERN MODEL

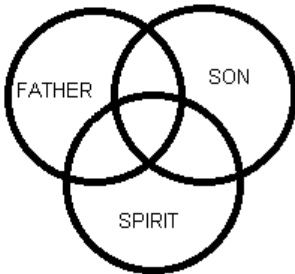


FIG. 2

THE EASTERN MODEL

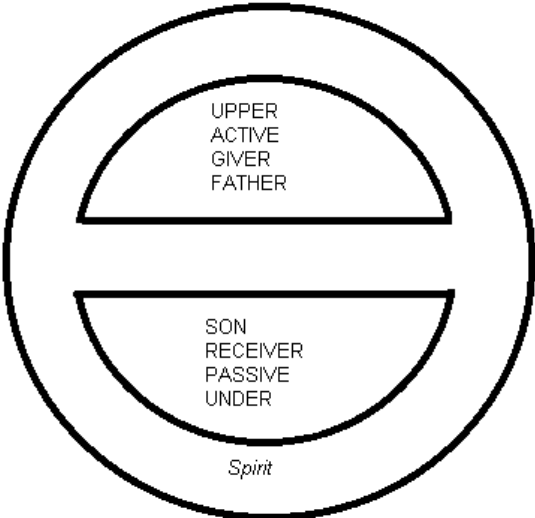


FIG. 3

ERSKINE'S BINITARIAN MODEL

Erskine is convinced of his argument because love has to have “sympathy” to be complete. Erskine has not departed from his moral argument. As in the above model Erskine does not leave the Spirit of God out completely. He says,

This idea of God as comprehending both the active and the passive of all goodness, distinguished by the personalities of Father and Son but united in one common Spirit, seems to me to give the perfect conception of love and of blessedness in love; and when we add the idea that the spiritual creation stands in the Son, we have the assurance that it also is intended to be included in that fellowship of love.⁷⁴³

So the Spirit does unite the personalities of the Father and the Son thus giving acceptance in Erskine’s theology to the actuality of the Spirit. However, in this context the Spirit is more of a force than a person and continues to confirm the dynamic aspect of Erskine’s pneumatology. The Spirit is a force uniting the two Persons of the Father and the Son. Throughout Erskine’s works the Spirit is represented as more of a force than a Person. Since “spiritual creation” is included in the Son, then we share in this love relationship. Erskine says in another place,

He had always access to his Father in the Spirit, that is, in the eternal life, because that life was not under the condemnation; but whilst he bore about with him the natural life, the man Christ Jesus could not appear in the holy of holies.⁷⁴⁴

The Spirit is equated to “the eternal life.” Again, less of a personality here.

⁷⁴³ Erskine, “Divine Son,” 36-37.

⁷⁴⁴ Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent*, 64.

The eternal life is the human Jesus' entrance into the presence of the Father since his natural life which he shares with all men is under condemnation and can not appear in the presence of the Father. Consequently, the fellowship of love that exists between the Father and the Son is extended to the "spiritual creation" because "spiritual creation stands in the Son."

"When St. John wrote " God is Love," he was no doubt contemplating the Divine Father pouring out the eternal treasures of His love and wisdom into the all-embracing and all-sympathising capacity of the Divine Son, who receives it not for himself alone, but as the Head and First-Begotten of the whole creation. . . . There can be no full and perfect revelation of Fatherhood but in and through Sonship, and thus the revelation of an eternal Son in the Divine Nature itself,—a Son in whom the whole spiritual family has its root and standing,—gives an assurance of the unchangeable fatherly relation of God to man which nothing else could have given.⁷⁴⁵

This is in agreement with Erskine's Federal Theology; Christ is the Head of the new creation. It is a confirmation of his Christology; the Son receives the treasures of the Father. It is a confirmation of his soteriology; man receives from the Father through the Son who shares man's flesh or mortal nature in the "First Bond" and can therefore share the life as a result of the Second spiritual bond.

Now let us think what the right place must be for such moral intelligences to occupy. If they are created to be good, and if there is no goodness but of God, surely their goodness must be that of the Son,— loving and sympathising obedience, trustful dependence, a filial will entering into and adopting the purpose of the Father; and their capacity of goodness must consist in the indwelling of the Son, whose presence

⁷⁴⁵ Erskine, "Divine Son," 38-39.

in them both confers on them his own filial relation to the Father and communicates to them the character of his own goodness. Thus we see how Christian morality rises out of and is dependent on Christian theology; and how those precepts which direct the doing of the most ordinary actions of humanity have, according to the Christian theory, their root in these claims of Jesus.⁷⁴⁶

The communicating of the Divine goodness to mankind through the indwelling Son is the basis for Christian morality. Erskine's method of arriving at his conclusions is shaped by his preconceptions about the bond of the flesh and his concept of the essentially Binitarian nature of God. Erskine's belief in the "moral and spiritual education of man" by God is a part of his theology and of this particular argument.

We may venture then to say, that, even apart from all authority, we have reason to believe that there exist in the Divine nature these personalities of Father and Son; and the light which this fact throws on the whole conception of the spiritual world, and of man's place in it, and relation to it, shows us that the revelation of it is no superfluous information, but is of the highest importance in the moral and spiritual education of man.⁷⁴⁷

Here Erskine sees just two Personalities in the Divine nature and man's place in this scheme is to be educated morally and spiritually by God. Furthermore, just as the life of God is a substance to be transmitted to man through the Son so is the Spirit of God likened more to a substance and not a Person.

The spiritual creation constitutes the body of the Son, its countless individualities going to make up the organs and members of that body

⁷⁴⁶ Erskine, "Divine Son," 39-40.

⁷⁴⁷ Erskine, "Divine Son," 42-43.

in all its fair proportions. For he is " the beginning of the creation of God," the point, so to speak, in the Divine nature from which the creation proceeds. And as he is himself essentially the Truster, the Believer, the Receiver from his Father, so he is on that account the fit channel of the life and Spirit of God to the whole spiritual order; his presence in each individual of that order giving it its filial relation to the Father, and its consequent capacity of receiving out of the fulness of God.⁷⁴⁸

In all of his writings Erskine only refers to the "Trinity" one time and that is in a negative context. In discussing the difference between a moral argument and a metaphysical argument he says, "I may instance the ordinary statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, as an illustration of what I mean. It seems difficult to conceive that any man should read through the New Testament candidly and attentively, without being convinced that this doctrine is essential to and implied in every part of the system." On the one hand Erskine sees that the doctrine of the Trinity is "essential to and implied" throughout the New Testament theological system. On the other hand he says, "But it is not so difficult to conceive, that although his mind is perfectly satisfied on this point, he may yet, if his religious knowledge is exclusively derived from the Bible, feel a little surprised and staggered, when he for the first time reads the terms in which it is announced / in the articles and confessions of all Protestant churches."⁷⁴⁹ Even if the fact of the "essential and implied" existence of the Trinity is accepted, Erskine says that if a person first encounters the terms in which the doctrine is

⁷⁴⁸ Erskine, "Divine Son," 43-44.

⁷⁴⁹ Erskine, Erskine, Thomas, *Remarks On The Internal Evidence For The Truth Of Revealed Religion*, 9th edition, Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1829, 94-95.

articulated in the confessions of the church he will, in fact, be misled. This is because, “ In these summaries, the doctrine in question is stated, by itself, divested of all its scriptural accompaniments; and is made to bear simply on the nature of the Divine essence, and the mysterious fact of the existence of Three in One.” The missing element in creeds and confessions is that they do not include the scriptural context that helps develop moral character. “It is evident that this fact, taken by itself, cannot in the smallest degree tend to develop the Divine character, and therefore cannot make any moral impression on our minds.”⁷⁵⁰ This is why Erskine tends to avoid the traditional approach in his theology which can have the effect of slighting a pneumatology.

For instance, there are twenty-six references to “person” in *The Brazen Serpent* with many more in the plural, or references to “personal, personality” etc. Many of these refer to the person of Jesus, others to human persons regarding their involvement with Jesus or God. This book, *The Brazen Serpent*, is Erskine’s celebration of the Spirit written when he was at the height of his excitement concerning the West Country revival. Whatever high pneumatology he would ever have will be expressed in this book. However, none of these references to “person” refer to the Spirit. The thirteen references to “person” in *The Doctrine Of Election*, Erskine’s other major post-revival work, all refer to a human person or to Christ.⁷⁵¹

One time in his writings Erskine refers to the “anti-trinity.”

⁷⁵⁰ Erskine, *Internal Evidence*, 95.

⁷⁵¹ Erskine, *The Doctrine Of Election*.

And thus the flesh appears as the third person of the anti-trinity—the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet—the devil, the world, and the flesh—the dragon being opposed to God, as the fountain of life—the beast being opposed to Jesus, as the anointed king—and the false prophet, who continually urges on us the delusions of the dragon and the beast, being opposed to the spirit, who takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us.⁷⁵²

Erskine is willing to consider three influences that oppose God under the title of “anti-trinity” but studiously avoids references to the actual Trinity except in the one negative instance already discussed above.

Erskine even speaks of how the Spirit dwelled in Jesus “personally” and “federally,” but “personally” refers to the person of Jesus and not to the Spirit.

This same life was in him before his resurrection—it was the life by which he lived, but he was not the Fountain of life, he was not the Head of life, until his resurrection. He was born of the spirit, and he lived *personally* by the spirit, but it was not till his resurrection that the spirit dwelt in him *federally*. He was raised by the spirit, and then the spirit dwelt in him as the Head of the body. And so to know the power of his resurrection, is just to receive that spirit, which raised him from the dead and dwelt in him as the common Head after the resurrection.⁷⁵³

Therefore, in Erskine we see a lot of a dynamic “spirit”, but no “personal” Spirit. Erskine sees a two Person, or Binitarian, Godhead, with an dynamic auxiliary Spirit.

⁷⁵² Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent*, 219.

⁷⁵³ Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent*, 159-160.

D. Analysis

Erskine's pneumatology is closely related to his Christology. His Christology is higher than his pneumatology. Since he perceives of the "living Word" as the force that enters into man bringing new life, this diminishes the place of the Holy Spirit in the process. "It is the voice of the living Word not only giving direction as to what ought to be done, but also, in those who yield to it, working in them, not to will only, but to do, of his good pleasure."⁷⁵⁴ His pneumatology is not intentional but merely reflected in his talk about the actions of the Spirit. Erskine was unable to follow Irving's more thoroughly Trinitarian doctrine because he was proud to be unfettered by the restraints of a traditional reformed theology.

In comparing Erskine's pneumatology to that of Irving and Campbell we are forced to conclude that Erskine's is a one-of-a-kind pneumatology. Irving's is strongly Trinitarian in nature although there are certainly many dynamic mentions of the Spirit in his writings as well. Campbell accepts traditional concepts of the Holy Spirit but does not dwell on this much. In his *The Nature Of The Atonement*, he barely mentions the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the fellowship we have in Christ but not directly about the Person who makes this possible. In the conclusions to *The Nature Of The Atonement* where he speaks of the value of mystery in the faith he repeats the Trinitarian formula twice, "God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," but this

⁷⁵⁴ Erskine, *The Doctrine Of Election*, 40.

appears to be more out of habit and a sense of theological propriety than conviction.⁷⁵⁵ Erskine mentions the Holy Spirit dynamically many times in his writings as reflected in the research of this thesis. He simply does not develop a traditional pneumatology. This would seem to put Erskine solidly in the middle with a strong dynamic pneumatology between Irving on the one hand with both a traditional and dynamic pneumatology and Campbell who rarely speaks of the Holy Spirit at all.

In order to repair Thomas Erskine's particular theology a mixture of the dynamic and traditional is required. Erskine's friend and contemporary Edward Irving can offer some help in this regard. Edward Irving organizes his, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature* in four parts. In the first part he discusses the doctrine of Jesus' human nature as it is derived from scripture. Then he confirms this doctrine from the creeds of the church, both of the primitive church and of the Church of Scotland. Then he carefully considers the objections to the true doctrine of the human nature of Christ. This includes objections arising out of beliefs in the miraculous conception, the nature of atonement, and the value of Christ's sufferings. Based on this foundation Irving then considers other doctrines which "stand or fall" with the doctrine of the human nature of Christ. The first three of these considerations are the bearing upon the work of the Father, the bearing on the work of the Son, and the bearing on the work of the Holy

⁷⁵⁵ Campbell, John McLeod, *The Nature Of The Atonement And Its Relation To Remission Of Sins And Eternal Life*, London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1959. (1st edition published by Macmillan & Co. in 1856.), 321-323.

Ghost. Regarding the doctrine of the human nature of Christ and its bearing on the work of the Holy Ghost, Irving says,

Now the office of the Spirit they do in a still more remarkable manner subvert by their inventions. As the office of the Father is from his secret concealments, the unsearchable abode of his Godhead, to manifest himself unto sinful creatures; and as it is the office of the Son coming out of his bosom to sustain the fulness of the Father's Godhead, and render it into the comprehensible language of human thought, feeling, suffering, and action; so is it the part of the Holy Ghost to furnish him for such an undertaking. . . .He serveth himself with Holy-Ghost power which the Father bestows upon him. . . . And thus, while all the power to redeem is proved to be from God in the person of the Father, and all the activity from God in the person of the Son, all the ability is proved to be from God in the person of the Holy Ghost;⁷⁵⁶

This excerpt, and indeed Irving's entire method, is a thoroughly Trinitarian approach which is founded in scripture and in the creeds and it is dynamic as well, while Erskine's only concern is to be scriptural in accord with his own moral and reasonable presuppositions. Irving finishes this book with the bearing of the doctrine on the scriptures, on faith and union with Christ and on regeneration and holiness before he summarizes and concludes his work and argument. He finishes all of his arguments in a thoroughly systematic manner.⁷⁵⁷

At one point Irving says, "Surely this systematic divinity is becoming as noxious a thing as the scholastic divinity ever was."⁷⁵⁸ Irving is taking his fellow

⁷⁵⁶ Irving, Edward, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, London: Printed by Ellerton and Henderson for Baldwin and Cradock, 1830, 118-119.

⁷⁵⁷ Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*.

⁷⁵⁸ Irving, *Our Lord's Human Nature*, 101.

theologians to task for departing from a scriptural view of Christ Himself. Irving believes that they were doing this because they were using a “convenient logical form” instead of adhering to the testimony of scripture.⁷⁵⁹

Thomas Erskine’s theology is free of any error resulting from following any external systematic theology does not prefer this. Erskine is not enslaved to any “convenient logical form.” He demands the freedom to search the scripture under the guidance of his own conscience. His Christology is taken directly from the New Testament and is not bound by any imposed systematic form. Perhaps the greatest advantage of this is Erskine’s understanding of the true humanity of Christ which is at the heart of his federal theology. “The doctrine of the human nature of Jesus Christ, is not merely that he is of the *same nature, of the same flesh and blood* with every man; but that he has *part* of that *one nature, that one flesh and blood*, of which, as a great whole, all are partakers.”⁷⁶⁰

It is in his anthropology and soteriology that Erskine isolates himself from his reformed contemporaries because of his convictions concerning the “First Bond.” In his anthropology man is not found to be dead in sin which changes the very nature of the needed salvation. Therefore, in the opinion of this writer, the weakness in Erskine’s pneumatology comes from two major factors. The first factor is the power of the “First Bond” which eliminates the need for the power of a convicting and resurrecting Spirit among mankind with the attending weaknesses as discussed above.

⁷⁵⁹ Irving, *Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 101.

⁷⁶⁰ Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent*, 39.

The second major factor is his self-avowed aversion to creedal sources. Erskine does not trust any dependency upon doctrine which stems from “church articles.” He says, “I do not talk of the propriety or impropriety of having church articles, but the evils which spring from receiving impressions of religion exclusively or chiefly from this source.”⁷⁶¹ Erskine prefers the Bible to creeds and church articles. He says that the Bible always presents doctrines in connection with the character of God and the character that God expects to be formed in man and that they have a “majesty” and “consistency and truth” which further affirm their authority. Erskine says that it is “far otherwise” with the creeds and articles. Creeds and articles were written to deal with error and “metaphysical speculations” in religion and were intended only to be “barriers against the encroachment of erroneous opinions.” The doctrines in creeds and articles are not presented with reference to the “great object in the Bible,—the regeneration of the human heart, by the knowledge of the Divine character.”⁷⁶² They indicate no moral cause or effect.⁷⁶³

Here is a key to Erskine’s thinking. He is most interested in moral cause and effect in the Christian life. He is not interested in metaphysical speculations. A traditional Trinitarian pneumatology is more of a metaphysical speculation delving into the relationship between the members of the Godhead and issues of personhood. A dynamic pneumatology deals with the actions of the Holy Spirit in the lives of

⁷⁶¹ Erskine, *Internal Evidence*, 94.

⁷⁶² Erskine, *Internal Evidence*, 93.

⁷⁶³ Erskine, *Internal Evidence*, 93-94.

people in order to cause them to become believers and to enable spiritual growth. However, the creeds and counsels of the church have been her guiding light from patristic times and should not be so easily discarded.

His resulting dynamic pneumatology can be noticed by a cursory scan of Erskine's writings and can be more clearly seen when his works are analyzed as in this thesis. Such an analysis uncovers a preference on Erskine's part to see the Spirit in His actions as recorded in the Scriptures.

E. Looking Forward

Today we can appropriate Erskine's work into a theology which affirms Christ's humanity from the early 20th century from the writings of Hugh Ross McIntosh and D.M. Baillie and which moves on into the theology of the later 20th century which is an outgrowth of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement with their emphasis on the dynamism of the Spirit of God. Mackintosh, who affirmed the true humanity of Christ as did Irving, Campbell, and Erskine, says,

For it is only as the Spirit – one with Christ Himself – comes to perpetuate the spiritual presence of the Lord, and to cast light on the unending significance of His work, that we are quite liberated from the impersonal and external, whether it be lifeless doctrine or the historically verified events of an ever-receding past. Only through the Spirit have we contact with the living Christ. . . . The coming of the Spirit, however, is not to be conceived as forming a compensation or substitute for the absent Christ; it is the higher mode in which Christ Himself is present. "I will come to you" and "when the Comforter is

come” occur interchangeably, and any doctrine of the Trinity which finds that an insuperable obstacle stands so far convicted of tritheism.⁷⁶⁴

Mackintosh here blends the traditional Trinitarian with the dynamic in an effective way. These words were published in 1912.

D.M. Baillie says

A new thing had come into the world with Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh; and the new thing, while dependent on him, was not confined to the days of His flesh or to those who had known Him in the flesh: it is available in an even fuller form to everybody, everywhere, and in every age, through the Holy Spirit. If we go on to ask whether there is any difference between having God’s presence with us, having Christ dwelling in us, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, we are bound to answer that the New Testament makes no clear distinction. It is not that no distinction is made between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; but all three come at every point in the full Christian experience of God. It is not the case of three separate experiences: it is all one.⁷⁶⁵

Here we also see traditional distinctions with dynamic workings. This was published in 1948.

John V. Taylor agrees in *The Go-Between God* that he is critical of the dogma or the lack of theology in the classical Pentecostal movement. However, “he remains Pentecostal in practice and believes it to be vital for a truly ecumenical Christianity to understand Pentecostalism as an expression of New Testament forms of religious

⁷⁶⁴ Mackintosh, Hugh Ross, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1951, 373-374.

⁷⁶⁵ Baillie, D. M., *God Was In Christ*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1948, 153-154.

belief and practice which might be following a very independent line, but could not be ruled out on a priori theological grounds'.⁷⁶⁶ Indeed, 20th and 21st century Pentecostalism and charismatic thinking does lack sound theology. And although it should “not be ruled out on a priori theological grounds”, there is much wisdom available from Irving, Campbell, Thomas Erskine, Mackintosh and Baillie for the Pentecostal and charismatic movements which have an enduring influence today. The many errors of those movements can move towards correction with a sound pneumatology which is balanced with both the traditional Trinitarian and dynamic elements. As Taylor says, “But, positively, this constantly recurring desire for the charismatic gifts must surely be seen as an insistence upon the wholeness of man. No man, least of all Christian man, can live fully in that protracted paranoia which exalts and idealizes his cerebral life and demotes his instinctual being. True growth is not from the intuitive to the rational, but always towards an integration of the two. We never leave primitive man behind but must learn to travel with him in the company.”⁷⁶⁷ Taylor speaks to us from 1972 which was the height of the charismatic movement.

F. Finally

All in all, Erskine was a man of his time. He was influenced by the spirit of his time in which Romanticism, the *Marrow*, Schleiermacher, Zinzendorf, the Great Disruption, the West Coast Revival and others were significant factors. His love for

⁷⁶⁶ Taylor, John V., *The Go-Between God; The Holy Spirit And The Christian Mission*, London, SCM Press, 1972, 200-201.

the Scriptures and his zeal for the Spirit of God shaped his own unique theology. His two “Bonds” are perhaps his most precious concepts. Yet, in the opinion of this writer, we should reject the entire construct of the two “Bonds” and Erskine’s understanding of the role of conscience for the more tested Reformed position in which we are dead in our sins and totally at the mercy of the Godhead. We should certainly stand more in Irving’s direction than in Erskine’s regarding the Trinitarian, as opposed to a Binitarian, approach to Christian theology. In this writer’s opinion Erskine’s position on universalism is unacceptable. Yet, Erskine had much to offer in the dynamism of his pneumatology to future theologians. His overall approach leaves little need or room for a strong formal pneumatology. The primary value of Erskine’s pneumatology lies in his zealous appreciation of the Spirit as seen dynamically in the overall context of his works.

⁷⁶⁷ Taylor, *The Go-Between God; The Holy*, 220-221.