

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF EDWARD IRVING

David J. Keyser
Th.M. Thesis 1997
New College, University of Edinburgh

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1. Irving And His Contemporaries

Edward Irving (1792-1834) was a Scotsman of his time. Irving was born in Annan, Scotland and always made high marks in school and later became a school teacher. But he was destined for the ministry. He graduated from Edinburgh University in 1809 and began to study for the ministry while teaching and in June of 1815 he got his license to preach. When Chalmers heard him preach in August of 1819, he invited him to become his assistant in Glasgow. For a short time two of the most noted Scottish preachers of the nineteenth century were at the same church. However, Irving was much different as a man and as a preacher than Chalmers. He felt overshadowed by Chalmers and very much wanted his own charge. In 1822 he received a call from the little Scottish Caledonian chapel in London. From here he leapt to fame. Irving married Isabella Martin in 1823 after a long engagement even though he had fallen in love with Jane Welsh whom he had introduced to his friend Carlyle. This was thought to be uncharacteristic of Irving who appeared to be romantic and flamboyant. ¹

It has been said that Edward Irving was the type of Scottish genius of “a more popular type, partaking of the metaphysical tendency or not, but drawing their essential inspiration from the sentimental depths of the national character. . . . Irving is a great representative Scotsman, not merely a great divine.” ²

Some thought that Jane could have counterbalanced Irving better than Isabella. The outward factors which shaped Irving and his beliefs were the people around him and the context of his times. His communication with and his understanding of God were predominant.

¹ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, Sidney Lee, Ed. (London: Smith, Elder, And Co., 1892), 52-53.

² Andrew Landale Drummond, *Edward Irving And His Circle* (London: James Clarke And Co., Ltd., [N.D.]), Vii.

The times of Irving were ripe for change. A major upheaval in the Church of Scotland was only ten years away when Irving first undertook his London charge. Many of those who would come to his great services in London were not theologically trained but were merely seeking a new sensation. Irving got the attention of London society and with this the press was not far behind. Nevertheless, change would come to the Church of Scotland although for different reasons than those which would embroil Irving and his followers in conflict.³

There were many factors which led to change. There had been much lukewarmness in the church in the eighteenth century. Irving despised this and for him it was time for it to go from the church. The events of the French revolution had profoundly influenced Europe and even gave rise to an apocalyptic expectation. This, as usual, brought a revival in “enthusiastic religious feeling” and Edward Irving was the kind of a man who would join in and when Irving joined in, he did not do so halfheartedly.⁴

His entire absorption in the subject may be dated from the beginning of 1826, when he became acquainted with the work of a Spanish jesuit Lacunza, published under the pseudonym of Aben Ezra, ‘The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty.’ . . . The translation was published in 1827, with a long preface, which has been reprinted separately.⁵

Irving’s preface to Ben Ezra’s work was his first significant publication. He continued to teach and to publish on the theme of the return of Christ and was very influential in this area. By 1827 Irving held premillennial views about the second coming. “These he popularized, fervently and profusely, both in preaching and writing. Iain Murray attributes to Irving the turning of the tide in British evangelical circles to premillennialism from a previously postmillennial consensus.”⁶

It is reasonable to assume that all of his ensuing theology was flavored by his expectation of the second coming. But there were other influences to be considered as well. The influence of

³ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 53.

⁴ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 53-54.

⁵ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 54.

⁶ *Dictionary Of Scottish Church History And Theology*, Nigel M. De S. Cameron, Ed. (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1993), 436.

the Enlightenment was strong and was an avowed enemy of most Protestants with a Confessional background. They harked back to their confessions for comfort and for answers. For many this was to return to the tenets of Reformed doctrine. For Irving doctrine alone was far too dry and remote although he was true to his own understanding of his creeds. Also, he did not trust the motives and the methods of evangelicalism. He considered Methodism as little better than outright Pelagianism. He began by preaching on the sacraments, especially Baptism. And in Baptism he stressed the power of the Holy Spirit. ⁷ “In his early London ministry he appealed tremendously because he was essentially the Romantic in the pulpit at a time when Evangelicalism was losing influence because it was unimaginative and prosaic.” ⁸

Irving’s association with Chalmers and the influence of both men has led to much comparison and discussion. During Irving’s lifetime and thereafter he was seen by most churchmen at best as a unique failure. Chalmers, on the other hand, was the great Scottish leader of the day. Their personalities were very different. Chalmers was intent on the practical; he was impatient with idealism. Irving lived in a different realm. If Irving believed he was right, he considered resistance from human sources as something to be ignored. Irving cared little for the opinions of other leaders or even the opinions of his own friends. Chalmers’ conversion experience had left him with definite views. Irving was always on a quest for the truth but he did not follow conventional reasoning nor was he confined to simple experience. Chalmers and Irving were even different in their conception of the grace of God. “Chalmers conceived of grace, like Paul, as an emancipation of the heart and conscience from the bondage of self . . . Unfortunately for Irving, he [Irving] was disposed to regard grace as flowing to the faithful

⁷ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*, “Irving”, I.S. Rennie; *The New Bible Library*, Cdrom, (Oklahoma City, Ellis Enterprises Incorporated, 1993.)

⁸ Andrew Landale Drummond, 53.

rather through the ordinances and ministers of the Church.”⁹ And perhaps most importantly,

Irving believed that Christ should be understood through our own humanness.

Mr. John Hair, who spent many years in patient, scholarly thought on Irving and his environment, came to this conclusion: -- ‘If Irvingism is to be traced to its original germ, so far as any system can be traced to an individual, it may be found in Irving’s religious experience, and in his consequent mode of apprehending divine truth not by open spiritual vision, but through a human medium.’¹⁰

Although comparisons of Irving with Chalmers accentuate their differences there was another well known preacher who was more like Irving in several ways, John McLeod Campbell.

Early in 1828 he [Irving] published his ‘Lectures On Baptism,’ evincing a decided approximation to the views of the sacramental party in the church of England. In May of that year . . . he contacted a friendship with Campbell of Row, soon about to be tried for heresy, which gave support to the suspicions of heterodoxy which were beginning to be entertained against himself.¹¹

Thus the taint of association with Campbell came off on those around him. Irving not only did not fear that taint but agreed enthusiastically. In Irving’s own words:

In the west of Scotland the thick and dark veil which men have cast over the truth had been taken away, chiefly by the preaching of that faithful man of God, John Campbell, late minister of Row, who was deposed by the last General Assembly for teaching that God loves every man, and that Christ died to redeem all mankind. His word leavened all that land . . . he had prepared them for every thing by teaching them the boundless love of God, and the full and free gift of Jesus with all the riches of glory which he contained.¹²

Campbell and Irving were so close in their convictions concerning the purpose of the Incarnation that it was inevitable that they become friends. Torrance says,

McLeod Campbell found that in preaching the gospel of saving grace he had to correct people’s basic conception of the character of God and align it again with Christ: God and Christ, the Father and the Son, are one in their being and nature – there is no God behind the back of Jesus Christ. . . Christ coming among us in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the likeness of flesh as it is in us sinners, in order to condemn sin in the flesh and reconcile us to God, is the very movement

⁹ Andrew Landale Drummond, 55

¹⁰ Andrew Landale Drummond, 55.

¹¹ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 54.

¹² Edward Irving, *Facts Connected With Recent Manifestations Of Spiritual Gifts*, Extracted From Fraser’s Magazine For January, March, And April, 1832. (London: Privately Printed For James Fraser, 215, Regent Street, 1832), 3.

and expression of the love of God. The ‘mind of God’ and the ‘mind of Christ . . . are completely one.’¹³

Campbell’s entire concept of saving grace was rooted in the oneness of the nature of the Father and the Son as God and in the Son’s coming in the same flesh as all mankind. Campbell believed that this was not only scriptural but that it was also the position of the true church throughout the ages as well as the position of the Reformers.

McLeod Campbell unquestionably held firmly to ‘the Catholic and Reformed’ doctrine of the atonement. In Jesus Christ his incarnate Son God himself has come among us as the one Mediator between God and man, to be one with us and one of us in such a way as to appropriate our actual human nature, and make our life and death under divine judgment his own, in order to pay our debt and make restitution which we are unable to do, to substitute himself for us (on our behalf, as well as in our place) in such a way as to bear upon and in himself the righteous wrath of God against our sin.¹⁴

With this most important of points, Irving is in complete agreement in countless places in his teachings of which one must suffice.

Whether this be new doctrine or not, I appeal to the Epistles of Paul; whether it be new in the Reformed church, I appeal to the writings of Martin Luther. I know how far wide of the mark these views of Christ’s act in the flesh will be viewed by those who are working with the stock-jobbing theology of the religious world, - that God wanted punishment, and an infinite amount of it; which Christ gave for so many; and so he is satisfied, and they escape from his anger, which flames as hot as ever against all beyond this pale.¹⁵

Irving’s entire structure and thrust of his most central work, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature* is relational and not legal. The activities of all three members of the Trinity are considered to be essential to our understanding of both the Incarnation and the atonement. Campbell thoughts were in the same framework and this framework requires that forgiveness precede the atonement. Again Torrance with a quote from Campbell,

It must be noted right away, however, that he expounded the nature of the atonement not in abstract legal terms, as though it were the acting out of a plan, but in *personal* terms, and in

¹³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology From John Knox To John McLeod Campbell*, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1996.), 294.

¹⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, 295.

¹⁵ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 95.

particular in terms of the *filial* relation between the Father and the Son. . . . ‘if God provides the atonement, then forgiveness must precede the atonement; and the atonement must be the form of the manifestation of the forgiving love of God, not its cause.’ (McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 15.)¹⁶

Irving and Campbell became friends and even worked together. Like Irving Campbell was disturbed with the state of the church in his day. In April, 1828, he writes, “I am daily more impressed with the awful state of our Church. The prophets speak words of false peace, and the people wish to have it so I am in truth of opinion that the Protestantism of our day is as much in need of reformation as the Catholicism of the days of Luther.”¹⁷ Campbell wanted reform and Irving was of the same inclination only from a different perspective. Donald Campbell, the son of John McLeod Campbell, said,

It was in the summer of this year that my father became acquainted with Edward Irving. Mrs. Oliphant quotes a letter dated June 10th, in which Irving speaks of preaching at Row on the preceding Sunday: “I was much delighted,” he says, “with Campbell and Sandy Scott, whom I have invited to come to London.” On the same day my father writes: “I have the prospect of preaching the glad tidings of free pardon in London Mr. Irving has been with me and is away. I have had much pleasure in his short visit. His peculiar views are new to me, as to others, and too important to be suddenly taken up, but I feel much cause of thankfulness to be given me in the possession of his most Christian friendship.”¹⁸

Campbell admitted that Irving’s views were peculiar to him but obviously important and showed the wisdom of not attempting to take them up suddenly but rather wanting to wait until a later time so that they could be considered at length. Like many others who did not understand or perhaps even agree with Irving, Campbell valued Irving’s friendship. This is reported repeatedly as a characteristic of Irving’s relationships. Irving was open in his attitude to those whom he admired and invited Campbell to preach in his pulpit. Campbell later quoted Irving as saying, “I remember when first we met our parting was in Glasgow; and after we had prayed together, in

¹⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, 295.

¹⁷ John McLeod Campbell, *Reminiscences And Reflections*, Referring To His Early Ministry In The Parish Of Row, 1825-31., Edited With An Introductory Narrative By His Son Donald Campbell (London: Macmillan And Co., 1873.), 28.

separating he said to me, ‘Dear Campbell, may your bosom be a pillow for me to rest upon, and my arm a staff for you to lean upon.’” The visit to London was accomplished; and Irving wrote that his Kirk-session “were loud in their acknowledgments to Mr. Campbell.”¹⁹

It was said that Irving taught faith without fear when he said, “I do not wish to leave one soul, believer or unbeliever, without a witness in his breast of God’s good title to the name of ‘Father’.

It is to no chartered few, but to all mankind that he makes the overtures.”²⁰

There is a distinctive similarity in the teachings of Irving, Campbell and Chalmers. But each man dealt with his convictions differently and for different reasons and each met different fates. Chalmers said in more than one instance that “there is nothing in the doctrine of predestination which should at all limit the universality of the gospel offer.”²¹ Chalmers refused to take part in the proceedings against Campbell at the General Assembly; he remained silent, he refused to vote. He wrote later regarding the Kirk’s attitude to “the universality of the Gospel” that “there must be a sad misunderstanding somewhere.”²² Campbell positioned himself somewhere between Chalmers and Irving. Both Campbell and Irving were put out. Irving even believed that certain further developments lay on the foundations of Campbell which he, Irving, also shared. Irving speaks of the young missionary from his church who was traveling in Scotland in 1829 “in the heart of that district of Scotland upon which the light of Mr. Campbell’s ministry had arisen.” This missionary “was led to open his mind to some of the godly people in those parts, and, among others, to a young woman who was at that time lying ill of a consumption, from which afterwards, when brought to the very door of death, she was raised up

¹⁸ John Mcleod Campbell, *Reminiscences And Reflections*, 28.

¹⁹ John Mcleod Campbell, *Reminiscences And Reflections*, 28-29.

²⁰ Andrew Landale Drummond, 56, Irving’s Sermon On Matthew, Vi., 9.

²¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology, From John Knox To John Mcleod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1996.), 285.

²² Thomas F. Torrance, 289.

instantaneously by the mighty hand of God.”²³ This ultimately led to the Pentecostal outbreak of 1830 and all of the events that followed. Irving was criticized for not only failing to repress the manifestations but for even encouraging them.

The ‘unknown tongues’ . . . were first heard on 28 March 1830. . . .On Irving’s theories of the second advent, this and the miraculous cure of Miss Campbell . . . were events to be expected, and he can scarcely be excused of excessive credulity for having rather encouraged than repressed the manifestations which rapidly multiplied.²⁴

Irving had chosen an entirely different way.

There were other charges concerning Irving represented by such statements as, “Intellectually he was weak, to say nothing of his deficiency in judgment and common sense.”²⁵ But such statements have been counterbalanced by ones such as, “This poverty of matter is in part redeemed by the dignity of the manner, for which Irving has never received sufficient credit.”²⁶ and “Irving was one of the most striking figures in ecclesiastical history, and as exempt from every taint of charlatanism as a man can be. . . .Morally his character was most excellent.”²⁷

Some might say that Campbell was rejected earlier for what Chalmers would lead in later. For them perhaps timing was the issue. Some may not agree. But for Irving his path was too different to be attributed to timing alone.

2. The Objections Of The Presbytery

The objections of the London Presbytery formed the basis of all the establishment resistance against Irving and their original publication of the charges of their committee is most important. These charges were essentially four-fold. Quoting nine different passages from Irving’s *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature* the Presbytery concluded that “by these and similar expressions, it appears to your committee, that the author of

²³ Edward Irving, *Facts Connected With Recent Manifestations Of Spiritual Gifts*, 3.

²⁴ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 54.

²⁵ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 56

²⁶ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 56.

this pamphlet is chargeable with the error of imputing to Christ that corruption of nature which is commonly called ‘Original Sin.’ They held to this even while acknowledging such statements by Irving as, “original sin was avoided in the constitution of his person” and “that the miraculous conception depriveth him of original sin and guilt, needing to be atoned for.” They said that Irving either contradicted himself too often in this matter or that he held a view of original sin that was different from the view expressed in the standards of the church. On this matter they concluded that “the unscriptural doctrine is taught that he who came to save sinners was himself a sinner.”²⁸

At the time others could read the same book, such as one of Irving’s listeners who published under the name of “A Layman”, and see it differently. This author says that a school child could tell us that Jesus was both God and man and that the clergy agreed with Irving as to the “perfect immaculacy of Jesus Christ, God and man in one person. . . . I have heard him in the pulpit say it hundreds of times.” But “the whole point at issue, therefore, is *how* was the *man*, the *creature*, which the Son of God assumed into union with himself, immaculate?”²⁹ The only question remaining is whether this immaculate state is innate or is it preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit working in the creature. This issue resurfaces often in the study of Irving’s works. This “Layman” makes an observation which provides some much needed wisdom in the entire matter when he says, “We had supposed that he must have known, that the difficulty of giving accurate utterance to the deep things of God, increased in a rapidly accelerating ratio, as we approached the point in which all contrarieties centre, the Deity with the creature . . .”³⁰ This layman understood that in such profound matters as the Incarnation words have limited value and

²⁷ *Dictionary Of National Biography*, 55.

²⁸ *A Brief Statement Of The Proceedings Of The London Presbytery, In Communion With The Established Church Of Scotland In The Case Of The Rev. Edward Irving, And Of A Book, Written By Him, And Entitled The “Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature.”* Published By Authority Of The Presbytery. (London: Published By Basil Steuart, 139, Cheapside; Hamilton & Adams, Paternoster Row: W. Whyte & Co. Edinburgh; Maurice Ogle, Glasgow; And Brown & Co. Aberdeen, 1831.), 23-25.

²⁹ *Candid Examination Of The Controversy Between Messrs. Irving, A. Thomson, And J. Haldane Respecting The Human Nature Of The Lord Jesus Christ.* By A Layman. (London: James Nisbet, Berners Street, 1829.), 13.

that the entire case needs restating in many different ways if a position is to be clearly understood. Apparently, the presbytery did not proceed under this presumption.

The London Presbytery committee disagreed with Irving's method of referring to the Lord's human nature "as considered apart from him, in itself," and his assertion that it is by his Person that redemption comes into the human nature. Irving asserts that it is the power of the Person of Christ, which is that of the Son of God, that causes strength and change to come into his human nature. This is not enough for the presbytery as their position was set on the standards of the Scottish Church as they understand them. Irving does not understand either the scriptures or the standards in the same manner.

The committee believed that "several of the most vital doctrines of Christianity" were "either entirely controverted, or so greatly impoverished, that they can yield to the Christian but little either of comfort for the present or of hope for the future."³¹ They object to Irving's understanding of "at-one-ment" as the key to atonement. In this they understand correctly that Irving is saying that it is by the union of fallen human nature and divinity that the human nature is overcome and restored. However, they point out that scripture says that it is the "blood that makes atonement for the soul."³² Irving did not deny this.

Regarding the doctrine of Satisfaction the committee was most offended by Irving's perspective which opposes "that God loveth suffering, will have it out of some one or other, without abatement."³³ Concerning the doctrine of Redemption the committee understands that, according to Irving, Christ himself was in need of redemption and, therefore, not capable of being the Redeemer. They refer here to Irving's concern that mankind must not become the worshipper of unfallen human nature. This concept has no place in the thinking of the committee.

³⁰ *Candid Examination Of The Controversy Between Messrs. Irving, A. Thomson, And J. Haldane*, 11.

³¹ *A Brief Statement Of The Proceedings Of The London Presbytery*, 26.

³² *A Brief Statement Of The Proceedings Of The London Presbytery*, 26-27.

³³ *A Brief Statement Of The Proceedings Of The London Presbytery*, 27-28. They Opposed With *W.C.F* Viii, 5 And *W.L.C.* Q. 70.

Regarding the doctrines of Imputation and Substitution, the committee counters Irving's position that if God treated Jesus as if he were in the "position of a sinner" when he had not sinful flesh, then the traditional meanings of imputation and substitution were unacceptable.³⁴

The committee said that there were also many more less important errors in the book in that they have "forborne to notice many inferior errors" and, "alas! but too true, that there are many things in this book, which are contrary to the mind of the Spirit revealed in the Scriptures, and such as are calculated to lead men from the truth as it is in Jesus."³⁵ This is by no means the end of the debate as Irving was to follow with the publication of his book *Christ's Holiness In Flesh* in which he refutes the charges put against him here.

3. The Early Days

H.C. Whitley says that three things, a book, a meeting, and a conference, were to play an all important part in Irving's life. The book was *The Coming Of The Messiah In Glory And Majesty* by Ben Ezra which Irving translated from the Spanish and, for which he wrote a long preface. The meeting was with S. T. Coleridge which quickly grew into a loyal and lasting friendship. The conference was the Albury conference which started out as a conference on prophecy and went on to design the Catholic Apostolic Church with its liturgy, doctrine, planning and government.³⁶

During Irving's early days in London he met Mr. Basil Montague and through him also met Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It was a mutual friendship drawn together by both respect and curiosity. Irving respected Coleridge as an adventurous thinker and Coleridge admired Irving's ability as well as his gifts and character. As Coleridge was not known as a man to tolerate mere eccentrics his opinion of Irving recommends Irving's contributions. Coleridge said of Irving, "I hold withal, and not the less firmly for these discrepancies in our minds and judgements, that

³⁴ *A Brief Statement Of The Proceedings Of The London Presbytery*, 31.

³⁵ *A Brief Statement Of The Proceedings Of The London Presbytery*, 31-32.

Edward Irving possesses more of the spirit and purposes of the first reformers, that he has more of the head and heart, the life and the genial power of Martin Luther, than any man now alive; yea than any man of this and the last century.”³⁷ Irving did not spare the compliments either when he said, “you have been more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine, and to my right conception of the Christian church, than any or all of the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation,” and, “the first fruits of my mind . . . are the offering of a heart that loves your heart, and of a mind which looks up with reverence to your mind.”³⁸ Perhaps this friendship was the strangest of all to many who understood that Irving and Coleridge held widely different views on many things including Christian doctrine.³⁹

4. Irving’s Writings

This was the order of Irving’s publications. Irving arrived in London in 1822. In 1823, Irving’s second year in London, he published his first book, the *Orations and the Arguments For Judgment To Come*. In 1824 there was *For Missionaries After The Apostolic School, A Series Of Orations*. In 1825 came *Babylon And Infidelity Foredoomed*. In 1827 his *Introduction To Ben Ezra* and the *Ordination Charge* to the Minister of the Scots Church, London Wall was published. In 1828 *Ten Homilies On Baptism* was published of which H.C. Whitley says it was

³⁶ Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle: An Introduction To The Life And Teaching Of Edward Irving* (London: Scm Press, Ltd., 1955.), 36-41.

³⁷ Whitley, 39, *Blinded Eagle*, From *Inquiring Spirit - A New Presentation Of Coleridge*, Kathleen Coburn, Ed.

³⁸ Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle*, 40.

³⁹ In discussing the concept of “person” in the Godhead, Colin E. Gunton says that Coleridge was concerned about the “fashionable mechanical philosophy” of his day. He wanted a theology of the Trinity because the members of that Trinity are Persons in relation who take their being and particularities from each other. Coleridge did not want an impersonal, mechanical God because the nature of God is reflected in creation and especially in the actions and affairs of mankind. For Coleridge “the question of the three in one is also the question of the kind of world we live in.” However, Gunton believes that Coleridge is weak in his thinking because he is deficient in the incarnational dimensions of his theology. This weakness is brought to a strength by Coleridge’s friend Irving. Gunton says, “Irving held that the concrete link between the one and the many, the eternal God and his erring creation, is Jesus Christ, who is both the one and the many: the historic *hypostasis*, Jesus Christ, utterly human, tempted as we are; and yet through the Holy Spirit the basis from all eternity of a personal and communal relationship with God. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise Of Trinitarian Theology*, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 99 - 100.

Irving at his best. And in the same year *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*⁴⁰ which was the beginning of Irving's publications on the subject and was presented in a didactic manner. This publication began the controversy which was to bring forth two other works. In 1828 *Last Days* also appeared in print. In 1829 the periodical, *The Morning Watch*, began and Irving wrote long and often for it. In 1830 *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature and Christ's Holiness In Flesh* appeared.⁴¹ By then Irving was on the defensive. However, this did not cloud his judgment or his clarity of thinking. *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature* is not only an adequate summary of the first work, but it is clearer in some respects as the subject had by then been more carefully considered, while the treatment was more carefully written due to the severe polemics of Irving's critics. In addition, it is also an accurate preview of *Christ's Holiness In Flesh* which was a logical sequel to the middle work. Although these three works do not comprise half of the total printed works of this prodigious man, who had a large and busy pastorate and a family and who died at the age of forty-two, they are the core of his writings and all that is necessary to understand his position on the Incarnation.

The *Orations and the Arguments For Judgment To Come* went into three editions in three months. In it Irving stated two propositions. The first one declared that the chief obstacle to the progress of divine truth was that it was not being presented sufficiently to the minds of men. The second proposition stated that 90% of people know nothing of the power of God because they do not hear it or because they do not see it incarnate in the life of the church. His purpose became to make the word of God speak to the people of his day. He did not believe that the Bible was a

⁴⁰ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, The Collected Writings Of Edward Irving In Five Volumes, Edited By Rev. G. Carlyle, Vol. 5 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865), Chapters: (1) That The Beginning Or Origin Of The Mystery, That The Eternal Word Should Take Unto Himself A Body, Is The Holy Will And Good Pleasure Of God, (2) The End Of The Mystery Of The Incarnation Is The Glory Of God, (3) The Method Is By Taking Up The Fallen Humanity, (4) The Preparation For, And The Very Act Of, The Incarnation Of Christ, (5) The Fruits Of The Incarnation, (6) Conclusions Concerning The Subsistence Of God, And The Subsistence Of The Creature, Derived From Reflections Upon The Incarnation. There Was Also An Appendix Published To This Treatise.

book to be discussed and divided but one to challenge and compel men to action.⁴² Irving's philosophy formed here would mold all his future activities.

Therefore, in 1830, Irving's major works were completed although some other minor writing followed.⁴³ Just four years later after Irving's death his friend Carlyle said, "Edward Irving's warfare was closed, if not in victory, yet in invincibility, and faithful endurance to the end. The spirit of the time, which could not enlist him as its soldier, must needs fight against him as its enemy . . .this Messenger of Truth in the Age of Shams."⁴⁴

Since Irving's rejection is often attributed to his zeal and his language rather than his theology the perception of a man of words such as S. T. Coleridge is pertinent. Coleridge said, "Irving's expressions upon this subject were ill-judged, inconvenient, in bad taste, and in terms false . . . It is Irving's error to use declamation, high and passionate rhetoric, not introduced by calm and clear logic."⁴⁵ Another more modern commentator adds, "Irving's intention was undoubtedly to remind the Church of the reality and relevance of Jesus' human brotherhood; his tragedy was to shipwreck such a noble enterprise by pushing language beyond the limits of catholic Christological reflection on the sinlessness of the Saviour."⁴⁶

"The reality and relevance of Jesus' human brotherhood" is indeed important and still a message that is widely misunderstood in the church. Perhaps the present atmosphere will forbear more regarding the pushing of language to the limits.

5. The Manifestations Issue

⁴¹ Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle*, 43-49.

⁴² Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle*, 43.

⁴³ Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle*, 48-49.

⁴⁴ Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle*, 49. *Reminiscences* By Thomas Carlyle, Vol.1.

⁴⁵ *Dictionary Of Scottish Church History And Theology*, 436

⁴⁶ *Dictionary Of Scottish Church History And Theology*, 436.

There were also the issues of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in Irving's day. These manifestations did not appear to occur in the same manner as they had occurred before or have occurred since. Regarding these manifestations Gordon Strachan says,

“unlike any previous manifestations of the Spirit, they were occasioned not by the overflow of powerful religious feeling but by faithful response to the systematic study and preaching of the Word of God. Theological understanding was central to all that happened and preceded all forms of experience of spiritual gifts. It is the centrality of a coherent theological system which makes the Pentecost of 1830-32 unique and quite distinct from all previous revivals.”⁴⁷

Comparing what happened with Irving's people Strachan refers to speaking in tongues as this occurred among the Huguenots and Jansenists in the past. Then this came amidst great enthusiasm and most unexpectedly. Conversely, what happened in London and in the West of Scotland, and that which followed in the Catholic Apostolic Church which arose after Irving's expulsion from the Church of Scotland, was based on the understanding that the people had as to what to expect of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ This is believable even though Irving had somewhat of a reputation as a romantic as he was firmly committed to his understanding of the Reformed position. And it must be remembered that he himself never experienced any of the manifestations that his followers experienced although he said that he taught the scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit by what he called the “power of spiritual exposition.”⁴⁹ The outbreaks in both the Pentecostal movement just after the turn of the twentieth century and the charismatic movement which begin in the late 1950's were once again, for the most part, spontaneous eruptions. Although these eruptions fuel the fires of enthusiasm, they do little to promote stability among the participants. The almost numberless ensuing splits in both movements are testimony to their

⁴⁷ C. Gordon Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology Of Edward Irving* (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 14 - 15.

⁴⁸ C. Gordon Strachan, 14.

⁴⁹ Oliphant, 375.

instability. The followers of Irving in the Catholic Apostolic Church, although not without turmoil, began their proceedings in an orderly manner.⁵⁰

CHAPTER TWO - THE ISSUES

1. What Can Irving Contribute?

We can not deny the importance of each component that influenced Irving such as the return of Christ, the humanity of Christ, and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and of believers. But there is more than one reason to focus on his Christology. Primarily, Christians theologians broadly agree that Christology is foundational. Furthermore, Irving's doctrines of salvation and of the Holy Spirit are absolutely governed by his beliefs on the Divinity and humanity of Christ; his Christology is logically at the center of his whole approach.

Also, because of this Irving, knowingly or unknowingly, anticipated and provided some constructive answers for the present day Charismatic and Pentecostal element in the Church. Knowingly, because he was aware of what he was dealing with and through searching the scriptures and decided action attempted to provide an orderly yet free environment for Charismatic activity. Also, knowingly because he linked Holy Spirit manifestations to his doctrine of Christ. Unknowingly perhaps, because although he believed whole-heartedly that he was right, his small group was insignificant and outcast in Irving's own day. To date they have not yet been given a proper place in theological history even within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles.

Today Pentecostals and Charismatics outstrip all other orthodox Christian groups in growth. But they have never found a theological system which they can call their own. Their beliefs are often a combination of old theologies and new amendments which encourage or allow certain manifestations of the Holy Spirit. How can Irving contribute to a coherent and authentic charismatic theology for today? In the first place, all of Irving's theology centers around his

⁵⁰ Oliphant, 381- 82.

Christology. Also, he deals with the humanity of Christ in a unique and insightful manner. And finally, Irving's affirmation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are set in the context of the humanity of Christ and his oneness with us.

By way of context is not possible to understand Irving's soteriology, anthropology, pneumatology, ecclesiology or theology proper apart from his Christology. In his soteriology Irving challenges, and even condemns, what he calls a "sanctified selfishness" which makes the benefits received by believers the center of salvation. Atonement and redemption have to do with Christ's work for the sinner and have no bearing upon God. Therefore, atonement and redemption should be in third place in our thinking, behind the glory of God and Christ. He maintains that God's glory should be the focus of our thinking. If "God and Christ are postponed to my own personal safety . . . a system of sanctified selfishness is the result." His Christology asserts that it was nothing less than the condescension of the Son in becoming flesh that shows forth this glory.⁵¹

In his anthropology Irving insists that our humanity is alone and unredeemed if the Son took a form or flesh that was in any way different than our own. In his pneumatology he asserts that we can have no oneness with Christ in the Spirit unless we have a oneness with him in the flesh. Furthermore, any ministry that we have in the Spirit is only a copy of the selfsame ministry that Jesus had in the Holy Spirit. The work of the church as the Body of Christ is no more than the corporate extension of individual ministry.

Even in theology proper Irving's Christology dominates. He staunchly affirms the divinity of the Son with claims that he is more orthodox than his Reformed contemporaries. In addition, he sees that act of the Father in fostering the descent of the Son as the very act of love of the redemption. He stresses the Father's loss as well as the Son's obedience. He affirms that the Son does not change Father God, but rather reveals him. God's motive of love is above all.

In Irving's Christology the orthodox doctrine of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word is foundational. He will not sacrifice the divine for the human or the human for the divine. Why then all the controversy over his teachings? He chose to call the human nature of Jesus "sinful human nature". This nature Jesus derived totally from his mother. It must be identical. Consequently, no matter how often and how strenuously he affirmed that he believed that Jesus was without sin he was never believed.

2. The Flesh Of Christ

Of all the writing for which Irving received criticism the most vehement concerned the way that he understood Christ's sinless life in "sinful flesh." The preface of *The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened* provides a key phrase which is astutely commented on by the eminent biographer of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Oliphant. In her words a "deeply disingenuous guise" was used in putting the matter of Irving's position on Christ's flesh before the public. Irving had said, "Whether Christ's flesh had the grace of sinlessness and incorruption from its proper nature, or from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, -- I say the later." By Mrs. Oliphant's estimation this should not have shocked the public. But when, on the other hand, it is stated as an heretical maintenance of the "sinfulness of Christ's human nature," the matter changes its aspect entirely, and involves something abhorrent to the most superficial of Christians." And she quickly adds, "But in this way it was stated by every one of Irving's opponents." ⁵²

Irving held that the immediate and the formal cause of the Incarnation was the fall. By immediate he meant that the fall was the occasion or the reason for the Incarnation and by formal he meant that the Incarnation took the form that was necessary to compensate for the results of

⁵¹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature* (London: Printed By Ellerton And Henderson For Baldwin And Cradock, 1830), 99.

⁵² M.O.W. Oliphant, *The Life Of Edward Irving* (London: Hurst And Blackett, 1864), 257.

the fall.⁵³ He does not, however, hold that God was merely reacting to man's act but holds that although man's will is free, God foresaw man's need from the foundation of the world; its origin is solely in the will of God.⁵⁴ This position shapes all the development of Irving's Christology. The fact that Irving held to the free will of man as a Reformed minister is significant. This affirmation did not negate his belief in election but rather affirmed it.⁵⁵ This is a subject which he develops more fully later by differentiating between the universality of reconciliation and the particularity of election.⁵⁶ Irving believed in one covenant of grace throughout the Bible which was only completed and understood in Christ Jesus.⁵⁷ He sees in John's prologue the understanding of the One who was with God and who was God who became incarnate and revealed grace and truth to mankind.⁵⁸ It is God's will and pleasure to send the Son incarnate. From here he begins to build his case for the necessity of the true humanity of Christ.

Irving considered the Incarnation to be the greatest and most wonderful mystery of God. The Incarnation was not an expedient to meet an accident. In it the uncreated Substance of the eternal Essence formed an eternal union with the very substance of the fallen earth. The humiliation and endurance of Jesus is beyond comprehension. The exaltation of the Son of man resulting from the Incarnation is the salvation of the church.⁵⁹ In it Satan is defeated.⁶⁰ The end of the Incarnation is the glory of God. This glory is not in Christ as the Son of God, but as the Son of man. Irving affirms the immutability of God and affirms that divinity indeed does not change. "The divinity had of its own accord suspended itself, and by its own power kept itself continually suspended. He was man and God in one person; and during His humility the God-head was employed in humbling or restraining itself, -- which, I may say, is the highest act of a

⁵³ In the Aristotelian sense as having intelligible content.

⁵⁴ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened, From The Collected Writings Of Edward Irving In Five Volumes, Edited By Rev. G. Carlyle, Vol. 5 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865.)*, 10.

⁵⁵ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 56.

⁵⁶ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 153.

⁵⁷ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 13.

⁵⁸ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 19.

⁵⁹ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 59 - 60.

self-existent being to suspend His own activity, as it is also the highest act of grace.”⁶¹ God is manifested in all three persons in the Incarnation; the Son reveals the Father and manifests the Spirit. The holiness of God is justified in the manifestation of the Son. The glory of God is manifested in the Incarnation.⁶²

Irving insisted that the flesh or human nature that Christ took to himself is none other than fallen human nature, since he maintained that there was no other nature in existence to take.⁶³ This flesh was not the flesh before the fall but the flesh after the fall. It was a true body and a reasonable soul. If Christ did not have a reasonable soul, then his human feelings would be only an “assumed fiction.” It was most important to Irving that we understand that it was not this nature which was directly glorified. It had to die and be raised, or transformed first; otherwise, fallen humanity would have cause to worship its own being. Graham McFarlane, writing recently on Irving, is not correct in assuming that Irving wrote these things to develop the doctrine of the Trinity as would a teacher of theology. As McFarlane himself says, “Irving’s thoughts on the doctrine of God as Trinity were given shape and form in 1825 in a series of sermons on the Trinity.”⁶⁴ Irving was first and foremost a pastor. These were published sermons. The topic was the Incarnation. The development of the doctrine of the Trinity was an unavoidable by-product from the mind of Irving. But, to see it as a doctrinal thesis rather than a pastoral teaching puts the entire work in an unfair and perhaps even a deceptive light. It is not that Irving can not stand up to inspection; he can. But his motive in these sermons was to strengthen the faith of his flock and not to prove his position theologically. There is far less interest in the pew in orthodox Trinitarian theology than there is in making it through the week without giving in to sin or discouragement or despair. To make these sermons, although

⁶⁰ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 62.

⁶¹ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 87.

⁶² Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 88 - 97.

⁶³ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 115 - 116.

published as a book, a treatise on Trinitarian theology is to remove them from their proper context, and in missing the intent some meaning is also lost. McFarlane is more accurate when he says, “Therefore, his is not an explicit analysis of God’s being. Rather, it is a theological concern aimed at a specifically soteriological end.”⁶⁵

One reason that it is particularly difficult to separate Irving’s Christology from his soteriology is because his entire concept of the truly human Christ exists for our salvation. In insisting that Jesus received Mary’s true flesh at conception Irving quickly adds that from the same moment the Holy Spirit “abode in Him and sanctified Him.”⁶⁶ And as Irving follows this line of reasoning, he necessarily develops his Trinitarian position. In the third sermon Irving explains that the method of salvation is by God the Son taking up the fallen humanity. This is the heart of his Christology. He then discusses the Covenant.

This was the covenant between the Father and the Son: this was the purpose in the Christ: the Father willing it out of very goodness . . . the Son consenting to it out of a very dutifulness unto his Father . . . thus the covenant between the Father and the Son being willed and worded, the Holy Ghost, of very delight in the communion of the Father and the Son, to execute what their pleasure is, and likewise of very goodness to the creature, consented to prepare that body, so willed and so worded by the Godhead.⁶⁷

In this way the entire Trinity is involved in the action of salvation; the Father willing, the Son consenting, and the Spirit executing. And even though this is a convincing Trinitarian formula, Irving’s motive is not to construct a neat Theology but to provide the necessary elements in his Christology. For Irving there must be a form of kenosis in the Incarnation. If this is to be so and if all the power and purpose of the Godhead is to be expressed, then the Holy Spirit’s activity becomes more important and the Father’s initiating is required.

⁶⁴ Graham McFarlane, *Christ And The Spirit; The Doctrine Of The Incarnation According To Edward Irving* (Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster Press, 1996), 14.

⁶⁵ Graham McFarlane, 15.

⁶⁶ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 121.

⁶⁷ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 122.

Irving says that if Christ's flesh is not the same as ours, “ it deprives us of all knowledge of God’s inclinations and affections towards us, and defeats us of all heavenly influences whatsoever. . . . Christ stands in the room of sinful men, and that God’s dealings with him shew us how he will deal with those who believe on him.”⁶⁸ How God deals with believers is Irving’s pastoral concern. This is his approach and no other. The first step is necessarily the fact that for Irving the human nature of Christ is identical with ours except without sin. The next step is to understand how the Father deals with the man Jesus and then to project how he will deal with all those who have the same human nature. Christ stands in our place and by understanding God’s inclinations and affections towards Christ in the scripture, we can know God’s inclinations and affections towards us. Our triumph, our belovedness, our resurrection, our reigning all depend on Christ's. Irving is strong and consistent in examining the opposite. “If Christ, when he became man, did take manhood altered and specially prepared for him, and not manhood as every man hath it . . . therefore the work done in and for Christ is no signification of any work which God intendeth to do in and for any other man.”⁶⁹ The flesh of Christ must not be altered or our inheritance is nullified. This rings of Calvin’s doctrine of the Wondrous Exchange.⁷⁰

Irving concept of substitution is unique and requires examination. Irving said,

It is substitution, that Christ from being the Son of God should instead thereof become the Son of man. It is substitution, that instead of the sinner proving the extremes of God’s being, whereof he could as little sustain the holiness as he could receive the love, God’s own Son should come into his place and bear them all, and enable us through substitution in his person to bear them also.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature* (London: Printed By Ellerton And Henderson For Baldwin And Cradock, 1830), 112.

⁶⁹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 113.

⁷⁰ “This is the wondrous exchange made by his boundless goodness. Having become with us the Son of Man, he has made us with himself sons of God. By his own descent to the earth he has prepared our ascent to heaven. Having received our mortality, he has bestowed on us his immortality. Having undertaken our weakness, he has made us strong in his strength. Having submitted to our poverty, he has transferred to us his riches. Having taken upon himself the burden of unrighteousness with which we were oppressed, he has clothed us with his righteousness.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 558, (IV, XVII, 2-3).

⁷¹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 117.

Irving's contemporaries thought of substitution in the legal and penal sense. Irving thought of substitution as being representative which included the penal aspect. David Dorries has said, "Irving's opponents rejected this doctrine of the atonement because their legal, contractual understanding of God and his covenant drawn from Federal Theology caused their Christology to be controlled solely by the penal substitutionary doctrine of atonement."⁷² For Irving Jesus is not only "a man" but he is most definitely "the second Adam." All that we have from God is "in him."

Irving considers Jesus' life and the acceptance of it by the Father to be the end of the matter of the flesh.⁷³ He says that the representative or substitute principle of the reformers was "certainly too narrow" and that only ignorance or unbelief in the Trinity or in redemption could cause a person to withstand his position.⁷⁴⁷⁵ This reveals a distinctive of Irving's Christology which was vital to his argument, and which he believed most strongly, and which was at variance with many of his day.

3. Pneumatology And Christology In Irving

The relation between Pneumatology and Christology in Irving's theology is of great significance.

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. [underlining mine]⁷⁶

⁷² David William Dorries, *Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centering Upon Edward Irving's Doctrine Of Christ's Human Nature*, A Thesis Presented For The Degree Of Doctor Of Philosophy At The University Of Aberdeen, 1987, 532.

⁷³ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 114.

⁷⁴ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 116.

⁷⁵ Unlike the Lutherans, the Reformed theologians applied the category of exinanition to the divine nature of Christ. It was the Son of God who emptied Himself, and He did this in becoming man. The Incarnation itself, in the actual form in which it took place, was a kenosis for Him who was in the form of God before he took the form of a servant. But the kenosis or *exinanitio* was only a *quasi*, an emptying as to use and manifestation, not as to possession, a hiding of divine glory and of divine attributes, not a *self-denudation* with respect to these. The standing phrase for the kenosis was *occultatio*, and the favorite illustration the obscuration of the sun by a dense cloud. A.B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1895.), 125.

⁷⁶ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 118.

The furnishing power and function of the Spirit in the life of the Son is vital to Irving's Christology. His is no mean pneumatology. The Holy Spirit is not a necessary but uncomfortable addition. The Spirit is integral to the entire plan of God in the Incarnation and in salvation. This links his soteriology and his Christology. It also integrates his acceptance of the manifestations of the Spirit to the core of his theology. In modern terms it makes Irving's theology uniquely charismatic. It is unique in that most modern charismatic thinking consists of a core of thought from one tradition or another with an emphatic add-on affirming the acceptableness of the gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit for today. For Irving a supernatural and present Holy Spirit is basic to his entire Christology. It is central; it is vital; it is necessary. If the Holy Spirit furnished Jesus with not only the power to minister but also to live the perfect life - although the idea of his perfect faith by virtue of his divine nature is also important - and we have the same flesh as Christ possessed, then the need for the power of the Spirit in all Christian experience is assumed. Irving considers it just as great an error to mix the divine nature of the Holy Spirit with the human nature of Christ as to mix the divine nature of the Son with his own human nature.⁷⁷ He believes that in this he is following the wisdom of Chalcedon. He sees the entire function of the Holy Spirit as totally equal in importance with that of the Father and the Son. Regarding the perfect faith of Christ, even though we do not have perfect faith we do have the opportunity to grow in faith throughout our lives and we have the same Holy Spirit as our helper that was essential to the victorious life of Christ. His pneumatology is high.

Now behold what a wonder-working person is this Holy Ghost . . . This office of the Holy Ghost, first to unite the invisible Godhead with the visible Son; and secondly, to furnish the Son for the work of bringing human nature into perfect reconciliation with, and obedience of, God: this, which is the essence of all sanctification of wicked men.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 119.

⁷⁸ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 120.

It is the Holy Spirit who converts the creature out of its state of rebellion into a state of holiness and love. And this work is first in the life of the human nature of the Son and then in the lives of all believers. This is linked to Irving's doctrine of "at-one-ment" which describes the relationship between God and his people and does not rest on the amount of punishment necessary to appease God's sense of justice.

Even though Irving holds to the necessity of mystery in the Incarnation he does have his own understanding of this mystery which is consistent with his overall concept when he says:

"And the instant that act of the Holy Ghost began, in the very beginning of it, in the instant of life quickened before the sight of God, did the Son, in His independent personality, once and forever join himself to the holy thing, which by that conjunction became properly named the Son of God. And such I conceive to be the mystery of this conception of the Child."⁷⁹

Three things are inextricably linked in Irving's thought, the true humanity of the Son, the separation of Chalcedon, and the activity of the Holy Spirit. He insists that "It is the substance of the Godhead in the person of the Son, and the substance of the creature in the state of fallen manhood, united, yet not mixed, but most distinct forever."⁸⁰ But this in itself is not enough. There must be a "thorough communication, inhabitation, and empowering of a Divine substance" by the Holy Spirit as well.⁸¹ He says that without an absolute dependency on the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus there is a sort of deifying of human nature. This leads to all sorts of heresy. But when the Holy Spirit has his proper place, then "in the manhood of Christ was exhibited all of the Godhead that shall ever be exhibited, Father, Son and Spirit; according as it is written, 'In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,' or in a body." This refers only to Christ's life before the resurrection as the time was not yet come to see a glorious body while Jesus was still overcoming sin in the flesh.⁸²

⁷⁹ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 123.

⁸⁰ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 123.

⁸¹ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 123-4.

4. The Doctrine Of “Sinful Flesh” And Chalcedon

In the preface to *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature* Irving explained his use of the words “sinful flesh”. He also makes it clear that he is referring to the Lord’s human nature and that he is “speaking of it considered as apart from Him.”⁸³ He is not speaking of the Lord’s person. In this way Irving defines his words and qualifies his concepts.

On this issue Hugh Ross Mackintosh said of Edward Irving,

“Irving built up a theory of salvation according to which our Lord, thus maintaining His personal sinlessness, and enduring to the uttermost the penalty due to His sinful human nature, achieved the reconciliation of God and man in His own person, the thing done in one portion being done, virtually, in the whole.”⁸⁴

The emphasis on “His sinful human nature” is inaccurate taken out of context with the balance of Irving’s writings. Irving repeatedly reiterates that Jesus had no sin of His own for which to atone. He is only affirming that Jesus’ flesh was exactly the same as the flesh of all men; both the visible flesh, or body, and the invisible flesh, human nature. It was the flesh of his mother. However, in going on Mackintosh shows a still greater misunderstanding of Irving’s position.

“Of this eccentric though touching view it may be said, briefly, that the oneness of our Lord with us in the moral conflict, which was for Irving the heart of all things, is indeed a great fact; yet the theory of it is not to be purchased at the price of asserting that His humanity was corrupt, with a corruptness which only the Holy Spirit could hold in check.”⁸⁵

The key words here are “eccentric” and “a great fact” and “only the Holy Spirit”. Most importantly, Mackintosh missed Irving’s concept of the perfect faith of Jesus. The perfect faith of Jesus and its source is not an insignificant theme in Irving. He says, “To understand

⁸² Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 123-4.

⁸³ Edward Irving, *Christ’s Holiness In The Flesh* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1831), Xiii.

⁸⁴ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1951), 277-8.

the work which he did, you must understand the materials with which he did it. The work which he did was, to reconcile, sanctify, quicken, and glorify this nature of ours, which is full of sin, and death, and rebellion, and dishonour unto God.”⁸⁶ He notes that there is no disagreement here with other teachers, except that others maintain that the human nature of Christ underwent a change in the miraculous conception. Irving holds that there was no change. Christ’s human nature was “full of fellowship and community with us all his life long” and was only changed at the resurrection. The change Irving does hold to is that the human nature of Christ was regenerate at conception by the Holy Spirit. By regenerate he means that it was cleansed and made righteous from the exact moment of conception and was therefore never in need of continuing sanctification. But it was still post-fall flesh. The regenerate life was however “in measure greater because of his perfect faith.” The reason for this perfect faith was because Jesus was a Divine Person of one substance with the Father.⁸⁷ A key statement is,

The thing, therefore, which we maintain is, That as Adam was the perfect man of creation, Jesus was the perfect man of regeneration: perfect in holiness, by being perfect in faith; perfect in faith, though all the created universe strove to alienate him from God; and prevailing to believe in the Father, against the universe, through the Divinity of his person; which was thereby proved to be uncreated, and above creation, by prevailing against a rebellious creation, with which he clothed himself, and under whose load he came.⁸⁸

In this Christ's holiness is the result of his perfect faith. His Person is divine. He had a human nature identical with ours. He prevailed against the rebellion in creation by being a Divine person with a perfect faith. He came under the load brought about by this rebellion. Therefore, Christ's perfect faith is the key to Irving’s understanding of Christ and his redemptive work. Irving held “ that there is no other way of seeing his Divinity in action save by this only, That his union with the Father by faith stood good against the whole

⁸⁵ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ*, 277-8.

⁸⁶ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, vii.

⁸⁷ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, vii.

creation, and prevailed to draw creation out of the hands of its oppressors back again, and to reconcile it unto God.”⁸⁹

It is clear from this that Irving believed that Jesus’ perfect faith derived from his Divine nature and this produced his life-long unbroken holiness. Irving understands this divine nature as having the power to have life in himself.

This, again, will receive its explanation from another passage of Scripture (John v. 26): “For, as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.” This shews us whence he derived that power of having life in himself, even from the Father. And that his life was supported from the same fountain, take this testimony (John vi. 57): “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” These two passages teach me that the power of holding his life in his own hands, which Christ speaketh of in the passage in question, is one given to him in virtue of his perfect faith; just as in virtue of our faith we derive from him the gift of everlasting life. Take this passage, in the same discourse, where it is as strongly affirmed of a believer (John viii. 51):⁹⁰

This perfect faith proves that Jesus is Divine in his person; it is not the faith that makes him divine. And we can not forget that Irving believed that he was entirely in accord with the Chalcedonian definition of the person and natures of Christ. He sees, “something increate, for all creation is rushing the other way; something superhuman, for all human persons have been withdrawn from their confidence. And thus Christ’s perfect faith . . . doth prove him to be not a creature, doth prove him to be inseparable from God, doth prove him to be one with God.”⁹¹

He makes this even clearer by comparing it with our regeneration as our nature after regeneration is the same as before. Therefore, Christ’s substance after his conception in Mary is the same, unaltered and “without addition to any creature part; a perfect or complete humanity, a true body and a reasonable soul; a personable substance, though not a human person; the person being the person of the Son of God.”⁹² Irving maintains the Chalcedonian definition of the two

⁸⁸ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, vii - viii.

⁸⁹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, viii.

⁹⁰ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 94.

⁹¹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 128-9.

⁹² Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 3.

natures without mixing. For him the Person of Christ is not a human being merely but the Son of God.

Therefore, in this context Mackintosh falls short of a complete comprehension of Irving when he says that Jesus' humanity was kept from corruptness by "only the Holy Spirit"? Who is the Holy Spirit? Would He be capable of preserving the flesh of Jesus without sin even without the perfect faith of the Son of God? Further, coupled with this concept of perfect faith as a result of being a divine person, Irving maintains that the Holy Spirit is certainly more than sufficient for maintaining the sinless life of Christ. But this does not exhaust Irving's position. He sees the entire Incarnation as the saving process which is performed jointly by all members of the Godhead working in perfect harmony to bring about the benefits for mankind. Mackintosh agrees with this "great fact." How then is it eccentric? For Irving the Holy Spirit is not an addendum but an integral part with the Father of Divine action in salvation. This is a concept almost wholly missing from Mackintosh's theology. It is difficult to understand how Macintosh can interface with Irving without properly dealing with his pneumatology.

A charge against Irving of confusing the natures is erroneous. A charge of docetism is absurd. The hypostatic union is stated, "In the incarnation of the Son of God, a human nature was inseparably united forever with the divine nature in the one person of Jesus Christ, yet with the two natures remaining distinct, whole, and unchanged, without mixture or confusion so that the one person, Jesus Christ, is truly God and truly man."⁹³ Where, or Who, then is the Person? First of all, in this definition it is the human nature which is inseparably united forever with the divine nature. It has to be so for the divine nature is eternal and the human nature is created. C.A. Blaising says that several important Christological issues are highlighted by Chalcedon. The continuity of the Savior's identity is maintained in the sense that Jesus Christ is the same person

who was the preexistent Logos, the Son of God. The complexity of the Savior's nature is maintained, it is no longer the Divine nature alone which is expressed in his person. The distinction of the natures is maintained, and Eutychianism is excluded along with monophysitism. And the perfection of the natures is maintained, Jesus Christ is truly God, and truly man.⁹⁴ In Irving all of these are affirmed. Irving did nothing, when his central writings are studied in context, to contradict them. There is one person, both natures are real, the natures are distinct, and both natures are perfected and complete. At the same time, the reality of the human nature is sharply affirmed. There remains only what has been called the "metaphysical" question. But the doctrine of Chalcedon was not produced as a purely philosophic statement on the subsistence of the finite and the infinite. It was offered as a description and explanation of what was found in scripture and made use of language that would help in this task.⁹⁵

4. Kenosis As An Issue

In considering Irving's position on the humanity of Christ the issue with and without kenotic theory needs to be considered. Some theologians will see Christ's humanity hand in hand with kenotic thought and some will not. H.R. Mackintosh is representative of the kenotic school and will be considered here. Irving's "kenoticism" consists of his "self-contracting God" and his emphasis on the "sinful flesh" of Christ. Irving stresses the true humanity of Christ which he obtains from his mother while at the same time defending the formula of Chalcedon and the holiness of Christ in the flesh.

John A. T. Robinson says that the defect of kenoticism was that it stripped Christ of the qualities of transcendence which make him the revelation of God. It assumed that the

⁹³ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*, "Hypostatic Union", C.A. Blaising; *The New Bible Library*, Cdrom, (Oklahoma City, Ellis Enterprises Incorporated, 1993.)

⁹⁴ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*, "Hypostatic Union", C.A. Blaising.

superhuman attributes had to be removed in order for Jesus to live in a human form. He does allow that although the theory has received damaging criticism, it does contain “vital truth” and there will no doubt be attempts to revive it. According to Robinson, the strength of kenoticism is that it shows that a humiliated man can not only be an expression of the power and love that moves the sun and the stars but can be the “fullest expression” of that love.⁹⁶ He thinks that this is the New Testament approach and that “The Christian indeed cannot look into man without seeing Jesus, and cannot look into Jesus without seeing God.”⁹⁷ In Robinson, also, there seems to be a pneumatological weakness. In the kenotic school so often the lack of power in the man Jesus is the most vulnerable point. And yet they say they are presenting the Jesus of the New Testament. Their critics quickly seize upon the fact that this Jesus is too powerless. Yet neither side seems willing or able to attribute the needed power to the Holy Spirit. Irving does not have this problem. Whatever else his critics may say, pneumatology is not a weak point for him. Again the difference between the pastoral approach and the professorial approach may be the reason for this emphasis. For the academic it needs to make sense or at least be a well developed argument. For the pastor it needs to work in the lives of his people. For both, starting with the man Jesus of the New Testament and finding God in him is the best approach. The opposite will invariably lead to docetism.

In critiquing the doctrine of the two natures Mackintosh says that it brings into the life of Christ an “incredible and thoroughgoing dualism”. One concern is that the mystery will be lost. He says, “For tradition the unity of the person is always a problem, and to the last a mystery; for the New Testament it is the first reality we touch.”⁹⁸

Does Irving speak to these problems? In a large measure, yes. And the answers lie in Irving’s understanding of the Person and the natures coupled with his pneumatology. Irving, like

⁹⁵ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*, “Hypostatic Union”, C.A. Blaising.

⁹⁶ John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face Of God* (London: Xpress Reprints, 1994), 207-8.

⁹⁷ John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face Of God* (London: Xpress Reprints, 1994), 243.

Mackintosh, acknowledges the mystery. There will always be an aspect, and a not insignificant one at that, that we will not be capable of understanding about the Incarnation. But Mackintosh's primary concern seems to be in perceiving a Jesus that lacks the personal impact of the New Testament Jesus. He blames Chalcedonian Christology for the "dissection" which depersonalizes Jesus. And yet Irving's human Jesus is more real than tradition's, much more. The human traits that Irving's Christology allows make Jesus more one of us than tradition would allow. Mackintosh says, "He is still holding Himself at a distance from its experience and conditions. There is no saving descent."⁹⁹ This is not true of the Jesus portrayed by Irving's teaching. Mackintosh's reason for this aloofness lies in the fact that Deity is impassible; Christ executed one act as God and suffered another as man. In this he finds duplicity. And left in traditional hands duplicity it would be, for Christ is "not a single consciousness after all."¹⁰⁰ Mackintosh can not abide the understanding of "nature" as it was traditionally held.

In the second place, there is a difficulty concerned with the person in which the two natures are held to be "inseparably joined together." Once more we are obliged to report unfavorably on the term "nature", . . . The ancient dogma proceeds on the definite assumption that, in both God and man, there exists a complex whole of attributes and qualities, which can be understood and spoken about as a "nature" enjoying some kind of real being apart from the unifying or focal Ego; . . . To put it frankly, when we abstract from personality . . . what we vaguely call "human nature" is not human nature in the least. . . . A twofold personality, however, is not merely something that we fail to understand; it is something we see quite well to be impossible.¹⁰¹

But Irving does not see nature apart from personality. He sees the Person of Jesus to be the Son of God although he can refer to the "sinful human nature" of Jesus as "considered" apart from the person. There is no duplicity in the person of Jesus as he walks around in Israel, perhaps because of something that Mackintosh himself would affirm, that Jesus' awareness of his divinity and his call was something that he understood progressively. If Jesus had been fully aware of his mission and fully prepared to accomplish it from the cradle, then there would have been an ongoing

⁹⁸ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ*, 297.

⁹⁹ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1951)*, 294.

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ*, 295.

division in his person throughout his life and ministry. But because of his progressive development he could truly function appropriately as a human being at every place and time. In the New Testament picture Jesus was first the Son of man and then, unavoidably, the Son of God. Irving while supporting the Chalcedonian doctrine interprets it with more humanity. As far as considering different attributes of Jesus separately is concerned, there is no way to conduct a Christology aside from a solitary reading of the Gospels without such devices. Devices which Mackintosh himself and Irving and others have to resort to in normal human reasoning.

Although Irving did not discuss kenosis in the technical manner characteristic of later nineteenth century theology, he did make use of Philippians 2:8, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”¹⁰² Irving’s understanding of what he terms the “self-contracting power” of God is very similar to kenosis as understood by the kenotic school in general. First of all, he affirms that the person of Christ as the Son of God does not change as a result of becoming a man. In this he does, as ever, maintain the distinction between person and nature. Next, he understands that this Person’s motive for becoming incarnate is for the purpose of manifesting God’s love, grace, mercy and power to fallen mankind. He acknowledges that the sheer ability to become man, this “self-contracting”, is one that can only be possessed by God and not by any creature, “by that power of self-contraction - which belongeth not to a finite, but to an Infinite Being; not to a creature, that hath a law and bound of its being, but to the Creator, who is not restricted, but may take unto himself what form he pleaseth - in virtue of this self-contracting power.” This is consistent with kenotic thought. He affirms that the purpose of this condescending is to overcome sin in the flesh

¹⁰¹ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ*, 295-96.

and to destroy the “potentate of death”. He insists that the Person of the Son, “In parting with his glory, he doth not surely do an evil thing, but the best of all things; for shewing God’s goodness, for working man’s well-being.”

The results of this act are good and fruitful in, “that he, then, who hath contracted no stain from this act, but covered himself with infinite grace and love, should be assailed with all the infirmities and temptations incident to the nature which he hath taken; this surely is not sin, unless they prevail against him: if they do not prevail, but he prevaieth over them, surely that is righteousness, and not sin.”¹⁰³

In discussing Christ’s actions he says, “every action was a true man’s action, [in this] consists the merit of it; - the merit that He should have humbled His Divinity, or emptied it out, or suspended it, (express it as you will,) in order to be found in fashion as a man, and do a man’s action.” This shows a certain flexibility in Irving’s wording of what has been termed kenotic. This language approaches kenosis proper.¹⁰⁴ As to what kind or what extent measured by subsequent kenotic development, that is a topic for further discussion.

Among adherents the difficulties concerning kenotic theory revolve around the method of kenosis rather than the actual reality of kenosis. Something had to happen in the incarnation of the Son. There was some form of self-limitation on the part of the Son; but what of the extent or definition of the limitation, or the way in which the limitation was accomplished.

Mackintosh says that if a person believes that a reasoned Christology is possible, then kenoticism in some form or some sort of a “real surrender of the glory and prerogatives of deity” is necessary. Four positions must be held simultaneously which include the fact of Christ's divinity in and out of time, his localised life on earth and the fact that he can not be attributed

¹⁰² Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 148.

¹⁰³ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 29.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 361.

two consciousness' or wills.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, according to Mackintosh, "We are faced with a Divine self-reduction which entailed obedience, temptation and death."¹⁰⁶

One of the great critics of kenotic theory, D. M. Baillie, does not deny that the "emptying" of Phillipians has a place in Christian thought. But he disagrees with kenotic theory on the grounds that during the incarnation Christ would not be able to continue his sovereignty over the universe and that the entire kenosis seems like a temporary theophany with no logical end at the resurrection.¹⁰⁷ The weakness of this criticism is that it minimizes the power and impact of the resurrection which glorifies Christ thus returning to him all that was his and also adds Christ's humanity to the Godhead. It also overlooks the patristic concept which affirms that the operations of the Godhead cannot be divided.

Vincent Taylor has some penetrating views on the entire issue. He says that the views of Mackintosh are more closely reasoned than those of others and he affirms Mackintosh's four conditions. This then must "infer a real surrender of the glory and prerogatives of deity." And that Mackintosh "will not allow that the idea of the divine immutability rules out such an act of sacrifice."¹⁰⁸ Taylor continues in his analysis of Mackintosh by saying that he rejects the distinction of Thomasius between the relative and essential attributes of God. In its place he talks of the qualities of Godhead in the form of "concentrated potency" rather than "full actuality." It is because of this concentrated potency that the awareness of his relationship with the Father came gradually to Jesus as he developed. This "concentrated potency" of the Godhead seems closer to Irving's "self-contracting" God than most other concepts used in describing the incarnation.

Mackintosh attempts no psychological theory and is silent about the "Word" or "Son" apart from the incarnation on the grounds that the New Testament does not provide the necessary

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1951), 469-70.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person Of Jesus Christ*, 470.

¹⁰⁷ D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ* (London, Faber And Faber Limited, 1948.), Pp. 95-97.

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, 263.

data and that traditional arguments often tend to go in the direction of ditheism. Mackintosh counters objections such as Baillie's regarding cosmic chaos during the incarnation by referring to Augustine's emphasis on the theory of the inseparability of the operations of the Trinity. Irving says little on the issue. Mackintosh responds to objections from Ritschl and others that the Christ of kenoticism had no "Godhead at all" as "simply essential to the personal advent of God in time."¹⁰⁹

Taylor observes that, if we take seriously the human conditions of the life of Jesus and His personal identity and continuity with the Eternal Word, 'then a Kenotic Christology appears to be indispensable'.¹¹⁰ He goes on to say that some form of a kenotic hypothesis is unavoidable because the Son would have had to have accepted some form of self-limitation in order to appear on the earth. "Christology, in short, is incurably kenotic."¹¹¹

The truth is that we cannot get rid of kenoticism. If we dismiss it at the door, it comes back through the window. If we deny it in word, we affirm it in principle, however much theologically we may be upon our guard. The reason must be that self-limitation is an essential form of the divine manifestation. God is God when He stoops no less than when He reigns. He is a God who in revelation hides Himself.¹¹²

Irving's Christology is inherently kenotic yet without denying the precepts of Chalcedon. The true humanity in the nature and the Son of God as the Person are his mainstays. All of which supports the claims of Irving's followers that he was, indeed, a pioneer. But his approach was so unique that it still remains to be appreciated just how much of a pioneer Irving was.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Vincent Taylor, *The Person Of Christ In New Testament Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1959), 264.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, 269.

¹¹¹ Taylor, 272.

¹¹² Taylor, 276.

¹¹³ John Owen says, "The first thing in the divine constitution of the person of Christ as God and man, is assumption. That ineffable divine act I intend whereby the person of the Son of God assumed our nature, or took it into a personal subsistence with himself. . . The assumption, the taking of our human nature to be his own, by an ineffable act of power and grace, is clearly expressed. And to take it to be his own, his own nature, can be no otherwise but by giving it a subsistence in his own person; otherwise his own nature it is not, nor can be." Owen also has an appreciation for the mystery. "This ineffable act is the foundation of the divine relation between the Son of God and the man Christ Jesus. We can only adore the mysterious nature of it, -- "great is this mystery of godliness." John

In one book Irving uses the word combination “sinful flesh” no less than 35 times and the word “flesh” even more often.¹¹⁴ Flesh that is seen is the body and flesh that is unseen is human nature. Built upon this Irving attributes all instances of holiness as found in the scriptures to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

What is alleged from the expression, “ the holy thing born of thee shall be called the Son of God,” has nothing to do with the question; for we assert him to be holy in the same sense in which holiness is used in all the Scriptures; -- namely, through the energizing of the Holy Ghost.¹¹⁵

Therefore, all human flesh, particularly in regard to the inner man, as found in the scriptures must be the same.

And, on the other hand, I say, that every passage of Scripture which declares Christ to have come in the flesh, which declareth the Word to be made flesh, which declareth God to be manifested in the flesh, is a proof total and complete that he came in sinful flesh. For what is the meaning of flesh in Scripture ? Is it not the sinful, mortal, corruptible, fleeting thing, of which it is said, “all flesh is grass;” of which it is said, “the flesh warreth against the Spirit;” of which it is said, “in it (in the flesh) dwelleth no good thing?” If, then, it be said that Christ came in flesh, who shall dare to interpret that word, “flesh,” otherwise than all Scripture doth interpret it?¹¹⁶

And not only is all flesh the same flesh but all flesh since the fall must be considered to be “sinful flesh” when he says, “ who shall interpret it otherwise than sinful flesh? that is, flesh of that kind and property which betrayeth and tempteth all other persons unto sin, and with equal force wrought against the Person of the Son of God.” But the flesh “never prevailed by reason of the Holy unction with which the Father continually supplied his believing Son, and which the obedient Son ever used to restrain and constrain the creature-substance unto the will of the

Owen, *The Works Of John Owen*, William H. Goold, Ed., Vol.I (London: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1987.), 224 - 225.

¹¹⁴ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*

¹¹⁵ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 18-32, 19.

¹¹⁶ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 18-32, 19-20

Godhead.”¹¹⁷ Jesus came to overcome sin in the flesh. In this Irving has an apparent sympathizer in Karl Barth. According to James Torrance,

He [Jesus] assumes the very humanity which is in need of redemption, and by being anointed by the Spirit in our humanity, by a life of perfect obedience, by dying and rising again, for us, our humanity is healed *in him*. We are not just healed “through Christ” because of the work of Christ but “in and through Christ.” That was why these fathers did not hesitate to say, as Edward Irving the Scottish theologian in the early nineteenth century and Karl Barth in our own day have said, that Christ assumed “fallen humanity” that our humanity might be turned back to God in him by his sinless life in the Spirit, and, through him, in us.¹¹⁸

5. Irving and Barth

In speaking of the obedience of Christ Barth says that “flesh” as it is used in both testaments means that man stands “under the divine verdict and judgment, man who is a sinner and whose existence therefore must perish before God, whose existence has already become nothing, and hastens to nothingness and is a victim of death.” and that flesh is “the concrete form of human nature and the being of man in this world under the sign of the fall of Adam – the being of man as corrupted and therefore destroyed, as unreconciled to with God and therefore lost.”¹¹⁹ Barth undoubtedly employs the same hermeneutic as Irving is seeing that there is indeed only one reality in this life which corresponds to the use of the word “flesh” in scripture. In another striking similarity to Irving Barth links his understanding of flesh to the doctrine of election when he says that “the Old Testament alone attests the election of God, and it is only in the light of God’s election that we see who and what is man – his unfaithfulness, his disobedience, his fall, his sin, his enmity with God.”¹²⁰ As a Reformed pastor and theologian Irving strenuously affirms election and holds that universal redemption in no way reduces the sovereignty of God’s election.

¹¹⁷ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, 18-32, 20

¹¹⁸ James. B. Torrance, “The Vicarious Humanity Of Christ”, in Thomas F. Torrance, Ed., *The Incarnation* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981), 141.

¹¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV, Part One, Editors: G.W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1956.), Chapter XIV Jesus Christ, The Lord As Servant, Section 59. The Obedience Of The Son Of God, 1. The Way Of The Son Of God Into The Far Country 157 -211, 165.

¹²⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV, Part One, 171.

In affirming universal reconciliation Irving comes against what he calls “debtor-and-creditor theology”. He believes in what he call “at-one-ment”, or the healing of our relationship with God in the life and victory of Christ and not a vengeful God who gets all the punishment that he can get in order to balance the books. After universal reconciliation he believes in particular election. He makes a convincing case that the true humanity and the atoning life and sacrifice of Christ is the basis for both doctrines.¹²¹ He calls universalism “a most damnable heresy” and says that election is no hindrance to the “freeness of our door of entrance.”¹²² Redemption is comprehensible and visible to us and election is invisible and incomprehensible and is revealed individually.¹²³ In other words, it is a mystery that can not be fully understood but he must maintain both on his understanding of scripture.

Barth agrees in principle with Irving regarding the sufferings of Christ. Christ suffers as “a man” under “the wrath and judgment of the electing and loving God. To be flesh is to be in a state of perishing before this God. . . . *He* stands under the wrath and judgment of God, *He* is broken and destroyed on God. It cannot be otherwise. It has to be like this. His history must be a history of suffering. For God is in the right against Him. He concedes that the Father is right in the will and action which leads Him to the cross.”¹²⁴

Regarding Christ's flesh Barth says, “The Word is not only the eternal Word of God but “flesh” as well, i.e., all that we are and exactly like us even in our opposition to Him. . . .And He would not be man if He were not “flesh” in this definite sense.”¹²⁵ In regard to this Barth cites H.R. Mackintosh’s citation of Irving.

Gottfried Menken . . .concluded from Rom. 8.3 that “the Son of God when He came into the world did not then assume a human nature such as this nature was when it came forth from God’s hand, before the fall, before it had in Adam . . .become sinful and mortal. On the contrary, it was

¹²¹ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 177-203.

¹²² Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 248.

¹²³ Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*, 251.

¹²⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume Iv, Part One,175.

¹²⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, sec.15, (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1956), 151 - 52.

a human nature such as was in Adam after the Fall and is in all his successors.” . . .The same doctrine was delivered about 1827 by the Scottish Theologian Edward Irving and it led to his excommunication: “The point of issue is simply this, whether Christ's flesh had the grace of sinlessness and incorruption by its own nature or from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; I say the latter. . . .It was manhood fallen which He took up into His divine Person, in order to prove the grace and the might of Godhead in redeeming it.” (H.R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine Of The Person of Jesus Christ.*)¹²⁶

From this it would appear that Barth is more in agreement with Irving than is Mackintosh and it is Mackintosh that has passed Irving's words to Barth.

Like Barth Irving's view regarding the suffering of Jesus Christ stresses the immutability of God and the suffering in the limited aspect of manhood.

Now I utterly deny that any thing suffered but the human nature of Christ; and that could only suffer according to the measure of a man. . . . If more, whence came it? from the Divine nature? But this is contrary to all sound doctrine, that the Godhead should be capable of passions . . . it is but the sufferings of a perfectly holy man, treated by God and by men as if he were a transgressor.¹²⁷

Irving follows the suffering of Christ through to the death of Christ when he says, “Now it hath been made a question how he who never sinned could die. But the question, if a question is to be made of it, is far larger; how he that never sinned could suffer. The answer to both questions is, Because his human nature was held of sinful Adam.”¹²⁸ And here is where he goes on to say that Christ's flesh is from the same “lump” as all human flesh. “And the part which he took was subject to the same laws, as the lump of which he took it: and so he became dead by becoming flesh.” He goes on to berate those who claim that Christ's flesh was different than ours but “do indeed talk long and loud about its being vicarious and sacrificial, to cleanse away our sins, which no orthodox man ever denied.”¹²⁹ Contrary to the charges set against him by the presbytery Irving never denied the vicarious and sacrificial nature of Christ's passion.

¹²⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, sec.15, (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1956), 154.

¹²⁷ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 95-96.

¹²⁸ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, Conclusion, 151.

¹²⁹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, Conclusion, 151.

And yet as a Person Jesus is unique. Here Barth is clear.

The New Testament tradition . . . is self-consistent in one great truth. There can be no doubt about the full and genuine and individual humanity of the man Jesus of Nazareth, but in that man there has entered in and there and there must be recognised and respected One who is qualitatively different from all other men. He is not simply a better man, a more gifted, a more wise or noble or pious, in short a greater man. But as against all other men and their differences we have in the person of this man One who is their Lord and Lawgiver and Judge. He has full power to condemn them or to pardon. He has full power to call them and bind them to Himself. . . .He is the Saviour before whom there was none other, neither shall be after. ¹³⁰

And Irving very much anticipates this view for at the heart of his argument that the Person of the Son of God was born into human nature in order to conquer that human nature and win it back to God. This is his “great theme” about which he says, “What was holy, was his Person; and from that came redemption into the nature. . . . The Person of the Son of God was born into it; he restrained, withstood, overcame this co-operation of a sinful creation, conquered the conqueror, and won it back to God; obtained power over all flesh. This is the great theme which we maintain. ¹³¹

Barth echoes this great theme when he says,

The world is not abandoned and left to its own devices. God takes it to Himself, entering into the sphere of it as the true God, causing His kingdom to come on earth as in heaven, becoming Himself truly ours, man, flesh, in order to overcome sin where it has its dominion, in the flesh, to take away in His own person the ensuing curse where it is operative. ¹³²

Furthermore, Irving maintains that the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit empowered the man but did not change his nature beyond that of regeneration as it is found in all men.

It is of the essence of the truth, it is all that the truth is worth, to maintain that regeneration, or impartation of the Holy Ghost addeth nothing, withdraweth nothing, changeth nothing of our created substance, but by an invisible person of Godhead controlleth and overcometh it: so necessary is it to believe likewise of Christ's human nature, that its generation of the Holy Ghost added and altered nothing of its creature-substance, but ever operated by Godhead-power to restrain and subdue, and sanctify and uphold all its motions and actions. ¹³³

¹³⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume Iv, Part One, 159-60.

¹³¹ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, X.

¹³² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume Iv, Part One, 198.

¹³³ Edward Irving, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, 3-4.

The references to this theme in Irving's work are too numerous to consider them individually.

But does this theme always mean a kenosis? Apparently not for Barth.

Paraphrasing Barth on kenosis Bromiley says,

Whatever *kenosis* (self-emptying) may mean, it does not mean Christ ceasing to be himself. . . . While Jesus Christ as God enters into the human contradiction, he is not God against God in absolute paradox. He is Lord of the contradiction, for there is not paradox in God, nor is he properly defined by such abstractions as the Wholly Other.¹³⁴

Barth says that the deity of Christ can not have any "subtraction or weakening" or the atonement could then be in doubt. In humbling himself Christ did not cease to be who he is. Even in a strange land Christ did not become a stranger to himself. Barth goes on to deal with the history of the subject of kenosis in an excursus. In discussing the history of kenotic development from the 17th century on and in the Lutheran school including Thomasius and then Gess and through to Ritschl and modern kenotics Barth concludes,

There are many things we can try to say in understanding the christological mystery. But we cannot possibly understand or estimate it if we try to explain it by a self-limitation or de-divinisation of God in the uniting of the Son of God with the man Jesus. If in Christ . . . God is not unchanged and wholly God, then everything that we may say about the reconciliation of the world made by God in this humiliated One is left hanging in the air.¹³⁵

In this statement we find Barth set against self-limitation in any form. Kenoticism in almost any form requires a self-limitation of Christ in the incarnation. In the end Barth seems to agree with Irving on the flesh and the humanity of Christ. Irving does not speak in specific kenotic terms and Barth comes out against kenotic thought as he understood it. There is, however, a similarity in the approach utilized by both Barth and Irving. They both respect the mystery of God especially in the incarnation. Barth, of course, developed the dialectical method with its crisis and tension especially as seen in the Word and the God-man.¹³⁶ Barth's approach is also hostile to certain forms of Protestant Scholasticism. In this Barth and Irving are similar.

¹³⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *An Introduction To The Theology Of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. And T. Clark, 1979.),181

¹³⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Iv,I, Sec. 59, I, 180-183.

¹³⁶ Elwell, Karl Barth, R.V. Schnucker

CHAPTER THREE - CONCLUSIONS

1. A Matter Of Perspective

H.C. Whitley, in the section entitled “Samson Agonistes” from his book *Blinded Eagle*, gives a view on what Irving was trying to do which provides a good perspective.

Irving believed with all his heart that no faith could stand up to the demands of ordinary life and the trend of world events which had not a basic acceptance of the real humanity of Christ. While he did set himself to do the impossible – to penetrate into the deep mystery of the being of God – to explain reasonably what is beyond reason – to express in words the inexpressible, he never forgot the extent and danger of his daring. Yet always there was the flash of insight and the deeper awareness.¹³⁷

Several things are apparent from Whitley’s remarks. Firstly, Irving’s eschatology was responsible for the pressing urgency of his Christology. Secondly, Irving’s primary concern was for the well being of his flock; his pastoral motive dominated. He wanted the faith of his people to be able to stand up to the demands of life; and he believed that things were taking place in the world that heralded the return of Jesus Christ to the visible sphere. Thirdly, Irving did set himself to do the impossible, which was not to explain some ancillary doctrine, but to plumb the depths of the great mystery of God himself and especially regarding the Incarnation and to go on to explain to the human reason what is essentially beyond explanation. Irving knew that this was a dangerous undertaking, but he considered his reasons for doing so to be important. Fourthly, Whitley affirms as Irving students have done for some time, that regardless of the impossibility of the task, Irving had some extraordinary insights into the mystery. Irving was dealing with deep truths and he actually managed to mine some gold, but at a great price. It cost him many friends, much peace of mind, his beloved Church of Scotland, and an early death.

¹³⁷ Whitley, H. C., *Blinded Eagle: An Introduction To The Life And Teaching Of Edward Irving* (London: Scm Press, Ltd., 1955.), 91.

There was also the factor of the activities of the Holy Spirit. Whitley says, “The libel when boiled down only referred to the supposed heretical doctrine of the sinfulness of our Lord’s human nature, and did not touch upon the ‘gifts’. The sad reflection however is that, but for the notoriety of the ‘gifts’, it is doubtful whether this would have been any libel.”¹³⁸ As today, much of it was tried in the press because the manifestation of the Holy Spirit had drawn their attention.

2. Irving’s Place In Historical Theology

Tom Smail, in discussing the Father’s gift to the Son, presents a pneumatology for today which integrates a theology of the Trinity, the activity of the Holy Spirit and a unity of the flesh of Christ with the flesh of believers. First of all, he sees the Holy Spirit as a gift that is given in both directions.

The Spirit comes down from the Father to the Son, but he also ascends from the Son to the Father when, in obedience and sacrifice, the Spirit-filled Son gives himself to the Father. Thus the Spirit who is first the Father’s gift to the Son is then the Son’s responsive gift to the Father.¹³⁹

Then he sees what was accomplished in the humanity of Christ as something that is now available to be worked out in our humanity.

Not only does the Father give the Spirit to the incarnate Son, but through that Son the Spirit is also given to us whose humanity the Son shares. . . . We receive from him the regeneration, the messianic anointing and the sanctifying transformation that were wrought by the Spirit in his humanity and are now to be worked out in ours.¹⁴⁰

Irving would agree with this so long as it is clear that the regeneration and sanctification were accomplished at the moment of conception although we definitely share the messianic anointing

¹³⁸ Whitley, 92.

¹³⁹ Tom Smail, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994.), 113.

¹⁴⁰ Tom Smail, 113.

in our flesh with the man Jesus Christ in his flesh. The church is the fruitfulness of Christ; “In what happens to us what happened to him bears fruit.”¹⁴¹

In the conclusions to his thesis David Dorries examines Irving’s theology and his opposition under five categories. Regarding redemptive love Dorries concentrates on Irving’s Christology which centers on the revelation of the Incarnation as the proof of God’s love in His innermost being. As noted earlier, Irving’s opponents rejected this doctrine of the atonement because their legal, contractual understanding of God and his covenant drawn from Federal Theology caused their Christology to be controlled solely by the penal substitutionary doctrine of atonement.

In considering Christ as Very God and Very Man Dorries says that Irving’s position is that the Son who is eternally God became consubstantial with mankind by taking man’s nature in the Incarnation. And even though Irving’s opponents subscribed to the orthodox doctrine of Christ’s person the dominant place given to their view of atonement served to undermine their professions of orthodox Christology.

Dorries points out that Irving declared that the Son in becoming consubstantial with mankind assumed our nature under the conditions of the fall. However for Irving’s opponents it was unthinkable for Christ to have assumed fallen nature. For them Christ’s human nature had to be immune to the conditions common to fallen humanity. However, Dorries contends that the Fathers and the Reformers held to the doctrine of Christ’s fallen human nature. The well known saying of Gregory of Nazianzus, “that which he has not assumed he has not healed,” is put forth for the Fathers. And Calvin said Christ, “suffered in his soul the tortures of condemned and ruined man.”

¹⁴¹ Tom Smail, 114.

Christ's quiescent Deity is of primary importance to Irving according to Dorries. He says that Irving's opponents misrepresented his doctrine of quiescence as a full kenosis, or abdication of the deity of Christ. Irving's opponents rejected any form of kenosis, yet a kenotic veiling or quiescence of the Son's deity is a common theme of the Fathers and the Reformers.

According to Dorries the testimony of the Fathers and the Reformers favors the view of Irving regarding Christ as the receiver of the Spirit. Irenaeus spoke of the Spirit first coming to Christ that He might become accustomed to dwelling in other men. Calvin also recognized the necessity of the Spirit's continuing operation in assist Christ in the weakness of his humanity.

Dorries contends that Irving and his party were in agreement that their opponents were in the error of Eutyches, they mixed and confused the two natures in Christ in their attempt to defend the holiness of Christ. Eutychianism was carried forward to the sixteenth century group of Monophysites called Aphthartodocetists. Another form of the ancient heresy was called the Incorruptibles who contended that Christ's human nature was transformed into incorruptibility in the Incarnation.

In conclusion Dorries says, "Irving's works should be elevated to their long-overdue status as some of the finest Christological expressions in the post-Reformation era."¹⁴²

As a modern scholar Dorries has accurately assessed Irving's value to the present day Christian community and has clearly identified where and why Irving's opponents of his own day differed in their views. Essentially, Irving's position, although sometimes expressed unwisely, is consistent with that of the Fathers and the Reformers as well as Barth and other modern theologians. And the emphasis of Irving's teaching is still much needed to combat docetism in the Church.

¹⁴² David William Dorries, Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centering Upon Edward Irving's Doctrine Of Christ's Human Nature, A Thesis Presented For The Degree Of Doctor Of Philosophy At The University Of Aberdeen, 1987, 532-49.

Why does Irving's Christology provide a sounder foundation for modern day Charismatics and Pentecostals? Irving's Christology gives the present day charismatic more to stand on in identification with the man Jesus than does classical reformed Christology which still leans toward the docetic. It is also firmer than the kenoticism of Mackintosh or the whole person image of Mackintosh and his followers. This is because Christ's humanity is more real in Irving when properly understood. The predominant teaching in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles is often not based on the Person of Christ but upon an understanding of spiritual manifestations built upon a foundation, but not too well, of the evangelical necessity to become a Christian in order to escape the wrath of an angry God. Most Charismatic teaching is neither Christological or Reformed whereas Irving insists that his teaching is both.

Irving's Christology intrinsically includes a strong pneumatology. There is much division within Charismatic and Pentecostal camp. An emphasis on the Person of Jesus Christ can overcome much of this division for Charismatics and Pentecostals are above everything else "Jesus people." An emphasis on the Person of Jesus Christ as not just the emissary of the Father and the very sacrifice provided by the Father but also as the Mediator who embodies and deals with human nature where it lives, in "the flesh", will not only unite people but will also unite their understanding of the Incarnation, the atonement and the Holy Spirit. God is properly represented, man is properly represented and the solution to their dividedness is properly represented in this Christology which is not only biblical but Reformed. The activity and manifestations of the Holy Spirit are not only allowed in the church but they are seen as necessary if believers are to function as human beings with an effectiveness which reflects the ministry of Jesus himself when he was in the same flesh. The gifts of the Spirit are no longer an add-on to the Christian faith. If our oneness with Christ in the flesh is the key to our oneness with him in the Spirit then the Incarnation and the Spirit-filled life are inseparably bound together.

However, we cannot see Irving as a stepping stone for modern Christology. Irving was not understood by the theological mainstream which produced Mackintosh and Baillie. Furthermore, Irving's entire construct is founded on different strengths than the ones we find in Mackintosh and his disciples. And for this reason alone Irving must be considered on his own. His Christology is unique and has never fully come into its own. This is mainly due to a misunderstanding of his position. This misunderstanding arises either from a hasty judgment of what he is saying, either because his principle works are not studied in detail, or from approaching his Christology with a preconceived Christological structure. Irving must be approached with no more of an opinion than would be supplied by a cursory understanding of Nicea and Chalcedon. Irving was first a pastor although he was no mean theologian. He developed his Christology from the ground up. He firmly believed that it was totally true to Chalcedon and to the confessions.

Irving preferred to be known as Reformed rather than Evangelical. He is more on the side of tradition as he understands it. Irving would consider himself true to the concepts of "without conversion, composition or confusion" of the *Westminster Confession*. We could even go so far as to say that Irving's self-contracting Divinity in the Son joined to his true human nature is more true to the "without conversion" phrase than some kenoticists. Irving would be more in agreement with Thomasius' absolute and relative divine attributes than with Gess' complete metamorphic view which seems to pave the way in thinking to Mackintosh's "whole person" concept carried forward by D.M. Baillie and others. But perhaps Irving's position could be more satisfying, complete with his loyalty to Chalcedon, than what is presented by others as a palatable substitute.

Irving's strength is in an absolute commitment to the true humanity of Jesus Christ. He is unique in his handling of the sin issue. Christ had no original sin but his flesh is that of after the

fall. Christ is vulnerable to sin but he never succumbed. He defeated sin in the flesh. The over sensitivity to the sin issue by some moderns only obscures the issue with unnecessary emotion as a thorough understanding of Irving makes it clear that he did not see Jesus as having any sin of his own for which to atone. His Christology is kenotic in kind although he uses different terms which predate the kenotic school, terms such as “the self-contracting God”. He maintains that self-contracting is something that only a God can do and that it is an act of love rather than an act of weakness. Both of these insights are kenotic.

Like Barth Irving maintains the mystery and the tension involved in understanding something as momentous as the Incarnation. At the same time, also like Barth, Irving does not sacrifice the Divinity. And most importantly, Irving involves all three Persons of the Trinity in his application, the Father to initiate, the Son to obey, and the Spirit to furnish the ability to obey. All of this makes Edward Irving a vital topic of discussion for the church today.