

# In Search of the Romantic Christ: The Origins of Edward Irving's Theology of Incarnation.

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I, Nicholas John Cuthbert Tucker, declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work which it embodies is my work and has not been included in another thesis.

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## Abstract

This thesis, reassesses the evidence surrounding Edward Irving's controversial teaching about the doctrine of the incarnation. Irving was a controversial figure in his own day and his legacy has been contested ever since he was dismissed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland for teaching that Christ had a 'fallen' human nature. This thesis re-examines the emergence and significance of Irving's teaching. It evaluates the scholarly consensus that his distinctive Christology was a stable feature of his thought and argues the case that his thinking in this area did change significantly.

Methodologically, this thesis draws on some aspects of Quentin Skinner's work in the importance of context (Chapter Two) to understand Irving as he really was, rather than in terms of his later significance. In the light of this, Irving's biography is examined in Chapter Three, before moving into a discussion of the influential part played by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Irving's intellectual development (Chapter Four). The second half of the thesis then moves on to consider the development of Irving's Christology and the questions surrounding its provenance and development (Chapters Five and Six). Finally, in Chapter Seven, possible sources of explanation for Irving's distinctive ideas about the Incarnation are exhibited and assessed.

The argument of this thesis is that Edward Irving developed an account of the Incarnation that was essentially novel, in response to the Romantic ideas that he had derived from Coleridge. In accordance with Coleridge's assessment, it is argued that this derivation was rendered more complex by Irving's incomplete apprehension of Coleridge's underlying philosophy. Nonetheless, it is argued that Edward Irving's teaching presented a Romantic version of Christ, and that this distinctive conception owes more to the times in which Irving lived than to the theological tradition to which he claimed adherence.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Alone in the churchyard at Annan, at the eastern end of the Solway Firth, stands a statue bearing the likeness of Edward Irving. That this effigy, albeit of one of Annan's most famous sons, should stand where it now does would have been unthinkable in his lifetime. In the same location, on 13 March 1833, Edward Irving was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland on charges of heresy. That he should now be honoured, where once he was so disgraced, illustrates powerfully the changing reception of Irving's ideas amongst his countrymen and in the National Kirk.

Edward Irving was one of the most influential preachers to occupy a Church of Scotland pulpit in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was typically unusual of Irving that his entire ordained ministry in the Kirk should have been conducted, not in Scotland, but in the heart of Georgian London. Irving was happy to be unconventional, he believed that he was destined to breathe new life into a national Church that he considered had grown stale and cold, and always cut a distinctive figure. A very tall and handsomely built man, everything about Irving was larger than life. James Grant relays the story of 'a popular Dissenting minister' who attended Irving's home for prayers at 6 in the morning, on his way to teach a class of theological students at 7am. Irving opened the meeting by praying and was still in full flow forty-five minutes later, when the minister in question, anxious to get to his class and despairing of Irving's prayer reaching a conclusion, tried to sneak down the stairs and open the front door as quietly as he could:

he was in the act of taking off the latch when a large Newfoundland dog, which Mr Irving kept in his house at the time, sprang upon him and, placing one of his fore paws on either shoulder, forced the reverend gentleman down to a crouching position with his head against the door...when Mr Irving...concluded his devotions, one of his

servants...released [this man] from the exceedingly awkward and unpleasant predicament in which he was placed.<sup>1</sup>

Irving's gigantism seems to have extended to every area of his life and ministry to the extent that, in a pun on his home town, he came to be known as a 'Son of Anak'.<sup>2</sup> He certainly never failed to make an impression.

For many today, the only acquaintance they have with the name of Edward Irving is as a footnote to the stories of other, better remembered, characters from the early nineteenth century. He was sufficiently important in the lives of Thomas and Jane Carlyle (independently of each other at first), Thomas Chalmers, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge that his name appears regularly in the indexes of works devoted to those great figures. It is even said that the greatest Shakespearean actor of his day, Sir Henry Irving, took his *nom de théâtre* because of an admiration for Edward Irving's dramatic talent.<sup>3</sup> But, although Irving is better known today by association with others than in his own right, it was not always so.

Some indication of the extent of the fame and notoriety that adorned Edward Irving's career can be observed from the proliferation of obituaries published following the death of his Father, Gavin, on 17 June 1832. Irving senior, a tanner, was not a figure of particular note even in his own town of Annan, yet his death was reported in newspapers around the country. In those days, the regional papers reported deaths in two parts: the first announcing the decease of local people, and the second recording people of national significance. Gavin Irving's name appeared in the second section in each of the papers which carried news of his death. The *Lancaster Gazette* included Gavin (or as they had it Gawin) Irving in the company of an admiral's wife, a duchess, a baronet and a noted author.<sup>4</sup> *The*

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1. James Grant, 'The Rev. Edward Irving,' in *The Pulpit: Biographical Sketches of the Most Popular Preachers in London*, (London: George Virtue, 1843), pp. 171-172.

2. The descendants of Anak in the books of Genesis were said to be exceptionally tall and descended from the Nephilim. For examples of this nickname see Andrew Landale Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the 'Tongues' Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology* (London: J. Clarke & Co., 1937), pp. 13-25. Anonymous, 'Lamb, Andrew,' *Hampshire Independent*, 6 April 1881. Andrew Lamb had been one of Irving's elders at Regent Square and his newspaper obituary recorded that he had insisted that Irving was 'a son of Anak'.

3. *Henry Irving*, Richard Foulkes ed (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 2.

4. Anonymous, 'Births, Deaths, Marriages and Obituaries,' *The Lancaster Gazette and General*

*Newcastle Journal* on 23 June 1832 included only one other non-local death alongside that of Gavin (in this paper Gaivin) Irving, that of the Earl of Scarborough.<sup>5</sup> Despite the distinguished company his name kept in the announcements, Gavin Irving's only recorded distinction was that he was the father of 'the Rev. and celebrated Mr Irving'.<sup>6</sup> Most papers failed to spell Gavin's name correctly. The real interest was not in the deceased but in his son.

Another mark of Edward Irving's place in the public consciousness was the extent to which he was satirised. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, satire, whilst scarcely flattering, is surely the most honest endorsement of fame. The satirist relies on the subject being recognisable to the intended audience, for otherwise the barbs will neither amuse nor bite. In Irving's first full year of ministry in London, a satirical pamphlet *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving M.A. A Cento of Criticism*, was published.<sup>7</sup> It would run through eleven editions in the next two years.<sup>8</sup> Irving was evidently a well known figure even in his early thirties, and he remained such until his death.

The extent of Irving's influence and importance in his own time is perhaps seen most clearly in the movement that grew out of his public ministry. Its members were widely known until 1849 as the 'Irvingites',<sup>9</sup> albeit that they were vehement in their refusal to accept the name and insisted that Irving was not the founder of their movement. Edward Miller, an early historian of the movement, recorded their objections as follows:

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*Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmorland, &c.*, Saturday 30 June 1832.

5. Anonymous, 'Births, Deaths, Marriages and Obituaries,' *The Newcastle Journal*, Saturday 23 June 1832.

6. Ibid.

7. Anonymous, *Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A. A Cento of Criticism* (London: E. Brain, 1823).

8. Anonymous, *Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A. A Cento of Criticism*, 11th ed. (London: Knight & Lacey, 1825).

9. Manfred Henke, 'The Catholic Apostolic Church and its Gordon Square Cathedral: Bloomsbury, the 'Irvingites' and the Catholic Apostolic Church,' *The Bloomsbury Project*, [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/articles/CAC-Gordon\\_Square.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/articles/CAC-Gordon_Square.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2014), p. 3. By studying the minutes of Apostolic meetings, Henke has been able to demonstrate that 'Towards the end of 1847 it had been decided by the ten remaining apostles collectively that the proper name of the congregation assembled in Newman Street was 'the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, London, The Central Church', before the decision in 1849 to adopt the name 'Catholic Apostolic' more widely.

They point to the fact that Irving was never one of their Apostles, that he died before their constitution was perfected, and that the elaborate organization of the Body is carried to a height far beyond what he taught or even contemplated.<sup>10</sup>

Like the majority of his contemporaries outside the movement, however Miller was not convinced by these objections and continued to refer to them as 'Irvingites'. He pointed out that the 'Catholic Apostolic Church', as it came to refer to itself,<sup>11</sup> was a movement whose beginnings were so closely tied to Irving's ministry that it was 'difficult to see' how it could have come about 'if Irving had not pursued his brilliant career in Hatton Garden and Regent Square'.<sup>12</sup> Without Irving there would have been no 'Catholic Apostolic Church'.

The significance of this observation may not be immediately obvious to the contemporary reader, and the reasons for this are a part of the explanation for Irving's disappearance from public consciousness. After all, if the Catholic Apostolic Church<sup>13</sup> had survived in the same way as Methodism, we might have expected Irving to be remembered as John Wesley has been. In the mid-nineteenth century, the CAC was much larger and more influential than many might now suppose. Its 'cathedral' in Gordon Square, at the heart of London's Bloomsbury, bears mute testimony to the grand scale of their ambitions and to the ample resources at their disposal at the height of the movement. Remarkably, the doctrines of the CAC could in part be reconstructed by reading *Hansard*. The parliamentary speeches of Spencer Perceval Jr. (1795-1859),<sup>14</sup> latterly member for Tiverton (and son of the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated whilst in office) and Henry Drummond (1786-1860),<sup>15</sup> the wealthy banker and aristocrat who founded a professorship in 'Political Economy' at the University of

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10. Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism; or, of the So-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), p. 2.

11. Henke, 'The Catholic Apostolic Church and its Gordon Square Cathedral: Bloomsbury, the 'Irvingites' and the Catholic Apostolic Church', p. 3.

12. Miller, *History and Doctrines 1*, p. 3.

13. The abbreviation CAC will be used from now on to avoid confusion with the 'universal Church, commonly referred to in Creeds as the 'One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'.

14. Perceval, Spencer S. Speech to the House of Commons, 'Maynooth College', 26 September 1831. *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol.7, (1831), cols. 606-10.

15. Drummond, Henry. Speech to the House of Commons, 'Jewish Disabilities Bill', 11 March 1853. *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol.125, (1853), cols. 95-96

Oxford,<sup>16</sup> are filled with expressions of their distinctive theology. Both these men were apostles in the CAC, which included in its ranks many senior figures in the British establishment. The CAC was a large, influential and wealthy body, yet it disappeared, taking Irving's name with it.

The CAC was an adventist group, yet, unlike many of the millennialist sects that sprang up in the early nineteenth century, the CAC responded to Christ's disappointing failure to return quickly, by holding to its principles, even at the cost of the movement's effective existence. It was formed with the conviction, following Irving's calculations based on 'Bible prophecy', that Christ would return in their generation. This was the basis for the members' belief that God was appointing twelve apostles to oversee the gathering in of his elect in 'the last days'. The apostles would be needed only in the short term until the *parousia*, but they were the essential pillars on which the whole structure was built. One way or another, the CAC, in its original form was inherently a temporary construction. Its members expected the apocalypse, but the end came gradually as the result of twelve rather smaller tragedies. In 1855 the apostles began to die. The first of them, Thomas Carlyle,<sup>17</sup> died on 26 January: by year's end a quarter of them would be dead.<sup>18</sup> Six of the them met in June, and concluded that no new apostles should be appointed to replace the those who had died.<sup>19</sup>

The ordination of new angels (bishops) could take place only at the hands of an apostle, and the ordination of new presbyters relied on the imposition of angelic hands. This system meant that the Church could not possibly sustain ministry in the long term once the apostles died. Thus, when John Valentine Woodhouse, the last CAC apostle, died in 1901, the church moved inexorably towards what surviving members called a 'time of silence'.<sup>20</sup>

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16. Henry Drummond, *Speeches in Parliament and Some Miscellaneous Pamphlets of the Late Henry Drummond, Esq.*, vol. 1 (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1860), p. v.

17. This Thomas Carlyle (1803-1855) was a barrister, who like Irving was first educated at the academy in Annan. He served as a barrister and is not to be confused with Irving's great friend, the writer, who married Jane Welsh.

18. Timothy Grass, *The Lord's Work: A History of the Catholica Apostolic Church* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), p. 73. The other two to die that year were William Dow and Duncan Mackenzie.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

Some idea of what CAC might, otherwise, have become can be gleaned by observation of the fortunes of an offshoot called the *Neue Apostolische Kirche* (NAK), which owes its distinct existence to the result of a schism, within the CAC. A prophet belonging to the CAC church in Berlin, Geyer by name, declared that God was indeed calling a new set of apostles,<sup>21</sup> and when this was accepted by a grouping within CAC a breakaway was *de facto* inevitable. The group which followed Geyer's lead in accepting new apostles came to be known as NAK has continued since that time with new apostolic leadership. It became a large body in Germany and currently claims over ten million members worldwide.<sup>22</sup> The largest of the Methodist denominations in the world, the United Methodist Church, boasted a membership of approximately 12 million in 2014.<sup>23</sup> It is not outside the bounds of reason to suggest that, under slightly different circumstances Irving might have come to be remembered, like Wesley, as the founder of a major international movement.

Irving's significance in his own day was largely a factor of his almost preternatural gifts in the pulpit. He lived in an age when 'sermon tasting' was a popular entertainment and there were even periodicals, such as *The Preacher* and *The Pulpit*, that would report on and even reproduce sermons for an eager public. Irving's oratory drew huge crowds, to the extent that, on Sunday 15 June 1828 when he was the visiting preacher at Kirkcaldy, so many crowded into the parish church to hear him that a gallery collapsed and thirty-five persons lost their lives in the subsequent panic.<sup>24</sup> Much of Irving's subsequent preaching on visiting Scotland was conducted outdoors. On a visit to Annan, for example, he is alleged to have preached to thirteen thousand on one afternoon.<sup>25</sup> Given that the town

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21. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

22. New Apostolic Church, 'About the NAC,' <http://www.nak.org/about-the-nac/> (accessed 3 December 2013).

23. United Methodist Church, 'Quick Facts,' <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/united-methodists-at-a-glance> (accessed 6 February 2018).

24. Anonymous, 'Dreadful Accident and Great Loss of Lives at Kirkcaldy (sic.),' *Caledonian Mercury*, 19 June, 1828.

25. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 84.

itself only boasted a population of a little over one tenth of that number,<sup>26</sup> this gives some idea of the pull exerted by his preaching.

Although Irving has gradually receded from public notice, he has not entirely disappeared. He drew attention in the mid-twentieth century when his thought was deemed relevant to certain theological questions and controversies that were emerging. In particular, certain of Irving's ideas bore a similarity to those of the Swiss-German theologian Karl Barth; and Irving's understanding of the gifts of *glossolalia* and prophecy was echoed in the burgeoning Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Much of the scholarship on Irving in that period sought either to defend or condemn him, depending on whether the writer in question wished to establish the orthodoxy of Irvingite ideas or to use his errors and excesses to 'poison the well' regarding those who shared his views. This has had a profoundly distorting effect on the understanding of his thought and of him as a man. He was doubtless a man of great abilities and similarly great flaws, but in the end, scholarship which has treated Irving primarily as hero or villain has missed something much more interesting and important about him. To see the true significance of Edward Irving, his ideas must be examined in their own context.

Irving was born at an especially turbulent time, both in international politics and in civic society. It is hard, in retrospect, to appreciate just how significant the events of the French Revolution and its aftermath seemed to Christians on the English-speaking side of the Channel. Whilst the population was alert to fears of similar civic and social unrest at home, reflected in the events surrounding the 'Peterloo Massacre' in August 1819, there was also a profound sense among many that the events in France anticipated something much more momentous. The atheist mob had triumphed over the Catholic Church and a divinely appointed monarchy, and this had to portend something. For many, the events about which they read in their daily newspapers convinced them that they were living at the very 'end of days'.

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26. ('A Friend to Statistical Inquiries') Anonymous, 'Number XXII. Parish of Annan (County and Synod of Dumfries, Presbytery of Annan),' *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland: Account of 1791-99.*, <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Dumfries/Annan/> (accessed 8 June 2016).



In 1798 the French Republican army took possession of the City of Rome and many Protestants, who had learned to see the Pope as a fulfilment of the biblical figure of 'Antichrist', searched for explanations in the Bible. Irving became part of a group for whom this event became a fundamental pillar of biblical exegesis, as it seemed to fit with the prophecy of Daniel 7:23-7 and the defeat of the fourth beast. Daniel apparently predicted that this beast would reign for 1260 years before being conquered. With a bit of imagination, Irving and others found that they could make a case for the year 538 as the beginning of the papacy as a world power, as that was the year that saw the triumph of Belisarius over the Eastern Goths.

Contemporary events came, as a result of this new approach, to have hermeneutical significance. The newspapers effectively explained aspects of the biblical text by describing their fulfilment, and so the group of which Irving was a part, that met at Albury Park to discuss 'Bible prophecy', was constantly alert for news from the continent. It is said that news of the death of Napoleon's son, the Duke of Reichstadt (22 July 1832), arrived during one of the Albury conferences, and that one of the members of the gathering was overcome with shock, exclaiming 'that cannot be true, ...for it would overturn this whole interpretation'.<sup>27</sup> Whether this story is entirely accurate or not, the approach to current events it embodies was authentically that followed by Irving. It is necessary to take context seriously to understand any figure from history. It is all the more so for Edward Irving, whose very reading of the Bible was so self-consciously shaped by the events of his age.

The dizzying social, intellectual and spiritual change going on around Edward Irving shaped his thought in more ways than just his interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy. He lived in an age of change that had removed many of the old certainties and, in keeping with this tumultuous age, Irving himself was part of an intellectual revolution.

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27. Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism; or, of the So-called Catholic and Apostolic Church.*, vol. 2 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), p. 42.

Disillusioned with the reductionism of Enlightenment accounts of humanity and the world, Irving turned, like many of his time, to a cast of thought known as Romanticism. This outlook offered a rehabilitation of metaphysics and spirituality, and sought to restore something of what had been lost in the intellectual and cultural life of the West in the previous century. Where accounts of life and knowledge had been reduced to the merely mechanical, the Romantics sought a more comprehensive vision of reality, and it was this vision that captivated Edward Irving and gave colour to his utterances. Irving, then, was a product to some degree of a novel intellectual and cultural movement that belonged very much to his moment in history.

To treat Irving only as a Romantic is, however, to give only a partial account of his intellectual identity, for he was shaped by and part of a very deep intellectual tradition that significantly preceded the Enlightenment against which the Romantics were reacting. The Church of Scotland, within which Irving grew up and into which he was ordained, was distinctively different from the established Church of England. Having steadfastly resisted attempts to conform the Scottish Church to the Anglican episcopate, the Scottish Church, from 1691, represented a robustly Reformed ideal of a national church. The Church to the south of the border was governed by a relatively minimalist doctrinal statement, the *Thirty Nine Articles of Religion*, relying on the *Book of Common Prayer* and *The Homilies* to provide a more detailed expression of belief. The Church of Scotland, on the other hand was much more self-consciously confessional. In the Westminster Confession of Faith, which it termed the subordinate standard,<sup>28</sup> the Church of Scotland had a very detailed and thorough account of Christian theology. The result was a communion that was very conscious of detailed theological questions to an extent that its Anglican cousins generally were not. Consequently, where there were secessions from the Church of England they tended to extend to questions of Church order. Whilst there was a very strong Dissenting tradition, which rejected membership of the established Church of England after the

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28. Subordinate, that is, to the Bible.

Restoration, none of the alternatives was a parallel episcopal denomination.<sup>29</sup> In Scotland, by contrast, there were a number of Presbyterian alternatives to the established Church, which differed on the interpretation of aspects of the Westminster Confession, rather than on the confession or the ordering of the Church.

A pertinent example of such a division within Scots Presbyterianism is the so-called ‘Marrow Controversy’, which played a crucial part leading up to the Secession of 1733, in which a group of congregations broke away from the Church of Scotland to form an ‘Associate Presbytery’. The origin of the controversy stemmed from the republication, in 1719, of a seventeenth-century work of popular theology entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.<sup>30</sup> The *Marrow* stressed a calvinistic understanding of grace in the reception of forgiveness, something also stressed by the *Westminster Confession*. Within the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland at the time, however, this emphasis on grace generated a suspicion of antinomianism and led to its condemnation of the work in 1720. Strikingly both sides in the controversy considered themselves to be defending the theology of the *Confession*, and were, as William VanDoodewaard has demonstrated, in agreement on detailed matters such as ‘a particular atonement that was penal and substitutionary in nature and appeared to include the active obedience of Christ in fulfilling the law.’<sup>31</sup> Their primary difference seems to have lain in the precise nature of ‘Gospel offer’, that is, the way in which salvation is presented to people. This was a very detailed and nuanced controversy, but the crucial observation for our purposes at this point, is that the Presbyterian tradition in Scotland, into which Irving was born, was one given to very detailed and precise theological discussion and disagreement. Indeed, this theological background is particularly pertinent to Irving, who as a youth attended a seceding church.<sup>32</sup> Irving’s ecclesiastical background was characterised

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29. Although the Moravians were technically episcopalian, they weren’t really a Dissenting denomination.

30. William VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition: Marrow Theology in the Associate Presbytery and Associate Synod Secession Churches of Scotland (1733–1799)*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jay T. Collier (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), p. 24.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

32. For a discussion of this see Chapter 3 p.53-4.

by profound theological investigation and thought, and thus he belonged to a venerable intellectual tradition that had roots stretching deep into his nation's past.

Irving, then, was a creature of Scotland's deep religious traditions as well as the revolution and intellectual turmoil of his own time. This renders him an acutely interesting subject for study in intellectual history, as the eddies of these two powerful intellectual streams can be seen in his life and writings. He was an intimate of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and translated many of the poet-philosopher's ideas into the vernacular of the pulpit, thereby making them accessible to a much wider ecclesiastical public than the semi-reclusive Coleridge ever did. As such, and as Irving came from the theologically precise world of Scottish Presbyterianism, Irving's thought makes an important study in the influence of Romanticism on the English-speaking Protestant theology of his time.

Irving's most distinctive theological development, from the perspective of his own time, was the detailed conception of his Christology - in particular the idea of the Son of God's incarnation in "sinful flesh" for which he was dismissed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland. He taught that the second person of the Trinity took on a 'fallen' human nature, subject to the sinful impulses common to postlapsarian humanity, which has been a controversial topic ever since Irving gave it voice, although, ironically, the question of whether his ideas were genuinely original, or unusual at the time has been highly contested in scholarship. If this teaching did indeed represent a break from the ancient tradition from which Irving came, it would make an illuminating subject of study in understanding something of the influence of Romantic ideas on his theology. It will, therefore, be necessary to devote space in this thesis to assessing whether or not these ideas were indeed new in Irving's context.

The following chapters will lay out and evaluate the evidence available to answer the necessary contextual questions about Irving's theology of the incarnation, before turning to an examination of the shape and genesis of his ideas. For that

reason this thesis will effectively be divided into two parts. The first part, comprising Chapters Two to Four, will lay out the context of Irving's life and Chapters Five to Seven will turn to the narrower questions surrounding the Christology itself.

Chapter Two will be concerned with the historiography surrounding Irving, addressing questions of method and laying out the relevant existing scholarship. In this chapter certain missteps and mischaracterisations in the study of Irving will be addressed in order to clear the way for a renewed investigation of his ideas. Chapter Three will then offer a biographical sketch of Irving. We shall introduce the major relationships and events in his life and consider the development of his thought in general, to give a setting for his ideas about Christology. Chapter Four will then offer a consideration of the impact made on Irving's wider thought by his interactions with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This chapter will take into account the development of Irving's theory of knowledge and also the more detailed theological questions upon which Irving's thinking changed significantly during his ministry.

In Chapter Five the attention turns to Irving's Christology. The focus question for this chapter will be whether Irving's teaching about Christ's 'fallen' human nature was something he inherited from an ancient theological tradition, or whether it represented a revision of that Christological tradition. Following this investigation, Chapter Six will discuss a related, but distinct, question: did Irving's thinking in the area of Christology develop during his public ministry? The consensus on this matter, since the work of David Dorries in 1987,<sup>33</sup> has been that Irving's public teaching, from the beginning of his ministry to its end, consistently presented the second person of the Trinity as incarnate in 'fallen flesh'. Dorries's work has been in need of re-appraisal for some time and this chapter will offer that scrutiny. Building on the conclusions of these two chapters, Chapter Seven will then assess the possible sources of explanation for the shape

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33. David W. Dorries, 'Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature.' (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1987).

of Irving's teachings on the incarnation, considering both intellectual and biographical factors. This work completed, we shall be in a position to answer the underlying question of this thesis: was Edward Irving's Jesus a distinctively Romantic reimagining of the person at the heart of the Christian faith?

## Chapter 2

### Historiography and Edward Irving

It is a mark of Edward Irving's celebrity that he was only thirty-two years of age when James Fleming published a book entitled *The Life and Writings of Edward Irving*.<sup>1</sup> The contents of this rather premature biography illustrate some of the difficulties of writing a study of Irving. Although he wrote during Irving's lifetime, the author was unable to disentangle truth and legend, even about details as basic as his age. Fleming tells his readers that Irving was born 'according to some of the accounts, in 1792; but the best authorities seem to concur in calculating his age at a little under forty'.<sup>2</sup> The identity of these unreliable 'best authorities' is not recorded.

The questionable accuracy of this early biography was in no way unique. Irving's notoriety was such that a number of false rumours became part of the historical record. For example, Irving's profoundly dramatic style of preaching was so impressive that at least one writer invented a theatrical past for him. William Leman Rede, in 'Records of a Stage Veteran' for the *New Monthly Magazine* of March 1835, recorded Irving's brief acting career with 'Ryder's company in Kirkcaldy'.<sup>3</sup> The troupe was real enough, but Irving's participation was entirely fictitious.<sup>4</sup> Another example of the mythologies that sprang up in his wake is the more widely reported claim that his tomb was attended by a 'number of young women clothed in white, who confidently expected he would rise again'.<sup>5</sup> Though this colourful anecdote continues to be repeated, even by historians of the stature of Stewart J. Brown,<sup>6</sup> it is spurious. Writing in 1862, the son of Irving's friend

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1. James Fleming, *The Life and Writings of the Rev. Edward Irving*. (Glasgow: Knight & Lacey, 1824).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3. Barbara Waddington, *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012), p. 54.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 55. It is typical of Barbara Waddington's thoroughness in her study of Irving that she has chased down this detail to determine its veracity. Her demonstration that this was not an accurate claim comes even though, in an earlier publication, she had taken this claim at face value. Barbara Waddington, *The Rev. Edward Irving & the Catholic Apostolic Church in Camden and Beyond*, ed. F Peter Woodford & David A Hayes (London: Camden History Society, 2007), p. 18.

5. Andrew Landale Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the 'Tongues' Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology* (London: J. Clarke & Co., 1937), pp. 227-228.

6. Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2008), p. 73. Dallimore and Whitley also repeat versions

Robert Story, provided eye-witness testimony to rebut the rumour that Irving's followers waited in expectation of his resurrection. His father had protested in the strongest terms that there was '[n]o such display of rebellious credulity', and he had been 'one of the very last to quit the resting-place of the "man greatly beloved"'.<sup>7</sup> It seems likely that the account which Story described as being 'idly reported again and again'<sup>8</sup> was an embellishment which reflected the view many held of Irving and those around him as credulous in their embrace of the miraculous. Whatever its provenance, that this 'fact' of Irving's life has so often been reproduced is evidence of the care needed by the historian investigating Irving.

The existence of misleading claims about details of Irving's life is, however, a comparatively minor difficulty in comparison with the task of writing an intellectual history. If finding and verifying information about historical *events* is problematic, the task of accurately reconstructing the *thought* of a figure like Irving presents another degree of complexity altogether. For this reason, this chapter will include some discussion of historiographical method alongside an analysis of the significant historical treatments of Irving.

The first challenge to be faced in analysing the literature about Edward Irving is the bewildering breadth of perspectives available. From the outset Irving's legacy was unclear and his history contested. One might take as an example the fledgling ecclesial community that he left behind. Disagreement over the significance of Irving's part in the foundation of the CAC was one of the earliest historiographical debates about him. For instance, Miller identified the attempt 'to prove a distinction between [Irving] and the Body to which the public have affixed his name' as the 'one major blot' in Margaret Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving*.<sup>9</sup> From the start the simple question of whether Irving was really an

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of this story. Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 188. Henry Charles Whitley, *Blinded Eagle: An Introduction to the Life and Teaching of Edward Irving* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 34.

7. Robert Herbert Story, *Memoir of the Life of the Rev. Robert Story* (Edinburgh: Macmillan, 1862), p. 233.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism; or, of the So-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), pp. 3-4.



'Irvingite' or whether the 'Irvingites' were properly so called was a matter of dispute.<sup>10</sup>

Ambivalence about Irving was typical of his opponents as well as his followers. Robert Murray McCheyne, a doyen of Calvinistic orthodoxy, wrote in his journal on 9 December 1834:

Heard of Edward Irving's death. I look back upon him with awe as on the saints and martyrs of old. A holy man in spite of all his delusions and errors. He is now with his God and Saviour whom he wronged so much yet I am persuaded loved so sincerely.<sup>11</sup>

Horatius Bonar agreed to write a preface to a (posthumous) second edition of Irving's *The Last Days*, and in it he expressed his sympathy with Irving as 'one widely conversant with the Word of God and deeply in communion with God himself'.<sup>12</sup> In the same preface, however, he was at pains to distance himself from Irving's theological eccentricities, emphasising that: '*I do not identify myself with him or with any class of opinions of which he may be deemed the exponent or representative.*'<sup>13</sup> These reactions to Irving are representative of a tendency to separate the man from what were seen as his excesses. Put more bluntly, for many writers, there has been a danger of creating two distinct Edward Irvings: the one they wished to celebrate and the one who had lived.

So dense is the thicket of perspectives available that Irving's more recent biographer, Tim Grass, has described the development of a 'quest for the historical Irving'.<sup>14</sup> He is presented by turns as: Christological heresiarch<sup>15</sup> and guardian of Christological orthodoxy;<sup>16</sup> as a typical Evangelical and an analogue

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10. For a brief discussion of this Cf Chapter 1 'Introduction' p.5

11. Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne, Minister of St Peter's Church, Dundee.*, books.google.com (Dundee: William Middleton, 1845), p. 25. The date is wrongly reproduced as 9 November - an impossible date as Irving died on 7 December and the previous entry in McCheyne's journal is for 24 November.

12. Edward Irving and Horatius Bonar, *The Last Days. With a preface by the Rev. Horatius Bonar*, 2nd ed. (London: James Nisbet, 1850), pp. viii-ix.

13. *Ibid.*, p. ix. (italics original).

14. Timothy Grass, *Edward Irving: The Lord's Watchman* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), p. 106.

15. Josiah Conder, *An Analytical and Comparative View of All Religions Now Extant Among Mankind: With Their Internal Diversities of Creed and Profession* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1838), p. 538.

16. Jacob Jamani Nantomah, 'Jesus the God-Man: The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Edward Irving in the Light of the Teaching of the Church Fathers and Its Relevance for a Twentieth Century African Context' PhD Thesis, Aberdeen, 1982). David Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002). Graham W.P. McFarlane, *Christ and the*

of the Oxford Movement;<sup>17</sup> as the instantiation of the Spirit of his own Age<sup>18</sup> and the pioneer of later ‘Nineteenth Century Theology’;<sup>19</sup> as a tragic hero<sup>20</sup> brought low by either fame<sup>21</sup> or marrying the wrong woman;<sup>22</sup> as the forerunner of the contemporary Charismatic and Pentecostal movements<sup>23</sup> and the seculariser of prophetic ideals.<sup>24</sup> The breadth of diversity in the historical portrayals of Irving suggests that Grass’s allusion to Albert Schweitzer<sup>25</sup> is apposite. However, when one recalls that Schweitzer wrote in the *Quest of the Historical Jesus* that ‘each epoch...found its reflection in Jesus; [also] each individual created Him in accordance with his own character’<sup>26</sup>, Grass could scarcely have chosen a better simile. Irving, like his master, seems to have been particularly malleable in the hands of both his supporters and his detractors in the years since his death.

Even the writings of his contemporaries exhibit this tendency to find in Irving an exemplar of the author’s great concern. His notoriety combined with the closeness of his association with Coleridge and London’s *literati* meant that Irving was singled out for consideration by some of the great essayists of his day. In particular, William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey used their depictions of Irving to illustrate their wider analysis of the cultural mood of their day.

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*Spirit: The Doctrine of the Incarnation According to Edward Irving* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996).  
*Edward Irving: the Trinitarian Face of God*, Graham McFarlane ed (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1996).  
 Colin Gunton, ‘Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving’s Christology,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41, no. 3 (1988),

17. Pierce Butler, ‘Irvingism as an Analogue of the Oxford Movement,’ *Church History* 6, no. 2 (1937),

18. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits* (London: Henry Colburn, 1825), pp. 79-96.

19. Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn, *Essays Chiefly on Questions of Church and State. From 1850 to 1870* (London: John Murray, 1870), pp. 452-453.

20. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862).

21. Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London: Macmillan, 1887).

22. James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life 1795-1835*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), pp. 153-164.

23. See C. Gordon Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973). Also, Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement*. Strachan and Dallimore agree that Irving prefigured the modern Charismatic movement. They represent opposite sides of the debate, however, on whether this was a good thing.

24. William Hosking Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978).

25. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: a Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. William Montgomery (London: A.&C. Black, 1910).

26. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Hazlitt, writing during the first phase of Irving's London ministry, considered him to be a figure who embodied what Percy Shelley had called 'the Spirit of the Age'.<sup>27</sup> For Hazlitt, Irving's early success was an unusually clear illustration of 'the prevailing and preposterous rage for novelty'<sup>28</sup> that typified the times in which he lived. The 'novelty' that Irving represented was, in the mind of Hazlitt, his 'transposition of ideas',<sup>29</sup> that is that Irving 'jumbled up' in his own character the characteristic attitudes of the stage, of literature and of the pulpit. 'He has, with an unlimited and daring licence, mixed the sacred and the profane together, the carnal and the spiritual man, the petulance of the bar with the dogmatism of the pulpit, the theatrical and theological, the modern and the obsolete'.<sup>30</sup> Irving's allure, in the eyes of Hazlitt, was that he was a sort of personification of dialectic: bringing together opposites and combining them in one person. Hazlitt also saw this unity of opposites in the strange attraction that people felt to Irving who 'keeps the public in awe by insulting all their favourite idols',<sup>31</sup> suggesting that 'he has found the secret of attracting by repelling'.<sup>32</sup> In the age of *Romantische Ironie*, the self-conscious attempt to reconcile opposites,<sup>33</sup> Hazlitt saw Irving as an embodiment of the *Zeitgeist*.

Similarly, Thomas De Quincey, most famous for his autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, saw Irving as both extraordinary and typical. Like Hazlitt, De Quincey portrayed Irving as a man of contradictions and a figure who typified the age in which he lived, although De Quincey did so in a less stylised manner than Hazlitt. He gives a more intimate portrait of Irving, drawing on personal encounters with him, whereas Hazlitt portrayed Irving much more at arms length. In his *Literary Reminiscences*, De Quincey recounts the occasion of their first meeting. They were introduced at a London dinner party early in

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27. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, pp. 83-102. Shelley coined the phrase in his *Defence of Poetry*, which was written in 1821, but published posthumously in 1840. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry.', in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. Mary Wollestonecroft Shelley, (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840), p. 62.

28. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, p. 83.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

33. For a discussion of this concept see: Lilian R. Furst, 'Who Created "Romantische Ironie"?', *Pacific Coast Philology* 16, no. 1 (1981),

Irving's career in the city, during which the young preacher offered an assessment of De Quincey's character, which he arrived at by means of phrenology.<sup>34</sup> De Quincey also arrived at conclusions about Irving's character from that meeting, albeit by the more prosaic method of listening to him and observing his actions. De Quincey describes Irving as subject to the 'overmastering demoniac fervor of his nature' and 'the constitutional riot in his blood',<sup>35</sup> portraying the young Scotsman as a wild prophetic figure. Irving's 'fervid nature' made such an impression on De Quincey that, on the strength of this first meeting alone, he 'immediately expressed it to more than one friend; that he was destined to a melancholy close of his career, in lunacy.'<sup>36</sup> This was not to question Irving's powers, or to belittle him; indeed, in the reminiscences Irving is recalled as a 'man of genius'<sup>37</sup> and 'unquestionably, by many many degrees the greatest orator of our times'.<sup>38</sup> Thus De Quincey set Irving up to be a representative figure, of his age and of that Romantic trope, the tortured and ill-starred genius. The traits that De Quincey saw as making Irving great he also believed would be his destruction.<sup>39</sup>

The historiographical problems that begin to become apparent, even from the earliest histories of Irving, are entirely predictable. Since the so-called 'postmodern' critique of history made itself felt, it has been second nature to any student of the humanities to reject the possibility of neutrality in the interpretation of history. Indeed, the secondary literature on Irving is such that if there was not a pre-existing commitment to a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' we should be compelled to invent it.

A survey of the major works on Irving in the twentieth century reveals a broad correlation between the presentations of the subject with the theological controversies and fashions at the time of their writing. For example, a number of

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34. Quincey De, Thomas, *Literary Reminiscences; From the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater*, Works (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851), p. 237. 'My head, with a very slight apology for doing so, he examined'

35. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

PhD theses were written in the closing decades of the twentieth century with the aim, in the words of one of their authors, David Dorries, of ‘vindicating the orthodoxy of Edward Irving's doctrine of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.’<sup>40</sup> These dissertations were supervised by either Colin Gunton or James B. Torrance, both of whom were profoundly influenced by the work of the Swiss-German theologian Karl Barth.<sup>41</sup> Gunton’s observation that ‘it is a mark of the genius of Karl Barth that, whilst reading in a history of theology a critical reference to Edward Irving’s teaching that the Son of God assumed our sinful humanity, he decided that the 19th-century Scot had something important to say’,<sup>42</sup> offers an insight into his interest in the nineteenth-century outcast. If Irving’s theology was beyond acceptable theological bounds, then the implications for Barth’s Christological orthodoxy would, by turns, be unpromising. It would seem fair to surmise that, for scholars as committed to Barth as both Gunton and Torrance were, the research they supervised on Irving was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to vindicate the thought of ‘the Father of Neo-Orthodoxy’ himself.

The desire in the latter part of the twentieth century to resurrect old debates about Irving’s orthodoxy was not limited to the ivory towers of London and Aberdeen. During the last decades of the millennium, many Christian denominations experienced significant conflict over a growing interdenominational movement seeking renewal in the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament. Apologists for, and objectors to, this ‘Charismatic’ movement reached for Irving as a useful weapon in the debate. As the controversy grew in the early 1970s, the Banner of Truth Trust, a highly conservative grouping opposed to Charismatic theology, re-published Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield’s ‘cessationist’ manifesto *Counterfeit Miracles*.<sup>43</sup> A substantial section of the book was

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40. Dorries, *Edward Irving’s Incarnational Christology*, p. xix. See also, Graham W.P. McFarlane, ‘Edward Irving, Christology and the Spirit’ (PhD Thesis, Kings College, 1990); Nantomah, “Jesus the God-Man”.

41. Torrance, based in Aberdeen, supervised Nantomah and Dorries. Gunton, based at King’s College, London, supervised McFarlane.

42. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit*.

43. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918). republished in 1972 as Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972).

devoted to criticism of Irving,<sup>44</sup> whom Warfield believed to have been ‘plastic wax in the hands of everybody’, until he was finally bewitched by the miraculous gifts.<sup>45</sup> For those opposed to proliferation of these phenomena in churches, Warfield’s deluded and credulous Irving made a convenient illustration of the dangers of the *charismata*.

In 1973, the year following the re-publication of *Counterfeit Miracles*, however, Gordon Strachan wrote *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving*.<sup>46</sup> At the time of this book’s release, Strachan, an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland, was sub-warden of St Ninian’s, Crieff, a centre for Christian mission and part of the Charismatic renewal movement. His book represented an attempt to rehabilitate Irving the theologian, as part of an *apologia* for a distinctly Charismatic theology within his own Presbyterian tradition. To this end Strachan commended Irving as ‘the first Reformed-Pentecostal theologian’,<sup>47</sup> arguing that ‘if he is to be judged by the canons of Scriptural authority or theological consistency, then he must be exonerated and cleared of the charges for which he was condemned’.<sup>48</sup> For Strachan, Irving’s unique insight was the connection between pneumatology (the doctrine of the Spirit) and Christology (the doctrine of Christ).<sup>49</sup> He argued that although Karl Barth had seen the value of Irving’s Christology, he had missed its connection to his understanding of the Spirit.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Strachan suggested, Pentecostals had come to similar conclusions to those reached by Irving about the Spirit, but had missed the significance of his Christology.<sup>51</sup> Irving’s theology thus represented a more coherent approach to these central doctrinal *loci* than either Barth or the Pentecostal movement. So high was

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44. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 125-153.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 144. It is interesting to note, in passing, that it was to Drummond and Scott that Warfield attributed the most significant theological influence on Irving. He does not mention Coleridge.

46. Strachan, *Pentecostal Theology*. In 1972 and 1973 he also published two articles in which Irving figured heavily, but which were much more specifically about the history of, and present need for, Charismatic renewal in the Church of Scotland. C. Gordon Strachan, ‘Pentecostal Worship in the Church of Scotland Part 1,’ *The Liturgical Review* 2, no. 2 (1972), C. Gordon Strachan, ‘Pentecostal Worship in the Church of Scotland Part 2,’ *The Liturgical Review* 3, no. 2 (1973),

47. Strachan, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 21.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16, 21-22.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Strachan's estimation of Irving that he looked forward to the day when 'the Church of Scotland begin[s] to take seriously the challenge of Pentecostal doctrine and experience', and Edward Irving, 'still without honour in his own country', would 'leap to theological prominence'.<sup>52</sup> The contrast with Warfield's assessment could scarcely have been sharper.

A decade later, the Banner of Truth Trust re-entered the fray by publishing a new biography, *Edward Irving, Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement*, by the Canadian Baptist Arnold Dallimore.<sup>53</sup> Where Strachan had suggested that Irving represented a truly 'Reformed' approach to the *charismata*, Dallimore presented the opposite view. Irving was for Dallimore, as he had been for Warfield previously, a cautionary tale for the Reformed. Dallimore's Irving was a promising young Presbyterian minister who made shipwreck of his career. He divided Irving's ministry into two phases, the second of which, 'The Downward Course', was marked by millenarian speculation and Charismatic confusion.<sup>54</sup> Strachan had used Irving to press the case for Charismatic renewal in the Reformed world; Dallimore presented Irving as the case for avoiding any such enterprise.

A number of other works were produced in which the ongoing debate over Charismatic gifts was the central question. Narelle Jarrett of Moore College, Sydney, wrote a paper ostensibly about Irving, but which in its final three pages revealed itself to be a warning about the Vineyard movement.<sup>55</sup> On the other side of the argument, Jacob Nantomah, a Ghanaian, wrote a PhD thesis on the orthodoxy of Irving's Christology and its value for contemporary African ministry.<sup>56</sup> His introduction makes it clear that he was motivated to study Irving both because of the tendency to docetism in his own church culture,<sup>57</sup> and because 'a preacher who wants to present the Gospel in a place like Ghana needs

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52. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

53. Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement*.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-170.

55. Narelle Jarrett, 'The Spirit in the Teachings of Edward Irving,' in *Spirit of the Living God*, ed. B.G. Webb, Explorations 6 (Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1992).

56. Nantomah, "Jesus the God-Man".

57. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

to have a proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>58</sup> He was the first of two students in quick succession to produce PhD theses on Irving's Christology under the supervision of James B. Torrance in Aberdeen. The second was David Dorries, the first Pentecostal theologian to make a thorough study of Irving, who wrote a PhD thesis<sup>59</sup> which was later published as *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*.<sup>60</sup> He undertook his work to fill in some of the gaps left by Strachan's account<sup>61</sup> and thus 'allow for Dr Strachan's presupposition to be shared by present and future generations of theologians'.<sup>62</sup> As noted above, Dorries's own motivation was to prove that Irving was orthodox. Ironically Dorries built this case by criticising the lack of objectivity in those arguing the other side of the case. The PhD thesis of P.E. Davies (submitted in 1928),<sup>63</sup> which argued that Irving's Christology developed during his London ministry, drew particular scorn: 'Davies proceeded with the assumption that he was dealing with an unorthodox doctrine' and thus 'placed himself in no position to offer an objective assessment of Irving's doctrine'.<sup>64</sup> To what extent Dorries believed himself to have risen to the standards of 'neutrality' he required of Davies is a moot point.<sup>65</sup>

Dorries's identification of the mote in Davies's eye was more than a little ironic. It does, however, highlight the critique raised by the postmodern theorists. Agendas and subjectivity shape historiography, and absolute objectivity is a chimera. This critique could lead to a view of historiography which sees historians inevitably treating their sources as a palimpsest upon which to scratch out their own ideas. However, such an observation, treated as a lone and universal absolute, becomes a counsel of despair for history as a meaningful discipline.

Yet the practice of history is not straightforward ventriloquism, for the scholarly apparatus of academic history is designed to make a historian's claims testable

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58. *Ibid.*, p. x.

59. David W. Dorries, 'Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature.' (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1987).

60. Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

63. Paul Ewing Davies, 'An Examination of the Views of Edward Irving Concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ' (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1928).

64. Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, pp. xvi-xvii.

65. For re-evaluation of the status of Davies's work, See Ch.8 p. 251



against the available evidence and has proven to be effective in so doing. A powerful example of this burden of proof can be found, for instance, in the case of Deborah Lipstadt's victory over David Irving in a court of law. This particular Irving is a revisionist historian who has written controversially about the holocaust and sympathetically about Hitler. He brought a libel action against Professor Lipstadt for her claims that he had distorted and falsified the historical record. Irving's claims for libel were dismissed on the basis that the Hon. Justice Mr Gray was satisfied 'in relation to the plea of justification... that the Defendants have proved the substantial truth of the imputations, most of which relate to [David] Irving's conduct as an historian'.<sup>66</sup> In the eyes of the law, at least, the historical record proved not to be infinitely malleable.

The so-called postmodernists do not hold the monopoly on pointing out historiographical missteps. Quentin Skinner, for instance, noted a tendency amongst historians to impose an order on the material to be studied in a way that 'gives the thoughts of the major philosophers a coherence and the air of a generally closed system, which they may never have attained or even aspired to attain'.<sup>67</sup> In his influential essay, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas',<sup>68</sup> Skinner cited Locke and Hobbes as examples of authors whose statements of intention are sidelined in order to 'extract a message of maximum coherence' from their work.<sup>69</sup> Remarkably, he noted, some historians have gone so far as to excise entire works from the corpus of both writers to ensure the stability of their system. Skinner contended, quite rightly, that an assumption of absolute coherence throughout an individual's works will simply produce 'mythical accounts of what [the writer] actually thought'.<sup>70</sup>

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66. No Author, 'Irving v. Penguin Books Limited, Deborah E. Lipstat [2000] EWHC QB 115,' <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/QB/2000/115.html#5> (accessed 15 January 2015). see also Richard J. Evans, *Telling lies about Hitler: the Holocaust, History and the David Irving trial* (London: Verso, 2002).

67. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics Vol. 1 Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 68.

68. Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,' *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969), The essay has since been republished and updated in Quentin Skinner, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Polity, 1988). and Skinner, *Visions*.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

A second observation from Skinner's essay illustrates another pitfall to be avoided in the pursuit of intellectual history. The usage of language has changed over time and, particularly when working in one's native language, there is a resultant danger of misunderstanding. Skinner offers the example of Bishop Berkeley who was criticised in 1745 for the 'egoism' of his outlook.<sup>71</sup> The naïve modern reader of a text containing that criticism could easily misapprehend the author's intent. In the eighteenth century, the term 'egoism' carried a meaning more akin to 'solipsism' than the sort of self-regard it would convey in more contemporary discourse.<sup>72</sup> Careful study of the text alone would not necessarily reveal this. To understand Berkeley, it is vital to understand his context. It is instructive to consider both the bias towards finding coherence and the danger of de-contextualising in the existing scholarship on Irving. We will, thus, consider them in turn.

First, then, we turn to what Skinner called the 'mythology of coherence'. When it comes to scholarship about Irving, the first issue to be faced is that, although Irving was capable of addressing the major questions of systematic theology, he never did so in a sustained or systematic way. All his major published works, other than his translation of Lacunza's *Venida del Mesias en gloria y magestad*,<sup>73</sup> were occasional literature. His *oeuvre* was made up of published sermons,<sup>74</sup> works of polemic,<sup>75</sup> and prefatory chapters to the works of others.<sup>76</sup> The lack of systematic

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71. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

72. *Ibid.*

73. (Manuel Lacunza) Juan Josaphat ben Ezra, *Venida del Mesias en Gloria y Magestad* (Cadiz: Felipe Tolosa, 1812). For biographical details of Lacunza see Leroy Edwin Froom, *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, vol. 3 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), pp. 303-336.

74. For example: Edward Irving, *Farewell Discourse to the Congregation and Parish of St. John's, Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Chalmers and Collins, 1822). Edward Irving, *For the Oracles of God, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, an Argument, in Nine Parts*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Hamilton, 1823). Edward Irving, *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School: A Series of Orations* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1825).

75. For example: Edward Irving, *A Letter to the King, on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Laws, as it affects our Christian Monarchy* (London: James Nisbet, 1828). Also, Edward Irving, *An Apology for the Ancient Fullness and Purity of the Doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland: a Sermon [on Jer. ix. 1, 2] Preached on the Occasion of a Fast Appointed by the Presbytery of London, to be Held. because of the Low Ebb of Religion among the Children of the Scottish Church* (London: James Nisbet, 1828). And Edward Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature Set Forth, in Four Parts, etc.* (Edinburgh: John Boyd, 1830).

76. Edward Irving and W. Gilpin, *The Life of Bernard Gilpin. With an Introductory Essay by the Rev. Edward Irving* (Glasgow: W. Collins, 1824).

Edward Irving, 'Introductory Essay,' in *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ed. George Horne,

exposition in his works themselves is illustrated by the production, in 1857, of a volume of *Gathered Gems from the Orations of the Rev. Edward Irving: Systematically Arranged*.<sup>77</sup> The anonymous editor of this work clearly felt the need to apply some order to Irving's otherwise diffuse works. The reviewer of the volume in the *United Presbyterian Magazine* commented on this systematising in a way that, if one follows Skinner, seems less than the ringing endorsement that was intended:

The selection here published presents some of his most striking thoughts and felicitous sayings unencumbered with the objectionable theology with which they were originally associated.<sup>78</sup>

To this mid-nineteenth-century reviewer at least, Irving was at his best when he was not being Irving.

Another issue, along with this attempt to impose order where it did not originally exist, is that many studies of Irving neglect his intellectual development and overlook dramatic changes in his thought. A fuller discussion of some of these changes and what they reveal about Irving's development as a theologian will be undertaken in the following chapters. For now, however, two examples will suffice to highlight the different ways in which this happens repeatedly in modern scholarship.

The first example highlights the problems that arise when the dates of particular publications are not given proper weight. In a frequently perceptive article on Irving's 'Religious Epistemology',<sup>79</sup> Martin Sutherland discusses Irving's understanding of divine revelation in relation to that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. One of the most impressive sections of his paper is his discussion of the similarities and differences between the two men's understanding of the relationship between the Bible and the act of divine revelation.<sup>80</sup> In this section,

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(London: Whittaker, 1826).

Orlando W. Roberts and Edward Irving, *Narrative of Voyages and Excursions on the East Coast and in the Interior of Central America, with Notes and Observations by Edward Irving* (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1827).

77. Edward Irving, *Gathered Gems from the Orations of the Rev. Edward Irving: Systematically arranged*. (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1857).

78. Anonymous, review of "'Gathered Gems from the Orations of the Rev. Edward Irving: Systematically Arranged.'" by *The United Presbyterian Magazine* 3, (April 1859): 178.

79. Martin Sutherland, 'Preaching as Truth: The Religious Epistemology of Edward Irving,' *Colloquium Journal* 36, no. 1 (2004),

80. *Ibid.*

however, Sutherland risks presenting a distorted version of Irving's ideas by quoting works from different periods of his life as though they were parts of one larger work. The citations on pages fifteen and sixteen of Sutherland's paper alternate between references to 'The Word of God'<sup>81</sup> which is a series of four sermons preached in July 1823, and 'Idolatry of the Book - The Bible'<sup>82</sup> which dates from the autumn of 1825.<sup>83</sup> The significance of these dates is that, whereas the first sermon was preached at around the time of Irving and Coleridge's first meeting, the second sermon was preached more than two years later, that is after the publication of *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School*, in which Irving described Coleridge as 'more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine...than any or all of the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation'.<sup>84</sup> A comparison of Irving and Coleridge's approaches to revelation cannot be entirely successful if it fails to take into account the possibility of a change in Irving's views in the course of the two years after they met.

When studied on their own terms, the two Irving works to which Sutherland refers display very different understandings of the relationship between revelation and scripture. In the earlier sermon, 'The Word of God', Irving refers to the Bible in terms entirely similar to his Evangelical brethren of the day. For Irving in 1823 the Bible *was* 'the Word of God'<sup>85</sup> to the extent that when reading the Bible 'it is the voice of the Eternal which we hear'.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, speaking in the later sermon on the 'Idolatry of the Book', he is scornful of those who speak as if 'the very words are inspired'.<sup>87</sup> In this sermon, Irving insists that 'the written word is but the outward form'<sup>88</sup> distinguishing the record of revelation from the substance, namely 'the eternal Word'.<sup>89</sup> Some of the parallels between this sermon of Irving's and Coleridge's *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* will be examined in

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81. Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 1 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1864), pp. 1-66.

82. Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 4 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), pp. 75-85.

83. For an explanation of my dating for these sermons see Chapter 4 p. ...

84. Irving, *Missionaries*, pp. vii-viii.

85. Irving, *CW i*, p. 3.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

87. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 82.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

89. *Ibid.*

more detail in chapter six. At this point, however, it is enough to observe that, by speaking in this way, Irving was simply following Coleridge in developing a particular version of platonic *logos* theology. From this observation it should be apparent that in neglecting the development of Irving's thought, and Coleridge's influence on that development, Sutherland undermines his ability to present an accurate description of Irving's thought.

A second, more general, area in which the development of Irving's thought is neglected is his relationship to Evangelicalism. It is a commonplace of scholarship to refer to Irving as an Evangelical, both in specialist works on the history of Evangelicalism, such as that of David Bebbington,<sup>90</sup> John Wolffe,<sup>91</sup> and Doreen Rosman,<sup>92</sup> and in broader histories of the period, as in for instance the works of Stewart J. Brown<sup>93</sup> and Robert Crawford.<sup>94</sup> More recently, this classification of Irving as an Evangelical has been called into question by those engaged in close study of his life and works. Peter Elliott has argued that it is questionable 'whether Irving should be considered an Evangelical at all'.<sup>95</sup> Elliott measured Irving's beliefs against the 'Bebbington Quadrilateral', the now widely-accepted taxonomy of Evangelicalism, developed by David Bebbington in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.<sup>96</sup> Bebbington's proposal is that there are four characteristics (biblicism, activism, conversionism and crucicentrism) that, taken together, have historically characterised Evangelicals. According to this definition, it not appropriate to label a figure 'Evangelical' unless all four attributes are in evidence. Elliott's assessment of Irving's theology is that whilst he did indeed exhibit 'biblicism' and 'activism' Irving was 'less conversionist than

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90. See for instance, David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a History from the 1750s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 78-80. Also, David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: the Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), p. 151.

91. John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: the age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 77.

92. See Doreen M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012), pp. 20-21.

93. Brown, *Providence*, p. 35.

94. Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: A History of Scottish Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2007), p. 486.

95. Peter Elliott, 'Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis' (PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2010), p. 239.

96. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp. 2-17.

most Evangelicals, and far less crucicentric'.<sup>97</sup> To what extent, then, is the broader scholarship correct to label Irving an Evangelical?

As will be demonstrated more fully in subsequent chapters, the evidence suggests that Irving did *begin* his ministry as an Evangelical — both by self-identification and also in the sense that his teaching and churchmanship were typical of Evangelicals of his day. He did not continue to identify himself as Evangelical, however. Indeed by August 1827 Irving was speaking of 'the theology called Evangelical, in contradistinction to the orthodox theology of the Reformers',<sup>98</sup> and speaking of 'the evangelical spirit' as a 'temporary and ineffectual shoot'.<sup>99</sup> His theology, also, had become much less like that of his evangelical contemporaries. Elliott's observation that Irving downplayed the centrality of the Cross is entirely correct — although this is only true of the later period of Irving's ministry. The same is the case with Irving's changing understanding of the nature of the Bible: his initial statements are typical of Evangelicals, his later statements are less so.<sup>100</sup> It is appropriate, then, to speak of Irving as an Evangelical in his early career, but it is problematic to categorise his later ministry in these terms.

This observation that his thought moved away, significantly, from his Evangelical beginning is important. For instance, *pace* Bebbington, care is needed before Irving is described as transposing 'evangelical theology into a Romantic key'.<sup>101</sup> Irving certainly began as an Evangelical but under the influence of Romanticism he changed his tune, not just his pitch. The parallel with a near contemporary of Irving, John Henry Newman (1801-1890), is instructive. Newman experienced an Evangelical conversion whilst at school,<sup>102</sup> and was still a committed Evangelical when he went up to Trinity College, Oxford. As an undergraduate, Newman was so indebted to the ideas of the Evangelical stalwart Thomas Scott that he contemplated a pilgrimage to his home.<sup>103</sup> Newman, also profoundly

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97. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis", p. 239. For the Bebbington Quadrilateral see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp. 2-19.

98. Irving, *CWi*, p. 157. On the dating of this sermon, which was part of a series on 'The Parable of the Sower' see Ch.4 p...

99. *Ibid.*, p. 301.

100. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography'. pp. 92-6.

101. Bebbington, *Dominance*, p. 213.

102. John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 25.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

influenced by Romantic ideas, shifted away from Evangelicalism. In fact he shifted far enough from his Evangelical beginnings that he ended his career as a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. It would be a profoundly distorted history that treated Newman as an Evangelical throughout his life. This, it is true, is an extreme example. It does, nonetheless, illustrate the importance of taking seriously the shift in Irving's self-identification and in his theology.<sup>104</sup> To follow the opposite course and insist that Irving should never be identified as an Evangelical is, of course, no less distorting. Peter Elliott, who questions Irving's earlier Evangelical identity on the basis of his later career,<sup>105</sup> risks misrepresenting the younger Irving.

We now turn to Skinner's second pitfall: the risk of misunderstanding historical writings by failing to develop a proper appreciation of their context. A salutary example of this when it comes to Irving is the significance of his adoption of Coleridge's technical usage for the word 'Reason'. As a result of following Coleridge's idiolect, Irving deploys the word in a manner entirely at odds with the typical usage of the word during the Enlightenment and indeed with modern usage. Coleridge distinguished between 'Reason' and 'Understanding' in terms broadly in accord with Kant's distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. For Coleridge, 'Reason' is the higher faculty which operates in the realm of 'Ideas', whereas the 'Understanding' is the lower faculty which operates in the realm of sense experience.<sup>106</sup> Irving's explanation of the phenomenon of *glossolalia* in his *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* drew on Coleridge's universal, platonic, view of reason. Those in Irving's congregation who spoke in tongues did not understand what they were saying. What many, for that cause, described as irrational —

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104. This is not, of course, to deny the importance of Irving to Evangelicalism in this period, see for example Ralph Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism: The Radical Legacy of Edward Irving,' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58, no. 04 (2007), Irving was very influential in certain Evangelical circles and, as observed previously, continued to be revered by the Evangelical generation of McCheyne and Bonar even though they considered him to have been seriously misled in his later teaching.

105. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis", p. 239.

106. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, vol. (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825), p. viii. Coleridge habitually capitalised the terms 'Reason' and 'Understanding', Irving did not. For that reason when referring to Irving's use of the terms they are not capitalised, but when Coleridge's usage is in view they are.

something outside the bounds of reason — Irving saw as an expression rather than a repudiation of reason.

Speech is the manifestation of reason; and by our capacity of uttering, and understanding the words uttered, is proved the commonness, the oneness of that reason, in which many persons have their being. Now when Christ doth occupy the place of my reasonable spirit, and with my tongue doth express whatever I am capable of expressing, he is proved to be in me as truly as I am in myself.<sup>107</sup>

In keeping with Coleridge's usage, Irving used the term 'Understanding' to refer to the logical faculty which is more generally denoted 'reason'. Thus he could argue that this experience which accorded with 'Reason' nonetheless bypassed the use of the normal cognitive function that he called 'understanding':

[Paul] takes a distinction between praying in the spirit and praying in the understanding, praising in the spirit and praising in the understanding; holding man to be capable of worshipping and serving God when his understanding is wholly without activity.<sup>108</sup>

To give another example of this usage, in a letter encouraging his friend Robert Story, minister of Rosneath, to avoid prejudice against the miraculous gifts, he urged him to 'Keep your conscience unfettered by your understanding.'<sup>109</sup> Irving's use of this Coleridgean terminology demonstrates that familiarity with the author's precise linguistic context is essential to accurate interpretation.

This regard for context must of course go beyond the merely semantic. It has already been observed that a substantial portion of recent scholarship has approached Irving with an eye to his significance for the modern Charismatic movement. Descriptions of Irving as 'Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement' or of his theology as 'Pentecostal' represent attempts to understand his thought in terms of movements that he could have known nothing about. Not only does this approach run the risk of interpreting Irving in ways that he did not intend

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107. Edward Irving, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation, in a Series of Lectures by the Rev. Edward Irving*, vol. 1 (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1831), p. 704.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 706.

109. Irving to Robert Story, July 1831. Quoted in Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 317.



(indeed that he could not have intended) but it can also obscure the significance of his actions and words in his own context.

This is particularly evident in the work of Gordon Strachan. He argued from the maxim '[h]istorical judgements are based on analogies between similar sequences of events',<sup>110</sup> that Irving had not received an adequate evaluation due to '[t]he absence of any known parallel outside Scripture to the miraculous events of 1830 to 1832'.<sup>111</sup> The Pentecostal movement provided the parallel which Strachan sought and so he ventured to offer the assessment of Irving's theology that was now possible. Regrettably, Strachan's approach was flawed, even on its own terms. He limited his consideration of parallels to the Irvingite experience of the gift of tongues to what he considered to be mainstream, orthodox, Christian movements. Thus he entirely ignored the parallels between Irving's approach and that of contemporaneous movements that Strachan would doubtless consider more *outré*.

Irving lived at a time of political and religious upheaval and supernaturalism and millennialism were not unique to him. A close parallel to the beginnings of the Irvingite movement can be found, for instance, in the birth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: a movement founded, officially, on 9 June 1830.<sup>112</sup> The similarities between Mormonism and Irvingism are notable. The movement founded in the United States by Joseph Smith developed, just as Irving's did, out of a belief that the Church was largely apostate and had thus lost the use of the miraculous gifts of the apostolic age.<sup>113</sup> As with the Irvingite movement, the Latter Day Saints experienced *glossolalia*<sup>114</sup> and appointed twelve

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110. C. Gordon Strachan, 'Pentecostal Worship 1', p. 18. - His footnote for this points to John Macquarrie's discussion of the historical method of Ernst Troeltsch but he does not engage in any discussion or explanation of this.

111. *Ibid.*

112. Joseph Smith and B.H. Roberts, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), p. 84.

113. James E. Talmage, *The Great Apostasy, Considered in the Light of Scriptural and Secular History* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1909), p. iii. In the preface Talmage writes 'If the alleged apostasy of the primitive church was not a reality, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is not the divine institution its name proclaims.'

114. Jeremy Sean Lofthouse, 'Pentecostal Power: A Study on the Origin and Conflicts of Glossolalia within Nineteenth Century Mormonism,' *Utah Historical Review* 3, (2013), pp. 232-235.

men to the role of Apostle.<sup>115</sup> The coincidence between the development of an expectation that Apostles would be restored to the church and the appointment of men to that role is striking. The command to appoint twelve Apostles came to Joseph Smith in June 1829,<sup>116</sup> which is remarkably near to the point at which Irving began to look forward to a restoration of this order of ministry. The quorum of twelve apostles for the Latter-Day Saints was finally appointed in 1834,<sup>117</sup> the first of the Irvingites in 1832.<sup>118</sup>

Another similar movement grew out of the ministry and prophetic interpretations of the American Baptist preacher William Miller. Like Irving, Miller predicted a date for the second coming of Christ, in his case 1843/44.<sup>119</sup> Like Irving, he emphasised the humanity of Christ to the extent that he is believed to have taught a similar 'sinful nature' doctrine to that of Irving.<sup>120</sup> He too called believers out of the 'Babylon' of the established churches.<sup>121</sup> Although sharing Irvingite expectations for a restoration of miraculous gifts, the Millerite movement came to be divided in 1842 over the question of *glossolalia* which were practised by some who knew themselves as 'Gift Adventists'<sup>122</sup> and treated with suspicion by others.<sup>123</sup> The Millerites are famous for the 'Great Disappointment' of 22 October 1844 when the last of their predictions of Christ's return failed. This event is remembered particularly because many of the expectant believers had divested themselves of their possessions in preparation. What is less well known is that the church that started to meet in Newman Street under Irving displayed a similar attitude to the possession of goods. For instance, they deliberately took

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115. Smith and Roberts, *History*, pp. vol.I, 62.

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Ibid.*, pp. vol.II, 186-7.

118. Manfred Henke, '175 Years Ago: The Call of John Bate Cardale and the Contemporary Idea of Apostleship,' [http://www.nak.org/fileadmin/download/pdf/Call\\_of\\_Cardale-2010.pdf](http://www.nak.org/fileadmin/download/pdf/Call_of_Cardale-2010.pdf) (accessed 14 July 2014).

119. *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley eds (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999–2003), p. 18.

120. R. Larson, *The Word was Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Seventh-Day Adventist Christology, 1852-1952* (New York: TEACH Services, 1986), pp. 7-11.

121. Hugh Ivor Brian Dunton, 'The Millerite Adventists and Other Millenarian Groups in Great Britain, 1830-1860' (PhD Thesis, King's College London, 1984), p. 92.

122. Charles William Shumway, 'A Critical History of Glossolalia' (PhD Thesis, Boston University, 1919), p. 109.

123. Dunton, "The Millerite Adventists and Other Millenarian Groups in Great Britain, 1830-1860".

out a lease for exactly 33 years on the Newman Street building because they would have no need of the building after the *parousia* which they believed would come at the end of this period.<sup>124</sup>

What these examples demonstrate is that to treat Irving as a forerunner of some later movement is inherently misleading, not least because he did not believe that the earth would survive long enough for such movements to come about.

Whether or not one accepts Mark Patterson's thesis that Irving's premillennial approach became the grid through which every idea had to be forced,<sup>125</sup> it is clearly a mistake not to consider Irving's thought in the light of his belief that the end was nigh. To disregard the parallels between Irving and movements like Mormonism and Adventism is to fail to treat him as a historical figure, and instead to replace him with a platonised ideal of himself. Irving was not an urbane Barthian theologian *avant la lettre*. He was a herald of the end of days, who believed the mainstream churches to be under the control of Satan and who was capable of pronouncing a solemn curse on people for arriving late to divine service at the Regent Square church.<sup>126</sup> If ever a thinker needed to be considered in the context of his own age, it is surely Edward Irving.

Strikingly, it has been more common to treat Irving with the appropriate level of concern for context amongst those for whom Irving was not their primary focus. The study of Evangelical eschatology in particular has produced a number of treatments of Irving, particularly by Timothy Stunt,<sup>127</sup> Boyd Hilton<sup>128</sup> and Sheridan Gilley,<sup>129</sup> that outline his place within a broader movement. Sue Zemka

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124. Manfred Henke, 'The Catholic Apostolic Church and its Gordon Square Cathedral: Bloomsbury, the 'Irvingites' and the Catholic Apostolic Church,' *The Bloomsbury Project*, [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/articles/CAC-Gordon\\_Square.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/articles/CAC-Gordon_Square.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2014). , pp. 1,2.

125. Mark Rayburn Patterson, 'Designing the Last Days: Edward Irving, the Albury Circle and the Theology of The Morning Watch' (PhD Thesis, Kings College, 2001), p. 131.

126. Jonathan Gray to Mary Gray, 25 January 1827 in 'Letters of Jonathan Gray and Mary, his wife: Gray Family Papers, York City Archive, Acc5,6,24,235/J130/b,' n.p.

127. Timothy Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-55* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

128. Boyd Hilton, 'The Age of Atonement: the Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865,' (1988),; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad Bad and Dangerous People? England 1785-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

129. Sheridan Gilley, 'Edward Irving: Prophet of the Millennium,' in *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, ed. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew, (Milton Keynes: Hambledon Press, 1993).

has made a similar contribution within the area of Christology.<sup>130</sup> Most important, however, has been the recognition that the currents which influenced Irving's course were not simply the eddies of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism but the much broader cultural and intellectual movement known as Romanticism. The first to draw attention to the significance of Romanticism to understanding Irving was David Bebbington in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.<sup>131</sup> Since Bebbington wrote that '[i]n short, Irving was a Romantic',<sup>132</sup> this perspective has become increasingly influential. However, the first full-length development of this idea was Peter Elliott's *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis*, which began life as a PhD thesis.<sup>133</sup> Elliott has been sufficiently successful in demonstrating the necessity of appreciating Irving's 'Romantic vision'<sup>134</sup> that it was necessary for David Malcolm Bennett to include a chapter on 'Irving the Romantic' in his *Edward Irving Reconsidered*: the first biography to be published after Elliott's work.<sup>135</sup> The previous Irving biography, written just before Elliott completed his PhD research, makes very little mention of the impact of Romanticism upon its subject.<sup>136</sup>

We have established the need to apprehend the context of Irving's works and ideas in order properly to understand him. We will now offer a brief summary and examination of the most important studies of Irving's life that have been completed to this point.

Two single-volume biographies of Irving emerged in the first twenty years after his death. The first, which appeared in 1841, was modestly entitled a *Biographical Sketch*. It was written by a Baptist minister, William Jones, who had previously authored books including an *Ecclesiastical History*,<sup>137</sup> a life of the eighteenth-

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130. Sue Zemka, *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

131. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

133. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis"; Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Publishing, 2013).

134. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis", p. 320.

135. David Malcolm Bennett, *Edward Irving Reconsidered: The Man, His Controversies, and the Pentecostal Movement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), pp. 100-109.

136. Grass, *Watchman*.

137. William Jones, *Ecclesiastical History, in a Course of Lectures, Delivered at Founders' Hall, Lothbury, London* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1831-1834).

century Evangelical stalwart Rowland Hill<sup>138</sup> and a *History of the Waldenses*.<sup>139</sup> Jones was not part of Irving's circle, did not have direct access to the sources required for a full-scale biography, and began his 'Advertisement' with a warning that 'The reader who expects...a full, circumstantial, and detailed account of the Life of the late MR. EDWARD IRVING, will assuredly find himself disappointed.'<sup>140</sup> Instead he set out 'to bring together, in a condensed form, the principal incidents which lay upon the surface of the subject'.<sup>141</sup> The book was originally intended as a complement to the release of a collection of unpublished sermons from early in Irving's career,<sup>142</sup> although, when the time of publication came, the two were issued separately by the same publisher.

Jones worked with very limited sources and was not able to provide insight into Irving as a man or access to material that was not otherwise available in the public domain at the time of writing. As a result his work is of more value as an example of attitudes to Irving in his immediate posterity than it is as a source of information about the man himself. Although Jones believed that he was able to provide a comparatively disinterested account of Irving because he had neither 'been in collision or co-operation with him' and thus had 'neither prejudices nor partialities to gratify',<sup>143</sup> as an Evangelical, Jones had some significant concerns about Irving's theology. These concerns became particularly evident in regard to his Christology, which Jones described as 'novel...utterly subversive of the Gospel of Christ', stating that 'it directly leads to Socinianism and Infidelity'.<sup>144</sup> Jones's account of Irving is of a man of considerable abilities and deep personal piety who was nonetheless flawed and led astray. In this assessment he echoed the minister of Crown Court Presbyterian Church in London, John Cumming, who wrote that Irving was exemplary of the 'danger that environs a lofty intellect, arising from self-sufficiency and self-confidence, ministerial popularity, and

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138. William Jones, *Memoirs of the Rev. Rowland Hill* (London: John Bennett, 1834).

139. William Jones, *History of the Waldenses* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1812).

140. William Jones, *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving, etc.* (London: John Bennett, 1841), p. iii.

141. *Ibid.*

142. *Ibid.* Edward Irving, *Thirty Sermons, by E. I., preached during the first three years of his residence in London. From the notes of T. Oxford. To which are added, five lectures delivered in 1829, at the Rotunda, Dublin, taken in short-hand by Mr. Harley* (London: John Bennett, 1835).

143. Jones, *Biographical Sketch*, p. 1.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

departing from the truth, giving the preference to opinions merely on account of their novelty'.<sup>145</sup> It is understandable that the publisher John Bennet chose to issue Jones's account separately from the *Thirty Sermons*, which he could have hoped would sell mostly to those with a rather more favourable view of Irving.

A second full-length biography appeared in 1854. It was written by the politically radical editor of the *Carlisle Examiner*, Washington Wilks, who would attain brief fame as a prisoner in the clock tower of the House of Commons, where he was detained for breach of parliamentary privilege.<sup>146</sup> Wilks, as a child, had known Irving, 'my father's last, best friend'.<sup>147</sup> Like Jones, he was at pains to point out the limits of his study. He entitled his work *An Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography*, so as to distinguish it from a '[p]ersonal...[b]iography', stating that it was 'the [m]emoir, not of a [p]rivate, but only of a [p]ublic [l]ife'.<sup>148</sup> This limitation meant that Wilks's work was inevitably eclipsed by the arrival of Margaret Oliphant's much bigger, fuller, work when it was published eight years later. Although he provides some fascinating anecdotes about Irving which are drawn from the reports of those who knew Irving well, including his wife and children, Wilks lacked the biographical flair of Mrs Oliphant. His descriptions of Irving the man sound more like a eulogy than a biography. For example, having praised Irving for his sartorial elegance, Wilks informs his readers that Irving, 'though a scholar and a divine...had none of the Phariseism either of society or of the Church',<sup>149</sup> going on to praise his learning and his character in florid terms. As a study of Irving the man, Wilks's book certainly lacks the psychological insight of Mrs Oliphant's later work, but it offers a fuller picture of Irving's writing and teaching than her more famous biography.

Wilks took significant pains to introduce Irving as a thinker and author. Much of the *Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography* is made up of extended quotations from Irving's writings at the various stages of his career. Crucially, these excerpts are

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145. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

146. 'Mr Washington Wilks: State Prisoner', *The Carlisle Journal* (Carlisle), Tuesday, 1 June, 1858; p. 3.

147. Washington Wilks, *Edward Irving: an Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography* (London: Freeman, 1854), p. i.

148. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

paired with Wilks's commentary and an outline of their reception when they were first published. The fourth chapter, for instance, comprises an outline and exposition of Irving's *For the Oracles of God*, and the following chapter presents a detailed discussion of its reception in the press.<sup>150</sup> Thus, over the course of a little over seventy pages the reader is introduced at first hand to Irving's writing, but also given an idea of the context into which Irving was speaking and the impact of his communication. Consequently, whilst Wilks does not give such a full picture of Irving the man as Mrs Oliphant, he provides a much more sure-footed introduction to Irving's thought and to its development.

Unlike Jones, Wilks did not 'presume to decide between Mr Irving and his impugners as to what is or is not the 'Catholic and Orthodox Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature'.<sup>151</sup> Nonetheless, like Jones, he was unable to maintain neutrality and his contempt for Irving's accusers is evident. He convicts the ecclesiastical courts of cowardice<sup>152</sup> and at one point even takes on the role of speechwriter for Irving, suggesting a response to the critics that he felt Irving might fairly have used if he had so chosen. The opening two words of this ghostwritten speech are revealing: 'Thou fool!'.<sup>153</sup> Wilks came not to bury Caesar but to praise him.

Irving's life was characterised by such extremes of success and despair that it could easily be confused with rather overwrought fiction. It is perhaps little surprise, then, that his most popular and influential nineteenth-century biographer specialised in stories of that type. At the publication of her *Life of Edward Irving*, Mrs Oliphant was much better known for the one hundred or so novels she had published.<sup>154</sup> Her two-volume biography of Irving has more than a little of the romantic novel about it. Access to primary documents such as journals and correspondence<sup>155</sup> (some of which have since been lost), as well as extensive interviews with the *dramatis personae* of Irving's story, enabled her to give very

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150. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-134.

151. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

154. Wm. A. Guerry, 'Mrs. Oliphant,' *The Sewanee Review* 8, no. 1 (1 January 1900), p. 65.

155. Oliphant, *Life*, p. viii.

detailed, first-hand, insights into the life of her subject. Nonetheless, despite these unique advantages as a historian, her desire to portray Irving as a tragic romantic hero led Mrs Oliphant, at least on occasion, to blur the lines between reality and fiction. This blending of history and fiction is particularly evident in her portrayal of Irving as the victim of powerful figures in the fledgling denomination, which was first based at Newman Street, where Irving ministered after being dismissed from Regent Square.

Mrs Oliphant's descriptions of the treatment Irving received at the hands of the potentates of Newman Street suggest that she believed them to have been responsible for his death. She laid the blame for his fateful journey to Scotland, against the orders of his physician, to their charge. She wrote sympathetically of the frustration felt by Irving's friends, such as the essayist and critic Thomas Carlyle who were outside this circle. She wrote 'it is not wonderful that they should add the blame of this, to all the other wrongs against his honour and happiness of which they held the prophets of Newman Street guilty'.<sup>156</sup> Senior figures within the CAC did not recognise her description of them.<sup>157</sup>

Representatives of this body, such as David Ker, who was unique amongst Irving's deacons from Regent Square in moving with him to Newman Street,<sup>158</sup> pointed out that far from sending Irving to the frozen north without regard for his health, they, like his doctor, had urged him to travel to the Mediterranean. Ker even pointed out that his friends, who included the fabulously wealthy Henry Drummond, had offered to pay for his travel.<sup>159</sup> Despite these protests and the counter-evidence provided, Mrs Oliphant's account, distorted though it is, has remained a central influence in the historical understanding of Irving.

Fundamentally, Mrs Oliphant wrote about Irving, not out of historical interest, but out of personal devotion to Irving's memory. In her introduction she acknowledges that her book sprang, not from a concern with Irving's thought,

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156. *Ibid.*, pp. 375-376.

157. David Ker, *Observations on Mrs Oliphant's Life of Edward Irving and the Correction of Certain Misstatements Therein* (Edinburgh: Thomas Laurie, 1863).

158. John Hair, *Regent Square: Eighty Years of a London Congregation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1898), p. 103.

159. Ker, *Observations*, pp. xvi-xvii.



but from her interest in ‘the man himself, and his noble courageous warfare through a career encompassed with all human agonies’.<sup>160</sup> Few would deny that Mrs Oliphant succeeded in her task of portraying Irving as a spiritual warrior beset by many trials. In doing so, however, she certainly made the task of later historians more complicated by producing a combination of history and legend that must be disentangled.

In 1878, Edward Miller produced a two-volume account of *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism*. He wrote out of distress at the ‘acceptance of the opinions generally known as Irvingite by Clergymen of the Church of England’,<sup>161</sup> with the aim of making ‘it forever impossible that well-informed Clergymen, or indeed well informed Laymen, should be thus led away from the teaching of the true Branch of the Church in this country’.<sup>162</sup> His work is distinguished from many elenctic works addressing Irving’s theology, by an apparently genuine attempt at understanding the other side of the argument, and an eirenic spirit. Miller corresponded with John Bate Carlyle, ‘the pillar of the apostles’, and then met with two senior figures in the movement, one of whom was resident at Albury.<sup>163</sup>

The majority of Miller’s work is not about Irving himself, but the movement that followed him. He does, however, give the first hundred and fifty pages of the first volume to the beginnings of the movement, much of which is devoted to Irving’s biography. The details of this portrayal largely follow the work of Mrs Oliphant, although Miller offers a more sympathetic view of the behaviour of the Newman Street church towards Irving than his earlier biographer. Miller’s treatment of Irving was not, however, entirely derivative. Miller assessed Irvingism, and indeed Irving himself, to be a product of the historical situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He recognised the significance of the shifts in society which grew out of the Industrial Revolution, seeing the period as the closing of the Middle Ages. Key to this epoch in Miller’s eyes was the violence of the French Revolution and the challenge it presented to the generally established

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160. Oliphant, *Life*, p. vii.

161. Miller, *History and Doctrines 1*, p. vii.

162. *Ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*, pp. viii-ix.

view of the world and the church. This state of flux constituted the background against which he viewed Irving's life and theology, and in consequence he treated the movement's development of an eschatology to explain the times as the central and organising thesis of his work. Miller argues that Irving's Christological teaching was not really central to his development and that he 'drifted into...error'.<sup>164</sup> He shows a significant degree of empathy with Irving, recognising that his words were treated uncharitably and that the controversy might entirely have been avoided if he had 'been met in a spirit of large-minded love, and found his error pointed out by men who joined heartily in the positive and valuable truth which he was inculcating'.<sup>165</sup> Irving's real significance for Miller was his role in the founding of this new movement that he felt threatened his own beloved Church of England. Nonetheless, he presented a sympathetic, even affectionate portrait of Irving, stating towards the close of his biographical section that 'even his errors were strong'.<sup>166</sup> Whilst Miller's work is certainly not the last word on Irving, its great strength is in the attention to Irving's context. Miller is not able to offer much in the way of new information about Irving. He does offer, however, one of the most balanced portrayals of the preacher that has, to date, been produced.

For several decades after Miller, there was little publishing interest in Irving. The generation that had known him was dead, and the ecclesiastical movements such as the renewal movement and neo-orthodoxy, which would see a revival of interest in Irving, had yet to develop. The next biography after Miller's did not appear until, in 1912, the American author Jean Christie Root published a short account of Irving's life. Root was best known as a writer of historical abridgements for school children, such as her *Nathan Hale*,<sup>167</sup> an account of the famous American Revolutionary spy, published as part of a series of 'juvenile literature' by MacMillan.<sup>168</sup> The title of her work on Irving was revealing enough about where her sympathies lay: *Edward Irving, Man Preacher Prophet*. Her work

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164. Ibid., p. 86.

165. Ibid.

166. Ibid., p. 147.

167. Jean Christie Root, *Nathan Hale* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

168. Anonymous, 'Book Notices: Nathan Hale by Jean Christie Root,' *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 38, no. 3 (1915),

was based on the researches of the Catholic Apostolic preacher William Watson Andrews, which he had intended to publish in a much larger work, but which he never completed.<sup>169</sup> As a work of history Root's book carries little weight. It takes to an extreme the tendency of studies of Irving to be either hagiography or hatchet-job, painting Irving as a kind of plaster saint. Coupled with this highly slanted treatment of the subject is the fact that the research is very much secondhand. Root was not well-versed in the history or the people of Irving's Scotland and London and this shows through repeatedly. An American, she records that Irving received a 'legacy of a few hundred dollars';<sup>170</sup> she refers to Canning as 'the then Prime Minister'<sup>171</sup> in describing the events of 1822 (he did not become First Lord of the Treasury until 1827). Wigtown, where two women of the Covenanters were judicially drowned, is described as being 'a few miles below Annan',<sup>172</sup> as if it were a local town. Wigtown is in fact 48 miles from Annan as the crow flies and a journey over land between the two is roughly 70 miles, which means that it is about as local to Annan as Edinburgh and Glasgow. Rather more significantly than any of these inaccuracies of detail is that Root presents a very skewed timeline of the development of the CAC,<sup>173</sup> treats Irving's Christological teaching as unquestionably orthodox without offering any understanding of the position of his mainstream opponents,<sup>174</sup> and strongly misrepresents characters like Baxter who withdrew from the movement.<sup>175</sup> The chief value of the book is the occasional insight it gives into the thinking of Andrews, a representative of the CAC.

When the hundredth anniversary of Irving's death (1934) went unmarked by a new biography, Andrew Landale Drummond ventured to improve on the work of Mrs Oliphant, whose account of Irving's life he described as a classic.<sup>176</sup> Despite the substantial size and exalted status of Mrs Oliphant's work, Drummond

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169. Jean Christie Root, *Edward Irving: Man, Preacher, Prophet* (Boston: Sherman, French, 1912), p. 95.

170. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

171. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

172. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

173. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

174. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4, 82-8.

175. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

176. Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the 'Tongues' Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology*, p. vii.

believed that it would be possible to construct a fuller account than had been possible in 1862, not least because Carlyle's *Reminiscences* had since been published. Along with the greater availability of historical materials, Drummond considered that what he called 'Modern Psychology' also offered a new perspective on the movement and in particular the 'tongues'.<sup>177</sup>

Like Miller before him, Drummond saw Irving's eschatology as the driving force behind the development of his theology and the other aspects of the movement. 'Irvingism was a child of Millennarianism', he wrote, 'that mother of "fancy religions"'.<sup>178</sup> Along with Irving's focus on the last things, Drummond hinted at other factors in Irving's biography that shaped his fate, including his response to the strongest intellectual and cultural current of his time. He commented that Hazlitt was correct in 'setting Irving side by side with such different personalities as Coleridge, Bentham, Southey, Malthus, Jeffrey, Cobbett, Leigh Hunt, and Charles Lamb'.<sup>179</sup> Drummond recognised that this was because 'Irving was far more sensitive than most ministers of that time to literary and political currents...essentially the Romantic in the pulpit at a time when Evangelicalism was losing influence because it was unimaginative and prosaic'.<sup>180</sup> Although it is a more recent phenomenon to recognise the importance of Romanticism to Irving's thought, Drummond was a sufficiently acute reader of Irving to observe that he was a Romantic.

Drummond explains the tragic conclusion to Irving's career in largely psychological terms, as one would expect from his title. He saw Irving's character as crucially flawed, not least in his inability to accept criticism and correction.<sup>181</sup> He also believed Irving to have been intellectually out of his depth in his dealings with Coleridge and in the theological crisis which engulfed him.<sup>182</sup> Peter Elliott has taken issue with this claim and opines that 'Irving had eluded [Drummond]'.<sup>183</sup> He argues that Drummond was struggling to 'reconcile his

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177. Ibid.

178. Ibid., p. 236.

179. Ibid., p. 52.

180. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

181. Ibid., p. 55.

182. Ibid., pp. 65-69.

183. Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis*, p. 48.

chosen position of Irving as a fanatic with the evidence'.<sup>184</sup> It is also the case that Drummond's assessment of Irving's character and intellectual development were incompatible with Elliott's chosen position, which was to see Irving as a major theological contributor of the nineteenth century. We will have cause to return to the question Drummond raises about whether Irving misunderstood Coleridge in the concluding chapter of this study.<sup>185</sup>

H.C. Whitley was a minister in the Church of Scotland for twenty years prior to the publication, in 1955, of his short biography of Irving, *Blinded Eagle*.<sup>186</sup> During that period, however, Whitley remained a communicant in the Edinburgh congregation of the CAC.<sup>187</sup> Unsurprisingly, Whitley's tone was defensive of Irving. In his assessment 'No theologian in any age has written with more compelling force of the grandeur and glory of the incarnate Son of God'.<sup>188</sup> In Whitley's eyes, the opposition to Irving was borne of 'sour grapes',<sup>189</sup> 'envy and resentment',<sup>190</sup> and 'a stupidity verging on the wilfully malicious'.<sup>191</sup> Irving, in turn, was only able to make the (unspecified) mistakes that led to his destruction because those closest to him failed to offer the necessary support at the right time. Whitley's most stinging *j'accuse* was aimed at Thomas Chalmers who, rather than offering guidance to Irving at the crucial moment, 'guarded his safety and his silence'.<sup>192</sup> Whitley also blamed Irving's wife Isabella for failing 'to restrain him at a time when restraint might have saved him from later [again unspecified] tragic mistakes'.<sup>193</sup> Such was Whitley's disdain for Isabella that he also seems to blame her for the deaths of four of Irving's children, stating that 'she did not have a thriving hand with them'.<sup>194</sup> The third of Irving's close associates in Whitley's crosshairs was Henry Drummond, who it is implied might well have been

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184. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

185. Cf Chapter 8, 'Conclusion', p.250.

186. Whitley, *Blinded Eagle*, p. 84.

187. *Ibid.* This is a condensed version of his PhD thesis, submitted to the University of Edinburgh in 1953. The thesis is sufficiently hard to access that *Blinded Eagle* has effectively been Whitley's contribution to Irving scholarship.

188. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

189. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

190. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

191. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

192. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

193. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

194. *Ibid.*

'Irving's evil genius'.<sup>195</sup> In the end, for Whitley, Irving was a prodigiously talented visionary who was failed by those he loved and thus, like the proverbial eagle in his title, flew too close to the sun and was blinded.

Whitley, who became minister of the High Kirk of Edinburgh, was not unfamiliar with ecclesiastical tensions in the Church of Scotland. He was a close associate of George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona movement, and was, with MacLeod, a campaigner for ecumenism and for a 'New Reformation' in the Church.<sup>196</sup> In *Blinded Eagle* there are hints that Whitley saw in Irving a model for the future of the Kirk as well as a missed opportunity in her past. He goes so far as to suggest that 'Chalmers and Irving together might have prevented the Disruption and preserved Scotland from spiritual and communal disaster'.<sup>197</sup> Though it was too late for the two men to act in person, Whitley held out the hope that a 'synthesis of the teachings of both men holds the secret of true Catholicity and the dynamic of a New Reformation'.<sup>198</sup> More than a little of Whitley's interest in Irving came from his conviction that Scotland's religious woes could be traced back to his dismissal from the movement and that their healing could come from his reinstatement as a great Scottish theologian.<sup>199</sup>

Despite the publication of Whitley's slim volume there was no new biography of Irving that had a comparable stature to Drummond's, between 1927 and the arrival, in 2011, of Tim Grass's *The Lord's Watchman*.<sup>200</sup> Grass offered a very detailed and thoroughly researched work, which brought a substantial amount of archive material to light in presenting a fuller and more balanced picture of Irving than had appeared in print to that point. As a historian whose PhD had a twin focus on the CAC and the Brethren,<sup>201</sup> Grass was able to cut a path through the confusion left by previous publications in their handling of the former movement,

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195. Ibid., p. 47.

196. Ron Ferguson, *George MacLeod: Founder of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1990).

197. Whitley, *Blinded Eagle*, p. 71.

198. Ibid.

199. Ibid., p. 106.

200. Grass, *Watchman*.

201. Timothy Grass, 'The Church's Ruin and Restoration: The Development of Ecclesiology in the Plymouth Brethren and the Catholic Apostolic Church c.1825- c.1866' (PhD Thesis, Kings College, 1997).

whilst also engaging with the wider history of the period. This quality is evident not least in Grass's untangling of the controversies around Irving's final days and his treatment by the nascent CAC.<sup>202</sup> Although Grass portrays Irving with a good deal of sympathy, his biography does not read either as an attempt to vilify or exonerate his subject. His treatment of Irving's Christology is highly unusual in its even-handedness.<sup>203</sup> The controversy is laid out in detail with sensitivity to both sides of the argument and, unusually, the author's own assessment is offered in a tentative manner, which is both appreciative of Irving and cautiously critical at certain points.<sup>204</sup> This treatment of Irving's Christology highlights the difference between this work and others on the subject. Grass presents an Irving who has something to say, without treating him as either infallible or irredeemable.

Despite this, there are areas in which the book is, perhaps of necessity, incomplete. Whilst Romanticism is not unmentioned, there is little engagement with the significance or otherwise of this movement in understanding Irving's distinctiveness and development. In the same vein whilst Grass acknowledges that 'Coleridge was to have a deeper intellectual influence on Irving than anybody else',<sup>205</sup> there is not a great deal of discussion of the shape this influence took. Grass observes the influence of Coleridge on Irving's growing eschatological pessimism, his view of scripture speaking to the 'inner man' and hints at influence on Irving's fateful series of sermons on the incarnation.<sup>206</sup> What is not apparent is how Coleridge's own thought was distinctive nor how it shaped the underlying contours of Irving's theology.

Although not strictly a biography, a vital contribution to the study of Irving has been provided by Barbara Waddington, the archivist for 'Lumen', the United Reformed Church which now occupies the site of Irving's Regent Square church, in her *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving*.<sup>207</sup> Combining the archives discovered

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202. Grass, *Watchman*, pp. 276-288.

203. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-189.

204. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

205. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

206. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

207. Waddington, *Letters and Diary*.

in the crypt at Regent Square with collections from universities, libraries and in private hands, Waddington has produced a meticulously edited and highly illuminating resource for the study of Irving. The editing is light and the collection is as exhaustive as it was possible to make it.

The most recent biography, published in 2014, is by the Anglo-Australian author David Malcolm Bennett. It is entitled *Edward Irving Reconsidered*,<sup>208</sup> although it is difficult to see what new insight it brings to the subject. A clue is found in the preface, in which Bennett reveals that the title is an echo of a comment, made by Gordon Strachan in 1972, that ‘almost everything already written about [Irving] must be reconsidered’.<sup>209</sup> Bennett’s work is competent and highly readable. Indeed it has the readability of a book aimed at a more popular market than, for instance, Grass’s very detailed work. The critical apparatus, for example, in *The Lord’s Watchman* is much fuller and more detailed than that in *Edward Irving Reconsidered*. Viewed from the perspective that it is designed to be a more popular book, Bennett’s title makes sense. If his intention was to provide a summary and review of the assessments of Irving which have been made since Strachan, then Bennett is right to claim that he presents a reconsideration of Edward Irving. The book does not, however, offer any genuinely unique insight or perspective on Irving, but Bennett has produced a well researched and careful account that will serve as a valuable introduction to Irving’s life, work and thought.

It has been observed that there are a number of challenges to be faced when writing intellectual history about Edward Irving. The first of these is that there are points at which the record is complex and where care is needed to avoid confusing popular myths about Irving with historical facts. More significant than this problem, however, is the difficulty, faced by any intellectual historian, in reconstructing ideas that belong to another age and context.

One useful tool in reviewing the diverse literature on Irving is the postmodern ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’. The value of the postmodern approach at this point is that it explicitly includes a consideration of historians as well as the data that they

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208. Bennett, *Irving Reconsidered*.

209. Strachan, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 21. Quoted in: Bennett, *Irving Reconsidered*, p. viii.



present. Thus, although the postmodern approach does not provide a means of successfully reconstructing the thought of Irving, it does aid in a critical reading of the various histories. Much of the historiographical material on Edward Irving is transparently polemical, such as the various publications which use Irving to justify either the support or the rejection of the interdenominational Charismatic movement.

Along with the need to be alert to the tendency to distort Irving's thought with an eye to polemics, we also observed, drawing on the work of Quentin Skinner, that historians have tended to misrepresent Irving's ideas when they have treated his works as a seamless whole. In particular, it has been shown that it is important to recognise the development in Irving's theological outlook in relation to Evangelicalism. Although he began as an Evangelical, Irving self-consciously moved away from his earlier identification with this grouping. For that reason, just as it would be a mistake to treat John Henry Newman as a representative Evangelical, a failure to apprehend Irving's self-acknowledged departure from Evangelicalism will lead to a skewed understanding of both Irving and the Evangelical movement.

A second observation drawn from Skinner is the significance of historical and linguistic context. Handling Irving's writings from the perspective of later movements was shown to be particularly problematic, as it leaves the reader ignorant of the context in which Irving was speaking and writing. Gordon Strachan's treatment of Irving as an analogue of the Pentecostal movement, and Dallimore's identification of him as a forerunner of the Charismatic movement wrench him out of his historical context and run the risk of presenting a fictionalised version of his thought.

Any history of an aspect of Irving's thought must be written within a broader understanding of his life and of his broader social, theological and linguistic context. Further to that, each publication, letter and sermon surveyed in evidence must be examined with an eye to its context within Irving's biography and in particular his theological development. This is the method that underpins the chapters that follow.

## Chapter 3

### A Hero's Journey? The life of Edward Irving

Edward Irving was born in relative obscurity, but went on, after false starts and disappointments, to achieve fame of a kind known by few in any generation. At the height of his popularity, his congregation erected a magnificent church building to house the vast congregations who gathered to hear him preach. Yet even as this new church in Regent Square opened, the clouds of a crippling ecclesiastical scandal were gathering. Dismissed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland, exhausted and ailing with tuberculosis, Irving died at only 42. The events and achievements that made up his short but influential life are well deserving of the many full-length biographies that he has received. The purpose of this chapter is not to rehearse the details of his life, so much as to investigate the factors that shaped the path of his theological career, and in particular his Christology. This will necessitate some biographical narration, but this should not be mistaken for an attempt to provide a detailed account of Irving's astonishing life.

He was born on 4 August 1792, the same day as the Romantic poet Percy Shelley,<sup>1</sup> and a few days before the American revivalist Charles Grandison Finney.<sup>2</sup> These two exact contemporaries of Irving's illustrate that, though he was a remarkable figure, his very remarkableness was also typical of his age. Like Shelley, Irving was a Romantic in his thought and, like Finney, he belonged to an age in which preachers could be public celebrities. He was the second of nine children born to Gavin Irving, a tanner, and his wife Mary.<sup>3</sup> The Irvings lived in

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1. Michael O'Neill, 'Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792–1822),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

2. David Malcolm Bennett, *Edward Irving Reconsidered: The Man, His Controversies, and the Pentecostal Movement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), p. 1., Charles Grandison Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*. (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1876), p. 4.

3. Timothy Grass, *Edward Irving: The Lord's Watchman* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), p. 2.

Annan, at the time a small town of 1,620 souls,<sup>4</sup> and occupied a place of quiet respectability within the community.

Gavin, Irving's father, was described by the philosopher and essayist Thomas Carlyle as 'prudent, honest hearted' and 'rational' but without 'pretension to superior gifts of mind'.<sup>5</sup> He was a modestly successful businessman who was a 'bailie' (a post with similarities to those of councillor and magistrate) in Annan and who seems to have been upwardly mobile in a modest sort of way. Carlyle, who was a close friend of Irving's, describes Gavin's approach to tanning as supervising it only 'from afar',<sup>6</sup> which suggests a degree of success in the business. Irving's most recent biographer, David Malcolm Bennett, suggests that Carlyle's use of 'afar' is metaphor as the tanning yard was 'only across the street'.<sup>7</sup> This makes perfect sense, if one accepts that the Irvings remained in the home, near the Fish Cross in Annan, where Edward was born. The evidence of the John Wood map of 1826 suggests, however, that Gavin had earned enough to escape the smell of his tannery by moving to a property on the edge of town, located at the junction of the roads to Ecclefechan and Preston Hall.<sup>8</sup> Despite this commercial success Gavin Irving was not, by any means, a prominent figure even in Annan. The account of the town in the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* does not mention him as one of the 'considerable' heritors of the parish,<sup>9</sup> and tanning is listed as a minor trade in the town.<sup>10</sup> The list of significant trade in goods from the area makes no mention of leather goods or anything else directly related to tanning.<sup>11</sup>

Gavin Irving was a respectable and well regarded man in his home town, but the younger Irving's dreams of fame, apparent even in his youth, would not seem to have been derived from him. Mary, his wife, was, however, significantly different.

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4. ('A Friend to Statistical Inquiries') Anonymous, 'Number XXII. Parish of Annan (County and Synod of Dumfries, Presbytery of Annan),' *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland: Account of 1791-99.*, <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Dumfries/Annan/> (accessed 8 June 2016).

5. Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 3 (2).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 5 (2).

7. Bennett, *Irving Reconsidered*.

8. John Wood, 'Plan of Annan from Actual Survey,' <http://maps.nls.uk/view/74400005#zoom=1&lat=1383&lon=2083&layers=BT> (accessed 5 May 2016).

9. Anonymous, 'Statistical Account', p. 448.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 449.

11. *Ibid.*

Carlyle comments that Gavin Irving had ‘married well, perhaps rather above his rank’,<sup>12</sup> which may be both a reference to Mary’s physical stature and personality as well as her family background. The latter was clearly something of conscious significance to Irving, as we shall see, but the former aspects may also have made an impression on him.

Mary Irving was from a family named Lowther. Though her closest kin were from the Dumfriesshire area, Carlyle insisted that her family background was in Cumberland.<sup>13</sup> If this was so, indeed even if Irving believed it to be so, this name is of no small moment. The Cumberland Lowthers were noble, living at Lowther Castle and holding a significant earldom. Perhaps this was behind the comment of his most famous biographer, Margaret Oliphant, that ‘the Lowthers were more notable people’,<sup>14</sup> as compared to the Irvings. Whether she had the Earls of Cumberland in mind or not, Mrs Oliphant’s comment was true also of the more local branch of the family, who were landed - albeit in a modest way. Though his own parentage was modest, this connection to the Lowthers would have offered Edward Irving a sense of ancestry to bolster his feeling that his would be a noble destiny.

The Annandale Lowthers, whether or not they were closely related to nobility, were certainly a striking people. Mary’s brother George was known as the local ‘giant’ and it was clearly from that side of the family that Irving derived his impressive physique and his striking looks. From the accounts of the time, Irving’s mother was herself an impressive person. Although she died in 1840,<sup>15</sup> Mary Irving was well remembered in Annan when Mrs Oliphant wrote her son’s biography in 1862, even to the details of what she wore returning from her wedding.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Mrs Oliphant’s biography of Irving, deliberately or unconsciously, presents on its opening page an imbalance between Gavin and

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12. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 5 (2).

13. William Howie Wylie, *Thomas Carlyle: The Man and His Books: Illustrated by Personal Reminiscences, Table-talk, and Anecdotes of Himself and His Friends* (London: Marshall Japp & Co., 1881), p. 337. See also Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 5 (2).

14. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 1.

15. Anonymous, ‘Death of the Mother of the late Rev. Edward Irving,’ *The Morning Post*, 23 July, 1840.

16. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 2.

Mary. Gavin is presented as 'well known, but undistinguished' and his occupation as 'humble', whereas Mary is described as 'handsome and high-spirited' and the daughter of a 'small landed proprietor'.<sup>17</sup> Her forebears, the Howys, are presented as the most notable of Irving's ancestors and her immediate family are treated as more important.<sup>18</sup>

This apparent imbalance would likely have had a profound effect on the young Irving. There is some evidence to suggest that what we might infer from Mrs Oliphant is indeed the case. He did for instance have a tendency to compare all other women with Mary Irving. Later in life he would even claim that Evangelicalism had ruined 'the women of Scotland' and that 'there are now no women like my mother'.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the general pattern of his relationships with men and women in adulthood is quite striking. Irving had a tendency to attach himself to older men who served as father figures. There are elements of this pattern in his relationship to Thomas Chalmers, the eminent minister of St John's in Glasgow (where Irving served as his associate). On the publication of Irving's farewell to the church, Chalmers's wife, Grace, had to intervene to tone down Irving's rather excessive praise for her husband.<sup>20</sup> This pattern of relationship is even more apparent with the poet-philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whom he treated like a guru or rabbi, describing himself as the older man's 'disciple'.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, Irving had a pattern of attaching himself romantically to considerably younger women with whom he already had a particular kind of power relationship. We know of three women with whom Irving was to some degree romantically involved: Jane Welsh, Margaret Gordon and Isabella Martin. He met all of them as children and they were all his pupils before they were the objects of his affection. Jane Welsh, for whom his feelings ran deepest, was only nine years of age when he first met her. There is no suggestion of an inappropriate attachment to her at this age - his romantic

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17. Ibid., p. 1.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 7. I sound a slight note of caution at this point: I have not been able to establish the quote from any other source.

20. Andrew Landale Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the 'Tongues' Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology* (London: J. Clarke & Co., 1937), p. 42.

21. Edward Irving, *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School: A Series of Orations* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1825), p. ix.

feelings surfaced when she was seventeen<sup>22</sup> - nonetheless, repeated as it was, there is surely significance to this pattern. Whilst it would be to push the evidence further than it can bear to claim that Irving's life was shaped by a quest to find a stronger father and to escape an overbearing mother, his life does have some tendencies that suggest something like it.

Family history was central to Irving's self-understanding. He was eager to root himself in the past and when he wished to create a spiritual genealogy for himself, fitting to his own aspirations, it was to his mother's side of the family that he looked. In her family, the young Irving found a precedent for his own aspirations to the ministry of the Church of Scotland. He also found a connection to heroic figures from Europe's Christian past. The nature of this ancestry, and its effects on Irving's self-understanding, are sufficiently important that it is worth considering them at some length.

Irving's great-great-grandfather on his mother's side was one Thomas Howy, minister of Annan from 1703 to 1753.<sup>23</sup> Howy was just the sort of person the young Irving dreamed of emulating. His tombstone, which stands as an elevated horizontal slab in the grounds of Annan's Old Kirk, records that 'he was faithful and diligent in his Lord and Master's service', devoted to seeking 'to save his own soul and those of oyr[s]. [*sic*]'<sup>24</sup> Howy's ministerial diligence and spiritual seriousness offered a stark contrast to the state of the Old Kirk in Irving's day. William Hardie Moncrieff, minister from 1783 to 1825, was known to be, in Carlyle's words, 'a drunken clergyman'.<sup>25</sup>

The disappointing state of the ministry in Annan was, most likely, a significant factor in Irving's decision, at the age of ten, to join a group from Annan which

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22. Bennett, *Irving Reconsidered*, p. 22. Drummond places her age at 18 on this renewal of their acquaintance: see Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the 'Tongues' Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology*, p. 31. This meeting, however, was during the latter part of 1818 which places Jane (D.O.B. 14 July 1801) at 17.

23. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 2.

24. David C.A. Agnew, *Protestant Exiles from France, Chiefly in the Reign of Louis XIV; Or, the Huguenot Refugees and their Descendants in Great Britain and Ireland. Volume 1: Refugees Naturalized Before 1681* (For Private Circulation, 1886), p. 107. This spelling of 'others' is typical of the time in Scotland, in that it uses the letter 'thorn' which, though it looked very like the letter 'y' was pronounced 'th' and often written without the subsequent vowel.

25. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 11 (2).

walked the seven miles or so to the Burgher Seceder meeting house in Ecclefechan.<sup>26</sup> The seceding church, which after the split of 1733 stood apart from the Kirk due to disagreements over church patronage rather than doctrine or fundamental ecclesiology, divided further in 1747 regarding the legitimacy of taking the 'Burgess Oath',<sup>27</sup> something which the 'Burgher Seceders' allowed. Carlyle understood the popularity of the seceding congregation amongst those from Annan to be derived from loyalty to the historic Kirk rather than a schismatic spirit. As he put it, 'all Dissent in Scotland is merely a stricter adherence to the National Kirk in all points'.<sup>28</sup> The young Irving's regular visits to the seceding congregation might thus be said to represent his preference for the 'faithful and diligent' Kirk of Thomas Howy over the dissipations of William Moncrieff. Perhaps even at that early stage in his life, the young Irving dreamed of restoring the faded glories of the Kirk and emulating his prestigious forebear. The name of Howy certainly became important for Irving: his son Martin Howy Irving, later a professor at the University of Melbourne, would bear it prominently and pass it on to his own children.<sup>29</sup>

In his maternal ancestry, Irving also found what was potentially an even more impressive connection to the history of the Kirk and the spiritual life of Scotland. Irving discovered that he was connected to one of the great Covenanter families. Growing up near the Solway Firth, Irving was surrounded by images of the religious persecution suffered by this group of martyrs, who had died almost within living memory. During the period of the Restoration, Scots who believed themselves bound by covenant with God to uphold the Presbyterian faith, resisted Charles II's attempt impose episcopacy on them. They paid for their loyalty to this covenant with their own blood. The name Covenanter, then, reflected their self-image as those defined by their covenanted commitments. Near his home, scattered around Annandale, were the ruined forts which illustrated the local tales of the rebellion.<sup>30</sup> The warfare of this period had left

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26. Oliphant, *Life*, pp. 11-12.

27. See Grass, *Watchman*, pp. 5-6.

28. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 12 (2).

29. G. C. Fendley, 'Irving, Martin Howy (1831-1912),' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ed. D. Pike, (Carlton: University of Melbourne Press, 1972).

30. Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh:

scars on the countryside and the memories of the people and this historical landscape made a powerful impression on the young Irving.

Irving found in particular that, through his great-great-grandfather Thomas, he was related to the renowned author John Howie. This distant cousin, who died the year after Irving's birth, was author of an enormously popular work recounting the sufferings of the Covenanters: *Scots Worthies* (1775). Howie's family had been deeply involved in the struggle and were in possession of a number of relics of the conflict. Irving took considerable pains in seeking out this branch of the family, and when he found them he took great delight in viewing the memorabilia that they brought out.<sup>31</sup> In return, he presented them with a copy of his first major publication: *For the Oracles of God*. The copy he gave them bears the following inscription 'To the Howies of Loch Goyne, the representatives of a family which has done much and suffered much for the testimony of Christ.'<sup>32</sup> This sense of connection to the Covenanters and to the Howie family continued to the end of his life, although his memory became a little scrambled. In his *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* he referred to the record of the Covenanters 'written by the worthy Thomas Howie',<sup>33</sup> thus confounding his mother's great-grandfather with his more distant, and more illustrious, cousin.

In 1829, at a time of renewed tension in the relations between Church and State, Irving took on himself the mantle of publishing Covenanter lore: 'A Tale of the Times of the Martyrs'.<sup>34</sup> In this brief article, Irving reproduced the story, told to him by a parishioner when he was Thomas Chalmers's assistant in Glasgow, of William Guthrie. In Irving's account, Guthrie is said to have rescued the head of his judicially murdered covenanting uncle, James (one of the major characters in Howie's *Tales of Scots Worthies*), from a pike outside Edinburgh Castle. This younger Guthrie then evaded capture by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, a man

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Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 5.

31. Wylie, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 334-337.

32. John C. Johnston, *Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1887), p. 639.

33. Edward Irving, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation, as (in Substance) Preached in Edinburgh During the Sitting of the General Assembly, etc. No. 1.*, vol. 2 (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1829), p. 849.

34. Edward Irving, 'A Tale of the Times of the Martyrs,' *The Anniversary: Or Poetry and Prose for MDCCCXXXIX* (1829), This article was also published as 'William Guthrie Minister of Irongray' Edward Irving, 'William Guthrie, Minister of Irongray,' in *Historical and Traditional Tales in Prose and Verse, Connected with the South of Scotland*, (Kirkcudbright: John Nicholson, 1843).



fervent in his support for Charles's religious policies and his desire to apprehend Guthrie, who all the while was courting his daughter.<sup>35</sup> William was exiled to France and his betrothed died before his return. He did eventually marry and become the minister of Irongray, where his wife bore him a daughter. The climax of the story, as told by Irving, was that the old lady who related it to him was herself that daughter. Perhaps in recounting this coda to one of Howie's *Tale* of James Guthrie,<sup>36</sup> Irving believed himself to be continuing the work of his relative. It turns out, however, that this story was largely fabricated.<sup>37</sup> Irving's acceptance of it, despite a number of implausibilities and factual inaccuracies that would have been very easy to look up, indicates that Carlyle was perhaps not simply being caustic when he suggested that 'when Irving wanted a thing to be true, he was almost sure to find a reason for believing it'.<sup>38</sup> Irving's readiness to accept and reproduce so tendentious a narrative certainly gives the impression that, though not gullible, he was given to a certain ingenuousness when it came to religious heroism.

One possible example of Irving's credulity comes in a speech given to the Continental Society in 1823. In this speech he claimed that 'I have in my veins the blood of the persecuted Albigenses who fled to Scotland and took up their refuge there'.<sup>39</sup> This claim to descent from a persecuted medieval sect appears sufficiently strange that recent historians have tended to discount it. Tim Grass, apparently unaware that this claim comes direct from Irving himself and not just a later biographer, rejects the sources that indicate an Albigensian ancestry for him, preferring to interpret this as referring to the Huguenot ancestry to which Mrs Oliphant refers.<sup>40</sup> He reasons that 'as this term refers to a French brand of the medieval Cathars it is incorrect'.<sup>41</sup> Bennett on the other hand, aware of the

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35. Edward Irving, 'A Tale of the Times of the Martyrs'.

36. The story of James Guthrie is the first in *Tales of Scots Worthies*.

37. This wonderful story is entirely debunked by a later minister of Irongray who regretfully states 'I am Irving's friend [but] I am a greater friend of truth'. S. Dunlop, 'Two Irongray Traditions,' in *Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society: Transactions and Journal of Proceedings 1914-15*, ed. G.W. Shirley, (Dumfries: The Council of Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society, 1915).

38. Wylie, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 337.

39. Anonymous, review of "Review of New Publications: Mr Irving's Orations," by *The Christian Observer* (September 1823), p. 563.

40. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 2.

41. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 2.

speech from 1823, questions whether Irving ever made the claim in the first place. He suggests that ‘his words, presumably taken down in shorthand, have been transcribed incorrectly’.<sup>42</sup> That is, should “Albigenses” read “Huguenot”?’ Irving’s apparent claim to Albigenian heritage seems to founder on these twin objections that it would have been a claim to an unlikely and undesirable ancestry and that the recording of his speech might have been inaccurate.

Despite these objections, however, the evidence suggests very strongly that Irving - whilst possibly mistaken - believed wholeheartedly in this ancestry and that it was an important part of his identity. William Watson Andrews, a Catholic Apostolic evangelist based in the United States of America, who was acquainted with Irving, wrote a review of Oliphant’s *Life* in 1863. In the course of this review, Andrews recounts a meeting with Irving’s widow, Isabella, that took place in 1843. He took detailed notes of their conversation, including an account of Irving’s visit to the Howies in their isolated dwelling.<sup>43</sup> In the course of that conversation, Isabella produced this account of the family’s origins: ‘Many hundred years ago, three brothers of the Albigenses of the name of Howie, fled to Scotland from the persecutions they suffered in their own land.’<sup>44</sup> This version of Howie ancestry is not unique to Irving, by any means. It appears in passing in the foreword to the 1853 edition of *Scots Worthies*,<sup>45</sup> and in more detail in Agnew’s *Protestant Exiles from France*. Agnew states that ‘If...the Howies were Albigenses...they may be truly called the very earliest French evangelical refugees in Scotland’.<sup>46</sup> The tradition is also found in more recent scholarship - such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which records the same Albigenian heritage and the same tradition of three brothers.<sup>47</sup>

We can be sure then that, when Irving is recorded as claiming Albigenian descent, this is no transcription error. Indeed, in the Continental Society sermon

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42. Bennett, *Irving Reconsidered*, p. 2.

43. Andrews’ account accords strikingly with that of Thomas Carlyle; see: Wylie, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 334-337.

44. William Watson Andrews, review of “The Life of Edward Irving by Mrs Oliphant,” by *The New Englander* 22, (1863), pp. 365-366.

45. John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (new York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), p. viii.

46. Agnew, *Protestant Exiles*, p. 107.

47. Alexander Du Toit, ‘Howie, John (1735–1793),’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of 1823, he himself made reference to ‘three brothers of a family from which I have descended, and I have about me some of their venerable tokens’.<sup>48</sup> Whether by these ‘tokens’, Irving referred to his physical characteristics inherited from his mother, or to some items carried with him that bore a direct connection to the Howie family is not clear. What is clear is that Irving believed himself to be a direct descendant of religious refugees from an era before the Reformation. This sense of belonging to a tradition older even than the Church of Scotland was perhaps a factor in some of his approaches to the Kirk during his career. It might help to explain his preference for the earlier Scots confessions over the Westminster Confession, which was the doctrinal standard of the Kirk in his day.<sup>49</sup> For Irving, older was generally better and, in his own Romantic imagination, he could trace his own Protestant lineage back to before the Reformation.

Grass’s objection to a suggestion of an Albigensian heritage for Irving is that they were a heretical sect, also known as the French Cathars. Given that the Cathars were dualists who had more in common with the Manichaeism of Augustine’s youth than they did with any sort of orthodox Christianity, it is understandable that Grass would find them an ironic choice of ancestors for Irving to celebrate. After all, he who would stake his career on a very strongly *incarnational* Christology, whilst the Cathars denied the possibility that God could have anything to do with flesh let alone be born into it. It is highly unlikely that any self-respecting Presbyterian would rejoice in such a heritage. However, what matters in understanding Irving is not so much whether these claims regarding French refugees are accurate, but rather what Irving believed about them and what he believed to be the significance of this descent for himself.

Irving seems to have taken a very different view of the Albigenses from those of more recent writers. He clearly saw them as precursors to the Reformation. In one of his sermons on John the Baptist, Irving lists the Albigenses with the

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48. Anonymous, “Review of New Publications: Mr Irving’s Orations”, p. 563.

49. Edward Irving, *The Confessions of Faith and the Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland of Date Anterior to the Westminster Confession. To Which are Prefixed, a Historical View of the Church of Scotland* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1831).

Waldenses, Hussites, Lollards, Huguenots, Covenanters and others amongst those to suffer persecution during the 'ecclesiastical age'.<sup>50</sup> In his *Church and State*, Irving treated the Albigenses as pretty much interchangeable with the Waldenses and repeatedly named them first in any list of groups persecuted for their preservation of 'sound doctrine'<sup>51</sup> or simply for their resistance to the Pope.<sup>52</sup> He describes his Albigensian forebears as 'the heads of the Lollards in Scotland, and then the heads of the Covenanters'.<sup>53</sup> In an address on behalf of the London Scottish Hospital in 1826, Irving revealed quite how important he believed the Albigenses to be in the history of Christianity in Europe: he describes their diaspora as the basis of the churches in the Vaud, the 'seed of the Huguenots' in Picardy and of the 'protomartyrs' in Bohemia.<sup>54</sup> He traces others of the Albigensians

to Saxony, where they waited for Luther's appearing; and three brethren to Scotland, where they abode in the west, maintaining the faith of the Lollards, and affording a refuge to Wickliffe's followers, when they were dispersed by the persecution that arose in the time of the fourth Edward.<sup>55</sup>

In this passage, which offers what amounts to a racial account of the history of authentic Christianity, Irving illustrated his own clear sense of consanguinity with the persecuted brethren around Europe and a very deep connection to the pre-Reformation roots of Scottish Protestantism. Thereby Irving could reflect on a heritage that bolstered both his sense of himself as an heir to the established church and as belonging to a long line of persecuted outsiders.

Irving was not eccentric at the time in holding this view. In his 1828 preface to an edition of John Howie's *Scots Worthies*, for instance, William McGavin referred to the Albigenses as forerunners of the Reformation,<sup>56</sup> as did the ecclesiastical

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50. Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 2 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1864), p. 183.

51. Edward Irving, *The Church and State Responsible to Christ, and to One Another. A Series of Discourses on Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts* (London: James Nisbet, 1829), p. 224.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 245, 246, 257, 326, 370.

53. Anonymous, "Review of New Publications: Mr Irving's Orations", p. 563.

54. Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 3 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), pp. 481-482.

55. *Ibid.*

56. John Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, ed. William McGavin (Glasgow: W. R. M'Phun, 1830), p. xviii.

historian William Jones<sup>57</sup> in his *History of the Waldenses*. Jones insists that the Albigenses took the Bible to be the word of God and dismisses talk of Albigensian dualism as ‘disgusting caricature’ and ‘Papal Slander’.<sup>58</sup> This certainly helps to explain why Irving would be so happy to associate himself with a group that, had he been more familiar with their tenets, he would doubtless have condemned with a degree of colour and eloquence that few could match.

The effect of Irving’s sense of connection to the Covenanters and the Albigenses, by blood as well as belief, is evident in a number of ways. The first is his sense of himself as a persecuted representative of true religion. From the very outset of his ministry in London, beginning in 1822, Irving saw himself as a ‘voice crying in the wilderness’.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, some of his earliest London sermons formed a series on John the Baptist.<sup>60</sup> Even at the height of his popularity, as his church filled, weekly, with the cream of English society, Irving could write that ‘I have been abused in every possible way, beyond the lot of ordinary men.’<sup>61</sup> It was true that Irving had received negative press reports; however, he had gone out of his way to court adverse publicity. This pattern continued as his ministry went on. In 1828, in the very early stages of his Christological controversy and before any formal moves had been made against him, Irving dined with the Carlyles and took his leave with the portentous phrase, ‘Farewell, I must go then and suffer persecution as my fathers did’.<sup>62</sup> Irving felt that he came from a line of martyrs, and from the start of his ministry he had a desire to emulate them.<sup>63</sup>

The second evidence of the powerful influence of the Covenanters on Irving is seen in his commitment to the idea of Scotland (and later England) as a covenanted nation. During his ministry Irving developed a very particular form of eschatology which also shaped his engagement in public affairs; both bore the

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57. Jones would later write a *Biographical Sketch* of Irving, shortly after his death. See chapter 2 page 35

58. William Jones, *History of the Waldenses* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1812), p. v.

59. Matthew 3:3

60. Irving, *CW ii*, p. 2.

61. Edward Irving, *For the Oracles of God, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, an Argument, in Nine Parts*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Hamilton, 1823), p. xi.

62. Lawrence Hansen and Elisabeth Hansen, *Necessary Evil: The Life of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (London: Constable, 1952), p. 122.

63. See pages 74-75.

marks of this idea of covenant. During Irving's lifetime, questions of the relationship between Church and State acquired an unprecedented significance in British politics. The level of disquiet this produced is memorably summarised by Sheridan Gilley: '[n]ever before or since the 1820s have so many Britons wanted to strangle their king with the entrails of the Archbishop of Canterbury'.<sup>64</sup> The year of Irving's birth, 1792, saw the effective suppression of the Roman Catholic Church in France;<sup>65</sup> in Britain, groups dissenting from the State Churches grew, in the first forty years of Irving's life, from about a tenth to approximately one third of churchgoers;<sup>66</sup> and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 along with the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 marked a fundamental shift in the place of religion in British politics.<sup>67</sup> Irving believed that, in accommodating Dissenters and Roman Catholics in public life, Britain had 'broken those covenants and old obligations...in order to win Papists and nurse infidels'.<sup>68</sup> Thus it was that, four years before Keble's famous assizes sermon,<sup>69</sup> Irving preached on *National Apostasy*, having already, a year previously, addressed a public letter to the King on the subject of the Christian nature of the monarchy.<sup>70</sup>

Returning to Irving's early years, we find a capable, eager and headstrong young man marked by religious devotion and generosity. On one occasion for instance, the young Irving insisted on extracting his mother from a neighbour's party in order to obtain her permission to give away some of his possessions to a sick child.<sup>71</sup> Although clearly able, Irving doubtless owed much of his intellectual attainment to excellent schooling. The academy at Annan, run by the dour but inspiring Adam Hope, despite its small size, produced three remarkable alumni

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64. Sheridan Gilley, 'Edward Irving, The National Scotch Church and the Catholic Apostolic Church,' *Architectural Heritage* 8, no. 1 (1997), p. 37.

65. Sheridan Gilley, 'Edward Irving: Prophet of the Millennium,' in *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, ed. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew, (Milton Keynes: Hambledon Press, 1993), p. 95.

66. Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2008), p. 3.

67. Stewart J. Brown, *The national churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 138, 168-9.

68. Irving, *Church and State*, p. 209.

69. John Keble, *National Apostasy considered in a Sermon preached. July 14th, 1855. (Centenary edition.)* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1931).

70. Edward Irving, *A Letter to the King, on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Laws, as it affects our Christian Monarchy* (London: James Nisbet, 1828).

71. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 11.

within a couple of years. Along with Irving, Thomas Carlyle and the explorer Hugh Clapperton sat under Hope's tuition at the turn of the century.

Irving left Annan for a university career in Edinburgh at the (then unexceptional) age of thirteen. His arts degree would have been rather more like a modern baccalaureate than a degree. The Edinburgh course had a broad scope including philosophy, ethics, classics, mathematics and physics. This laid Edinburgh open to the criticism that its students were hothoused and lacking depth.<sup>72</sup> This mode of study left its mark on Irving. Thomas Carlyle commented, for instance, that 'Irving himself, I found, was not, nor had been, much of a reader; but he had, with solid ingenuity and judgement, by some briefer process of his own, fished out correctly from many books the substance of what they handled'.<sup>73</sup> Regardless of any possible deficiencies in his course of study, Irving performed well in them, gaining a prize in spring 1808 for mathematics<sup>74</sup> and impressing the noted mathematician and physicist Professor Sir John Leslie sufficiently that he recommended Irving as teacher of a newly opened mathematical school in the small nearby town of Haddington.<sup>75</sup> Leslie also recommended Irving's services to a local doctor who was seeking a tutor for his nine-year-old daughter. It was in this way that Irving came to be the man who taught Jane Welsh to name the stars. He spent the hours between six and eight each morning, and some evenings, in tutoring this precocious young girl with an intellect to match his own.

After three years, Irving left Haddington to take up a post at a new academy in Kirkcaldy. In the town, controversy erupted over Irving's teaching methods. One Mr Greig, whose son's ears Irving had pulled, claimed publicly that his child's safety was in danger from a man 'destitute of Christian or human principle or feeling'.<sup>76</sup> Irving on the other hand believed that the punishment the boy had

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72. Laurance James Saunders, *Scottish Democracy 1815-1840: The Social and Intellectual Background* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1950), 307 quoted in: Grass, *Watchman*, p. 9.

73. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 29.

74. Anonymous, 'University of Edinburgh,' *Caledonian Mercury*, 21 April, 1808.

75. Anonymous, 'Circuit Intelligence,' *Caledonian Mercury*, 24 April, 1809. Mrs Oliphant mistakenly states that Irving started his teaching career in Haddington in summer 1810. This newspaper article confirms Grass's arguments for his arrival in spring 1809. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 21. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 10.

76. Edward Irving to Rev. John Martin. Kirkcaldy, 25 December 1815 in Barbara Waddington,

received was a ‘puny matter’,<sup>77</sup> and that ‘I am persuaded that in the Kingdom there is not a school in which so much good is done with less punishment’.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, Irving developed a reputation for brutality in those years that followed him into his later ministry. One hostile writer in 1832 described how Irving ‘crossed the Queen’s-ferry [sic], and taking up the birch, which he resolved should be no idle instrument in his hand, ... became dominie in the ‘lang town o’ Kirkcaldy’.<sup>79</sup> Indeed even the highly sympathetic Mrs Oliphant hints at a tendency in Irving to use his superior size to make threats of physical violence in his dealings with adults as well as children. She recounts several encounters, including one in which he threatened a man who tried to prevent him entering a pew in St George’s Edinburgh with the words, ‘Remove your arm or I will shatter it in pieces!’<sup>80</sup> On another occasion Irving, finding the door to the students’ pew at the General Assembly barred, and unable to persuade its keeper to open for him, put his shoulder to it and ‘fairly wrenched it off its hinges’.<sup>81</sup> One satirical poem of 1833, *The Groans of Edward Irving*, mocks Irving’s response to his dismissal from the ministry of the Church of Scotland in verse. The climactic stanza reads:

Oh Dr Duncan! Mr Sloan!  
 With fronts of brass, and hearts of stone -  
 I now abjure your system.  
 My time in words no more I’ll lose,  
 For I would much prefer to use,  
 The argument *ad fistem*.

Whether or not Sheridan Gilley is right to describe Irving as ‘something of a bully’,<sup>82</sup> he certainly carried that reputation to the end of his life. As a schoolmaster, however, he was well loved by his charges, and they took to themselves the designation ‘Irvingite’ as a sign of their identification with their ‘dominie’.<sup>83</sup>

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*The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012), pp. 64-66.

77. Edward Irving to Rev. John Martin. Kirkcaldy, 25 December 1815 in *Ibid.*

78. Edward Irving to Rev. John Martin. Kirkcaldy, 26 December 1815 in *Ibid.*, p. 67.

79. John Mackay Wilson, ‘Border Characters: Sketch of the Reverend Edward Irving,’ *The Border Magazine: November 1851- December 1852* 1, (1833), pp. 219-220.

80. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 25.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

82. Gilley, ‘Prophet of the Millennium,’ p. 95.

83. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 26.



Irving developed two important alliances during his years in Haddington. The first was with John Martin, the local minister. Judging by Irving's letters to him about the Greig accusations of 1815, Martin was clearly a support and confidant to the young man. During this period, Irving came to some sort of 'understanding' with Martin's daughter Isabella, whom he eventually married in 1823.<sup>84</sup> The second key friendship that grew in Kirkcaldy at this time was with Thomas Carlyle, who came to be master at a new school. Although this new institution may well have been founded in reaction to disquiet about Irving's methods, rather than treating him as a rival, Irving welcomed Carlyle with warmth and generosity. Irving and Carlyle developed a life-long friendship<sup>85</sup>, which saw Carlyle follow in Irving's footsteps to Edinburgh and then London.

Irving's intention throughout his years as a schoolmaster, both in Haddington and Kirkcaldy, was to become a minister in the Church of Scotland. To that end he began part-time theological training at the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh and studied alongside his teaching duties in Haddington. In 1815, his education complete, the presbytery granted him a licence to preach, and he gave his first sermon to a large congregation in Annan. This event was memorable for all concerned. Irving dropped his notes midway through the sermon and, without breaking stride, regathered them with a long arm and scrumpled them into a ball, completing the sermon as if nothing had happened.<sup>86</sup> This early demonstration of a pulpit gift did not translate into great success in Kirkcaldy, however, where he was considered pompous,<sup>87</sup> and on at least one occasion a member of the congregation ostentatiously left the service when it was clear that Irving was to preach that day.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these discouragements, he was undeterred and left Kirkcaldy for Edinburgh in 1818. He was 26 years old and determined to pursue his vocation

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84. Anonymous, 'Marriages,' *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 October, 1823. The nature of this arrangement with Isabella and the anguish of Irving's apparent attempt to break it off will be discussed below.

85. The two were both from Annandale and were previously acquainted, but it was in Kirkcaldy that their friendship flourished. See Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, pp. 24-40.

86. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 36.

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

88. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, pp. 40-1 (2).

as a minister. The Church of Scotland operated at the time on a system of lay patronage, Evangelical dissatisfaction with the implications of which would eventually lead to the great 'Disruption' of 1843.<sup>89</sup> Under this system of patronage, ministers were frequently appointed to churches on the basis of their social or political connections rather than their suitability for the role. From humble beginnings and without influential connections, Irving found the process of gaining an appointment fruitless and frustrating. Without a post Irving resumed his academic studies<sup>90</sup> and after a year began to consider becoming a missionary.<sup>91</sup> Eventually, however, an opportunity arose. During his years in Kirkcaldy, Irving had made a habit of visiting some of the ministers of the city. One of these acquaintances, the influential Evangelical minister of St George's, Andrew Thomson (1778-1831)<sup>92</sup>, invited him to preach at St George's when the great Thomas Chalmers, who was seeking a new assistant, would be in attendance. Chalmers was suitably impressed and Irving began his new employment at St John's, Glasgow, in October 1819.<sup>93</sup>

John Hair, the historian of Irving's later Regent Square church, offers a concise summary of Irving's Glasgow career: his preaching was still not widely appreciated, but '[h]is human kindness won...hearts',<sup>94</sup> particularly those of 'the poor and non-churchgoing people of St John's parish'.<sup>95</sup> Irving was an assiduous visitor who showed an understanding of and compassion for his lowlier parishioners, declaring in a rather sacerdotal manner 'Peace be to this house!' on entering each dwelling. If there was potentially a flaw in Irving's character that could lead him to verge on bullying when he did not get his way, there was also an unmistakable generosity and kindness to him. Indeed, even those who parted company with Irving theologically and ecclesiastically seem to have done so with

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89. Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 282-349.

90. These appear, according to Mrs Oliphant, to have been largely in the sciences and modern languages. See Oliphant, *Life*, p. 42.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46.

92. Stewart J. Brown, 'Thomson, Andrew Mitchell (1779-1831),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

93. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 51.

94. John Hair, *Regent Square: Eighty Years of a London Congregation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1898), p. 34.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

regret and with personal affection still intact. Thomas Carlyle, who despaired at Irving's course in later life, described Irving as 'the freest, brotherliest, bravest human soul mine ever came in contact with'.<sup>96</sup>

The relationship between Irving and Chalmers, from whose Evangelicalism and Enlightenment principles Irving came to distance himself significantly, is a case in point. They developed a shared esteem and an affection for each other to the extent that Irving became almost a member of the Chalmers family. The correspondence between the two men after Irving's departure for London indicates this warmth. For example, in closing a letter of September 1824, soon after the birth of his short-lived son Edward, Irving wrote, 'Tell Elisa [Chalmers's daughter] I have a little boy for her husband, his name is Edw Irving.'<sup>97</sup> They continued to express mutual support in ministry (Chalmers was for instance the preacher at the opening of the National Scotch Church in 1827) and to express mutual concern for each other, even when their political interests differed, such as in the debate over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in which Irving took the role of vigorous opponent to Chalmers.

Just as Irving had experienced difficulties in finding his first ministerial employment, so when the time came to seek a call to a congregation of his own, Irving faced the same disappointments all over again. Again he considered life as a missionary and again opportunity arose in an unexpected way.<sup>98</sup> He was invited, in December 1821, to preach at the Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden,<sup>99</sup> which had been founded by the Highland Society of London to offer spiritual care to Scots (especially Gaelic speakers) in the English capital.<sup>100</sup>

His preaching was welcomed much more warmly in London than it had been in Scotland and he was invited to become the minister at the chapel. There were, however, obstacles to be overcome. The congregation of 50 families had to demonstrate to presbytery first that they could afford to support a minister and

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96. Thomas Carlyle, 'The Death of Rev. Edward Irving,' *Fraser's Magazine* (1835), p. 103.

97. Edward Irving to Thomas Chalmers, 21 September 1824 in Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, pp. 201-202.

98. Oliphant, *Life*, pp. 67-68.

99. Hair, *Regent Square*, p. 27.

100. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 40.

secondly that Irving's inability to speak Gaelic would not contravene the trust-deed.<sup>101</sup> These assurances in hand, Irving was duly ordained by the Presbytery of Annan on 19 June 1822, in the church in which he had been baptised.<sup>102</sup>

Shortly before this occasion, he preached his farewell sermon to St John's, Glasgow, where he had been serving as Chalmers's assistant. In this sermon, which became his first published work, Irving chose to preach in a manner quite untypical of such occasions.<sup>103</sup> In part the unusualness of the sermon was due to Irving's deep regard for Dr Chalmers (this was the sermon that Grace, Chalmers's wife, had bowdlerised before publication).<sup>104</sup> Even more out of the ordinary, however, was the subject matter. Typically a young preacher in Irving's position would preach a sermon on an improving topic with a brief coda about his departure. Irving, however, preached in an almost apostolic manner, taking his leave of the congregation by laying out his grander 'more heroic'<sup>105</sup> view of Christian ministry than that which predominated in Scotland at the time.<sup>106</sup> As he prepared to travel to London, he spoke of a new kind of Christian ministry, distinct from that which he believed to be typical of his age. He claimed that 'The multitude of preachers will plod the beaten track, and weary you with the same succession of objects and views.'<sup>107</sup> By contrast he proposed to offer a religion 'as broad as thought and experience'.<sup>108</sup> The criterion of judgement for a preacher such as himself was that the people should bring 'him to no bar of favourite preachers, but to the bar of your own religious feelings and experience alone'.<sup>109</sup> This expression bore a more than cursory similarity to the preface to Coleridge and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* in which poetry is idealised as 'the spontaneous

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101. Edward Irving, *The Last Days: a Discourse on the Evil Character of These our Times, Proving Them To Be the "Perilous-Times" of the "Last Days"*. (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), pp. vii-viii. See also Grass, *Watchman*, p. 43.

102. Edward Irving, To the Elders and the Congregation of the Caledonian Church, 20 June, 1822 in Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 152.

103. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 43.

104. Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the "Tongues" Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology*, p. 42. p.52 of this thesis.

105. Edward Irving to John Martin June 1822, quoted in Hair, *Regent Square*, p. 34. There is a brief extract from this letter in Mrs Oliphant's biography, but Hair quotes it at greater length.

106. Edward Irving, *Farewell Discourse to the Congregation and Parish of St. John's, Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Chalmers and Collins, 1822).

107. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*

overflow of powerful feelings'.<sup>110</sup> It is a matter of little surprise that, on arrival in London, Irving fell in among the literary Romantics of London including, importantly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

That Irving was a Romantic when he arrived in London seems to be beyond dispute. Indeed it would have been more surprising, given the times in which he lived, if this deeply intelligent and inquisitive young man had not been significantly affected by the Romantic movement. As a youth, he was enthusiastically taken with the fashion for ancient 'folk' literature, as his habit of carrying around and reading aloud from James McPherson's spurious *Ossian* poems testifies. During Irving's boyhood a number of the key texts of English-speaking Romantic literature were published. The first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* came off the presses when he was eight years old;<sup>111</sup> Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in his eleventh year.<sup>112</sup> William Hazlitt later included Irving as one of the great exemplars of 'The Spirit of the Age' in a time characterised by an upsurge in Romantic thought and feeling:<sup>113</sup> a judgement that Charles Kegan Paul perhaps deliberately echoed, fifty years later, commenting that Irving 'could not but drink deeply of the Spirit of the Age'.<sup>114</sup> His farewell sermon to the congregation at St John's illustrates the truth of this assessment.

A question that will be developed more fully in later chapters is the extent to which Irving's thought was influenced by Coleridge. Nonetheless, the purely biographical aspects of this question require some consideration at this point. Peter Elliott, who has done a great deal to demonstrate the importance of understanding Irving as a Romantic, argues that, since Irving had significant Romantic characteristics before coming to London, the aspects of his thought that are characteristically Romantic cannot have been derived, primarily, from

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110. William Wordsworth and Samuel-Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 246.

111. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, With a Few Other Poems* (London: J&A Arch, 1798).

112. Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads* (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1802).

113. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits* (London: Henry Colburn, 1825).

114. C. Kegan Paul, *Biographical Sketches* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883), p. 16.

Coleridge. He thus seeks to demonstrate that Irving and Coleridge related much more as equals than as pupil and master:

regardless of his respect for Coleridge, Irving never subjected his adventurous Romantic agenda to that of the Sage of Highgate: admiration never became subjugation... Coleridge's influence on Irving was not as dominant as it has often been described, whereas Irving's influence on Coleridge, on the other hand, was far more extensive than previously supposed.<sup>115</sup>

Elliott's thesis is that '[t]he influence Coleridge (or anyone else) had on him was always kept ... within the confines of his own Romantic vision'.<sup>116</sup> Irving can thus be considered to be a distinctive and original thinker in his own right.

Elliott devotes substantial space to establishing a date for Irving and Coleridge's first meeting in order to demonstrate that a number of Irving's central ideas were firmly in place before Coleridge had any opportunity to influence him.<sup>117</sup>

Although his research is detailed and illuminating, divining when Coleridge first began to influence Irving is not quite so simple. After all, Romanticism is not like influenza; close contact is not required for transmission. As Coleridge was well known and widely published by the time Irving was a student at Edinburgh, it is surely reasonable to expect that Irving might have been influenced by his ideas *before* he arrived in London. Indeed there is evidence that this was the case.

Emery Neff, in his short biography of Carlyle, reports that Irving exhorted Carlyle to study Coleridge's works during the burgeoning of their friendship in Kirkcaldy.<sup>118</sup> Thus, Neff describes Coleridge as Irving's 'favourite contemporary author' in 1816, seven years before their first meeting.<sup>119</sup>

Irving's early devotion to Coleridge helps to explain another puzzle, namely why a young Scottish Presbyterian so concerned with the history of the Covenanters, and in particular their resistance to enforced episcopacy, should favour the

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115. Peter Elliott, 'Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis' (PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2010), p. 171.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

117. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-2, 120-1.

118. Emery Edward Neff, *Carlyle* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1932), pp. 33-38. Neff repeatedly uses the spelling 'Kirkcaldy'

119. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

writings of Richard Hooker. In an extended reply to the critics of his first published volume, *For the Oracles of God* (first published in July 1823), Irving explained his idiosyncratic style by reference to Hooker, Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter as his 'companions' in theology.<sup>120</sup> In 1828 he looked back on Hooker, in particular, as 'the venerable companion of my early studies'. Given that Hooker provided the most robust Anglican defence of episcopacy against the presbyterianism of his Puritan contemporaries, he was a curious choice as a model of theology or of style for the young Irving.

Coleridge too favoured Hooker, and this seems unlikely to be a coincidence. Neff credits Irving with introducing Carlyle to Coleridge 'and to the seventeenth century divines, philosophers and dramatists whom Coleridge recommended as models of style'.<sup>121</sup> This approbation of seventeenth-century style is confirmed in a letter, of 19 July 1821, to Jane Welsh in which Irving suggests that an English composition she had sent him 'might be rendered richer by the study of some of our more ancient models (Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, Milton, &c)'.<sup>122</sup> This commendation of Hooker *et al.* was not confined to his private correspondence. In his published works, even those that date from before his first meeting with Coleridge, Irving, like the poet, had a tendency to refer readers to passages taken from 'the judicious Hooker'.<sup>123</sup> Coincidence seems an even less likely explanation for Irving's public fondness for Hooker when a passage from Coleridge's *The Friend* (1809) is compared with Irving's reply to his critics (1824).

Coleridge's article in this particular edition of *The Friend* was written with an eye to criticisms of the 'abstruseness and obscurity' of his writing.<sup>124</sup> With more than a hint of irony, Coleridge offered in his defence that 'I have...injured my style...from having almost confined my reading... to the Works of the Ancients

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120. Irving, *Oracles*, pp. xv-xvii. The preface is dated 1 December 1823.

121. Neff, *Carlyle*, p. 34. Carlyle would seem to corroborate this: Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 41 (2). 'He [Irving] affected the Milton or Old-English Puritan style, and strove visibly to imitate it... We were all taught at that time, by Coleridge etc. that the old English Dramatists, Divines, Philosophers, judicious Hooker, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, were the genuine exemplars'.

122. Edward Irving to Jane Welsh, 9 July, 1821. Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 113.

123. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'No. 6, Thursday, September 21, 1809.', in *The Friend*, (London: Gale and Curtis, 1812), p. 31. Also Irving, *Oracles*, p. 173.

124. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Friend: No.11, Thursday, October 26, 1809. To Correspondents,' in *The Friend*, (London: Gale and Curtis, 1812), p. 166.

and those of the elder Writers in the modern languages'.<sup>125</sup> He went on to accept that these writings in which he had immersed himself had

often made me willing to forget that the stately march and difficult evolutions which characterize the eloquence of Hooker, Bacon, Milton and Jeremy Taylor are notwithstanding their intrinsic excellence still less suited to a periodical Essay.<sup>126</sup>

In other words, the 'flaws' in his writing were derived from his acquaintance with great literature and his inability to 'sacrifice my judgement to the desire of being immediately popular...or affect a style...'.<sup>127</sup>

Having read the reviews of his *For the Oracles of God*, Irving found himself, just as Coleridge had done years previously, forced to defend his antiquated style on the basis of his indebtedness to certain seventeenth-century authors. He complained that 'I have been accused of affecting the antiquated manner of ages and times now forgotten...'.<sup>128</sup> The reason for this, claimed Irving, was that:

Hooker and Taylor and Baxter in theology Bacon and Newton and Locke in philosophy have been my companions as Shakspeare [sic] and Spenser and Milton have been in poetry.....They were the fountains of my English idiom they taught me forms for expressing my feelings...<sup>129</sup>

The similarity between Irving's response to criticism of his style with that of Coleridge, in a work that dates to before their first meeting, suggests that, even before they were personally acquainted, Irving's mind bore the stamp of Coleridge's influence. It would certainly seem rather precipitate to claim that Irving's Romanticism had developed entirely independently from Coleridge's influence prior to their meeting in the summer of 1823.

The friendship which Irving did eventually develop with Coleridge was possible because of the circle of influential literary and political figures into which Irving was drawn almost immediately on arrival in the capital. The speed with which Irving's ministry at the Caledonian Chapel took hold of the *élite* of London must

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125. Ibid.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

128. Irving, *Oracles*, p. xv. The preface is dated 1 December 1823.

129. Ibid., p. xvi.



have been a surprise to his countrymen. The chapel, which had a regular congregation of 50 families but could seat 600, was soon overrun. Before long there were 1,500 requests to subscribe for seats.<sup>130</sup> It became necessary for the trustees to permit entry to services by ticket only, and even those possessing a ticket could not be guaranteed a suitable seat. Carlyle remembered seeing Lady Jersey 'sitting on the pulpit steps';<sup>131</sup> Gladstone, with mischievous delight, recalled watching as a schoolboy, whilst the headmaster of Eton was jostled as he looked for somewhere to sit.<sup>132</sup> Fleming lamented the unbecoming behaviour to which some members of the aristocracy were prepared to stoop to gain access to the chapel, particularly that of the then prime minister, Lord Liverpool, who was, 'said to have made his way through one of the windows and then let himself down into the interior of the chapel'.<sup>133</sup> Although quite probably apocryphal, the fact that this anecdote gained traction is evidence of Irving's pull on the aristocracy.

High demand caused the trustees to enact plans for the erection, at great expense, of a much larger structure, which would be capable of holding 1,800. Hair highlights that plans for a National Scotch Church preceded Irving's arrival in London.<sup>134</sup> As his task was to write a history of the Regent Square church, which continued after Irving's departure, part of his concern was to demonstrate that the congregation had an identity and an existence independent of its founding minister. Nonetheless, it is evident that the scale of the plan and the speed with which funds were raised owed a great deal to the astonishing growth in the congregation under Irving's ministry. The National Scotch Church, Regent Square (near Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital), opened in 1827.

It was the dramatic power of Irving's preaching that attracted so many high-born people to the out-of-the-way Caledonian chapel. The biographer of Sir James Mackintosh, a Whig intellectual and MP, reports that he was so struck by a 'beautiful expression of his' that he repeated it to future prime-minister George

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130. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 54.

131. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 135 (2).

132. David W. Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone: Faith and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993), p. 29.

133. James Fleming, *The Life and Writings of the Rev. Edward Irving*. (Glasgow: Knight & Lacey, 1824), pp. 27-28.

134. Hair, *Regent Square*, p. 45.

Canning, who was inspired to attend service at Hatton Garden the following Sunday.<sup>135</sup> Irving's way with words had a powerful effect on admirers and detractors equally. A highly unflattering pen portrait of Irving, published some years later, gives a first-hand account of just how powerful his preaching could be. The writer describes being captivated despite his own unwillingness: 'I have felt the flesh creep and tremble on my bones, and the hair on my head move. He will not speak a quarter of an hour, till you are convinced.'<sup>136</sup> He attributed Irving's popularity to the powerful emotional experience of hearing him preach, stating that people 'come away with a mixture of delight and astonishment. They go again to see if the effect will continue.'<sup>137</sup> Irving's high profile, coupled with his John the Baptist style indictments of the sins of high society, ensured that Irving would be a controversial figure.

The controversies of his first years in London were of a very different sort from those that he faced in his later career. A satirical pamphlet entitled *The Trial of Edward Irving M.A.: A Cento of Criticism* first appeared in 1823,<sup>138</sup> the conceit of which was the cross-examination, in a court of law, of editors from the various periodicals who had either been critical or supportive of Irving. Within a year of his arrival in London, Irving had evidently succeeded in becoming one of the main objects of gossip in the capital city. There was no real venom to this publication. Irving was found 'not guilty' on most of the charges, because they had been that he was 'a common quack' or a 'common brawler' and so on. The judge instructed the jury that if they 'thought that in any one of these respects the defendant was *something more than common* they could not...convict him'.<sup>139</sup> He was portrayed as an extraordinary man, but one who radically divided opinion. One was either for Irving or against him.

Other publications had more malicious intent. For example an anonymous pamphlet by 'An Actor' railed against his 'puritanism' and his distaste for the

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135. James Mackintosh and Robert James Mackintosh, *Memoirs of the life of Sir James Mackintosh*, vol. 2 (London: E. Moxon, 1836), p. 478.

136. John Mackay Wilson, 'Sketch', p. 221.

137. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, p. 68.

138. Anonymous, *Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A. A Cento of Criticism* (London: E. Brain, 1823).

139. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

theatre.<sup>140</sup> This tract was published with a frontispiece by Robert Cruikshank (the lesser known brother of ‘the modern Hogarth’, George Cruikshank)<sup>141</sup> entitled *The Puritanical Gasometer Exploded*.<sup>142</sup> It was nothing more than a personal attack on Irving: ‘you have greatly over-rated your own prowess; and that, if you do not possess the strength of Sampson [*sic*], you have at least his blindness’.<sup>143</sup> As an artefact, it is nonetheless revealing, because it demonstrates the extent to which Irving’s reputation and influence extended.

The author revels in the blow struck against Irving by King George IV’s command production of Bickerstaffe’s 55 year-old satirical comedy *The Hypocrite*. The reader is informed that this staging of the play was designed to ‘expose’ Irving, ‘the northern quack’.<sup>144</sup> The pamphlet claims that 107,000 persons attended the production and that ‘the Head of our Church’ pointedly and without precedent insisted on the repetition of the ‘satirical and pointed passages’.<sup>145</sup> Irving had, by 1824 amassed some very influential friends and some even more significant enemies.

Irving’s character, rather than his orthodoxy, drew negative attention in those early days. He was considered by his critics to be precocious, presumptuous and self-regarding.<sup>146</sup> The newspaper editor and historian James Grant, who like Irving was a Scot who made his fortune in London,<sup>147</sup> records a chance meeting between an associate of his and Irving before he had achieved any public notice.

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140. (‘An Actor’) Anonymous, *Shakespeare, and Honest King George, Versus Parson Irving and the Puritans; or, Taste and Common Sense, Refuting Cant and Hypocrisy. By an Actor. With a coloured plate, by Cruikshank* (London: C. Harris, 1824).

141. Special Collections Newcastle University Library, ‘George Cruikshank: A Successor In Satire.’ <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/exhibitions/current-and-past-exhibitions/gillray/science/cruikshank> (accessed 13 September 2016). see also, Robert L. Patten, ‘Cruikshank, George (1792–1878),’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

142. M. Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1952), p. X.

143. Anonymous, *Shakespeare*.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 6. This royal intervention is also mentioned (though without mention of Irving) in Anonymous, *The Dramatic Souvenir: Being Literary and Graphical Illustrations of Shakespeare and Other Celebrated English Dramatists. Embellished with Upwards Of two Hundred Engravings on Wood* (London: Charles Tilt, 1833), p. 156.

145. Anonymous, *Shakespeare*, p. 6.

146. See for instance: William Burns, *The Law of Christ Vindicated from Certain False Glosses of the Rev. Edward Irving, Contained in his Argument on a Judgment to Come* (London: R. Hunter, 1824), p. 50.

147. D.M. Griffiths, ‘Grant, James (1802–1879),’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Grant's informant made the mistake of expressing to Irving that a man coming under 'such high auspices as those of Doctor Chalmers' could be hopeful of success in his ministry. Irving's rebuke was telling: 'Sir I do not come here under the auspices of any man. I came here relying entirely upon my own resources.'<sup>148</sup> A reviewer of his work, writing in *The Pulpit*, a periodical devoted to popular preaching, having previously offered a complimentary account of Irving, commented that 'We find, however, that in Mr Irving's own estimation, we had underrated him vastly.'<sup>149</sup> However, far from being deflated by such criticism, Irving's rather grandiose reaction was to see all opposition as an endorsement of his ministry, saying 'I regard [it] as an extraordinary honour.'<sup>150</sup> Even at the height of his success, Irving identified with his persecuted forebears and welcomed even this rather trivial opposition, believing it to be evidence of the rightness of his course. It seems reasonable to propose that these experiences of rejection in his early ministry, at a time when he was apparently enjoying divine favour, may have inoculated him against the more substantial questioning of his theology in later years.

Despite the, sometimes severe, criticism, Irving's early years in London were marked by success and increase. In 1823, his second year in London, Irving published his first book, which was a collection of his early London sermons. He styled these pulpit addresses as 'Orations' to distinguish them from the typical sermonic fare of his time.<sup>151</sup> In the autumn he married Isabella Martin, to whom he had been engaged for the twelve years since he was a schoolmaster in Kirkcaldy.

Irving's courtship of Isabella had, as its duration might indicate, not been entirely smooth. After he had left Kirkcaldy he was reintroduced to his 'beloved pupil' Jane Welsh.<sup>152</sup> It seems that there was a sufficient attachment to Jane that Irving

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148. James Grant, 'The Rev. Edward Irving,' in *The Pulpit: Biographical Sketches of the Most Popular Preachers in London*, (London: George Virtue, 1843), p. 101.

149. *The Pulpit*, no. 12 (10 July 1823), 484 quoted in Grass, *Watchman*, p. 76.

150. Irving, *Oracles*, p. xi.

151. *Ibid.*

152. Irving regularly referred thus to Jane in letters along with other affectionate variations such as 'dear and lovely pupil'. He used the appellation frequently enough that Carlyle sometimes playfully adopted it to refer to Jane in his correspondence with her.

sought the Martin family's release from his understanding with Isabella.<sup>153</sup> This request was firmly refused. At this Jane insisted that Irving must preserve his reputation from the kind of scandal that had recently befallen a young licentiate of the Church of Scotland who had broken off an engagement.<sup>154</sup>

The ongoing tensions resulting from this parting were visible for many years, posing significant problems for Irving's early marriage and even threatening Carlyle's burgeoning courtship of Jane. In March 1822, a little more than a year before his marriage, Irving wrote to Jane, expressing his yearning:

When I think of you my mind is overspread with the most affectionate and tender regard which I neither know how to name nor how to describe. One thing I know it would long ago have taken the form of the most devoted attachment, but for one intervening circumstance, and showed itself and pleaded itself before your heart by a thousand actions from which I must now restrain myself...When I am in your company my whole soul would rush to serve you, and my tongue trembles to speak my heart's fulness...But I feel within me the power to prevail and at once to satisfy duty to another and affection to you. I stand, truly, upon ground which seems to shake and give way beneath me, but my help is in heaven.<sup>155</sup>

As he stood on the brink of his new life in London, in a decision that caused him significant psychological distress, Irving steeled himself to marry for duty rather than love.

Although he desired to make a clean break, Irving could not stop himself picking at the wound. Shortly before his marriage to Isabella, Irving made arrangements for Jane and Thomas to make an extended stay with him and his new wife in London. He might not be able to marry Jane, but he could at least have her live under his roof for an extended period. This was much to his former pupil's delight - she wrote to Carlyle that 'I am almost out of my wits with joy...This summer in London will make a new creature of me'.<sup>156</sup> The visit was not, however, to be. The

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153. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 57 (2).

154. *Ibid.*, p. 61 (1). This point is taken from Geraldine Jewsbury's 'In Memoriam' of Jane (dated 21 April 1866), which is included as part of Carlyle's *Reminiscences*.

155. Edward Irving to Jane Welsh, 6 March 1822 in Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 139.

156. JBW to TC, 14 October 1823, *The Love Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh*, Alexander Carlyle ed, vol. 1 (London: John Lane, 1909), pp. 290-291.

new Mrs Irving was clearly rather less enthusiastic about having Jane, whom she surely knew was responsible for Irving's attempts to seek release from their engagement and who 'if *flirting* were a capital crime would have been in danger of being hanged many times over',<sup>157</sup> in such close proximity to her new husband.

Irving wrote initially via Carlyle that 'I have not had it in [my] power to second the invitation which I gave her to come up...For though we be in a condition to receive [a gentleman] and one so dear to us and so simple in all his habits, we are not in a condition to receive a lady.'<sup>158</sup> Carlyle did not manage to pass this news to Jane before she herself had received a letter dated 10 May 1824 repeating the same rather flimsy excuse.<sup>159</sup> In the same letter, Irving hinted at the real reason:

My dear Isabella has succeeded in healing the wounds of my heart...but I am hardly yet in a position to expose them. My former calmness and piety are returning. I feel growing in grace and in holiness; and before another year I shall be worthy in the eye of my own conscience to receive you into my house and under my care, which till then I shall hardly be.<sup>160</sup>

Even after his marriage Irving was troubled by his feelings for Jane, and did not entirely trust himself around her.

Jane did not admit the extent of her quondam feelings for Irving to Carlyle for some time. Her desire to come clean is, however, evident in some letters. On one occasion she asked whether Carlyle had ever read Irving's sonnet 'to a lock of my Lady's hair which reached me thro' hair-breadth 'scrapes'.<sup>161</sup> In the letter she artfully disguised that the sonnet was about her, although she commented cattily that 'there is not one word of Isabella in it from beginning to end'.<sup>162</sup> Though she could not bring herself to tell Carlyle explicitly at this stage of the intensity of their infatuation, she could not help but allude to it.

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157. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 60 (1). This characterisation of Jane is again taken from Geraldine Jewsbury's 'In Memoriam' of Jane

158. TC to JBW, 19 May 1824, "Love Letters", pp. 365-366.

159. EI to JBW, 10 May 1824, Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, pp. 195-196.

160. EI to JBW, 10 May 1824, *Ibid.*, p. 196.

161. JBW to TC, 19 December 1824, *The Love Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh*, Alexander Carlyle ed, vol. 2 (London: John Lane, 1909), p. 50.

162. JBW to TC, 19 December 1824, *Ibid.*

Carlyle seems to have been blissfully, or wilfully, unaware of this attachment. Indeed, in 1825 when Mrs Montagu (in whom Irving had confided freely) wrote to Carlyle about the situation, he dismissed it. Mrs Montagu's letter was explicit about the problems Carlyle faced in wooing Jane: 'Her heart is in England, her heart is not there.'<sup>163</sup> That she referred to a love for Irving is clear as she suggests that '[i]f Miss Welsh were to spend a week with me, she might be satisfied that to be Mr Irving's wife would...be entire an unmixed misery: they are not the least fitted to each other.'<sup>164</sup> Carlyle's response to Jane was that '[s]he labours under some delusion, I believe, about your secret history'.<sup>165</sup> Eventually Mrs Montagu was able to change Carlyle's mind about her 'delusion'. She wrote to Jane in July insisting that there must be 'no Bluebeard's closet in which skeletons might be discovered'.<sup>166</sup> Jane took this to be a veiled threat to reveal all if she did not do so herself, so she forwarded the letter to Carlyle at once with a letter of her own admitting that she 'once passionately loved [Irving]',<sup>167</sup> and that she had persuaded Irving to honour his commitment to Isabella to 'preserve his honour from reproach'.<sup>168</sup> Carlyle remained unshaken and eventually married Jane on 17 October 1826.

The thought that she and Irving might have been wed never completely left Jane. After a melancholy meeting, shortly before Irving's death, in which Carlyle tried to persuade Irving to rethink his course concerning the manifestations in his church, Jane is reported to have claimed that 'if Irving had married me there would have been no tongues'.<sup>169</sup> Whether or not this was so, it is impossible to know. Had Irving married Jane Welsh his life would certainly have been very different; she and Isabella were entirely dissimilar to each other. It is not, however, certain that Irving's life would have been happier. The essayist Samuel Butler famously quipped that it was 'very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs

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163. Mrs Montagu to TC, 30 May 1825, q. in Hansen and Hansen, *Necessary Evil*, p. 96.

164. Mrs Montagu to TC, 30 May 1825, q. in *Ibid.*

165. TC to JBW, 24 June 1825, "Love Letters", p. 134.

166. Mrs Montagu to Jane Welsh, 20 July 1825, *Ibid.*, pp. 148-150.

167. JBW to TC, 24 July 1825, *Ibid.* Carlyle scrawled on the envelope 'more of Mrs Montagu's nonsense'.

168. JBW to TC, 24 July 1825, *Ibid.*

169. James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life 1795-1835*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), p. 164. Also Hansen and Hansen, *Necessary Evil*, pp. 146-148.

Carlyle marry one another, and so make only two people miserable and not four'.<sup>170</sup>

Whatever might or might not have been the case had Irving married Jane is impossible to say. The effects, however, of his decision to marry for duty rather than for love are worth considering. First, Irving plunged himself with a fury into his London work. Indeed, he laboured with an energy and focus that repeatedly damaged his health. After merely a year in London he could write to his friend, the Glasgow merchant David Hope, that 'I have been unwell and living in the country...[e]very day is to me a day of severe occupation...[a]ll my leisure is refreshment for new labour'.<sup>171</sup> By the age of 39, Irving was so worn out that on seeing him in 1831 Carlyle described him as 'hollow and haggard; thin, grey-whiskered, almost an old man'.<sup>172</sup> To what extent Irving's frenetic working pattern can be attributed to his tangled emotional life cannot be determined with certainty. It would seem likely to have been a factor, nonetheless.

Secondly, a notable theme in Irving's preaching around the time of his marriage was temptation. One of his earliest preaching series in London was on *The Temptation*<sup>173</sup> of Christ in the wilderness. And Irving, preoccupied as he was by the subject, kept returning to the theme of the Lord's victory over temptation and his role as an example to the Christian experiencing the powerful allure of sin. The idea of a Messiah who was tempted for us also formed a central strand in his reasoning in the Christological controversy that eventually resulted in his dismissal from the ministry of the Church of Scotland.<sup>174</sup> Wrestling so desperately with the ongoing desires he had for the woman he loved but did not marry, Irving perhaps knew more of the power of temptation than most. It is unsurprising, then, that this became such a dominant theme in his ministry.

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170. Samuel Butler to Miss Savage, 21 November 1884, in Samuel Butler and Eliza Mary Ann Savage, *Letters between Samuel Butler and Miss E.M.A. Savage, 1871-1885*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill (London: J. Cape, 1935), p. 349.

171. Edward Irving to David Hope, [End of September 1823], Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 188.

172. Thomas Carlyle to James Carlyle the Elder, 13 December 1831, CLO

173. Irving, *CW ii*, pp. 191-246.

174. See for instance the introduction to *The Lord's Human Nature* Edward Irving, *The Opinions Circulating Concerning Our Lord's Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1830), pp. 1-10.



Thirdly, there is the question, raised repeatedly by the Carlyles in particular, of whether Isabella was really a suitable wife for Irving. Quite aside from the question of how the Irvings *felt* about each other through their marriage (and there does seem to have been a growing warmth), there is the matter of just how far Isabella Irving was really a *match* for her husband. The Carlyles repeatedly complained that she was in his thrall and did nothing to curb his excesses but, rather, encouraged them. Irving was certainly not someone prone to self-doubt about his ideas and his actions as a minister, but a wife who was more obviously his intellectual equal (such as Jane Welsh) might have been able to temper his course.

Whatever might have been, Irving did marry Isabella and she would go on to bear Irving eight children. Of these, all but three would predecease their father. Such griefs lay in the future, however, and for the moment he was able to enjoy the growth of his profile in London. He received the highly prestigious invitation to preach at the annual May Meeting of the London Missionary Society<sup>175</sup> for 1824. The following month saw the laying of the foundation stone for the new National Scotch Church in Regent Square,<sup>176</sup> and his son, Edward, was born in July. Irving's delight in fatherhood was so great that Thomas Carlyle found it ridiculous, describing him, in a letter to Jane Welsh, as a 'fatherly leviathan' who delighted in playing the part of 'dry nurse' to his infant son.

There were, however, clouds beginning to gather, though at this point they were no bigger than a man's hand. On 13 May 1824, Irving addressed the LMS May Meeting at Whitefield's Tabernacle on the Tottenham Court Road. On this evening Irving's apparent fearlessness in courting controversy was evident, albeit alongside his somewhat incongruous self-regard. Rather than praising the work of the society and urging the assembly to give generously to the work, as was expected, he launched into a diatribe against the whole missionary enterprise as currently conceived. His objection was that the societies sought to operate a model of prudence and provision that was at odds with Jesus's command to the

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175. Hereafter 'LMS'

176. 'Preparatory to Laying the Foundation-Stone of the National Scotch Church, Regent Square' in Irving, *CW* iii, pp. 363-369. This sermon was preached on 27 June 1824.

twelve to take 'neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money'.<sup>177</sup> He implied that the approach of the societies, as it did not accord with the Lord's institution, was 'born of flesh', stating that it 'consorteth with Mammon, and hath fellowship with Belial'.<sup>178</sup> After this association of their work with two of Milton's demons, the LMS did not offer Irving the customary invitation to publish his address.<sup>179</sup> Nonetheless, Irving published under his own steam, with a dedication to Coleridge,<sup>180</sup> whose orthodoxy, from the Evangelical perspective of the LMS, was questionable at best. Irving's claim that the poet had been 'more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine to my spiritual understanding of the word of God and to my right conception of the Christian Church than any or all of the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation',<sup>181</sup> served further to inflame the situation.

Irving's friendship with Coleridge had developed over a series of Thursday evening 'conversations' held at the home of the Gillman family. Dr James Gillman had taken Coleridge into his household at Highgate in April 1816 to treat the poet's addiction to opium.<sup>182</sup> In subsequent years, he and his wife Ann willingly opened their home each Thursday to a stream of visitors-cum-pilgrims who came to sit at the intensely brilliant Coleridge's feet. At these evenings the conversation would be dominated by Coleridge to the extent that even Irving, for all his force of character and facility with words, was perplexed at his inability to break into the unremitting stream which poured forth from the lips of the older man.<sup>183</sup> The effect of Coleridge's conversation on his hearers was not dissimilar to the effect of Irving's preaching on his. Listeners were carried along, even against their own will, on the torrent of ideas. Just how much this Coleridgean deluge overwhelmed Irving's thought is a contested question, and will be considered in chapters four and seven of this thesis.

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177. Irving, *Missionaries*, p. 18. quoting Lk 9:3.

178. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

179. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 97.

180. Irving, *Missionaries*, pp. vii-ix.

181. *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii.

182. Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), pp. 423-430.

183. T. Allsop, *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Frederick Farah, 1864), p. 111.

From the point of his LMS controversy until his ejection, in 1832, from his ministry in Regent Square, it is easiest to make sense of Irving's biography through the examination of themes rather than by strict chronology. A number of doctrinal motifs dominated Irving's ministry in this seven-year period, the most significant of which were, in order of the following discussion rather than appearance: the return of Christ, the gifts of Christ, and the person and work of Christ. These developments marked a distinct change in his own sense of his theological identity, and particularly his relationship to Evangelicalism.

Before we begin our consideration of these themes, we must first contend with the tragic loss of Irving's son Edward. This bereavement, which occurred in October 1825, is of particular significance to a consideration of Irving's mature ministry as some writers have attributed Irving's adoption of new theological ideas to the impact of this event. James Grant wrote that 'the loss of a child to whom he was devotedly attached so deeply affected his mind as in a great measure to prepare him...for the adoption of the extravagant views which unhappily characterised the latter years of his life'.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, Irving himself believed that the tragedy of his son's death did influence his theology. In particular he felt that it *confirmed* a new view of the baptismal covenant, which gave him great comfort in the face of this and subsequent losses. His dedication to Isabella in his *Homilies On Baptism* (1828), which was written after they had lost a second child, Mary, describes the connection:

I BELIEVE in my heart, that the doctrine of the holy Sacraments, which is contained in these Homilies, was made known to my mind, first of all, for the purpose of preparing us for the loss of our eldest boy... the thought contained in those two Homilies remained in my mind, like an unsprung seed, until it was watered by the common tears which we shed over our dying Mary...I resolved, at every risk, to open...the thoughts which had ministered to us so much consolation.<sup>185</sup>

In particular, his thoughts about baptism were concerned with the fact that it 'sealed' the infant as a member of 'the new covenant' meaning that it was now 'an heir of all the promises which are the everlasting inheritance of the faithful

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184. Grant, 'The Rev. Edward Irving,' p. 103.

185. Irving, *CW ii*, p. 267.

disciples of Christ'.<sup>186</sup> Irving clearly drew great comfort from this idea, and the certainty that it offered him about the future resurrection of his much-lamented offspring, Edward and Mary.<sup>187</sup>

Irving's new focus on baptism and, in particular, the difference between being part of God's covenant people and being a genuinely converted person (he believed that the grace bestowed at baptism could be lost if not attended to properly)<sup>188</sup> amplified for him the relationship between the Church and State. Liam Upton, in his essay on Irving's conception of religious and national identity, highlights the extent to which Irving believed that 'the Church of Scotland and the Scottish nation were co-extensive'.<sup>189</sup> This is a key insight into Irving's thought and ministry. Not only did he see that there was a profound connection between Church and State; he also believed, in a way characteristic of the Romantics, that there was an organic unity between them. This belief in the inseparability of the political and ecclesiastical nation helps to explain a number of emphases in Irving's ministry.

One example is Irving's very clear desire, quite unlike his Evangelical contemporaries such as Chalmers, to dissociate himself from 'Dissent'. Not only did Irving take pains to avoid being considered a nonconformist - despite being a non-Anglican minister in London - but he also vigorously opposed political relief for Dissenters. The vehemence with which he pursued this course comes through in Chalmers's journal entry after the older man had expressed his support for the Sacramental Test Act of 1828 at the General Assembly. He wrote, 'Mr Irving is wild upon the other side from me', going on to describe Irving's attempts to intimidate him by sitting directly opposite and staring at him throughout.<sup>190</sup>

As well as shaping his engagement in the public square, Irving's convictions about national religion also fed his eschatological imagination as he began to see

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186. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

187. Mary lived from 23 February to 14 December 1827: Grass, *Watchman*, p. 125.

188. Irving, *CW ii*, pp. 346-348.

189. Liam Upton, "Our Mother and our Country': The Integration of Religious and National Identity in the Thought of Edward Irving (1792 - 1834)," in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c.1700-2000*, ed. Robert Pope, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 243.

190. William Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh: Edmeston and Douglas, 1867), p. 173.

political events as fulfilling the prophecies of apostasy in 'the last days'.<sup>191</sup> It is at this point that the connection between baptism and the return of Christ begins to emerge. The repudiation, as he saw it, of the nation's baptismal covenant fed into his ideas about a 'Gentile Apostasy' which was already developing within the western Church.<sup>192</sup>

This doctrine, [of baptism] is, in fact, the only one which puts a difference between us and a heathen nation... But, being measured by our obligations as a baptised nation... into what an awful depth below Papists, Mohammedans, and Heathens, do we at once sink!<sup>193</sup>

One outcome of this was that it made Irving psychologically immune to censure from the Church of Scotland, because he would come to write off all the major churches as apostate.

His heightened eschatological expectation in general and his anticipation of an imminent resurrection of the dead might also have been, at least in part, a psychological reaction to an extreme experience of loss in the present. Although plausible and very likely a factor in Irving's theological development, his grief is not a *sufficient* explanation for his change of mind concerning either eschatology or baptism. It can be observed from his dedication of the *Homilies on Baptism* quoted above, that Irving believed that he had been given these insights in preparation 'for the loss of our eldest boy'.<sup>194</sup> Thus at least some of the change in Irving's thinking about baptism preceded Edward's death. The same is true of his thinking about the the second coming of Christ, which he began to develop in a sermon preached in May 1825,<sup>195</sup> several months before Edward's death.

When he arrived in London, Irving had held similar assumptions about the return of Christ to many of his Evangelical contemporaries: he held what is known as a 'postmillennial' view.<sup>196</sup> This means that, in his early ministry, Irving had understood the 'thousand years' of which Revelation chapter 20 speaks to predict

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191. Irving, *Last Days*, pp. 582-583.

192. Hair, *Regent Square*, p. 62.

193. Irving, *Last Days*, p. xi.

194. Irving, *CW ii*, p. 267.

195. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 94.

196. See for instance, Iain Hamish Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

a glorious epoch that would develop as the Christian gospel triumphed in the world. This 'Millennium' would predate the consummation of all things, the second coming of Christ, which was thus understood to be 'post-millennial'. For example, in a sermon preached on 25 January 1824, Irving stated that 'to make the restoration complete, Christ needed to destroy both sin in Earth and sin in Hell, and to bring again the millennial reign, To make the wilderness like Eden, is what the great husbandman is bringing about.'<sup>197</sup> His use of the present continuous conveys that this 'millennial reign' is the culmination of an ongoing process rather than the consequence of a cataclysm.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the catalyst for a change in Irving's views in this matter. When Irving presented Coleridge with a copy of his *Oration*s, the man whom Irving would come to call 'The Sage' wrote in the front: 'Let this young man know that the world is not to be converted, but judged.'<sup>198</sup> According to Isabella, this had a profound effect upon her husband.<sup>199</sup> Indeed Irving publicly acknowledged Coleridge to be one who had taught him to read the Bible in the manner that he followed in his study of prophecy. He wrote that it was from Coleridge that 'I received the first idea of the prophetic growth of God's word: as what have I not received from him?'<sup>200</sup> If Coleridge persuaded Irving that his thinking needed to change, James Hatley Frere, a civil servant, inventor and amateur interpreter of 'biblical prophecy' provoked the substantial change in Irving's thought. Soon after their first meeting Frere had convinced Irving of a new way to interpret the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation, as outlined in his *Combined View of the Prophecies*.<sup>201</sup> In particular he taught Irving to seek details of specific, concrete, historical events as fulfilment of the ancient Scriptures: an approach known as 'historicism'. This approach apparently yielded

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197. William Gray, '25th Jan 1824 Evening Service, Caledonian Church, Cross Street, Hatton Garden, Mr Grey [sic] in Green Pew,' *Sermons of Rev. Edward Irving (1792-1854)* 2 manuscript notebooks: recto only written, In Gray Family Papers, York City Library, Acc5,6,24,235/S2a/b, (1824), (punctuation and capitalisation preserved from handwritten original).

198. Robert Herbert Story, 'Edward Irving,' in *Scottish Divines 1505 - 1872*, St Giles' Lectures, Third Series (Edinburgh: MacNiven and Wallace, 1883), p. 244.

199. William Watson Andrews, "Review of Edward Irving", p. 60.

200. Edward; Lacunza Irving, Manuel Y Diaz, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty. By Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. Translated from the Spanish, with a Preliminary Discourse by E. Irving.* (London: L. B. Seeley & Son, 1827), p. lxxv.

201. J.H. Frere, *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Esdras, and S. John* (London: J. Hatchard, 1815).

astonishing details concerning the development of the Napoleonic Empire and, consequently, Irving became so taken up with it that, on reading a book by Irving, Frere's sister exclaimed that Irving was simply a mouthpiece for her brother.<sup>202</sup> Irving preached his first sermon on the 'second Advent' on Christmas Day 1825 and, from 1826 onwards, the idea that a cataclysmic intervention would usher in a new age began increasingly to dominate his outlook.<sup>203</sup>

This understanding of the apocalyptic prophecies of the Bible brought Irving into a new circle of theological peers. In 1826 he was invited, by the influential politician and banker Henry Drummond, to be a participant in the discussions of biblical prophecy at Albury Park, his Surrey estate. The approach adopted at the Albury conferences is known, by contrast to Irving's previous 'postmillennial' views, as 'pre-millennial'. As the name suggests, the primary differentiating feature from Irving's previous belief is the expectation that Christ would return before the prophesied millennium.

Irving's thought in this area developed quickly as he devoted himself to study. In early 1826 he published an oration given to Drummond's Continental Society, which was devoted to revitalising the Reformed churches in Europe, as *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God*, dedicating the work to Frere.<sup>204</sup> He then made a remarkably quick study of the Spanish language with the end of translating a book by Manuel Lacunza, a Chilean Jesuit, entitled *Venida del Mesías en gloria y magestad*.<sup>205</sup> This work, published by Irving as *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*,<sup>206</sup> carried a long preface, written on Christmas Day 1826, but published in 1827, which gave an indication of the tectonic shift taking place in Irving's theological landscape. He describes the Church as 'labouring under...dimness

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202. See Grass, *Watchman*, p. 102.

203. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

204. Edward Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: a Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: William Collins, 1828).

205. (Manuel Lacunza) Juan Josaphat ben Ezra, *Venida del Mesías en Gloria y Magestad* (Cadiz: Felipe Tolosa, 1812). For biographical details of Lacunza see Leroy Edwin Froom, *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, vol. 3 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), pp. vol.3, 303-336.

206. Irving, *Coming of Messiah*.

concerning the future advent of Christ' and adds that there was thus a great deal 'needing to be reformed by the views which we now offer'.<sup>207</sup>

The new view at which Irving had arrived of the 'future advent' of Christ meant that he saw the theology of the Church in a new light. In his eyes, failure to appreciate properly the subject which now occupied his greatest attention had resulted in an over-emphasis on the events of the first coming of Christ and the events of Pentecost. This he believed, had resulted in a distorted understanding of Christ and the Church. This was so because Irving had begun to see the ministry of Christ as characterised by three epochs, corresponding to the three 'offices' of Christ as prophet, priest and king. The events of the first century, centred around Galilee and Jerusalem, belonged to the prophetic ministry of Jesus; the events following his ascension, notably Pentecost, marked the beginnings of his priestly ministry; but the goal was the revelation of the kingship of Christ in his second coming.

David Brown, later principal of the Free Church College, Aberdeen, but between 1830 and 1832 assistant to Irving in London, described the impact on the older man of this turn to prophetic study. 'Its first effect was to give a new and more exact turn to his biblical studies, which till now had dealt only with great generalities.'<sup>208</sup> As Brown hints, Irving began in this period to reject many of the ways in which Evangelicals had interpreted Scripture, particularly prophecy. He derided their interpretation as 'spiritualizing', insisting instead on a 'literal' understanding of prophetic literature.

[I]n the great question of Messiah's former advent, I should undertake to hold the Jewish side against a goodly number of our Christian divines...For if they spiritualized away a part, I should insist upon spiritualizing away the other part...and if they insist for the literal interpretation of a part, I would insist for the literal interpretation of the other part...and in either case I would defeat them.<sup>209</sup>

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207. Ibid., p. ciii.

208. David Brown, 'Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving,' *The Expositor* Series 3 Volume 6, (1887), p. 258.

209. Irving, *Coming of Messiah*, p. lxxviii.



This 'literal' emphasis, which Irving shared with his Albury colleagues, was vital to them, in particular because of their focus on the prophecies which referred to the restoration of the Jews in God's plans. Joseph Wolf, a converted Jew and missionary to the Jews, and Lewis Way, who bankrolled the London Society for the Propagation of Christianity amongst the Jews (LSPCJ),<sup>210</sup> were key figures amongst the Albury group.

Irving was sufficiently committed to the continual place of a literal 'Israel' in God's plans that he could write: 'My conviction, then, is, that our dispensation, since Christ, is altogether an interjected and intercalated period...that not the Old Testament but the New-Testament [sic] dispensation hath an end: and then the other resumes its course'.<sup>211</sup> This is decidedly similar to the later 'dispensationalist' idea of Christianity as a 'parenthesis' in God's plans for Israel. As a result Irving's views have been compared with those of the Anglo-Irish founder of the Exclusive Brethren, J.N. Darby, whose 'dispensational' ideas would become so significant in North American Christianity. Given that Irving and Darby were both delegates at 'prophetic' conferences at Powerscourt near Dublin, and that Darby's system was first given public expression in 1840,<sup>212</sup> ten years after this passage from Irving was published, it is quite reasonable to assume that Irving was an influence on the development of Darby's ideas. The exact nature of this influence is very hard to divine, not least because of Darby's own antipathy to many of Irving's other ideas and his reluctance to be associated with him.<sup>213</sup>

The 'literal' approach became Irving's basic hermeneutical position in handling the Bible. So, for instance, in his August 1827<sup>214</sup> lectures on the parable of the sower, he warned that 'this kingdom to come is turned into thin vapour by our

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210. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 149.

211. Edward Irving, 'Interpretation of all the Old Testament Prophecies Quoted in the New: Interpretation VII, Messiah's Birth Place,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* 2, (1830), p. 788.

212. C. Gribben and A. Holmes, *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790-2005* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), p. 15.

213. Timothy Stunt, *The Elusive Quest of the Spiritual Malcontent: Some Early Nineteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Mavericks* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015), p. 141.

214. Dating from Simpson's Diary entry for 31 August 1827, 'For some Sabbaths past Mr Irving has been setting forth what he considers the measure of a "good +honest heart" as set forth in the Parable of the Sower in St Luke's Gospel.'

spiritualizing divines, who resist the letter of the prophetic word'.<sup>215</sup> Thus, particular, concrete, historical events were to be expected as the fulfilment of prophecy and nothing less: an idea that was doubtless strengthened by Frere's success, by this interpretative method, in predicting the downfall of Napoleon.<sup>216</sup> Brown concludes that these changed eschatological ideas 'gradually moulded and modified [Irving's] whole views both of Christ and of the world'.<sup>217</sup>

There is a broad range of evidence that supports Brown's recollection of the significance of this new eschatological theme for Irving. There is, first of all, the fact that this was the great theme of the latter part of his ministry. Although he wrote a number of books and articles about the incarnation in the years following the outbreak of scandal on that subject in 1827, these were all written in response to controversy. The nature and nearness of the bodily return of Christ, however, was the subject which dominated his labours by choice. It was his desire to speak of the return of Christ that took him on two preaching tours of Scotland of 1828 and 1829.<sup>218</sup> His theme was avidly taken up by those who heard him.

The importance of this prophetic theme to Irving also drove much of his writing. Take, for instance, his numerous articles for Henry Drummond's journal devoted to disseminating the Albury interpretation of biblical prophecy, portentously called *The Morning Watch*. Apocalyptic themes did not only dominate his public writings, but also the sphere of domestic relations. Thus, in taking up the role of matchmaker for R.H. Story of Rosneath, Irving had tried to persuade his friend to consider marrying one particular lady because 'She knows more of the Mystery of the Papacy than any woman in England, except my wife.'<sup>219</sup> In the public and the domestic arenas, Irving's thought was dominated by eschatological themes.

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215. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 1 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), p. vol.2 p.574.

216. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a History from the 1750s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 82.

217. David Brown, 'Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving', p. 258.

218. See especially Grass, *Watchman*, pp. 190-202.

219. Robert Herbert Story, *Memoir of the Life of the Rev. Robert Story* (Edinburgh: Macmillan, 1862), p. 125.

Irving's apocalyptic expectation played a part in another major development in his thought that characterised his later career: the place of spiritual gifts. He was beginning to see the history of the world as a series of 'dispensations' in God's economy. He saw the old 'ritual and prophetic dispensation' as fulfilled by the incarnation of the Son of God to be an 'earthly dispensation'. This completed work of Christ was, for Irving, only the beginning. In contrast, the 'present dispensation', which was the 'unfolding and completing' of that which went before, was the 'spiritual dispensation' awaiting a new, heavenly, 'dispensation of glory'.<sup>220</sup> Thus the church, in this age of the Spirit, straddled the earthly and the heavenly, belonging to the coming age but living in the former. Irving began to express this new emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a Christian in the preface to his translation of Lacunza. Here, for the first time, he began to develop in detail the idea that Jesus is the archetype of the Spirit-filled Christian life:

Now because Christ in the days of his flesh was the type of all his people... I do most certainly conclude, that the same Holy Spirit...doth not take effect upon our spirit only, but upon our body also, upon our whole fallen humanity to restrain it and to sanctify it and to prepare it for eternal glory.<sup>221</sup>

In concert with the development of his eschatological views, then, Irving was beginning to re-cast the Christian life as being a continuation of the Spirit-filled life of Jesus.

As Irving began to re-imagine his Christian faith in this way, his expectations about the life of the church also began to change. His expectation of an imminent upheaval in world history was coupled with an anticipation of a sudden spiritual outpouring on the Jews, what Irving called the 'latter rain'.<sup>222</sup> This was a key idea in changing Irving's understanding of the Spirit's work in the church. As a younger man he had believed that the supernatural spiritual gifts had passed from the church with the end of the apostolic age, a position known as cessationism. In

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220. Irving, *Coming of Messiah*, p. xcvi.

221. *Ibid.*, p. cxiii.

222. *Ibid.*, p. v. Irving believed that this outpouring would also be given to Gentiles who were receptive to it.

his infamous address to the London Missionary Society he said, '[t]he miraculous gifts whether external or internal have brought themselves to an end',<sup>223</sup> but in a sermon preached in Bath in August 1830, Irving spoke again about missionaries, though in new terms. Joseph Hunter recorded Irving's predictions as follows:

... The missionaries ...sent out, did not go with faith enough ... the Apostles enjoyed the gift of tongues, this would be [revived] to the Church. He was confident that this gift would be given to the new missionaries who are arising. The Holy Spirit would speak in all languages by their organs...These were signs that the Lord was coming on the clouds of heaven.<sup>224</sup>

It was no longer Irving's belief that the gifts had 'brought themselves to an end' but that they had disappeared from the Church through a lack of faith. Now Irving expected to see them restored.

This sermon was preached whilst a party of inquirers from Regent Square were visiting the Gareloch region to look into the claims that they had heard about an occurrence of just this sort. Indeed in his sermon, Irving spoke of a 'young woman' (Mary Campbell) who 'was speaking in languages which she had never learned'.<sup>225</sup> According to her pastor at the time, Robert Story — a supporter of Irving's in most other respects — she had been avidly looking for the restoration of these gifts because of Irving's teachings,<sup>226</sup> and was herself expecting to become a missionary.<sup>227</sup> Irving had always upheld a high view of that calling, and now he was convinced that it would once again be furnished with its original supernatural power.

The delegation that returned from Scotland included the lawyer J.B. Cardale, who would eventually become the first person to be named as one of the 'apostles',<sup>228</sup> in the fulfilment of the Irvingite expectation of a return to the

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223. Irving, *Missionaries*, p. xxiii.

224. Joseph Hunter, 'Biographical Notices of Contemporaries: 1827-1836 (Edward Irving),' *British Museum Additional Manuscripts 56527* (August 31 1830), n.p. Square brackets indicate an uncertain word in this handwritten document.

225. *Ibid.* n.p.

226. Story, *Memoir*, p. 215.

227. That she never did go as a missionary, despite being offered the opportunity, was one of the reasons that Story eventually rejected the gifts as counterfeit. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

228. Timothy Grass, 'John Bate Cardale, Bloomsbury Apostle,' <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/events/conference2011/grass.pdf> (accessed 22 July 2013).

conditions of the earliest Church. In the beginning, however, Cardale's wife was of more significance, in that she became the first to speak 'in the power' of the Spirit in London. This happened at her home on 30 April 1831.<sup>229</sup> When their Anglican minister, the confusingly-named Baptist Noel, would not accept the authenticity of these gifts, the Cardales moved to Irving's congregation where they became part of a group of 'gifted persons'. These ecstatic utterances occurred first in private homes and then at prayer meetings. They finally burst out in a Sunday service on 6 November 1831, a communion Sunday.<sup>230</sup> In the morning service, two of the gifted persons, Miss Hall and Mr Taplin, rushed into the vestry to prophesy as they could not hold back 'the power' but did not wish to disrupt the service. Miss Hall's utterance, however, was so loud that it could be heard clearly in the congregation. In the evening service, Irving expressed his sorrow that he had not given permission for them to speak publicly, fearing that he had silenced God. That night the tongues were allowed for the first time in gathered worship at the National Scotch Church. From that point, until Irving's dismissal, they became a regular feature of the services.<sup>231</sup>

Irving's departure from his congregation clearly marked a significant change in his ministry and came about because of the practical effects of his development in theological outlook. Whilst he was never someone who could readily conform himself to the ideas or the mores of a particular group, and never fitted comfortably into any 'party' within the church, to the extent that he can be described as belonging to any group, 'Evangelical' is the best description of the young Irving. The depth of the change in his theology can be observed in his movement away from his youthful Evangelicalism.

The very brief journal that remains from around the time of Irving's nineteenth birthday illustrates this point. His entry for Thursday 19 July 1810 recounts his arrangements for his sister to receive a copy of Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*.<sup>232</sup> 'my intention was to desire her acceptance of Coelebs and to press the

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229. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 224.

230. Hair, *Regent Square*, p. 107.

231. Grass, *Watchman*, pp. 232-235.

232. For an illustration of the place of *Coelebs* in Evangelical culture at the time see Doreen M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012), pp. 141-142.

designs for which the Book appears to have been written'.<sup>233</sup> Not content that this gift would achieve its desired purpose, Irving recalls, in terms characteristic of an Evangelical of his time, that his letter went on to press home the point. He

made some observations...upon the difference in point of Enjoyment between a woman of an uncultivated mind and a friend who had improved her understanding and who was possessed of religious principles — upon the influence of bad or ignorant and foolish company, Upon what books she ought to read — upon the inutility and dangerous consequence of novells [sic] — and lastly upon the advantages to be derived from a careful perusal of her Bible.<sup>234</sup>

In his entry for Monday 13 August 1810 we see a mirror image of Irving's concern for the development of his sister's good character. He reveals his horror at a rumour circulating about his own character: 'to my utmost astonishment I was informed that I attended bad houses... I felt hurt that I should be suspected of such a thing, and also from the consequences which it might occasion to a person with my views,'<sup>235</sup> Irving was very conscious of the need for his life and his reputation to measure up to the standards expected of, and by, Evangelicals.

In a letter to the mother of Jane Welsh written in December 1822, Irving described his appreciation of the Evangelical stalwart Thomas Scott, who was famously converted under the influence of John Newton when the latter took care of the suffering members of Scott's neglected Buckinghamshire parish. Scott was, for this reason, an emblem of Evangelical religion, a member of the Anglican clergy rescued from an 'unconverted ministry',<sup>236</sup> by the strenuous labours of an Evangelical neighbour. Irving clearly felt a strong affinity with the Evangelical Scott: 'I have read this morning part of the life of Thos Scott, the Commentator on the Bible which lies in your drawing room. He was a man. He was a Christian.'<sup>237</sup> He continued, in a manner typical of Evangelicals of his day, by

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233. Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 7.

234. *Ibid.*

235. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

236. *The Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry* was a sermon preached in 1740 by Gibert Tennant (1703-1764) that was particularly influential around the time of the 'Great Awakening' in New England. The Wesley brothers were another example of Evangelicals who considered themselves to have begun ordained ministry discovering only later that they were not yet 'converted' to a living form of Christian faith. This was a testimony relatively common amongst significant Evangelical leaders like Scott and Chalmers.

237. Edward Irving to Mrs Welsh, 6 December 1822, in *Ibid.*, p. 168.

encouraging his correspondent to partake of some improving reading: 'If it come in your way, I recommend it to your perusal. I also recommend Newton's *Cardiphonia*, a series of letters.'<sup>238</sup> The recommendation itself, far beyond its manner, was distinctively that of an Evangelical in early nineteenth-century Britain. John Newton was an Evangelical, and if possible, an even more powerful prize for Evangelicalism than Thomas Scott. Newton was a convert from the worst excesses of his age; a former slave trader, he had become a key agitator in the Evangelical campaign to abolish the trade in slaves and was the author of one of the best known Evangelical hymns of that or any other age: 'Amazing Grace'. Irving's literary recommendations in 1822 are hard to explain if they do not originate in Evangelical piety.

If 'a man is known by the company he keeps',<sup>239</sup> then Irving's early associations render the label 'Evangelical' appropriate. In Glasgow he was joint secretary of the Glasgow Auxiliary Bible Society,<sup>240</sup> and he acted at times as an emissary for Chalmers's ideas about the organisation of the church and social commonwealth. For example, on a trip to Ireland in 1820, he wrote to explain his delay in returning to Glasgow: 'there was excited amongst them a general wish that I should remain till the meeting of their union on Tuesday - in order to set forth to them en masse what of your Local Ideas I had expounded to them individually'.<sup>241</sup> His friendships with Thomas Chalmers, Robert Gordon and Andrew Thompson, with each of whom he shared a strong mutual esteem, put him in a circle with the leading Scottish Evangelicals of the day.<sup>242</sup>

Many of his early associates in London were Evangelical luminaries, even if his letters do, at times, express, with unflattering candour, his views of them. After a dinner with prominent members of the Clapham Sect, Irving wrote to Chalmers describing the likes of Thomas Baring and William Wilberforce as 'essentially

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238. Edward Irving to Mrs Welsh, 6 December 1822, in *Ibid.*

239. G.F. Townsend, H. Weir, and J. Greenaway, *Three Hundred Aesop's Fables* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1867), p. 182.

240. *Glasgow Herald*, Friday, 23 February, 1821

241. Irving to Thomas Chalmers, 3 August 1820, Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 89.

242. Oliphant poignantly comments on the sorry reality that some of Irving's closest friends and associates became his chief opponents. Oliphant, *Life*, p. vol.2 p.80.

stupid people'.<sup>243</sup> He was, nonetheless, welcomed as a prominent Evangelical in his own right as is illustrated by his numerous invitations in 1824 to address special events for mission societies in London, including his infamous appearance for the LMS.<sup>244</sup> Similarly significant is Irving's invitation, in 1825, to replace Robert Gordon in the pulpit at Hope Park Chapel in Edinburgh.<sup>245</sup> The nature of Gordon's ministry at Hope Park is well illustrated by a list of his sermons published in the same year:

The Ungodliness of the Human Heart, The Ungodliness of Worldly Pursuits... Necessity and Nature of Repentance...Necessity of Regeneration...The Humblest an Instrument of Good.<sup>246</sup>

That Irving was sought out by a delegation from the church to fill the pulpit from which those sermons had so recently been preached suggests that, at least in the eyes of some, Irving's Evangelical credentials must have been impeccable.

Certainly, Evangelicals in London considered him to be one of their own number. This, of course, made his frequent criticisms of the Evangelical establishment all the more stinging and hard to bear. On 1 May 1825, William Orme, pastor of the Congregational church at Camberwell, wrote an open letter to Irving, expressing in vivid terms the pain his Evangelical brethren experienced from his public attacks: '[The world] will naturally rejoice. It is a glorious thing with them to see one of the Evangelicals attacking the rest.'<sup>247</sup> Although Irving was never really a party man, as his criticisms of fellow Evangelicals reveal, he was, in the early years of his ministry, to the extent that any classification is appropriate for a man like Irving, an Evangelical. Indeed, in retrospect, Irving would refer to himself in just those terms.

In 1828, when Irving published the second volume of *Sermons Lectures and Occasional Discourses*, he wrote a dedication to Basil Montagu and his wife in

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243. Irving to Thomas Chalmers, 10 March 1823, Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 180.

244. Grass, *Watchman*, pp. 93-94.

245. See Irving's letter to The Elders of St Cuthbert's Edinburgh, 16 July, 1825. Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, p. 213.

246. Anonymous, 'Sermons By the Rev Robert Gordon DD Minister of Hope Park Chapel Edinburgh,' *The Congregational Magazine [formerly The London Christian Instructor]*. (1825),

247. William Orme, *An Expostulatory Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M: Occasioned by His Orations for Missionaries After the Apostolical School* (London: BJ Holdsworth, 1825), p. 7.



which he complained of 'the distance at which I was held from the affections of my Evangelical brethren, whom I had never persecuted, like Saul of Tarsus, but too much loved, even to idolatry'.<sup>248</sup> By the start of the following decade, Irving's earlier identification with Evangelicals was something he looked back on rather as though it was a misspent youth. In his 1831 Preface to *The Confessions of Faith and Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland*, he relayed that it was the article on the Lord's Supper from the *Scottish Confession* of 1560 'which delivered me from the infidelity of evangelicalism'.<sup>249</sup> In the same year, adopting the third person in a manner reminiscent of the Apostle Paul addressing the Corinthian Church,<sup>250</sup>

Irving wrote:

Again, I knew another man who came unto a flock which was literally no flock...but God was pleased to untie his Evangelical bonds, and to enlarge his knowledge, and to open to him the riches of Christ.<sup>251</sup>

That it is to himself, rather than another, that he refers, is made clear in the following pages where he writes, 'when God shewed me the more excellent way...I... laid aside all former ideas of my profession and submitted myself to the teaching of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>252</sup> The Irving of 1831 understood himself to have been an Evangelical in the past, but to be one no longer.

Although contributing to departure from Regent Square, Irving's new-found interest in biblical prophecy and the last things was not atypical for an Evangelical of his day; indeed neither was his interest in the *charismata* uncommon.<sup>253</sup> The most obvious breach between Irving and his contemporaries came in the the controversy over his teaching about Christ's human nature, which was also linked to his understanding of that central Evangelical shibboleth: the centrality of the Cross. The details of this teaching and its development will be the focus of the latter part of this study and so they will be dealt with in later chapters. For the sake of understanding Irving's biography, however, it is

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248. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, vol. 2, 333 (The page numbers are continued from the first volume).

249. Irving, *Confessions*, p. xcix.

250. 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Irving refers to this passage in Irving, *Coming of Messiah*, p. clxxix.

251. Edward Irving, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation, in a Series of Lectures by the Rev. Edward Irving*, vol. 2 (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1831), pp. 839-840.

252. *Ibid.*, pp. 841-842.

253. Cf Chapter 5 'Revival or Revision', pp.149-51

important to note that Irving's Christology came to be the focus of opposition to him and his ministry, and it was his distinctive teaching in this area that caused his dismissal from the ministry of the Church of Scotland.

In 1830, Irving's presbytery in London brought heresy proceedings against him in the light of this Christological teaching. Determined that his office was held on the basis of his ordination by a Scottish presbytery, not that of London (which had dubious legal standing), he walked out and refused the presbytery's right to try him.<sup>254</sup> In this matter his trustees at Regent Square stood firmly by him. The following year, however, with the outbreak of *glossolalia* in services at the National Scotch Church, the trustees no longer felt that they could support their pastor. Their objection was not so much theological as procedural: unlicensed persons were participating in the leadership of public worship, amongst them a number of women. The unruly interruptions of ecstatic utterance also offended their sense of decency and church order. After seeking legal advice, and in concert with the presbytery of London, they locked the gates of the church against Irving and had him removed as minister.<sup>255</sup> Irving finally faced a heresy trial over his Christology the following year. This time he could not deny the legal authority of his accusers, his ordaining presbytery of Annan, even if he denied their spiritual fitness to try him.<sup>256</sup> On 13 March 1833, convicted of 'printing, publishing and disseminating heresies and heretical doctrines, particularly the doctrine of the fallen state and sinfulness of our Lord's human nature',<sup>257</sup> Irving was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland.

The rest of Irving's ministry was conducted under the auspices of the nascent CAC, although that name was never given to or claimed by the movement during Irving's lifetime. An important factor in the beginning of that denomination<sup>258</sup> was that many of the Regent Square congregation moved with Irving. Initially this

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254. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 219.

255. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 300.

256. Presbytery of Annan, *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, AM, Before the Presbytery of Annan: On Wednesday, March 13, 1833: Also, Mr Irving's Letter to His Congregation* (London: W. Harding, 1833).

257. *Ibid.*

258. The Catholic Apostolic Church always refused to acknowledge that its members constituted a denomination - thus the development of the name - but it is hard to know how else to describe them.

group gathered around Irving at meetings in the open air and then in a rented room at the nearby “Horse Bazaar” before a more permanent home was made for them in a converted gallery in Newman Street. In this new movement Irving was a central member, serving as the ‘Angel’ (bishop) of the Newman Street church. The role of the tongues speakers was considered to be prophetic and so their utterances ‘in the power’ were considered to bear the authority of God himself. Alongside them a new, even higher, class of ministers was appointed, by words of testimony from the prophets themselves. Irving and his colleagues believed that, as the return of Christ was near, God would restore the New-Testament ministry of apostleship to the church. These apostles began to be appointed in 1832.<sup>259</sup> Thus Irving, despite his own high view of ministerial authority, became functionally subordinate not only to the prophets but also to those who had been appointed as ‘apostles’ by means of their prophecies.

Controversy had placed Irving under great strain and, during the last few years of his life, Irving aged very quickly. Gradually it became clear that Irving was suffering from tuberculosis and his health went rapidly downhill during 1834. He was convinced that, as a future ministry in Scotland had been prophesied for him, healing would be his. So in September 1834 he began a journey north to preach in Glasgow, rather than following the encouragement of his doctor and of friends like Carlyle who insisted that he must head to southern Europe to recuperate.

Irving’s healing never came. He reached Glasgow exhausted and though he managed a little ministry activity, it was not long before he began to fade. On 8 December 1834 he died, his last recognisable words being, ‘If I die, I die unto the Lord, Amen.’<sup>260</sup> He was buried in the crypt of Glasgow Cathedral, the service being attended by the clergy of the Glasgow churches, ready to honour a man they believed saintly despite their serious theological differences.

After his death, the CAC continued to grow and develop. By the time of Irving’s death it had six apostles in place: the full complement of twelve was reached soon

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259. Grass, *Watchman*, pp. 280-281.

260. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862).

after. The movement grew to become internationally significant but, when the expected date of Christ's return had come and gone and the apostles had begun to die, it became clear that it would not continue to prosper.<sup>261</sup>

In this outline of Irving's life, a number of factors that played into his development, both as an influential public figure and as an outcast, have emerged. First his parentage and upbringing were considered. Irving was shown, in various ways, to favour his mother's side of the family in considering his heritage, and this inheritance was seen to be associated with the ambitions he had, even at an early age, to be a continuation of Scotland's proud ecclesiastical tradition. As well as leaning on her heritage, the young Irving may well have been shaped by the fact that his mother was a more impressive character than his father. His later relationships with men and women showed some traits in line with this sort of childhood experience.

Irving's sense of descent from a line of spiritual warriors such as the Covenanters, the Huguenots and (in his mind) the Albigenses, was reflected in his spiritual courage and willingness to suffer. It has also been shown to be a likely factor in his courting of opposition, facing which he was able to reprise the experiences of his forebears. His personality, which was seen to be paradoxically generous and grandiose, also influenced his tendency to court and then inflame controversy.

His education under Adam Hope and then at the University of Edinburgh had its flaws, but the high level of achievement of his fellow students at the Annan Academy suggests that it was pretty much as good as any he could have received anywhere in the world at the time. His erudition, skill at argument and the breadth of his intellectual hinterland enabled him to engage with some of the great minds of his age and to produce published works at a prodigious rate. This capacity undoubtedly contributed to his success, but possibly also to his sense of his own intellectual unassailability and lack of discretion in controversy.

Irving's Romanticism has been seen to be a feature of his thought from the earliest evidences we have of his intellectual life. This approach to the world was

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261. Cf p.6 of this thesis.

an undoubted influence, not only on the content, but also on the form of his public delivery. He was seen, in this regard, to be a notable instantiation of the 'Spirit of the Age'. It was also shown that it is not possible to dismiss the possibility that Coleridge was a significant influence on Irving prior to their first meeting in London. Indeed, evidence has been presented that suggests that this influence was important.

The development of Irving's relationship with his wife, Isabella, in the shadow of an infatuation with his former pupil Jane Welsh, reveals a turmoil to his emotional life that was important to the development of his ministry in London. He tended to workaholicism and became fixated on the nature of temptation. The balm he found in his own struggles with temptation was to focus on the temptations of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. Irving's thoughts in this area fed into his ideas about the nature of the incarnation itself and were a factor in the development of the Christological ideas that were the epicentre of his later controversies.

Like any other historical figure, Irving was as much a product of his times as a shaper of them. This is nowhere more evident in Irving than in his adoption of radical eschatological views. With the political upheavals of Catholic Emancipation and the Great Reform Act, Irving and his generation witnessed the reshaping of the political landscape in Britain. Like Irving, many of them felt that they were experiencing the birth pangs of the apocalypse. On being offered a way to interpret both the scriptures and the times in which he lived by James Hatley Frere, Irving quickly became a leading figure at the prophetic conferences of Albury and Powerscourt. This development in his thought, particularly his concept of the Gentile Apostasy, also had the effect of offering a man who had always been uneasy in dealing with authority a reason to reject the established churches which he had formerly defended. His later ministerial career was characterised by a renewed eschatology and by controversies over Christology and the spiritual gifts.

The extent of Irving's theological metamorphosis is evidenced by his departure from the Evangelicalism of his youth. It has been shown that his early ministry is

rightly characterised as Evangelical and that he self-identified as the same, although he later disavowed this designation. An exploration of the changes in Irving's theology that underpinned his move away from his Evangelical roots was deferred until a later chapter. What is clear at this stage, however, is that Irving was much transformed over the decade of his sojourn in England's capital. By the end of his ministry it was only Irving's astonishing power as an orator that remained unaltered from his early days as London's favourite preacher.

## Chapter 4

# Seeds Bearing Fruit: The Intellectual Influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Although he was never without opponents, there was perhaps no fiercer critic of Edward Irving's early ministry than Irving himself would become. In 1831, he admitted to previously having been 'as ignorant of the truth of God as Evangelical ministers generally are',<sup>1</sup> which, coming from him at that time, was a searing indictment. His ideas had undergone significant development during the course of his London ministry and, from Irving's point of view, this transformation could best be understood by reference to his departure from Evangelicalism.

David Bebbington has described Irving as the transposer of 'evangelical theology into a Romantic key'<sup>2</sup> and, whilst it is clear that Irving's theology did not remain Evangelical, Bebbington was quite correct to note the importance of Romanticism to understanding Irving's thought. Furthermore, many of those seeking an explanation for the profound changes in Irving's mind during his London ministry have come to accept that Bebbington was correct in seeing Irving's Romanticism as central to this theological transformation.

In some ways this recent consensus echoes the explanation that came most readily to hand for Irving's near contemporaries: namely his relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Peter Elliott has argued that this explanation is mistaken because, 'although Coleridge influenced Irving's thought, Irving's Romanticism was flourishing before his first meeting with the poet-philosopher.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, 'Irving never subjected his adventurous Romantic agenda to that of the Sage of Highgate: admiration never became subjugation... Coleridge's influence

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1. Edward Irving, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation, in a Series of Lectures by the Rev. Edward Irving*, vol. 2 (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1831), pp. 839-840.

2. David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: the Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), p. 213.

3. Peter Elliott, 'Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis' (PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2010), p. 233.

on Irving was not as dominant as it has often been described'.<sup>4</sup> He concluded that 'in the three areas of Irving's greatest theological distinctiveness – Christology, the *charismata*, and millennialism – Coleridge had very little influence on him at all'.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, Irving's departure from Evangelicalism needs explanation. When he arrived in London in 1823, already a Romantic, he was an Evangelical; still a Romantic in 1831, he was by no means an Evangelical. Elliott is right to note that Irving's thought developed in the three areas he lists, but he also moved away from his Evangelical peers in two central aspects of Evangelical thought: his understanding of the Cross and of the nature of Scripture. As we consider Irving's development in these areas and their intellectual provenance, we do well to remember that Romanticism was far from a monolithic movement.

Indeed, the history of attempts to define Romanticism indicates just how broad a movement the term denotes. Writing in the 1920s, Arthur Lovejoy, historian of ideas, lamented that:

There is no hope of clear thinking on the part of the student of modern literature, if...he vaguely hypostatizes the term, and starts with the presumption that "Romanticism" is the heaven-appointed designation of some single real entity, or type of entities to be found in nature.<sup>6</sup>

By 1941 his despair of finding a definition had peaked, leading to his declaration that Romanticism had 'come to be useless as a verbal symbol'.<sup>7</sup> This was not to deny that there was an 'intellectual revolution of the Romantic period',<sup>8</sup> but rather to reject the lumping together of various intellectual movements that were divided by more than united them.

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

6. Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms,' *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 39, no. 2 (1924), p. 236.

7. Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, no. 3 (1941), p. 258.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 278.



After Lovejoy, the Czech critic René Wellek offered a defence of the 'Unity of European Romanticism' on the basis of similarities of style and approach.<sup>9</sup> This rejoinder to Lovejoy's dissection of Romanticism found ready acceptance in the field, to the extent that Jerome McGann could write, in 1992, that Wellek's approach was 'the bounding horizon for much of the work on romanticism done between World War II and the early 1980's'.<sup>10</sup> Wellek's attempt at defining Romanticism was not, however, watertight. As McGann has pointed out, Wellek's definition had no place for someone like Byron, who was undeniably a Romantic, but a figure whose work did not fit within Wellek's boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

Such was the breadth of the movement that an alternative approach to definition was required. Currently the most satisfying proposal is that offered by Lillian Furst, who used set-theory to argue for a unity of Romanticisms based on a 'net' of traits rather than one or two characteristics held in common by every member of the set.<sup>12</sup> The strength of this approach is that it admits family likenesses without excluding difficult cases like Byron or resorting to a procrustean approach to their work.

That such an approach to finding a definition of Romanticism has been required reveals just how much care is needed in using the term. Friedrich Schlegel's career illustrates the extent to which an individual could change, whilst still fitting within the designation 'Romantic'. As a *Frühromantiker* Friedrich Schlegel was politically radical, arguing in his 1796 *Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus* (Essay on the Concept of Republicanism) in favour of the right to revolution.<sup>13</sup> As Schlegel grew older his political views morphed powerfully, as he became first a Roman Catholic (in 1808) and then a diplomatic representative of

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9. René Wellek, 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History II. The Unity of European Romanticism,' *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 2 (1949),

10. Jerome McGann, 'Rethinking Romanticism,' *English Literary History* 59, no. 3 (1992), p. 735.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 737.

12. Lillian R. Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective: a Comparative Study of Aspects of the Romantic Movements in England, France and Germany* (London: Macmillan, 1969). This thesis has since been built on by Bode and Domsch, see: *British and European Romanticisms: Selected Papers from the Munich Conference of the German Society for English Romanticism*, Christoph Bode and Sebastian Domsch eds (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007).

13. See: *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, trans. Frederick C. Beiser. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

the Metternich regime (from 1809).<sup>14</sup> It is quite proper to accept that Irving was a Romantic at the beginning and end of his ministry and yet to argue that the fundamental structure of Irving's thought was changed radically through his relationship with Coleridge. There was more than one kind of Romanticism, and that embodied by Coleridge was highly distinctive in a British context.

In Irving's own time, and in his immediate posterity, there was little doubt that Coleridge's influence on Irving was powerful and pervasive. Charles Lamb (1775-1834) wrote about Irving to the essayist and critic Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) in 1824. He likened their relationship to that of rabbi and pupil, describing Irving as 'a humble disciple at the foot of Gamaliel S.T.C.'. <sup>15</sup> Four years later Hunt offered his own assessment, as part of his analysis of Coleridge:

Mr Irving, who, eloquent in one page, and reasoning in a manner that a child ought to be ashamed of in the next, thinks to avail himself now-a-days of the old menacing tone of damnation without being thought a quack or an idiot, purely because Mr Coleridge showed him last Friday that damnation was not what its preachers took it for.<sup>16</sup>

Hunt's implication was clear: Irving was entirely in Coleridge's thrall. This impression was also reflected in Thomas Chalmers's comment that 'Irving sits at [Coleridge's] feet, and drinks in the inspiration of every syllable that falls upon him.'<sup>17</sup>

An appreciation of Irving's intellectual debt to Coleridge was not limited to casual observers; Irving himself acknowledged it freely. As early as 1824<sup>18</sup> he advertised his new role as Coleridge's catechumen. The dedication to *For Missionaries after the*

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14. Hans Kohn, 'Romanticism and the rise of German nationalism,' *The Review of Politics* 12, no. 4 (1950),

15. Charles Lamb, *The Essays of Elia* (London: E. Moxon, 1869), p. 379. Gamaliel was a prominent rabbi at the time of the earliest Christians, best known in the Christian tradition for his defence of the apostles (Acts 5:34) and as the Jewish teacher of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3)

16. Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), pp. 51-52.

17. William Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh: Edmoston and Douglas, 1867), p. 127.

18. Although *Missionaries* was not published until 1825, the intended contents of Irving's preface was already common knowledge in 1824, as illustrated by Lamb's letter to Leigh Hunt in 1824 in which he quotes from it: 'I tell you he has dedicated a book to STC acknowledging to have learnt more of the nature of Faith Christianity and Christian Church from him than from all the men he ever conversed with'. Lamb, *Essays*, p. 379.

*Apostolical School*, written less than two years after his introduction to Coleridge, must have felt pointed to Chalmers after their much longer association:

you have been more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine, to my spiritual understanding of the Word of God, and to my right conception of the Christian Church, than any or all of the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation...<sup>19</sup>

Already Irving ranked Coleridge's influence ahead of that of any of his teachers, or even of Chalmers himself.

Nor did Irving balk at describing his relationship to Coleridge in terms that echoed Lamb's letter to Hunt. In a conversation with a man named McVickar, he described his own mind as fertile soil for Coleridge's ideas: 'his words sink into my mind like seeds in the ground, they grow up afterward, I know not how, and bear fruit'.<sup>20</sup> Freely admitting that he saw himself as a follower, Irving expressed, in the preface to *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School*, 'the gratitude of a disciple to a wise and generous teacher',<sup>21</sup> and offered Coleridge 'the first-fruits of my mind since it received a new impulse towards truth, and a new insight into its depths, from listening to your discourse...'.<sup>22</sup> Irving expressed his debts to Coleridge in terms that suggested that the older man had become the lodestar for his theological pilgrimage. Reading this, it would be natural to assume that his relationship with Coleridge had significantly altered Irving's theological path.

Nonetheless, the preface to *Missionaries* deserves to be treated with some caution. This purple passage could simply have been hyperbole on the part of the passionate Irving. The young preacher might simply have been expressing a sense of being star struck at meeting and finding conversation with such a great figure as Coleridge. However, this preface was not an isolated instance, nor was such language confined to the early years of their relationship. Irving addressed the copy of *Sermons Lectures and Occasional Discourses* that he presented to Coleridge in

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19. Edward Irving, *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School: A Series of Orations* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1825), pp. vii-viii.

20. Quoted in *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure ed (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 290.

21. Irving, *Missionaries*, p. ix.

22. Ibid.

1828 to 'my Sage Counsellor and most honoured friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge esq.'<sup>23</sup> His second volume under the same title was prefaced by a dedication to Basil Montagu and his wife, in which he wrote that 'I must ever acknowledge myself to be more beholden to our sage friend Mr Coleridge...than to all men besides, for the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus'.<sup>24</sup> After Irving's death, Coleridge's daughter Sara wrote that 'he acknowledged that to my father, more than to any one, he owed his knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus."' <sup>25</sup> Irving's pattern of referring to Coleridge in terms that suggested a unique and overwhelming degree of influence remained consistent throughout his career up until his death.

It is unsurprising, then, that his early biographers saw significance in this relationship to the development of Irving's thought. *Fraser's Magazine* carried a record of a Bryan Procter's<sup>26</sup> panegyric to Irving, delivered in 1835 at a meeting of contributors, referred to as the 'Fraserians'. Procter was in no doubt as to Coleridge's influence, stating that 'the lessons he taught Irving enabled him to bring at once into practical bearing upon theology and upon morals all the deepest truths of philosophy'.<sup>27</sup> As a concrete example of that influence, he adduced 'a course of sermons on the Trinity, which were preached in Hatton Garden'.<sup>28</sup> Irving's one-time assistant David Brown, who went on to a distinguished theological career of his own, recalled the influence of 'Coleridge, at whose feet [Irving] may be said to have sat for years, drinking in those incomparable outpourings...on almost every subject of human thought.'<sup>29</sup>

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23. Flyleaf to Copy of Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 1 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828). (held in British Library shelf mark C.126.i.8.)

24. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 2 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), p. Vol. II p.332.

25. Sara Coleridge to Mrs Plummer, 1825, in Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge.*, ed. Edith Coleridge (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), p. 127.

26. The author better known in his own day as 'Barry Cornwall'

27. Oliver Yorke, 'The Fraserians,' *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* XI, no. LXI (January 1835), p. 5.

28. Ibid.

29. David Brown, 'Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving,' *The Expositor* Series 3 Volume 6, (1887), p. 227.

Drawing on these and other sources, Margaret Oliphant described Coleridge's effect on Irving as changing him

in an instant...from the orator who, speaking in God's name, assumed a certain austere pomp of position...into the simple and candid listener, more ready to learn than he was to teach, and to consider the thoughts of another than to propound his own.<sup>30</sup>

Those closest to Irving believed Coleridge to have had a profoundly shaping influence on his thought, and this assessment came to receive wide acceptance.

Whether or not these testimonies are a valid assessment of Coleridge's influence on Irving should be discernible from Irving's writings. If these witnesses are correct, Irving's writings can be expected to bear a distinctively Coleridgean stamp. Now, to discern the mark of Coleridge in the thought of another is a task, ironically, at once straightforward and difficult. It is difficult because Coleridge's thought is recondite: the Methodist theologian James Rigg, writing in 1857, bemoaned that '[t]he obscurity of the Coleridgean philosophy and theology has long been a matter of common complaint. Coleridge himself is understood by very few.'<sup>31</sup> Another writer who agreed with this assessment was F.J.A. Hort, an Anglican theologian who was self-consciously an intellectual follower of Coleridge. He too considered that '[i]t is a common delusion that Coleridge is well known'.<sup>32</sup> Yet Hort goes on to reveal how observing Coleridgean influence might be, after all, a relatively straightforward task. Coleridge was such an unusual creature, he said, that he was hard to classify:

An author whose opinions will not range with those of any recognised party...occupies in general estimation what was once the place of a zoophyte or a platypus...and to no school of poetry, philosophy, politics, or theology was he unreservedly a friend or an enemy.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), pp. 189-190.

31. James Harrison Rigg, *Modern Anglican Theology: Chapters on Coleridge, Hare, Maurice, Kingsley, and Jowett, and on the Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement* (London: Alexander Heylin, 1857), p. iii.

32. F. J. A. Hort, 'Coleridge,' in *Cambridge Essays, 1855-58*, (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1856), p. 293. It might be observed that there is a difference between 'well known' and 'well understood', nonetheless, the context does suggest that Hort considered Coleridge ill-understood not simply unknown.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

The image of Coleridge as like a platypus, a mammal that lays eggs, is revealing. Coleridge did not fit into any of the neat classifications of his day; indeed he was not even typical of English Romantics. Thus, there is a distinct probability that, whilst Coleridge is difficult to understand, anyone writing in English whose ideas resembled those of Coleridge was influenced by him, as he was *sui generis*.

It would go well beyond the scope of this study to attempt to delineate Coleridge's thought, even its exclusively religious dimensions. We may, however, pause to outline it in the most general terms and then look briefly in a little more detail at what Coleridge had to say about the particular areas in which we can observe a change in Irving's thinking.

Coleridge saw himself as part of an intellectual revolution concerning the mind.<sup>34</sup> Whereas thinkers like John Locke (1632-1704) had employed a mechanical analogy for the workings of the intellect, Coleridge and other Romantics favoured organic metaphors. Coleridge, that is, understood thought more in terms of the growth of a plant than the workings of a machine. This rejection of what he called a 'mechanistic' approach was key for Coleridge. In his *Biographia Literaria* (1816), Coleridge describes Locke's as the first of a number of philosophical systems that he had tried to follow, but been unable to find any 'abiding place for my reason'.<sup>35</sup> What he meant by this is illustrated in his comment on Locke in *Aids to Reflection* (1825) where he diagnoses his error as 'taking half the truth for a whole Truth' by starting from the Aristotelian premise '*Nil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu*'.<sup>36</sup> For Coleridge, Locke, by denying the possibility of innate ideas, was limiting himself to the world of what Coleridge called the 'Understanding', by which he meant 'the faculty judging by the senses'.<sup>37</sup> The Understanding dealt only in terms of cause and effect, those things 'comprehended in Time and Space', but could not properly comprehend those things which Coleridge described as Spiritual, namely things which did not have a cause within space and time, such

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34. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 158.

35. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1 (New York: George P. Putnam, 1848), p. 254.

36. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, vol. (London: Taylor and Hesse, 1825), p. 73. Italics in the original.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 353.

as morality.<sup>38</sup> Thus in Coleridge's view, the 'Understanding' was the locus of scientific knowledge rather than philosophy.<sup>39</sup>

In Coleridge's view, the prevailing philosophical system of his age approached everything according to the ordering of this faculty of 'Understanding' to the neglect of what he described as the higher 'Reason' (the faculty for which he could find no place in Locke). In his preface to *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge set out four 'special objects'<sup>40</sup> in his intention for the book: the third of these being '[t]o substantiate and set forth at large the momentous distinction between Reason and Understanding.'<sup>41</sup> This distinction was, from Coleridge's own point of view, the *sine qua non* of his philosophical approach:

My philosophy (as metaphysics) is built on the distinction between the Reason and the Understanding. He who, after fairly attending to my exposition of this point...can still find no meaning in this distinction...for him the perusal of my philosophical writings, at least, will be a mere waste of time.<sup>42</sup>

To put it another way, Coleridge saw himself as a Platonist in a world of Aristotelians. Indeed, he divided the world into 'two classes of men'<sup>43</sup> who saw the world through the eyes of one or other of those two archetypal thinkers.

Coleridge's Aristotelians conceived of the world only according to sense data, whereas Platonists had a category for a higher kind of knowledge and contemplation:

With Plato ideas are constitutive in themselves. Aristotle was, and still is, the sovereign lord of the understanding; — the faculty judging by the

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38. Ibid., p. 73.

39. Ibid., p. 353.

40. Ibid., p. ix.

41. Ibid., p. viii. (when referring to Coleridge's distinction, 'Understanding' and 'Reason' will be capitalised according to Coleridge's tendency and placed in inverted commas to make it clear that these words are being used according to their specific, technical, Coleridgean definitions in distinction from common colloquial usage.

42. Quoted in Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796-1817: Coleridge's Responses to German Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 170.

43. This phrase taken from his *Table Talk* (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Hartley Nelson Coleridge, vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1835), p. 182.) became popularised by F.D. Maurice and was taken as the title for David Newsome's excellent exploration of Platonism in the English Romantics. David. Newsome, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* (London: J. Murray, 1974).

senses. He was a conceptualist, and never could raise himself into that higher state... in which the understanding is distinctly contemplated, and, as it were, looked down upon from the throne of actual ideas, or living, inborn, essential truths.<sup>44</sup>

When he spoke of Aristotle's inability to rise to 'that higher state', Coleridge was illustrating the importance of the Reason/Understanding distinction for him. His own intellectual quest was to demonstrate how one can transcend the particular to attain the ideal. Some historical context will be necessary to understand Coleridge's approach to this issue.

The rehabilitation of the Platonic distinction between the realm of 'Ideas' and the physical universe was by no means unique to Coleridge in his time. The intellectual descendants of Immanuel Kant shared this approach in common, and this has led to suggestions that Coleridge should be numbered amongst those who inherited this idea from Kant. Although our main concern is with Coleridge's influence on Irving rather than the genesis of Coleridge's thought, it is instructive to note the debate in the academy at this point. Steve Holmes reads the consensus as follows: 'It is now generally agreed that Coleridge's assertions that he formulated his ideas from English sources independently of Kant are to be accepted.'<sup>45</sup> Writing two years after Holmes, however, Monika Class claimed the exact opposite: 'the majority of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars do not agree' with this claim, she said, but name Kant as the source of Coleridge's ideal/particular distinction.<sup>46</sup> Dr Class points out the early provenance of this identification: 'Little more than a decade after Coleridge's death, F.J.A. Hort noted without a shadow of a doubt that the 'cardinal distinction of Coleridge's philosophy was obviously derived from Kant.'<sup>47</sup> That it is possible for two scholars to read the literature on Coleridge so differently from each other is revealing in at least two ways.

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44. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, pp. 182-183.

45. Steven R. Holmes, 'Coleridge,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. D. Fergusson, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 91.

46. Class, *Kantian ideas*, p. 170.

47. *Ibid.*



First, it demonstrates something of the complexities involved in studying Coleridge. He possessed a peculiar erudition: being ‘a library cormorant...deep in all out of the way books’,<sup>48</sup> who left six volumes worth of marginalia that demonstrate the depth and breadth of his reading. Not only were the influences on him extremely diverse and hard to trace, but his own cast of mind and his fragmentary, dilatory, working habits make a coherent study of his thought testing.

Secondly, the ongoing quest for influence and origins reveals just how much Coleridge had in common with his Romantic contemporaries in Germany. He was wrestling with ideas so similar to those that drove them, and often in the same terms, that he could easily be identified with them as driven by intellectual impulses derived from Kant. In his own day it was generally believed that Coleridge was unique in his insight into the German Romantics. Thomas Carlyle wrote, in his typically acerbic manner, ‘He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing by ‘the reason’ that which ‘the understanding’ had been obliged to fling out as incredible.’<sup>49</sup> John Stuart Mill, in his 1840 essay on Coleridge for the *London and Westminster Review*, speaks of Coleridge as having a ‘subordinate share’ in the ‘continental philosophy’.<sup>50</sup> Mill repeatedly used ‘Germano-Coleridgean’<sup>51</sup> as an adjective to describe the approach of Coleridge’s intellectual progeny.

The parallels between Coleridge and the German Romantics went far beyond their shared debt to the monumental influence of Kant. Indeed there was a long Neo-Platonic tradition in Europe, that even in the scholastic heyday of Aristotelianism had never been completely eclipsed. As well as a background in the writings of Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), Coleridge shared with many of the

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48. Letter to John Thelwall 19 November 1796

49. Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, ed. Henry Duff Traill, The Works of Thomas Carlyle, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 53.

50. John Stuart Mill, ‘Coleridge,’ *The London and Westminster Review* no. v. 33-34 (1840), p. 151.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 150, 151.

German Romantics an interest in the pietist mystic Jakob Böhme (1575-1624)<sup>52</sup> and the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). When accused of plagiarising the ideas of Schelling (1775-1854), Coleridge cited the common influence of these thinkers as the explanation for similarities between his ideas and those of his German contemporary:

[A]n identity of thought, or even similarity of phrase, will not be at all times a certain proof that the passage has been borrowed from Schelling... We had studied in the same school; been disciplined by the same preparatory philosophy, namely, the writings of Kant; we had both equal obligations to the polar logic and dynamic philosophy of Giordano Bruno; and Schelling has lately, and, as of recent acquisition, avowed that same affectionate reverence for the labours of Behmen, and other mystics, which I had formed at a much earlier period.<sup>53</sup>

Whether or not Coleridge was directly indebted to Schelling (a similar dependence on A.W. Schlegel (1767-1845) is also often alleged), he was certainly conscious that they expressed a number of the same ideas in very similar ways and were part of the same intellectual tradition. Coleridge expressed a lack of interest in 'who said what?' because, in keeping with his understanding of the 'Reason' as a part of the mind in touch with the Ideal, he believed that he, and they, were simply giving voice to truths that were self-existent: 'I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist: I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible.'<sup>54</sup> Coleridge saw himself and the *Frühromantiker* as ciphers for the transcendent and, as such, it would have been more surprising for him if they had not expressed substantially similar ideas.

We may now return to Coleridge's central question, which relates to his distinction between 'Reason' and 'Understanding': how does one transcend the particular to attain the ideal (and thus unite these two discrete means of knowing)? In pursuit of this quest, Coleridge adopted a mode of reasoning known as dialectic, which allows for a uniting of apparently contrary ideas.

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52. Coleridge spells his name Behmen; it is also written in modern English as Boehme. Thomas McFarland has an extended discussion of Boehme's influence on Coleridge in his *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)..

53. Coleridge, *Biographia*, p. 271.

54. *Ibid.*

Dialectics was nothing new (it can be traced back at least as far as Plato, and Coleridge encountered it in the seventeenth-century theologian Richard Baxter)<sup>55</sup> but it was nonetheless a method in resurgence in Coleridge's day. His German contemporaries had seized upon the dialectic as the means by which to address the tensions within Kant's philosophy. This dialectic is what Coleridge means when he speaks of his and Schelling's equal obligation to the 'polar logic and dynamic philosophy of Bruno'.<sup>56</sup>

The form of dialectical logic to which Coleridge was committed can be observed in his approach to knowledge. There is a unity of opposites, subjective and objective, that is irreducibly necessary to the act of knowing:

Both conceptions [subjective and objective] are in necessary antithesis...Now in all acts of positive knowledge there is required a reciprocal concurrence of both, namely of the conscious being, and of that which is in itself unconscious...During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs. There is here no first, and no second; both are coinstantaneous and one.<sup>57</sup>

Knowledge, for Coleridge, was of necessity a coincidence of two antitheses, subject and object. As such, knowledge itself offered a means for understanding the unity behind a diverse reality.

This unity of opposites, or 'poles' was programmatic for Coleridge in the whole of philosophy. He outlined his structured dialectic in an extended footnote in *Aids to Reflection*,<sup>58</sup> stating that all forms of logic are 'borrowed from Geometry',<sup>59</sup> and then going on to outline his logic in diagrammatic form. He began by placing two points or poles, 'Thesis' and 'Antithesis' on a horizontal line at the centre of which he placed the point of 'Indifference'.

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55. Tim Milnes, 'Coleridge's Logic,' in *British Logic in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods, Handbook of the History of Logic (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2008), p. 61.

56. Coleridge, *Biographia*, p. 251.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

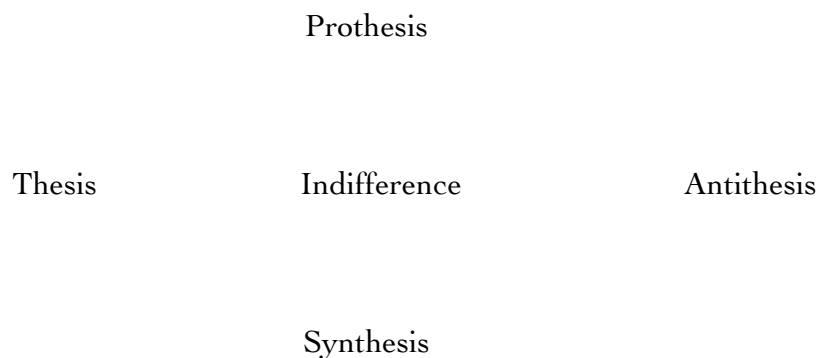
58. In *Aids*, Coleridge referred to a fuller description of his logic in another work, 'Elements of Discourse' which remained unpublished until the fragments intended for it were included in the *Logic*, released as Volume 13 in the Bollingen *Collected Works* (1981).

59. Coleridge, *Aids*, p. 172.

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The Indifference 'is to be conceived as both in so far as it may be either of the two former.'<sup>60</sup> What Coleridge meant by this was that the 'Indifference' was a term of relation: it could be equal to the antithesis relatively to the thesis and vice versa. Coleridge illustrated this by means of a chemical example 'Sulphuretted Hydrogen is an Acid relatively to the more powerful Alkalis, and an Alkali relatively to a powerful Acid.'<sup>61</sup> Viewed from either pole, the Indifference represents the other.

Having established this, Coleridge then introduced a fourth term, the 'Prothesis'. This term represents the 'unoriginated' origin of the two poles, 'or the Identity of T and A, which is neither, because in it, as the transcendent of both, both are contained and exist as one.'<sup>62</sup> Below the line Coleridge then placed a fifth term, the 'Synthesis or Composition', which was distinct from the Prothesis in that it was not transcendent. The Prothesis was a term that found 'its application in the Supreme Being alone...the Point, which has no (real) Opposite or Counterpoint'.<sup>63</sup> As such the 'Prothesis' is ineffable. The 'Synthesis', however, is not, and Coleridge was happy to illustrate the concept using examples drawn from the world of the finite, such as the 'several forms of Equilibrium, as in quiescent Electricity'.<sup>64</sup> After adding what has now become a vertical line to the horizontal, Coleridge's logic can be illustrated as follows:




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60. Ibid.  
 61. Ibid., pp. 172-173.  
 62. Ibid., p. 173.  
 63. Ibid.  
 64. Ibid.

In an extended footnote in *Aids to Reflection* Coleridge goes on to hint at an answer in his quest for the ideal. 'What is an Idea?' he asks. His answer is to peg out three sides of the triangle; the Prothesis is the 'Absolutely real'; the Thesis is the 'subjectively real'; and the Antithesis is the 'objectively real'.<sup>65</sup> From this point Coleridge simply places 'the Idea' at the centre of the diagram and points out that 'if it be conceived in the Subject the Idea is an Object...but if in an Object, it is a Subject'.<sup>66</sup> Thus the Idea becomes the means of contemplating at once (in Kantian terms) the phenomenon and the noumenon.

Coleridge's philosophical 'pentad', illustrates the similarity of his approach with that of the early German Romantics (*Früromantiker*) and with that of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) who all used the language of thesis, antithesis and synthesis (albeit in differing ways). Indeed, it should be remembered that Hegel began his intellectual career as a fellow traveller with the *Früromantiker* and shared lodgings with Schelling when they both attended the Tübinger Stift, a Protestant seminary attached to the university.<sup>67</sup> 'Novalis' (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772-1801)) even described the application of dialectic using 'romanticize' as a verb:

The world must be romanticized. In this way one rediscovers the original meaning. Romanticizing is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. The lower self becomes identified with a better self...Insofar as I give the commonplace a higher meaning, the ordinary a mysterious countenance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite an appearance of infinity, I romanticize it. The operation is precisely the opposite for the higher, unknown mystical and infinite - these are logarithmized by this connection — they become common expressions.<sup>68</sup>

Like Coleridge, the *Früromantiker* conceived of reality as an organic whole that was ultimately indivisible. Philosophy was the task of describing and demonstrating this unity. Coleridge, in that sense, had more in common with the German Romantics than he did with most of his English-speaking

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65. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 9.

68. Novalis II 545 (105) q. in Jane Kneller, 'Novalis' Other Way Out,' in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis, (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 202.

contemporaries, notwithstanding Sir Walter Scott's dialectical structure in the *Waverley* novels.

Where Coleridge did diverge from the Germans was, as we shall see, in the theological conclusions he drew from his philosophical foundations. As we turn to his theology, it would be natural to outline Coleridge's philosophical and theological 'system'. He himself believed that a systematic exposition of his thought would be the crowning work of his career: his 'Opus Maximum'.<sup>69</sup> However, he never completed this project to his own satisfaction, with the result that the combined fragments from his notebooks, published in the Bollingen edition as *Opus Maximum*, deliberately reproduces the hesitancy of the original by including the scored out words and phrases. Thus the critical edition of his most systematic work indicates by its form the difficulties inherent in defining a Coleridgean system.

There have, nonetheless, been recent scholarly attempts at a complete synthesis, notably in Jeffrey Barbeau's *Coleridge, the Bible and Religion*, and Luke S. H. Wright's *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Anglican Church*. Both works, which are insightful and scholarly, have nonetheless, perhaps inevitably, faced charges of reductionism. Wright's account presents Coleridge as a consistent high-church Tory throughout his career. This account requires him to describe Coleridge's own accounts of his career as a Unitarian preacher as a matter of the writer 'lying about preaching in order to gain subscribers'<sup>70</sup> which, if established, would require a substantial revision to the various biographies of Coleridge.<sup>71</sup> Barbeau on the other hand chooses to focus on the posthumously published *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, claiming that it establishes Coleridge's religious system and the framework for a complete recovery of his understanding of Christian doctrine'.<sup>72</sup> The boldness of this claim has drawn criticism, notably from Anthony Harding,

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69. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, ed. Thomas McFarland and Nicholas Halmi, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

70. Luke S. H. Wright, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Anglican Church* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 51.

71. See for instance Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), pp. 174, 176-181.

72. Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Coleridge, the Bible, and Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 161.

who points out that the edition of *Confessions* that Barbeau uses (published in 1840) is misleading because it creates ‘an impression of deliberation and finality that C[oleridge]’s ms, so close to the uncertainties and hesitations of composition, wholly lacks’.<sup>73</sup> Interesting exposition of Coleridge’s religious ideas though it is, Barbeau’s work tends to airbrush away the uncertainties and provisional nature of Coleridge’s texts. It seems better to speak of Coleridge’s ‘approach’ than his ‘system’: the latter term having an air of finality that is not appropriate to the existing sources of data.

Coleridge’s approach to theology can nonetheless be laid out, utilising the terms of his philosophical method. Just as he rejected the imbalance of the ‘Understanding’ relative to ‘Reason’ in Locke and others, Coleridge also eschewed a similar approach that he saw embodied in the Unitarian or Socinian theological tradition which he had espoused in his youth. His published works and notebooks bear repeated negative references to Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)<sup>74</sup> and William Paley (1743-1805).<sup>75</sup> Coleridge believed that Paley, himself a pupil of Locke, was a (perhaps *the*) prominent representative of the theological expression of the ‘mechanistic’ philosophy. Paley’s version of Christianity was fundamentally the Christianity of phenomena, so Coleridge wrote of ‘the evidences of Priestley and Paley’,<sup>76</sup> rather scandalously ranking the

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73. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H.J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 11 (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1111. q. in Anthony Harding, ‘Anthony Harding Reads *Coleridge the Bible and Religion* (Palgrave 2008) by Jeffrey W. Barbeau,’ *The Coleridge Bulletin New Series* 33, (2009), p. 134.

74. “Priestley, Joseph (1733–1804),” Robert E. Schofield in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, September 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.stir.ac.uk/view/article/22788> (accessed March 18, 2014).

75. “Paley, William (1743–1805),” James E. Crimmins in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.stir.ac.uk/view/article/21155> (accessed 18 March, 2014).

76. Coleridge, *Aids*, p. 350.

Anglican Paley together with the Unitarian Priestley as exponents of the same approach.<sup>77</sup>

Coleridge's search for an alternative to a philosophy based solely on the 'Understanding', was mirrored in his return to trinitarian orthodoxy. In his mind the two were inseparable: 'For I was at that time and long after, though a Trinitarian (that is *ad normam Platonis*) in philosophy, yet a zealous Unitarian in religion'.<sup>78</sup> This disjunction was untenable for Coleridge who passed 'through Spinosism into Plato and St. John.'<sup>79</sup> His confession of the Trinity, following the *Logos* theology of John's gospel (itself widely believed to have Platonic overtones), was worked out within his pre-existing Platonic approach.

Coleridge followed the same pattern in explaining his understanding of 'Revealed Religion' as he used to explain his theory of mind:

[A]s all Power manifests itself in the harmony of correspondent Opposites, each supposing and supporting the other, — so has Religion its objective, or historic and ecclesiastical pole, and its subjective, or spiritual and individual pole.<sup>80</sup>

Thus the dialectic informed his theology as much as his philosophy. Indeed, in a marginal note to Irving's *Ben Ezra* made in 1827, Coleridge produced a version of the 'logical pentad'.<sup>81</sup> The same diagram appears in the introduction to *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1835), in which it is labelled the 'pentad of operative Christianity'.<sup>82</sup>

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77. This could be seen as scandalous because this was effectively a charge of serious heresy against Paley. Coleridge was not the first to raise this spectre, however. Although Paley was at least formally orthodox he was widely suspected of Socinian tendencies and his pupil, William Frend, was expelled from Cambridge in 1793 for his Socinian views. For a full discussion see Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 49-58.

78. Coleridge, *Biographia*, p. 286.

79. James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1 (London: W. Pickering, 1838), p. 161.

80. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, 3rd ed. (London: Edward Moxon, 1853), p. 114.

81. Coleridge's presentation copy is held at the British Library. Edward; Lacunza Irving, Manuel Y Diaz, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty. By Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. Translated from the Spanish, with a Preliminary Discourse by E. Irving.* (London: L. B. Seeley & Son, 1827).

82. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, p. 36.



*Prothesis*  
Christ, the Word

*Thesis*  
The Scriptures

*Mesothesis, or the indifference*  
The Holy Spirit

*Antithesis*  
The Church

*Synthesis*  
The Preacher

We shall explore the significance of the tetractys for his understanding of revelation shortly, but for Coleridge its most important implication was the centrality of the Trinity for Christianity.

The doctrine of the Trinity was fundamental, as it cohered with his dialectical conception of reality, shared with Schelling, whilst protecting against the German's pantheism. It was here that he diverged from the *Frühromantiker*. Indeed, Rigg's assessment of Coleridge was that 'the cherished desire of the last twenty or thirty years of his life was to show the coincidence of the transcendentalism which he had adopted with the Christian Revelation — in a word, to harmonise Schelling with St. John and St. Paul.'<sup>83</sup> The means by which Coleridge attempted this integration was a figure taken from the school of Pythagoras called the tetractys.<sup>84</sup>

The use of a tetractys for the Trinity might sound a little odd, as it derives from the Greek word for 'four'; however, for Coleridge, it was the necessary means of expressing at once the unity and the threeness of the Trinity. In addition to the terms Father, Son (Word) and Spirit, Coleridge's tetractys included, as the Prothesis, 'Absolute Will'. This fourth term renders Coleridge's 'tetractys' distinct from the triad of 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis' that Schelling and Hegel derived from Kant via Fichte.<sup>85</sup>

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83. Rigg, *Modern Anglican Theology: Chapters on Coleridge, Hare, Maurice, Kingsley, and Jowett, and on the Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement*, p. 17.

84. Coleridge, *Aids*, p. 173.

85. Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, p. 89.

*Prothesis*  
Absolute Will

<i>Thesis</i>	<i>Mesothesis, or the indifference</i>	<i>Antithesis</i>
Father	Holy Spirit	Son (Word) <sup>86</sup>

Crucially, the addition of the Prothesis gave Coleridge a way of expressing the absolute unity and indivisibility of the other three terms and, by establishing a purely transcendent basis for the dialectic, offered him a bulwark against the pantheism into which so many of his Platonic contemporaries had fallen.

Whilst we have needed a somewhat extended discussion to get here, we have observed some of the things that made Coleridge such a highly distinctive thinker. Because he drew on many of the same Platonic and Neoplatonic sources as the *Frühromantiker*; he developed ideas sufficiently similar to theirs that he was open to the accusation of plagiarism, yet he was distinguished from them by his commitment to Trinitarian orthodoxy. Coleridge developed a distinctive version of the dialectic, based on the Pythagorean tetractys, with a fourth term encompassing Father Son and Spirit, expressing their absolute unity. The distinctive shape of his logic, the pentad and the tetractys, along with his emphasis on the Trinity, should be distinctly recognisable in Irving if he was indeed shaped by Coleridgean ideas.

It is with interest, then, that we observe that Barry Procter first noted Coleridge's sway on Irving 'in a course of sermons on the Trinity, which were preached in Hatton Garden'.<sup>87</sup> Yet Coleridge's influence on Irving was not limited to one locus of theology; in the previous chapter we noted that his turn to the study of eschatology was prompted by Coleridge,<sup>88</sup> albeit that his studies in this area would become a bone of contention between the two. This interest in the last things was hardly unique to Irving amongst his Evangelical contemporaries.

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86. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Collected and edited by H.N. Coleridge*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, vol. 3 (London: William Pickering, 1838), pp. 1-3. and The entry for 8 July, 1827, in: *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table Talk; Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, Carl Woodring ed, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 77.

87. Oliver Yorke, 'The Fraserians', p. 5.

88. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography' p. 85.

However, his departure from them in his ideas about the Atonement and Scripture, the two more obviously *theological* traits in the 'Bebbington Quadrilateral', is marked. What influence might Coleridge have exerted in these vital areas of Irving's theology?

Evidence of Coleridge's influence in what constituted a fundamental change of approach for Irving can be observed by considering a comment made by the older man in 1823, around the time of their first meeting. Coleridge described Irving, in a letter to his own son Edward, as 'certainly the greatest Orator I ever heard'.<sup>89</sup> This was not, however, an unqualified compliment. Coleridge was certainly impressed by the quality of Irving's abilities as a communicator, but he went on to add '(N. B. I make and mean the same distinction between oratory and eloquence as between the mouth + the windpipe and the brain + heart)'.<sup>90</sup> To Coleridge, Irving had the mechanics required of a great preacher but not necessarily the 'genius'. In a passage written eight years later, Irving seems to have come to share this perspective on his preaching: he had, in those early years, been constricted by 'the bonds and trammels of argument and oration'.<sup>91</sup> He believed his appreciation of ministry to have undergone such a metamorphosis that he could look down on his former self from new heights.

Indeed this passage, written in 1831, shows deeper signs of Coleridgean influence than simply Irving's view of his own *juvenilia*. He identified the means of his ministerial liberation as his decision to '[lay] aside all former ideas of my profession and [submit] myself to the teaching of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>92</sup> The first thing to notice about this is the extent of the change in Irving: he claims to have abandoned 'all former ideas of my profession'. Even allowing for the rhetorical bent of the orator, this statement is significant. Secondly the alternative to Irving's former argumentative and oratorical approach is submission 'to the teaching of the Holy Ghost'. This change may well reflect Irving's switch to extempore preaching, described in a letter to his wife dated 10 June 1828, which he

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89. Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1895), p. 726.

90. *Ibid.*

91. Irving, *Revelation*, p. 842.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 841.

considered 'will constitute an era in my ministry.'<sup>93</sup> He believed that the mainstay of his preaching had moved from his own gifts of 'natural reason'<sup>94</sup>, to the 'teaching of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>95</sup> This represents an acceptance of Coleridge's prescription as well as his diagnosis, for the exchange Irving sought to make of natural reason for the Spirit reflects Coleridge's understanding of the role of a Christian preacher as illustrated in his diagram above (p.120). In Coleridge's estimation, the preacher as 'mesothesis' is the point at which the Word and Spirit are co-ordinated in such a way that the preacher represents the Scriptures to the Church, becoming, as Coleridge put it, 'the sensible voice of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>96</sup>

It would be easy to mistake this move to extempore, Spirit-led, preaching as being a claim to the sort of prophetic ministry he expected to see restored to the church. However, despite his great hopes, Irving never believed himself to have received any of the miraculous gifts.<sup>97</sup> He also believed that, when voices were raised in ecstatic outbursts of glossolalia and prophecy in church meetings, the voice of Christ heard in the preaching of the word was complemented and answered by the voice of the Spirit in these utterances.<sup>98</sup> The miraculous gifts never supplanted the role of the preacher for Irving; rather, they were a supplement.

In his change of approach to preaching itself, Irving was, in fact, following Coleridge to the letter. We have already encountered Coleridge's 'Pentad of Operative Christianity'. At this point it will be instructive to hear something of Coleridge's explanation of this schema, as reproduced in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*:

The Eternal Word, Christ from everlasting, is the Prothesis, or identity; — the Scriptures and the Church are the two poles, or Thesis and Antithesis ; and the Preacher in direct line under the Spirit, but likewise the point of

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93. Quoted in Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 27.

94. Irving, *Revelation*, p. 841.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 842.

96. Coleridge, *Remains*, pp. 93-94.

97. Cf Chapter 3 'biography'

98. See Timothy Grass, *Edward Irving: The Lord's Watchman* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), p. 265.

junction of the Written Word and the Church, is the Synthesis. This is God's Hand in the World.<sup>99</sup>

The preacher, he goes on, is nothing other than 'the sensible voice of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>100</sup> It was to this role that Irving aspired, and this understanding of preaching is what he meant when referring to his own submission to 'the teaching of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>101</sup>

Coleridge was not simply presenting an isolated rethinking of the dignity of the office of the preacher. He was expressing his fundamental, metaphysical, understanding of the world and his religious epistemology. Irving's own writings reflect a considerable adoption of Coleridge's approach in this area. A particularly striking example is found in his 1827 *Lectures on the Parable of the Sower* in which Coleridge's distinction between 'Reason and Understanding' is seen at play.

[I]cy men of the intellect...who will have every thing proved to their **understanding**, before they will give it ear...and who despise the natural motions of their spirit towards purity and honesty and goodness ; holding all such emotions, which are the cravings of the **reason** of man after the revelation of God, to be no better than womanish weakness;<sup>102</sup>

This use of Coleridgean terminology is not mere coincidence. Irving expands on his meaning to explain the difference between what can be perceived by the understanding and that which can only be spiritually discerned.

But the Lord saith, 'No ! I will not plead my cause before your partial and divided being. Ye shall not scorn the spirit that I have put within you, nor expect me to speak to your sense as a piece of matter doth, or to your **understanding** as doth a phenomenon of the material world...I am a **Spirit**, and will speak to your **spirit** concerning righteousness and truth.'<sup>103</sup>

Irving's very conception of ministry was reshaped by an adoption of Coleridge's categories of thought and of revelation. Indeed Irving's move away from an

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99. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, p. x.

100. Coleridge, *Remains*, pp. 93-94.

101. Irving, *Revelation*, p. 842.

102. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc.*, p. 392. Emphasis mine

103. Ibid. Emphasis mine

Evangelical view of Scripture was closely related to this fundamental change in his approach.

Despite his hesitance over whether or not Irving should be classed as an Evangelical,<sup>104</sup> one aspect of the evangelical 'Quadrilateral' that Peter Elliott believes that Irving did fit was his 'biblicism'. There could be no argument over this, if only Irving's early career were in view. In his earliest writings he spoke of the words of Scripture as the very words of God himself. 'Who feels the awful weight there is in the least iota that hath dropped from the lips of God?'<sup>105</sup>

Speaking in the first person on behalf of a personified scripture, Irving wrote:

Mine ancient residence was the bosom of God; no residence will I have but the soul of an immortal; and if you had entertained me, I should have possessed you of the peace which I had with God, "when I was with him and was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him".<sup>106</sup>

He describes reading the Bible as 'listening to the voice of God',<sup>107</sup> and even describes the Bible as the 'audible voice of the Spirit'.<sup>108</sup> These were sentiments very much in accord with those of the Evangelicals of Irving's day.

In these early days Irving believed that divine aid was required in reading the scripture because:

'These two sentiments — devout veneration of God for his unspeakable gift, and deep distrust of our own capacity to estimate and use it aright, will generate in the mind a constant aspiration after the guidance and instruction of a Higher Power.'<sup>109</sup>

This twofold reverence for scripture and suspicion of self was entirely commonplace for an Evangelical of the day, as exemplified in Horatius Bonar's

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104. Cf Chapter 2 'Historiography', pp. 28-9.

105. Edward Irving, *For the Oracles of God, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, an Argument, in Nine Parts*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Hamilton, 1823), p. 5.

106. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 476-477.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

plea, 'let God be true and every man a liar, the Bible is the Bible still'.<sup>110</sup> By 1827, however, Irving's conception of the relationship between Word and Spirit had altered dramatically. Now he saw the intervention of the Spirit as necessary because revelation was addressed to the spiritual Reason as distinct from the Understanding.

With this change there was a concomitant transformation of Irving's appreciation for the Scriptures themselves. In his sermon 'The Idolatry of the Book - the Bible', he wrote that amongst Evangelicals the point at which 'the enemy hath worked his mines the most effectually, is the Holy Scriptures itself...the idolatry of the Bible.'<sup>111</sup> In Irving's view, quondam peers were guilty of 'converting religion into an objective thing, and the object they have chosen is surely the most worthy one, the written word ; but inasmuch as it is objective merely, it is idolatry.'<sup>112</sup> He explains that the outward letter on its own, merely objective, is dead. True spiritual life can only come when it is simultaneously something objective and subjective, 'and to make it subjective in us, the Spirit of God must work upon us the power of receiving it'.<sup>113</sup> At this point he has cast himself so much in the mould of Coleridge that he could almost be accused of the failing frequently alleged against his mentor: plagiarism. In *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, Coleridge wrote of 'Bibliolatry':<sup>114</sup>

[T]he main error of which consists in the confounding of two distinct conceptions, revelation by the Eternal Word, and actuation of the Holy Spirit... this cannot but be vague and unsufficing to those, with whom the Christian Religion is wholly objective, to the exclusion of all its correspondent subjective... Revealed Religion... is in its highest

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110. Horatius Bonar, *Man, His Religion and His World* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1851), p. 182.; Bonar was fond of quoting Romans 3:4, which is the source of the first part of this statement. See for example: Horatius Bonar, *Truth and Error; or Letters to a Friend on Some of the Controversies of the Day* (Edinburgh: W.P. Kennedy, 1847), p. 10.; Horatius Bonar, *Family Sermons* (London: James Nibet and Co., 1863), p. 405.;

111. 'On the Idolatry of the Bible' Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 4 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), p. 73.

112. 'On the Idolatry of the Bible' Ibid., p. 81.

113. 'On the Idolatry of the Bible' Ibid.

114. A concept which he seems to have adopted from Lessing: Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, p. 26.

contemplation the unity, that is, the identity or co-inherence, of Subjective and Objective.<sup>115</sup>

Irving's accusation of idolatry was levelled at his peers in the same language of subjective and objective, and rested on the same reasoning as Coleridge's. Irving's approach to Scripture would seem to have been substantially remodelled in imitation of the philosopher-poet.

The emergence of this idea in Irving's thought confirms this perception. Although Gavin Carlyle does not offer a date in the *Collected Writings* for the preaching of Irving's sermons on idolatry, including them in a collection which he dates to 'between the year 1822, when Mr Irving first settled in London, and 1832, two years before his death',<sup>116</sup> it is possible to suggest a date with some confidence. In a series of letters written to his wife in late 1825, Irving repeatedly uses the phrase 'idolatry of...' in a manner that suggests that this was a phrase that came readily to his mind in this period.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, the other place in his writings that picks up these ideas in the most similar terms is a sermon preached in 1825 for the Hibernian Society, entitled 'On Ireland's Evil Condition'.<sup>118</sup> In it he writes:

I shall never allow it to be said, uncontradicted in my presence, that the reading of the word, without the preaching of the word, is likely to accomplish any thing good or great in the church of Christ. It is after this idolatry of the book, the Bible, that the ignorance of Protestants runneth.<sup>119</sup>

The similarities with the undated sermon on idolatry, together with the similarities of sentiment and expression in his sermon for the Hibernian Society, suggest that these are ideas that began to emerge clearly in the autumn of 1825, the period of greatest intensity in Irving's friendship with Coleridge.<sup>120</sup> One further piece of evidence that corroborates that Irving self-consciously altered his

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115. Ibid., pp. 87-92.

116. Handwritten on flyleaf of Irving, *CW iv*.

117. Letter to Isabella Irving 26 October 1825 quoted in Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 257.

118. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 3 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), pp. 1221-1222.

119. Ibid., p. 1241.

120. Cf Chapter 3 'Biography' p.81



view of Scripture under Coleridge's influence is Henry Crabb Robinson's recollection in a diary entry for 15 June 1826. On that date Robinson wrote of his pleasure with Irving who said that 'Coleridge had convinced him that he was a bibliolatrast'.<sup>121</sup>

Alongside the changes in his approach to revelation, Irving's departure from Evangelical norms can be seen in his understanding of the work of Christ, and in particular the significance of the crucifixion. Writing in 1830, where Evangelicals spoke of 'the remission of sin through the blood of a satisfying atonement',<sup>122</sup> Irving accused them of gross distortion, calling this 'the stock-jobbing theology of the religious world'.<sup>123</sup> He saw the incarnation as the decisive act of redemption, speaking of 'at-one-ment':

If it be, as the English word plainly imports, the condition of being at one with God; then is there no such atonement wrought, or procured, or exhibited as done in Christ, unless he did join in personal union and harmony and oneness, for ever, the two several and separated and discordant things; namely, the nature of God, and the nature of the apostate sinful creature.<sup>124</sup>

The reconciliation of humanity with God was achieved by the uniting of the divine nature and fallen human nature in the incarnation. For Irving, the incarnation was the 'at-one-ment' and not the Cross. We will pay more attention to the detail of this in a subsequent chapter. For now it is enough to note the profound change in the structure of his thought. The central locus for Irving's doctrine of redemption was found not at Calvary, but in the Virgin's womb.

It must be admitted that, even in Irving's early days in London, the imagery of his preaching was not as saturated in the blood of Calvary as that of some of his Evangelical contemporaries. However, although Irving suspected an antinomian

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121. Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), p. 43.

122. Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works of Thomas Chalmers: Prelections on Butler's Analogy, Paley's Evidences of Christianity, and Hill's Lectures in Divinity* (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1852), p. 121.

123. Presbytery of London, *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: Presbytery of London, 1831), p. 30.

124. Edward Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature Set Forth, in Four Parts, etc.* (Edinburgh: John Boyd, 1830), p. 88.

strand to much evangelical emphasis on the Cross, sacrifice was by no means an absent theme in the sermons he preached in Hatton Garden. On one of the two sacrament Sundays of his first year in London, he preached an evangelistic sermon entitled 'Christ the Propitiation'.<sup>125</sup> During 1823, attenders at the Caledonian Chapel would hear Irving speak of 'the free forgiveness purchased by the death of Christ',<sup>126</sup> and 'the benefit of the great atonement made for human guilt by the Son of God, the common saviour of the human race'.<sup>127</sup> In a sermon reported in *The Pulpit* from the evening of Sunday 6 April, he explained that, 'It is the weight of a ruined world that lies so heavy upon us; and which, but for the interposing mercy of God, who has sent his only Son to shed his blood for our redemption, would sink us into utter perdition.'<sup>128</sup> In March 1824, his preaching continued to explain the fundamental change in the human condition as resulting from the crucifixion: 'You can remember the melancholy that sat enthroned like the night-mare on the bosom, from which it hath been rescued and made cheerful by the blood of Christ.'<sup>129</sup> In fact some of the earliest criticism that Irving faced accused him of erroneously emphasising the penal nature of Christ's death:

You want to conjure down that phantom of your own raising...and to make us believe, that Christ accomplished this by obeying the behests of your law, and suffering the penalties inflicted by such justice, in our behalf.<sup>130</sup>

It is hard to imagine an accusation such as this being levelled against the man who in 1828 wrote, 'if that [penal substitution] is the meaning of their imputation and substitution, or by whatever name they call it; away with it, away with it

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125. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 58.

126. Irving, *Oracles*, p. 395.

127. Edward Irving, 'Men's Duties in the Present Times...The substance of a sermon preached in the Caledonian Chapel, Hatton Garden, in July 1823,' in *The Holy War; a Vision. A Poem in Five Books. To which is Added, the Holy War, in Prose. Also, Men's Duties in the Present Times*, ed. 'John Bunyan (redivivus)', (London: William Cole, 1825), p. 173 (emphasis mine). Although published in 1825 this sermon was actually preached in 1823.

128. Sermon preached at the Caledonian Chapel, Hatton Garden, Sunday Evening, 6 April 1823, British Library: Bound volume of Sermons by Edward Irving, taken from *The Pulpit and The Preacher, 1823-1833*. 764h10 London,

129. *The Pulpit* vol. II (56), Thursday 15 May 1824, record of a sermon preached 21 March. *Ibid.*, p. 405.

130. ('A Layman') Anonymous, *An Examination and Defence of the Writings and Preaching of the Rev. Edward Irving, MA, Minister of the Caledonian Church, Cross Street, Hatton Garden: Including Copious Extracts from His "Four Orations for the Oracles of God," and His "Argument for Judgment to Come"* (London: John Fairburn, 1823), p. 25.

from my theology for ever: for it makes my God a God of fictions, a God of variableness, a God of make-believes, and not of truths.<sup>131</sup> His approach to redemption and atonement changed dramatically between 1824 and 1828, putting him at odds with his Evangelical contemporaries.

This reorientation in Irving's system offers another striking echo of Coleridge, who wrote:

[N]o one point, as for instance the Redemption by Christ's Assumption of Humanity as the unique, sole possible means of Salvation [...], can be denied or doubted without the annulment of Christianity *in toto*.<sup>132</sup>

Not only does this note reveal the importance of the incarnation for Coleridge, but it begins to illustrate its function within his system. His use of the phrase 'Redemption by Christ's Assumption of Humanity' suggests that he shared a similar approach to Irving. The apparent similarity of thought between the two men at this point is heightened when we note that it was in fact Coleridge who coined the usage of 'at-one-ment' in *The Statesman's Manual*.<sup>133</sup> In a note on this passage in Irving, Coleridge admitted himself the originator of this wordplay, albeit regretfully: 'It is strange that I, the originator of this sense of atonement, should have publicly, i.e. in a printed work, recanted it as a grave pun: and that Mr I. should have wedded himself to this cast-off Dalila!'<sup>134</sup> The word play was Coleridge's, but only Irving had ongoing use for it.

Although Coleridge rejected Irving's continued adoption of 'at-one-ment', he expressed the same concept of redemption by incarnation repeatedly. For example in summer 1830 he wrote in his notebooks that '[t]he restitution of the fallen Spirits to the Pleroma was the object of his incarnation'.<sup>135</sup> On 15 October 1833, he wrote: 'The Trinity is the Idea, the Incarnation, which implies the fall, is

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131. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 116.

132. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1834*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding., vol. 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 5215.

133. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual: A Lay Sermon* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1816), p. ii.

134. 'S.T.C.' Marginal note on Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. 140 (xliv).

135. Note from Summer 1830. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1834*, p. 6355.

the Fact, the Redemption is the mesothesis of the two — the Religion.<sup>136</sup> By mesothesis Coleridge refers to the middle term in his dialectic, ‘the indifference’. Thus, in describing redemption as the mesothesis between the incarnation and the Trinity, he is stating that Christianity is the point at which the ideal Trinity and the earthly incarnation are reconciled and expressed relative to each other. Christianity, for Coleridge, looks to the incarnation and the Trinity as the two poles which define it.

This dialectical understanding of ‘Redemption’ meant that Coleridge’s understanding of the heart of the Christian faith was metaphysical rather than juridical. He recognised that this was a departure from the theology of the Reformers and thus from their theological heirs. Evangelicals, such as Edward Bickersteth, would write that in the Son’s sufferings on the Cross, ‘we behold the immutable justice...inflicting the righteous penalty of a violated law’.<sup>137</sup> believed to be the heart of the Gospel. Coleridge could not, however, accept ‘[t]he Scheme of *Pardon* by transfer of the original Sentence from the Sinful to the Sinless’.<sup>138</sup> He counted himself as part of the group of theologians that ‘cannot degrade the Divine justice into a fatal appetite for the infliction of PAIN’.<sup>139</sup> Instead of this kind of forensic act of redemption, Coleridge looked for a ‘redemptive *process*... co-extensive with Human Nature’.<sup>140</sup> This was the message Coleridge discovered in Paul and John. He concluded his note by stating that, instead of the sort of redeemer described by the ‘Calvinists’, ‘the Evangelist speaks of *the* WORD made flesh’.<sup>141</sup> In other words, the redemption was not achieved by sacrifice but by incarnation.

So strong was Coleridge’s aversion to the idea of the Cross as ‘sacrifice’ that he wrestled with those parts of scripture that seem to indicate a continuity between the events of Good Friday with the system of blood sacrifices recorded in the Old

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136. “Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table Talk; Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)”, p. 444.

137. Edward Bickersteth, *A Treatise on the Lord’s Supper; Designed as a Guide and Companion to the Holy Communion* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1849), p. 32.

138. Note 5564 July/August 1827. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*.

139. Note 5564 July/August 1827. Ibid.

140. Note 5564 July/August 1827. Ibid.

141. Note 5564 July/August 1827. Ibid.

Testament. In his notes on the New Testament letter of Romans, he wrote in the spring of 1829 that, 'St Paul would have recoiled as from a blasphemy from the notion of the modern Calvinists of an arbitrary lawless Act of the Will which is essential Reason.'<sup>142</sup> This was an apriori statement that he set out to guide his interpretation of Paul's reference to:

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past...<sup>143</sup>

He found the verse sufficiently difficult to square with his understanding of redemption that he wrote, 'I confess, that <in> this & the following verses the Apostle's Reasoning is anything but luminous and the construction not always clear', going on to comment that, 'I cannot help considering [this] as the most clouded & perplexed passage in the Epistles'.<sup>144</sup> He worked out an explanation, although not entirely to his own satisfaction, that this was intended as an *apologia* for a Jewish audience, in which Paul was at pains to stress the continuity of Christ with the religion of Moses.

In the end he sought proof for this gloss not in the text itself but in his wider system of interpretation:

If St Paul held the belief of St John respecting the nature of Christ, he must have held likewise the Consequences of that belief—i.e. a renewal of the divine image by being born again in Christ, or by the birth of the Christ = the divine Humanity in us.<sup>145</sup>

As far as Coleridge was concerned, the essential dogma in the theology of Paul and John is that the incarnation is *the* locus of God's redeeming work and that the redemption in question consists in a transformation of human nature by that incarnation.

Thus, the overall system of redemption set forth by Coleridge is essentially similar to that of Irving. The incarnation represents the bringing together of the

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142. Note 6006 March/April 1829. Ibid.

143. *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Romans 3:24–25.

144. Note 6006, March/April 1829. Ibid.

145. Note 6006, March/April 1829. Ibid.

disparate parties, divine and human nature: 'The Son of God submitted to be of one Kind with Men. He took up the Humanity into his Divinity, as the Mordant, or common medium, without which no affinity is possible'.<sup>146</sup> Coleridge recognised that Irving was following him in this view of the incarnation. In the leaves at the beginning of his copy of *Sermons Lectures and Occasional Discourses*, he wrote complaisantly of Irving's 'higher views, the mysterious death-conquering energy of the sinless Will, and the possibility of reunion with the Deity with that divine Humanity which is the *Ground* of the humanity or spiritual Personēity in every Person.'<sup>147</sup> He believed Irving to be correct in seeing redemption more in terms of the incarnation than of the sufferings of Christ. In fact his quibble with Irving at this point was that he 'cannot or rather will not, leave hold of the old prison-mumpsimus of the Debtor and Creditor Account, so much pain & suffering for so much Sin'.<sup>148</sup> Although Coleridge believed that Irving had escaped the 'strongly-woven Spider-web of Calvinism', he feared that he had 'carried off with him a portion of the Threads and viscous bonds'.<sup>149</sup> Irving's departure from his former Evangelical crucicentrism, substantial though it was, was not yet complete to Coleridge's satisfaction in 1828. Nonetheless it has been shown that Irving had significantly changed course in this area, and that, once again, the direction was set by Coleridge.

What, though, of Irving's other great controversial subject, the charismata? Can Coleridge really be thought to be a key influence behind this too? After all, Irving was not alone amongst Evangelicals of his time in seeking a restoration of the miraculous gifts.<sup>150</sup> What's more, we have already traced a little of how Irving's expectations of renewed charismata grew out of his own apocalyptic outlook.<sup>151</sup> Yet, surprisingly, there is evidence that Coleridge did indeed have a part to play even in *this* fateful turn in Irving's career.

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146. Note 5816, March 1828.Ibid.

147. Flyleaf to Copy of Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc.* (held in British Library shelf mark C.126.i.8.)

148. Flyleaf to Copy of Ibid. (held in British Library shelf mark C.126.i.8.)

149. Flyleaf to Copy of Ibid. (held in British Library shelf mark C.126.i.8.)

150. Cf Chapter 5, 'Revival or Revision', p.p. 149-51

151. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography', p. 90.

We observed in Chapter 3 that, in Summer 1830, a party of inquirers was sent from Regent Square to assess the claims of a revival of the gifts in the Gareloch.<sup>152</sup> Before that party was dispatched, Irving sought counsel about these occurrences from Coleridge himself. Bearing with him Thomas Erskine's letter recounting the events in the Gareloch, he rode, on 4 June, with a new acquaintance, John McVickar, in a carriage up Highgate Hill.<sup>153</sup> McVickar later wrote up an account of this visit for the press. He describes how Irving prefaced his request for Coleridge's counsel by describing him as being the man 'from whom I have gained more wisdom than from all other men living'.<sup>154</sup> He then produced Erskine's letter and asked Coleridge, 'How is this to be regarded?'. McVickar records Coleridge's solemn, oracular, response as follows:

"Sir...I make no question but that it is the work of the holy spirit, and a foretaste of that spiritual power which is to be poured forth on the reviving Church of Scotland...These events...in my opinion, are nothing less than the outpouring of the Spirit, promised in all ages to the Church, and long withheld from the deadness of its faith."<sup>155</sup>

In McVickar's recollection, Irving, apparently unsure what to think about Erskine's letter, submitted himself as a disciple or a pupil to Coleridge. Coleridge on the other hand showed no sign of hesitation and expressed exactly the doctrine about spiritual gifts that Irving had begun to teach in 1827. This extraordinary account requires that we consider the possibility that Irving was led into his restorationist teachings by Coleridge himself.

Though at first blush this might seem surprising, it ought perhaps not to be so. We noted previously that Coleridge's understanding of divine revelation, in which he was largely followed by Irving, was essentially 'spiritual' as opposed to objective, and required an ongoing and lively ministry of the Spirit in the church. In the section of *Aids to Reflection* in which he lays out what distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, his list includes:

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152. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography', p. 91.

153. William A. McVickar, *The Life of the Reverend John McVickar, S.T.D.* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1872), p. 129.

154. Quoted in "Connection", p. 290.

155. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 291.

IV. The belief in the awakening of the Spirit in them that truly believe, and in the communion of the Spirit, thus awakened, with the Holy Spirit.

V. The belief in the accompanying and consequent gifts, graces, comforts, and privileges of the Spirit...<sup>156</sup>

Coleridge's renewed Trinitarian approach to theology was not simply theoretical: the Spirit's active work was essential to the Christian life. This need not of course mean that he expected to see the miraculous gifts of the New Testament at work in Georgian London, but it does leave that possibility open.

What evidence is there that Coleridge might have been amenable to the idea of ongoing *charismata*? First there is the slightly oblique comment made at the end of his manuscript notes on *For Missionaries after the Apostolical School*, in which he identified the weakness of Irving's argument as being that he was arguing for an apostolic ministry whilst denying the present activity of apostolic gifts.

...[I]t is ... to be regretted that he had not... met the main objection of his antagonists, the miraculous Gifts of the apostolic missionaries. [His readers] say to themselves ["To whom Christ commanded a supernatural independence of human means and aids, to them in the same commission he delegated superhuman powers.["]<sup>157</sup>

On first observation, this could be simply an example of Coleridge's acute insight. Perhaps he simply recognised that Irving's pastoral and theological trajectory inevitably would result in an insistence on the return of the gifts. A note added, in a different ink, to the same margin suggests that there might be another way to read this comment:

The time is not yet come for man to believe what they would actually find in Luke's Acts of the Apostles if they looked at the contents with the naked Eye - instead of Katterfelto's Glass, that shewed 500 non-descript animals, each as large as his black cat in a drop of water.<sup>158</sup>

A plain reading of Acts, as opposed to the microscopic examination of the text, would require a kind of belief for which his contemporaries were unprepared. Could it be that Coleridge did not believe that the gifts had ceased because they

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156. Coleridge, *Aut*, p. 128.

157. Edward Irving, *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School: A Series of Orations*. (Coleridge's Copy, British Library shelfmark: C.61.c.8.) (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1825), p. 131.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 132.



were no longer available, but that they were simply absent because of a lack of faith?

Certainly Coleridge's reinvigorated Trinitarianism led him to seeking a more active role for the Spirit in the Church. It is equally certain that he was interested in the concept of *glossolalia* before Irving had encountered him, for he made detailed notes about the tongues in Acts and the epistles. In his notes on Acts it is clear that Coleridge doubted the authenticity of verses 5 to 12 of chapter 2, in which the writer describes speakers of many nations astonished to hear the unlearned disciples declaring the wonders of God 'ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις'.<sup>159</sup> Coleridge believed this section to be an 'interpolation' or 'augmentation...tho' of very ancient date'.<sup>160</sup> He sets out the steps in his argument in as follows

[F]irst to prove from the N.T. Itself, that no such Miracle ever existed—  
2nd — the senselessness of the miracle in the first instance— 3— it's  
worse than uselessness— 4. it's contrariness to all the Analogy— & then  
to examine the verses themselves.<sup>161</sup>

Coleridge's rejection of the account of the miracle did not arise, although his notes suggest he was aware of claims to the contrary, from an opposition to the miraculous *per se*. In the following note he describes it as 'folly' to attribute his 'scepticism to a desire of discrediting the miracles of the O. and N. Testament generally, or of ~~grounding my doubts on~~ supposing that I rejected a particular incident, ~~on the~~ because it was miraculous'.<sup>162</sup> He reasserts his belief in a number of specific miracles recorded in the New Testament, including the raising of Lazarus and the turning of water into wine at the wedding of Cana. If Coleridge's rejection of those verses in Acts 2 was not a symptom of anti-supernaturalism, why was he so unwilling to accept the existing account of the tongues on the Day of Pentecost?

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159. Acts 2:11 *The Greek New Testament*, ed. Eberhard; Nestle Nestle, Erwin; Aland, Barbara; Aland, Kurt ; Karavidopoulos, Johannes; Martini, Carlo M.; Metzger, Bruce M., 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). 'each in our own tongue' (my translation).

160. Note 5776, 23 February 1828. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*.

161. Note 5776, 23 February 1828. Ibid.

162. Note 5777, February 1828. Ibid. The crossings out of Coleridge's manuscript are preserved here.

The answer lies in the type of miracle being described. The concept of speaking in unlearned languages made no sense to Coleridge, as it contradicted his concept of inspiration (as expressed in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*). In a note of September 1829, he explicitly coupled his ‘opponency to the supposed Miracle of the Gift of Tongues’ with his rejection of the identification of inspiration with what he called ‘Superhuman Dictation’.<sup>163</sup> A note of April-May 1829 reveals that he felt that the best way to understand the phrase ‘to speak in tongues’ in 1 Corinthians 14 was not to refer to speaking unlearned languages, but ‘[t]hat γλωσση λαλειν = to speak ecstatically’.<sup>164</sup> In this note he tellingly refers the common understanding amongst commentators to a misapprehension of ‘the Second Chapt. Of the Acts’.<sup>165</sup> Notes made in November 1828 also confirm this idea. Writing about Acts 19 and the coming of the Spirit on the Gentiles at Ephesus, in which ‘ἐλάλουν τε γλώσσαις’,<sup>166</sup> Coleridge comments on the ‘absurdity of the common notion, respecting the miraculous power of conversing in unknown languages’,<sup>167</sup> insisting instead that what is described is ‘extraordinary seizures and ecstatic utterances’.<sup>168</sup> In his mind, the ‘tongues’ of the New Testament were not human languages but expressions of spiritual rapture.

At the meeting with Irving and McVickar of June 1830, Coleridge and McVickar argued over the nature of the biblical tongues. McVickar insisted that they were intelligible languages, on the basis of Acts 2. Coleridge responded by quoting Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: ‘He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto men but unto GOD, for no man understandeth him’.<sup>169</sup> Paul’s entire argument in the section was surely based ‘on the supposition that the saints often spoke in tongues which no man understood?’. When McVickar responded by appeal to the second chapter of Acts,

he finally cut short the argument with denying the genuineness of the chapter that contained it; and concluded with reiterating his first

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163. Note 6079, Sept 1829. Ibid.

164. Note 6029, April-May 1829. Ibid.

165. Note 6029, April-May 1829. Ibid.

166. ‘they spoke in tongues’ (languages) Acts 19:6

167. Note 5928, November 1828. Ibid.

168. Note 5927, November 1828. Ibid.

169. Quoted in “Connection”, p. 292. Coleridge was quoting 1 Corinthians 14:2.

assertion. “These events,” said he, “in my opinion, are nothing less than the outpouring of the Spirit, promised in all ages to the Church, and long withheld from the deadness of its faith.”<sup>170</sup>

This last comment from Coleridge suggests very strongly that he did indeed mean, in his marginal note on *Missionaries*, that the Church was unprepared to believe the manifestations of the Spirit that they would expect if they read Acts plainly.

As described in a previous chapter, Irving moved from a cessationist position, expressed in *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School* (1825), to an expectation that the gifts would be renewed, expressed in a sermon of August 1830.<sup>171</sup> In the earlier sermon, he claimed that the gifts ended;<sup>172</sup> by 1830 he was expressing a conviction that they had disappeared from the Church through a lack of faith, but would now be restored to a new breed of missionary.<sup>173</sup> If the correlation between Irving’s development in this area and the criticisms Coleridge made in the margins of *Missionaries* along with his adoption of Coleridge’s belief that the gifts perished for lack of faith is striking, Irving’s submission to Coleridge’s assessment of the events in the Gareloch is remarkable. It would seem, *mirabile dictu*, that even in the area of the *charismata*, Irving took his lead from Coleridge.

It has become evident in this chapter that Irving’s thought took on a new shape under the influence of Coleridge. Whilst it is clear that Edward Irving was a Romantic before he met Coleridge, it is also clear that, unqualified, ‘Romantic’ is an insufficiently precise term to be of much value in understanding the influences on Irving’s developing thought. Romanticism was a sufficiently broad movement that it is quite possible to suggest that his thought underwent radical structural change and still hold that he began and ended his career as a Romantic.

Irving himself, his contemporaries and the generation that followed ascribed to Coleridge a central role in his theological transformation, although Peter Elliott

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170. Quoted in *Ibid.*

171. Cf Chapter 3, ‘Biography’, p. 91.

172. Irving, *Missionaries*, p. xxiii.

173. Joseph Hunter, ‘Biographical Notices of Contemporaries: 1827-1836 (Edward Irving),’ *British Museum Additional Manuscripts 56527* (August 31 1830), n.p.

has, more recently, called into question the extent to which Coleridge was behind these changes. What is undoubted is that Irving's thought did, however, change dramatically during his London ministry, as demonstrated by his breach with Evangelicalism. In this chapter we have reconsidered the evidence which points to Coleridge as a substantial influence behind this change.

Coleridge rejected what he called the prevailing philosophy of his age, which he dismissed as mechanical. He also believed that the prevailing theology of his day partook in the same basic mechanistic errors, substituting 'Understanding' for 'Reason'. The distinction between the faculties operating in the realm of sense experience, 'Understanding', and innate ideas, 'Reason', was central to his thought, and it was on this basis that he described his system of logic. That system was closely related to that of Immanuel Kant and the *Frühromantiker*, the latter group sharing his interest in the work of Bruno and Böehme amongst others.

Following these thinkers, Coleridge utilised the 'polar' logic of dialectic that proceeded by demonstrating the unity of opposites. This was something that Coleridge held in common with the *Frühromantiker*, but that set him apart from his English contemporaries. Nonetheless, he was not simply a ventriloquist's dummy for the ideas of Schelling and others. Coleridge developed his own particular version of dialectic with the introduction of the 'prothesis' which enabled him to make sense of the 'transcendental' philosophy and keep hold of Christian revelation in the face of Schelling's pantheism. The key to this, as far as Coleridge was concerned, was the Trinitarianism that set him apart from the continental thinkers with whom he had so much in common.

It is striking that others first observed the extent of Coleridge's sway over Irving in his sermons on the Trinity, yet this influence was not limited to one area of theology. Irving's departure from Evangelicalism, particularly in the areas of Scripture and the Atonement — two of the four traits in the 'Bebbington Quadrilateral' — was evidently driven by ideas gleaned directly from Coleridge. Though he began with a typically Evangelical understanding of the nature of Scripture, Irving, adopting the Coleridgean distinction between 'Reason' and

'Understanding', came to see things differently. He followed Coleridge in adopting the concept that true religion is the synthesis of the subjective and objective and accused his contemporaries of making the Bible into an idol. His 1825 sermon on *Idolatry of the Book* is, in many respects, a précis of parts of Coleridge's *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. The subject itself is reminiscent of the Coleridgean coinage 'bibliolatry'<sup>174</sup> (a term Irving used explicitly in conversation with Crabb Robinson)<sup>175</sup> and the sermon repeats the arguments of *Confessions*.

Irving also found himself increasingly uncomfortable with Evangelical ideas of propitiatory atonement, calling them a 'gross distortion'. He left behind Evangelical 'crucicentrism' for a version of the atonement, or at-one-ment, which was the achievement of the incarnation rather than the Cross. In this he was, again, following closely in Coleridge's footsteps and developing a central notion of the Christian faith based in dialectics and rejecting the forensic approach of his peers.

Surprisingly, it is also apparent that Irving developed his understanding of the spiritual gifts in concert with Coleridge. He moved from his earlier belief that the gifts had ceased naturally, to a conviction that they were unknown only because of a deficiency in faith. When he received Erskine's letter from Gareloch, Irving took it to Coleridge and sought his counsel. The older man was much more certain of the veracity of the gifts therein described than Irving and insisted that 'these events...are nothing less than the outpouring of the Spirit, promised in all ages to the Church'.<sup>176</sup> Even in this matter, Irving followed Coleridge remarkably closely. It has been seen therefore that the landscape of Irving's theology was profoundly and fundamentally reshaped by ideas he received from Coleridge.

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174. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, p. 48.

175. Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, p. 43.

176. Quoted in "Connection", pp. 290-292.

## Chapter 5

# Edward Irving's Understanding of Christ: Revival or Revision?

On 13 March 1833, at the Old Kirk in Annan, where he had both been baptised and ordained, Edward Irving was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland on charges of heresy. At the time, his removal from the ranks of the Scottish clergy seemed like the inevitable conclusion to Irving's career. The charge upon which he was dismissed from the ministry of the Kirk was that he was guilty of 'printing publishing and disseminating heresies and heretical doctrines, particularly the doctrine of the fallen state and sinfulness of our Lord's human nature'.<sup>1</sup> Theological fashions have changed, and Irving's ideas are now met with a much more favourable reception. With this change of the theological landscape, questions have been raised about whether or not Irving's ideas were, in fact, novel and even whether they were actually controversial in his own day. Speaking in 1982, Thomas F. Torrance, a distinguished professor of theology and himself once a Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, implied strongly that his predecessors in the Kirk had been grievously mistaken in their treatment of Irving.

His argument was that it was not the views of Irving, but rather those of his opponents, which represented a theological deviation:

Perhaps the most fundamental truth which we have to learn in the Christian Church, or rather relearn since we have suppressed it, is that the Incarnation was the coming of God to save us in the heart of our fallen and depraved humanity.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that Torrance's call was not for the acceptance of a new insight from Irving, but a claim that Irving's was the ancient, orthodox,

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1. Presbytery of Annan, *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, AM, Before the Presbytery of Annan: On Wednesday, March 13, 1833: Also, Mr Irving's Letter to His Congregation* (London: W. Harding, 1833), p. 4.

2. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ: The 1992 Didbury Lectures* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983), p. 489.

Christology. Thus he claimed, 'this is a doctrine found everywhere in the early Church in the first five centuries'.<sup>3</sup> In saying this, Torrance echoed Irving's own claim that he taught nothing new, but that his was the ancient testimony of the church - albeit in his own time suppressed. An exercise as simple as reading the titles of Irving's works issued in defence of his position reveals his belief that he was defending the only historically credible understanding of the incarnation. For example, in 1830, Irving published both *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*,<sup>4</sup> and *The Doctrine Held By The Church Of Scotland Concerning the Human Nature Of Our Lord, As Stated In Her Standards*.<sup>5</sup> These are merely examples of a broader literature, written by Irving and his close associates, which consistently claimed an ancient pedigree for his teachings.<sup>6</sup> Though his peers considered his views both novel and eccentric, Irving and his subsequent defenders, more recently in the majority, have insisted that his Christology was both ancient and mainstream.

So why was there a controversy at all? Put simply, Irving's contention was that, in the incarnation, the Son of God took upon himself human nature bearing the consequences of Adam's sin. This statement could, even at the time, have been understood as relatively uncontroversial. It was always a commonplace of Reformed theology that Jesus experienced the 'sinless infirmities' of the human condition after the fall.

Although there are apparent examples amongst Irving's contemporaries, such as William Hamilton, the minister of Strathblane, of churchmen who wished to deny any effects of the fall on the humanity of Christ,<sup>7</sup> most of those who opposed

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3. Ibid., p. 49.

4. Edward Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature Set Forth, in Four Parts, etc.* (Edinburgh: John Boyd, 1830).

5. Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Held by the Church of Scotland Concerning the Human Nature of Our Lord, as Stated in her Standards* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1830).

6. Other examples include: Edward Irving, *The Opinions Circulating Concerning Our Lord's Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1830). Edward Irving, *The Confessions of Faith and the Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland of Date Anterior to the Westminster Confession. To Which are Prefixed, a Historical View of the Church of Scotland* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1831).

7. William Hamilton, *A Defence of the Scriptural Doctrine Concerning the Second Advent of Christ from the Erroneous Representations of Modern Millenniumians* (Glasgow: Maurice Ogle, 1828), pp. 330-332. Quoted by Irving in Edward Irving, 'On the True Humanity of Christ: To the Editor of the Morning Watch,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 3

Irving's teaching asserted that Jesus experienced the 'common infirmities' of humanity 'yet without sin'.<sup>8</sup>

In affirming this they echoed The Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standard of the Kirk, that was subordinate to scripture alone. The Confession states that 'the second Person in the Trinity...[took] upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof; yet without sin'.<sup>9</sup> To put it another way, the tradition which Westminster represents understood Christ's humanity to have borne the marks of the fall, such as susceptibility to sickness, but to have been free from the sinful inclinations that humans experience from having a 'sinful nature' as a result of 'original sin'.

The following statement from Irving, written in 1828, could be read as an uncontroversial restatement of the doctrine found in the Westminster Confession:

it was manhood fallen, which he took up into his Divine person...his flesh was, in its proper nature, mortal and corruptible.<sup>10</sup>

However, for Irving, the traditional formula concerning 'sinless infirmities' was insufficient, to the extent that he criticised the General Assembly for *limiting* Christ's solidarity with fallen humanity to 'sinless infirmities'.<sup>11</sup> For him, if the Son was to become incarnate in a way that was relevant to a sinful human race, he must share their nature in every detail:

If his human nature differed, by however little, from ours, in its alienation and guiltiness, then the work of reducing it into eternal harmony with God hath no bearing whatever upon our nature, with which it is not the same.<sup>12</sup>

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(1829), p. 437.

8. For example" James Alexander Haldane, *Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving, Respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1829), p. 55.

9. 'The Westminster Divines', *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881). VII, 2 (emphasis added).

10. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 3 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), p. iv.

11. Edward Irving, 'A Judgment As To What Course The Ministers And The People Of The Church Of Scotland Should Take In Consequence Of The Decisions Of The Last General Assembly,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* 5, (1831), p. 5.

12. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 88.



It was this language of 'alienation' and 'guiltiness' that caused people to question Irving's orthodoxy. It suggested that he supposed Christ to be tainted in some way with sin.

This disquiet with Irving's doctrine was intensified by his colourful rhetoric in defending it. For example in his *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of the Lord's Human Nature* he used language so stark that it came to be repeated in every ecclesiastical enquiry against him:

Manhood, after the fall, broke out into sins of every name and aggravation; corrupt to the very heart's core, and from the centre of its inmost will sending out streams black as hell. This is the human nature which every man is clothed upon withal, which the Son of Man was clothed upon withal, bristling thick and strong with sin like the hairs upon the porcupine<sup>13</sup>.

Such rhetoric brought outrage and condemnation from the majority of his peers in the Church of Scotland, and eventually its General Assembly approved a report accusing Irving of heresy and calling, by a vote of 147 to 40, for his trial.<sup>14</sup>

It was not only from within the Church of Scotland that reaction came, but also from prominent Anglicans such as Hugh McNeile<sup>15</sup> (later Dean of Ripon), and influential Dissenters such as the Baptists James Alexander Haldane<sup>16</sup> and W.H. Colyer.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as the split vote in the General Assembly might suggest, there were voices raised in Irving's favour, albeit that those voices were very much in the minority. Irving's Christology was broadly rejected by his contemporaries as unorthodox.

There are various possible explanations for this dissonance between assessments of Irving's orthodoxy. One such explanation is to suggest that the extent to which Irving differed from his peers in matters of substance has been overestimated.

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13. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

14. Anonymous, 'General Assembly: Monday, May 30,' *Caledonian Mercury*, 2 June 1831.

15. Hugh McNeile, *Letters to a Friend who has Felt it his Duty to Secede from the Church of England* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1834).

16. Haldane, *Refutation*.

17. W. H. Colyer, *Animadversions on that Pestilent Heresy, the Sinfulness of the Human Nature of the Lord Jesus Christ: As Promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving, AM in the Third Number of the Morning Watch, and in His Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature. In a Letter to a Highly Honourable Individual* (London: Westley and Davis, 1830).

The merit of this suggestion is that it would account for Irving's consistent claim that he had been misrepresented and misunderstood. Indeed it has been suggested that Irving's Christology was not particularly atypical and that the charges against him were brought out of theological pedantry or personal malice. For instance, a little over twenty years after Irving's trial, J.S. Davenport (of the CAC) could claim that Irving's teaching was now 'admitted to be in accordance with the teachings of Athanasius, Augustine and the Fathers'.<sup>18</sup> He believed that Irving's 'glowing rhetoric' along with the theologically benighted state of the church combined to bring about his downfall.<sup>19</sup> The area in which he believed Irving's preaching could be 'most exposed to the charge of novelty was that concerning the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>20</sup> H.C. Whitley, on the other hand, writing in 1955, saw the ecstatic utterances in his church as the real reason for Irving's trial. He reasoned that, although the charges 'did not touch upon the gifts', without their 'notoriety...it is doubtful whether this would have been any libel'.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker have suggested that it was Irving's broader eschatology that was the real motivation for his removal. They argue that, from the late 1820s onwards, Irving's increasingly virulent statements, against Christendom in general and the Church of Scotland in particular, along with his growing interest in Pentecostal manifestations, had made him a controversial and troubling figure.<sup>22</sup> They contend, therefore, that the Christological controversy was an exercise in splitting theological hairs, intended to silence Irving's notoriously loud voice. Ernest Sandeen argued along similar lines, stating that, although Irving was insufficiently 'cautious or precise' in his statements of doctrine, his teaching was:

so nearly orthodox and the church generally so lax that one is forced to conclude that he was tried on that charge as a pretext and principally because his other activities had alarmed his ministerial colleagues.<sup>23</sup>

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18. John Sydney Davenport, *Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church* (New York: John Moffet, 1863), p. 8.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21. Henry Charles. Whitley, *Blinded Eagle: An Introduction to the Life and Teaching of Edward Irving* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 92.

22. Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker, "'Our Unspeakable Comfort": Irving, Albury, and the Origins of the Pretribulation Rapture,' *Fides et Historia* 31, (1999), pp. 72-73.

23. Sandeen, Ernest Robert, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British e<sup>3</sup> American Millenarianism*,

There is certainly evidence that supports this contention that Irving's writings about the incarnation cannot fully account for his fall. As was observed in a previous chapter, for instance,<sup>24</sup> his removal from the Regent Square church by its trustees was driven by their discomfort with the charismatic manifestations, or rather with Irving's failure adequately to control them.<sup>25</sup> The same trustees, a mere two years previously, had defended the orthodoxy of Irving's Christological position.<sup>26</sup> One significant aspect, then, of Irving's ecclesiastical downfall, his removal from the pulpit at Regent Square, was orchestrated by people prepared to defend his Christology, but dissatisfied with other aspects of his theology and conduct.

So, were the heresy charges against Irving essentially trivial and merely a *casus belli* for his opponents? Despite the voices raised in support of this conclusion, there is evidence to the contrary. Consider, by way of example, that in their proceedings against Irving, the Regent's Square trustees did not raise any questions about his Christology. The observation that Irving could successfully be removed from this most secure position, without resort to the expedient of trumped-up heresy charges, raises a question. If the trustees of the National Scotch Church did not need to use accusations about Irving's Christology as a lever for his removal, what reason is there to believe that the members of the General Assembly, or the Presbytery of Annan, found themselves so constrained? Could it be that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland accused Irving

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1800-1950 (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2008.), p. 29 n.49. (This work was originally published in 1970)

24. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography', p.97.

25. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 261.

26. Edward Irving, 'Declaration from the National Scotch Church, London,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 3, (1831), According to Mrs Oliphant, although the trustees and session were not identical, there was considerable overlap and the majority of the trustees who opposed Irving in 1832 were members of both groups. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 248.

of heresy on the grounds of a belief that his teachings marked a significant departure from orthodoxy?

There is ample evidence that Irving's teachings about Christ's human nature did indeed provoke a substantial reaction. For example, the Irish Baptist minister and theologian, Alexander Carson, wrote an open letter to Irving in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* on 25 May 1829, which he concluded by saying:

Your views of prophecy whether true or false are of little importance compared with your views on this subject...I am grieved that one standing in your situation...should entertain views of the human nature of the saviour, so degrading to his character.<sup>27</sup>

Of particular significance in this extract is that Carson distinguished Irving's Christology from his eschatology and insisted that the former was incomparably more serious. This distinction gives precisely the opposite impression from the suggestion that Irving's contemporaries prosecuted Irving's Christology because they were concerned about other *loci* in his system. What is more, Carson was himself a refugee from Presbyterianism, and so would hardly be a natural target for any accusation of obsessive enforcing of minute details of Presbyterian theology or polity.

It is also significant that some of Irving's fiercest opponents regarding Christology were his allies on the very subjects that Sandeen, Walker and Patterson argue were the *real* cause of opposition. Robert Baxter, a lawyer from Doncaster who became prominent in Irving's circle, is a pertinent example. In his role as one of the early prophets in the Irvingite movement, Baxter made a number of specific predictions about the imminent return of Christ, including a prediction that Irving's 'translation of the saints' (a version of what came to be known as the 'Rapture') would occur in summer 1835.<sup>28</sup> As such Baxter was

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27. Alexander Carson, 'Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving,' *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 26 May 1829. The letter is dated 25 May.

28. Robert Baxter, *Narrative of Facts, Characterizing the Supernatural Manifestations in Members of Mr. Irving's London Congregation, and Other Individuals in England and Scotland, and in the Writer Himself*, 2nd ed. (London: James Nisbet, 1833), pp. 17-19. Baxter explains what he means by the translation of the saints as follows: 'An opinion had been advanced in some of Mr Irving's writings, that before the second coming of Christ, and before the setting in upon the world of the " days of vengeance,"

evidently supportive, at this stage, of Irving's pneumatology and eschatology. Irving, in turn, was sufficiently convinced of Baxter's prophetic credentials that, on 24 January 1832, he wrote to a Mr MacDonald saying, 'The Lord hath anointed Baxter of Doncaster after another kind, I think the apostolical'.<sup>29</sup> In this Yorkshire lawyer, Irving had found a man that he believed might be the first of the apostles in fulfilment of his expectation that this office would be restored to the church.

However, by April 1832, Baxter had become concerned about Irving's Christology and exchanged letters with him on the subject. Irving wrote to Baxter on 21 April 1832<sup>30</sup> in terms that caused the lawyer to become certain of 'the erroneousness of Mr Irving's views'.<sup>31</sup> When Baxter then considered the repetition of Irving's Christological nostrums by those speaking 'in the power', he concluded that their gifts must also be spurious.<sup>32</sup> Baxter followed this logic to the conclusion that he himself was 'convicted as a false prophet'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, like Carson, Baxter exemplifies a scale of priorities entirely at odds with the suggestions of Sandeen and his school of thought. Rather than being anxious about Irving's embrace of ecstatic religion and pre-millennial eschatology, and consequently raising theological questions about his Christology, Baxter took exactly the opposite course. Initially wholeheartedly persuaded by Irving's millennial schemes, and experiencing the charismata to a degree that Irving then saw as unparalleled, Baxter came to reject his own religious experience and beliefs because he found Irving's Christology abhorrent.

Another example, similar to that of Baxter, but of even greater significance, was Hugh McNeile. An Ulsterman of Scottish descent, McNeile was rector of Albury in Surrey from 1822 until 1834. He owed his appointment as rector to Henry Drummond, convener of the Albury conferences for prophetic interpretation,

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emphatically so called in the Scriptures, the saints would be caught up to heaven like Enoch and Elijah.' *Ibid.*, p. 17.

29. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 427.

30. Baxter, *Narrative*, pp. 103-108.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

who was the local landowner and held the advowson of the parish.<sup>34</sup> McNeile and Drummond enjoyed a fruitful relationship for a number of years; McNeile was, and remained, an enthusiast for the millennial expectations of Drummond and the Albury circle. A sign of Drummond's esteem for McNeile is that, although the latter was a relatively young man (he was 31 at the time of the first conference), he was given the chair for the Albury conferences.<sup>35</sup> In 1832, however, McNeile broke with Drummond and Irving decisively, and in 1834 he resigned the living of Albury and published an exhortation discouraging others from joining the Irvingites.<sup>36</sup> Despite this breach, McNeile remained, until his death, a fervent advocate of the millenarianism that he and Irving had helped to develop at Albury.

Eschatology, then, and millennial speculation could not have been the cause of the rift between McNeile and Irving. Rather, McNeile believed that he could no longer be associated with Irving and Drummond because of their teaching on the human nature of Christ. In 1840, McNeile lamented that the reception of their millennial teaching was damaged by the teachings of Irving and others who seceded from the church and thus 'added schism to heresy'.<sup>37</sup> McNeile feared that the teaching of Irving and others and the scandal of their secession 'recoiled upon the study of unfulfilled prophecy'.<sup>38</sup> Far from being put off Irving's Christology by his millenarianism, McNeile feared that this teaching, which he labelled heresy, would turn people away from his eschatology.

It might be argued that McNeile's real quarrel with Irving was not his teaching about the human nature of Jesus Christ but rather the charismatic gifts, experienced amongst the Irvingites, which McNeile believed were spurious. Surely these supernatural manifestations might have been the reason he accused Irving of heresy. This would be an entirely understandable position to take,

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34. That is, he had the right to 'present' a clergyman to the living when it became vacant. Timothy Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-55* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 101.

35. Ibid.

36. McNeile, *Letters*.

37. Hugh McNeile, *Sermons on the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Orrin Rogers, 1840), p. v.

38. Ibid.

because McNeile *did* reject the gifts. However, McNeile had not always been so sceptical. In 1830 he preached a sermon, at the Episcopal Chapel for the Jews in Bethnal Green, urging the congregation to seek the charismatic gifts, including 'divers kinds of tongues'.<sup>39</sup> His later rejection of the gifts is telling, because it represents a reversal of a view which he had expressed publicly and with enthusiasm shortly before. He expressed his reasons for this *volte-face* in a series of letters published in 1832. Addressed to an anonymous friend who was considering leaving the Church of England to join the Irvingites, these letters argued that the teaching being propounded by the gifted was evidence that the gifts were not genuine: 'To me, their theology (if it deserve the name) is conclusive against their claims.'<sup>40</sup> Again Irving's Christology had undermined an associate's trust in Irving's ministry.

In the face of sometimes conflicting and contradictory prophetic utterances, the Irvingites had developed a 'test' to distinguish between words spoken by the Holy Spirit and those from deceitful spirits. It was this criterion of judgement that finally convinced McNeile that the gifts were not authentic. The 'test', based on 1 John 4,<sup>41</sup> concerned whether or not the prophets confessed the truth of Irving's doctrine of the incarnation whilst 'under the power'. A prophetic spirit would be interrogated to discover where it stood on this vexed question. As McNeile could not bring himself to accept Irving's Christology, he had also to reject the prophets. After all, as far as he was concerned, 'their attempts to explain...our Lord's experience in the flesh' ran so far contrary to scripture that he felt he 'must either reject them, or give up my Bible'.<sup>42</sup> Just as with Baxter, McNeile's relational interests and spiritual expectations would have driven him to accept Irving's teachings about the incarnation, and yet he found those teachings so

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39. Stunt, *Awakening to Secession*, p. 249.

40. McNeile, *Letters*, p. 119.

41. 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.' 1 John 4:1-3 (NRSV)

42. *Ibid.*

unacceptable that he rejected the spiritual gifts that he had so longed for and ended his association with his closest theological allies.

The claim that the Christological debate was a stalking horse is also questionable from the perspective of chronology. The 'tongues' were first heard in London in May 1831 at prayer meetings which were instituted to pray about the outcome of the trials of John McLeod Campbell, A.J. Scott and Hugh Maclean.<sup>43</sup> The latter two of these were Irving's *protégés* in London and faced the loss of their licences on account of their views concerning Christ's human nature.<sup>44</sup> Given that the *glossolalia* broke out at assemblies convened because of adverse reaction to Irving's doctrine of the incarnation, disquiet about those gifts is an unlikely motive for the genesis of that rejection. Moves against Irving himself also came before he was associated with the exercise of these gifts. The London Presbytery brought heresy proceedings following the publication of his *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*. This book appeared in January 1830 and was raised at the presbytery on 20 April 1830, followed by 'a private conference' two days later.<sup>45</sup> The report by the presbytery was published early in 1831, before anyone in Irving's circle had spoken in a tongue.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, a brief survey of the publications of the time shows that this was a debate that generated considerable heat, both outside and within the Church of Scotland, as much before as after the tongues began. For example, Cole,<sup>47</sup>

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43. Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 112-113.

44. Anonymous, *An Account of the Whole Proceedings in the Case of the Rev. H. B. MacLean, Before the Presbytery of Irvine and the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr* (Irvine: E. MacQuistan, 1830).

45. Presbytery of London, *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: Presbytery of London, 1831), p. 5.

46. *Ibid.* A review article in *Fraser's Magazine* which included a discussion of this publication by the presbytery appeared in May 1831 Anonymous, 'The Rev. Edward Irving and his Adversaries,' *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* III, no. XVI (1831), p. 423.

47. Henry Cole, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving, Minister of the Caledonian Chapel, Compton Street, in Refutation of the Awful Doctrines (held by Him) of the Sinfulness, Mortality, and Corruptibility of the Body of Jesus Christ* (London: J. Eedes, 1827).



Colyer,<sup>48</sup> Carne<sup>49</sup>, Dods (twice),<sup>50</sup> Haldane (twice),<sup>51</sup> Rodman,<sup>52</sup> Stevens<sup>53</sup>, Wilson,<sup>54</sup> and Urwick<sup>55</sup> wrote vehemently in denunciation of Irving's teaching before the tongues were first heard in London in July 1831. The controversy over Christ's human nature also continued beyond the end of Irving's ministry. In 1836, an anonymous writer addressed a ninety-six-page letter to the 'Followers of the Late Edward Irving' arguing for the 'Purity of Our Glorious Immanuel's Human Nature',<sup>56</sup> and Daniel Bagot, Dean of Dromore, published a detailed refutation of Irving's 'sinful flesh' doctrine five years after his death.<sup>57</sup> This suggests that there was sufficient concern about Irving's Christological thought that writers felt the need to continue to attack the ideas even when they no longer had any need to oppose the man. Whilst this evidence does not constitute proof of the motives of the members of either the General Assembly or the Presbytery of Annan in prosecuting Irving, it does demonstrate that Irving's teaching about Christ's human nature was by no means considered to be trivial. Neither, we must conclude, was opposition to it merely related to the supernatural events in Irving's church or his apocalyptic denunciations.

The level of controversy, together with the extent to which Irving's views on this matter were generally rejected, is evident from a pamphlet 'Circulated by the

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48. Colyer, *Animadversions*.

49. Robert Harkness Carne, *The True Humanity of Christ. A Second and Third Letter to the Editor of the Morning Watch* (London: Ebenezer Palmer, 1829).

50. Marcus Dods, review of "Review of Publications on Christ's Human Nature," by *The Edinburgh Christian Instructor* 29, (1830): 1-168. Marcus Dods, *On the Incarnation of the Eternal Word* (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1831).

51. Haldane, *Refutation*. James Alexander Haldane, *Answer to Mr. Henry Drummond's Defence of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by Mr. Irving, Respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, etc.* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1830).

52. John Rodman, *A Friendly Letter to Warrand Carlile, Esq., in Confutation of his Views on What He Calls the Fallen Human Nature of Christ* (Paisley: Alex. Gardner, 1831). Warrand Carlile was married to Irving's sister Agnes.

53. John Stevens, *The Sinlessness of Jesus; Being the Substance of Some Discourses, Delivered at Salem Chapel. to Which are Annexed, Animadversions on. E. Irving's Doctrine of our Lord's Humanity* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1830).

54. John Wilson, *A Calm Inquiry into the Representations of Scripture Concerning the Sinless Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Glasgow: Maurice Ogle, 1830).

55. William Urwick, *The True Nature of Christ's Person and Atonement Stated: in Reply to the Unscriptural Views of the Rev. E. Irving "On the Human Nature of Christ."* (London: William Curry, 1831).

56. Anonymous, *A Letter on the Purity of Our Glorious Immanuel's Human Nature, Addressed to the Followers of the Late Rev. E. Irving; With an Appendix, Containing Some Remarks on his Penitential Letter* (London: J. Hatchard and Sons, 1836).

57. Daniel Bagot, *The Temptation of Our Blessed Lord in the Wilderness; Or, an Exposition of Matthew IV, 1-11* (Edinburgh: J. Johnstone, 1839).

Irvingites'.<sup>58</sup> The anonymous book, which was published before Irving's death in 1834, is a careful attempt to remove the offence of some of Irving's statements about the incarnation. In attempting to remove the offence, however, the writer adopted a number of the positions assumed by Irving's critics and directly contradicted Irving, even on the point about which he was most certain. Irving insisted that Christ took 'sinful flesh' and that this precluded suggesting that 'any change passed upon Christ's flesh in its conception, or at any other time anterior to the resurrection'.<sup>59</sup> The anonymous writer of the tract, presenting a sanitised version of the Irvingite 'sinful flesh' doctrine, asserted to the contrary that 'in His human nature there was no inclination to sin',<sup>60</sup> due to his conception 'of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed the writer went even further, insisting that Christ's human nature was purified at conception to the extent that 'being in humanity, as entirely and absolutely holy as Godhead is holy, and pure as Godhead is pure...HE COULD NOT SIN'.<sup>62</sup> Thus, perhaps unwittingly, this writer concluded that anyone who claimed 'that Christ had a fallen nature', which is what Irving repeatedly did, 'would without all question, be guilty of blasphemy of the foulest kind'.<sup>63</sup> It is a mark of just how unpalatable Irving's teaching was that, even whilst he was still alive, some of his supporters felt compelled to disavow it in such vehement terms.

It might be suggested that the pamphlet detailed above was an isolated instance of 'friendly fire' against Irving's teaching on Christology. There is evidence, however, that even amongst the Irvingites there was more disquiet than such a suggestion would allow. John Nelson Darby, founder of the Exclusive Brethren and Irving's erstwhile associate in prophetic speculations, wrote a brief essay about the *Word of Instruction*. Darby noted with some glee the contrast between passages from Irving's *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature*

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58. John Nelson Darby, 'Remarks on a Tract Circulated by the Irvingites Entitled "A Word of Instruction"', in *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby vol. 15*, ed. William Kelly, (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible & Tract Depot, 1956), p. 1.

59. Edward Irving, 'True Humanity', p. 422.

60. Anonymous, *A Word of Instruction Concerning "The Man Christ Jesus"*. In *a Letter to a Friend* (Greenock: H. Fraser, 1834), p. 5.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 5. emphasis original

63. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

and the careful explanation in the *Word of Instruction*. He claimed that Irving's doctrine of Christ's 'sinful flesh' was 'so plainly and wickedly evil' that the 'people called Irvingites' had 'taken great pains...to disclaim and deny this [doctrine]'.<sup>64</sup> According to Darby, the 'tract' was not their only 'attempt to screen themselves from the charge of this most unholy and wicked doctrine'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Darby recounted being told by a very senior figure in the Irvingite organisation that the prophetic support for Irving's teaching about Christ's humanity could be explained by the Spirit's 'prejudice to please Mr Irving'.<sup>66</sup> This statement, from a leading figure in what would become the CAC (which was founded in part on the direction of these prophets) is noteworthy because it suggests that a sufficient anxiety had developed within the movement about the orthodoxy of Irving's position that its members were willing to call into question the truthfulness of particular prophetic utterances that supported it.

This observation is made all the more striking when the importance of this particular doctrine to Irving and to the early movement is considered. It will be remembered that a prophetic spirit's willingness to affirm Irving's doctrine was initially used as a test of the prophecy's divine origin. Whatever its historical pedigree, Irving's teaching about Christ's human nature was sufficiently scandalous in its time that it prompted even his friends to go to surprising lengths to distance themselves from it.

As noted above, what made Irving's teaching in the area of Christology controversial was his insistence that the Son of God was incarnate in 'sinful flesh'. He was emphatic on this point, not because he was a particularly precise dogmatician (he was not), but because he believed that '[t]o know and to understand how the Son of God took sinful flesh and yet was sinless' was 'the alpha and the omega...of orthodox theology'.<sup>67</sup> This point of contention was, as far as he was concerned, a matter of fundamental Christian belief. Indeed, he went so far as to claim that his doctrine of incarnation was 'the substance and

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64. Darby, 'Remarks on a Tract Circulated by the Irvingites Entitled "A Word of Instruction"', p. 2.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

67. Edward Irving, 'True Humanity', p. 422.

essence of the orthodox faith'.<sup>68</sup> He considered this point so vital 'because [it] is that upon which alone the personal manifestation of a God, the redemption of our fallen nature from sin, and its resurrection from the grave do rest'.<sup>69</sup> Irving did not believe that any orthodox theology was possible without affirming the Son's incarnation in sinful flesh, which he describes as 'the radiating point of truth'.<sup>70</sup> To understand what was at stake in Irving's doctrine of incarnation, then, it is necessary first to review its significance in his wider understanding of Christian theology.

Irving's beliefs about the incarnation were tied closely to his understanding of salvation. This linkage in and of itself was, of course, nothing new, as exemplified for instance by the Nicene Creed of 325. The creed, the first ecumenical expression of the doctrine of Christ, included the phrase 'τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα',<sup>71</sup> - 'who for us (humanity) and for our salvation came down and was incarnate being made a man'.<sup>72</sup> Irving's Christology was shaped by the same concerns as the creed, namely that the heart of the incarnation is the work of salvation.<sup>73</sup> He wrote:

To understand 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.<sup>74</sup>

If it sounds, in this extract, as though Irving's understanding of salvation is more to do with human nature than human guilt, that is because it is. Despite his Evangelical beginnings, as we observed in the previous chapter, Irving's understanding of the atonement changed dramatically during the course of his

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68. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 127.

69. Edward Irving, *A Judgment as to What Course the Ministers and the People of the Church of Scotland Should Take in Consequence of the Decisions of the Last General Assembly. Extracted from the Morning Watch*, no. 15 (Greenock: R. B. Lusk, 1832), p. 46.

70. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 22.

71. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Greek and Latin Creeds*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), p. 60.

72. My translation, emphasis added.

73. Graham W.P. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit: The Doctrine of the Incarnation According to Edward Irving* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), pp. 135-136.

74. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. vii.

ministry. His early emphasis on the atoning work of the Cross gave way to an explicit rejection of what he called 'stock-jobbing theology'<sup>75</sup> in favour of this, more cosmic, view of salvation and incarnation.<sup>76</sup> In the quotation above, we can observe how his changing view of incarnation played into his changing understanding of soteriology and vice versa. His argument was that the Son of God's primary work was achieved by the act of incarnation itself. This shift of emphasis and its implications were not lost on Hugh McNeile, who characterised Irving's theology as a 'doctrine of redemption by incarnation, instead of by blood-shedding'.<sup>77</sup> To the minds of Irving's Evangelical contemporaries, his scheme represented an entire reconfiguration of the Christian faith.

In 1828, when Irving released his *Sermons Lectures and Occasional Discourses*, his first published work concerning the incarnation, he was widely accused of Socinianism.<sup>78</sup> This accusation reveals just how seriously his contemporaries took the connection between his Christology and his soteriology. The Socinians were originally an anti-Trinitarian, biblicist, sect who gained their name, and their initial theological impetus, from the Italian theologian known as Socinus (Fausto Paolo Sozzini, 1539–1604). The Evangelical commentator, Thomas Scott, offers us a window into the implications of 'Socinian' as an epithet in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He described his conversion from being 'very nearly a Socinian' or (he put it another way) a 'dangerous heretic'.<sup>79</sup> In an explanatory footnote Scott explained 'the import' of the term Socinian, setting out the anti-Trinitarian aspects of Socinian thought and explaining that Socinians saw Christ's death merely in exemplarist terms; seeing it as a 'confirmation of his doctrine, not as a real atonement satisfactory to divine justice for man's sins'.<sup>80</sup> To accuse Irving of a Socinian view of the atonement was, for his accusers, an indictment that would disqualify him from his ministerial office.

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75. London, *Proceedings*, p. 30.

76. This shift is discussed and explained more fully in Chapter 4 'Seeds Bearing Fruit', pp. 128-33.

77. McNeile, *Letters*, p. 119.

78. e.g. Haldane, *Refutation*, pp. 38, 39, 47, 49.

79. Thomas Scott, *Tracts, by the Rev. Thomas Scott with an Introductory Essay, By Thomas Chalmers, D.D.* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1826), p. 54.

80. *Ibid.*

Irving rejected the accusation in forthright terms, describing his accusers as ‘Malicious men! wicked railers!’<sup>81</sup> and claiming that he agreed with his opponents ‘that by the death of clean and innocent Lamb of God atonement or redemption is to be effected’.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, what Irving meant by this was not entirely straightforward. He did not consider that Christ’s death was itself the means of achieving pardon for sinners. It was not even the prime locus of sacrifice. He believed instead that ‘The *humiliation* was the sacrifice; the *becoming* man, the *being made flesh*’.<sup>83</sup> Rather than achieving anything by itself, the death of Jesus *demonstrated*, by his complete identification with fallen humans, the possibility of forgiveness by a God who hates sin. As Irving explained, the death of Jesus showed just ‘how far [God’s love] can condescend, even to sinners like us’.<sup>84</sup> Thus, for Irving, ‘Atonement and redemption are the names for the bearing of Christ’s work upon the sinner; and have no respect to its bearing upon the Godhead’.<sup>85</sup> In Irving’s understanding, the atonement transformed believers but had no effect at all on God.

Irving’s understanding of the atonement as the transformation of fallen humanity reveals why he was so insistent on Christ having a *fallen* human nature. This possession of human nature in all its corruption was, for him, the vital underpinning of the whole economy of salvation. So Irving concluded that ‘no one can be saved unless he hold the truth, that Christ came in flesh no wise different from what ours hath been since the fall’.<sup>86</sup> This last statement also helps to explain the vehemence of his critics. For both sides, the fundamental matters of Christian faith, atonement, redemption and salvation, were at stake.

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81. Edward Irving, ‘True Humanity’, p. 436.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. 156.

84. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 95. Emphasis original.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

86. Edward Irving, *Christ’s Holiness in Flesh, the Form. Fountain Head, and Assurance to us of Holiness in Flesh* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1831), p. 97.

The accounts of Irving's contemporaries suggest that they believed that his thought was almost entirely novel.<sup>87</sup> They did believe that the Bourignonian sect of the eighteenth century had held a similar position on Christ's human nature,<sup>88</sup> but this was hardly to render the teaching a theologoumenon. Since David Dorries claimed in his PhD thesis that '[w]hen Edward Irving brought to the attention of the 19th-century British church the view that Christ's incarnate humanity was in a state of fallenness and sin, he was in no sense propounding a new doctrine',<sup>89</sup> the originality of Irving's Christology has been seriously in doubt. It is to this question that we now turn.

It will be necessary in addressing this matter to attend closely to the arguments made by both sides in the controversy. A survey of some of the more recent appeals to ancient sources will also be in order and will in turn require some consideration of the historical sources which are contested. In approaching this ancient material, we will focus on the primary sources, rather than more recent theological publications, precisely because Irving's theology is a live question within the theological academy and the waters are therefore muddied by ongoing theological dispute.

Despite Irving's repeated claims to hold the historical high ground in this debate, he did not provide a detailed historical *apologia* for that claim. Nonetheless, others amongst his coterie did attempt such a defence on his behalf. During the controversy, an article entitled 'On the Human Nature of Christ' appeared in *The Morning Watch*, defending Irving's position and citing a large number of Reformed divines and early Church Fathers.<sup>90</sup> Patterson and Lee have both attributed this work to Irving,<sup>91</sup> as did some (including Haldane) at the time of publication.<sup>92</sup>

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87. For example, Haldane, *Refutation*, p. 3.

88. Cf Chapter 6, 'Emergence', p.182.

89. David W. Dorries, 'Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature.' (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1987), p. 209.

90. Anonymous, 'On the Human Nature of Christ,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 1 (1829),

91. Byung Sun Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh: Edward Irving's Christological Theology within the Context of his Life and Times' (PhD Thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2012), p. 115 fn. 111. And Mark Rayburn Patterson, 'Designing the Last Days: Edward Irving, the Albury Circle and the Theology of The Morning Watch' (PhD Thesis, Kings College, 2001), p. 149 fn. 42.

92. Haldane, *Refutation*, p. 8.

Although it might be natural to assume that Irving was the author, given how closely the issue had become associated with his name by the point of publication, the evidence that he did not write it is compelling. First, Irving wrote many articles for *The Morning Watch* which were published with his name attached. In the first volume alone he contributed four articles on the interpretation of prophecy,<sup>93</sup> a separate work on the 'True Humanity of Christ',<sup>94</sup> an article concerning 'the Character of Apostasy',<sup>95</sup> and an article concerned with 'The Signs of the Times'.<sup>96</sup> Given that Irving put his name to seven articles in *The Morning Watch* in 1829, it seems an unlikely presumption that an article published anonymously should be attributed to him.

Secondly, the defence of Irving's doctrine was not confined to Irving alone. Articles on the controversy over Christ's human nature were numerous in *The Morning Watch* of 1829. Some of these pieces were published anonymously, but others bore the names of their authors. For example Thomas Chevalier wrote an attributed endorsement of Irving's doctrine entitled 'A Defence of the Athanasian Creed'.<sup>97</sup> It would be a mistake to assume that the subject alone is enough to indicate Irving as author.

Thirdly, the journal contains a number of articles which adopt the second person plural in the manner typical of an editorial. One example is the defence of the doctrine of 'sinful flesh' cast as a review of 'Sermons on Various Subject by

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93. Edward Irving, 'Interpretation of all the Old-Testament Prophecies Quoted in the New. (By the Rev. E. Irving — Continued From P. 174.) Interpretation III,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* 1, no. 3 (1829), Edward Irving, 'Interpretation of all the Old-Testament Prophecies Quoted in the New. (By The Rev. E. Irving — Continued From P. 350.) Interpretation IV,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* 1, no. 4 (1829), Edward Irving, 'Interpretations of all Those Passages of Prophecy Quoted in the New Testament. Communicated by the Rev. Edward Irving,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 1 (1829), Edward Irving, 'Old-Testament Prophecies Quoted in the New. Interpretation II. Communicated by the Rev. E. Irving,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 2 (1829),  
94. Edward Irving, 'True Humanity'.

95. Edward Irving, 'On The Doctrine And Manifestation And Character Of The Apostasy In The Christian Church. (Communicated By The Rev. Edward Irving.)', *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 1 (1829),

96. Edward Irving, 'Signs of the Times, and the Characteristics of the Church. (Communicated By The Rev. Edw. Irving.)', *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 4 (1829),

97. Thomas Chevalier, 'A Defence of the Athanasian Creed, in Answer to the Attack of the Rev. R. H. Carne and Others.', *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review*. 1, no. 3 (1829),



Andrew Thomson',<sup>98</sup> which begins 'We intend' and makes repeated use of phrases such as 'nor should our readers suppose',<sup>99</sup> thus speaking as a personification of the journal rather than as an individual author. Irving's articles in the journal, on the other hand, are replete with uses of the first person singular, for instance his 'On the True Humanity of Christ' which begins 'It grieves me everyday'.<sup>100</sup> The article which Patterson and Lee believe to have been written anonymously by Irving uses the second person plural exclusively. The style of the article thus suggests that it was written by the editorial team rather than by an otherwise named contributor like Irving, who wrote in a very different style. A much more credible candidate for authorship is Henry Drummond, who published in the same year a *Candid Examination* of the controversy using many of the same arguments and quotations as the *Morning Watch* article.<sup>101</sup>

Drummond engaged in a pamphlet war with Haldane during 1829 and 1830. In reply to Haldane's riposte to Drummond's *Candid Examination*, Drummond criticised Haldane's use of hearsay in his writings about Irving. A key point at which he challenged Haldane was over his claims to knowledge concerning the provenance of 'On the Human Nature of Christ' in the first issue: 'He pretends to know who are the writers in the Morning Watch'.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, Thomas Carlyle - a barrister who would later be one of the first apostles in the CAC (not to be confused with his namesake, the husband of Jane Welsh) - explicitly denied that Irving wrote the article. He taunted Haldane that he apparently knew 'Mr Irving's sentiments and style so well as to see evidently his authorship in a passage which he did not write'.<sup>103</sup> Drummond chided that this 'might have taught Mr Haldane to distrust his authorities in future'.<sup>104</sup> Whoever the

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98. Anonymous, review of "'Sermons On Various Subjects, By Andrew Thomson, D. D., Minister Of St. George's Church, Edinburgh.'" by *The Morning watch: or, Quarterly journal on prophecy, and theological review*. 1 (3), no. 3 (1829): 470-495.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 470.

100. Edward Irving, 'True Humanity', p. 421.

101. Henry Drummond, *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, 1829).

102. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

103. Thomas Carlyle, *The Word Made Flesh: Or the True Humanity of God in Christ Demonstrated from the Scriptures* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1829), p. xiii.

104. Henry Drummond, *Supplement to the 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:

anonymous author of the article may have been, Carlyle and Drummond's gleeful twitting of Haldane suggests that they knew very well the author's identity and that it was not Irving. Thus, although amongst his supporters sufficient familiarity with the Fathers could be found to wield their writings in his defence, Irving himself did not demonstrate any such knowledge. There is no existing evidence, then, that his teaching developed out of his own close familiarity with the ancient writers on the subject.

Irving's manner of argumentation was very different from that of the 'theological department' of *The Morning Watch*. He expressed a preference in such debates for 'deep arguments drawn from the nature of the Godhead itself, or from the work of the redemption and regeneration of the creature' rather than 'the quotation of texts'.<sup>105</sup> In keeping with this preference, his case was constructed largely by inference from biblical expressions rather than by proof texts, and by systematic arguments developed from the creeds and confessions of the church.

The references Irving himself made to the history of the church tended to refer to particular controversies or periods rather than to particular theologians or councils. For example, he argued that his opponents were merely expressing a revived Marcionism, or docetism, which denied the reality of the incarnation in ordinary human nature: 'This heresy of the immortal and incorruptible body of Christ... was broached by Cerdon ...from him it passed to Marcion, and Valentine'.<sup>106</sup> In making this comparison of his contemporaries to heretical figures from the past, Irving made no specific reference to representatives of the orthodoxy they opposed. However, his reconstruction of the genesis of Marcion's docetism is remarkably similar to that found in the pseudo-Tertullianic *Against All Heresies*.<sup>107</sup> As he does not make any specific reference to the ancient source for his

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James Nisbet, 1830), p. 20.

105. Edward Irving, *An Apology for the Ancient Fullness and Purity of the Doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland: a Sermon [on Jer. ix. 1, 2] Preached on the Occasion of a Fast Appointed by the Presbytery of London, to be Held, because of the Low Ebb of Religion among the Children of the Scottish Church* (London: James Nisbet, 1828), p. 18.

106. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 1 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), p. cxxxviii.

107. This work was already being attributed to 'Pseudo-Tertullian' long before Irving's time but was nonetheless typically included with the collected works of Tertullian. This was still standard practice decades after Irving's death, as illustrated by Sydney Thelwall's inclusion of the work

reconstruction, it is perhaps more likely that it came from a work of ecclesiastical history than from a direct reading of the source itself. He refers in the same context to an anecdote found originally in Irenaeus's *Against Heresies*,<sup>108</sup> echoing first one writer then the next in a manner that suggests his source material is anthological rather than original. Nonetheless, although Irving does not mention either Tertullian or Irenaeus directly in his writings (and it is quite possible that he received their ideas through secondary literature), he did display some familiarity with the concerns of patristic writers on Christology.

There are similarities, at points, between Irving's arguments and those of Tertullian, which suggest that he might have acquainted himself to some degree with the 'father of Latin Christianity'. For example, Tertullian insisted on Christ's flesh originating in Mary, thus making him the offspring of David and Abraham.<sup>109</sup> Irving followed a very similar line of argument, contending, with parallel glosses for David and Abraham, that because '[Christ] was made of a woman (Gal. iv. 7): his substance, then, was woman's flesh'.<sup>110</sup> The conclusion for Tertullian, as for Irving, was that as Christ's flesh was 'not traced from the origin of a spiritual stock',<sup>111</sup> his flesh could not be spiritual either but must be 'none other than Abraham's'.<sup>112</sup> Although this similarity does not constitute proof of influence, Irving was at least forming his arguments in a manner similar to those of Tertullian.

Although Irving seems to follow Tertullian's logic up until this point, there is a point of significant difference. Irving concludes his chain of logic concerning Christ's descent from Mary by concluding that he could thus be shown to share,

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with his translation of Tertullian in 1870. Tertullian, 'Against All Heresies,' in *The Writings of Q. S. F. Tertullianus*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870).

108. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc.*, p. cxxxviii. In mentioning Polycarp's recognition of Marcion as 'The first-born of Satan', Irving was repeating the story found in Irenaeus's most famous work. Irenaeus of Lyons, 'Against Heresies,' in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), p. 416 3.iii.4.

109. Tertullian, 'On the Flesh of Christ,' in *A Select Library of the Christian Church, Ante Nicene Fathers (Vol. 3)*, ed. Alexander Robertson and James Donaldson, (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1999), p. 540.

110. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 22.

111. Tertullian, 'Five Books,' p. 540.

112. *Ibid.*

with his forebears, a nature that 'is sinful'.<sup>113</sup> Tertullian's argument, on the other hand, seems deliberately to be framed to cut off the chain of logic that Irving followed. Recognising that others might conclude, as Irving later would, that 'if He took our flesh, Christ's was a sinful one',<sup>114</sup> Tertullian insisted that this was not so because 'in putting on our flesh, He made it His own; in making it His own, He made it sinless.'<sup>115</sup> Despite the similarities visible in much of their argument about Christ's humanity, Irving and Tertullian came to precisely opposite conclusions about the sinfulness or otherwise of his human nature.

Tertullian also explicitly contradicts another fundamental tenet upon which Irving's argument relied. Irving argued that it was not possible for Christ to possess human nature in an unfallen state, because 'We have no community of substance or of condition with Adam unfallen, he is not common with us.'<sup>116</sup> Tertullian, on the other hand, relies on human commonality with Adam before the fall to establish their commonality with Christ: 'All who refuse to believe that our flesh was not in Christ on the ground that it came not of a human father, let them remember that Adam himself received this flesh of ours without the seed of a human Father'.<sup>117</sup> Note that Tertullian refers to the creation, before the fall, and states that Adam received 'this flesh of ours'. Irving reflected Tertullian's chain of reasoning at certain points, but he also seems to have been unaware of the conflict between his own views and those of the ancient writer. It seems unlikely, then, that he was working with direct reference to his works. More likely his echoing of Tertullian came from half-remembered reading dating to his studies at Edinburgh or from a secondary work of history.

A second early church dispute in which Irving saw direct parallels to his own situation was the Apollinarian crisis of the fourth century. Referring to the Apollinarian teaching, that in Christ the divine logos replaced the human mind, he wrote that Christ must be understood to possess 'perfect and complete manhood, as the Council of Constantinople delivered against Apollinarius, the

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113. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 22.

114. Tertullian, 'Five Books,' p. 535.

115. *Ibid.*, pp. 535-536.

116. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 5.

117. Tertullian, 'Five Books,' p. 536.

totality of that substance which was created, and after being created had fallen'.<sup>118</sup> Though Irving did not quote specific texts or refer to Gregory Nazianzen by name, Gregory's dictum, 'that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which he has united to his Godhead is also saved',<sup>119</sup> has become the most frequently quoted evidence of patristic support for Irving's position. Gregory clearly affirms the complete assumption of human nature by the second person of the Trinity and that, if there is any aspect of humanity that is excluded from the incarnation, that aspect is also excluded from redemption. This would seem to give significant support to Irving's position that in the incarnation, the Son took our human nature *in toto*, fallenness included. However, just as with Tertullian, the Cappadocian Father does not provide quite the level of support for the sinful flesh doctrine as a surface reading would suggest.

Gregory was writing to refute the Apollinarian heresy that only Christ's flesh was human and that he did not have a human soul. It is helpful to read the statement in its immediate context:

If anyone puts his trust in him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which he has united to his Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.<sup>120</sup>

It is clear from this extract that Gregory's interest is not in the fallenness *per se*, but that which fell. As with the rest of human nature, if the mind fell it needs to be restored. In the same letter Gregory explains how that was achieved and in the process clarifies his explanation in a way that undermines any claims that his argument offers much support to Irving's position.

He may sanctify humanity, and be as it were a leaven to the whole lump; and by uniting to Himself that which was condemned release it from all condemnation, becoming for all men all things that we are, except sin; -

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118. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 110.

119. Gregory of Nazianzen, 'Letter to Cledonius the Priest: Against Apollinarius,' in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Volume VII: Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, ed. Philip Schaff, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894).

120. *Ibid.*, p. 440.

body, soul, mind and all through which death reaches and thus He became Man, who is the combination of all these.<sup>121</sup>

Reading carefully, it again becomes apparent that Gregory is emphasising that the Son of God took all of humanity to himself, body, soul and mind. However at exactly the point of insisting on the wholeness of Christ's humanity, Gregory makes the exception of sin. Again, close examination of a patristic text that might appear to be a source for Irving's position reveals the connection to be specious. Whatever similarities there may be between some of the concerns of the earliest Christian writers and the concerns of Edward Irving when it comes to the incarnation, it turns out to be very difficult to find any support for the tight dogmatic affirmation of sinful flesh upon which he insisted.

Questions of Christology provided the fuel for most of the serious doctrinal disputes of the early church. There is thus a wealth of material available covering the very questions that Irving was so concerned to answer. In fact, if anything, the availability of material is a problem as any survey of material in this area will be, of necessity, partial. One means of ameliorating this difficulty is to make an examination of a circumscribed area of writing. There is, thankfully, an obvious candidate for this line of research: the third verse of the eighth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Herein Paul states that the Son came ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας<sup>122</sup> ('in the likeness of sinful flesh') and thus defeated sin. For Irving, this verse made his point conclusively:

If the righteousness of the law therefore, is ever to be produced in flesh, it can only be by casting out this antagonist of the law, which is in flesh; and to do this very work, namely, to condemn the sin in the flesh...this, the Apostle says, was the reason for which God sent his own Son.<sup>123</sup>

Even the phrase 'sinful flesh' is used in the verse, which makes it unsurprising that Irving deployed this passage as a linchpin in his argument. Romans 8:3, as

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121. Gregory of Nazianzen, 'Fourth Theological Oration: Concerning the Son,' in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Volume VII: Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, ed. Philip Schaff, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894), p. 317.

122. Romans 8:3 in *The Greek New Testament*, ed. Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Aland, Barbara; Aland, Kurt; Karavidopoulos, Johannes; Martini, Carlo M.; Metzger, Bruce M., 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

123. Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic*, p. 11.

far as Irving was concerned, provided an unambiguous statement of his doctrine within the pages of holy writ itself.

If we are to seek support for Irving's 'sinful flesh' Christology in the writings of earlier Christians, we do well to look at their commentaries on Romans 8:3. Not only does the wording of the verse offer commentators ample opportunity to express their apprehension of this doctrine, but the expression ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας<sup>124</sup> is so blunt that it might also require them to offer an explanation of a contrary view.

As we examine the variety of commentators on Romans 8:3, what emerges is indeed a unanimous view - but not at all the one that Irving would expect us to discover. One after another, ancient commentators explain the function of ὁμοίωμα in Paul's syntax as being to *distinguish* the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ from sinful flesh. A key example of this interpretative approach, as conceded by Torrance and Dorries, was Augustine. He wrote that God

sent His Son, not in the flesh of sin, but... in the likeness of the flesh of sin...from the likeness, because in Christ there is no sin, but only the likeness of the flesh of sin...there was no real iniquity in Christ; but there was mortality in Him. He did not take on sin, but He took on the punishment of sin. By taking on the punishment without the fault, He cured both punishment and fault.<sup>125</sup>

Dorries, like T.F. Torrance,<sup>126</sup> treats Augustine as the father of a new approach to the incarnation, in contrast to what he describes as the 'prominent doctrine [of fallen flesh] common to Early Church Christology, particularly among the Greek Fathers'.<sup>127</sup>

However, it is quite wrong to speak of Augustine in this way, at least regarding the interpretation of Romans 8:3. Partoens and Dupont, in a paper on Augustine's use of Romans 8:3 in a sermon (preached in either 417 or 418),<sup>128</sup>

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124. Romans 8:3 in *Greek New Testament*.

125. Gert Partoens and Anthony Dupont, 'Sed de quo peccato?: Augustine's Exegesis of Rom. 8:3c in sermo 152, 9-11,' *Vigiliae christianae* 66, no. 2 (2012), p. 195.

126. Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 49.

127. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 209.

128. Sermon 152, 9-11

actually go so far as to describe Augustine's interpretation of Romans 8:3 as 'traditional' in his own day.<sup>129</sup> Their description of this 'traditional' interpretation of Romans 8:3 is remarkably similar to the idea that Christ shared humanity's sinless infirmities. They parse the traditional understanding of 'in the *likeness* of sinful flesh' as taking it to signify

that Christ's flesh, was no *caro peccati* [lit. flesh of sin], but resembled the *caro peccati* of ordinary humans in that it shared with them the physical weaknesses caused by Adam's fall: hunger, thirst, fatigue and — most importantly — death. Christ's flesh bore the consequences of sin while being without sin; it was real flesh (*In carne quidem* [. . .]), but no flesh of sin ([. . .] *sed non in carne peccati*).<sup>130</sup>

Again we note the dual stress on the reality of Christ's human nature and its sinlessness. Irving insisted that his opponents could not claim both. They could have either a real incarnation, or they could deny the sinfulness of the Messiah's humanity. Strikingly, at least by the lights of Augustine, this is a false dichotomy. But are Partoens and Dupont correct in asserting that Augustine was upholding, rather than revising, the tradition at this point?

In a monograph on Augustine's Christology, Dominic Keech traces the influence of Ambrosiaster, Ambrose and Origen in the great bishop of Hippo's handling of ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας<sup>131</sup>. It is not difficult to see why he posits such influence. Ambrosiaster, commenting on the significance of the word 'likeness' states that '[i]t is the likeness of our flesh, because although it is the same as ours, it was sanctified in the womb and he was born without sin, neither did he sin in it'.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, Origen's gloss on Romans 8:3 is that 'we indeed have flesh of sin, but the Son of God had "the likeness of the flesh of sin", not the flesh of sin'. He reasons that, on account of the virgin birth, the Son's nature is: 'the same nature as ours but without the corruption of sin that is passed on by the act of

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129. Gert Partoens and Anthony Dupont, 'Sed Quo', p. 191.

130. Ibid.

131. Dominic Keech, *The Anti-Pelagian Christology of Augustine of Hippo, 396-430*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

132. Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, Il.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 62.



conception'.<sup>133</sup> Augustine was evidently not producing an idiosyncratic account of the incarnation in making no room for sinfulness in Christ's flesh.

If it cannot be argued that Augustine pioneered an entirely new understanding of the incarnation, perhaps Dorries is still correct to suggest that he stood within a Western (Latin-speaking) interpretative tradition and that Irving's position was representative of an Eastern (Greek) approach. The first, rather obvious, objection to this is that Origen is hardly a representative of the Western tradition, and so any approach that he took cannot be said to be exclusively Western. The second, and even more decisive, objection is that this would also be a misrepresentation of the Eastern tradition in the way it handles the incarnation.

John Cassian (c.360-435) makes an interesting example. He was nurtured within the Eastern monastic tradition before becoming a senior figure in the Latin church. He was thus acquainted with senior theologians in East and West. His account of Romans 8:3 accords entirely with that of Augustine:

on this account, the Son of God is said not to have come fully in the flesh of sin, but in the likeness of the flesh of sin. For when he was in that real flesh (eating, drinking and sleeping; truly accepting the mark of the nails) he did not have the sin which common guilt contracts, but only the appearance of it.<sup>134</sup>

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, a highly regarded patristic scholar in his own right, recognises that, in denying fallenness to the flesh of Christ, Cassian was not casting any doubt on the reality of the incarnation:

there is no ambiguity, says Cassian, about the reality of Christ's bodiliness, but so far as the consequence of the Fall in our bodies is concerned, he can only have the appearance of this.<sup>135</sup>

Williams emphasises that Cassian saw Romans 8:3 as a text which enabled him both to acknowledge the reality of the incarnation and to deny any sort of

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133. Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Books 6-10*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), p. 49.

134. Dominic Keech, 'John Cassian and the Christology of Romans 8:3,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 64, no. 3 (2010), p. 286.

135. From the Archbishop of Canterbury's Opening Lecture at the Fifteenth Oxford International Conference on Patristic Studies, 6 August 2007, "*Tempted as we are*": *Christology and the Analysis of the Passions*, q. in *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

pollution of the human nature. This, once again, accords entirely with the position that Irving's opponents were seeking to defend.

Indeed, even when it comes to the subdivisions of the Eastern tradition itself, representatives of the two great catechetical centres, Alexandria and Antioch, can be seen to have taken the same view as Augustine and thus contrary to Irving. John Chrysostom (349-407), a representative of the Antiochene school, wrote:

But if he does say that it was "in the likeness of" flesh, that he sent the Son, do not therefore suppose that his flesh was of a different kind. For as he called it sinful this was why he put in the word "likeness." For sinful flesh it was not that Christ had, but like indeed to our sinful flesh, yet sinless, and in nature the same with us.<sup>136</sup>

Cyril of Alexandria expressed the same concerns but more vehemently, when he exclaimed 'God forbid that Paul should ever say that Christ's body was made of sinful flesh! Rather, it was in the likeness of sinful flesh'.<sup>137</sup> Just as in the West, likewise in the East we find a significant aversion to the language of 'sinful flesh' and an emphasis on Paul's use of the word ὁμοίωμα (likeness) to highlight the disjunction.

It might still be argued as Dorries suggests that, at least among those seminal Eastern theologians, the Cappadocians, the doctrine of 'sinful flesh' prevailed. However, the evidence in favour of this argument is not as strong as might be imagined. We have already observed (see above) that Gregory's dictum about the unassumed being unhealed offers no support to Irving's doctrine. There is also evidence to suggest that Basil and the two Gregorians (Nyssen and Nazianzen) took the same view as Origen and Augustine. Gregory of Nazianzus, who affirmed in a similar vein to Augustine the consequences of Original Sin for human *nature*, was so concerned to uphold Christ's freedom from this pollution,

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136. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, A select library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church., vol. 11 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 432-433.

137. Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanation of the Letter to the Romans*, q. in Gerald Bray, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Romans* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1998)., q. Bray, Romans pp.204-205

that he spoke of Mary herself as having received a preparatory purification before he was conceived:

He becomes Man in all things, save sin, having been conceived by the Virgin who had been fore-purified (προκαθαρθείσης) by the Spirit as to both soul and flesh.<sup>138</sup>

Thus, far from suggesting that the Son had ‘sinful flesh’, Gregory in fact suggests that his mother’s flesh was purged of sin to ensure that there is no question of attributing fallenness of nature to the Son. The other Cappadocian Gregory, bishop of Nyssa and brother to Basil of Caesarea, also draws a connection between the virgin birth and the holiness of the Son’s human nature: ‘He Alone is believed to be spiritually a male child, contracting nothing of the female sin, whence He is also indeed worthily called Holy’.<sup>139</sup> Whilst the language of ‘spiritually male’ and ‘female sin’ does not make obvious sense to modern ears, the point that Gregory is making is nonetheless crystal clear. The virgin birth is significant, because it renders the Son uniquely holy in his human nature.

These last two pieces of evidence come from an anthology provided by Irving’s near contemporary Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), who was Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford from 1828 to 1882. Pusey’s interest in the subject of Christ’s sinless humanity was entirely unrelated to Irving. Pusey collected a huge anthology of sayings about Original Sin and Christ’s sinless humanity as the basis for a letter, sent in 1869 to his erstwhile colleague and pioneer of the Oxford Movement, John Henry Newman. The letter was part of an epistolary *rapprochement* between Pusey and Newman after the former had published an explanatory historical preface to the infamous *Tract 90*. This preface had laid out Pusey’s unwillingness, for various reasons, to seek reunion between the Church of England and the Church of Rome. In this letter he explains one aspect of his differences with Rome, namely his objections to doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, which had been codified in *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854 and which

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138. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 58*, Quoted in E. B. Pusey, *First Letter to the Very Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D. In Explanation Chiefly in Regard to the Reverential Love Due to the Ever-Blessed Theotokos, and the Doctrine of Her Immaculate Conception; With an Analysis of Cardinal De Turrecremata’s Work on the Immaculate Conception* (London: Rivingtons, 1869), pp. 90-91.

139. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Occursu Domini*, Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113. 112–113.

would be fixed into Roman dogma in 1870 with the declaration of papal infallibility in *Pastor aeternus*.

In his letter, Pusey argues *for* the propriety of calling Mary 'Theotokos' (God-bearer), as was agreed at the Council of Chalcedon (451), but argues *against* her immaculate conception. The relevance of all this is that most of the letter is made up of quotations from the Fathers and medievals which demonstrate the nature of the doctrine of Original Sin and the fact that, while the majority testimony of the historic church is in favour of the holiness of Christ's flesh, the tradition regarding Mary is much muddier. Pusey shows that it is often her *virginity* rather than her own sinlessness, which is seen as safeguarding the purity of Christ's humanity. Although the question about Mary is irrelevant to Irving (her relationship to original sin was not part of the debate amongst Evangelical Protestants in the early nineteenth century), the salient point is that Pusey was interacting with a tradition across East and West that insisted that Christ's humanity was sinless in every regard.

Just as the patristic and medieval traditions show no hint of the doctrine that Irving would claim as historic orthodoxy, the same is true for the Reformers. It will suffice for now simply to demonstrate this contention for Luther and Calvin. One of Irving's opponents at the time, W.H. Colyer, took great delight in pointing to Luther's unequivocal statement that 'Christ...hath not a CORRUPT and SINFUL, but a MOST PURE and HOLY FLESH.'<sup>140</sup> Likewise, in Calvin's *Institutes* we find an account of Romans 8:3 which accords entirely with the patristic tradition observed above.

The apostles teaches the same thing in another passage, that Christ was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh"...Thus, so skilfully does he distinguish Christ from the common lot that he is true man but without fault and corruption...because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation may be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam's fall.<sup>141</sup>

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140. Martin Luther, *Comment on Galatians 5:19-20*, quoted in Colyer, *Animadversions*. Title Page (Colyer's emphasis).

141. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).II, xiii, 4 (vol.1 p.481).

The evidence of Luther and Calvin suggests that the stable tradition of the Fathers regarding the freedom of Christ's human nature from any taint of sin continued to be upheld in the development of Protestant thought. The claim that there were mainstream historical antecedents for Irving's Christology has little to commend it.

### **Conclusion:**

We have seen that, although Irving faced theological censure and disgrace in his own time for his teaching that Christ possessed a 'fallen' or 'sinful' human nature, his views have received a much more favourable appraisal in more recent years. Theologians such as T.F. Torrance have suggested that Irving's view was, in reality, the orthodox view, and that it was his opponents who were in error and adrift from the mainstream of Christian theology.

As a result a number of different theories have been put forward to explain why his views were rejected in his own time. It has been suggested that he was simply misunderstood and that his views were not, in fact, particularly eccentric in his own day. Proponents of this view have suggested that it was not, therefore, Irving's Christology to which his opponents *really* objected, but rather other aspects of his ministry. H.C. Whitley proposed that the real cause of Irving's troubles was the ecstatic utterances in his church. Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker blamed Irving's apocalyptic vision and rejection of Christendom for his travails.

These suggestions have some merit. Irving's denunciations of the hierarchy of the Church of Scotland cannot have won him many friends in high places, and the trustees of the National Scotch Church defended him from charges of heresy over his Christology, but dismissed him from his post because of the 'manifestations'. Nonetheless, there is substantial evidence that his Christology really was considered eccentric and alarming by a broad range of persons. Notably, many of Irving's closest allies, regarding his eschatological views and his expectation of renewed supernatural gifting for the Church, abandoned fellowship with him and sometimes rejected the other views they had held in common with him, on the basis that they viewed his Christology as so significantly defective. Indeed, even

his ecclesiastical heirs in the CAC sought to distance themselves from his views or at least to water them down.

We have seen clearly, then, that Irving's views were genuinely controversial in their time. The question that follows is whether or not this was because he was better acquainted with, or more in tune with, the orthodox theological tradition on the human nature of Christ than his peers? The evidence we have observed, from the Fathers and the Reformers, demonstrates conclusively that there was, in fact, a very strong theological tradition which stood contrary to Irving's claim that his was the only orthodox Christological view. His opponents were not, then, representatives of a narrow or sectarian version of Presbyterianism only, but represented the mainstream theological tradition. This conclusion raises the possibility that Irving was saying something genuinely new, even if he did so unintentionally.

## Chapter 6

# Emergence: The Development of Edward Irving's Christology

Edward Irving's doctrine of the incarnation has been shown, despite scholarly arguments to the contrary, to have been genuinely controversial and apparently novel in his context. His tenets were received with horror by many of his contemporaries and a search for theological progenitors for his 'fallen flesh' Christology failed to reveal anything within the mainstream Patristic or Protestant traditions, in which he claimed to stand, that resembled his statements about Christ's human nature. The established scholarly wisdom on Irving, which minimises the novelty and the scandal of his incarnational thought, has seen questions of the origin of his ideas in this area as a *cul de sac*. With that tradition called into question, a wide vista for investigation of its genesis opens up before us.

The necessary prelude to a discussion of the influences that led Irving to his new understanding is an investigation of their emergence. The most basic question that faces us must be "*when* did Irving come to think like this?" Answering that will allow us to set in place the context within which to consider the possible explanations for the emergence of Irving's disputed idea. Remarkably, that is so complex and disputed a matter that this entire chapter must be devoted to it.

For a long time, scholars, believing Irving's teachings to be innovations, suggested that Irving's doctrine had exhibited gradual development during his London ministry. Edward Miller, who reluctantly, though with certainty, identified the 'fallen flesh' Christology as 'Irving's heresy',<sup>1</sup> considered that 'Irving really drifted into the error', which he describes as born of an 'intellectual inadvertence'.<sup>2</sup> P.E. Davies expressed a similar view in his PhD thesis of 1928. He argued that Irving's final understanding of the incarnation was formed in

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1. Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism; or, of the So-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), p. 302.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

reaction to a controversy that he had inadvertently started in 1827.<sup>3</sup> According to Davies, Irving initially affirmed nothing more controversial than that 'Christ simply became one of us, a natural man to be described in ordinary terms'.<sup>4</sup> Irving then progressed by stages towards his mature position, finally expressed in *Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses* (henceforth *SLOD*), published in 1828.<sup>5</sup>

This approach to Irving has been challenged by subsequent scholarship, most notably in the 1987 PhD thesis of David Dorries.<sup>6</sup> He argues that Irving's 'doctrine of Christ's humanity in its objectionable form...was an integral component of his preaching from the beginning.'<sup>7</sup> He argues *contra* Davies that Irving's Christology was consistent throughout his ministry and that his disputed ideas about the incarnation can be found as much in Irving's earliest writings as in his later work. Although the controversy did not break out until 1827, Dorries (following Mrs Oliphant)<sup>8</sup> identifies the addresses reproduced in Irving's controversial first volume of *SLOD* as a series preached at Hatton Garden in 1825.

The importance of Dorries's thesis can be seen, for instance, in the work of Peter Elliott.<sup>9</sup> The thrust of Elliott's thesis is that Irving was, in his own right, a significant figure in the Romantic movement. To that end, Elliott presents evidence that Irving was shaped by Romantic ideas from his youth.<sup>10</sup> With Irving's credentials as a young Romantic established, Elliott goes on to argue that, though his relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an important influence on Irving, the Scotsman's most significant ideas were really his own.<sup>11</sup> In the

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3. Paul Ewing Davies, 'An Examination of the Views of Edward Irving Concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ' (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1928).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

5. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 1 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828).

6. David W. Dorries, 'Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature.' (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1987).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

8. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 3.

9. Peter Elliott, 'Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis' (PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2010).

10. Cf chapter 3, 'Biography', pp. 68-9

11. *Ibid.*, p. 320.



context of Elliott's thesis, he sees the stability of Irving's Christology as an important line of argument in demonstrating his independence of thought. Because some writers, such as Arnold Dallimore, have suggested that Coleridge was the key influence behind Irving's distinctive Christology,<sup>12</sup> Elliott recognised that, if this could be shown to be inaccurate, his case for Irving's independence from Coleridge would be strengthened. Thus it was important for him to demonstrate that Irving was teaching about Christ's 'sinful flesh' before he even met Coleridge.<sup>13</sup> In Dorries's work, he found a case so dominant in the scholarly arena that he merely needed to cite Dorries's thesis to establish this vital plank in his own argument.<sup>14</sup>

Dorries can almost be said to hold the field entirely at this stage in the scholarly argument. There has been one recent dissident voice, that of Tim Grass. In his biography of Irving, *The Lord's Watchman*, Grass does not accept Dorries's identification of 'sinful flesh' teaching in the earliest sermons.<sup>15</sup> He does not go into detailed discussion of this matter, nor does he completely reject Dorries's arguments. In particular, he accepts the identification of the series preached in 1825 as the source material for volume 1 of *SLOD*.<sup>16</sup>

As the debate stands at present, the first matter for consideration is Dorries's evidence that Irving was already committed to a belief in Christ's 'sinful flesh' before the 'Trinity' sermons of 1825. This is not entirely straightforward to establish, as firsthand evidence of his theological understanding prior to his beginning at Hatton Garden is very scarce. Irving himself is at least partly responsible for this paucity of information, following his resolution, in 1820,<sup>17</sup> to burn all his early sermons. From his period as assistant to Chalmers, only his farewell sermon to the congregation in Glasgow was published and survives.<sup>18</sup>

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12. Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 46-47.

13. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis", p. 121.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Timothy Grass, *Edward Irving: The Lord's Watchman* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), p. 175.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

17. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 82.

18. Edward Irving, *Farewell Discourse to the Congregation and Parish of St. John's, Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Chalmers and Collins, 1822).

There are some newspaper reports of addresses given in Glasgow, but they offer very little detail about the content of the sermons, merely describing Irving's preaching as 'very animated'<sup>19</sup> and 'very impressive'.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, Dorries began his investigation with the early years of Irving's ministry in London. However, despite the lack of direct evidence from Irving's writings, there are other sources which can help us to weigh the likelihood that Irving taught the idea of incarnation in 'fallen flesh' before he moved to London.

The first line of available evidence concerns Irving's theological education. When he made his partial studies at the Faculty of Divinity, the professor responsible for instructing the young Irving in 'systematic divinity' was William Ritchie, who was appointed in May 1809. Ritchie was a man renowned for his thoroughgoing adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith. In 1822 Alexander Bower, author of a history of the University of Edinburgh, published *The Edinburgh Student's Guide: Or an Account of the Classes of the University*. In this publication, Bower's account of Professor Ritchie's teaching, which he describes as 'very orthodox', describes the plan and goal of his classes as follows:

Though no text book be employed by him yet the plan he has adopted may be considered as founded upon the standards of the Church or the Westminster Confession of Faith which every candidate for a license [sic] is required to sign before he can obtain it.<sup>21</sup>

Not only was Professor Ritchie concerned with understanding of and adherence to the doctrinal standard of the Kirk himself, but he was also fastidious in ensuring the orthodoxy of his students.

The young Irving clearly enjoyed the esteem of his teacher. Mrs Oliphant tells us, for example, that Ritchie's relationship with Irving was such that, at the age of 26, Irving 'was engaged to supply the pulpit of his old Professor of Divinity'.<sup>22</sup> Could Dr Ritchie have shared Irving's ideas about his Saviour's human nature, or perhaps even been the source of it? The testimony of Robert Balmer renders this

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19. *Glasgow Herald*, Friday, 9 November 1821, p.4

20. *Glasgow Herald*, Monday, 12 November 1821, p.4

21. A. Bower, *The Edinburgh Student's Guide: Or, an Account of the Classes of the University, Arranged under the Four Faculties; with Detail of What is Taught in Each* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1822), pp. 99-100.

22. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 83.

doubtful. Balmer, who was a near contemporary of Irving under the tutelage of William Ritchie at Edinburgh,<sup>23</sup> wrote as follows about Irving's teaching:

A recent author presumes to assert that though Jesus Christ never committed actual sin, he assumed "sinful flesh" ...the late Mr Irving [was] the chief author and abbetter [sic] of this monstrous dogma.<sup>24</sup>

Balmer, who was academically able, winning a prize at Edinburgh for 'the best essay on Moses as a legislator',<sup>25</sup> understood Irving's Christology to be deviant. What's more, he identified Irving as 'author' of this teaching, which renders it extremely doubtful that the ideas in question were ever expressed by his fastidious tutor. Had Ritchie believed this teaching to be orthodox, we can be certain he would have made sure that his students knew it, and a gifted student like Balmer would have been unlikely to miss it entirely.

The second strand of evidence is found in Irving's relationship with his first ministerial employer. Thomas Chalmers's affection for Irving as a colleague and *protégé* was such that S.J. Brown describes it as 'almost paternal'.<sup>26</sup> Despite this, at no point did Chalmers give any indication of sympathy with Irving's distinctive Christology, and at no point did he speak in Irving's defence. Brown points out that in 1830, when Irving, under fire from the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, made a direct appeal to him for aid, he refused.<sup>27</sup> Chalmers's son-in-law and biographer, William Hanna, records that at this time Chalmers was sympathetic to Irving's associates who also faced censure for their theological publications.<sup>28</sup> He notes that Chalmers had a 'substantial agreement with many of the leading doctrines of those generally denominated "Marrow men"', a group accused of antinomianism because of their emphasis on free grace. Hanna goes on to indicate that this agreement caused Chalmers to 'judge mildly of the errors of Mr Erskine and Mr Campbell',<sup>29</sup> that is Thomas Erskine and John McLeod Campbell, who

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23. Robert Balmer, *Academical Lectures and Pulpit Discourses. By the late R. Balmer. With a memoir of his life* (Edinburgh: W. Oliphant & Sons, 1845), pp. 12-13.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

26. Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 215.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

28. William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1852), p. 246.

29. *Ibid.*

both taught, in contrast to the teaching of the Kirk, the theory of universal atonement. Campbell was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland in 1831. Erskine, an Episcopalian, was beyond formal censure by the Kirk, but received fierce criticism and was often linked with Campbell. Whilst Chalmers was sympathetic to their controversial teaching, Hanna notes that in contrast, '[f]rom the daring speculations of Mr Irving he sensitively shrunk back'.<sup>30</sup> Though some have criticised Chalmers for not supporting Campbell and Erskine,<sup>31</sup> with whom he held theological sympathies, it is a mistake to assume that those sympathies extended to every element of Irving's thought as well.

Chalmers's relationship with Irving cooled significantly towards the end of the 1820s. S.J. Brown traces the final break in their friendship to Irving's refusal to intervene in the affair of R.H. Herschell and Helen S. Mowbray, a matter in which Irving insisted that Miss Mowbray's parents were not in a position to oppose a marriage approved of by the Holy Spirit, no matter how shady Herschell's past.<sup>32</sup> This may, for Chalmers, have been the last straw, but it was the end of a drawn-out parting. In 1827 Chalmers, investigating a possible opening at the new University College in London, also preached at the opening of the Regent Square church.<sup>33</sup> On 20 October of that year, Chalmers wrote to a Mrs Paul, herself clearly a 'student of prophecy', expressing his own inclination towards millenarian views encouraged by a favourable reaction to reading Irving's book on the subject.<sup>34</sup> By June 1828, however, Chalmers's view of Irving had dimmed. He wrote to his sister, 'I perfectly agree with the soundness and good sense of your observations on the subject of Mr Irving whose extravagance and obscurity have placed him far out of my sympathy and sight'.<sup>35</sup> In May 1830, the conversation on his visit to Coleridge in Highgate was dominated by 'Mr Irving and his unlucky phantasms',<sup>36</sup> as Coleridge put it, or in Chalmers's

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30. Ibid.

31. For a discussion of this see Brown, *Chalmers*, pp. 215-217. and John Roxborough, *Thomas Chalmers, Enthusiast for Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), p. 231.

32. Brown, *Chalmers*, p. 217.

33. Anonymous, 'Sermon: by Thomas Chalmers...at the Opening of the new National Scotch Church, in Regent Square,' *The Pulpit* 8, no. 215 (19 May 1827),

34. William Hanna, *A Selection from the Correspondence of the Late Thomas Chalmers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), p. 302.

35. Hanna, *Memoirs*, p. 221.

36. Letter to J.H. Green, 31 May 1830. Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*,

recollection: '[Coleridge] poured out an eloquent tribute of his regard mourning pathetically that such a man should be so throwing himself away. Mr Irving's book on the "Human Nature of Christ" in its analysis was minute to absurdity'.<sup>37</sup> Chalmers was far from in sympathy with Irving by the end of the decade, and the younger man's theological speculations about the human nature of Christ were not exempt from his disquiet.

For Chalmers indeed, speculative theology was a baneful thing. He was concerned with what was plain and what was useful. Nowhere is this more obvious than in his comments on Hill's *Lectures in Divinity*,<sup>38</sup> where Chalmers decried the 'sad desecration' of 'the truth as propounded in Scripture' in the work of 'the most unsavoury and untasteful theologians, whose speculations...are often absolutely hideous.'<sup>39</sup> Hill, who had been Principal in Divinity at St Mary's College, St Andrews, was an important figure for Chalmers. He had been Chalmers's teacher and Chalmers went on to use Hill's *Lectures* as a textbook in his own teaching.<sup>40</sup> In reviewing Hill's work, Chalmers gives warm endorsement to his teachings about the nature of Christ and what he says about the hypostatic union.<sup>41</sup> Whilst Chalmers does not go into particular detail on the subject, it is worth recalling one passage from Hill's *Lectures*, that precedes any controversy featuring Irving. Hill wrote as follows about the implications of the Virgin Birth:

Not only is he the Son of God, but, as the Son of man, he is exalted above his brethren, while he is made like them. He is preserved from the contamination adhering to the race whose nature he assumed.<sup>42</sup>

It is evident that the instruction Chalmers received from Hill regarding the humanity of Christ was exactly opposed to what Irving would teach, and Chalmers showed no sign of demurring from the position laid out by Hill when

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ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1895), p. 752.

37. Hanna, *Memoirs*, p. 262.

38. George Hill, *Lectures in Divinity (3 vols)*, ed. Alexander Hill (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1833).

39. Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works of Thomas Chalmers: Prelections on Butler's Analogy, Paley's Evidences of Christianity, and Hill's Lectures in Divinity* (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1852), p. 317.

40. Daniel F. Rice, 'An Attempt at Systematic Reconstruction in the Theology of Thomas Chalmers,' *Church History* 48, no. 2 (1979), p. 175.

41. That is, following the Council of Chalcedon, the idea that Christ is fully human and fully divine with the natures preserved intact and distinct from each other. The union is achieved by each nature being possessed by the one person, in Greek *hypostasis*, thus 'hypostatic union'.

42. Hill, *Lectures*, p. 508.

he used his materials in teaching.

The other striking feature of Chalmers's *Prelections* is that he continues to endorse an idea of atonement by the substitutionary death of Christ rather than, as in Irving's schema, by the incarnation itself. He wrote:

But I do feel jealous of any representation which removes as it were to the background what I hold the great and distinguishing article of Christianity, the remission of sin through the blood of a satisfying atonement.<sup>43</sup>

As Irving's doctrine of the incarnation was so closely tied to his rejection of a model of sacrificial atonement, Chalmers's ongoing espousal of such an atonement also makes it less likely that the two men would have agreed on Irving's particular Christology. This significant difference between Irving and Chalmers would surely have caused remark at some point if it had been present during their time as colleagues in Glasgow.

There is a third factor that renders it highly improbable that Irving taught or even held the particular doctrine that would eventually cost him his position as a presbyter in the Kirk: that is his examination before Presbytery. In July 1822, Irving underwent the 'trials' that a candidate was to face before being admitted to ordination. These were accelerated, due to the unusual circumstances of his appointment to London,<sup>44</sup> but nonetheless, would have had to involve:

1st Catechetic trials on divinity chronology and church history,  
2d A trial on the Hebrew and Greek languages,  
3d An exegesis in Latin on some controverted head in divinity,  
4th A homily in English,  
5th An exercise and addition,  
6th A lecture on some large portion of Scripture,  
7th A popular sermon.

It being understood that if the Presbytery see cause they may examine the student upon the subject of these several discourses.<sup>45</sup>

However thoroughly or not the Annan Presbytery may have examined Irving,

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43. Chalmers, *Posthumous Works*, p. 121.

44. Letter to The Elders of the Caledonian Church, 3 May 1822, in Barbara Waddington, *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012), pp. 147-148.

45. Bower, *Guide*, pp. 99-100.

what they were required to do on satisfactory completion of that examination is crucial. Bower, in his *Edinburgh Student's Guide*, records that, following these tests, presbyteries were required to ask a series of questions and sign a 'formula' relating to an act passed by the General Assembly in 1711. These questions and this formula required the student solemnly to reject the teachings of the Flemish mystic Antoinette Bourignon,<sup>46</sup> who had gained significant popularity in early eighteenth-century Scotland to constitute a threat to orthodoxy.<sup>47</sup>

It was Mme Bourignon's error that the General Assembly would claim to recognise in Irving's writings a little over a century later,<sup>48</sup> and it is not difficult to see why. According to the laws of the Kirk, the seventh error of Madame Bourignon's teaching, rejected by every ordinand before admission to the presbyterate, was: 'Asserting the sinful corruption of Christ's human nature and a rebellion in Christ's natural will to the will of God.'<sup>49</sup> It is hard to imagine the Edward Irving of 1828 onwards subscribing to this formula; his later career would show him to be entirely willing to confront authority and in no way to be someone to make oaths with his fingers crossed behind his back. In swearing his rejection of Bourignonism, Irving denied asserting the 'sinful corruption of

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46. There are a variety of spellings for this name in the literature of the time. Her publications were issued in the name of Antoinette Bourignon (see for instance: Antoinette Bourignon, *The Renovation of the Gospel-Spirit. Part the First. Translated from the French*, trans. George Garden (London: n.p., 1737).). The General Assembly adopted the spelling with an extra 'i' and for reasons of consistency in quotation this spelling has been adopted. The literature of the time also refers to her as Mme Borrinian, see for instance: Anonymous, 'The Irving Heresy. General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 21,' *The Monthly Repository (and Review)*, 1831.; Irving himself described the 'Borigninian' heresy, see: Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. (140) lxxv. He made reference three years later to accusations of the 'Bourignian' error, see: Edward Irving, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation, in a Series of Lectures by the Rev. Edward Irving*, vol. 3 (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1831), p. 1043.

47. Alexander Robertson. MacEwen, *Antoinette Bourignon, Quietist* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), p. v.

48. Edward Irving, 'A Judgment As To What Course The Ministers And The People Of The Church Of Scotland Should Take In Consequence Of The Decisions Of The Last General Assembly,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* 5, (1831), p. 114. Note Georg Grub, *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland from the Introduction of Christianity to the Present Time*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861), p. 197.

49. Thomas Pitcairn, *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1658-1842* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Printing and Publishing Company, 1843), p. 308. Irving does in fact make reference to this oath (against what he calls here the 'Borigninian' heresy) in the Incarnation Lectures in *SLOD*, but only mentions the claim of rebellion in the natural will, pointedly avoiding mention of the previous clause about 'sinful corruption of Christ's human nature'. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. (140) lxxv.

Christ's human nature' on the very eve of his departure to London.

David Dorries, seeking positive evidence for the 'remarkable consistency' of Irving's Christology,<sup>50</sup> confined his investigation of the earliest available evidence to the years between 1822 and 1825, during which Irving conducted his early ministry in London.<sup>51</sup> The *terminus a quo* for this investigation was determined by the availability of the evidence, there being no written records of sermons before 1822. 1825 is significant on the other hand, and forms the *terminus ad quem*, because this is the year to which Mrs Oliphant<sup>52</sup> attributed the preaching of four sermons that would become part of Irving's first controversial work on the incarnation, *SLOD*, which was published in 1828.<sup>53</sup> Dorries's aim was to demonstrate that 'the essential and enduring elements of his Christology, including the doctrine of Christ's fallen human nature, were present from the earliest publications of his preaching'.<sup>54</sup> Given what has been demonstrated about the novelty of Irving's ideas, and the likelihood that he did not learn them in Scotland, the evidence that Dorries adduces for this requires very careful analysis.

Key to Dorries's argument is a series of quotations, taken from sermons belonging to this period between 1822 and 1825, that appear to show Irving speaking, at an early date, of the Son of God incarnate in 'sinful flesh' or taking 'fallen human nature'. Assessing the value of these citations is not, however, altogether straightforward. In part, this is because Dorries does not, generally, specify which work he is citing beyond a page reference within the *Collected Writings*. As the five volumes in question are not arranged chronologically, it is left, at a number of points, for the reader to investigate for himself whether the passage in question does in fact date from before 1825. This problem is compounded by the fact that Gavin Carlyle, the editor of the *Writings*, only gives the vaguest of information about the dating of many parts of the collected works. For example, the information available about the origin of the 'Miscellaneous

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50. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 73.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 3.

53. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc.*

54. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 73.



Discourses', which constitute volume four, is as follows: 'The Discourses contained in this volume were written at various periods between the year 1822 when Mr Irving first settled in London and 1832 two years before his death. The whole of them with one exception are now printed for the first time.'<sup>55</sup> In interacting with Dorries on this point, then, it will be necessary to investigate in some detail just what it is that is being quoted and, when that is established, to investigate the evidence for the date of origin.

There is another, perhaps more serious, difficulty: not all the footnotes actually point to the text that is quoted. For instance, on p.87 of Dorries's thesis, which provides crucial evidence for early talk of 'fallen flesh', only one of the nine footnotes accurately points to a page where the quoted text is to be found.<sup>56</sup> To give an example of this problem with Dorries's references: Irving's description of Christ bearing fallen human nature 'pure, holy, and spotless, without one particle of uncleanness'<sup>57</sup> is cited as occurring on p.359 of the first volume of the *Collected Writings*: it does not. In fact, the distinctive phrasing of the quotation comes from an article from the *Morning Watch* of 1833, also published as 'Jesus our Example' and included in the fourth volume of the *Collected Writings*.<sup>58</sup> This falls well outside the timeframe that Dorries is attempting to examine.

A careful examination of the quotations in this section reveals that the most likely explanation for this problem is a rather unfortunate confusion in Dorries's research notebooks. At a number of points where the footnotes are incorrect, the references have simply been transposed. The indicated location for the phrase 'the creature's fallen condition'<sup>59</sup> (p.211 of volume two of the *Writings*, a sermon entitled 'The Temptation'), does not fruitfully reveal its whereabouts. However, a footnote on the same page of Dorries's thesis, itself a mistaken citation for 'in the likeness of fallen Adam' (p.341 of volume four), does point to the location of the original missing phrase. This is regrettably not a unique example. A reference to

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55. Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 4 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), p. x.

56. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 87.

57. Ibid.

58. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 526.

59. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 87.

'man's fallen nature,'<sup>60</sup> which Dorries mistakenly indicates to have come from p.474 of volume four of the *Collected Writings*, does appear on p.211 of volume two, which is the location mistakenly given for the first missing phrase mentioned above. This also makes sense of the reference to p.474 of volume four as, at this location, Irving refers to the Son of God inhabiting 'sinful flesh' — which Dorries mistakenly indicates as coming from p.98 of volume two.<sup>61</sup> Not all of the errors in citation are errors of transposition; some are more likely errors in transcription. The phrase 'clothe him in imperfect manhood'<sup>62</sup> has a footnote leading to p.77 of volume one of the *Writings*, when the quotation is actually to be found on p.87 in volume two. A certain amount of unscrambling will be necessary, therefore, before Dorries's claims can be adequately assessed.

As we shall see, some of the quotations that are mis-referenced do, eventually, turn out to be from the period in question. However, this is not true of all of them. For instance, a reference to 'the substance of the fallen creature'<sup>63</sup> is found, not in the location indicated, but in the preface to *SLOD*,<sup>64</sup> published in 1828, well after the period in question. There are also occasions when, though the citation is correct, the quotation is not. A reference to 'the fallen humanity of man'<sup>65</sup> appears to be a *précis* of Irving's prose at the location indicated; what the author wrote at that point was 'a part of the fallen creature'.<sup>66</sup> Dorries then cites Irving using the phrase, 'in the likeness of fallen Adam'<sup>67</sup> referring his readers to the same page as the previous quotation. This phrase does not seem to appear verbatim anywhere in Irving's works; regardless, it is certainly not from the page he indicates.

In light of the rather confusing nature of the evidence provided, the table below sets out the fourteen phrases quoted by Dorries in this section that are vital to his argument, along with the location indicated by his footnote and, where relevant the actual location of the quoted text.

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60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., p. 88.

62. Ibid., p. 87.

63. Ibid.

64. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. vol.1 p.vii.

65. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 87.

66. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 339.

67. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 87.

<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Citation</b>	<b>Correction</b>
'The Fallen humanity of man'	CW iv p.340-1 'The Lord Jesus Christ'	'A part of the fallen creature'
'In the likeness of fallen Adam'	CW iv p.341 'The Lord Jesus Christ'	Not found in exactly this form
'Taking a part of the fallen creature into union with himself'	CW iv p.339 'The Lord Jesus Christ'	'[U]nited itself to the substance of the fallen creature'
'The creature's fallen condition'	CW ii p.211 'The Temptation'	CW iv p.341 'The Lord Jesus Christ'
'The substance of the fallen creature'	CW ii p.98 'John the Baptist'	CW v p.5 'The Doctrine of the Incarnation opened'
'Man's fallen nature'	CW iv p.474 'Strivings of the Holy Spirit'	CW ii p.211 'The Temptation'
'The fallen ruins of humanity'	CW ii p.98 'John the Baptist'	Correct as Stated
'To inhabit sinful flesh'	CW ii p.98 'John the Baptist'	CW iv p.474 'Strivings of the Holy Spirit'
'His manifestation in sinful flesh'	CW iv p.526 'Jesus our example'	CW ii p.98 'John the Baptist'
'Sinful human nature'	CW ii p.87 'John the Baptist'	CW ii p.98 'John the Baptist'
Humanity in the 'apostate condition'	CW iv p.353 'God's Glory in the Church'	Correct as Stated
'Of the seed of mother Eve'	CW iv p.346 'The Lord Jesus Christ'	Correct as Stated
'Under its conditions of mortality'	CW iv p.527 'Jesus our example'	Correct as Stated
'The infirmities of mortality which he partook of'	<i>Thirty Sermons</i> p.310	Correct as Stated

A quick glance at this table reveals that, despite the significant problems of citation, all seven of the works to which Dorries intends to make reference are indeed represented on the right. In other words, there is at least some evidence for Dorries's claim that Irving's 'fallen flesh' teaching can be seen in his early ministry. It is necessary therefore to examine the evidence for the dating of each of these works to ascertain their significance in establishing this point.

The first work from which Dorries quotes in this section, and the one from which he quotes most frequently, 'The Lord Jesus Christ', is found in volume four of the *Collected Writings*. Carlyle's statement that the contents of this volume date from between 1822 and 1832 reveals that this volume does indeed include works from Irving's earliest London years, but only because it includes works from nearly the whole of Irving's London ministry. The date of the particular sermon, a discourse on 'The Lord Jesus Christ', is not, however, entirely obscure. There is strong evidence that this sermon was preached in July 1828.

In Mrs Oliphant's biography, we find a letter of Irving's dated 19 July 1828, in which he informed Isabella that, immediately upon his return to London from Scotland, 'I preached my sermon on 'Jesus'.<sup>68</sup> On its own, this would scarcely prove anything; however, the sermon as recorded by Carlyle contains a very personal note that is revealing. Towards the end of the sermon, Irving said, 'And now, brethren, before I close, allow me to express, in a few words, the heartfelt satisfaction with which I return to my charge over your souls, and to the labours of the ministry in this city.'<sup>69</sup> Again, on its own all this proves is that he preached the sermon in question after being away from London; yet as the sermon draws to its close, July 1828 seems an increasingly likely date. Irving describes his preaching tour of Scotland and his preaching to the Scottish churches in which his focus was 'the coming of the Lord in judgment'.<sup>70</sup> This recollection tallies with Mrs Oliphant's description of his travels of 1828<sup>71</sup> and fits with the recollections of others about this tour. In a letter dated 4 June 1828, Anne Grant of Laggan,

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68. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 42.

69. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 348.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Oliphant, *Life*, pp. 13-32.

who heard Irving preach during that summer, describes Irving's 'new doctrines' concerning the second coming as 'the sole topic of conversation' amongst her neighbours.<sup>72</sup> Having described the general theme of his tour, Irving then describes a specific occurrence, which appears to be a reference to the tragic events of Sunday 15 June 1828, when the gallery collapsed at Kirkcaldy Parish church:

I preached unto them the coming of the Lord in judgment, little thinking that I should witness any act of His judgment; but so it was, the Lord did lift up His hand and make a breach in the midst of the congregation. It is a fearful thing, let me tell you, brethren, to witness such an awful sight.<sup>73</sup>

Whether this is a reference to the Kirkcaldy disaster or not, the other circumstantial details mean that we can confidently assign a date in July 1828 to this sermon. The effect of this is to rule out the four quotations Dorries makes from 'The Lord Jesus Christ' as evidence that Irving's doctrine of the incarnation was a feature of his early preaching.

The next work Dorries quotes is the preface to Irving's *Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses* which was published in 1828. Although some of the sermons reproduced in that work date from somewhat earlier, and much of it was printed well prior to publication, the preface itself was clearly written in 1828, with the controversy already beginning to gain momentum. Irving writes, '[t]he stir which was made in divers quarters, both of this and my native land, about this matter... shewed me... that it was necessary to take controversial weapons in my hand, and contend earnestly for the faith as it was once delivered to the saints.'<sup>74</sup> It would be impossible to argue on any grounds that *this* was a 'pre-controversy' document.

Irving's lectures on 'The Temptation', which are next to be quoted by Dorries, do appear to have an early provenance. Unlike the works included as 'Miscellaneous Discourses' in volume four of the *Collected Writings*, Gavin Carlyle gives this work

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72. Anne MacVicar Grant, 'Letter XLVII to Mrs. Smith, 4 June 1828,' in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan*, ed. John Peter Grant, (London: Green and Longmans, 1844), p. 120.

73. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 348.

74. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. lv. reproduced in Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 2 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1864), p. 3.

a date: 'These lectures, delivered in 1823, formed part of an intended series on the Gospel of St Luke; the plan of which was, however, only partially carried out.'<sup>75</sup> This statement, if accurate, would put this sermon squarely in Dorries's window of 1823-1825.

Carlyle clearly had some difficulty in pinpointing dates for Irving's previously unpublished works, which helps to explain why he offered such vague information for the original timings of the works he published in volume four of the *Collected Writings*. Notebooks amongst the papers belonging to the Gray family from York, who liked to attend Irving's preaching when they visited London, include very detailed notes by a member of the family who attended the 'Temptation' lectures on the evenings of consecutive Sundays: 25 January, 1 and 8 February 1824.<sup>76</sup> Examination of the notebooks reveals that these are the lectures reproduced in the *Collected Writings*. The longhand notes in the Gray family papers are more condensed than the apparently verbatim transcript provided by Carlyle, but they have substantially similar phrasing and follow the same structure. For instance: the sermon of 25 January, taking the opening of Luke 4 as its text, follows an exploration of the powers bestowed by 'the descent of the Holy Spirit, like a dove resting upon him' with a discussion of whether this renders him 'inferior to his father,' concluding that this subjugation was true regarding his human nature but 'does not affect his everlasting equality with the Father'.<sup>77</sup> The corresponding sermon in the *Collected Writings*, the first on 'the Temptation', is based on the same passage of scripture and picks up the same themes, concluding the section in question, 'From the something additional that is now bestowed upon Him, it is vain to argue that heretofore He must have been inferior to what He now is, and inferior to His Father, by whom those things were bestowed. Surely, He was inferior before His baptism to what He now is after His baptism, and inferior to His Father from whom those things were

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75. Ibid., p. 192 (asterisked footnote).

76. William Gray, '25th Jan 1824 Evening Service, Caledonian Church, Cross Street, Hatton Garden, Mr Grey [sic] in Green Pew,' *Sermons of Rev. Edward Irving (1792-1854)* 2 manuscript notebooks: recto only written, In Gray Family Papers, York City Library, Acc5,6,24,235/S2a/b, (1824), n.p.

77. Ibid. n.p.

bestowed, but that has no relation to His everlasting equality with His Father.<sup>178</sup>  
There can be little doubt that these are records of the same discourses.

Thus we are faced with two alternative dates for these lectures. It is not difficult, however, to discern which should be preferred in this case. The evidence from the Gray papers is clearly superior, because it belongs to the time of the lectures themselves, whereas Carlyle was working forty years later and does not offer any documentary evidence for the dates he gives. The Gray evidence still places the lectures within the timeframe that Dorries implies. However, it does raise certain questions about the sources with which Carlyle was working, particularly the accuracy of their dating.

In seeking early evidence for Irving's Christology, Dorries also quotes from 'John the Baptist', a series of fifteen lectures. Carlyle dates these lectures as follows: 'This series of discourses on the Life of John the Baptist, now printed for the first time, was delivered in the year 1823, soon after Mr Irving settled in London.'<sup>179</sup> Corroborating evidence for the claimed date is provided by the fact that some of these lectures were also published in *Thirty Sermons*.<sup>80</sup> This collection of Irving's works was published in 1835 but consisted of sermons preached in his first three years in London, and taken down in shorthand.<sup>81</sup>

With the contents of *Thirty Sermons* already accepted as belonging to this pre-1825 period, there remain three works to be investigated. The first of these, 'Strivings of the Holy Spirit', is difficult to place. There is no obvious reference to it in Mrs Oliphant's biography, in Irving's correspondence or in *The Pulpit* magazine. In an age when preaching was considered to be an art form and a means of entertainment, a number of publications with names like *The Pulpit* and *The Preacher* catered for those who wished to sample sermons from the great preachers of the day but were unable to attend their churches. *The Pulpit*, in

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78. Irving, *CW ii*, pp. 193-194.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

80. Edward Irving, *Thirty Sermons, by E. I., preached during the first three years of his residence in London. From the notes of T. Oxford. To which are added, five lectures delivered in 1829, at the Rotunda, Dublin, taken in short-hand by Mr. Harley* (London: John Bennett, 1835).

81. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 160.

particular, published many of Irving's sermons shortly after they were preached. The one clue to its date, within the sermon, is a comment found towards the end, which suggests that Irving was 'about to remove from you for a short season'.<sup>82</sup> One such period of separation from his congregation would be the late summer of 1825 when he indicated, in a letter dated in August, his intention to join his heavily pregnant wife and his ailing son who awaited him in Kirkcaldy.<sup>83</sup> The other possibility that presents itself is the summer of 1826 which he and Isabella spent in Beckenham.<sup>84</sup> There is no conclusive evidence for either. However, as it seems that Irving was present in London for the Sundays of summer 1826,<sup>85</sup> late August 1825 is the more likely date. This is confirmed by the diary of James Simpson, a prominent member of Irving's congregation, whose entry for 21 August 1825 reads: 'This morning, Mr Irving having finished his Discourses on the blessed Trinity, commenced a course of sermons on the work of the Spirit'.<sup>86</sup> This sermon will be of real interest in examining the emergence of Irving's ideas about Christ's human nature; however, it cannot confirm the early provenance that Dorries seeks to establish, as it was preached after the 'Trinity' sermons that Dorries believes were Irving's first systematic and detailed exploration of the doctrine and that mark the end of his 'pre-controversy' period.

Of the remaining two works, 'Jesus Our Example'<sup>87</sup> is the most easily and accurately dated. It was first published in the *Morning Watch* in two parts. The first part appeared in September of 1832 under the title 'Jesus our Ensample that we should follow his steps';<sup>88</sup> the second part was published in December of the same year as 'Jesus our Example'.<sup>89</sup> This document is not only significantly after the 'pre-controversy' period, but it belongs to what might more accurately be called the 'post-controversy' period. Illustrative of this description is that the

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82. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 479.

83. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 239.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

86. NLS Edinburgh, Acc. 12489/1, 'J.G.S. Journals 1806-1830,' *Journals and Papers of James G. and Jane Simpson*, p. 21 August 1825.

87. Irving, *CW iv*, pp. 526-559.

88. Edward Irving, 'Jesus our Ensample that We Should Follow his Steps,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* vi, (1832),

89. Edward Irving, 'Jesus our Example,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* 6, (1832),



September 1832 edition of the *Morning Watch* bears an article entitled 'Mr Irving's Church the Sign of the Times',<sup>90</sup> which describes how the congregation now gathered around Irving at Newman Street has been 'cast out of that part of the great Babylon called the Church of Scotland'.<sup>91</sup> Far from illustrating Irving's position prior to the distorting influences of controversy, this work represents his settled position in its aftermath.

The one remaining publication, 'God's glory in the Church',<sup>92</sup> just like 'Strivings of the Holy Spirit', is extremely difficult to place. It also appears in Carlyle's 'miscellaneous' fourth volume as dated between 1822 and 1832. No further information presents itself to narrow that date range. The sermon itself is similarly coy about its provenance, containing no obvious allusions to contemporary events, writings or controversies. If anything, however, we are inclined to opt for an early date in this instance. The manner in which Irving speaks of the second advent in this sermon is suggestive of his thinking prior to his meeting with Frere in 1825.<sup>93</sup> He writes, '[t]he Son must be openly adopted and declared in the face of all the world before He can enter into the inheritance'.<sup>94</sup> This sounds very different from Irving's mature pre-millennialism, which had a much gloomier tone about the prospects for the triumph of the gospel before the return of Christ. This is not definitive, as this statement is patient of an interpretation more in tune with Irving's later teachings. Nevertheless, such an interpretation comes less naturally. For that reason, although there is no way to be sure of a date, a probable determination would place it before early 1825, thus placing it pre-controversy.

The cumulative effect of these investigations is to leave Dorries's argument for Irving using fallen/sinful flesh language prior to his sermons of 1825 resting on a much thinner basis of evidence than he suggests. Nonetheless, there remains evidence that demands examination. That evidence is made up of five quotations,

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90. Anonymous, 'Mr Irving's Church THE Sign of the Times,' *The Morning Watch: or, Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* vi, (1832),

91. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

92. Irving, *CW iv*, pp. 350-366.

93. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 221.

94. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 358.

one from 'The Temptation', one from the collection of *Thirty Sermons*, one from 'God's Glory in the Church' and two from the same page of a lecture on 'John the Baptist'. To see whether they uphold what Dorries is seeking to establish, we must examine each in its context.

Irving's second lecture on 'The Temptation', preached on 1 February 1824, comes as part of an exposition of the details of Jesus's time spent surrounded by the wild beasts in the wilderness.

In this trial of his fidelity, man, having failed by the cunning and lies of the prince of evil, became an exile...and fell into that spiritual misery and moral barrenness of which the wilderness and the solitary place are the emblem. Into the wilderness, therefore, was the Saviour transported to undergo the trial of His strength and fidelity, because the wilderness represented the condition from which he had condescended to remove the sons of men.<sup>95</sup>

This is the context in which Irving makes his reference to 'man's fallen nature':

Thus the Saviour stood in the hoary wastes, with all these forms and emblems of man's fallen nature around Him, in order to undo the evil which Adam, by eating the forbidden fruit, had done unto his race.<sup>96</sup>

Whilst Dorries quotes this phrase in isolation as an early example of Irving's 'fallen nature' doctrine, taken in context there is nothing here to suggest that Irving means that Jesus himself was incarnate in *fallen* human nature. In fact, the implication is the opposite, as the use of the term here, in a distinct contrast with his later writings, depicts forces and symbols that are *external* to Christ.

Indeed, it could be added that, throughout this series on 'The Temptation', at the very points where one might most expect Irving to make explicit reference to the Son of God come in sinful flesh, there is only a stress on the reality of his humanity. Irving makes no reference to fallenness. 'He is to be conceived...as being really that which He seemed — a man and the son of man.'<sup>97</sup> In these lectures, of early 1824, Irving stressed the reality of the incarnation but gave no hint of what was to come later. Far from supporting Dorries at this point, then,

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95. Irving, *CW ii*, p. 211.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

this quotation suggests that Irving's mature Christology was not explicitly in place in early 1824.

Dorries's evidence from *Thirty Sermons*, the compilation of sermons from Irving's first three years in London, in which Irving referred to Christ partaking in 'the infirmities of mortality' is similarly specious. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the concept of the Son of God partaking in the 'sinless infirmities' of the human race was commonplace and was accepted even by Irving's fiercest critics. Thus, that Irving makes reference at some point in the early 1820s to Christ sharing human infirmities proves precisely nothing regarding the 'sinful flesh' doctrine he would later promulgate.

There is more support for Dorries's argument in the sermon 'On the Glory of God in the Church', which is undated in volume 4 of the *Collected Writings*, but which was probably preached before 1825.<sup>98</sup> In this sermon, Irving speaks of the Son of God coming 'forth into the same apostate condition'<sup>99</sup> as fallen humanity. This phrase sounds much more convincingly like the mature Irving. The passage does, however, need careful handling. The full quotation is as follows:

...but the adoption contemplates us as fallen *out of the family of God* into an apostasy, and restored thereunto by the way of Christ, who voluntarily came forth into the same apostate condition, in order that He might become the way through which the election might be recovered into union with God.<sup>100</sup>

This statement is indeed much more redolent of Irving's controversial idea, but even this similarity is misleading. Irving's language of 'apostasy' here is defined by the italicised phrase above, 'out of the family of God'. What Irving has in view, then, is a relational rather than an ontological alienation. Indeed, that Irving did not have in mind the doctrine he later propounded is confirmed by a circumstantial detail. On the previous page, Irving described this state of apostasy as 'marked by its constitution in Adam'.<sup>101</sup> During the controversy, Irving would repudiate, strenuously, the claim that his doctrine made Christ

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98. see above p.

99. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 353.

100. Ibid. Italics mine.

101. Ibid., p. 352.

guilty of original sin.<sup>102</sup> Such guilt would be exactly the implication here if, by his use of the phrase 'apostate condition', we are to infer that Irving means possessing 'sinful flesh'.

It is much more natural to understand Irving's reference to Christ's coming into the 'apostate condition' of Adam as a reference to Calvary. Indeed Irving goes on in this same sermon to explain that:

All those who are chosen in Him...though heirs of wrath...and apostate from the faith of Christ, as all men by nature are, and rebellious to the will of God, are freely forgiven...on account of the beloved One... in whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace.<sup>103</sup>

In the light of Irving's ongoing argument, his reference to Christ's entering 'the apostate condition' of sinful humans must surely point to the crucifixion and the alienation from the Father expressed in the cry of dereliction: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'<sup>104</sup> To speak in this way of Christ entering the 'apostate condition' of humanity, 'out of the family of God', would have been entirely uncontroversial amongst his Evangelical peers and bears no distinctive mark whatsoever of his later controversial teaching.

In consequence, Dorries's only remaining evidences of Irving speaking of Christ's human nature as fallen prior to 1825 are found on the same page of a lecture on 'John the Baptist', which Gavin Carlyle dates to some time in 1823.<sup>105</sup> It is to these that we must now turn our attention. Irving writes in the section in question of '[t]he fallen ruins of humanity', of '[Christ's] manifestation in sinful flesh' and of 'sinful human nature'. Once again, context will be vital to understanding Irving's meaning. The page in question is taken from Irving's eighth lecture in his 'John the Baptist' series. This discourse focuses on the baptism of Christ and in particular God's desire to 'manifest his Son by a voice from heaven'.<sup>106</sup> The section of the sermon in which Dorries discovered the phrases above is preceded

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102. Edward Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh, the Form. Fountain Head, and Assurance to us of Holiness in Flesh* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1831), pp. 8, 9.

103. Irving, *CW ii*, p. 355.

104. Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34

105. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

by a discussion of John's reluctance to allow Jesus to submit to a 'rite which had in it a confession of sin of which He was guiltless'.<sup>107</sup> Irving then exegetes Jesus's expressed desire 'to fulfil all righteousness' as follows:

I am come forth from the Eternal for this very end of submitting to the laws, moral or ceremonial, which God imposeth on man; to brave all the ills and natural maladies that sin hath brought upon the world; to be tempted by the alternate powers of the devil, the world and the flesh...<sup>108</sup>

To this point, Irving need not be committed to anything more than the typical Reformed understanding of Christ sharing in humanity's 'sinless infirmities'. Indeed, his recognition that baptism was not inherently appropriate for Jesus other than to identify with sinners, would suggest that this standard position was in view.

This appearance is called into question, however, by a single paragraph that follows, in which the three phrases to which Dorries points occur. The paragraph in question reads as follows (with Dorries's quoted phrases highlighted):

This is the spirit of His incarnation, one great end and meaning of *His manifestation in sinful flesh*, to teach humanity how there resideth with the Spirit of God a power to fortify humanity, and make it victorious over all trials and temptations, a power to reconstruct *the fallen ruins of humanity* into a temple of holiness... This courage and confidence in his power of being regenerated could never, never have been imparted to *sinful human nature* but by an instance, an experiment made into the world of human nature of very flesh and blood.<sup>109</sup>

It is immediately apparent that the second and third phrases are not direct references to Christ's human nature, but rather the nature of those he came to rescue. There remains, then, out of all Dorries's evidence, only one unambiguous reference to Christ as incarnate 'in sinful flesh'.

Even so, this reference alone might be enough to suggest that Irving did indeed teach this controversial doctrine from near the beginning of his London ministry. The case, even for the significance of this quotation, however, is far from

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107. Ibid., p. 96.

108. Ibid., pp. 97-98.

109. Ibid., p. 98.

watertight. In a preceding sentence, Irving wrote,

The Captain of our salvation, saith the apostle, was made perfect through suffering, not that in His proper nature He was ever affected with imperfection, but that, in order to be the Captain and Leader of men out of thralldom, it behoved Him to be brought in contact with their sympathies.<sup>110</sup>

There is, of course, no denying that Irving used the phrase 'manifestation in sinful flesh' in this sermon, and yet on the same page he denies any imperfection in Christ's nature. Here the incarnation is described in these terms to describe the psychological effects on believers - it is a matter of gaining 'their confidence', 'to teach humanity', 'to fortify' and to impart 'courage and confidence in the power of being regenerated'. This focus is distinct from Irving's later construction, where the incarnation itself is a metaphysical 'at-one-ment'. The language of 'sinful flesh' may be the same in this instance of Irving's writing, but there is little evidence of the doctrine. To this observation can be added the fact that the reference in question is actually a combination of 1 Timothy 3:16 with Romans 8:3: 'he was manifested in the flesh' and 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. It is at least plausible that in this instance, in the flood of his oratory, Irving simply ran two biblical texts together in error.

Of all of Dorries's evidence that Irving used the language of 'sinful flesh' or 'fallen nature', we have discovered only one reference prior to the late summer of 1825 that bears any weight. Even this reference does not represent a fully fledged version of Irving's later Christology. Given the lack of any other evidence for a 'sinful flesh' Christology at this stage, and indeed given some of the counter-indications that we have observed, such as its absence from the sermons on 'The Temptation', this one apparent instance cannot be considered convincing proof that Irving's position did not substantially change over the course of his ministry. What may, from the vantage point of the end of Irving's life, look like evidence that the idea was there all along can lead us to confuse the historical burden of proof. Without any other evidence from the time that he held to this doctrine, and in a situation in which such ideas were unheard of, the presumption must actually

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110. Ibid.

be that he did not. Rather, it is better to suppose that this one instance of 'sinful flesh' language was the result of a rhetorical error, not representing the preacher's mind.

There are two other lines of evidence which show that it is very unlikely that he held a 'fallen flesh' view of the incarnation at this stage. The first is picked up briefly by Grass who thinks that Dorries's case 'may be more than the evidence can bear.'<sup>111</sup> He notes that '[i]f [Irving] had taught such a view, we can be sure it would have been picked up by the religious press.'<sup>112</sup> He notes that, once the public became aware of this teaching (after his 10 July 1827 sermon), there was an immediate reaction that then 'flare(d) up' in October.<sup>113</sup> He is surely right in this observation. Once Irving's teaching became well known, the conflagration was instant.

The controversy proper began in the aftermath of an October meeting between Irving and an unbeneficed Anglican clergyman named Henry Cole, who would later be notorious as a controversialist for his opposition to 'the new Geology'.<sup>114</sup> Cole, no stranger to public contention, visited Irving in his vestry, after hearing him preach, accused him of heresy, and then rapidly went into print with his denunciations.<sup>115</sup> However, the outcry may have become serious even more quickly than this account suggests.

Irving makes it clear that a series of sermons on the incarnation were intended to be the *first* volume of his *SLOD*, to be published in 1827. In his preface, he informs us that the publication of those sermons was delayed very late in the day: 'when the printing of them had all but concluded; there arose, I say not by what influence of Satan, a great outcry against the doctrine...the doctrine I mean of his human nature, that it was manhood fallen'.<sup>116</sup> The postponement turned out to be

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111. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 175.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

114. J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses part 2: from 1752 to 1900. Volume 2: Chalmers to Fytche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 89.

115. Henry Cole, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving, Minister of the Caledonian Chapel, Compton Street, in Refutation of the Awful Doctrines (held by Him) of the Sinfulness, Mortality, and Corruptibility of the Body of Jesus Christ* (London: J. Eedes, 1827).

116. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc.*, p. iv.

a whole year and its effects are evident in the published version of the first volume: page 140 spans 196 pages. This anomaly in pagination occurred because an entire sermon was inserted between pages 140 and 141 by means of pages numbered '(140)' followed by roman numerals. The other volumes, which were intended to come later, were published before volume one. The preface to volume two was dated 28 September 1827. Cole came to visit Irving exactly a month *after* this preface was written, suggesting that the delay to the first volume might well have been decided upon *before* Cole's visit. This would seem to indicate that there was, within two months of the sermon being preached, a strong enough reaction to enforce a significant and costly change to Irving's publication plans. With the speed and intensity of the reaction, once this idea came to public notice, it seems highly unlikely that a man of Irving's notoriety had taught this same idea in public for the previous five years without any negative reaction whatsoever.

One counterpoint to this suggestion is the work of Gordon Strachan, who has contested the timing of the sermon, suggesting that the outcry was nothing like so intense as it would appear. He argues that, as Cole recalled his visit as being six months after Irving's sermon for the Gospel Tract Society, the address must have been delivered in March 1827.<sup>117</sup> Cole's recollection, however, runs counter to the best evidence available. *The Pulpit* of 2 August reproduced the sermon in question, indicating that it had been preached on 10 July. It is unlikely that this publication, so soon after the event, would have confused the date by three months.

The second piece of evidence that Irving was unlikely to have held his controversial opinion in the first few years of his London ministry comes from Irving's relationship with his father-in-law. John Martin, who was Irving's protector in Kirkcaldy when he came into collision with parents of pupils at the academy, had become very close to the young preacher. The depth of the bond that they continued to enjoy was reflected in Irving's letters, which address Martin as 'My Dear Father'.<sup>118</sup> The esteem in which Irving held this older man is

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117. C. Gordon Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 26.

118. Waddington, *Letters and Diary*, pp. 191, 200, 211, @227 etc..



also indicated by a letter to Thomas Chalmers in 1823, in which Irving laid out his publishing plans and his intended dedications. He planned to follow the first two books, which were indeed published according to his plan, with a third on 'the Incarnation of Christ in 6 or 7 lectures'.<sup>119</sup> This third book he intended to dedicate 'to Mr Martin'.<sup>120</sup> Unlike the other books he described in his letter, the book on the incarnation never appeared. It is interesting to note, however, that he was planning such a work and that he intended to dedicate it to his father-in-law, as Martin did not accept Irving's later teaching as orthodox. In the midst of the controversy, rather than supporting Irving, he wrote him what William Landels calls a 'wounding letter' about Christology.<sup>121</sup> Grass points out that Martin even went so far as to prepare a detailed rebuttal of Irving's ideas for a meeting of fellow clergy.<sup>122</sup> We must conclude either that Irving never spoke to Martin about the subject in 1823, even though he wanted to dedicate a book on the subject to him, or that he held different ideas at this early stage in his career from those he would later espouse. Irving's surprise at the reaction to his teaching about the incarnation in 1827 would seem to confirm the latter interpretation. Surely if he had broached these ideas with Martin beforehand, he would have expected significant resistance when he expressed his views more publicly.

If he did not teach along these lines from the start, it should be possible to trace the emergence of his new ideas leading up to the dispute of 1827. In seeking evidence of this development, the first witness must be Irving himself. In the preface to *The Last Days*, written in 1828, Irving, rather conveniently for our purposes, laid out a brief theological biography of his ministry with his London congregation. He outlined growth, sequentially, in the church's understanding of the Trinity, of eschatology, of baptism and finally of Christology: 'Next in the order of God's mercies to us, we have to acknowledge his instructing of us in the true humanity of Christ....[namely that] Christ took human nature in the fallen and not in the unfallen state'.<sup>123</sup> Irving states that his clarity on Christ's human

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119. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

120. *Ibid.*

121. William Landels, *Edward Irving: A Lecture* (London: YMCA, 1863), p. 81.

122. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 186.

123. Edward Irving, *The Last Days: a Discourse on the Evil Character of These our Times, Proving Them To Be the "Perilous-Times" of the "Last Days"*. (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), pp. x-

nature came after he changed his view on eschatology. Thankfully, it is relatively easy to assess when this change in his thinking about the last things occurred. Irving preached his first sermon about the 'second advent' on Christmas Day 1825<sup>124</sup> and his teaching about the last things developed very rapidly throughout 1826. Given that he is describing the intellectual journey of the whole church and not just himself, that puts a date of 1826 as the earliest point at which this novel Christology could have appeared amongst the congregation.

In her biography, Mrs Oliphant identifies a series of sermons preached in summer 1825 on 'The Trinity' as the basis for the first volume of *SLOD*, Irving's first controversial publication about the incarnation.<sup>125</sup> This identification is at odds with what Irving appears to say in the preface to the last days. However, another statement from Irving appears to corroborate Mrs Oliphant's timing. In *The Monthly Review*, December 1831, there is a critical report of Irving that quotes from a sermon printed in volume 438 of *The Pulpit*. 'It is now, I may say, at least six years since I was first led into the mystery of this myself, and set it forth in a work I wrote on the Incarnation — the mystery of Christ's resurrection life being in the church.'<sup>126</sup> This apparent reference to a book on the incarnation, written six years before 1831, that is, in 1825, is indeed apparent proof that Mrs Oliphant is correct in her identification of 1825 for the sermons in question.

This evidence might seem decisive, but the concept of which Irving speaks, 'Christ's resurrection life being in the church', is not even a minor theme of any of the sermons in volume one of *SLOD*, so Irving cannot have been referring to those sermons. This concept of 'resurrection life' is, however, extremely prominent in a work, at least part of which can be traced back to 1825: Irving's *On Baptism*.<sup>127</sup> In this treatise, Irving writes, '[t]he life of every member of Christ, the life of the whole Church, His body, a first-fruits of Christ's resurrection, is in truth a resurrection life'.<sup>128</sup> This idea is repeated a number of times in the pages

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124. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 149.

125. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 3.

126. Anonymous, 'Religious Delusions of the Day,' *The Monthly Review* (December 1831), p. 483.

127. Edward Irving, *Homilies on the Sacraments, vol. 1. On Baptism* (London: Andrew Panton, 1828).

128. Irving, *CW ii*, p. 297.

that follow. The original date of this work can be traced via the moving dedication to his wife, Isabella. In this inscription, Irving states that he came to a new understanding of the Sacraments on that very week you went with [Edward] to Scotland, whence he never returned'.<sup>129</sup> The younger Edward Irving and his mother left London at the end of June 1825,<sup>130</sup> which gives a definite, though poignant, date to the sermons in question. Given that this theme of 'resurrection life' can be traced so clearly here, but not to the incarnation sermons, it seems much more likely that this is the book to which Irving was referring in 1831. The mistaken identification of this book can probably be explained rather simply with reference to the source. *The Pulpit* relied on shorthand recordings of the sermons taken 'live' by someone attending the service. At a time when Irving stood accused of being a heretic about the incarnation and had been forced out of his own presbytery in London on that account,<sup>131</sup> it would hardly be surprising if a slip of the stenographer's pen (or indeed Irving's tongue) introduced 'incarnation' instead of 'baptism'.

Irving's statement in 1831 may have referred to sermons other than those eventually published in *SLOD*, but that does not necessarily imply that those sermons do not also date from 1825. The most impressive evidence that they did originate from that year is presented in Mrs Oliphant's biography, where she states that Irving describes the gradual composition of several of them in his journal-letters in 1825.<sup>132</sup> Her identification of these sermons as those reproduced in *SLOD* was derived from a panegyric for Irving, written by Oliver Yorke in 1833 for *Fraser's Magazine*, in which he wrote that

...A course of sermons on the Trinity, which were preached in Hatton Garden, though not published till many years after...are now stigmatized as heretical and dangerous by a large proportion of the religious world.<sup>133</sup>

Yorke's point was simple: the ideas that were later labelled 'heresy' had passed for years without comment; indeed they were 'received by all with the greatest

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129. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

130. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 110.

131. Grass, *Watchman*, p. 220.

132. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 3.

133. Oliver Yorke, 'The Fraserians,' *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* XI, no. LXI (January 1835), p. 5.

applause'.<sup>134</sup> This being the case, surely the later accusations of heterodoxy were disingenuous. Yorke's is a highly polemical piece, and on its own cannot be thought to constitute proof that the 'Trinity' sermons were, in fact, those which brought about the Christological controversy. Further proof must be sought.

Indeed, on the surface of it, it is strange to identify a series of sermons on the Trinity<sup>135</sup> with what Irving described as 'Sermons on the Incarnation'.<sup>136</sup> What is more, the letters to which Mrs Oliphant refers, written by Irving to Isabella during the composition of the 'Trinity' sermons in July 1825, reveal the subject of these sermons to be quite distinct from the content of the sermons in question. In a letter dated 1 July he wrote, 'I have been busy with my first discourse upon the Will of the Father,'<sup>137</sup> and on 19 July he goes into more detail about the content of his latest addition to that series:

Last Sabbath, I preached in the morning on the subject of the Trinity, showing that...Law, Gospel, and Obedience...were severally the forms of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; so that a trinity [sic] was everywhere in the Word of God;<sup>138</sup>

James Simpson recorded on 3 July 1825 hearing Irving preach on the role of the Father in salvation. Simpson's description of the sermon runs as follows: 'His subject was the insufficiency of Man himself to come unto Christ, without the Father drawing him'.<sup>139</sup> The following week, Irving's focus continued to be much more to do with the Trinity than the incarnation.

Mr Irving again preached on the doctrine of the Will of the Father necessary in drawing the soul of Man to Christ, the Three Persons of the Trinity has each a particular office, The Will, The Word and The Spirit.<sup>140</sup>

These sermons on the Trinity focussed on the differing roles the persons had in the salvation of humanity; it would be a stretch to describe these, under any circumstances, as sermons on the incarnation.

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134. Ibid.

135. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 2.

136. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. vol.1 p.iii.

137. Oliphant, *Life*, p. 235.

138. Ibid., p. 238.

139. NLS Edinburgh, 'J.G.S. Journals 1806-1830', p. entry for 3 July 1825 (n.p.).

140. Ibid., p. entry for 10 July 1825 (n.p.).

Given this, it is unsurprising to find that the 'incarnation' sermons published in *SLOD* bear little or no resemblance to the sermons preached in July 1825. The titles given to these later discourses are, on their own, enough to show their distinct emphasis. The four original<sup>141</sup> orations had the following subjects:

- Sermon I      That the Beginning and Origin of the Mystery that the Eternal Word should take unto himself a body is the holy will and good pleasure of God
- Sermon II     The End of the Mystery is the Glory of God
- Sermon III    The Method of accomplishing the Mystery is by taking up the Fallen Humanity into the Personality of the eternal Son of God
- Sermon V      The Fruits of the Incarnation.<sup>142</sup>

Although the first address mentions God's 'will', which was a major theme in the Trinity sermons of 1825, that is where the similarity begins and ends. Irving's emphasis in this first 'incarnation' sermon is the taking of a body by the Son of God as an act of obedience. This was evidently an entirely different sermon from any in the series he planned and preached in 1825.

Indeed, Mrs Oliphant's own work reveals that as Irving worked to finish *SLOD*, he was considering a future work on the Trinity. In a letter written by Irving to Isabella in 1828, from around the same time as the completion of his *Last Days*, Irving communicated to his wife the satisfaction he felt in his progress with the writing of 'The Method of the Incarnation', and added that

I have been strongly impressed, at the conclusion of the book, with the necessity of undertaking a work upon the Holy Spirit and the Church... and then, if God spare me, I undertake a work upon the Trinity.<sup>143</sup>

Irving was certainly planning to publish a work on the Trinity, but the first volume of *SLOD* was not it. It is simply not possible to accept the identification of the 'Trinity' sermons of 1825 with the 'Incarnation' sermons that Irving planned to publish in autumn 1827.

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141. Sermons IV and VI were added later in response to the controversy that erupted in 1827.

142. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, pp. xix-xx.

143. Oliphant, *Life*, pp. 54-55.

In current scholarship, following David Dorries, Mrs Oliphant's identification of these sermons as being those preached in 1825 has carried so much weight that the testimony of Irving's contemporaries about the emergence of these ideas has been sidelined. Their voices can now be heard.

The Christological controversy which engulfed Irving in 1828 found him facing a number of his former allies as opponents: one such was the conservative Baptist minister James Alexander Haldane. A controversy had broken out in the Bible Society over whether or not it was permissible for the Society to supply Bibles with the Apocrypha included, something that had been commonplace in mainland Europe.<sup>144</sup> Irving and Haldane were both leading figures in the tight-knit 'Anti Apocryphist' group.<sup>145</sup> Typically for a beleaguered minority group, they formed a strong alliance despite significant differences over other matters such as baptism.<sup>146</sup> This *esprit de corps* was not enough, however, to mitigate their differences over Christology. In a letter of 19 June 1828, Haldane gave a detailed account of the origin of the lasting and bitter breach between himself and Irving:

Mr Irving lately brought forward a very pernicious sentiment, that the flesh of Christ was, like ours, disposed to sin, although he was preserved from sin by the power of the Holy Ghost.<sup>147</sup>

Haldane had read the newspaper reports of this and in consequence preached a sermon in opposition to this opinion. Shortly after this, both men had been guests at the same party and, much to Haldane's distress, an indiscreet third party had raised the topic between them with the result that 'Mr. Irving became rather warm'.<sup>148</sup> Importantly for our investigation, Haldane relates the controversial Christology as a recent development in Irving's public ministry. Indeed so 'pernicious' did Haldane find this teaching that, within a year, he had gone into print with a *Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving*.<sup>149</sup>

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144. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 87.

145. Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of the Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of His Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Company, 1852), p. 509.

146. Timothy Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-55* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 135.

147. Letter dated 19 June 1828, recipient's name not recorded, printed in Haldane, *Memoirs*, p. 545.

148. Letter from Robert Haldane, dated 19 June 1828, recipient's name not recorded. *Ibid.*

149. James Alexander Haldane, *Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by the Rev. Edward*

The speed and intensity of this reaction, from a friend and ally, is striking and suggests that it is extremely unlikely that Irving had been teaching these ideas for an extended period without comment.

Haldane's was not an isolated case. The 'lecture' he refers to above, given in Edinburgh, was reported in the *Caledonian Mercury* ten days earlier. Although broadly supportive of Irving, the reviewer passed the following comment:

Let it not be supposed, however, because we think this extraordinary man has been unjustly censured, that there was nothing in his appearances here deserving of blame. His minute, and, we had almost said, obstetrical specifications on the subject of the Incarnation, gave just offence, and shocked many whom the splendour of his talents had previously conciliated.<sup>150</sup>

Quite unlike the picture painted by Yorke, the *Mercury's* correspondent suggests that, even to Irving's friends and admirers, this was an idea that was unpalatable as soon as it was presented. Indeed, Simpson records a breach even closer to home. On Friday 18 September 1829, James Simpson recorded in his diary that 'Mr Panton, one of the Elders, has resigned his office and left the Regents Church in consequence of his believe [sic] that Mr Irving's views are not sound regarding Christ's two natures.'<sup>151</sup> Andrew Panton had been not only an elder but one of Irving's publishers,<sup>152</sup> again suggesting that it is highly unlikely that his congregation had simply listened to the Christological ideas, untroubled, throughout Irving's ministry.

These reactions to Irving's teaching indicate that the emergence of Irving's 'sinful flesh' Christology, at least in its most explicit form, cannot have preceded the

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Irving, *Respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1829).

150. 'The Reverend Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday 9 June 1828 p.3.

151. James Simpson Diary Entry for 18 September 1829 NLS Edinburgh, 'J.G.S. Journals 1806-1830'.

152. NLS Edinburgh, 'J.G.S. Journals 1806-1830'; Edward Irving, 'Ordination Charge, by the Rev. Edward Irving, to the Ministers of the Scots Church, London Wall, March 15, 1827,' in *The Discourse and Charges at the Ordination of the Reverend Hugh Baillie Maclean, at the Scots Church, London Wall, March 15, 1827. The Ordination Sermon, by the Rev. James Miller. The Charge to the Minister, by the Rev. Edward Irving. The Charge to the People, by the Rev. W. Wodrow*, (London: A. Panton, 1827); Irving, *On Baptism*; Edward Irving, *A Collection of Sermons by Edward Irving, Chiefly Extracted from "The Pulpit" and "The Preacher."* (London: Andrew Panton, 1829).

controversy by long. David Brown, who first met Irving in the spring of 1827, recalled the beginnings of the controversy as follows:

As early as when I first met with Mr Irving, he had been meditating a course of sermons on the Incarnation, and had got deep in it towards the end of 1827, when a stranger stepping in one evening heard what shocked him about Christ's human nature. On asking an explanation in the vestry, and receiving it, instead of calling, as invited, on the preacher for fuller explanation (day and hour being named), he went straight with it to the public press. On learning this, Mr Irving, who by this time was preparing his discourses for publication, determined to recast them in a more formal style.<sup>153</sup>

In spring 1827 Irving was still planning his sermon series on the incarnation, which he preached later in the year. Brown's recollection is that it was the visit of Cole who 'went straight with it to the public press' that prompted a delay in the publication of the sermons in question. This series of addresses, which were not even planned until spring 1827, must be the controversial sermons published in *SLOD*. We can, then, confidently place the first airing of these sermons between spring and September 1827.<sup>154</sup>

There is internal evidence within the sermons that corroborates this. In the third of them, there is evidence of the scheme of prophetic interpretation that he developed whilst translating Lacunza's work, to which Irving habitually referred as *Ben Ezra*. It will be recalled that this work of translation was carried out during 1826, with publication taking place in 1827. In the sermon 'The Preparation and Act of the Incarnation', we read that,

The third great intimation and introduction of the Incarnation was in the prophetic dispensation completed and fulfilled in Christ. By which I do not mean that his incarnation fulfilled all the prophecies which went before upon him — a monstrous figment, which neither Jew nor Christian can believe, otherwise than by blinding their understanding, or

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153. David Brown, 'Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving,' *The Expositor* Series 3 Volume 6, (1887), p. 263.

154. Brown does not specify a date in 1827 for his first visit to London, but he attended Irving's preaching at the Caledonian Chapel for a number of weeks, thus putting his visit prior to May, as the 'last sermon preached in the Caledonian Church' was on 29 April. Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, vol. 3 (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), p. 507.



spiritualizing away the letter and substance of all the prophecies, whereof by far the greater part I might say, almost nine out of ten remain to be completely accomplished in his second coming.<sup>155</sup>

This is very much the Irving who wrote the preface to *Ben Ezra*, insisting on 'literal' rather than 'spiritual' interpretation of prophecy, and seeing the second coming as the primary focus of divine revelation and prophecy.

Irving's discussion of prophetic fulfilment goes on for a few pages of the 'Preparation and Act' sermon and is an integral part of it. It certainly cannot simply be dismissed as a minor editorial comment added later. Furthermore, Irving speaks in terms that suggest that his audience is familiar with the 'prophetic' ideas he is discussing. One phrase that is important in terms of dating the sermon is 'latter rain'. Irving writes about it as follows:

The Spirit ripened the spiritual seed, which the Son of Man had sown gave at Pentecost, the first fruits, and is yet to give the latter rain upon the earth, after which cometh the harvest.<sup>156</sup>

He gives no explanation of this idea, to which he first made reference in his preface to *Ben Ezra*, suggesting that this was, by now, a well-worn theme. It is likely that Irving began teaching about the 'latter rain' before he published *Ben Ezra* in 1827, but we can find no trace of it before 1826, and this evidence alone suggests an earliest possible dating of late 1826.

Another interesting piece of data from the sermons themselves is that the fourth of the original sermons (fifth in *SLOD*), 'The Fruits of the Incarnation', is substantially the same as that which Irving preached for the Gospel Tract Society on 10 July 1827, the sermon which first provoked controversy. The oration reproduced in *The Pulpit* is slightly briefer than the published version, but the similarities are dramatic. Comparison of a few extracts will demonstrate this.

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155. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. 148.

156. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<i>The Pulpit</i>	<i>SLOD</i>
<p>“The Grace of God, dear brethren, by its very name importeth that it is an essential and substantial part of the Divine existence, like power, or holiness, or justice, or goodness. It is not an accidental, but an essential part of his subsistence; which he may make known as seemeth good to his wisdom and sovereign will. But if it be manifested to men, then men must have come under his mortal displeasure: for it is more than goodness, it is <i>grace</i>, or mercy, manifested to those who have incurred his displeasure;</p>	<p>The Grace of God is an essential and substantial part of the Divine being and existency, like wisdom, or justice, or goodness or truth: not an accidental, but an eternal and necessary, attribute of his substance; which he may reveal and manifest to his creatures, or withhold to his own enjoyment, as it may seem good to his own infinite wisdom and unrestrained will. But if it is to be manifested to the creatures, those who are the subjects of it must have come under his mortal displeasure; because grace is more than goodness, it is forgiveness and favour to those who have deserved our displeasure.<sup>157</sup></p>
<p>Now I proceed to Speak, <i>Of the manifestation of this GRACE in the redemption of sinful men by CHRIST.</i> “<i>The law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus CHRIST.</i>”</p>	<p>And now I proceed to speak in particular of grace as manifested in the redemption of sinful men by Jesus Christ. "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."<sup>158</sup></p>
<p>It was farther manifested, by his permitting his SON to come under accursed conditions and to appear in flesh and blood; which was never to be thought of; and had not GOD himself devised it, it would have passed all belief.</p>	<p>...it was further manifested by his willingness to suffer his Son to go forth of his bosom, and take sinful flesh, and come under cursed conditions; which was a thing never to have been imagined, nor ever to have been believed.<sup>159</sup></p>

This early similarity is continued all the way through from the beginning of both sermons to their respective ends. Irving does mention the work of the Society for whom he is preaching towards the end of the sermon recorded in *The Pulpit*, but

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157. Ibid., pp. 213-214.

158. Ibid., p. 217.

159. Ibid., p. 218.

most of the differences are of the kind explicable by the reporter from *The Pulpit* recording the sermon in shorthand as a member of the congregation. Irving may well, of course, have preached the same sermon more than once. The similarity is such, though, that it seems likely that they were preached quite close together. This proximity is all the more likely given that this is a sermon as part of a series. It would be reasonable to think that this was his most recent work that fitted the occasion. Thus, another strand of evidence indicates that the sermon series, in which Irving's distinctive Christology was first systematically proclaimed, was delivered in summer 1827.

The preface to *Ben Ezra* also seems to corroborate this dating. This work, completed on Christmas day 1826, has elements that are at odds with the position expressed in *SLOD*, as well as speaking of the Cross in ways that he would come to reject. Irving spoke here of the incarnation in ways that seem contrary to his later position:

The word of God took flesh of the Virgin Mary, passive humanity he took, obnoxious to every temptation and begirt with every sinless infirmity...if flesh can abide the proof, and come off sinless; then shall all the matter of the world which was formed for flesh, and of which flesh was formed, be also redeemed.<sup>160</sup>

The language of 'sinless infirmity' was the language of orthodoxy in his tradition and offered a way of stressing the reality of the incarnation and the temptations faced by Jesus, whilst still preserving his sinlessness. Strikingly in this passage, Irving also speaks of Jesus's 'flesh' as sinless. He would later avoid this sort of language with great care.

At the end of 1826, Irving was still speaking of the flesh of Christ as 'sinless' and still referring to the Cross as the locus of atonement. Just as the 'Incarnation' sermons of 1827 are the first systematic exposition of the idea of 'sinful flesh', they are the first published document in which Irving speaks of the idea of 'at-one-ment'.

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160. Edward; Lacunza Irving, Manuel Y Diaz, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty. By Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. Translated from the Spanish, with a Preliminary Discourse by E. Irving.* (London: L. B. Seeley & Son, 1827), p. cxxvi.

Atonement is not reparation, is not the cost or damage, but the being at one. It should be pronounced at-one-ment...It is the work of God the Father, and of God the Holy Ghost, so to operate in and upon the fallen humanity of Christ as that it shall be ever harmonious with the Godhead of Christ.<sup>161</sup>

The teaching about at-one-ment is a natural corollary in Irving's thought to the idea of 'sinful flesh'. That the two emerge in the same document is not, then, a coincidence; they belonged together. Both ideas represent a development in Irving's thinking that took place after he had penned the preface to *Ben Ezra*. Thus we may state with certainty that the controversy over Irving's Christology, which began in 1827, flared up pretty much as soon as Irving's 'sinful flesh' doctrine began to emerge.

That is not to say that the development of Irving's thought itself was entirely 'neat'. In a sermon from August 1825, Irving made an isolated reference to the Son of God 'inhabit[ing] sinful flesh'.<sup>162</sup> Although there is no evidence of his developed doctrine in that statement, it is clear that Irving wished to stress the condescension inherent in the incarnation. He was continually at pains to stress the wonder that the Son of God would go so far as to dwell in human flesh and share something of the human condition. Before the more controversial version of his Christology had emerged fully, Irving was, as noted above, emphasising the parallels between the Spirit's work and the incarnation. There were continuities between Irving's earlier thought and that which came later as well as developments.

Irving's thinking in Christology also continued to develop after the beginning of the controversy. James Simpson records, in the same diary entry that chronicled the departure of 'Mr Panton', that:

Last Sabbath, Mr Irving resumed his Lectures on St Luke's Gospel, which he left off about two years ago, he observed a good Providence in having arrested his progress in these lectures until he was more fully taught in the subject of the Kingdom of God, and the two natures of

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161. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, pp. lxiii(140)-lxiv(140).

162. Irving, *CW iv*, p. 474.

Christ.<sup>163</sup>

Simpson believed that Irving had been 'more fully taught' in his Christology since August 1827, that is, around the time of the initial controversy. Irving's Christology clearly did develop significantly during his stay in London. It is important to remember that this development did not cease once his ideas had reached the controversial form for which they are remembered. Irving was a thinker constantly on the move. When it comes to his Christology, this has not been sufficiently appreciated in recent scholarship.

An earlier generation of scholars, as exemplified by P.E. Davies and Edward Miller, believed that Irving's Christology developed through the course of his London ministry, not reaching its controversial form until some time in the second half of the decade beginning 1820. David Dorries overturned this understanding, arguing to great effect, in his 1987 PhD Thesis, that Irving's teachings about the incarnation demonstrated a 'remarkable consistency' throughout his career,<sup>164</sup> and providing evidence of the theme in a number of Irving's earliest recorded sermons. Dorries's conclusions on the stability of Irving's Christology have been dominant for the last three decades, providing a foundation for the arguments of scholars such as Peter Elliott. Recently, Tim Grass has raised some questions about aspects of Dorries's arguments, although he remains in agreement that Irving's distinctive ideas about the incarnation were made public relatively early in his London ministry, in a series of sermons preached in 1825.

The available information about Irving's life and education does not show any evidence of the 'sinful flesh' doctrine in question. Indeed, the evidence surveyed suggests that it is highly unlikely that Irving held this view prior to his employment, in 1822, as minister of the Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden. Irving's teacher of 'systematic divinity', William Ritchie, was very much a Westminster Confession man and Irving's fellow tutee, Robert Balmer, was horrified at his erstwhile classmate's Christology, which he understood to have

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163. Diary entry for 18 September, 1829, NLS Edinburgh, 'J.G.S. Journals 1806-1830'.

164. Dorries, "British Christological Controversy", p. 73.

originated with Irving himself. Thomas Chalmers, despite his sympathy towards Erskine and McLeod Campbell, was unenthusiastic about Irving's incarnational theories and the attendant theories of atonement. Indeed, Irving himself, on the eve of his ordination, declared with his own mouth his rejection of the teachings of Mme Bourignon, which bear a striking similarity to his own, later, teaching.

It must be assumed, therefore that Irving's ideas about the incarnation developed during his ministry in London. Although David Dorries took pains to prove that the controversial teachings were present in Irving's earliest London sermons, an examination of the evidences provided for this claim found no corroboration for it. What is more, the speed at which the controversy developed after Irving's sermon for the Gospel Tract Society in July 1827 indicates just how unlikely it is that he, one of the most widely heard preachers in the country, had been teaching these ideas unchallenged for years.

Thus, Mrs Oliphant's identification of a series of sermons on the Trinity, preached in 1825, as the sermons published in 1828 and at the heart of the controversy has been significant. We have demonstrated that this identification was mistaken and that the sermons in question actually had their genesis in 1827. Indeed the similarity between the fifth address published in *Sermon Lectures and Occasional Discourses* and the Gospel Tract Society sermon which sparked the controversy suggests that Irving was either preaching or preparing this series in July 1827.

Despite Irving's consistent commitment to the reality of the incarnation, we are compelled to conclude that the best evidence available indicates that Irving's 'sinful flesh' doctrine first appeared in public at some point in the second half of 1827. Thus, contrary to popular belief, the controversy over Irving's 'sinful flesh' doctrine arose almost as soon as he first expressed it.

## Chapter 7

# A Romantic Christ: Sources of Explanation for Edward Irving's Christological Novelties

In previous chapters, it has been demonstrated that, contrary to most scholarly belief, Irving's ideas about the incarnation of the Son of God were both novel and controversial. Those ideas were shown to have emerged over the course of his ministry in London, and it was established that they appeared first in a series of sermons preached in summer or autumn 1827. It has also been demonstrated that Irving's theology was transformed by his relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This transformation was fundamental, to the extent that his theological approach came to mirror that of the older man in almost every significant respect. A combination of those observations would make it entirely plausible to suggest that the evolution of Irving's Christology would be explicable by the influence of Coleridge.

This suggestion is not, however, unproblematic. The scholarly consensus is currently opposed to the idea: not least because Irving insisted that his teachings were unchanged from his earliest ministry, which began before he met Coleridge; and also because Coleridge himself was critical of Irving's Christological writings. Thus, along with an examination of the evidence concerning Coleridgean influence we must also consider other factors which might account for the development of Irving's Christology. In doing so we cannot limit our enquiries to explicitly intellectual influences. It is impossible adequately to examine any person's thought without reference to the details of their lives. For Irving, given his personality, this is a particularly acute concern. It is, thus, with Irving himself, as a man, that we begin our search for factors that played into his theory of the incarnation.

The first such factor to consider is Irving's tendency to see himself in heroic terms, restoring the lost glories of the church.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to John Martin, his

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1. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography', pp.53, 67.

future father-in-law, Irving wrote that, of the very ‘few things which bind me to the world...one is to make a demonstration for a higher style of Christianity, something more magnanimous, more heroic than this age affects [sic]’.<sup>2</sup> Where he saw a deficiency in the belief or conduct the church he was primed to react and to redress the balance. During the Christological controversy itself, it became clear that Irving detected more than a hint of the ancient heresy of *docetism*<sup>3</sup> amongst his contemporaries (the idea that the Son of God had no real human existence, but only *appeared* in human form).<sup>4</sup> For instance, in a letter to Robert Story of Rosneath, he described those opposing McLean and McNeile as having ‘declared themselves Antichrist in denying that Christ came in the flesh’.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, Irving was not one to avoid controversy and he was only too willing to cast himself in the role of the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, standing *contra mundum* in his defence of orthodoxy. In Irving’s controversial publications on the incarnation, it is clear that he saw denials of a genuine incarnation everywhere. It must be at least a possibility that he took up a relatively extreme position in defending the reality of the incarnation against a docetic tendency round about him.

The influence of this factor, at least as regards docetism, is hard to demonstrate. Robert Meek, one of Irving’s opponents, responded to the accusation of docetism with bewilderment, ‘I know of no-one who doubts the all-important truth, that the Lord took *our* nature, that he was “man of the substance of his mother, born in the world.”’<sup>6</sup> As Meek points out, it was a basic tenet of orthodox Christian faith that Christ genuinely shared the human nature, ‘the substance of his mother’, in the words of the Athanasian Creed. Meek, though a critic of Irving’s Christology, was only too happy to affirm the reality of Christ’s humanity and he was unable to identify anyone who might justly be accused of a failure to do the same. His

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2. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 141.

3. (from, δοκεῖν to seem/appear)

4. See for instance Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 1 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), p. (140)v.

5. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p. 186.

6. Robert Meek, *The Sinless Humanity of Christ, Vindicated Against the Irving Heresy. In a Letter to a Clerical Friend*. (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1833), p. 4.



observation was that Irving mistook fallenness, which is ‘an accident or defect’<sup>7</sup> of human nature, for the substance of it. From the perspective of one of Irving’s interlocutors at least, Irving’s accusations of widespread docetism grew out of his novel *Christology*, not *vice versa*. Irving certainly does not seem to have been preoccupied with the subject of docetism before the controversy, which makes it less likely to have been a major cause of his developing a new perspective on the incarnation.

A second factor to be considered is Irving’s marriage to Isabella Martin. When he became reacquainted with Jane Welsh, his former pupil and his intellectual equal, it seems that Irving sought, however carefully, to end his engagement or ‘understanding’ with Isabella. When she was reluctant to allow this cancellation, he followed the course of duty and married the woman who had a claim on his propriety rather than on his heart. This evidently troubled Irving in his early years in London. His letters to Jane and to his great friend Carlyle, to whom she became betrothed, betray that tension.<sup>8</sup> It is entirely plausible that the exemplarist dimension to Irving’s *Christology* was developed partly in light of this dilemma. The Christ he set before others was one who was tempted in all things as they were, but overcame by the power of the Spirit. That example of triumph in temptation and suffering was one that Irving believed should give confidence to his followers that they could follow in Christ’s footsteps by the power of that same Spirit. Irving’s need for this sort of help, to overcome the proclivities of his own flesh, was acute.

This aspect of Irving’s thought became apparent before the more metaphysical ideas that emerged in 1827. In fact, it was evident as early as the ‘John the Baptist’ sermons of 1823 that Irving emphasised the idea of Jesus as example.<sup>9</sup> In that sense, not all Irving’s distinctive Christological ideas belong *exclusively* to his mature *Christology*. This emphasis on Christ’s example certainly survived into his later preaching and provided an important thread in his understanding of the human experiences of the Son of God. It may well be that Irving’s thought was

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

8. Cf Chapter 3, ‘Biography’, pp. 75-80

9. Cf Chapter 6, ‘Emergence’, pp. 196-7.

more likely to develop in the manner that it did in consequence of the comfort he experienced from a sense of solidarity with Christ in his battle against temptations of the flesh.

This factor was present well prior to the emergence of the controversial elements of Irving's Christology, and the effects are visible in his emphasis on the common experience of Jesus and Christians from his earliest ministry in London. It may well have played into the development of his Christology. However, while it may have been a necessary condition for the formation of the doctrine, it was not, by itself, a sufficient cause; as we have observed,<sup>10</sup> the 'sinful flesh' Christology was part of an alternative understanding of redemption *by* incarnation, and it was from this soteriology that the emphasis on fallen flesh developed in his teaching of 1827.

The search for an explanation of Irving's distinctive conception of the incarnation must begin elsewhere, and there are some promising places to look. First, there is an intriguing similarity between Irving's theology of incarnation and that of some of his German contemporaries. In an address of 5 January 1865, Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster, spoke about '[T]he theology of the nineteenth century' for which 'the main impulse' came 'from Germany'. It was this theology, said Stanley, 'which distinguished Edward Irving from the preaching and teaching of his day in the Church of Scotland, and accounts for the increasing estimate formed of his genius and character.'<sup>11</sup> For Stanley, Irving was ahead of his time in his ecclesiastical context because he was an exponent of a theology that was now dominating the churches in Europe and which Stanley compared in significance to the Reformation. Like the Reformation, Stanley saw that the main impetus for new theology had come from Germany.<sup>12</sup> This Germanic influence could present an alternative reason for the emergence of Irving's idiosyncratic ideas.

Although the German Romantics were not uniformly enthusiastic in their attitude to historic Christianity, there were in their number those who reserved a place for

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10. Cf Chapter 6, 'Emergence', pp. 196-7, and Chapter 4, 'Seeds Bearing Fruit', pp. 128-30.

11. Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn, *Essays Chiefly on Questions of Church and State. From 1850 to 1870* (London: John Murray, 1870), pp. 453-454.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 453.

the incarnation in their new critical paradigm. For example, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1767-1834), one of the influential group of *Frühromantiker* in Jena at the turn of the century, believed his Romantic friends to be much closer to Christian belief than they realised. In 1799, at the insistence of his illustrious contemporaries, he published his first book, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*.<sup>13</sup>

In this *apologia* for the ongoing value of religion, Schleiermacher offered a distinctly *Romantic* expression of Christian faith. In the 'First Speech', for example, he describes the dialectical approach typical of German Romantic thought:

[T]he deity, by an immutable law, has compelled itself to divide its great work endlessly, to fuse together each of its eternal thoughts in twin forms that are hostile to each other and yet exist inseparably only through each other.<sup>14</sup>

Schleiermacher's dialectical approach, finding unity in opposition, was expressed in a view of redemption that had notable parallels to that expressed by Irving. For Schleiermacher, Christianity was unique because 'only through Jesus...has redemption become the central point of religion',<sup>15</sup> and this redemption was achieved, not by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but by the incarnation of the Son of God as the Son of Man. Schleiermacher saw the person (dignity) and work (activity) of Christ as indivisible: 'His dignity...is identical with His activity', so that 'no conspicuous isolated acts' constitute his redemptive work but rather 'the whole course of His life'.<sup>16</sup> The degree of similarity between Schleiermacher and Irving is notable: following a similar dialectical approach, both men placed the incarnation at the centre of their understanding of redemption.

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13. For a modern, critical edition in English translation, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R.; Stewart Mackintosh, J.S. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), p. 57. §11 Cf Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, vol. (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825), p. 303.

16. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, p. 377. §93

There were, nonetheless, telling differences between Irving and Schleiermacher. Unlike Irving, Schleiermacher dispensed with traditional Christian beliefs such as the existence of a historical Adam and the corruption of human nature due to sin. Thus, he does not speak of incarnation in ‘fallen nature’ as he had no place for such a concept. He chose instead to speak of Jesus sharing the ‘complete identity of human nature’.<sup>17</sup> This distinction should not, however, be allowed to mask the similarities in their thought which are considerable. Indeed, to some degree, it highlights the extent to which their ideas were structurally similar, as the identification with humanity is the issue for both. Irving’s insistence on Christ’s ‘fallen’ nature was only necessary as a means of ensuring this identification, as is seen in his insistence on the docetism of his opponents.

Another instance that illustrates the similarity of approach between Irving and the German Romantic theologians is found in the thought of the American, John Williamson Nevin. Like Irving, Nevin began his career under the wings of one of the great Evangelical stalwarts of his generation; in Nevin’s case, this was the ‘Princeton theologian’ Charles Hodge.<sup>18</sup> Having studied under Hodge, Nevin spent two years, ending in 1828, filling Hodge’s chair during the latter’s study leave in Germany.<sup>19</sup> Soon after that Nevin and Hodge parted company, theologically as well as institutionally. Nevin began to develop a theological standpoint at odds with Hodge’s ‘puritanism’.<sup>20</sup> By 1840, Nevin and Hodge were at the helm of two theological institutions of contrasting temper, Nevin at the German Reformed Church’s seminary at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, and Hodge at Princeton.<sup>21</sup>

Although both were familiar with the predominant theology of their German contemporaries, their approaches to them were distinct. Nevin was an exponent of the German *Vermittlungstheologie* ‘mediating theology’, which was an attempt to

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17. Ibid., p. 385. §94

18. Peter J. Wallace, ‘History and Sacrament: John Williamson Nevin and Charles Hodge on the Lord’s Supper,’ *Mid America Journal of Theology* 11, (2000), p. 178.

19. Theodore Appel, *The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin* (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication House, 1889), p. 53.

20. Ibid., p. 280.

21. J.W. Nevin and C. Hodge, *Coena Mystica: Debating Reformed Eucharistic Theology*, ed. L.J. DeBie, W.B. Littlejohn, and A. Thayer, The Mercersburg Theology Study Series (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), p. xxviii.

hold together traditional Christian theology with the ideas of Hegel and Schleiermacher.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, Hodge believed that this ‘mediating’ approach represented a capitulation to rationalism; indeed he went so far as to dismiss it as ‘Christian only in name’.<sup>23</sup> Hodge’s reaction to the ‘mediating’ approach reveals a similar antipathy to Nevin’s ideas as that which Irving faced from his contemporaries in the Church of Scotland.

As Nevin tried to work out a theology that held together the ideas of Schleiermacher with more traditional theological categories, he began to express his theology in terms similar to those used by Edward Irving. In *The Mystical Presence*, a treatise on the eucharist, Nevin described ‘[t]he incarnation, by which divinity and humanity are joined together’,<sup>24</sup> as the solution to ‘[t]he necessity of a real union with the divine nature’ which ‘might be said to form thus the great burden of history, onward from the fall’.<sup>25</sup> Hodge recognised that this was the central focus of his erstwhile student and colleague’s theological project:

What is Christianity? It is the theanthropic life of Christ. The eternal Logos having assumed our fallen humanity, and taken it into life union with himself, his divine-human life is generic human nature, exalted and sanctified;<sup>26</sup>

The similarity between the *Vermittlungstheologie* of Nevin and Irving’s idea of salvation by the union of divine nature with fallen humanity in the incarnation is startling.

Like Irving, Nevin believed that the incarnation could only be the means of joining humanity with the divine if the human nature that was assumed in the incarnation was ‘fallen’. He said:

It is the full triumph of Christ's higher life over the limitations with which it had been called to struggle in its union with our fallen humanity; by

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22. Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2013), pp. 9, 97.

23. Charles Hodge, ‘What is Christianity?’, *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 52 1, (1860), p. 157.

24. J.W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: And The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord’s Supper*, ed. L.J. DeBie, W.B. Littlejohn, and M.A. Noll, The Mercersburg Theology Study Series (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), p. 179.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

26. Charles Hodge, ‘What is Christianity’, p. 157.

which this humanity itself is raised into the sphere of the same life, and completely transfused with its power, in the everlasting glorification of the Son of Man.<sup>27</sup>

Nor do the similarities with Irving end there. Nevin rejected other approaches to Christ's mediatorial work as 'a legal fiction only',<sup>28</sup> asserting that '[t]he entire scheme of the Christian salvation requires and assumes throughout, this view of the incarnation and no other'.<sup>29</sup> He also saw an important connection between the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and his ongoing work in believers: '[t]he Holy Ghost accordingly, as the Spirit of Christ, is, in the first place, active simply in the Saviour himself.'<sup>30</sup> *The Mystical Presence* to this extent could have been written by Irving himself.

Yet the evidence suggests that Nevin was not influenced by or particularly aware of Irving. Nevin was enthusiastic in his admiration of Coleridge, and in later years his colleague at Mercersburg, Philip Schaff, wrote appreciatively and knowledgeably about Irving and the CAC in his *Creeeds of Christendom*.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, Nevin makes no mention of Irving in his writings and there is nothing to indicate that the similarities in their thought reveal a dependence on Irving's writings by Nevin. The influence could not have flowed in the other direction as Irving published his *SLOD* in 1828, the same year that Nevin was asked to fill in for Hodge. Given that Hodge was so opposed to Nevin's later 'mediating theology' that he denied that it was authentically Christian, it seems highly unlikely that Nevin was expressing these views publicly in 1828.

In the absence of any evidence of direct influence between Irving and Nevin, it would be reasonable to posit that there was a third party who influenced them both. Given the points of contact we have already observed between Schleiermacher's thought and that of Irving, it is natural to look to Germany to

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27. Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, p. 195.

28. Cf Ch.6 'Emergence', pp. 128-9 Presbytery of London, *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: Presbytery of London, 1831), p. 30.

29. Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, pp. 184-185.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

31. Philip Schaff, *The Creeeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, vol. I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), pp. 905-915.

find the source of the approach that Irving and Nevin followed, albeit independently of each other.

The influence of Schleiermacher and even Hegel<sup>32</sup> on Nevin's thought is not in question. It is much harder, however, to discern a direct German influence on Irving. He never visited Germany, and he struggled to read the German language. There is certainly no evidence that he achieved the sort of mastery of German that he managed in learning Spanish with such astonishing speed when translating Lacunza. His letters make repeated reference to attempts to learn German, but they continually suggest a lack of progress, and even focus, in the task. On 4 June 1819, he wrote to Thomas Carlyle, 'I have been so entirely devoted to idleness or to insignificant Employments since you left me that German, Italian & every other study useful or serious have [sic] been relinquished'.<sup>33</sup> The following spring his studies were squeezed by industry rather than indolence. On 14 March 1820, he wrote: 'I have a German master and a class in College - I have seen neither for a week such is my state of engagement...'<sup>34</sup> That December, he was clearly still lagging behind Carlyle in acquiring the language, writing to his friend that: 'I might even be persuaded to take a lesson of German from you'.<sup>35</sup> Four years later Irving was still not displaying particular accomplishment in German. Henry Crabb Robinson recorded in his diary on 3 February 1824 that Irving was still in need of help: '[he] is learning German, which will be an occasion of acquaintance between us, as I can be of use to him.'<sup>36</sup> By the end of July 1828, Irving did seem to have begun to make some progress. In a letter to Isabella, he wrote that he and his amanuensis, Miss Macdonald, had been

reading a very curious German book of travels, full of beautiful plates — above all measure interesting. I think I shall be beyond you in German

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32. Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, p. 29.

33. To Thomas Carlyle, 4 June 1819 in Barbara Waddington, *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012), p. 70.

34. To Thomas Carlyle, 14 March 1820, *Ibid.*, p. 82.

35. To Thomas Carlyle, postmarked 14 December 1820, *Ibid.*, p. 100.

36. Diary entry for 3 February 1824, in Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), p. 2.

when you return, for I begin to like it very much.<sup>37</sup>

Irving's progress in the language had been slow, to the extent that, after almost a decade of trying, he had reached the point at which he could read a travelogue, and his letter implies that this represented progress and thus the full extent of his competence: 'I shall be beyond you...I begin to like it'. Other concerns seem perpetually to have kept Irving from immersing himself in the German language and becoming as technically competent as he had once hoped.

This rudimentary skill in German that Irving had achieved would not have equipped him to handle the philosophical and theological writings of Schleiermacher and his associates. The *Frühromantiker*, who took their intellectual impetus from Immanuel Kant, worked with a similar technical language to the 'sage of Königsberg'. Kant wrote a form of German that was sufficiently obscure that when, on the eve of his departure from Göttingen in 1799, Coleridge 'held forth' on his philosophy, a young lady of the town 'express[ed] her surprise that he, not being a German, could possibly understand Kant's philosophical writings, which were not even intelligible to her!'<sup>38</sup> It seems unlikely, for that reason, that someone who was just beginning to manage a German book aimed at a popular market (full, as it was, of pictures), would have reshaped his theology under the direct influence of bewilderingly technical German theological and philosophical treatises.

Any German influence on Irving, then, would have been mediated, either by translators or by English-speaking advocates of these ideas. Schleiermacher died in 1834, the same year as Irving and Coleridge, with only one of his works available in English translation, his *Critical Essay on the Gospel of St Luke*.<sup>39</sup> Coleridge, an avid student of 'higher criticism' regarding the biblical text, recorded on 8 February 1826 that he was diverted to study of 'the three first Gospels' by the publication of this opus in English.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore quite possible

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37. Edward Irving to Isabella Irving, 31 July 1828 in Oliphant, *Life*, p. 46.

38. Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 236.

39. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *A Critical Essay on the Gospel of St. Luke*, trans. C. Thirlwall (London: J. Taylor, 1825).

40. Note 5323, 8 February 1826, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding., vol. 4 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).



that Irving had access to this translation; however, it is a work of biblical criticism and does not deal with the theological questions of incarnation and redemption. Irving's Christology, thus, cannot have been influenced directly by Schleiermacher. Yet the similarities between Irving and Schleiermacher and, likewise, between Irving and Nevin, require some explanation.

The thinker whose influence could most likely explain the rather Germanic bent of Irving's thought was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Indeed, Thomas Carlyle wrote that '[Coleridge] was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms'.<sup>41</sup> Chalmers recognised a 'certain German mysticism'<sup>42</sup> as the basis for Irving's intellectual intercourse with Coleridge. Crabb Robinson, in a diary entry made in February 1824, mentioned Irving's statement that 'Coleridge had given him a new idea of German metaphysics, which he meant to study'.<sup>43</sup> Not only was Irving evidently influenced by Coleridge but, through the older man, he had come to have much in common with the *Frühromantiker*. It seems reasonable to suggest that Irving's Christology came to have a strong coincidence with the German mediating theologians by the same means. There are, however, strong objections to seeing Coleridge as *fons et origo* of Irving's ideas about the incarnation.

Previous suggestions of a Coleridgean genesis for Irving's Christological formulations have been examined and rejected by subsequent scholarship. The most recent attempt to argue that the concept of incarnation in fallen flesh came from the quondam lake-poet was that of Arnold Dallimore.<sup>44</sup> His explanation revolved around the assumption that Coleridge 'had never fully overcome his

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41. Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, ed. Henry Duff Traill, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 53.

42. William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1852), p. 160.

43. Entry of 3 Feb 1824, in Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, p. 2. This study of metaphysics does not seem to have progressed in such a way as to impress Crabb Robinson. He wrote of a meeting with Irving on 18 May 1824: 'A little serious talk; but Irving is no metaphysician, nor do I suppose a deep thinker.' Entry of 18 May 1824 in *Ibid.*, p. 5.

44. Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983). Grass does hint at Coleridge's importance for the development of Irving's doctrine of incarnation by highlighting the link between the doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation and Coleridge's demonstrable influence in the former. He does not, however, draw any closer link between their ideas about the detail of the incarnation itself. Timothy Grass, *Edward Irving: The Lord's Watchman* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), p. 177 n.14.

Unitarian beliefs' and conceived of Christ as 'less than fully divine'.<sup>45</sup> This unfortunate misreading of Coleridge, as denying the full divinity of the Logos and the importance of the Trinity, is diametrically at odds with the thrust of the poet's later writings and career.<sup>46</sup> An explanation of Irving's thought based on such a serious misperception of Coleridge was unlikely to be persuasive or accurate.

The flaws in Dallimore's argument have been pointed out repeatedly, not least by Elliott, who dismantles his case at some length.<sup>47</sup> Part of this rebuttal relies on Coleridge's negative statements about Irving's Christology, to which we shall turn shortly. It should be observed at this point, however, that a more prominent reason given by Elliott and others for concluding that Coleridge was not the *éminence grise* behind Irving's Christology is David Dorries's argument that Irving's sermons reveal that his mature Christology was in place from at least 1822.<sup>48</sup> Elliott points out that 1822 is a year before their meeting. 'Therefore, Coleridge can neither be blamed nor credited for being a major formative influence on Irving's distinctive Christology.'<sup>49</sup>

A second objection to the suggestion of Coleridgean influence is that Irving insisted that his understanding was unchanged from the orthodoxy of his youth. He argued repeatedly that his was the historic understanding of the incarnation, as held by the Church of Scotland.<sup>50</sup> It is important to distinguish this claim from the argument about the emergence of this subject in his public preaching. It is at least theoretically possible that Irving held his controversial Christological views from the outset of his ministry, but that they never found voice until 1827.

The third objection, and most powerful, objection comes from Coleridge himself, who was anxious to distance himself from Irving's 'somewhat too adventurous speculations on...the Body of our Lord'.<sup>51</sup> He did so publicly, as in *On the*

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45. Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement*, p. 61.

46. Cf Chapter 4, 'Seeds Bearing Fruit', pp.120-1.

47. Peter Elliott, 'Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis' (PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2010), pp. 96-98..

48. David W. Dorries, 'Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature.' (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1987), p. 82.

49. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis", p. 75.

50. Cf Chapter 5, 'Revival or Revision', p.142.

51. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each*

*Constitution of Church and State*, as quoted above, and privately, in conversation and in his notebooks.<sup>52</sup> During Chalmers's visit of May 1830, for instance, Coleridge 'poured out an eloquent tribute of his regard' for Irving, 'mourning pathetically that such a man should be so throwing himself away'.<sup>53</sup> The focus of this lament was 'Mr Irving's book on the "Human Nature of Christ"' which 'in its analysis was minute to absurdity; one would imagine that the pickling and preserving were to follow, it was so like a cookery book'.<sup>54</sup> In another conversation of 9 May 1830, Coleridge commented that '[h]is opinion about the sinfulness of the Humanity of Jesus is absurd'.<sup>55</sup> His notebooks bear similar testimony to Coleridge's concern about the coherence of Irving's Christological position. Writing about the 'mystery' of the incarnation, Coleridge notes that

a partial & confused view of which has unhappily so bewildered and mystified my the highly gifted but undisciplined and idealess mind of my still respected friend, the Revd. Edward Irving.<sup>56</sup>

It would be surprising if Coleridge had been the source of the very Christology that he was criticising in such terms. Whilst an argument could be made that Coleridge felt compelled to a certain reserve in supporting Irving's teaching in public, given the mounting controversy that it was producing, the same does not apply to his private notebooks. His antipathy to Irving's ideas in his private jottings would seem to be decisive against the possibility that Coleridge was the source of this idiosyncratic Christology.

The first strand of counter-evidence is that previous claims that Coleridge stood behind Irving's Christology have been seriously misconceived. This is most acutely the case in Arnold Dallimore's argument that Coleridge influenced Irving in a Unitarian direction. This is palpably spurious, as the lynchpin of Coleridge's religious thought was the Trinity, and his influence on Irving was first seen in the

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(London: 1830), p. 152.

52. See discussion of his Table Talk, Marginalia and notebooks in subsequent pages.

53. Hanna, *Memoirs*, p. 262.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Hartley Nelson Coleridge, vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1835), p. 131.

56. Note 6527, 15 November 1830, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1834*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding., vol. 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

younger man's renewed concern for this subject in a series of sermons he preached in Hatton Garden.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, it is of very little moment that Coleridge did not influence Irving in the manner suggested by Dallimore. A mistaken argument for a position does not nullify the position it fails to uphold. A suggestion of Coleridgean influence in the development of Irving's doctrine of the incarnation is not tantamount to a defence of Dallimore's position.

The second reason that recent scholarship has ruled out Coleridge as an influence on Irving's Christology is the settled conviction, following David Dorries, that Irving already held these beliefs when he began his London ministry. The problems with Dorries's claims about Irving's early preaching have already been discussed at some length<sup>58</sup> and need not be revisited here. Nonetheless, there does remain the possibility that Irving's *thought* did not change although he did not *express* his controversial doctrine of the incarnation in public until 1827. As unlikely as this silence might seem, given how centrally these ideas featured in his theology, Irving's own claims to orthodoxy and to be upholding the doctrinal standards of the Kirk<sup>59</sup> make it a possibility that must be considered.

Irving's repeated insistence that he was not teaching anything new was doubtless sincere. There is reason to believe, however, that this claim was not entirely accurate. Irving seems to have been capable of insisting on apparently counterfactual claims about his own intellectual past. In chapter five of this thesis it was observed that, in his discussions of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, Irving claimed that he had always believed that they were a perpetual inheritance for the Church.<sup>60</sup> This statement is hard to reconcile with an earlier sermon in which Irving showed contempt for Roman Catholic claims to ongoing miraculous gifting. Here he denounced the idea as an idolatrous 'making visible' of the Spirit and put it on a par with the idea of transubstantiation in the Catholic mass:

[T]hey have made that manifestation of the Spirit to the sense of man

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57. Cf Chapter 4, 'Seeds Bearing Fruit', p.121

58. Cf Chapter 6, 'Emergence', pp.183-198

59. Cf e.g. Edward Irving, *The Opinions Circulating Concerning Our Lord's Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1830).; Edward Irving, *The Doctrine Held by the Church of Scotland Concerning the Human Nature of Our Lord, as Stated in her Standards* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1830).

60. Cf Chapter 3, 'Biography', p.90-2

perpetual, holding miracles of all kinds to be in the church unto this day, and so making the Holy Spirit visible, as they have made the Father and the Son.<sup>61</sup>

Irving's capacity for redefining ideas whilst claiming consistency did not pass without comment amongst his contemporaries. Leigh Hunt, for instance, satirised the tendency in Irving to use theological language that was commonly understood in a particular sense, but mean something entirely different by it, as being evidence the sway Coleridge held over him.<sup>62</sup> There is certainly evidence that Irving could accept a substantial redefinition of a theological idea from Coleridge as being a truer or fuller expression of an old truth to which he already subscribed. We observed in Chapter 4 that, influenced by Coleridge, Irving made a *volte-face* in his position on the spiritual gifts, from a cessationist to a restorationist position.<sup>63</sup> Strikingly, he did not seem to believe that he had changed his mind. In an article for *Fraser's Magazine*, he wrote that

'since ever I read the word of God for the building up of my faith I have never ceased believe that the spiritual gifts...together with the various supernatural methods of operation...are...substantial and permanent forms of operation'.<sup>64</sup>

Once Irving became convinced that he was defending the *only* possible true definition of a position, whether about the Spirit or the incarnation, then it went without saying for him that this is what he had always believed. Provided he was convinced that he was teaching what the doctrine really *meant*, he could believe himself to be teaching the same thing, even if the detail was significantly transformed.

Even though the objections considered to this point have been found to be less compelling than they at first appeared, the most apparently decisive objection to Coleridgean influence on Irving's Christology remains. He rejected Irving's

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61. Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses, by the Reverend Edward Irving M.A. minister of the National Scotch Church Regent Square*, vol. 3 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), pp. 1221-1222.

62. Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), pp. 51-52. Cf Chapter 4, 'Seeds Bearing Fruit' p.105.

63. Cf Chapter 4, 'Seeds Bearing Fruit', pp.133-8.

64. Edward Irving, 'Facts Connected with the Recent Manifestations of Spiritual Gifts,' *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 4, (1832), p. 754.

teaching. That would seem conclusive; nevertheless the exact nature of Coleridge's objections have not, to this point, been explored adequately. In order to come to a proper understanding of the nature of Coleridge's objections to Irving's teaching about the incarnation, it is necessary to understand Coleridge's own approach to this central Christian doctrine.

James Boulger, in *Coleridge as Religious Thinker*, suggested that Coleridge's thought about the incarnation was of a very different stripe from that heard from the pulpit of the National Scotch Church. He wrote, in 1961, that 'Coleridge edged away from the human nature of Christ'.<sup>65</sup> Boulger has been followed by many scholars, such as Sue Zemka<sup>66</sup> and Peter Elliott,<sup>67</sup> who have concluded from his work that it was inevitable that Coleridge would reject Irving's Christology. After all, the reality of Christ's humanity was the *idée fixe* of Irving's work. For this reason, Zemka concludes that 'critics generally seem to agree'<sup>68</sup> that Coleridge rejected Irving's Christology and could not, therefore, have been its source.

As early as the publication of *the Friend*, which he stopped writing in March 1810 — well before his writing took on a more exclusively theological tone — Coleridge made passing mention of the 'divine humanity' which is 'the final cause of all creation'.<sup>69</sup> While this comment is suggestive of a high place for the incarnation in Coleridge's thought, even at this early stage, he did not, however, develop this passing comment further until his notebooks of 1827. Before this, in his 1825 *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge did begin to develop his theological ideas in more public form. In this work, Coleridge repeatedly contrasted his understanding of Christian faith with that of the Latitudinarian divines like Locke or Tillotson. Coleridge had long complained that their 'mechanico-corpuscular' theology 'hath prevailed about a century'.<sup>70</sup> This rejection of the

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65. James D. Boulger, *Coleridge as Religious Thinker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 181.

66. Sue Zemka, *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 51.

67. Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis", p. 96.

68. Zemka, *Victorian Testaments*, p. 51.

69. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend: A Series of Essays to Aid in the Formation of Fixed Principles in Politics, Morals, and Religion, with Literary Amusements Interspersed* (London: W. Pickering, 1844), pp. III, 207.

70. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual: A Lay Sermon* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1816), p. 80.

'Aristotelian' theology of the 'Understanding' is the most likely reason that Boulger and others have observed that Coleridge was 'edg[ing] away from Christ's humanity' in favour of a more Platonised, spiritual Christ. If Coleridge was moving his theology in a Platonic direction, then it is understandable that he might be seen to be less concerned with the observable, physical, reality of the incarnation and more interested in the spiritual realities which it expressed. This would be a misunderstanding of Coleridge, however, as his idealism did not allow for a rejection of the physical in favour of the ideal.

Coleridge's opposition to the prevailing theology of his day was focussed on the Latitudinarian treatment of Christianity as primarily a system of ethics. He expressed this pithily in his claim that 'Christianity and Redemption are equivalent terms'.<sup>71</sup> For Coleridge, religion was not simply a matter of ethical duty; it was founded on direct divine intervention in the world. As we observed in chapter four, Coleridge saw this intervention as being enacted through the incarnation, which represented 'Redemption by Christ's Assumption of Humanity'.<sup>72</sup> The divine Logos achieved redemption for humanity by reconciling divine and human nature in himself. It would be reasonable to expect, then, that Coleridge would hold a similar view to Irving about the *state* of that human nature. Given this understanding of redemption, it would be no surprise that Coleridge placed a high value on the reality of the physical incarnation.

What is more, when Coleridge returned to the subject of the incarnation in his notebooks, he showed himself to be in agreement with Irving: not only concerning the reality of the incarnation, but that Son of God must have assumed *fallen* human nature. He wrote, in March 1828, that, 'as the Son of Man he likewise humbled himself to the same Ground, and to have the Nature which Mankind had'.<sup>73</sup> On its own, this comment might be ambiguous, but taken with other entries in his notebooks there can be no doubt about his meaning. He wrote, on 15 November 1830, that the Son of God, 'descended into that Nature

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71. Coleridge, *Aiðs*, p. 303.

72. Note 5816, March 1828, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1834*.

73. Note 5816, March 1828, *Ibid.*

into which Creaturely Man had fallen'.<sup>74</sup> He then went on to quote Romans 8:3, making the point even more explicit:

our Lord without Sin put on το ομοιωμα σαρκος αμαρτωλης... the likeness of sinful flesh, *i.e.* a Nature containing the consequents, penalties and incitements of Sin, the base of Sin.<sup>75</sup>

This comment expresses the same doctrine that Irving taught, even to the extent of including the 'incitements' of sin along with its penalties. In this particular note, Coleridge expresses the doctrine by quoting one of the key texts for Irving's argument. Indeed, perhaps aware of the significance others had placed on the word 'likeness', Coleridge added the comment that '[I] likeness is a very inadequate Rendering of St Paul's ὁμοιωμα'.<sup>76</sup> It was vital to uphold the connection between the Logos and *sinful* human nature. Despite the negative comments Coleridge made about Irving's Christological writings, he seems to have been in agreement with Irving at its most controversial point.

Coleridge was clearly not, *pace* Boulger, 'edg[ing] away from Christ's humanity'.<sup>77</sup> Indeed he even subtly reworked the Greek text of Paul's epistle to make the link stronger. Where Paul uses the word 'ἁμαρτίας'<sup>78</sup>, the singular form 'sinful', Coleridge substitutes the genitive plural 'αμαρτωλης', 'the flesh of sinners'.<sup>79</sup> Coleridge did not allow for any doubt that the 'flesh' taken up in the incarnation was the fallen human nature of the sinners needing redemption. Coleridge and Irving shared a basic soteriological framework within which, whatever differences they may have had, they agreed that incarnation into *fallen* human nature was basic and central.

Now that it has been demonstrated that Irving and Coleridge shared a very similar Christology, it might, nevertheless, be objected that this does not *prove* that Irving derived his ideas from Coleridge. Although Irving demonstrably developed

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74. Note 6527, 15 November 1830, *Ibid.*

75. Note 6527, 15 November 1830, *Ibid.*

76. Note 6527, 15 November 1830, *Ibid.* This comment is recorded as a footnote.

77. Boulger, *Coleridge*, p. 181.

78. *The Greek New Testament*, ed. Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo Martini, Carlo Metzger, Bruce Metzger, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

79. Suzanne Elizabeth Webster, *Body and Soul in Coleridge's Notebooks, 1827-1834: 'What is Life?'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 126.



these ideas *after* he had met Coleridge, is it not possible that Irving developed them independently of him? Indeed, to go further, is it not possible that Coleridge followed Irving, not vice versa? Peter Elliott has demonstrated that Irving was able to persuade Coleridge to change his mind over the *bodily* return of Christ.<sup>80</sup> Why not allow for the possibility that he also persuaded Coleridge over the significance of that very body itself?

Coleridge's notebooks from the early months of 1827 provide an intriguing strand of evidence. It is in these volumes, in an entry for Sunday 13 May, that he records his first meeting with Thomas Chalmers.<sup>81</sup> Irving's former mentor was in London to preach at the first Sunday service at the National Scotch Church and, Coleridge records, to baptise Irving's daughter Mary. On the Thursday before this meeting, Chalmers attended the Gillmans' house in Highgate, along with Irving and the Montagues. This was the meeting at which Chalmers observed the 'communion of spirit' between Irving and Coleridge 'on the ground of a certain German mysticism and transcendental lake-poetry'.<sup>82</sup> Understandably, Chalmers does not provide any detail about contents of Coleridge's 'mighty unremitting stream'<sup>83</sup> of conversation, but Coleridge's notebooks do offer some clues to the ideas that were foremost in his mind at the time.

The entries for the early months of 1827 form what Coleridge was hoping would become 'a general preface to the "Essays on Physiogony["]"<sup>84</sup> (which was a word he coined to refer to the discussion of natural origins).<sup>85</sup> Along with detailed consideration of the origins of races and species, these notes consider the origins of life from the perspective of the form and *telos* of life. In his entry for 5 May 1827, he bemoans the 'want of insight into the nature of *Life* — what it is and what it is not', and comments that such insight is only possible if the mind is 'raised to the contemplation of the IDEA, the life celestial to wit - or the distinctive

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80. Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Publishing, 2013), p. 84.

81. Note 5510, May 1827, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*.

82. Hanna, *Memoirs*, p. 127.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

84. Note 5480, March-April 1827, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*.

85. The OED attributes this word to Coleridge as originator.

essence and character of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>86</sup> Then on 8 May 1827, he recorded his reflections on the 'final Cause of the Earth' something that he was sure intricately related with the revelation of 'the Son of Man as the Son of God'.<sup>87</sup> In other words, he saw the raising of humanity to the life of the Godhead as the *telos* of creation. The corollary of this idea was the incarnation itself: 'The first coming was the Son of God as the Son of Man.'<sup>88</sup> His ideas about physiogony, which continued to dominate his thinking in early May 1827, were also beginning to cause him to reflect again on the nature and importance of the incarnation.

The notebook entry in which Coleridge first makes that link between physiogony and the incarnation dates from just two days before Chalmers's visit to Coleridge in Irving's company. Coleridge recounts his meeting with Chalmers in his entry of 13 May (which he mistakenly recorded as 16 May),<sup>89</sup> in which he also narrated the events of that Sunday. After describing these events, Coleridge concludes the note by recording his latest theological conclusions arising from 'my recent Light on Physiogony'.<sup>90</sup> In this passage, he contrasts the '[I]nfirmities from or continued by nature' with 'the Princ. Individ.' (Soul),<sup>91</sup> drawing from this relationship of opposition the conclusion that:

the Soul shall then find the purging cleansing efficacy of the Spiritual Water, the nourishing and assimilating Substance of the noumenal Flesh & Blood of the Son of God Incarnate, & rise a pure capacity of the Righteousness in Christ!<sup>92</sup>

Thus, the subject that was most exercising his theological faculties at the time of Chalmers's visit, during which Irving 's[at] at [Coleridge's] feet and dr[ank] in the inspiration of every syllable that f[ell] from him',<sup>93</sup> was the solution, presented by the incarnation, to the problem of fallen human nature.

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86. Note 5505, 5 May 1827, Ibid.

87. Note 5507, 8 May 1827, Ibid.

88. Note 5507, 8 May 1827, Ibid.

89. His note for 8 May was also initially recorded as '12 May' but later amended. see Note 5507, Ibid.

90. Note 5510, 13 May 1827, Ibid.

91. This is Coleridge's shorthand for 'Principium Individualitatis' the principle of individuality which he believed to be human soul.

92. Note 5510, 13 May 1827, Ibid.

93. Hanna, *Memoirs*, p. 127.

That this relation of physiogony to the incarnation was a matter of sustained interest for Coleridge is illustrated by a note dated between 27 May and 7 June 1827.<sup>94</sup> It is apparent in this note that he believed these early months of 1827 to have been a period of significant progress in his own theological development. He rhapsodises over ‘the Harmony of the Scriptural Scheme of Revelation’, expressing his wonder, given his own infirmities, at the extent to which that scheme has ‘of late opened itself on my Spirit!’<sup>95</sup> The main content of the note is concerned with the ‘~~Four~~ [f]ive states ... requisite to complete the idea of Man’.<sup>96</sup> Having traced these ‘states’ through and explained how they express the progress of redemption in scripture, he describes the assumption by Christ of the ‘generic nature’ of humanity as simultaneously a ‘taking up’ and a ‘conquering’ of fallen human nature.<sup>97</sup> Thus he can explain that the human nature which was assumed was ‘now ally, now Antagonist’ of the redeemer: it was both that which needed to be redeemed and that which had to be overcome.

Although Coleridge clearly believed as early as 1825 that the ‘Redemption by Christ’s Assumption of Humanity’ was the ‘sole possible means of salvation’,<sup>98</sup> his ideas developed further in spring 1827. During this period, he began to contemplate a scheme of redemption by the assumption of *fallen* human flesh. This was a season during which he and Irving were in close contact and the timing of these notes is significant. In chapter four we concluded that Irving began to teach his controversial doctrine at some point in summer 1827. In the months preceding the emergence of Irving’s distinctive Christology, Coleridge was working out in his notebooks his own understanding of the incarnation, related to ‘physiogony’. This suggests that it would have been a prime topic of conversation with someone like Irving. That Irving’s controversial ideas should emerge at the same time as Coleridge was working out very similar ideas in his notebooks *could*, in theory, be coincidence, but it seems unlikely.

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94. Note 5518, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*. The note itself does not specify a date but note #5516 was written on 27 May and #5519 on 7 June, thus placing this not at some point between those dates.

95. Note 5518, May-June 1827, *Ibid.*

96. Note 5518, May-June 1827, *Ibid.*

97. Note 5518, May-June 1827, *Ibid.*

98. Note 5215, May 1825, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

Three years later, on 18 November 1830, as the uproar over Irving's ideas was at its height, Coleridge's notebooks reveal that he believed Irving to have adopted these ideas about redemption and nature from him. By autumn 1830, Coleridge had reverted to his original scheme of 'four states' of life (as opposed to the expanded scheme of five we observed from his note of May-June 1827). In writing about these states Coleridge recapitulated some of his ideas about redemption and its fallen nature. The four states he settled on in this mature version of his physiogony were:

1. The Man, <i.e. the Spiritual Man> the Finite Rational, the image of the Absolute
2. The Beast, the Finite Irrational
3. The Fallen Man, the Spirit sunk into & partaking of the Bestial = the Will by self determination become a Nature, and thus at once corrupting the innocent Nature as an alien ingredient and corrupted thro' it.-Briefly, state the 3rd as The Natural Man...
4. The Fiend, the Spirit creating itself to evil — = the Mystery of Evil, a Spirit inverted, and not as is No.3 simply corrupted and adulterated by combination with the inferior.<sup>99</sup>

In outlining these four states, Coleridge was most at pains to distinguish the 'Natural Man' from the 'Fiend': that is, humanity as a corruption or adulteration between 'Rational' and 'Irrational' as opposed to the 'Spirit inverted' of pure 'Evil'. In this way, Coleridge was working out an understanding of humanity as salvable by the re-institution of Reason, or the divine Logos. The fallen man had stooped to irrationality but not to pure evil; what was thus needed was a restoration of that which was lost in the decline into bestiality by corruption.

Coleridge believed that the distinction between the third and fourth states, as he outlined them, was 'the ground of the Mystery', by which he meant his scheme of redemption by means of incarnation. This is the context for the negative statement about Irving's Christology (quoted above), which seemed to suggest that Coleridge saw no common ground with Irving on the topic. Seen in its context, though, Coleridge's comment shows rather that he believed Irving only

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99. Note 6527, 18 November 1830, (words marked out by <> are a later addition to the manuscript). Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*.

half to have understood the pattern of redemption that he had taught him. He considered Irving to have ‘a partial and confused view’<sup>100</sup> of the ‘Mystery’ as explained by Coleridge himself. This incomplete apprehension had ‘bewildered and mystified ~~my~~ the highly gifted but undisciplined and idealess mind of my still respected friend, the Revd. Edward Irving’.<sup>101</sup>

His meaning in this last statement requires some exposition. ‘Idealess’ was a technical rather than derogatory description of Irving’s mind. It was Coleridge’s common complaint about the religious authorities of his day, meaning that their religion was one of the ‘Understanding’ rather than of ‘Reason’.<sup>102</sup> This observation is important for understanding what it was that Coleridge really objected to in Irving’s thinking about the incarnation and we shall return to it. For the moment, however, it is important to note that, despite this criticism, the implication of Coleridge’s comment is that Irving had derived Christological ideas, albeit uncertainly, from Coleridge.

This conclusion is confirmed by an earlier note, written in April 1829. Here, again writing about the incarnation, Coleridge records that ‘Mr Irving has adopted my general conception of this most important part of Christian Faith’.<sup>103</sup> In this note, as in the former, he appends to his recognition of his own ideas in Irving’s writings an expression of his hesitation about the younger man’s apprehension of his system, writing that, ‘he has mixed with it much that I am compelled to disavow.’<sup>104</sup> Similarly in conversation, recorded in the *Table Talk* for 15 May 1830, Coleridge discussed Irving’s Christology stating that ‘Irving caught many things from me’. Again Coleridge followed up this acknowledgement of his influence on Irving, regarding the incarnation with criticism. This time Coleridge bemoaned that ‘[Irving] would never attend to any thing which he thought he could not use in the pulpit. I told him the certain consequence would be, that he

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100. Note 6527, 18 November 1830, *Ibid.*

101. Note 6527, 18 November 1830, *Ibid.*

102. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each*, pp. 69, 252-4.

103. Note 5979, Feb-March 1829, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1834*.

104. Note 5979, February/March 1829, *Ibid.* He continues ‘...The sum of my Belief is, that nothing happened to Jesus, which in and thro’ him must not happen to every elect Believer. — I use the improper and mean word, *happen*, for want of a better —’.

would fall into grievous errors.<sup>105</sup> Whilst he repeatedly felt the need to distance himself from Irving in the Christological controversy, Coleridge also recognised that the younger man's ideas had grown from seeds that he himself had planted.

Coleridge's sense that Irving bowdlerised or adulterated his ideas offers a more compelling source of explanation for his public distancing of himself from Irving than that he disagreed over the language of 'fallen' or 'sinful' flesh. What Irving published was similar enough to his own ideas that there was a danger that the younger man's offences would be imputed to Coleridge himself. At the same time, those ideas represented, to Coleridge's mind, a partial and distorted reflection of his own. In his copy of *Sermons Lectures and Occasional Discourses*, Coleridge lays out a plan for a series of annotations on Irving's text to indicate which thoughts he believed were derived from himself (εσθηση), which from Calvinism, which from 'a perverted Calvinism', and which were original to Irving.<sup>106</sup> This indicates the extent to which Coleridge believed Irving's thinking to have become a *mixture* of Coleridgean, Calvinist and Irving's own ideas. Coleridge adverted to this issue in his summary comments on sheets inserted at the front of the first volume in which he likened his friend to a fugitive from modern Calvinism, who has freed the chain from the Staple-ring, but not his ancles from the Chain.<sup>107</sup> From Coleridge's perspective, Irving was no longer completely constrained by the system of his previous theology, but was still caught up in some aspects of 'modern Calvinism', or rather his continued adherence to them. This is the source of the criticism that Irving had 'mixed' with the ideas on Christology that he had taken from Coleridge a great deal that he could not accept.<sup>108</sup>

It should be observed that, by this point, Coleridge believed this partial understanding or taking up of his ideas to be a pattern with Irving. His description of 'idealess' Irving highlighted the issue. For Coleridge '[i]dealess

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105. *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table Talk; Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, Carl Woodring ed, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 128.

106. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. 12, Marginalia III: Irving to Oxlee*, ed. H.J. Jackson and George Whalley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 26-27.referring to Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, pp. 58-59.

107. Coleridge, *Marginalia III*, pp. 26-27.referring to Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, pp. 19-25.

108. Note 5979, February/March 1829, Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1834*.

theologians...cannot receive...an Idea'.<sup>109</sup> This is instanced by his comment in *On The Constitution of Church and State* that:

I look forward with confident hope to a time when [Irving's] soul shall have perfected her victory over the dead letter of the senses and its apparitions in the sensuous understanding; when the halcyon Ideas shall have alit on the surging sea of his conceptions.<sup>110</sup>

Coleridge's objection was that Irving was trying to express things that can only be apprehended as 'Ideas' in terms that are restricted to 'the letter of the senses', the 'sensuous understanding'. As such, Irving's approach to Coleridge's thought was, from the poet's point of view, essentially confused and futile.

This pattern of confused appropriation of Coleridgean ideas was such that Coleridge's marginal notes on, for example, his copy of *SLOD*, reveal his frustration. In the first volume, Irving wrote of the sufferings of the Messiah as 'placed to the account of mankind, and not to his own account'.<sup>111</sup> Coleridge's comment in the margin is scathing '[a]nd yet this is the Man who in the εσθήση fit talks with contempt of "the Debtor and Creditor Scheme" of Redemption!! Mr I. *Alarms* me with his shouldering mob of Inconsistencies!'.<sup>112</sup> On the next page, as Irving picks up the theme of the two natures working together in redemption, but in a way that Coleridge considers speculative, he writes, '[t]his is a fragment of an Echo from εσ τη ση Alas! Alas!'.<sup>113</sup> In the next volume, as Irving discusses the experience of Adam in his prelapsarian state, Coleridge comments:

This and the preceding ¶ph. I acknowledge as having been derived from my conversation, but then by only stating half of what I said, Mr I. has rendered the opinion liable to great and obvious Objections.<sup>114</sup>

A similar comment follows a few pages further on.

Yet another Παρασθησιμος, or diminution of εστωσής discourse. ...It is a mistake, however, of small importance. Would that all my worthy Friend's Misconceptions of my Conversation had been equally harmless! S.T.C. =

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109. Note 5564, July/August 1827, Ibid.

110. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each*, p. 115.

111. Irving, *Sermons, Lectures etc*, p. liv (140).

112. Coleridge, note in margin of Ibid.

113. Coleridge, note in margin of Ibid., p. (140)lv to lvi (140).

114. Coleridge, note in margin of Ibid., pp. 351-353.

The picture that emerges of Coleridge as he sat reading Irving's books is one of a teacher whose student is able to reproduce certain words and phrases that echo the instruction they have received, but is unable to demonstrate any real comprehension of the subject.

It is from this wider perspective, of Coleridge's frustration with Irving's uncomprehending and partial reproduction of his ideas, that the comments he makes about Christology need to be understood. Coleridge was convinced that Irving was trying to work with the 'Ideas' of 'Reason' in the terms of the 'Understanding'. This was an impression that others shared, particularly concerning the manner in which Irving derived his Christological ideas from Coleridge.

Irving felt that his vocation as an orator was to produce immediate effect; it was needful for him, therefore, to reduce the high truths that he received from Coleridge to the form of a mathematical diagram... [Irving's tendencies] were Aristotelian... The period of his strife in the middle way between the two opinions [Aristotelian and Platonist] was sore and perilous.<sup>116</sup>

When, for instance, Coleridge complained that Irving's 'opinion about the sinfulness of the humanity of our Lord is absurd... But what he says is capable of a sounder interpretation',<sup>117</sup> this is what he had in mind. The concept of incarnation in 'fallen flesh' itself was, to Coleridge, orthodox; the manner of Irving's expression of it was, however, 'absurd'. Most, if not all, his comments criticising Irving's doctrine of the incarnation fit this pattern. For example, when Coleridge writes that 'his analysis was minute to absurdity',<sup>118</sup> or that his speculations on the body of Christ were 'somewhat too adventurous',<sup>119</sup> it is this attempt to reduce 'high truths' to a 'mathematical diagram' that he has in view. Again, when he comments that 'a partial & confused view' of the incarnation 'has

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115. Ibid., pp. 370-373.

116. Anonymous, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Table Talk,' *Fraser's Magazine* XII, no. LXVII (1835), p. 132.

117. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, p. 131.

118. William Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh: Edmoston and Douglas, 1867), p. 262.

119. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each*, p. 152.



unhappily so bewildered and mystified...the highly gifted but undisciplined and idealess mind of...Edward Irving',<sup>120</sup> he is describing the same pathology. In short, Coleridge was critical of Irving's Christology, not because it was alien to him, but because it was derived from him.

It has been shown that, although there may have been biographical reasons for Irving being concerned with the incarnation, the most likely explanation for the development of Irving's thinking and teaching regarding the human nature of Christ was the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. There are significant possible objections to this theory. Those objections are, however, insubstantial.

The scholarly consensus that Irving's teaching was a perpetual part of Irving's didactic *oeuvre*, has been shown to be based on flawed research. Irving's public teaching about Christology changed significantly over time. Irving's own claims that he had always believed and taught the doctrines that brought about his fall have also been seen to be questionable. Irving similarly believed himself to have held a substantially coherent position concerning the ongoing availability of the supernatural *charismata* throughout his ministry. His record of public statements on the matter, however, demonstrate what would appear to be a complete *volte-face*. Irving had a capacity to change the *substance* of his doctrine dramatically and, so long as the accidents—the names or words—remained the same, believe that his doctrine had not really changed. The evidence suggests strongly that this was also the case with his doctrine of the incarnation.

Irving's mature ideas about Christology bore a very similar stamp to those of Friedrich Schleiermacher and John Williamson Nevin. This correspondence must be significant in understanding the genesis of Irving's new ideas. Irving was, after all, presenting something substantially new in his own setting and there were no apparent analogues in mainstream English-speaking theology at the time. The similarity between his work and Nevin's is, therefore, remarkable. Coupled with the similarity of both Irving and Nevin's teaching to that of the developing German theology, it would be natural to suggest that both were influenced by German theologians such as Schleiermacher. This was certainly the case for

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120. Note 6527, 15 November 1830 Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 1827-1854*.

Nevin; however, Irving lacked proper access to German and the key works of Schleiermacher were not available in English translation. The coincidence of Irving's ideas with the German Romantic, Schleiermacher, is thus either a remarkable fluke or it is evidence of some mediating or shared influence. In the end, the conclusion presses itself forcefully that Irving's similarity to the *Frühromantiker* reveals the influence on him of England's most German thinker of the time, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Irving's Christological novelties, although not precisely mimetic of Coleridge's ideas in every detail, nonetheless resemble them sufficiently well to betray their Coleridgean origin.

Despite Coleridge's objections to much in the writings of Irving between 1828 and 1830, he and Irving evidently shared a substantially similar view of the role and nature of the incarnation. Not only so, but Coleridge was working these things out in his notebooks during the months leading up to Irving's sermon for the Gospel Tract Society. It is natural to conclude that Irving, in this as in so many other things, found his thought reshaped by Coleridge. This was certainly, as we observed, Coleridge's conclusion on the matter. A survey of Coleridge's objections to Irving's Christology demonstrates that his negative reaction was provoked by the fact that Irving's thought was derivative from his own rather than because it was fundamentally different. Coleridge believed that, in Irving's teachings on the incarnation, he saw, though in distorted and adulterated form, a reflection of his own.

Jane Welsh-Carlyle famously claimed that, if Irving had married her, 'there would have been no tongues'.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps we may add that had Irving not met Coleridge, there would have been no trial. Although, given Irving's personality, it is safer to add that if there were a trial, it would not have been based on the charge that he preached 'the fallen state and sinfulness of our Lord's human nature'.<sup>122</sup>

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121. James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life 1795-1855*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), p. 164.

122. Presbytery of Annan, *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, AM, Before the Presbytery of Annan: On Wednesday, March 15, 1835: Also, Mr Irving's Letter to His Congregation* (London: W. Harding, 1833), p. 4.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

This thesis has presented a reconsideration of the origins of Edward Irving's ideas about the incarnation, in the light of his historical setting, his life and the development of his thought. This context-sensitive approach, drawn in part from the work of Quentin Skinner, has recognised the need to treat Irving's sermons and writings as belonging to the discourse of his age, and as having been shaped by that context. We have thus sought to avoid treating them as free-standing expressions of timeless ideas, but instead to locate them firmly in their *Sitz im Leben*. We have also observed the importance of discerning the development of Irving's own character and outlook, and thus allowing for the possibility that Irving might in time have come to disagree with his younger self. We have established that Irving's thought did indeed develop over time, and that he altered his views on a number of matters over the course of his ministry. He did so to the extent that his earlier writings represent a theology substantially at odds with the positions he adopted in his later ministry at Regent Square and beyond. One notable example of this development was Irving's relationship to the Evangelical movement in which he initially felt at home, but from which he eventually made a decisive departure.

A number of factors influenced Irving's development, not all of them intellectual. Irving, identifying strongly with his mother's side of the family, became ambitious to uphold its proud ecclesiastical heritage. His sense of being a scion of the Covenanters, the Huguenots and the Albigenses, was reflected in his willingness to suffer and quite probably in his courting of opposition. He received an excellent level of education under Adam Hope and then at the University of Edinburgh, and was able to publish extensively and find himself at home in the company of some of the great literary minds of his age. His association with such people, particularly Coleridge, reflected Irving's own Romantic bent. From the earliest evidences we have of his intellectual life, Irving was clearly shaped by

Romantic ideas. Indeed, Coleridge was probably an important influence on Irving even before they met, through publications like *The Friend*.

Irving's career was, to some extent, forged in the heat generated by the tension between his feelings for Jane Welsh, his former pupil, and his obligations to another of his erstwhile students, Isabella Martin - who became his wife. This emotional turmoil was a likely factor in his fixation on the nature of temptation and in the succour he found in the New Testament accounts of the trials of the Lord Jesus. This concern lay close to the heart of his Christological ideas and thus near the epicentre of his later controversies.

Irving lived at a time of profound social transformation, heightened by the revolution in the relationship between Church and State which found expression in Catholic Emancipation and the Great Reform Act. In the midst of these upheavals and in the wake of the overthrow of the power of the Catholic Church in France, Irving became convinced that the end was nigh. As a leading figure at the prophetic conferences of Albury and Powerscourt, Irving engaged with others in a reshaping of the theological landscape. For Irving, however, the changes were more seismic than for most as can be evidenced by his departure from the Evangelicalism of his youth.

Although the changes in Irving's thought were sufficiently powerful to propel him into a new theological identity, one aspect of his thought remained intact: his Romanticism. Even the stability of this designation does not, however, indicate intellectual stasis. Irving himself and a number of other observers recognised a profound change in his intellectual approach, for which they believed Coleridge to be responsible. The evidence in favour of this suggestion is compelling. Irving followed Coleridge in adopting the distinction between two faculties of the mind, 'Reason' and 'Understanding', and in applying this dialectic, or 'polar' logic, which distinguished Coleridge's approach to theology. This new way of thinking was at the root of the changes which marked Irving's departure from Evangelicalism. For example, his 1825 sermon on *Idolatry of the Book*, echoed closely Coleridge's argument in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. Similar influence is evident in Irving's changing ideas on the atonement and even the spiritual gifts.

None of Irving's ideas had as much impact on his career as his distinctive Christology, which became the basis for his dismissal from the ministry of the Kirk. Scholars have, more recently, questioned the extent to which Irving's teaching about the incarnation was really the problem. It has been suggested that Irving's eschatology or his encouragement of the tongues and other manifestations was the real cause of opposition to him, and that his Christological ideas were misrepresented in order to remove him from his position of influence. Irving certainly did present challenges to authority, but it would be a mistake to downplay the significance of his theology of incarnation in the eyes of contemporaries. Many of Irving's closest allies, who shared with him most, if not all, of the other opinions which caused him to be a controversial figure, parted company with him over Christology. These objections were not simply an expression of bigotry or ignorance on the part of his contemporaries, as there is ample evidence from the Church Fathers and the Reformers that Irving's 'sinful flesh' claim stood in opposition to a very strong and ancient theological tradition.

Although David Dorries's arguments to the contrary have proved influential, there are no grounds for claiming that Irving taught his controversial doctrines prior to 1827. The evidence available suggests that there was significant movement in Irving's understanding of the incarnation. Irving's flourishing under the education he received at the hands of traditional Calvinist theologians; his ordination oath in which he foreswore Bourignonism; and his intention to publish a book on Christology in honour of his father-in-law, who profoundly opposed Irving's later doctrine, all testify that he did not begin his ministry believing the doctrines which caused his downfall. Mrs Oliphant's mistaken identification of a series of sermons on the Trinity in 1825 as the source for Irving's *Sermons Lectures and Occasional Discourses* (1828) is responsible for some of the confusion in this matter. Our researches have demonstrated that the sermons in question formed a series on the incarnation, preached in 1827. The controversy over Irving's teaching, then, arose immediately around the time of its first expression and not suddenly, as if out of a clear blue sky, after years of complaisant acceptance. His

ideas about Christology evidently changed dramatically during his ministry in London.

The causes underlying this transformation were doubtless complex and not simply intellectual. His sense of himself as exceptional, and his low opinion of the theological state of the Church at large, may well have contributed to his sense that Christological orthodoxy needed a champion. These characteristics may also have reinforced his conviction that objections to his teaching grew out of either ignorance or error. It is highly plausible that his emphasis on Christ's temptations, which he tied closely to his 'fallen flesh' Christology, was related to his own struggles with 'the flesh', particularly in his desires for Jane Welsh, which conflicted with his duty to Isabella. Nonetheless, significant as these factors might have been, they cannot entirely explain the specific form of Irving's theological innovation.

Irving's thought in this area developed in a markedly similar direction to that of Friedrich Schleiermacher and John Williamson Nevin. Whilst, given the idiosyncratic nature of these ideas at the time, this similarity cannot be insignificant, Nevin's publication of these ideas postdates Irving's significantly and Irving, being unable to read German well enough, was not capable of unmediated access to the ideas of Schleiermacher. It has been shown to be much more plausible that Irving came to resemble Schleiermacher, the most theological of the *Frühromantiker*, due to the influence of Coleridge. Irving's new Christological ideas were a sufficiently close analogue to those of Coleridge to suggest that they had a shared origin. This conclusion is not weakened by Coleridge's negative reaction to Irving's writings on the incarnation, not least because Coleridge's deepest objection was based on the observation that Irving had received these ideas from him and reproduced them in adulterated form.

This investigation has focussed on Irving's Christology and has demonstrated that his distinctive ideas in this area of theology developed in line with broader changes in his thought. As he sought to come to terms with a new way of looking at the world, derived from Coleridge's neo-platonism, he came to see this central dogma of Christianity in a new way. In demonstrating that his thinking about the

incarnation was part of this wider development, this thesis has offered a new and fuller account, not only of what set Irving's doctrine of the incarnation apart from that of most of his peers, but also of the sources of explanation for his eccentricity in this area. Whilst explanations of Irving's theology have previously been offered, and whilst some of these explanations have indicated the importance of Coleridgean influence, none has been able to demonstrate *how* Coleridge's influence accounts for the development of Irving's understanding of the economy of salvation and the place of Christology within it.

Similarly, whilst it was already established that Irving was, throughout his career, best understood as a Romantic thinker, this thesis has established that the nature of Irving's Romanticism was radically reshaped under the influence of Coleridge. It has been demonstrated that it is not enough simply to describe Irving as a Romantic. He expressed, at the start of his London career, a Romantic vision of the ministry, which he laid out in his *Farewell to the Congregation at St John's Glasgow*.<sup>1</sup> The manifesto he laid out in 1822 was still recognisably Evangelical. Strikingly, the Irving of 1828, under the influence of Coleridge's particular version of Romanticism, came to describe Evangelicalism as something from which he had needed to be rescued. It is instructive to note that Irving's ecclesiological and theological transformation occurred not despite his ongoing commitment to a Romantic approach, but because of it. Just as scholars who specialise in Romanticism have attested to the breadth of approaches contained within the apparently simple category of 'Romantic', it is vital that this breadth is acknowledged in studies of Church History or Christian theology. As has been demonstrated in this thesis with regard to Irving, Romantic ideas could find expression in significantly divergent forms through the course of an individual's life.

Through this study, the conviction that precision is required in considering the context of a particular piece of writing or preaching, has been reinforced and brought into focus. Whilst there is evident continuity between the Irving of 1824

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1. Edward Irving, *Farewell Discourse to the Congregation and Parish of St. John's, Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Chalmers and Collins, 1822).

and 1828, there is also significant discontinuity. It is only with this close attention to context that a coherent picture of Irving can be built up.

In 1865, Arthur Stanley recognised that Irving was an early exponent of the ‘theology of the nineteenth century’.<sup>2</sup> We have observed the extent to which Irving’s distinctive ideas were shaped directly by Coleridge and, thus, indirectly by the powerful currents of German theological and philosophical thought that had, by Stanley’s time, come to dominate much of English theological discourse. In that regard, Irving represents a sort of stormy petrel for the intellectual movements that would shape the Church in the years following his death.

Of particular interest, is the extent to which Irving embodied a tectonic theological shift that would reshape the world of English-speaking theology, though this change would not be evident until several decades after his death. Boyd Hilton has characterised the first half of the nineteenth century as the ‘Age of Atonement’.<sup>3</sup> He argues that later in the century the centre of gravity for ‘orthodoxy’ moved from a focus on the Cross to more of a preoccupation with the incarnation, with a ‘new emphasis on Jesus as man rather than as lamb’.<sup>4</sup> Hilton believes this to have been distinctly noticeable by 1870 and to have reached its zenith with the publication of the *Lux Mundi* series of essays in 1889.<sup>5</sup> What is so striking about Irving (as revealed by this study) is that, between 1823 and 1828, he underwent substantially the same metamorphosis in his own thought as would be exhibited in the wider Church over the next forty years.

Irving’s development reveals something of how nineteenth-century theology came to reflect the *Zeitgeist*. This has come, more recently, to be readily recognised thanks to the work of David Bebbington who highlighted the importance of Romanticism to understanding Irving as a thinker. A similarly important insight into Irving, that does not yet seem to have received as much notice, is that of Sheridan Gilley who saw Irving as a thinker who redefined ‘the protestant

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2. Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn, *Essays Chiefly on Questions of Church and State. From 1850 to 1870* (London: John Murray, 1870), pp. 453-454.

3. Boyd Hilton, ‘The Age of Atonement: the Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865,’ (1988), p. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5. *Ibid.*



tradition'.<sup>6</sup> Gilley recognised Irving's profound influence on the course of protestant theology in the shift towards an eschatology of catastrophe and the development of the theological approach known as dispensationalism. As such, Gilley recognised Irving as a key influence leading towards twentieth-century Fundamentalism. Yet Gilley also recognised that Irving was an earlier exemplar of much that would come to define the movement known as theological liberalism (which Stanley called 'the theology of the nineteenth century').<sup>7</sup> Thus Irving embodied (to some degree and protologically) two polar-opposite approaches to the Christian faith that would not really develop fully for many years after his death.

Coleridge would likely have resonated with Gilley's assessment of his young *protégé* for at least two reasons. The first is that Gilley acknowledged, as Coleridge did before him, the foundational inconsistencies in Irving's thought which have frequently been overlooked or avoided. Coleridge believed that Irving was a thinker half transformed: that he was a *chimera*, stuck at the pupal stage between the Aristotelian caterpillar and the Platonic butterfly. Gilley recognises that Irving, despite being profoundly anti-liberal, was also in many ways a proto-liberal. The second resonance for Coleridge would be that such a description of Irving fits well with Coleridge's dialectical perception of reality, as expressed by the relation of thesis and antithesis. It is not new to suggest that Fundamentalism and liberalism grew out of the same intellectual crisis in the West. It is remarkable however to see the roots of both movements expressed in the thought of one individual in this way.

One, unanticipated, conclusion of this thesis is the observation that the most profound insights into Irving's thought have been expressed by those with a more general interest in Irving's period, rather than a primary interest in Irving himself. Of course it is no surprise that both Bebbington and Gilley should have such insights. It is, however, remarkable that no-one specialising in the study of Irving

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6. Sheridan Gilley, 'Edward Irving: Prophet of the Millennium,' in *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, ed. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew, (Milton Keynes: Hambledon Press, 1993), p. 95.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

has offered anything of similar importance or insight. Perhaps this simply leads to a reaffirmation of the importance of context. Too close an interest in Irving, without a concomitant understanding of the times in which he lived and the intellectual waters in which he swam, can easily become an exercise in missing the point.

Irving's earliest biographers were sufficiently proximate to their subject that their tendency to engage with him as counsel, either for the prosecution or the defence, was entirely predictable. These partisan perspectives, whilst understandable, marred their ability to present a satisfactorily rounded account of Irving or his Christology. Wilks was one of the first to engage in discussion of Irving's writings in detail, but, despite his erudition, he was unable to assess Irving's opponents with charity or comprehension.

The biography produced by Margaret Oliphant<sup>8</sup> in 1862, stands in contrast to these earlier works. The biographical thoroughness with which she surveyed her subject goes far beyond anything that was available before she wrote. As such, there remain significant insights to be gained by reading her. Indeed, her biography of Irving remains an invaluable resource, not least because she reproduced letters that have since been lost, and she had access to those closest to him.

Oliphant's work is marred, however, both by a lack of comprehension of what was really at stake in the debates around Irving, and by her desire to present him as a Romantic hero. The result of this obliquity of vision is that, although providing much solid evidence to illustrate and describe the extraordinary life of Edward Irving, her commentary on his controversies is much less reliable.

Edward Miller's *History and Doctrines of Irvingism*, of 1878,<sup>9</sup> appearing a decade and a half after Mrs Oliphant's biography, is controversialist in approach, but offers a much more balanced, though abbreviated, portrait of Irving. The great strength

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8. Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, vol. 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862).

9. Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism; or, of the So-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878).

of Miller's contribution was that he sought to understand Irving within the context of his time. He saw the significance of the times in which Irving lived, arguing that the French Revolution represented the end of the Middle Ages and painting Irving as a *fin de siècle* character *par excellence*. This is much to be welcomed, although it did not represent a particularly influential line of thought in the years that followed. Nor indeed did Miller make as much of it as he might have.

Miller does, however, display a lack of appreciation for the central role that Irving's Christology played in his thought or for that matter the underlying structural changes in his approach that help to explain this significance. This lack of depth in approaching Irving's thought is quite understandable in that Irving was not the primary subject of Miller's work. Given the observation that those who have tended to view Irving most accurately have been those viewing him through a wider-angled lens, it may be no coincidence that Miller offers a portrayal of Irving that is profoundly insightful despite being relatively shallow.

A similar sensitivity to context is visible in the Andrew Landale Drummond's *Edward Irving and His Circle*.<sup>10</sup> Drummond not only identified Irving as a Romantic, half a century before David Bebbington, but he recognised Irving's incomplete apprehension of Coleridge's ideas and saw a connection between this confusion and his theological woes. It was precisely this conclusion that led Elliott to criticise Drummond's work<sup>11</sup> and suggest that he had failed to understand Irving. It seems fair to suggest that this verdict on Drummond's work should be reconsidered in the light of the present study. Far from having been 'eluded' by Irving, as Elliott put it, Drummond caught hold of something very significant, namely that Irving's Christology was in some way a result of the eddies caused by the powerful currents of Romanticism interacting with the deep tradition of Irving's Presbyterian theology.

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10. Andrew Landale Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle, Including Some Consideration of the 'Tongues' Movement in the Light of Modern Psychology* (London: J. Clarke & Co., 1937).

11. Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Publishing, 2013), p. 48. Cf Chapter 2 'Historiography', pp.43-4.

One of the more difficult tasks of this thesis has been the need to unpick some of the missteps in the work of others. It will have been particularly evident that this was the case with the PhD thesis of Dr David Dorries, whose work on Irving has been sufficiently influential that it was, regrettably, necessary to address some of the flaws found therein. The evidence provided in Dorries's thesis to argue that Irving's Christology was both unchanged and unremarkable in his lifetime was shown to be particularly flimsy. This correction of Dorries's misapprehensions was necessary, as significant misunderstandings of the derivation and the significance of Irving's Christology abound. Contra Dorrie's assertion, it has been demonstrated that Irving's distinctive theology of incarnation was not a straightforward expression of the tradition from which he came, but that it developed through the period of his friendship with Coleridge.

The other side of the balance in this regard is that addressing Dr Dorries's findings does rehabilitate, to some extent, the older work of P.E. Davies, who accurately described the emergence of Irving's Christology.<sup>12</sup> Although Dorries charged him with being unable to handle Irving with fairness, Davies did in fact produce a discerning account of Irving's understanding of the nature of the incarnation and the manner of its development. Davies's work is not able to offer an entirely convincing depiction of Irving, and does not really exhibit a satisfactory apprehension of Coleridge or the shape of his influence on Irving. Nonetheless, although Davies died<sup>13</sup> in the same year that Dorries's PhD was examined at Aberdeen, it is appropriate that his careful analysis of Irving's Christology should be recognised.

Much of what this thesis has demonstrated chimes entirely with Tim Grass's biography of Irving, *The Lord's Watchman*.<sup>14</sup> Of all the works on Irving, Grass's stands out as the most thorough and even-handed. Nonetheless, this thesis does offer some insights which might be accepted as adding to the picture painted by Grass. For instance, whilst Grass acknowledges that 'Coleridge was to have a

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12. Paul Ewing Davies, 'An Examination of the Views of Edward Irving Concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ' (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1928), pp. 83-94.

13. Anonymous, 'Rev. Paul E. Davies,' *Chicago Tribune*, 30 June 1987.

14. Timothy Grass, *Edward Irving: The Lord's Watchman* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011).

deeper intellectual influence on Irving than anybody else',<sup>15</sup> he does not offer a great deal of discussion of the shape that this influence took. Grass observes the influence of Coleridge on Irving's growing eschatological pessimism, his view of scripture speaking to the 'inner man' and hints at influence on Irving's fateful series of sermons on the incarnation.<sup>16</sup> What is not apparent is how Coleridge's own thought was distinctive nor how it shaped the underlying contours of Irving's theology. Nor is the significance of Coleridge for Irving's Christology adequately examined. This latter deficiency, if that is not too strong a word, most likely results from the author's acceptance of Mrs Oliphant's misidentification of the 'Trinity' sermons of 1825 as the basis of the first controversial book on Christology, thus rendering pervasive Coleridgean influence less likely. Perhaps some engagement with these ideas would not be out of place in the second edition.

More recently, Peter Elliott has done a great service in recognising the significance of Irving as a thinker, by providing a detailed and thoroughly researched articulation of Irving's Romanticism.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless there are elements of his work that this thesis calls into question. The arguments presented for a gradual transformation of Irving's Christology under the powerful influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggest that Elliott's conclusion that 'Irving never subjected his adventurous Romantic agenda to that of the Sage of Highgate',<sup>18</sup> needs to be re-evaluated. Elliott's interpretation of Irving's Romanticism suffers from treating Irving as a more static or even consistent thinker than he really was. An example of this tendency was observed in Chapter 2 of this thesis in which Elliott's treatment of Irving's Evangelicalism did not seem to take proper account of the transformation that Irving's thought underwent during his London ministry. This thesis demonstrates something more of the restless quality of Irving's mind than Elliott allows.

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15. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

17. Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis*.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

The picture of Edward Irving that emerges from this study is of a man of enormous gifts who made a significant contribution to the cultural and intellectual life in his own day, and who also embodied some of the main intellectual trends that were barely recognisable to most at the time. Edward Irving was such a typical Romantic, that, in the ecclesiastical sphere at least, one could look for pretty much any hallmark found in later movements which expressed Romantic traits and find it in him. This characteristic, of course, renders him extremely unusual and atypical. Following the flawed logic of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, it would be tempting to make a case that as Irving to at least some extent prefigured and expressed the ideas or practices at the heart of the Fundamentalist, Charismatic, Anglo-Catholic, Neo-Orthodox and Liberal movements that he was somehow father of them all. He was not. He was however a very early, and very thoroughgoing exponent of the intellectual movement that spawned them all. His presentation of the incarnation, then, was - *par excellence* - a portrayal of the Romantic Christ.

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