

EDWARD IRVING'S INCARNATIONAL CHRISTOLOGY

A Theological Examination of Irving's Notion of Christ's Sinful Flesh as it relates to the Fullness of the Incarnation

Written by Trevor W. Martindale

Abstract

This dissertation examines the theological viability of Edward Irving's notion of Christ's 'sinful flesh'. The foundational element of this notion determines that his belief in Christ to have been fully consubstantial with mankind necessitates the positing of his assumption of a fallen human nature under the same conditions that are common to all humanity. We argue that Irving's contextual claims challenged the predominant doctrinal formulations of Federal Calvinism, which had departed from earlier Patristic and Reformed theological requirements for the vicariously salvific nature of the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ to be based primarily on ontological or substantial union with mankind.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”¹

At the heart of the Christian faith is the resolute conviction that “the Word became human and lived here on earth among us.”² The belief that Jesus Christ is “God with us”³ exhibits the foundational driving force of the Christian message – the Incarnation. While the origins of this doctrine are Biblically traceable,⁴ its development has often prompted intense controversy. From the great Christological controversies of the Patristic era⁵ to a more recent debate over the Incarnation as ‘myth’,⁶ such examples illustrate the church’s continual quest to understand what the Incarnation means for humanity within each generational context in which she finds herself. The importance of this doctrine cannot be underestimated, as the age-long struggle concerning issues pertaining to the Incarnation has often led to radical reinterpretation of foundational truths of the Christian faith⁷ – interpretations that are not always welcomed by the established church community.

This dissertation directs attention to the figure of Edward Irving (1792-1834), as his views concerning the humanity of Jesus Christ provide an insight into how such new interpretations can be fiercely opposed. Irving was accused of heresy for teaching that Christ was incarnate in ‘sinful flesh’ and was deposed from his ministerial status with the Church of Scotland. Irving’s general notoriety among Christians today may not amount to much more than a common awareness of this controversial issue, at best. Indeed, many believers may regard disputes over the nature of the human flesh of Christ and its implications for the faith as redundant. Yet the Incarnational focus of Irving’s Christology has received increasing attention in contemporary scholarship. Our present enquiry, therefore, raises the following question: Is Edward Irving’s notion of Christ having “sinful flesh”, as it relates to the fullness of the Incarnation, theologically viable?

As we begin, some remarks concerning the methodology used to achieve this are necessary. The aim of Chapter one will be to provide a ‘bird’s-eye view’ of the historical controversy. This will involve a brief summary of pertinent biographical

¹ John 1:14 (NIV)

² John 1:14 (NLT)

³ Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23

⁴ J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, London: SCM Press, 1980. For a review article on this book, see: L. Morris, “The emergence of the doctrine of the incarnation” in *Themelios* (1982) 8.1:15-19

⁵ Much theological development within the early church was focused on Christological/Incarnational questions. The formulation of various foundational creedal statements, such as The Apostle’s Creed, The Nicene Creed (325 AD) and the Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD), are evidence of the response to refute beliefs that were found to be heretical.

⁶ J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1977; M.D. Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, London: SCM Press, 1979; O. Skarsaune, (trans) T.R. Skarsten, *Incarnation: Myth or Fact?*, St Louis (MO): Concordia Publishing House, 1991

⁷ B. Hebblethwaite, “Incarnation” in D.W. Musser & J.L. Price (eds), *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992:250-4

details of Irving's life followed by a review of the significant literature that has been written both in support and rejection of his ideas since his death.

Chapter two will then provide an exposition of the 'crux' of Irving's theology. The original controversy itself, including various theological issues in question, will be examined. Rather than arguing in favour of one side or another, we will seek to uncover the dominant theological issues concerning the 'sinlessness' of Christ, which held sway over the controversy's outcome. Attention will then be directed to exposing the foundational issue that has all-too-often escaped many who have taken part in the debate. It will be argued that the crux of Irving's notion of Christ's sinful flesh primarily relates to the fullness of the Incarnation, in that his humanity is fully consubstantial with ours, rather than being a statement about Christ's sinlessness. The significance of this interpretation will then be unpacked by revisiting questions of the relationship between doctrinal issues of Incarnational Christology and Atonement theory in light of Irving's understanding.

In Chapter three we will then offer a final assessment as to the viability of Irving's views in the context of his place within the development of his theological tradition as well as being based on recent developments in theology. The considerations offered herein will reflect a postmodern interpretation of heterodoxy and highlight conceptual difficulties that are inherent within the framework of Irving's theological tradition. Nevertheless, Irving's views will be evaluated based on the perspectives both of his place within his own historical context as well as on the possibility of their continuing application in contemporary theology.

Chapter 1

THE CONTROVERSY THAT WAS EDWARD IRVING

*“He left neither an enemy nor a wrong behind him.”*⁸

The overall aim of this chapter is to introduce the Christological controversy for which Edward Irving has been known. We begin by briefly introducing Irving’s personal life and ministry while highlighting the various aspects that have been viewed as controversial. Contemporary literature that has specifically been dedicated to understanding Irving’s Christological views will then be reviewed in order to highlight his continuing significance within theology. A brief examination of the original controversy will then follow as we consider the theological issues pertinent to its historical outcome.

1.1. The Controversial Irving

It is appropriate to introduce the personality of Edward Irving in a brief summary of his life and ministry. Our intention is not simply to discuss the biographical detail of Irving’s life,⁹ but rather to draw attention to the contentious nature of Irving’s brief ministry. T.C. Gordon makes note of the many aspects of Edward Irving’s ministry that was known for its controversial nature. Yet, Gordon simultaneously ear marks Irving as a significant figure within Scottish ecclesiastical history.¹⁰ Therefore, awareness of Irving’s personal context is necessary to prepare for proper consideration of his theological significance.

Edward Irving was born in Annan, Scotland, on the 4th of August 1792. Being intellectually gifted, he enrolled in the University of Edinburgh at the age of thirteen and graduated with a Master of Arts degree four years later. Irving’s desire to become a minister with the Church of Scotland led him to study for a Divinity degree¹¹ at the University of Edinburgh whilst supporting himself financially by teaching at a school in Haddington. Within six years he had completed his Divinity degree and gained a licence allowing him to preach in the Church of Scotland. In 1819, he accepted an invitation by Dr Thomas Chalmers to serve as assistant minister at St. John’s Parish Church, Glasgow. By July 1822, Irving, aged thirty, had accepted a charge to pastor the

⁸ Cited in T.C. Gordon, “Edward Irving 1792-1834”, in R.S. Wright (ed), *Fathers of the Kirk*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960:142. Gordon here quotes the inscription engraved on a stone tablet near the Old Fish Cross of Annan marking the birth town of Edward Irving. This monument no longer stands near this site. Instead, there is an impressive statue of Irving which today stands on the site of the very church that condemned him for heresy and stripped him of his ministerial status. These tributes to him are ironic since it was the attitudes of his enemies that were influential in his downfall.

⁹ For literature adequate for this purpose, see: W. Jones, *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving, Late Minister of the National Scotch Church*, London: With extracts from, and remarks on, his principal publications, London: John Bennet, 1835; M.O.W. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* Vols. 1, 2, London: Hurst & Blackett Publishers, 1862.

¹⁰ Gordon, “Edward Irving 1792-1834”, in Wright, *Fathers of the Kirk*, 142-155

¹¹ Irving’s theology was later accused of being inadequate simply due to his part time study of divinity. For a defence to this, see Gordon, “Edward Irving 1792-1834”, in Wright, *Fathers of the Kirk*, 143

Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden, London. His ministry grew in popularity¹² and by 1824 the church had built and occupied new premises in Regent Square¹³ to accommodate the exponential growth of its congregation. It was during this time that Irving became known for his interest in a number of contentious theological issues.

Irving exhibited an intense interest in Eschatological issues and had interacted with J.N. Darby and other leaders of the Brethren movement as they shared views regarding the Second Advent of Christ.¹⁴ Despite this reception of his Eschatological views, Irving is perhaps more famously known for his Pneumatology, which sparked a separate controversy that certainly runs concurrent to the Christological one. Irving believed that there was in progress a resurgence of the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit,¹⁵ especially that of prophecy and ‘tongues’, which was to precede Christ’s Second Coming. His belief in the operation of spiritual gifts would no doubt have conflicted with the predominant theological milieu of Cessationism. Benjamin Warfield, a well-known proponent of Cessationism in modern times, dedicates some sympathetic attention towards Irving but describes what he calls the ‘Irvingite Gifts’ as fanatical.¹⁶ Even in more recent times there are those who, while being open to the operation of spiritual gifts for today, have expressed their weariness of Irving for his standing in this doctrinal area.¹⁷

Perhaps those who are partial towards Cessationist beliefs would summarily dismiss the validity of Irving’s Christological views without proper attention. Such an attitude is evident in the biography of James Haldane, one of Irving’s unwavering opponents during the Christological controversy. Haldane first met Irving at a dinner party before his Christological assertions became a matter of public concern. He later noted his first impression of Irving: “*I liked his conversation on the whole, although he feels himself too much like an oracle.*”¹⁸ Haldane’s biographer then immediately comments: “The

¹² T.C. Gordon remarks: “By 1823 the experts of eloquence in the House of Commons and the House of Lords were envious, and George Canning publically declared in Westminster that in Irving he had found the most eloquent preacher he had ever listened to.” See Gordon, “Edward Irving 1792-1834”, in Wright, *Fathers of the Kirk*, 145-6

¹³ This church building later had to be demolished after it suffered severe damage from German bombs in World War II.

¹⁴ Iain Murray notes the similarities of Darby’s eschatology with that of Irving’s. See I. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, London: Banner of Truth, 1971: 197-202

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

¹⁶ See B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972 (1st Published in 1918): 125-54

¹⁷ Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones expresses his concern over Irving as he warns his readers to test the evidence of what came from Irving’s ministry as being grounds for accepting his theology. See M. Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984: 189; (Further, more in-depth critique can be seen in M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Fight of Faith*, 72-3; M. Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Gifts (iii), sermon on Romans 12:6 (Tape 3314)* – cited in T. Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: Preaching and the Spirit’s Anointing in the Life and Thought of Martyn Lloyd Jones*, London: Paternoster, 2007: note. 219)

¹⁸ A. Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and his brother, James Alexander Haldane*, (3rd Edition) London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., Paternoster-Row, and Edinburgh: W. Whyte & Co., 1853:567 [Italics mine]

name of Edward Irving will remain to all a monument of the folly of a proud reliance upon self, and of the danger of popular applause. His genius, his talents, his eloquence, and his eccentricities, were a snare to him, and but for the grace of God, must assuredly have proved his ruin.”¹⁹ This line of critical commentary appears in a section where the biographer promises to respond to the controversy over Christ’s ‘sinful flesh’, within which any evaluation of this issue is poignantly absent.²⁰ Therefore, it would be unwise to allow tangential issues of controversy surrounding Irving’s ministry to distract attention from the task of considering his Christological views, as is the case in Haldane’s biography.

So then, discussion will now turn to the Christological controversy in question. Oliphant, Irving’s first biographer, points out that the focus of his ministry on the importance of the Incarnation was evident as early as 1825.²¹ The topic of the Incarnation was the first major concentrated series of teaching that Irving delivered to his church after his ministry had reached its height of popularity in London.²² It is undoubtedly evident that these teachings regarding the Lord’s human nature were greatly accepted by his congregation, as it was requested that they be published.²³ In response to which, Irving, referring to the Doctrine of the Incarnation as the “*great head of the Christian faith*”, states that the purpose of these sermons was to pastorally instruct and encourage his church.²⁴

While this publication was in progress, an infamous confrontation occurred with Henry Cole, a retired Anglican minister, which led to a charge of heresy against Irving. Having been disturbed to hear his use of the term ‘sinful flesh’ in regard to Christ’s assumed human nature,²⁵ Cole attended the evening service of Irving’s church on 28th October 1827 for a first-hand experience of what Irving was preaching.²⁶ In reaction to hearing Christ’s human nature being referred to as a “sinful substance”, Cole forced an impromptu interview with Irving after the service. He soon after published a tract accusing Irving of heresy due, as he saw it, to Irving’s denial of the sinlessness of Christ.²⁷ Irving believed that Cole’s publication would face criticism due to his

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 565-70

²¹ M.O.W. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving Vol. 2*, London: Hurst & Blackett Publishers, 1862:3

²² C.G. Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1973:25

²³ E. Irving, *Sermons, lectures, and occasional discourses*, in three volumes, London: R.B. Seeley & W. Burnside, 1828

²⁴ E. Irving, *Sermons, lectures, and occasional discourses: Vol. 1. The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened in Six Sermons*, London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828: iii

²⁵ Irving had used this term in a sermon delivered to a new society for the distribution of Gospel Tracts on 10th of July 1827. Although the exact date of this event is contested, see D.W. Dorries, *Edward Irving’s Incarnational Christology*, Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002:30

²⁶ Jones, *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving*, 228-9

²⁷ H. Cole, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving, in Refutation of the Awful Doctrines of the Sinfulness, Mortality, and Corruptibility of the Body of Jesus Christ*, London: J. Eedes, 1827

Irving later writes his own account of his meeting with Cole: “...I gave the stranger an invitation to come to me at leisure on the Thursday following for the further satisfying of his conscience. He did not think it

reputation for contentious divisiveness among fellow Christians. However, the opposite had taken place and a great controversy erupted.²⁸

The magnitude of the charge of heresy against him grew, despite a number of Irving's attempts to qualify his Christological position.²⁹ Additionally, some who had publically sided with Irving, namely Hugh Baillie MacLean and A.J. Scott, did so at the expense of their own ministerial careers.³⁰ Irving gradually became alienated from his denomination and resigned from the London Presbytery in October 1830,³¹ from which he was subsequently condemned for his Christological beliefs.³² Though Irving was legally able to continue serving in his ministerial charge with expressed support from the eldership of his own church.³³ However, events approached a climax in 1831-2 when manifestations of the Holy Spirit by way of prophetic utterances occurred within his congregation. Irving accepted the validity of these 'manifestations' and allowed them to occur freely during the church's main meeting. The eldership reported this to the London Presbytery in March 1832 in a move to oust him from his ministerial position on the basis that he was not in control of the worship services.³⁴ This was in no way due to his Christological teachings. Yet the Church of Scotland General Assembly of 1831 condemned Irving's views and in 1832 recommended that he be deposed from his ministerial status. A subsequent trial in Annan, Scotland, found him guilty of "following divisive courses, subversive of the discipline of the order to which he [belonged], and contrary to the principles of Christian fellowship and charity."³⁵

worth his while to do this, and could reconcile his conscience to the betrayal of pastoral and ministerial confidence, and to the publication of a conversation without ever asking me whether it was correctly reported or not." E. Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh: The Form, Fountain Head and Assurance to Us of Holiness in Flesh*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1831:v-vi

²⁸ Irving's records his astonishment in E. Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh*, vi

²⁹ Irving temporarily withheld the publication of his sermons on the Incarnation while he added two additional sermons of a polemical nature to the original four, in response to Cole's accusations. Further works by Irving can be found: E. Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature*, London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1830 (This was compiled from earlier writings that Irving had submitted to 'The Morning Watch' newspaper for publication.); E. Irving, *Opinions Circulating Concerning Our Lord's Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1830; E. Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh: The Form, Fountain Head, and Assurance to us of Holiness in Flesh*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1831

³⁰ Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, 40

³¹ Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh*, xvi-xli

³² The doctrinal errors in Irving's views were identified by the London Presbytery to be the proclamation of original sin in Christ and subsequent sinfulness of his person, leading to a denial of the doctrines of satisfaction, substitution and imputation regarding the atonement. Cf. London Presbytery, *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*, London: Basil Steuart, 1831:15, 23-5, 26-7, 28-9, 30-1

³³ The Kirk Session of Irving's church refuted these accusations, declaring that Irving indeed upheld the teachings that Christ was free from original and actual sin, was holy and spotless with regard to sin and therefore satisfied God's requirement of divine justice as he offered himself as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of mankind. Cf. *Ibid.*, 16-17

³⁴ *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A. Before the London Presbytery*, London: W. Harding, 1832: 3, 88

³⁵ *Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A.*, London: E. Brain, 1833: 4, 96

Irving was expelled from the ministry of the Church of Scotland on 18th March 1833 but independently continued pastoral ministry in an un-ordained capacity with some eight hundred loyal congregants from Regent Square who had followed him to start a new church.³⁶ This formed the foundation of what became known as the Catholic Apostolic Church.³⁷ However, he became fatally ill shortly afterwards on a mission trip to Scotland and died of ‘consumption’³⁸ in Glasgow, Scotland, on the 7th December 1834.

The memory of Irving has lasted on through the generations, as there are various monuments to his name.³⁹ Apparently, his life and ministry was tenderly remembered despite the degree of controversy that surrounded it. Still we suggest that it was these very controversial doctrinal issues that significantly affected the direction and nature of his brief 15 years in ministry. As a result of the socio-theological stigma surrounding Edward Irving, the likelihood that personal attitudes of believers might hinder any genuine interest in his Christological ideas, for fear of being labelled heretics themselves, is a real concern. We, therefore, briefly pause to consider how debate over Irving’s theological views has continued long after his death.

1.2. Reviewing a Development in Theological Perspectives

In the following survey, we review significant literature dedicated to examining Irving’s views regarding Christ’s human nature. It is not within our scope to review all literary works that mention Irving. Rather, our intention is to consider how the range of theological attitudes towards Irving’s views has developed within contemporary scholarship. Thus we hope to demonstrate Irving’s emergence as something of a figurehead within this debate.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, conclusions about Irving’s unorthodoxy prevailed. Alexander Bruce, who argues that Irving’s heretical views humiliate the gospel message of Jesus Christ,⁴⁰ exemplifies an attitude typical of this time period. It was not until the theological era of Neo-Orthodoxy, when new doctrinal understandings concerning the nature of sin were formulated, that Irving began to be viewed in a different light. Significantly, Karl Barth, widely regarded as one of the twentieth century’s greatest theologians, is perhaps Irving’s most renowned proponent. Barth’s theological affirmation echoes that of Irving: “There must be no weakening or obscuring of the

³⁶ J. Hair, *Regent Square, Eighty Years of a London Congregation*, London: J. Nisbet, 1899:124

³⁷ W. Wilks, *Edward Irving: An Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography*, London: W. Freeman, 1854; E.J. Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism: or of the so-called Catholic and Apostolic Church* [in two volumes], London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878; P.E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church sometimes called Irvinite: A Historical Study*, New York: King’s Crown, 1946; R.A. Davenport, *Albury Apostles, the story of the body known as the Catholic Apostolic Church (sometimes called ‘The Irvingites)*, London: Free Society, 1973; C.G. Flegg, *Gathered Under Apostles: A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992

³⁸ Known today as Tuberculosis

³⁹ The Church of Scotland has since recanted on their position and honoured Irving by setting his bodily remains to rest in Glasgow Cathedral. Also, a portrait of him is displayed in the current Church of Scotland building in London.

⁴⁰ A.B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ: in its physical, ethical and official aspects*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889: 236-83 (especially 250-6)

saving truth that the nature which God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall. If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us?”⁴¹ In fact, many other prominent theologians from within the Barthian tradition have since endorsed the view of Christ’s fallen, or sinful, humanity.⁴²

In moving beyond the purely anthropological question of whether Christ had sinful or sinless flesh, other attempts have enquired further into the role that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had upon Irving’s theology. Gordon Strachan examines the inter-relationship between Irving’s views on Christ’s human nature and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ While acknowledging the merit of the Barthian tradition’s agreement with Irving, he points out that Barth in no way adopts Irving’s Pneumatology; which he argues is integral to Irving’s Christological assertions.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Strachan responds to much of the negative opinion concerning Irving, as he argues that Irving’s Christological statements and writings invoked controversy due to “the intrusion of interpretative categories which have been alien and inappropriate to the subject-matter”.⁴⁵ As a result, Irving’s doctrinal assertions were understood out-with the context in which they were written. Strachan, therefore, dedicates substantial space to reviewing large portions of Irving’s writings in their own context in the hope of inspiring future examination of Irving’s views to be more appreciative of his theology.⁴⁶ More recently, Graham McFarlane, who has been hailed as one of the most capable apologists in favour of Irving’s cause,⁴⁷ has advanced Strachan’s work by examining how Irving’s Christology and Pneumatology are intricately linked.⁴⁸ Additionally, Colin Gunton commends Irving’s theology for being ‘broad and systematic.’⁴⁹ Such recent developments in favour of Irving’s views have attempted to show an integration and coherence within his theology.

Further attempts at proving Irving’s orthodoxy have focused on the Christological issue as it takes priority over other doctrinal areas in Irving’s thought. Some have sought to present unequivocal evidence for the validation or refutation of Irving’s views within the whole range of theological history. Thomas Weinandy explores the historical

⁴¹ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1:2, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956: 153

⁴² See T.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983; J.B. Torrance, “The Vicarious Humanity of Christ”, in T.F. Torrance (ed.), *The Incarnation*, Edinburgh: Hansel Press, 1981; W. Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, London: SCM Press, 1968:354-64. For a summary of other influential proponents, see: H. Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*, London: Epworth Press, 1962:167-78

⁴³ C.G. Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1973.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-2

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23-52

⁴⁷ D. Allen, “Regent Square Revisited: Edward Irving, Precursor of the Pentecostal Movement”, in *Journal of European Pentecostal Theological Association* (1997) 17:47-58

⁴⁸ G.W.P. McFarlane, *Christ and Spirit: The Doctrine of the Incarnation according to Edward Irving*, Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996

⁴⁹ C. Gunton, “Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving’s Christology” in *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1988) 41.3:365

foundations of the Patristic, Medieval and Contemporary Christological traditions that may lend weight to the doctrinal understanding of Christ assuming sinful flesh in the Incarnation, thus making a case for the doctrinal and scriptural concurrence with Irving.⁵⁰ Yet, one of Weinandy's weaknesses is that he does not engage with the main issues pertinent to Irving's context. David W. Dorries, on the other hand, does not make this mistake when arguing for the coherence of Irving's views.⁵¹ Dorries refutes earlier claims that Irving's notion of sinful flesh had been developed over time and thus was inconsistent with his earlier theology.⁵² Like Weinandy, Dorries argues that Irving's views are consistent with Patristic and early Reformed theological traditions. This contradicts Donald Baillie's prior claim that Irving's idea of Christ's humanity as fallen had "always been regarded as heretical."⁵³ Unfortunately, this type of argument is all too similar to the inconspicuous ethos of the whole debate – whomever successfully claims the most adherents to their theological interpretation wins the day.

A growing amount of scholarship has been dedicated to carefully considering Irving's theology. This suggests a departure from the once volatile dispute over his orthodoxy. David Allen describes Irving as one who was "almost universally condemned in his own day as a showman, crank and fanatic, but has more recently been taken seriously as a theologian of the front rank."⁵⁴ Still, there are respected contemporary scholars who have confidently disagreed with Irving without engaging in personal insult. Hugh Mackintosh finds Irving's views eccentric though touching.⁵⁵ Whilst there have been those who have acclaimed him for being somewhat of a forebear of the Pentecostal Charismatic movement,⁵⁶ Arnold Dallimore seems to attribute Irving's 'Charismatic' tendencies to have had a destructive effect upon his initially promising ministry.⁵⁷ Dallimore attributes the cause of Irving's departure from orthodox doctrine to the influence of Romanticism upon his thought, being specifically due to his friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. More recently, Donald MacLeod has often written in opposition to Irving's views, agreeing with Dallimore's opinion that they were

⁵⁰ T.G. Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993

⁵¹ Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, 2002. Earlier published as D.W. Dorries, *Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring Upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1987

⁵² P.E. Davies, *An Examination of the Views of Edward Irving Concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1928

⁵³ D.M. Baillie, *God was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement*, London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1948:16 (Italics mine)

⁵⁴ D. Allen, "A Belated Bouquet: A Tribute to Edward Irving (1792-1834)" in *Expository Times* (1992), 103.11:328-31

⁵⁵ H.R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, (2nd Ed), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913:278

⁵⁶ See: D. Allen, "Regent Square Revisited: Edward Irving, Precursor of the Pentecostal Movement", in *Journal of European Pentecostal Theological Association* (1997) 17:47-58; D. Vreeland, "Edward Irving: Preacher, Prophet & Charismatic Theologian", in *Pneuma Review* (2002) 5.2:55-73

⁵⁷ A. Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: A Fore-Runner of the Charismatic Movement*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983

heretical.⁵⁸ Significantly though, MacLeod offers no ‘new’ evidence contradicting Irving’s theology, except to continually reaffirm the argument of Irving’s original critics.⁵⁹ It seems that contemporary opponents of Irving are limited to the doctrinal objections of the historical debate.

It is somewhat remarkable that theological discussion over Irving’s views has long outlasted his ability to participate in debate. Many varied opinions of respected theologians continue to give attention to Irving, regardless of what conclusion is reached over the orthodoxy of his views. Incarnational issues such as this one seem to remain a significant part of Christological discussion in this generation, as with any other. Irving’s longevity in this particular debate suggests that he is a worthy theological figure whose views have come to present a considerable, sustained significance within contemporary scholarship. Hence, his theological contribution should not be frivolously dismissed. Therefore, the following chapter presents the foundational elements of Irving’s views in order to then determine their significance within his historical context.

⁵⁸ D. MacLeod, “The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Scottish Theology: Edward Irving” in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (1991) 9:40-50; D. MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998:221-230; D. MacLeod, *From Glory to Golgotha: Controversial Issues in the Life of Christ*, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2002.

⁵⁹ This suggests that, for MacLeod at least, the strength of argument against Irving is determined and settled by Irving’s peers. This line of objection will be examined in more detail in the following section.

Chapter 2

THE CRUX OF IRVING'S CHRISTOLOGY

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”⁶⁰

This chapter will expose the fundamental concept underlying Irving's Christology. Our treatment should not be understood to be exhaustive of his Christology on the whole. However, special consideration will later be given to the relationship between the Incarnation and the Atonement within our task.

2.1. Orthodox Doctrine at Stake – Irving's Christ as Sinner?

Before one can examine Irving's views in any depth, it is necessary to first make note of the key theological presuppositions that surrounded the historical controversy between the years of 1827 and 1833. Irving's encounter with Henry Cole provides a well-summarised glimpse into the theological issues that influenced the parameters of the controversy. The importance of this encounter should not be overlooked, as most who have written on this topic have inserted the encounter in their examination of the controversy. Yet very few have analysed the details of the theological presuppositions present within the conversation. We find this as sufficient reason for examining the theological issues pertinent to their confrontation, as follows:

My address and questions, and your answers, were as follows: 'I believe, Sir, a considerable part of the conclusion of your discourse this evening has been upon the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.' You answered in the affirmative. – I added, 'If I mistake not, you asserted that the human body of Christ was sinful substance.' You replied, 'Yes I did.' – I continued, 'But is that your real and considerate belief?' You answered, 'Yes it is, as far as I have considered the subject.' And here you produced a book, which I believe was some national confession of faith, to confirm your faith and assertions: in which you pointed out to me these words, (if I mistake not,) 'The flesh of Jesus Christ, which was by nature mortal and corruptible.' – Upon which I continued with amazement, 'But do you really maintain, Sir, that the human body of Jesus Christ was sinful, mortal and corruptible?' You replied, 'Yes, certainly. Christ (you continued) did no sin: but his human nature was sinful and corrupt; and his striving against these corruptions was the main part of his conflict.'⁶¹

It is evident that issues contained within Irving's assertion regarded the questions of whether his body was mortal and corruptible. Before Cole had heard about Irving, he had authored a tract positing a theory that the incarnate body of Christ was inherently immortal,

⁶⁰ Romans 8:3-4 (NRSV)

⁶¹ Cole, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving*, 7-8

incorruptible and without any taint of sin.⁶² The foundation for his belief was the presupposition that sin was totally absent from Christ's body because "where there is sin, there must inevitably and unalterably be mortality: and where there is mortality, there must inevitably and unalterably be sin."⁶³ The notion of Christ's mortality was inconceivable for Cole as this could only be due to the defilement and pollution of sin within his body, which would in turn make him a sinner.

While Irving unashamedly acknowledged his belief that Christ's flesh was mortal and corruptible, closer inspection of Irving's writings shows that he also defended the sinless perfection of Christ's humanity: "There was united in Jesus Christ, the Godhead, in the person of the son, and in the manhood, in its fallen state; that they subsisted together in one person, in such a wise as that He was wholly without sin, holy and blameless in the sight of God."⁶⁴ The assertion that Christ took our fallen flesh and "bore it pure, holy, and spotless, without one particle of uncleanness or defilement"⁶⁵ demonstrates a paradox within Irving's thought with the association of sin to the person of Christ. This was a possibility that Cole also refused to entertain: "...the misguided holders and disseminators of the mortality doctrine, will persist in maintaining that the Body of Jesus Christ was a mortal body, yet, by an unaccountable perversion of the nature of things, they profess, at the same time, to hold that it was sinless and undefiled; which is a flat self-contradiction and a palpable absurdity..."⁶⁶

In 1829, James Haldane concurred with Cole by criticising Irving for believing that Christ was naturally mortal: "...he [Irving] holds that Christ was naturally mortal, and consequently his death was not voluntary. It was not an 'atonement' for others, but a debt that he owed. Where there is sin there must be mortality, for the wages of sin is death. But such was not the death of Christ..."⁶⁷ Herein lies the bedrock of belief for Irving's opponents that must be protected: If Christ be naturally mortal, his flesh would therefore be corrupt and fallen and he would himself require salvation. This mingling of the concepts of sinfulness and sinlessness, which fundamentally seem diametrically opposed to one another, led Irving's critics to maintain that he had indeed abandoned belief in the sinlessness of Christ.

⁶² H. Cole, *The True Signification of the English Adjective Mortal, and the Awfully Erroneous Consequences of the Application of that term of the Ever Mortal Body of Jesus Christ, Briefly Considered*, London: J. Eedes, 1827

⁶³ H. Cole, *True Signification*, 10, cited in Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, 298

⁶⁴ G. Carlyle, (ed) *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving* (5 volumes), Vol. V, London: Alexander Strahan & Co. 1864:157. [Hereafter listed by abbreviated title, volume (in Roman numerals) & page. E.g. C.W. V, 157]

⁶⁵ C.W. I, 359

⁶⁶ Cole, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving*, 12

⁶⁷ J.A. Haldane, *A Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving, Respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1829:36

Irving's assertion that Christ assumed sinful flesh, yet remained sinless, was not theologically erroneous in his view. Christ's struggle against temptation was an important issue that occupied much of his writings.⁶⁸ Neither side of the debate would fail to acknowledge that Christ was tempted by the prospect of sin. However, the issue in contest is whether he strived against an inner conflict within himself due to this bodily state. Haldane argued that temptation arising from an internal source within Christ meant that he would have consequently been unholy.⁶⁹ He therefore rejected Irving's suggestion that Christ was subject to temptations arising from an inner propensity to sin that was inherent within his own humanity. The presupposition again follows the same line of thought; "the being who possesses a corrupt nature is a sinful being."⁷⁰ This inner propensity to sin could, therefore, in no way be ascribed to Jesus.

We continue as the argument intensifies:

... 'Or else (added you) what make you of all those passages in the Psalms, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me that I am not able to look up: They are more in number than the hairs of my head, etc., etc." – I answered with astonishment, ' But surely, Sir, by all those passages are represented the agonies of the blessed Saviour under the number and weight of all his people's sins imputed to and transferred upon him.' – 'No, No! (you replied) I admit imputation to its fullest extent, but that does not go far enough for me. Paul says, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Imputation was not the faith of the primitive saints, but introduced by councils which were held after the times of the Apostles.' – I observed, 'But, if, as you have already allowed, Christ did no sin, how can those passages in the Psalms refer to any sin, as being his own sins?' You replied, 'I will tell you what it is, and what I mean. Christ could always say with Paul, "Yet not I, but sin that dwelleth in me." – 'What! Do you mean, then, (I replied) that Jesus Christ has that "law of sin in his members" of which Paul speaks, when he says, "I find another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin in my members?"' – 'Not into captivity (you replied); but Christ experienced everything the same as Paul did, except the "captivity." – 'This, Sir, (I observed) is, to me, a most awful doctrine indeed.'⁷¹

The discussion turns toward the nature and extent of the doctrine of imputation. Irving found scriptural basis for believing that Christ was imputed with 'sin in his members', which was the cause of his having to struggle against temptation from within. Irving stresses that this struggle in no way resulted in Christ being captive to it. Yet Cole's disagreement rested on the foundation that if the 'law of sin' resided within Christ's body, he would have automatically been held captive by it, which would result in him being a sinner in need of salvation. Cole expresses how awful this proposition would be, as his understanding of imputation was limited to the 'blessed Saviour' being under the weight of the sins of others being transferred upon him at the cross. Yet for Irving, this fuller

⁶⁸ See CW II, (Lectures 1 – 5 on 'The Temptation')

⁶⁹ Haldane, *A Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine*, 15

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16

⁷¹ Cole, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving*, 8

understanding of imputation was necessary for Christ to experience temptation in the same way as his fellow man, albeit without ever succumbing to it.

Finally, the confrontation ends with the question of whether Christ's human body was 'like that of all mankind.' We again refer to Cole's encounter with Irving:

And after making other remarks upon the awfulness of the doctrine, and asking you once or twice if such was your deliberate and considerate belief, which you answered in the affirmative, I put this final question to you, - 'Do you then, Sir, really believe, that the body of the Son of God was a mortal, corrupt and corruptible body, like that of all mankind? The same body as yours and mine?' You answered 'Yes! Just so: certainly: that is what I believe.'⁷²

Here it is plainly seen that the issues of sinfulness, mortality and corruptibility within the confrontation between Cole and Irving culminate over the question of whether Christ was *fully consubstantial* with fallen mankind. Irving's assertion that Jesus was so closely associated with the fallen condition of mankind proved to be the root of the issue that caused concern among his contemporaries. It is regarding this concept that we will now refine the focus of enquiry to explore its significance in Irving's views of the Incarnation and the Atonement.

2.2. 'Consubstance' as an Incarnational Necessity

This issue of the commonality of Christ's flesh with the rest of humanity is the focal issue around which the debate over Irving's notion of Christ's 'sinful flesh' revolves – its relation to the understanding of the 'fullness of the Incarnation'. It is this very issue that we will now examine, as we seek to get to the very heart of Irving's teaching.

When the Church of Scotland had decided over Irving's orthodoxy, the assumption that the debate had been settled once and for all can be seen Robert Meek's claim that the views of the establishment had indeed been vindicated.⁷³ Yet with a degree of empathetic honesty, for which he is to be commended, Meek expresses his confusion over why, and indeed how Irving and his followers asserted that Christ's flesh *must* be described as 'sinful' while simultaneously claiming him to be holy, sinless and without sin:

... why do they persist in retaining terms, in speaking of the humanity of the Saviour, ... which give currency to heresy? Why do they hold up the Saviour as our great pattern, not as absolutely holy and clearly void of sin, both in flesh and the spirit, but as grappling with, and overcoming all sin and temptation *in* his flesh, and to which that flesh, they contend, was liable and inclined in common with our own? Why do they accuse their brethren with the denial of the true humanity of Christ, because they oppose Mr. Irving's heresy at this point? How comes it to pass

⁷² *Ibid.*, 9

⁷³ R. Meek, *The Sinless Humanity of Christ, vindicated against the Irving heresy: in a letter to a clerical friend*, London: J. Hatchard & Son, 1833

that there should be that singularity in their statements on this subject, which disturbs the faith of those who love the Saviour? ...⁷⁴

It seems there were still questions being asked by Irving's opponents over why Christ's assumption *had* to have been 'sinful' flesh. Why was it essential for Christ to have been incarnate in 'sinful flesh' in order for him to be fully consubstantial with humanity? For Irving, the importance of Patristic creedal language was clear: "...consubstantiability of flesh with us is as much an article of the right faith concerning Christ, as is the article of his being altogether without sin."⁷⁵ For Irving held the very essence of the Incarnation to be that Christ took upon himself the burden of our fallen nature, bore it during his life, and carried it to his death. He saw no other option but to presuppose that the human nature assumed by Christ was in the fallen condition. "That Christ took our fallen nature is most manifest, because there is no other in existence to take."⁷⁶

Yet for Irving's contemporaries, this was not the case. Haldane describes the theological foundation behind the culminating objection to Irving's ideas: "Although Christ came in the flesh, he was untainted by Adam's degeneracy, for his human nature was prepared by the immediate power of the Holy Ghost. He was therefore holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, as the east from the west, as light from darkness."⁷⁷ Therefore, for Christ to be holy, his flesh needed to be wholly different from that of a normal human being. In Haldane's reasoning, like that of all of Irving's opponents, the necessity for Christ to remain sinless in his humanity required that his flesh, or human nature, be *separate from sinners, as the east from the west, as light from darkness*. There could, perhaps, be no stronger way to describe the difference between Christ's flesh and the rest of humanity.

Irving clearly condemns this reasoning based purely on the need to have Christ as being intrinsically holy and 'unblemished by sin':

The erroneousness of all opinions which make a difference between Christ's body born and ours born, or Christ's body risen and his body interred, consisteth in this, that whatsoever was done in him and for his by the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, hath no necessary connection with us; proves no love, grace, or holiness of God towards us; holds forth no redemption, salvation, resurrection, nor glory for us, but only for one who had an essential difference from us...⁷⁸

Elsewhere, Irving persuasively exerts the full intensity and importance of this issue:

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-14

⁷⁵ Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh*, 1

⁷⁶ C.W. V, 115

⁷⁷ Haldane, *A Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine*, 45 [Italics mine]

⁷⁸ Cited in Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, 352-3

They argue for an identity of origin merely; we argue for an identity of life also. They argue for an inherent holiness; we argue for a holiness maintained by the Person of the Son, through the operation of the Holy Ghost. They say, that though his body was changed in the generation [i.e. virgin birth], he was still our fellow in all temptations and sympathies: we deny that it could be so; for change is change; and if his body was changed in the conception, it not was in its life as ours is. In one word, we present believers with a real life; a suffering, mortal flesh; a real death and a real resurrection of this flesh of ours: they present the life, death, resurrection of a changed flesh: and so create a chasm between Him and us which no knowledge, nor even imagination, can overleap. And in doing so, they subvert all foundations: there is nothing left standing in our faith...⁷⁹

Irving held that the flesh of Jesus was the concrete form of our human nature marked by Adam's fall. This necessitates the very same human nature that needs to be reconciled to God. This assertion leads to the purpose of the Incarnation – the Atonement.

2.3. Incarnation as the 'Cradle of Atonement'

We return to Robert Meek as we consider his claim that the purpose of Christ having an unfallen human nature was to act as a substitution on the cross for the sins of mankind:

[Irving's] doctrine is not only contrary to all our ideas of the immaculate holiness of Christ, but is subversive of our faith in his atoning sacrifice...Had Christ possessed a fallen nature, an atonement for the sinfulness of his own nature would have been necessary. 'For how,' it has been justly asked, 'could a being that was naturally corrupt, in whatever dept of his person the evil resided, ever make a satisfactory atonement for the moral corruption of other beings? An atonement was necessary to take away our sinfulness, and when, or where, or by whom, was that atonement made for Christ's nature?...If then I could believe the doctrine of Christ's assumption of a fallen and sinful nature, it would destroy my confidence in his atoning sacrifice.'⁸⁰

The soteriological concern of Irving's argument was not merely a focus on the death of Christ on the cross but primarily upon the salvific intension of the Incarnation to save that which is assumed – that being fallen humanity. This argument invokes a principle of the classic Patristic teaching that 'what Christ does not assume, he does not heal.' Gregory of Nazianzus argued that our whole flesh needed to be assumed by Christ in order to be healed (i.e. Body, mind and soul), for whatever was not assumed by Christ in the Incarnation was unredeemed and unhealed.⁸¹ Irving's opponents' alternative lay in the position that on the cross, all the sins of mankind were imputed to Christ. Colin Gunton comments regarding the weakness of this approach: "It is undoubtedly true that theologies centred on a legal or commercial metaphor can degenerate into what appears to be a kind of mathematical

⁷⁹ Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature*, xi

⁸⁰ Meek, *The Sinless Humanity of Christ*, 12-13

⁸¹ For more on Nazianzen's argument and the patristic debate and its implications, see T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988:161-68; T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975:146-7

balancing of evils: Jesus bears so much evil as a counterweight, so to speak, to ours.”⁸² Irving rejected this purely legal understanding of the atonement, stating that the problem that the Atonement solved “was is not the accumulation of the sins of all the elect; but the simple, single, common power of sin diffused throughout, and present in, the substance of the flesh of fallen human nature.”⁸³

⁸² C.E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988:128

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 131

Chapter 3

ASSESSING IRVING'S ORTHODOXY

*"In my humble opinion, if the common interpretation of the Bible is to be followed, our friend [Edward Irving] is perfectly right, nay indubitably and palpably so: at all events, the gainsayers are utterly, hopelessly, and stone-blindly wrong."*⁸⁴ ~ Thomas Carlyle

Now that the framework of Irving's theological views upholding his notion of Christ's sinful flesh has been presented, this chapter evaluates his views in light of a wider perspective; by considering his historical position within the development of contemporary theology. The viability of his views will be assessed on this basis.

3.1. Questioning Irving's Heterodoxy

The initial obstacle to the task of assessing Irving's orthodoxy regards the question of how the notion of 'heresy' is to be approached. In Irving's day, heresy was certainly thought of as "teaching that is regarded as [being] contrary to the basic confession of the church in some central point or points, such that the confession is endangered by it."⁸⁵ A heretic was, therefore, a Christian whose divergent stance with regard to the faith involuntarily bars him from the path of salvation.⁸⁶ Yet such treatment of this issue has recently attracted stern criticism.

Post-modernity has produced increasingly anti-authoritarian attitudes towards the established church. This has resulted in orthodoxy being understood as a dogma that is imposed on people by a coercive authority while a heretic is understood to be a victim of suppression by an intolerant church.⁸⁷ Walter Bauer's thesis on *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* argues that there were many prevalent orthodox forms of belief within the universal Christian community.⁸⁸ Consequently, these widespread and varied views were regarded as heterodox while simultaneously being upheld as authentic Christian expressions. Christianity could exist in a variety of forms and the lines between orthodoxy and heresy were indeterminate. Certainly, the valuing of diversity of opinion within post-modernity makes it possible for contemporary theologians to suggest that the category of 'heresy' is no longer applicable in the church today.⁸⁹ Excommunication for heresy is, therefore, no longer a viable possibility, especially when today's heresy may become tomorrow's orthodoxy.⁹⁰ The general

⁸⁴ Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 1 May 1830, *The Carlyle Letters Online*, 5:95-99, DOI: 10.1215/lt-18300501-TC-JAC-01, [cited 22 May 2009]. Online: <http://www.carlyleletters.org>.

⁸⁵ I. Howard Marshall, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity" in *Themelios* (1976) 2.1:14

⁸⁶ W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1972:234

⁸⁷ A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (3rd edition) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001:151

⁸⁸ W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1972 (First published in 1934)

⁸⁹ J. Macquarrie, *Thinking about God*, London: SCM Press, 1975:44-5

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

sway of conclusions over recent years about Irving's views (i.e. from being heretical to orthodox) bears witness to this phenomenon.

To be sure, Bauer's thesis is in line with the post-modern criticism that categories of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are notions used by the establishment of the church to impose a controlling influence upon others. This criticism could well be applied to Irving's situation, as his eventual deposition and official condemnation as a 'heretic' was a direct result of the elders of his own church disagreeing with his decision to allow the manifestation and operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the church worship services. The ousting of Irving from the Church of Scotland could legitimately be viewed as a manipulation of religious politics that superseded the task of honest doctrinal inquiry. One could conclude, then, that any continuing debate over whether Irving was a heretic or not should be rendered obsolete, especially given that the Church of Scotland has since recanted from its incrimination of him.

However, the hasty rejection of notions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, simply due to a critical attitude towards church government, carries with it the danger of a biased perspective. Exhibiting a willingness to entertain heresy based on the possibility of it becoming orthodoxy in future would be misguided, as there have been a number of heretical teachings that have consistently been opposed by the universal church in every generation.⁹¹ H.E.W. Turner rejects Bauer's overly critical thesis by arguing that the early church universally did, in fact, hold to a number of fixed elements of orthodoxy.⁹² Howard Marshall emphasizes the presence of theological diversity among apostolic writers as well as a clear distinction between heretical and orthodox issues in the New Testament church.⁹³ Also, most evangelical authorities today agree that evidence within early church history and theology shows that boundaries for orthodoxy were present earlier and more widespread than Bauer had allowed.⁹⁴ Still, Turner agrees with Bauer's call for the church to recognise the presence of theological diversity in the second century church, as well as the need for the recognition of doctrinal diversity within Christian teaching today.

Concerning Irving's historical debate then, proponents and opponents alike have suffered from a tendency to assume an attitude that their conclusions are supported unequivocally throughout the whole of church history. Yet it is imperative for each generation that evaluates Irving's views to recognise that the limits of their conclusions are no less derived from their own theological perceptions than it was from the original generation who condemned Irving. It is, therefore, prudent to state that the evaluation and conclusions that follow are influenced by a postmodern theological hermeneutic – in the sense that we do not intend to determine whether Irving was a heretic or not, but

⁹¹ For a discussion on the four fundamental heretical notions consistently found to preserve the *appearance* of Christianity yet contradicts its *essence*, see: F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960

⁹² H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Christian Church*, London: Mowbray, 1954

⁹³ I. Howard Marshall, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earlier Christianity" in *Themelios* (1976) 2.1:5-14

⁹⁴ B. Demarest, "Heresy" in S.B. Ferguson & D.F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester: IVP, 1994:292-3

rather to recognise Irving's place within the diverse and complex historical development of Incarnational Christology. We present this as an appropriate attitude for determining the viability of Irving's views; in that while they might have been deemed heterodox from the established church at the time, it does not necessarily follow that he be guilty of heresy.

3.2. An Assessment in Contextual Theology: Federalist Foundations vs. Romantic Inclinations

The previous chapter illustrated the polemical nature of the debate over Irving's orthodoxy. However, a simple exploration of the parameters of debate without conducting a detailed investigation of Irving's perspective would result in the formation of biased conclusions based upon one's own presuppositions, as has so often been the case in tempestuous theological debate. In order to avoid such pitfalls, this dissertation has not followed the conventional method of arguing for or against. Instead we seek to explore Irving's place within the historical context of his theological tradition. Arguably, there is no theological viewpoint that can be fully understood without investigating the context within which it was formed.⁹⁵ Therefore, it is essential to identify two relevant contextual factors affecting Irving's theology.

David Dorries has recently examined a significant contextual influence on Irving's thought, calling attention to his possible attitude towards the Federal theological tradition.⁹⁶ Derived from the Latin '*foedus*', meaning 'covenant', Federal theology came to be regarded as the most influential development of Reformed thought in the post-Reformation period.⁹⁷ The movement exhibited a highly scholastic approach to theological method,⁹⁸ which valued the systematic organisation of theological issues and relied heavily on Aristotelian philosophy, resulting in an increasing emphasis toward metaphysical and speculative theological questions.⁹⁹

Considering the historical issue at hand, David Dorries attributes Irving's views as being 'orthodox' primarily due to his position of stern opposition to his inherited theological tradition. Dorries bases his argument on the contribution of James B. Torrance, who claimed that Federalist confusion between the concepts of 'covenant' and 'contract' led to the portrayal of God as a contract-God rather than a covenant-

⁹⁵ D.L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (2nd Ed), Grand Rapids, M.I./Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004:4, 197-222

⁹⁶ Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, 261-95.

⁹⁷ W. Klempa, "The Concept of the Covenant in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Continental and British Reformed Theology", in D.K. McKim, *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992:94-107; D.D. Wallace Jr., "Federal Theology" in D.K. McKim and D.F. Wright (eds), *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1992:136-7

⁹⁸ For an extensive summary of the formation of Reformed Scholasticism as a term denoting the technical/academic process of the institutionalisation of Protestant doctrine, see: R.A. Miller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 Volumes, 2nd Ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003

⁹⁹ A.E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998:169-72

God.¹⁰⁰ However, Peter Golding refutes this claim: “To assert, as Torrance does, that the federalists placed law before grace betrays not only a deep-seated theological bias, but a complete failure to understand the mindset of such men.”¹⁰¹ Despite the fact that Federal theology has been susceptible to sharp criticism for the presence of an unhealthy emphasis on legal terminology due to syncretism within fiduciary culture, especially due to the ‘golden age’ of its seventeenth century developments,¹⁰² we suggest Dorries’ conclusions to be unnecessarily extreme. Even if Dorries’ critique may correctly highlight an underlying theological weakness present within the tradition, his argument falls short of grasping the foundational issue that distinguished Irving’s theological views from his opponents. Instead, the mistaken impression is given that Irving was adamantly opposed to major foundational tenets held within Reformed theology. Yet there is much evidence to suggest that Irving saw his teachings as being wholly within his theological tradition.¹⁰³ Graham McFarlane comments: “He is no radical thinker in the sense that he proposes ideas that undermine traditionally accepted formulae. Quite the reverse: Irving may be understood as unfolding what has been in the tradition from its very genesis.”¹⁰⁴ Setting aside the issue of whether he was right or not, McFarlane shows a clearer grasp of where Irving saw himself in his standing with his theological tradition. Therefore, the possibility that Irving entirely opposed his theological heritage remains unsubstantiated. Furthermore, this leads to a conjunctive influence that has to be considered.

Hence we direct attention to the earlier contribution of Arnold Dallimore, who devoted a large portion of his investigation of Edward Irving’s life to his affinity with a movement known as Romanticism – a cultural movement influencing literary, artistic, political, religious and philosophical aspects of culture within the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁵ Although, while Dallimore describes Irving’s modern dress

¹⁰⁰ J.B. Torrance, “The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics” in D.J. Elazar & J. Kincaid (eds), *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism*, Lanham; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2000:143-62.

¹⁰¹ P. Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition*, Ross-shire, Christian Focus Publications, 2004:57.

¹⁰² P.A. Lillback, “Covenant” in S.B. Ferguson & D.F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester: IVP, 1994:176. Also see: D.A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990

¹⁰³ Federal formulations of the covenants of works and grace received creedal status in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms (1643-49). Irving appeals to the Westminster Confession for validation of his teachings. For a short appeal, see E. Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord’s Human Nature*, London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1830:52-4; However, Irving unpacks the validation of his views by the Westminster Confession in E. Irving, *Opinions Circulating Concerning Our Lord’s Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1830

¹⁰⁴ McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit*, 5.

¹⁰⁵ J.H. Elias, “Romanticism”, in S.B. Ferguson & D.F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester: IVP, 1994:598-9

Literary and artistic figures of influence include William Wordsworth, S.M. Coleridge, G.G. Byron, Robert Burns, Percy, B. Shelly, John Keats, Sir Walter Scott, William Blake, Ralph W. Emerson, Henry D. Thoreau, Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn, Richard Strauss among many others. See: D. Wu (ed), *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006; H. Honour, *Romanticism*,

sense and illustrates how his early interest in the romantic poets may have led to his particularly flamboyant style of preaching, he neglects to present any proper evidence for how this cultural movement directly influenced Irving's theology.¹⁰⁶ Instead, Dallimore seems content enough to attribute the root of Irving's unorthodoxy to his affiliation with Samuel Coleridge.¹⁰⁷ His justification for this is simply to allege that the contentious nature of Coleridge's theology confused Irving's Christology, leading him away from orthodox belief and into Unitarianism.¹⁰⁸ Upon this shoddy reasoning, he unilaterally concludes that "nothing whatsoever in Coleridge's actions or writings qualified him to be addressed as an orthodox Christian, and to those who were truly orthodox Irving's statements seemed utterly ridiculous."¹⁰⁹

Yet Dallimore's claims are highly disputable. Graham McFarlane refutes the allegation that Irving's views were Unitarian: "For it was in [the Hatton Garden] congregation that [Irving] began to defend his doctrine of God *against* the increasingly Unitarian interpretation of God which late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Deism spawned."¹¹⁰ McFarlane adds that the contemporary influence of Romanticism upon Irving caused him to refute the Unitarian heresy "in a manner that engaged with the issues rather than simply mouthing old formulae."¹¹¹ Likewise, Claude Welch explains, "The work of Kant marked the end of a theological era...beginning a definite movement away from rationalism's view of religion toward new ways of understanding theology that would be distinct from those of both orthodoxy and rationalism. This tendency was accelerated and carried farther by the new intellectual and spiritual climate of romanticism."¹¹² This highlights the strength inherent within theological romanticism

NY: Westview Press, 1979; R.M. Longyear, *Nineteenth Century Romanticism in Music*, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969

Philosophical and theological figures of influence include J.G. Hamann, G.E. Lessing, J.G. Herder, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, J.G. Fichte, Friedrich Schlegel, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schleiermacher. See: I. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999

¹⁰⁶ Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving*, 5-6, 10-11, 12, 16-17, 18, 23-25, 35-36, 39-41, 45-49

¹⁰⁷ The esteemed views that each man held for one another can be observed in their writings:

Coleridge wrote, "I hold that Edward Irving possesses more of the spirit and purpose of the first Reformers, that he has more of the Head and Heart, the Life, the Unction, and the genial power of Martin Luther, than any man now alive. See, J. Colmer (ed), *The Collected Works of S.T. Coleridge*, Vol. 10, London: Routledge, 1976:143.

Similarly, Irving wrote in appreciation of Coleridge's influence; "...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 the men with whom I have entertained friendship." See, Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving*, 98; Also cited in Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving*, 4

¹⁰⁸ Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving*, 46

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 49

¹¹⁰ G. McFarlane, "Irving, Edward (1792-1834)" in T.A. Hart (ed), *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000:275-6.[Italics mine] To further address the question of Unitarianism would be to digress away from the main issues surrounding this thesis. However, if the reader is interested, Irving's arguments against the Unitarian heresy can easily be viewed in C.W. IV.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² C. Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century Volume 1 (1799-1870)*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972:52

in that it rejected any rationalistic formulae, formulated within scholasticism, which had increasingly been regarded as resulting in the hindrance to the spiritual growth of Christian believers.¹¹³ Conceivably, such evidence suggests that Dallimore was wholly mistaken about the result of Romanticism's influence on Irving, as well as its wider influence on religious thought.

Irving was so characteristically linked to this movement that he occupies centre stage in the historian, David Bebbington's examination of how Romanticism profoundly influenced many evangelical leaders within the nineteenth century.¹¹⁴ Regarding Irving's possible influence from Coleridge; it has been well documented that Coleridge's intellectual views reflect an affinity with the core ethos of theological romanticism.¹¹⁵

The theological significance of Coleridge's philosophy lies in its appreciation of the essential subjectivity of religious and moral convictions...of God, the freedom of the will, the authority of conscience and the immortality of the soul derive their origin from man's moral consciousness and any reception of them as objectively true is determined by a practical interest only. Its basis, like that of the rest of our beliefs, is experience.¹¹⁶

It is quite possible that these core ideals were passed on to Irving. If so, this would explain why he was so determined to emphasize the practical relevance of the Incarnation for the experience of the believer, and so adamant that this was an aspect in which the doctrinal formulations of his theological tradition had so abysmally failed. It should, therefore, be acknowledged that the influence of Romanticism on Irving's thought does not automatically condemn him for heresy, as Dallimore suggests.¹¹⁷

The opinions presented by Dorries and Dallimore have correctly identified the presence of two separate influences upon Irving's theology. Yet while each scholar has determined to argue wholly for Irving's orthodoxy or non-orthodoxy, neither has considered the possibility of the other's influence upon Irving's thought. Their approaches, therefore, hinder the achievement of a fuller understanding of his views. Any understanding of Irving's theology should therefore take into consideration the

¹¹³ A.E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998:227-9; R. Hille, "Transition from Modernity to Post-Modernity: A Theological Evaluation" in *Evangelical Review of Theology* (2001) 25:116-19

¹¹⁴ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989:75-104

¹¹⁵ B.M.G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966:239-53; See also, C. Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century Volume 1 (1799-1870)*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972:108-26

¹¹⁶ Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 242

¹¹⁷ If this condemnation were upheld on this basis, then figures such as John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, among many others, would suffer the same charge for heresy based on their influences from romanticism. See: C. Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century Volume 1 (1799-1870)*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972:52-5

convergent nature of his standing within the Federal theological tradition as well as his tendency towards the ideals of Romanticism.¹¹⁸

3.3. The ‘Substance’ of Christ’s Union with Humanity in Reformed Theology

We continue our assessment by demonstrating how Irving’s notion of Christ’s sinful flesh adhered to foundational elements of Reformed Christology while simultaneously challenging the federal scholasticism that had grown to obscure it.

In doing so, we look to the figure of John Calvin as a discussion partner. Calvin is not consulted here because we believe him to be the originator of Reformed theology (which is more commonly known as ‘Calvinism’). Indeed, it would be entirely inappropriate to identify Calvin as Federal theology’s sole benefactor, as the Reformed tradition is far more diverse in its origin and development.¹¹⁹ Rather, Calvin serves as an appropriate companion because his theology helps to bridge the gap of history, enabling us to compare fundamental Christological tenets within early Reformed theology with their subsequent developments in Federal theology.

Calvin’s Christology insists upon an organic or ontological union of God with mankind in the Incarnation, in such a way that it necessitates that Christ assumed full humanity in

¹¹⁸ An awareness of the tension between these two movements in Irving’s historical context is essential, not only with regards to our immediate enquiry but is also due to their increasing relevance in contemporary theology within a postmodern context. The reaction of Romanticism against the rationalism of Reformed Scholasticism is representative of the wider reaction of post-modernity against the Enlightenment. For an examination of Romanticism as the precursor of the Nihilistic epoch of the Postmodern age, see: M.A. Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995:101-34; I. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

The enormous challenges that face any Christian tradition that seeks to uphold its heritage within orthodoxy while simultaneously learning from the criticisms of post-modernity provides the backdrop of an emerging theological movement known as “Radical Orthodoxy”. See: J.K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic & Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004. Illustrations of this can be seen in various theological attempts to address the problems of modernism’s influence in aspects of the Christian life, each of which display provocative themes and language that are distinct to Romanticism, can be seen as follows: Dave Tomlinson acknowledges the disenchantment with approaches to faith experienced by many contemporary evangelicals. Many, locked into interpretations of Christianity that they can no longer accept, have given up on the Church altogether. See: D. Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, London: SPCK, 1995. But in his follow-up work, Tomlinson asks whether re-enchantment is possible in the post-modern, post-Christian age. He explores how Christianity, once deconstructed, can become credible again. This involves looking at key components of Christian belief – God, sin, the Bible, resurrection, the Church, mission, prayer and more – and asking how they can be understood in deeper, more meaningful ways. See: D. Tomlinson, *Re-Enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008. Another such example can be seen in Richard Harries’ work examining the practice of decision-making in the Christian life. He is critical of traditional Christian approaches based on the idea of obedience, in light of the problems of temptation and sin, which has lost resonance in the modern world, and leaves Christian ethics open to the charge of reinforcing immaturity. See: R. Harries, *The Re-Enchantment of Morality: Wisdom for a Troubled World*, London: SPCK, 2008

¹¹⁹ R.A. Muller, “John Calvin and later Calvinism: the identity of the Reformed tradition” in D. Bagchi & D.C. Steinmetz, *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004:130-149

its fallen state.¹²⁰ This was possible because Calvin distinguished between the person of Jesus Christ from the human nature that he assumed.¹²¹ As a result, it was perfectly reasonable to believe that God had assumed a fallen human nature because the intention of his person was to redeem that which he assumed. “Christ is worthy of our faith...because he is God. Only thus does he exhibit God’s power to save. But that power is exhibited to us and available for our faith insofar as he is with us – insofar as he has accommodated himself to our lowly condition and become human.”¹²²

Furthermore, Calvin makes clear that the Atonement and the way in which the benefits of salvation are transferred to the believer are fundamentally dependent on this organic union with mankind. “First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”¹²³

...the foundation of all that Christ does through his humanity is who he is in his humanity – he is our brother. His activity has meaning only as he is our brother, and it is only in this brotherhood that Christ in his divinity can reunite us to God. This fellowship of nature, the brotherhood, that Christ establishes through his incarnation is in many ways the pivot on which Calvin’s Christology turns. It is through this fellowship that God is revealed...in [this] sense, Calvin’s Christology is a Christology of the brotherhood of Christ.¹²⁴

For Calvin, the notion that God had assumed sinful flesh in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ did not automatically mean that He was a sinful being. This can be clearly seen in his institutes where he strongly opposes those who propagated the belief that Christ’s humanity was divinely pure and separate from sinners; the same reasoning that was to be held by Irving’s antagonists centuries later. Such discussion can be found concerning Calvin’s understanding of the reality that Christ was ‘Truly man – yet sinless’: “The absurdities with which they wish to weigh us down are stuffed with childish calumnies. They consider it shameful and dishonourable to Christ if he were to derive his origin from men, for he could not be exempted from the common rule, which includes under sin all of Adam’s offspring without exception.”¹²⁵

As we move beyond the early Reformation to the context of Irving’s time, we find that Reformed theology underwent a considerable amount of development, which can also be seen in Britain.¹²⁶ Although the thought notion of Christ’s union with humanity was

¹²⁰ S. Edmondson, *Calvin’s Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; J. Calvin, J.T. McNeill (ed) (ET by F.L. Battles), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Westminster: John Knox Press, 1960:474-81

¹²¹ S. Edmondson, *Calvin’s Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004:186-96

¹²² S. Edmondson, *Calvin’s Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004:183

¹²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.I.I

¹²⁴ S. Edmondson, *Calvin’s Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004:210

¹²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, XIII, 4

¹²⁶ For a general overview of how closely the Scottish Reformation was influenced by Calvinist Theology, see: J. Kirk, *Patterns on Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989:70-95; M.C. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*, Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985

still present within the federal theological tradition, its perspective had undergone a major shift. Torrance acknowledges a distinct presence in the early Scottish Reformation of the emphasis of an ontological link between the humanity of Christ and its application with the salvation theory.¹²⁷ However, he notes that this position is contrasted by a complete reverse of thinking within the later Scottish federal tradition: “It is however right here that we are faced with the deepest *scandalon*, that by His human nature Christ exerts saving influence on us. This was the very point in Calvin’s teaching so strenuously rejected by some of the greatest champions of the Westminster Theology, such as William Cunningham.”¹²⁸

Federal theology had come to rely increasingly upon Aristotelian metaphysics of nature.¹²⁹ This resulted in the mainstream acceptance that the nature of a substance totally equates to the whole being of what it represents. The particular use of the term ‘sinful flesh’ in Federal theology was to express the condition of humanity under the bondage of sin in a way that made an individual legally guilty of sin simply for being human. The only logical way around this was to assert that Christ had assumed a human nature that was inherently pure, innocent and free from sin, as was the human nature that was originally possessed by Adam.

Hendry argues that the strength of Patristic theology’s understanding of the relationship between Christology and Soteriology, i.e. Incarnation and Atonement theory lay in the concept of Christ’s ‘consubstantiability’ with mankind. Yet the significance of such a concept had not been given enough assent within the development of the western church, especially within the dogmatic formulations of reformed scholasticism in the shape of federal theology.¹³⁰ “The federal theologians did usually try to leave some significance to consubstantiability, but in effect it was swallowed up in confederation; for the distinctive thing about this theology is not that it employed the covenant idea, which is soundly Biblical, but that it projected the idea back into the eternal order and grounded the salvation of mankind in the covenant made between the father and the Son before the foundation of the world. Confederation was thus made more ultimate than consubstantiability.”¹³¹

Some English Federal theologians include Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603), William Whitaker (1548-95) and William Perkins (1558-1602), whereas Scotland had equally produced some well known Federalists; namely Scottish Federal Theologians: Robert Rollock (1555-99), Robert Howie (1565-1645), John Sharp (1572-1648) and John Cameron (1579-1625). See: R.A. Muller, “John Calvin and later Calvinism: the identity of the Reformed tradition” in D. Bagchi & D.C. Steinmetz, *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004:138

¹²⁷ T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965:151

¹²⁸ T.F. Torrance, *School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*, London: James Clark, 1959:lxxxii, cited in W.B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008:247

¹²⁹ K. Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007; D.M. MacKinnon, “‘Substance’ in Christology – A Cross-bench View” in S.W. Sykes & J.P. Clayton (eds) *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972:281-83

¹³⁰ G.S. Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation*, London: SCM Press, 1959:63-72

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 71

The federal theology, a characteristic product of a legally minded age, maintained its appeal so long as the minds of men were responsive to the legal concepts and categories with which it operated. Its appeal began to decline toward the closing years of the eighteenth century. The rationalistic and romantic movements of that period were evidences of a revolution in men's ways of thinking that had a profound influence in theology and that demanded restatement of the gospel [with a new set] of concepts and categories¹³²

Moving further along in history, there has been a growing need for modern theology to recapture the heart of the Incarnation as being an organic 'consubstantial', in the fullest possible sense, union of God with mankind in the God-Man, Jesus Christ – a concept which had been so prevalent within the theology of the early church but had been neglected within the mainstream of Irving's tradition.

The era of post-Reformation scholasticism spurred on the rise of eighteenth-century classical liberal Protestant theology, among which its most influential theologians must include Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889).¹³³ At the turn of the twentieth-century, Wilhelm Herrmann exposed a growing tension in modern western theology, especially found within evangelical Protestantism.¹³⁴ On the one hand, there is a great acceptance among Protestants that a foundation of the Christian life relied on a personal communion with the living God through a relationship with Jesus Christ.¹³⁵ Yet on the other hand, the danger of Christian piety is that it tends to give little or no place to the relationship of the Christian to the incarnate life of Christ.¹³⁶ In response, Herrmann sustained a vehement repudiation of the overly used forensic categories of salvation theory within Protestant Orthodoxy as well as a rejection of the over-emphasizing of a metaphysical two-natures Christology at the expense of more, what he calls, 'personalistic' categories when speaking of humanity's union with God in the Incarnation.¹³⁷ The influence of liberal Protestantism should not be underestimated, as it challenged many to reformulate their conception of Christ's union with humanity in more personal and ethical terms and to at least question their understanding of the notion of 'substance' and the theological meaning assigned to it within Christology.¹³⁸

¹³² *Ibid.*, 72

¹³³ R.E. Olson and C.A. Hall, *The Trinity*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002:67-95

¹³⁴ W. Herrmann, *Communion of the Christian with God*, London: Williams & Norgate, 1906; cited in G.S. Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation*, London: SCM Press, 1959:15-16. [For a more thorough discussion of Herrmann's significant critique of modern theology, see: G.W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978:397-404; H.R. MacKintosh, "Books that have influenced our epoch: Herrmann's 'Communion with God'," in *The Expository Times*, (1929) 40.7: 311-315]

¹³⁵ Herrmann, *Communion of the Christian with God*, 289

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 291

¹³⁷ W.B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008:241-3

¹³⁸ H.R. Mackintosh, "The Unio Mystica as a Theological Conception" in *The Expositor* 1909 7:138-55. For a defence of the legitimacy of holding to the notion of 'substance' in theological reflection regarding the Incarnation, and therefore resisting a completely liberal hermeneutic, see: D.M. MacKinnon, "'Substance' in Christology – A Cross-bench View" in S.W. Sykes & J.P. Clayton (eds) *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972:279-300

A revitalisation of Trinitarian thought in modern Christian theology,¹³⁹ and more specifically renewed attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation, has gone a long way to exonerate Irving's views.¹⁴⁰ This focus has been the thrust of recent theological enquiry into Irving's theology. We acknowledge that, while this is an essential component for many in determining the viability of Irving's views, we have limited our enquiry specifically to the fundamental question of whether the fullness of the Incarnation necessitates the assumption of sinful flesh. Yet full appreciation for Irving's theology should acknowledge that his particular perspective is found at a time when liberal Protestantism found cause for inception over the very issues that he had sought to engage. Edward Irving's motivation in emphasizing the notion of Christ's sinful flesh represented an attempt to return to a theological emphasis upon Christ's ontological and personal solidarity with humanity within the Reformed tradition in a period of history where the understanding of this, and related, theological issue/s had been hindered by the neglect of such a notion. His perspective reflects certain aspects of Herrmann's perspective. While his theology displayed a strong adherence to metaphysical categories in speaking of the human 'nature' of Christ and its ontological union with the rest of mankind (therefore retaining foundational tenets of belief within the Patristic and early-Reformed periods), he nonetheless guarded against the scholastic reductionist tendency to equate substantial 'nature' with actual 'being' by also adhering to an emphasis of Christ's 'person' and his personal solidarity with the human race. His perspective, therefore, shows some similarity with liberalism's critique of the scholastic orthodoxy. Yet rather than being led to completely disregard his theological tradition he sought to overcome the conceptual difficulties at issue by trying to uphold it.¹⁴¹ Arguably then, Irving is strategically placed in a period of theological transition and may indeed be a valuable example of how the development of major trends within modern western thinking can influence particular theological responses within a particular historical context.

Furthermore, the life and work of Thomas F. Torrance is perhaps the most recognised recent example of how a Reformed theologian can legitimately hold to a view that Christ assumed a fallen humanity in the Incarnation as a fundamental element of a coherent Christology that also informs related areas of systematic doctrinal engagement.¹⁴² The popularity and relevance of his views upon the contemporary

¹³⁹ R.E. Olson and C.A. Hall, *The Trinity*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002:95-115

¹⁴⁰ T.A. Smail, *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975; M. Habets, "Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo" in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (2003) 11:199-234

¹⁴¹ Perhaps Graham McFarlane ingeniously recognises this underlying perspective in Irving by comparing his theology with that of Schleiermacher's. See, McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit*, 131-8

¹⁴² For an introduction to Torrance's views on the significance of Christ's assumption of human nature in its 'fallen' state, see: G.S. Dawson, "Far as the Curse is Found: The Significance of Christ's Assuming a Fallen Human Nature in the Torrance Theology" in G.S. Dawson, *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Saviour*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007:55-74; For further illustration of how Torrance viewed the ontological implications of Christ assuming sinful flesh upon a vicarious view of the Atonement, see: E.M. Colyer, "The Incarnate Saviour: T.F. Torrance on the Atonement" in G.S. Dawson, *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Saviour*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007:33-54. For further explanation as to how Torrance responds to the critiques of liberal Protestantism,

theological stage still continues to increase even after his recent death.¹⁴³ Ironically, Torrance stands as the more fortunate counterpart to Edward Irving, as he enjoyed an academic theological career spanning 27 years as Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, Edinburgh, and even held the esteemed position of Moderator of the Church of Scotland General Assembly 1976-77 (a position of influence within the same church denomination that would no doubt have, in Irving's day less than 150 years before, condemned him for heresy). Therefore, it would seem that whichever direction theological discussion takes in future regarding this highly controversial debate over Christ's human nature, it should not be allowed to make the mistakes of past generations of neglecting or belittling the significance of Irving's contribution to these, and related, Christological issues when trying to discern what the Incarnation means for the twenty-first century.

3.4. Theologizing Beyond the Philosophical Restrictions within Western Theology

While the contemporary debate over whether Christ took a fallen human nature (i.e. sinful flesh)¹⁴⁴ continues, there are those who have attempted to reassess the parameters of debate in order to navigate through the theological impasse.¹⁴⁵ Kelly Kopic, in support of such an undertaking, has issued a sincere call for the whole theological community to seek some clarity upon which to build further, more productive theological enquiry.¹⁴⁶ A strong reason for this, Kopic claims, is that both sides of debate actually agree on more than they recognise. Trevor Hart mimics such a position by suggesting a way forward via the amalgamation of doctrinal assertions from both sides in order to eradicate controversy.¹⁴⁷

Yet while adopting Hart's suggestion of simplifying doctrinal decisions may aid in alleviating controversy, this may be too simplistic a solution in the long term as it disregards the underlying proclamation beyond the theological formulae invoked. Ivor Davidson argues that many systematic theologies falter because contemporary

see: W.B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008:246-9

¹⁴³ Torrance's treatment of the doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement are presently being popularised for a wider church audience beyond the purely academic context. See: T.F. Torrance, R.T. Walker (ed), *Incarnation: The Person and Life and Christ*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008; T.F. Torrance, R.T. Walker (ed), *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, Carlisle: Paternoster, *Forthcoming*...

¹⁴⁴ For a helpful argument for Christ assuming a fallen nature, see: K. Gage, "What Human Nature did Jesus take?: Fallen", p.1-9. [cited 22 May 2009]. Online: <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/humanatureChristfallen.pdf>

Conversely, works opposing an assumption of fallen nature include, P.E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989:125-35; O.D. Crisp, "Did Christ have a Fallen Human Nature?" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2004) 6.3:270-88; O.D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007:90-117

¹⁴⁵ I. Davidson, "Theologizing the Human Jesus: An Ancient (and Modern) Approach to Christology Reassessed", in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2001) 3.2:129-53

¹⁴⁶ K.M. Kopic, "The Son's Assumption of a Human Nature: A Call for Clarity", in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2001) 3.2:154-66

¹⁴⁷ T.A. Hart, "Sinlessness and Moral Responsibility: A Problem in Christology", in *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1995) 48:37-54

theologians fail to see ‘what is at issue’ when speaking about the human Jesus. He helpfully invokes Karl Barth’s warning regarding this matter: “There are more modern ways that are perhaps more accessible and easier to tread, but they cannot serve us as we need because, to put it mildly, they rest upon a much less profound and serious knowledge of the matter.”¹⁴⁸ Finding the significance of Irving’s theology rests not so much on the particular formulae in use, but rather on venturing beyond the mere conceptual categories in order to understand the underlying proclamation.

Kapic suspects that the divergent positions are a result of problems that arise from preconceptions and continuing misunderstandings. Concerning Irving, she comments:

While historians may agree that Irving’s adversaries misunderstood his position, they did so for a reason. The Presbyterian tradition was one steeped in the language and categories of the Reformation, and so they had tremendous difficulty making the conceptual leap required by Irving’s fluid language and ideas. He was able to speak of Christ as ‘fallen’ with ‘sinful flesh’ and yet also maintain that he was ‘without sin’. Much to his dismay his opposition could not so easily separate the two, especially in the midst of inflated rhetoric and church politics.¹⁴⁹

Kapic argues that genuine dialogue must go beyond the simple affirmation, or denial, of whether Christ assumed a ‘fallen’ or ‘unfallen’ human nature. The reason being that although both sides hold much in common, disagreement arises over the interpretation of theological terms that lack clarity and, therefore, theological substance.¹⁵⁰ Irving himself expressed misgivings about using the term “sinful” in relation to Christ’s flesh, as the danger was the inference that he was proclaiming Christ as a sinner, yet it was the only terminology available for him to work with.¹⁵¹ This demonstrates how theology in any context is limited to the constraints of the language used. While Kapic correctly identifies many topical issues that result in divergent understandings within the debate, what she neglects to mention is the fact that the doctrinal formulations needing review are heavily shaped by philosophical influences.¹⁵² Discussions of such influences, including the restrictions thereof, are all too often completely absent from the assessment of Irving’s views. It only stands to reason then that theologians must consider the conceptual difficulties contained within the philosophical theology of Western Christianity if they are to proceed in more productive enquiry in future.

One aspect of enquiry should, no doubt, revisit evident conceptual difficulties when ascribing philosophical and theological meaning to the notions of ‘flesh’ and ‘nature’ and what place they have in Christology. According to McGrath, the Enlightenment raised three major Christological problems. Firstly, the ‘two-natures’ doctrine of the ancient church was questioned as absurd and illogical. Secondly, it became

¹⁴⁸ Cited in I. Davidson, “Theologizing the Human Jesus: An Ancient (and Modern) Approach to Christology Reassessed”, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2001) 3.2:153

¹⁴⁹ K.M. Kapic, “The Son’s Assumption of a Human Nature: A Call for Clarity”, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2001) 3.2:163

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 164-6

¹⁵¹ E. Irving, *Christ’s Holiness in Flesh*, 37

¹⁵² C. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Leiden: E.I. Brill, 1977; B. Magee, *The Great Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987

increasingly difficult to maintain the uniqueness of Jesus Christ without recourse to the supernatural. Lastly, as the historical reliability of the gospel records were more and more questioned, there was an increasing skepticism concerning knowledge of the historical Jesus.¹⁵³ Certainly, one of the main difficulties with Irving's theology is that it is susceptible to contemporary criticisms concerning 'two-natures Christology'.¹⁵⁴ While this perspective alone represents a wide and complex debate in itself,¹⁵⁵ what is apparent throughout the whole history of theological discussion over the divine and human natures in Christ is the fact that controversy arises whenever one is emphasized more than the other, especially when such an emphasis claims to rectify a perceived over-emphasis towards one or the other.¹⁵⁶ Such a contention has been evident ever since the separate patristic schools of Antioch and Alexandria tended to begin Christological discussion from different perspectives.¹⁵⁷

George S. Hendry comments on the occurrence of a "general fragmentation of Christian tradition"¹⁵⁸ due to the presence of different conceptions of the gospel of the Incarnation: "The estrangement of churches owes much to the partial perspectives, because, when attention is concentrated unduly on one limited aspect of the gospel, that aspect, not being viewed in the context of the whole gospel, is usually distorted and made to bear a disproportionate weight of significance."¹⁵⁹ While Hendry cites a number of aspects that display such a fragmentation,¹⁶⁰ he claims that this fragmentation is at its deepest within the division between Eastern and Western theological traditions.¹⁶¹

The theology of the Eastern Church has always been characterised by a dominant interest in the Incarnation from a perspective that is particularly different to the Western alternative: While the Western church has predominantly been concerned with sin as a matter of the will by which man incurs guilt, leading to a general understanding of the purpose of salvation is primarily to remove the guilt of sin. Whereas the Eastern perspective is concerned to understand how salvation provides restitution for the whole of the human being and not merely the forgiveness of guilt. "It is this concern which underlies the preoccupation of the ancient church with the doctrine of the Incarnation in the traditional sense of the term; the Incarnation, the assumption of our nature by the

¹⁵³ A.E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986:17-18; also cited in McFarlane, *Christ and Spirit*, 131

¹⁵⁴ Gunton, *Two Dogmas Revisited*, 371ff

¹⁵⁵ S.W. Sykes & J.P. Clayton (eds) *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972:39-52

¹⁵⁶ R.G. Crawford, "The Two-Nature Doctrine of Christ" in *The Expository Times* 1967) 79:4-8

¹⁵⁷ For an explanation of the direct affect of this upon the understanding of Irving's views, see: Gunton, *Two Dogmas Revisited*, 359-65

¹⁵⁸ G.S. Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation*, London: SCM Press, 1959

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-24

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24-31

eternal Word, was to them the means of effecting a transmutation or ‘transubstantiation’ of the corrupted nature of man.”¹⁶²

Peter De Rosa examines the inter-relations between Christ and sin using the doctrines the incarnation and original sin in Western thought.¹⁶³ De Rosa argues that it is Christ who should illuminate original sin and that the latter cannot be understood except in relation to him, who came to take upon himself the sin of the world.¹⁶⁴ This argument counters practical unbelief in Christ’s humanity, not in the sense that anyone would deny that Jesus is a man, but rather in the sense that theological formulations regarding sin and humanity unnecessarily result in a general reluctance to accept the full reality of Jesus’ manhood within much of Western theology.¹⁶⁵

It is fair comment to say that dogmatic theologians have usually been inclined to minimize, as far as possible, the effects upon Christ himself of living and moving in a sinful world. The danger is that by the time they have set down everything they consider to be entailed by Christ’s divinity his humanity may almost dissolve in a blaze of glory.¹⁶⁶

De Rosa’s contribution stands as a powerful corrective for a theological system that gives priority to the doctrine of original sin, allowing it to dictate subsequent thought concerning the humanity of Christ – Such is the Federal view of original sin in that it leads to the need for a ‘perfect’ humanity of Christ and results in a restricted understanding of the Incarnation.

From a different perspective of Eastern theology, however, we may find cause for greater appreciation of Irving’s views.¹⁶⁷ Due to Eastern Orthodoxy’s emphasis on the Incarnation as playing a major ontological role in the redemption of mankind, i.e. requiring the union of perfect deity with sinful humanity in order to reconstitute and redeem it,¹⁶⁸ its perspective has the conceptual ability to see that Irving builds on a distinction between the levels of *nature and person*. “The human nature that Christ took at the incarnation was subject, like our own, to the effects of original sin; but on the level of personhood, in his freely-willed acts of personal choice, Christ was utterly and entirely sinless, his whole life being one continual victory over sin.”¹⁶⁹ Whereas, as we have seen, the main issue of contention for western thinkers remains to be the

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 25

¹⁶³ Kopic suggests that terminology regarding original sin is one of the major aspects of theological enquiry that needs to be readdressed. See: K.M. Kopic, “The Son’s Assumption of a Human Nature: A Call for Clarity”, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2001) 3.2:164-6

¹⁶⁴ P. De Rosa, *Christ and Original Sin*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967:14

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 27-8

¹⁶⁶ P. De Rosa, *Christ and Original Sin*, 42

¹⁶⁷ K. Ware, “A Note on Theology in the Christian East: The Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries” in H. Cunliffe-Jones (ed), *A History of Christian Doctrine (Scholars’ Editions in Theology)*, London: Continuum, 2006:453-7.

¹⁶⁸ D. Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002:79-95; J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987:69-89

¹⁶⁹ Bishop Kallistos of Diocletia, “The Humanity of Christ: The Fourth Constantinople Lecture” at the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association, 1985, cited in Gunton, *Two Dogmas Revisited*, 369

presumption that Christ's assumption of a human nature that is affected by sin automatically corrupts his person. It is conceivable, then, that a careful enquiry as to how the Eastern theological tradition may alleviate the conceptual pressures and difficulties inherent within the Western tradition regarding this issue may indeed shed further light and perhaps pave the way for further discussion and appreciation of Irving's theology in future.¹⁷⁰

We acknowledge that significant continuing conceptual difficulties are attached to the notions of sinful or fallen, and conversely, sinless or unfallen, regarding the Christological debate. Yet despite the problems inherent within the conceptual understandings of 'sinful flesh' within modern Western theology, a strength of Irving's notion of Christ's sinful flesh is that his views were a result of searching beyond the doctrinal formulations of his context to shed at least some light on the theological understanding of what it meant for Christ to become man.

From thinking about the truth of doctrine, we need to consider the more fundamental living truth of Christ himself. That truth comes before all the dogmas, scriptures, creeds, classical theological formulations and so on. These are attempts to put into words the truth of Christ, and of necessity they are imperfect attempts, for no form of words can fully express the living personal truth of Christ. But we cannot do without words and language. To the extent that the records, doctrines, creeds, and the like point us to Christ and bring him before us – and some of them do this more adequately, some less so – they share in his truth. Without the words of scripture and doctrine, his truth could not be appropriated or communicated by us. We never fully attain to that truth and in its fullness it always escapes our verbal formulations. But we do claim to have glimpsed the fullness of the truth in Jesus Christ, and to the extent that our words can express that truth, we affirm their truth. Thus we confess him true man at the same time true God in human form.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ This hermeneutic can be adopted from D. Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002

¹⁷¹ J. Macquarrie, *The Humility of God: Christian Meditations*, London: SCM Press, 1978:31-2

CONCLUSION

We now revisit the research question posed at the beginning of this dissertation: “Is Edward Irving’s notion of Christ having ‘sinful flesh’, as it relates to the fullness of the incarnation, theologically viable?” In response to this, we conclude by summarising our findings present within this theological examination as follows.

We began by acknowledging the controversial nature of various aspects of Irving’s ministry; the largest of which brought him criticism and eventual condemnation for heresy by the church establishment. To be sure, Irving’s condemnation was due in large part to the perception that his teachings resulted in the proclamation of Christ to have been a sinner. However, a prudent examination of Irving’s confrontation with Henry Cole reveals that the issue at hand concerned how the fullness of the Incarnation is to be understood rather than over the superficial question of whether Christ was guilty of sin. Therefore, as is reflected in our research question, it is wholly correct that the task of examining the viability of Irving’s views should be tailored to reflect the theological slant of Irving’s views by questioning whether the fullness of the Incarnation necessitates the notion that Christ took on ‘sinful flesh’.

The ultimate task of this dissertation has been to assess the strength of this notion. In order to do this, we have sought to assess Irving’s views within his own historical context. For the conclusions regarding any view of Christ’s humanity should not be determined within a dogmatic vacuum, nor should they be reduced to the simple recitation of or adherence to theological formulae. It is helpful to note here how Daniel Migliore describes that the task of systematic theology is to “venture a faithful, coherent, timely, and responsible articulation of Christian faith...[being] challenged to rethink and reinterpret the doctrines and practices of the church in the light of what the church itself avows to be of central importance – namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ that liberates and renews life.”¹⁷² Irving’s theology demonstrates that the driving force of his teaching was the proclamation that for Christ to have been fully consubstantial with mankind then the positing of his assumption of the same ‘sinful flesh’ that is common to all humanity was justifiably required. We suggest that Irving’s claims were highly relevant within his historical context, as his theology challenged the predominant doctrinal formulations of Federal Calvinism, which had, in Irving’s view, departed from Patristic and early-Reformed belief in this respect and become a hindrance to the proper appreciation for the vicariously salvific nature of the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ based primarily on his ontological union with mankind.

Although Edward Irving had to suffer the injudicious condemnation from the established church of his homeland for his theological position, history has shown that his perspective was not so unorthodox as was first believed. In this sense, Irving was a man before his time. And although there are many areas of contention and conceptual difficulty that remain within the debate that he became known for taking up, Irving remains a significant figure whose theological contribution is to be appreciated within contemporary scholarship.

¹⁷² Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 11

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