

A Charismatic Model of the Church

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*Edward Irving's Teaching in a
21st-century Chinese Context*

By

David Lee

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PREFACE

This book is a revised PhD thesis which examines how Edward Irving (1792-1834) came to understand and reconstruct the Pentecostal and eschatological character of the church, notably by re-appropriating the theological significance of the humanity of Christ.

The book begins by locating Irving within his 19th century Scottish ecclesiastical, philosophical and the emerging premillennial context. Samuel T. Coleridge's Romantic philosophy is shown to have exercised great influence upon Irving. Armed with a Coleridgean Logos as the principle of reconciliation, Irving is able to affirm dialectically the fallenness of Christ's humanity and his personal sinlessness. The humanity of Christ is argued to be Irving's over-arching principle.

Irving, the Reformed-Pentecostal theologian, understands the church as the body of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Owing to Irving's emphasis on the ascension of the humanity of Christ and the consequent spatial absence of Christ from the church, Irving asserts the necessary work of the Spirit to empower the church as a witnessing and visible body of Christ to the world.

Irving, the premillennial dispensationalist, also understands the church dynamically as an eschatological community in holiness on the way to *parousia*. Reacting to the 19th century postmillennialism and sterile Scottish Presbyterianism, Irving's emphasis on the imminent bodily return of Christ gives the church an eschatological character. Whilst Irving's ecclesiology is consciously eschatological, it is emphatically non-docetic and pneumatic giving due weight to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Irving's teachings are relevant to the twenty-first century church in China. Firstly, Irving's teaching can contribute to a Christological understanding of God's love in terms of Christ as mediator between God and humanity. Secondly, Irving's emphasis on the exalted humanity of Christ can be reconstructed to conceive the work of the Holy Spirit both within the church and outside in the Chinese culture and society.

It is concluded that Irving's genius lies in his creative engagement with his cultural context and critical reflection of his Presbyterian tradition. He transcends his context by re-appropriating the humanity of Jesus Christ and

holding closely Christ and the church together. His ecclesiology is both Christ-centred and Spirit-enabled resulting in a church that is non-docetic, charismatic, witnessing and eschatological.

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My study would not be possible without the support and prayers of the pastors and leaders of my home church, the Chinese Church in London. I am thankful for their prayer and understanding.

I am also thankful to family members who have waited long enough to see the completion of my study. Words cannot express my appreciation of their support. Finally, I am grateful to my wife, Jessie, and our son Cliff. Their love and support have made the completion of the thesis less difficult than expected.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BIFG* *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse which relate to these Latter Times, and until the Second Advent*, Glasgow: William Collins, 1828 [2nd ed.].
- CHF* *Christ's Holiness in the Flesh, the Form, Fountain Head, and Assurance to us of Holiness in the Flesh, in Three Parts*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay and Co., 1831.
- CMGM* *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty, by Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra a Converted Jew: Translated from the Spanish, with a Preliminary Discourse*, London: L. B. Seeley and Son, 1827.
- CS* *The Church and State Responsible to Christ, and to One Another. A Series of Discourses on Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts*, London: James Nisbet, 1829.
- CW* *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving, 5 Vols.*, ed. by Rev. G. Carlyle, London: Alexander Strahan, 1864.
- DP* *The Day of Pentecost or The Baptism with the Holy Ghost*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1831.
- MW* *The Morning Watch*.
- OCD* *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith. Set in Four Parts*, London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1830.
- PW* *The Prophetical Works of Edward Irving, 2 Vols.*, ed. by Rev. G. Carlyle, London: Alexander Strahan, 1865.

SSL *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving by William Jones, to which are added Thirty Sermons, also Five Lectures*, London: John Bennett, 1835

Other Abbreviations:

<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>DHT</i>	<i>Dictionary of Historical Theology</i> , general editor: T.A. Hart
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ERT</i>	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
<i>EuroJTh</i>	<i>European Journal of Theology</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>IJST</i>	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
<i>JRel</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Morning Watch</i>
<i>NDT</i>	<i>New Dictionary of Theology</i> , general editors: S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright
<i>NT</i>	<i>New Testament</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Old Testament</i>
<i>OIC</i>	<i>One in Christ</i>
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SJRS</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Religious Study</i>
<i>SVTQ</i>	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

CHAPTER ONE

IRVING THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN IN CONTEXT

A. Introduction

In the early nineteenth century, a particular religious controversy arose in Scotland. This controversy resulted in constructive theological thinking that deserves consideration even into the twenty first century. The so-called “Row heresy” or Rowite movement centred upon several men, namely, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870), John McLeod Campbell (1800-72), A.J. Scott (1805-1866) and Edward Irving (1792-1834).

Erskine was originally a lawyer by profession and later became an outstanding Scottish lay theologian.¹ In his later years, he taught the idea of “the final salvation of all”. He was fiercely attacked by the leader of the Evangelical Party of the Kirk in a series of sermons. Since the accepted pattern of theology was the Westminster Confession, any deviation from it often resulted in deposition. Being a lay person rather than an ordained clergyman, Erskine was free from the fear of deposition. However, this was not the case for Campbell and Irving: both were subsequently deposed by the Scottish Kirk. Campbell was deposed by the Church of Scotland in 1831,² being pronounced guilty of having “entertained and promulgated the

¹ A recent PhD thesis has made some ground-breaking insights into T. Erskine’s reconstruction of 19th century soteriology. D. Horrocks, *The Soteriological Eclecticism of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: Perceptions of Theological Innovation in an Age of Reconstruction*, PhD thesis (Uxbridge: Brunel University, 2001)

² Two more Scottish ministers, A.J. Scott and H.B. McLean were deposed in that year by the Church of Scotland. A.J. Scott, Irving’s assistant minister was deposed because he could not agree with the Westminster Confession. H.B. McLean was deposed for holding the same view as Irving that Christ took on fallen human nature. Irving spoke to him and his congregation in McLean’s ordination service in London. Irving met A.J. Scott in 1828 and then invited him to be his assistant in London. T. Erskine met A.J. Scott in 1826. Then, Erskine, Scott and Campbell had a unique triple friendship. W. Hanna (ed.), *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Edinburgh:

doctrine of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, and also the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation”.³ A.J. Scott was the earliest proponent among the Rowite group to advocate a renewal of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit.⁴ Irving was excommunicated by the Church of Scotland in March, 1833, the specific charge against him being that he denied the sinlessness of Christ and taught that Christ was tainted with original sin.

The theological insights of Scott, Erskine, Campbell and Irving were all rejected by the authorities of their day. However, they are being increasingly read and recognized today. Erskine has been called “one of the finest and most creative minds on the British theological scene in the early 19th century”.⁵ Campbell is identified as “one of the profoundest theologians in

David Douglas, 1884 [4th ed.]), 103.

³ N. Needham, *Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: His Life and Theology 1788-1837* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1991), 346.

⁴ Some scholars believe that A.J. Scott’s view of charismata affected Irving’s pneumatology. A. Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving. The Fore-Runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 87, 177; J.P. Newell, *A.J. Scott and His Circle*, PhD thesis (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1981) 3; M.R. Patterson, *Designing the Last Days. Edward Irving, The Albury Circle, and the Theology of the Morning Watch*, PhD thesis (London: King’s College London, 2001), 174-76. However, there are insufficient evidences to prove that A.J. Scott’s emphasis of the Holy Spirit altered the *course* and *direction* of Irving’s life and theology as argued by J. P. Newell. See Newell, *Scott*, 6. No doubt, each man was influential upon the other.

⁵ T. Hart, *Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Edinburgh: The St. Andrew Press, 1993) 1. See also T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology. From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 263-85. It should be noted that the perception of Erskine varied. Some studies asserted that Erskine was the great inaugurator of the Third Scottish reformation overthrowing traditional Calvinism. Recent study by N. Needham argues that Erskine’s teaching departed from Calvinism to Romantic Liberalism. Erskine ended up as a “classic Victorian theological Liberal” and “Liberal Universalist”. N. Needham, *Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1990), 3, 9, 177. D. Winslow argues that Erskine’s writings are a vigorous, original, and lively contribution to liberal thought. D. Winslow, *Thomas Erskine: Advocate for the Character of God* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993) vi. B.M.G. Reardon says that Erskine displayed a remarkable originality of mind. B.M.G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age* (London: Longman, 1995 [2nd ed.]), 294. D. Horrocks argues that Erskine has been significantly underestimated. Whilst Erskine’s logic might be unsatisfactory sometimes, “Erskine’s eclectic synthesizing genius, and largely

the history of Scottish theology since the Reformation of the Church of Scotland".⁶ Scott's preaching in the west coast of Scotland in 1829 on spiritual gifts initiated the outburst of glossolalia and the appearance of early 19th century Pentecostalism. Irving is recognized as both the first Reformed-Pentecostal theologian⁷ as well as a ground-breaking theologian.⁸

A.1.Choosing E. Irving for Further Investigation

Contemporary theological debates and agreements tend to be fought by professional theologians. The debate is often driven by ecumenism and serves to gather together different church traditions in order to reconcile and sharpen their theological understandings. However, at the congregational level, the reality is often one where the clergy and church members fail to capitalize on the fruits of theological debate and ecumenical agreement. There is a sense that debate and agreement have little relevance to ordinary Christian living, remaining, rather, at the academic level. Whilst the debate is ultimately meant to benefit the local church, the ordinary church

orthodox but innovative soteriological consciousness, meant that in his hands soteriology nevertheless remained robust and doctrinally and ethically viable, offering broader understandings, deeper insights, and inspirational gains, rather than losses of historic truth." Horrocks, *Erskine*, 291.

⁶ Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 287. Excellent theological studies on Campbell began as early as 1937 by E.G. Bewkes. See E.G. Bewkes, *Legacy of a Christian Mind* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1937). J.B. Torrance, "The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology", *SJT* 31 (1973), 295-311; John Macquarrie, "John McLeod Campbell, 1800-1872", *Expository Times* 83 (1972), 263-68; B.A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 71-98; G.M. Tuttle, *So Rich a Soil. John McLeod Campbell on Christian Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1986); C.D. Kettler, "Vicarious Humanity as Soteriological Reality: The Vicarious Humanity of Christ", *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); M. Jinkins, *A Comparative Study in the Theology of Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and John McLeod Campbell: Atonement and the Character of God* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen Research University Press, 1993); L. Van Dyke, *The Desire of Divine Love. J. McLeod Campbell's Doctrine of Atonement* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995); J.C. Goodloe IV, "J. McLeod Campbell. The Extent and Nature of Atonement", *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 3 (1997).

⁷ G. Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 21.

⁸ G.W.P. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), ix.

members usually are not able to receive the intended benefit. It should be noted that the Scottish reformers of the Rowite movement primarily were concerned with the vitality and meaning of the Christian gospel for the rapidly changing times of 19th century Scotland. Their teaching “made religion seem sweeter and less harsh than it too often did of old, more human though equally still divine, less loaded with unnecessary dogma, less of a system and more of a spirit.”⁹

The controversy in early nineteenth century Scotland was raised by the concerns about several ordained ministers and one layman, all with a proven pastoral concern for the spiritual wellbeing of Christian living.¹⁰ Daily in their pastoral duties, they dealt with church members who were burdened with earning their daily living in a society of poverty and injustice in 19th century Britain.¹¹ Consequently, the theological thoughts derived from such controversy warrant our closer attention because they dealt directly with the “grass roots” level of people who were in need of spiritual power to overcome the dilemma, i.e. the good news of the gospel and the lack of vitality in their faith. As such, their theological reflections have a direct bearing upon today’s ministers and lay people.

Irving is chosen for study from amongst the characters in the Rowite movement because he was one of the leaders and founders of an unprecedented church movement in London, the Catholic Apostolic Church.¹² Also, Irving is chosen because he wrote more than Scott,

⁹ J.C. Lees, “Bishop Ewing” in *Scottish Divines, 1505-1872*, by various authors (Edinburgh: MacNiven and Wallace, 1882), 369-70, 388.

¹⁰ H.C. Whitley commented that Irving’s “theology is no intellectual exercise governed solely by reason and a scrutiny of Holy Scripture and amplified by the ancient creeds, but something deeply rooted in life, always in transition, and afire with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit --- the expression of the mind of Christ in this period of the time between the times --- between the time of Christ’s coming in flesh and His coming again in glory.” H.C. Whitley, *Blinded Eagle: An Introduction to the Life and Teaching of Edward Irving* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955), 107.

¹¹ Although Erskine was not an ordained minister, he carried out pastoral duties by visitation and writings of comfort to people who were afflicted. He was ready to travel miles to be with those who were dying. He sought to comfort people by arousing in them an awareness of God’s presence and abiding love. Winslow, *Erskine*, 3.

¹² Much has been written about the Catholic Apostolic Church but not many sources are reliable and accurate because of the secretiveness of the believers within this church. Edward Miller wrote in 1878 the history and the doctrines of the Catholic Apostolic Church. He was able to get hold of some source materials, though with

Campbell and Erskine for further investigation. He provided sufficient written materials for us to examine his integrative ability in systematic theology and the doctrine of the church. Other members of the Rowite movement did not provide sufficient published materials for the purpose of this thesis.

A.2 Works on Irving

Both 19th century and more recently published books and articles on Irving are quite plentiful. Major important biographical accounts are by Mrs. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* and Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*.¹³ Mrs. Oliphant's *Life* has remained the standard work. A. Dallimore's biographical work seeks to discredit Irving, although he has acknowledged Irving's well-deserved recognition. For Dallimore, Irving began his ministry with the greatest potential but later tragically became a failure because he readily accepted new revelation and the superiority of the tongue speakers.¹⁴ Dallimore consequently presents Irving's theology as unworthy of any consideration.¹⁵ W.S. Merricks's biographical work is

difficulties, and spoke to some of the founders e.g. Mr. Cardale. He regarded this church as a sect which ended in failure. E. Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), vii, xi, 263. Being a former member of the church, C.G. Flegg is able to gain greater access into many more source materials. His study on the Catholic Apostolic Church is by far the fullest and most reliable "insider" account of this church. Although Irving had left the church in 1834 before the Catholic Apostolics began to establish a congregation, C.G. Flegg argues that Irving's importance to the movement was due to his prophetic initiation. He served as a catalyst and provided the initial acceptance of validity of the "tongues". Flegg also argues that the Catholic Apostolics drew to some extent upon Irving's teachings e.g. the importance of Christ's humanity C.G. Flegg, "*Gathered under Apostles*": *A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), 462.

¹³ M. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862 [6th ed.]); T. Carlyle, *Reminiscences* Vol.1, ed. by J.A. Froude (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1881).

¹⁴ Dallimore, *Irving*, 175-76.

¹⁵ A.L. Drummond examined Irving's life and teaching of the tongues in the light of psychology in the early 20th century. Although he tried to form a "composite photograph" of Irving's life and writings, he disagreed with Irving's teaching of the tongues. A.L. Drummond, *Irving and His Circle* (London: James Clarke & Co., no date), 164.

more sympathetic to Irving. Merrick attempts to draw parallels between Irving's nascent Pentecostalism and Pentecostalism as it exists today.¹⁶

Interestingly, a renaissance in Irving studies began in the late twentieth century. In 1973, G. Strachan's historical study on Irving's Pentecostalism was published and soon became a useful introduction to the Pentecostal teaching of Irving.¹⁷ In 1975, T. Smail took up Irving's Pentecostalism. With a critical view on the contemporary charismatic movement, he develops a pneumatology which gives full personhood to the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Smail acknowledges his indebtedness to Irving in two points. Firstly, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God entered into real humanity and lived in a human condition. Secondly, the Holy Spirit that operated in Christ's humanity also operated in the redeemed community.¹⁹ Several substantial studies on Irving are to be found in research theses and academic journals.

Several doctoral theses have been written in the last 40 years. A thesis in Dutch was submitted in the Netherlands by B. Brand in 1977.²⁰ This was followed by four English-speaking PhD theses. In 1982, J. Nantomah examined Irving's doctrine of incarnation in the light of the Church Fathers and its relevance to the 20th century African context.²¹ In 1987, D.W. Dorries's study covered Christ's human nature in the teaching of Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria, Luther and Calvin. Dorries puts Irving's teaching of the humanity of Christ within the understanding and context of the church tradition.²² Nantomah and Dorries convincingly argue that Irving's Christology was indeed orthodox. G.W.P.

¹⁶ W.S. Merricks, *Edward Irving: The Forgotten Giant* (East Peoria: Scribe's Chamber Publications, 1983).

¹⁷ G. Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973).

¹⁸ N. Wright, "The Charismatic Theology of Thomas Smail", *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 16 (1996) 16.

¹⁹ T. A. Smail, *Reflected Glory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 77.

²⁰ Brand, B.L., *Edward Irving: een roepende in de woestij* (Utrecht: Rijksuniversiteit, 1977).

²¹ J.J. Nantomah, *Jesus the God-Man. The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Edward Irving in the Light of the Teaching of the Church Fathers and its Relevance for a Twentieth Century African Context*, PhD thesis (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1982).

²² D.W. Dorries, *Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring Upon Edward Irving's Doctrine of Christ's Human Nature*, 2 Vols. (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen 1987).

McFarlane's work *Christ and the Spirit* was a slightly revised version of his PhD thesis in 1989.²³ McFarlane argues that Irving's Christology created a theological space for the understanding of the Holy Spirit. In addition to an orthodox Chalcedonian Christology, Irving's overall theology was also creatively pneumatological.²⁴ In 2001, M. Patterson studied the theology of *Morning Watch* and Irving's premillennialism. He asserts that Irving taught two Christologies.²⁵ A well-attended bicentenary conference was held in London in 1992. Scholarly interest in the theology of Irving and his Pentecostalism remained high on the conference agenda.²⁶

Near the end of the 20th century, whilst challenges to Irving's orthodox Christology subsided, Irving's premillennialism and eschatology have come under scrutiny. S. Gilley asserts that Irving's otherworldly premillennialism was a reaction to the "holy worldliness" of the early 19th century religious world, represented by William Wilberforce.²⁷ Patterson presents a thorough study of the premillennialism of the Albury Circle and the theology of the *Morning Watch* journal.²⁸ A major part of his research also re-examined Irving's teaching. Patterson argues that Irving's theology

²³ G.W.P. McFarlane, *Christology and the Spirit in the Teaching of Edward Irving*, PhD thesis (London: King's College London, 1989). G.W.P. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit. The Doctrine of the Incarnation According to Edward Irving* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996).

²⁴ McFarlane gives a succinct summary of the pneumatological dimension in Irving's Christology and the corresponding implication of Irving's pneumatology to the human condition. G.W.P. McFarlane, "The Christology of Edward Irving", in M. Elliott & J.L. McPake (eds.), *The Only Hope. Jesus Yesterday Today Forever* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2001), 147-49.

²⁵ M.R. Patterson, *Designing the Last Days. Edward Irving, the Albury Circle, and the Theology of Morning Watch*, PhD thesis (London: King's College London, 2001).

²⁶ The theme of the conference was "Edward Irving: A Theologian for Our Times", held in Regent Square Church and organized by the Research Institute in Systematic Theology, King's College, London.

²⁷ S. Gilley, "Edward Irving: Prophet of the Millennium", in Garrett and Mathew (eds.), *Revival and Religion since 1700* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993) 98-99. Gilley attempts to see Irving as part of 19th century Protestant revival. Gilley asserts that Irving's premillennialism stressed otherworldliness and the corrupted world would become Christian not by the activities of Christians but by the second coming of Christ. For Gilley, Irving's anticatholicism, antiliberalism, premillennialism and scriptural literalism were a powerful force to halt the advance of moderate evangelicalism in his times. Gilley, "Prophet", 110.

²⁸ Patterson, *Last Days*.

could only be properly and wholly understood if Irving was put within the immediate context of the Albany Circle's *Morning Watch* and 19th century premillennialism. For Patterson, a contextualised Irving is one whose theology is more complex and broader than previously thought. Patterson argues that Irving as a pretribulational-premillennial theologian had major weaknesses in both his eschatology and hermeneutical foundation. Patterson rightly has emphasized a much-neglected premillennial perspective in modern Irving studies but the evidences and sources he consulted were too restrictive for him to form such views about Irving. Patterson hardly studies other writings of Irving apart from *The Morning Watch*. Nevertheless, the 19th century premillennial context should be taken seriously in any future theological studies of Irving. This thesis will take up this premillennial context in addition to the influences by Coleridge and members of the Rowite movement in explicating Irving's ecclesiology.

Other scholars have contributed only articles in journals or sections within a publication. Two studies pay more attention to the premillennial background, namely A. Walker and C. Flegg. Walker gives fresh insight into the rise of Irvingism and its relationship with the Brethren movement.²⁹ Walker is one of the few scholars who has connected perceptively the two seemingly unrelated movements together within the context of 19th century eschatological hope of the imminent second coming of Christ.³⁰ Unlike most other Irving's researchers, Flegg, as a former member of the Catholic Apostolic Church, has had unhindered access to books, articles and manuscripts of the Catholic Apostolic Church founders. Flegg argues that Irving's emphases on the imminent second coming and the outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit became foundational to this church. Flegg further asserts these two emphases were later formalised in this new church.

Significantly, theological articles in journals or chapters on Irving's Christology rarely mention the 19th century premillennial context.³¹ These

²⁹ A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom* (Guildford: Eagle, 1998 [rev. ed.]), 228-47.

³⁰ Two recent studies have discussed Irving within the 19th century premillennialism. I. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971). Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from 1790's to the 1840's* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978); also, some materials of Irving's premillennialism in G.C. Cameron, *The Scots Church in London* (Oxford: Becket, 1979).

³¹ Works include: D. Allen, "A Belated Bouquet. A Tribute to Edward Irving 1792-1834", *The Expository Times* 103 (1992) 328-31; H. Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour* (London: Epworth Press, 1962); D. Macleod, *The Person of Christ*

works reflect the characteristics of two views of Irving's Christology: irrelevant anomaly or profound precursor of Pentecostalism. H. Johnson attempts to unravel the meaning of the fallen nature of Christ in the light of both Scriptures and historical theology. He strongly suspects a link or interdependence between Irving and Erskine in their Christological doctrine.³² Needham simply assumes that Erskine's doctrine of the assumption of fallen nature came from Irving.³³ Both Macleod and Needham dispute Irving's insistence that Christ took on sinful nature.³⁴ For them, it is not necessary to insist upon this. Although Allen presents brief articles, he is able to summarize the positive contributions of the teaching of Irving for the Pentecostal readers.³⁵ Gunton argues convincingly that Irving's teaching of atonement and of Christ as creature can break new ground for a theological re-appropriation of the work of Christ today. As Patterson rightly argues, most of these modern studies on Irving fail to contextualise Irving in his premillennial context. The aim of this chapter is to earth Irving within various contexts.

A.2.a Works on Irving in the 21st Century

Works on Irving continue to flourish in the early 21st century, in particular attention to his provocative Christology. However, there is no written work so far that relates his Christology and Ecclesiology to the contemporary church in China. There have been several published monographs on Irving, and many more essays in academic journals of various aspects of Irving's teaching and influences upon his thinking. Irving's Christology continues to be the most controversial subject.

Apart from Mark Patterson's work which shall be discussed extensively in this book, Byung Sun Lee has investigated Irving's teaching on sinful flesh.³⁶ Lee does not explore Irving's teaching on Christ's sinful flesh

(Leicester: IVP, 1998); C.E. Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 151-68.

³² Johnson, *Humanity*, 180-82.

³³ Against Needham, Horrocks argues with convincing evidences that Erskine's Christology did not derive from Irving, but from William Law. Horrocks, *Erskine*, 207-13.

³⁴ The work of Macleod will be discussed in chapter two.

³⁵ Allen, "Bouquet", 328-31. Also, D. Allen, "Regent Square Revisited. Edward Irving- Precursor of the Pentecost Movement", *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 17 (1997), 49-58.

³⁶ Byung Sun Lee, "Christ's Sinful Flesh": *Edward Irving's Christological*

doctrinally, within Irving's theological system. Rather, Lee investigates the historical development of Irving's Christology within the context of his life and times. Lee noted that Irving's "incarnational idea was widely spread throughout his works on a variety of subjects ... his other ideas, which I maintain, were broadly connected to his views of the incarnation."³⁷ Lee's study of the historical development of Irving's Christology agrees substantially with this present work.

Jim Purves asserts that Irving's strength and contribution towards Scottish Reformed theology was not quite experiential charismatic phenomena. Instead, "a proper perspective on the Spirit's activity in our lives is to be founded upon the relationship of the Spirit to the Word Incarnate, rooted in the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth."³⁸ Jim Purves further discusses the relationship between the Triune God and the Charismatic movement. Irving's teaching formed part of his study of Christology and Trinity.³⁹ Purves notes Irving's teaching of the resurrected Christ and the Spirit. "A significant feature of Irving's pneumatology lies in the importance attached to the resurrection and ascension of Christ in his human body, with the effect this has in shaping our present communion with the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰

Michael Paget has published an essay in which he compared Christology and original sin in the teachings of Charles Hodge and Edward Irving.⁴¹ Paget defensively argues that, like Hodge, Irving was primarily a Chalcedonian thinker and shared with Hodge a common heritage of Reformed Orthodoxy. However, Paget also notes the difference between them.

Whereas Hodge labours to establish discontinuity [Christ and his fellow humans], Irving's theological agenda is focused on establishing and

Theology within the Context of his Life and Times (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013). Also, Byung Sun Lee, "Christ's Sinful Flesh": *Edward Irving's Christological Theology within the Context of his Life and Times* (PhD thesis, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2011).

³⁷ Lee, *Christ's Sinful Flesh*, 12.

³⁸ Jim Purves, "The Interaction of Christology & Pneumatology in the Soteriology of Edward Irving," *Pneuma* 14.1 (1992), 90.

³⁹ Jim Purves, *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement: A Critical Appraisal of Trinitarian Theology and Charismatic Experience from a Scottish Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

⁴⁰ Purves, *Triune God*, 154.

⁴¹ Michael Paget, "Christology and Original Sin: Charles Hodge and Edward Irving Compared," *Churchman*, 121.3 (2007), 229-248.

developing the Son's soteriological incarnation in sinful flesh. The strength of this model is the robustly Trinitarian salvation offered in Christ. The Son is not the sole agent in the incarnation. The Spirit is not sidelined.⁴²

There are essays which have found Irving's Christology deficient. From the Wesleyan perspective, Van Kuiken disagreed with Irving's assertion that Christ assumed a fallen, even sinful, human nature.⁴³ Focusing on sanctification, he argued that while Irving affirmed Christ's flesh being converted from sinful into sinless by the work of the Spirit, the "underlying sin inherent in human nature can only be suspended, not destroyed, in this life... sin still clings to Christ's acts in the form of a less than whole-natured commitment to God."⁴⁴ Likewise, Damon So found weaknesses in Irving's Christology.⁴⁵ Irving's Christ was sinless due to the work of the Spirit resulting in a weak Christ, contrary to the lordship of Christ in the gospels. Moreover, Irving separated clearly Christ's divinity, humanity and the agency of the Holy Spirit without due care to their union.⁴⁶

A very readable and balanced account of the life of Edward Irving has been provided by Tim Grass.⁴⁷ It is an essential reading for anyone who is interested in Edward Irving. Tim does not agree with Irving that Christ's flesh was "sinful". He says that Irving's Christology is liable to the charge of Nestorianism, in that Irving drew too sharp a distinction between Christ's divinity and his humanity.⁴⁸

Other monographs and essays are not primarily about Irving's Christology. Peter Elliott published an influential monograph in which he argued the substantial influence of Romanticism upon Irving's teaching.⁴⁹ He also asserted that many were able to note the influence of Coleridge on the primacy of the will upon Irving. However, few were able to note that Irving also had an influence upon Coleridge. According to Elliott, Irving

⁴² Paget, "Christology and Original Sin", 242.

⁴³ E. Jerome Van Kuiken, "Edward Irving on Christ's Sinful Flesh and Sanctifying Spirit: A Wesleyan Appraisal," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 49.1 (2014), 175-85.

⁴⁴ Van Kuiken, "Irving," 181-82.

⁴⁵ Damon W.K. So, *Jesus' Revelation of his Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with Special Reference to Karl Barth* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006).

⁴⁶ So, *Revelation*, 244-51.

⁴⁷ Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving (1792-1834)* (Eugene, Pickwick Publications, 2012)

⁴⁸ Grass, *Watchman*, 188-89.

⁴⁹ Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis*, (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2013).

influenced Coleridge theologically “in three main areas: the Second Coming; the millennium (against his own initial conviction); and the visible church.”⁵⁰

A.3 *The Thesis*

The aim of this study is to argue that Irving is indeed a systematic thinker and examine how he came to understand and reconstruct the Pentecostal and eschatological character of the church, notably by re-appropriating the theological significance of the humanity of Christ.⁵¹

There will be seven chapters. The first chapter locates Irving the pastor-theologian in various contexts i.e. social, religious, philosophical, ecclesiastical and eschatological. This background information will form a backdrop to a later examination of Irving’s ecclesiology. Firstly, very little has been done on Irving’s ecclesiology which is a central thought in Irving’s dispensational system. This gives the rationale for this present study. Secondly, Irving has been portrayed either as a heretic or a profound theologian. It is to be argued that Irving’s thoughts are complex, and careful contextualising of Irving can give a better understanding of Irving the person and his thoughts taking into consideration the Rowite movement, 19th century premillennialism and in particular his mentor, S.T. Coleridge.

Chapter two will investigate the influence of Coleridge upon Irving’s doctrine of divine being and the humanity of Christ. Such Coleridgean influence has been understated. Coleridge provided the philosophical concept of the primacy of will and of the Trinity in relational terms. With this Coleridgean philosophy, Irving developed his doctrine of divine being in biblical, unitary, dynamic and relational terms. The resulting doctrine of the church from such an understanding of a triune God in whom there were inner relations between Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and outer relations with the creation and the world had a strong relational and dynamic character. This was in total contrast to Federal Calvinism’s understanding of God that was static and rationalistic.

⁵⁰ Elliott, *Irving*, 108.

⁵¹ Gunton asserts that K. Barth’s theology is systematic because he “understands Jesus Christ, as the Word of God, to operate as the centre or hub of a wheel from which various lines can be drawn in relative independence of one another.” C. E. Gunton, “Historical and Systematic Theology”, in C. E. Gunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 18. Likewise, the theology of Irving was systematic in this sense.

In addition, Coleridge's Logos philosophy is informative for an understanding of Irving's teaching about the humanity of Christ. Irving's assertion that Christ took on sinful nature has been a subject of past and present controversy. Not only did he emphasize that Christ took sinful nature, he also emphasized Christ's sinless humanity throughout the whole of his humiliated humanity. This apparent contradiction, sinful human nature and sinless humanity, could be better understood and reconciled as opposite poles of the Coleridgean Logos as the principle of reconciliation. With such a dialectic understanding of Christ's humanity, Irving opened up a theological space for the Spirit who acted upon the humanity of Christ. The Spirit also empowered the church as the body of Christ in missional witness to the world. Irving differed significantly from Coleridge in his emphasis for the whole humanity of Christ and such emphasis had profound implications for his understanding of the church. Innovatively, his understanding of the humanity of Christ creatively transcended his various contexts including Coleridge.

Chapter three examines the theological method of Irving's ecclesiology in relation to his understanding of divine purpose and the humanity of Christ. Reacting to the Enlightenment-rationalist notion of truth, Irving understood the church within a functional-experiential-communicational framework in accordance with the divine purpose of Christ and the church. Methodologically, his ecclesiology was rooted in his understanding of an internally and externally relational triune being who revealed himself historically and pre-eminently in the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. The divine purpose was to make the incomprehensible God comprehensible by the humanity of Christ as revealed in redemptive history. After Christ's ascension, the church was baptised by the Holy Spirit as the body of Christ and as the eschatological community moving toward the final revelation of the glory of God in the *parousia*. Innovatively, Irving's doctrine of the church focused upon the incarnational-recapitulative-eschatological movement of God in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the church's relational and ethical character.

Chapter four begins our detailed examination of Irving's ecclesiology. For Irving, Christ was both the bearer and giver of the Holy Spirit. In his humiliated humanity, Christ was baptised and carried out his work in the power of the Holy Spirit. After his ascension, the ascended humanity of Christ became the baptizer of the Holy Spirit upon the church on the day of Pentecost. The church as the body of Christ was then empowered by the Spirit to witness the exaltation of the ascended Christ to the world. Owing to Irving's emphasis on the spatial and temporal absence of the ascended

humanity of Christ from the church, Irving asserted the necessary work of the Spirit to empower the church as a communicational, visible and missional body of Christ to the world. As such, the identity of the church was intertwined with her missional character to reveal the grace and mercy of the divine being. Significantly and only in the Lord's Supper, the Spirit actualized the real presence of the humanity of Christ in the church and imparted ethical character to the church members who came to the Lord's Supper in faith. Thus, the spatial absence of the ascended humanity of Christ from the church became Irving's theological basis for conceiving of the church as the body of Christ.

In chapter five, we shall examine the eschatological and ethical character of Irving's ecclesiology. Irving, the millennial theologian, understood the church dynamically as an eschatological community in holiness on the way to *parousia*. Reacting to the over-confident and sterile 19th century postmillennialism, Irving asserted the imminent bodily return of Christ and championed premillennialism. Irving's dispensational system and his consequent premillennialism had two ecclesiological characteristics. Firstly, the ethical character of the church was grounded in the holiness of the flesh of Christ and made effective through the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the eschatological character of the church was typologically understood. The church was the "spiritual" community of Christ as the ascended humanity of Christ acted through the Holy Spirit whilst the Jewish nation continued to be God's people as the descendents of the Abrahamic covenant promise in accordance with the humiliated humanity of Christ. Significantly, the return of the ascended humanity of Christ became the foundational ground for the eschatological and ethical community in its movement towards the *parousia* without any hints of otherworldliness.

In chapter six, the teachings of Irving on Trinity, Christ, the Spirit and the church will be used as a lens through which the theological reconstruction of the church in China will be examined. The theology of a very prominent Chinese churchman Ding Guangxun who worked to contextualize, and reconstruct Chinese theology of the church will be discussed. Irving's teachings on the Trinity and the church will give creative insights to the theological reconstruction of the Chinese church.

In the final chapter, we shall conclude by giving some final comments from our study on Irving. It is important to note that this study is not meant to be an exhaustive study on Irving's ecclesiology. This study has not expounded Irving's teaching on the relationship between church and state. Irving asserted that kings "are the lieutenants of God, in whose sessions God himself doth sit and judge ... the civil magistrate hath authority, and it

is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church.”⁵² This study has not noted Irving’s attitude concerning the ecclesiastical establishment. Patterson’s study has clearly noted the increasingly critical responses of the Albury Circle towards various ecclesiastical establishments from 1829 to 1833. Earlier Irving hoped for a renewal within the establishment, but the later Irving longed for the imminent return of Christ and the total restitution of all things. This study has not commented on the interesting liturgical parallels between the Catholic Apostolic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. This has been done admirably by Flegg.

B. The Context in 19th Century Scotland

B.1 Introduction

Irving was greatly indebted to the spiritual heritage of the Scottish Church and the teaching of the Scottish reformers, yet he also reacted to his own tradition, demonstrating his seminal thinking. His pastoral experience in Glasgow and London, his sorrow in the death of his children, his warm domestic affections, his friendship with Thomas Chalmers, deep sympathy for John MacLeod Campbell’s teaching, subsequent deposition by the Scottish Church and his despair of the rigidity and exactness of the code of faith in the established church, his desire to see spiritual vitality and unity in the established church were all factors contributing to Irving’s theological thinking, development and articulation. Thus, it was through a combination of various major and minor influences, and juxtaposing contexts that a clearer and yet complex picture of Irving the person and his teaching might be evaluated and expounded.

Firstly, whilst Irving might be called a theologian, he demonstrated exemplarily the role of a shepherd of his flock. As a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he duly exercised his function to encourage his flock to re-examine the glory and power of the gospel that they had received despite the social problems, common diseases and ecclesiastical dissent that surrounded them. Irving the theologian must not be separated from Irving the pastor. He might be described as a pastor-theologian. However, Irving would see himself as a pastor more than a theologian.

Any re-examination of Irving’s theology must realize that he was first and foremost a pastor who was concerned with the physical and spiritual well-being of his flock. Thus, Irving’s theological method and doctrines

⁵² CS, v.

were not developed out of abstract theologizing. It is from this context that Irving the pastor-theologian and other members of the Rowite movement can speak afresh not only to the academy but to the church.⁵³ McFarlane rightly reminds us that Irving's distinctive Christology had "real pastoral cash value."⁵⁴ It was out of Irving's pastoral or soteriological concerns that he must defend the humanity of Christ. "In his solidarity with the human race, Christ identifies completely with a humanity in its being what it should not."⁵⁵

Secondly, contextualising Irving is important to understanding the person and his teaching. However, Irving studies have proved that an accurate picture of Irving the theologian is elusive. Oliphant's picture of Irving was of an exemplary pastor and a man of faith: "a man who trusted God to extremity, and believed in all Divine communications with faith as absolute as any patriarch . . . who desired to know nothing in heaven or earth, neither comfort, nor peace, nor rest, nor consolation, but the will and work of his Master."⁵⁶ Dallimore's picture is more derogatory: a genius but unwise and even lacking of sound mental balance; a man whose success made him arrogant; a charlatan who induced hysterical experiences in his hearers.⁵⁷ Gilley portrays Irving as the millennial prophet who split the early 19th century Protestant evangelical faith by emphasizing otherworldliness

⁵³ K.S. Kantzer rightly asserts the practical nature of systematic theology. "[It] is rooted in two things: first, the fundamental human need to know God better . . . and secondly because it seeks to enable humans to become rightly related to him and thus find their appropriate role in God's universe." K.S. Kantzer, "Systematic Theology as a Practical Discipline", in D. Lewis & A. McGrath (eds.), *Doing Theology for the People of God* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996) 22. A collection of essays has brilliantly argued the failures of modern theologians and churches alike to keep theology in the service of the church. These essays assert that (1) the church needs theology and theology needs the church and (2) the minister is always more than a theologian, but the minister is never less. See W.M. Alston Jr. (eds.), *Theology in the Service of the Church: Essays in Honour of Thomas W. Gillespie* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000). R.S. Anderson makes a recent sustained and successful attempt to bring theological reflection and Christian praxis together in the life of the church. See R.S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

⁵⁴ McFarlane, "Christology of Edward Irving", 145.

⁵⁵ McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit*, 138.

⁵⁶ Oliphant, *Irving*, 428.

⁵⁷ Dallimore, *Irving*, 174.

during the upheaval of Christendom.⁵⁸ Patterson attempts to present Irving as steering a middle course between Strachan's and Dallimore's view. Nevertheless, Patterson ends with an inconsistent Irving: "we are left with an Irving who can no more be proclaimed a Christological theologian as Christological heretic, enthusiast as rationalist, genius as fool."⁵⁹

Whilst Irving's teachings had occasionally an intense focus on the 19th century pretribulation-millennialism, our contention is that Irving's overall theology and ecclesiology consistently displayed a remarkable and creative Christ-centredness emphasizing both the humiliated and exalted humanity of Christ without departing from the orthodox Chalcedonian Christology.

This chapter attempts to ground Irving in his various contexts, appreciating him more comprehensively than previous attempts and identifying the key characters (Coleridge, Hooker and members of the Rowite movement) that shaped his thinking.⁶⁰ Whilst absolute certainty about Irving the man and his teaching may not be easy to grasp, this chapter serves to provide a more informed speculation by contextualising Irving the pastor-theologian.

Lastly, the 19th century was a century of transition. S. Wilkins & A. Padgett summarise the dynamics of interplay between philosophy and theology well.

Change was not limited to any one sphere but covered the entire spectrum of life in such a life that it is often difficult to distinguish between cause and

⁵⁸ Gilley, "Prophet", 95. A. Walker and M. Patterson have given an in-depth study of 19th century emerging millennialism arguing that both Darby and Irving are significant innovators of 19th century hope. See M. Patterson and A. Walker, "Our Unspeakable Comfort. Irving, Albury, and the Origins of the Pretribulation Rapture," *Fides et Historia* XXXI (1999), 66-81.

⁵⁹ Patterson, *Last Days*, 235.

⁶⁰ S. Wilkins and A. Padgett have asserted that in the 19th century West, philosophy and theology had a dynamic and symbiotic relationship, accompanying political and social revolutions. S. Wilkins & A.G. Padgett (eds.), *Christianity and Western Thought* (Downers Grove: IVP 2000), 11. Gilley's work gives an insightful account of Irving's premillennialism in the context of 19th century upheaval of Christendom paying special attention to the 18th century spiritual awakening from the 1730s and including the Clapham Sect spirituality. Gilley, "Prophet", 95-100. Patterson gives a helpful chart relating the events in the life of Irving with important events in Britain and Europe. Patterson, *Last Days*, 268-70. Whilst such background information is helpful, it does not refute our thesis that Irving is a consistent and creative Christocentric theologian with emphasis on the humanity of Christ.

effect. Instead, we find symbiotic relationship in which one engine, driving change, both feeds and is fed by others ... In the vitality of the nineteenth century temporal sequence is collapsed and even the logical order of ideas is difficult to untangle because of multiple influences. As a backdrop to the philosophical and theological dynamics ... there are corresponding political and social revolutions.⁶¹

Similarly, the 19th century had many story-lines e.g. French Catholicism, Romanticism and historicism. These story-lines were interwoven in various ways.⁶² How did the Rowite Movement respond to early 19th century religious thought? Horrocks's study of Erskine pays careful attention to various contexts affecting Erskine's thinking. Horrocks affirms that "Erskine resists narrow or exclusive categorisation, that in fact his association with other 'neologies' actually reinforces ... his essentially eclectic innovatory technique."⁶³ According to Horrocks, Erskine was an eclectic product of this broad context. Likewise, it might be argued that Irving was a product of his transforming context as he tapped into surrounding eclecticism both in Scotland and London.

Thus, studies that advocate Irving the Pentecostal theologian should take note of his premillennial influence in the Albury Circle; studies that advocate Irving the premillennialist need to take note of the influence of the Rowite movement, his churchmanship and reaction to his Presbyterian tradition. These contexts had symbiotic effects upon Irving who was a critical and creative thinker. It is our contention that Irving's encounter with Coleridge expanded his horizons of knowledge, possibly including the German Neo-Kantian influences, and that his arrival in London exposed him to new eclectic currents of thought. From that time onward, he became a well-known preacher and prolific writer covering both millennial and Christological themes. The rest of this chapter is to fill in all the various contexts important in contextualising Irving the person and his teaching.

⁶¹ S. Wilkens & A. Padgett, *Western Thought*, 11.

⁶² Editorial Introduction, in N. Smart, J. Clayton, P. Sherry and S. Katz (eds.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West, Vol. 1* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 2.

⁶³ Horrocks, *Erskine*, 180.