

Pentecost 1830

David J Keyser PhD

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Pentecost 1830

I. Introduction

I have been an admirer of Pastor Edward Irving (August 4, 1792 – December 7, 1834) since my studies in Edinburgh and St. Andrews in Scotland from 1998 through 2002. Irving has been called the father of Modern Pentecostalism because he preached what was then called the “two step” plan of God for his people; personal salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In 1829 the “Irvingite” revival broke loose and many received the baptism of the Spirit in the West coast of Scotland and in Irving’s Scottish church in London. Many young adults were healed; most of them of “consumption” which was most likely tuberculosis. But it was not the miraculous that got Irving in trouble with the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian.) It was his widely preached and published belief in the humanity of Jesus Christ. This in no way diminished his belief in Christ’s divinity. But this is difficult for many to understand. Another man, a layman, named Thomas Erskine was a friend of Irving. I also studied his writings of the period. I was looking for similarities between the Irvingite movement and the charismatic movement of the last 45 years. I found that there were many more similarities than there were differences.

Pentecost 1830

A. The Revival Begins

The West Coast Revival in Scotland and the accompanying manifestations in London were of considerable interest to Thomas Erskine even though he first endorsed these manifestations and later repudiated them.

An important preview to the outbreak of manifestations in the West Country and in London was the life and witness of a young woman named Isabella Campbell. Isabella had tuberculosis and was confined most of the time to her bed. She was very devout and during her confinement she had many extraordinary experiences of God. “In these experiences her countenance became radiant and her speech flowed forth at length in a spontaneous ecstasy of communion with God.”¹ She died in 1827 at the age of twenty. Isabella’s minister was Robert Story and he wrote a tract about her life and devotion which soon became widely spread in the West country. This small book caused many people to seek ecstatic experiences of God. It also caused many people to visit the Campbell home, a small farm at Fernicarry, which was inhabited by the widow Campbell and her two sons and remaining two daughters. The many visitors had the attitude of pilgrims visiting a shrine. One of Isabella’s sisters was named Mary and she was in her late teens when Isabella died.² Mrs. Oliphant, the popular

Pentecost 1830

biographer of the nineteenth century, says of Mary,

When Isabella died, a portion of her fame—her pilgrim visitors—her position as one of the most remarkable persons in the countryside, a pious and tender oracle—descended to her sister Mary. This was the young woman "of a very fixed and constant spirit," as Irving describes, whom Mr. Scott, a few months before, had vainly attempted to convince that the baptism with the Holy Ghost was distinct from the work of regeneration, but was as much to be looked and prayed for as the ordinary influences of the Spirit. Mary Campbell seems to have been possessed of gifts of mind and temperament scarcely inferior to genius, and, with all the personal fascination of beauty added to the singular position in which her sister's fame had left her—visited on terms of admiring friendship by people much superior to her in external rank, and doubtless influenced by the subtle arguments of one of the ablest men of the day,— it is impossible to imagine a situation more dangerous to a young, fervid, and impressionable

Pentecost 1830

imagination.³

Mary's fiancé died and she had grieved very heavily. Subsequently, Mary developed a form of tuberculosis which was worse than the strain that had killed her sister, Isabella. Her disease would form abscesses in her lungs which would burst and cause her much misery. Her brother, Samuel, was also very ill and not expected to live. Among the many visitors at the Campbell home was a group of aspiring missionaries. Irving's teachings about the afflictions of Satan which could be overcome by intensive prayer were known to them and when A. J. Scott, Irving's assistant, visited the area he spoke on the restoration of the gifts from Apostolic times. Scott preached in the pulpits of Row and Rosneath. Scott introduced Mary Campbell to the "Irvingite two-step concept of the Christian life," regeneration followed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit. She received this concept willingly.⁴ Before long the manifestations began.

Edward Irving reports these manifestations which he believed were the outcome of his two-step teaching.

There was no manifestation of the Holy Ghost until the end of March [1830], that is . . . but how surely the sound doctrines stated above had

Pentecost 1830

struck their roots into the heart of this young woman is made manifest from another letter, bearing date the 23d of March, of which the original is still preserved, and lies now before me. Along with some others, she had conceived the purpose of a mission to the heathen, and so was brought into the very condition in which the apostles were anterior to the day of Pentecost, when they had received their commission to go forth into all nations and preach the Gospel, but were commanded to tarry in Jerusalem until they should receive power from on high.⁵

Mrs. Oliphant comments on Irving's first contacts regarding the beginning of these manifestations when she says, "when these extraordinary events became known, they reached the ear of Irving by many means. One of his deacons belonged to a family in the district, who sent full and frequent accounts. Others of his closest friends, . . . looked on with wistful scrutiny, eagerly hopeful, yet not fully convinced of the reality of what they saw."⁶ Oliphant also includes the early participation of Thomas Erskine and Chalmers. "Mr. Erskine of Linlathen went upon a mission of personal inquiry, which persuaded his tender Christian soul of the

Pentecost 1830

unspeakable comforts of a new revelation. Almost every notable Christian man of the time took the matter into devout and anxious consideration. Even Chalmers, always cautious, inquired eagerly, and would not condemn.⁷ However, according to Oliphant, Chalmers was strangely silent on the subject.

Nothing can be more remarkable than the contrast between Irving's repeated appeals to his friend's standing as professor of theology, and the conduct of Dr Chalmers during the eventful and momentous period which had just commenced. During the following year several men, of the highest character and standing, were ejected from the Church of Scotland on theological grounds—grounds which Dr Chalmers, occupying the position of *Doctor, par excellence*, in the Scottish Church of the time, should have been the foremost; to examine, and the most influential in pronouncing upon. Dr Chalmers quietly withdrew from the requirements of his position in this respect. . . . Dr Chalmers preserved unbroken silence.⁸

Furthermore, in Oliphant's opinion, Chalmers should not have been so silent.

Pentecost 1830

It seems exactly the course of procedure which Dr Chalmers ought *not* to have adopted; and this becomes all the more apparent; in the light of Irving's frank appeals to the professor of theology—he whose business it was to discriminate most closely, and set forth most authoritatively, the difference between truth and error. . . . the chief representative of what is called in Scotland the theological faculty, sat apart and preserved unbroken silence, leaving the ship at a crisis of its fate, the army at the most critical point of the battle, to the guidance of accident or the crowd. It is impossible not to feel that this abandonment of his position, at so important a moment, was such an act of cowardice as must leave a lasting stain upon the reputation of one of the greatest of modern Scotsmen.⁹

Even as these manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the West Country were being reported, the Scots Presbytery at London was charging Edward Irving with heresy. Irving was being charged on allegations that he taught that Jesus Christ was a sinner because of his teaching that Christ assumed fallen humanity in order to

Pentecost 1830

redeem it.¹⁰

Gordon Strachan says, “On Sunday, 28th March, 1830, Miss Mary Campbell spoke in tongues and some days later was miraculously healed of consumption at her home at Fernicarry on the Gareloch in the parish of Roseneath, Dunbartonshire.”¹¹

In Irving’s own words in a veiled reference to Mary Campbell he says,

Sometime between the 23d of March 1830 . . . and the end of that month, on the evening of the Lord's day, the gift of speaking with tongues was restored to the Church. . . . It was on the Lord's day; and one of her sisters, along with a female friend, who had come to the house for that end, had been spending the whole day in humiliation, and fasting, and prayer before God, with a special respect to the restoration of the gifts. . . . When, in the midst of their devotion, the Holy Ghost came with mighty power upon the sick woman as she lay in her weakness, and constrained her to speak at great length, and with superhuman strength, in an unknown tongue to the astonishment of all who heard, and to her own great edification and enjoyment in God; “for he that

Pentecost 1830

speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself." She has told me that this first seizure of the Spirit was the strongest she ever had; and that it was in some degree necessary it should have been so, otherwise she would not have dared to give way to it.¹²

In just over a year these manifestations would also be occurring at Irving's church in London. "On 30th April, 1831 Mrs. Cardale spoke in tongues and prophesied at her home in London.¹³ Mrs. Cardale uttered three separate phrases which were interpreted by her as, 'The Lord will speak to His people – the Lord hasteneth His coming – the Lord cometh.' "¹⁴ On the morning of Sunday, 30th October, 1831, Miss Hall spoke in tongues in the vestry of Regent Square Church. Outbursts of tongues and prophecy interrupted the worship services on the following Sundays."¹⁵

Not far away from Fernicarry down the Loch was the town of Port Glasgow. There was a family here named McDonald which was composed of two brothers, James and George, and three sisters, Jane, Mary and Margaret. They all had been under the teaching of McLeod Campbell, A. J. Scott and Edward Irving. The sister Margaret was an invalid in her late teens. After Mary Campbell's experience was noised about Margaret McDonald received what she said

Pentecost 1830

was “the gift of prophecy and in just a few weeks both of the McDonald brothers also “spoke with tongues.”¹⁶ James McDonald was inspired to command his sister Margaret to be healed and she arose and declared herself to be healed. James then wrote a letter to Mary Campbell commanding her to be healed and she declared herself to be healed and came to visit the McDonalds. McLeod Campbell as minister of Row visited them and upon hearing James speak in tongues demanded an interpretation and George came forth with the words, “Behold He cometh – Jesus cometh.” Back at Margaret Campbell’s home many meetings were held with much rejoicing and many prayers for the blessings of the Holy Spirit. However, Samuel Campbell was not healed; he died. Mary Campbell moved to Helensburgh for a short time to share her experiences and then she moved to London to become a part of Irving’s church there.¹⁷ James and George McDonald refused to go to Irving’s church in London for fear of the gifts being abused there. They were fearless in the cholera epidemic at Port Glasgow entering the houses of the sick to pray for them. They both died in 1835, James on February 2nd and George on September 14th, both of tuberculosis, the disease from which Mary Campbell had been healed. They were both known for their “genuine religious passion.”¹⁸

It is the opinion of Arnold Dallimore that

Pentecost 1830

the manifestation of tongues in the West Country which began with the Campbells and the McDonalds did not come as an unexpected outpouring from heaven, but was something that was expected and came gradually as the frequent ecstatic speech “gave way to incomprehensible sounds.” Furthermore, Dallimore insists that these manifestations did not arise as a result of systematic expository preaching and teaching but as a result of the ministry of McLeod Campbell, A. J. Scott and Edward Irving. Dallimore says that Campbell’s ministry was notable for its fervour and Scott’s for its emphasis on the gifts.¹⁹ Mrs. Oliphant affirms Scott’s conviction that “the supernatural powers once bestowed upon the church were not merely the phenomena of one miraculous age, but an inheritance “for the church of their day.”²⁰ Irving’s ministry was notable for its emphasis on the soon return of Christ. Dallimore insists that the condition among these young adults who were involved was not one of “strong biblical learning” but of “high religious emotion.”²¹

At first Irving’s parishioners in London, including the elders and trustees, stood with him against the presbytery. But a year later after pleading with him to stop these occurrences, they evoked the authority of the Trust Deed in March of 1832.²² Irving’s response to this was as gracious as it could be under the circumstances. In a letter to the trustees he said, “But if it be so

Pentecost 1830

that you, the trustees, must act to prevent me and my flock from assembling to worship God, according to the Word of God, in the house committed into your trust, we will look unto God for preservation and safe keeping. Farewell! May the Lord have you in His holy keeping! Your faithful and affectionate friend, Edward Irving.”²³

“Irving's trial began on 26th April, 1832. On 2nd May, after three days' hearing, the court decided against him and he was ordered to be removed from his charge. On Friday 4th May, he found himself locked out of his church.”²⁴ Pursuant to this the Presbytery of Annan under instructions from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland deposed him on 13 March 1833.²⁵ McLeod Campbell had been deposed at the General Assembly of 1831 when Irving's teachings on the humanity of Christ had first been condemned.²⁶

Edward Irving began developing his theology on these matters early as some debate concerning the manner of the bestowal of the gifts had already surfaced.

And having thus brought my narrative down to the great event of the Holy Spirit's again making his voice to be heard, I shall stay here a little; and, before proceeding further, make one or two observations, which could not be

Pentecost 1830

so well introduced into the narrative. The first is concerning the manner of its bestowal, without any outward sign or demonstration, as on the day of Pentecost, and without the laying on of the hands of an apostle; but in the exercise of faith and prayer. That the Holy Ghost was commonly bestowed in the exercise of faith and prayer, without a visible sign, is not only manifest from the express promise of the Lord (Luke 9:5-14); but also from the example of the Samaritan church (Acts 8.15). And because faith and prayer come by preaching, the Holy Ghost descended upon the Gentiles at the conclusion of Peter's sermon to them (Acts 10.45); and in the case of the Ephesian church it attended upon baptism. In two of these cases the laying on of the hands of the apostles did intervene, but in the other it intervened not, which proveth that it is not necessary. When any one will shew me a passage of Scripture expressly declaring that the laying on of the hands of the apostles is necessary to the receiving of spiritual gifts, I will give heed to him; but till then I will believe the Lord, who declares that nothing is necessary but

Pentecost 1830

to ask and to seek. ²⁷

The majority of the members of the church at Regent Square had departed with Edward Irving and formed a new church which they named the Catholic Apostolic Church. In November of 1832 they named the first of their “twelve Apostles” and also named Irving as the “Angel” or Pastor of the new congregation on 5 April 1834. Irving died only eight months later on December 7, 1834 at the age of 42. The diagnosis was consumption. ²⁸

Among religious revivals over the centuries since the New Testament day of Pentecost few have been accompanied with the manifestation of tongues. In most cases, with or without tongues, the revival has been a spontaneous overflow of intense religious feelings. ²⁹ According the Gordon Strachan, in Irving’s day this was not the case. “For unlike any previous manifestations of the Spirit,” these manifestations “were occasioned not by the overflow of powerful religious feeling but by faithful response to the systematic study and preaching of the Word of God. Theological understanding was central to all that happened and preceded all forms of experience of spiritual gifts. It is the centrality of a coherent theological system which makes the Pentecost of 1830-32 unique and quite distinct from all previous revivals.”³⁰ Therefore, Strachan and Dallimore take positions as to the origins of this revival which differ.

Pentecost 1830

Beginning with a series of sermons on the sacrament of baptism in 1827 Irving had gradually come to the conclusion that since the spiritual gifts were equally as supernatural as the sanctification process then it must have been a lack of teaching and of faith in the church that had deprived the church of the spiritual gifts throughout church history. He could find no scriptural justification for the absence of these gifts within the church.³¹ He says, “Four years ago, about the time of the opening of the National Scotch Church, when teaching to my people the orthodox and Catholic doctrine of the holy sacraments, I shewed from the constitution of Christian baptism (Acts 2: 38, 39), that the baptised Church is still held by God to be responsible for the full and perfect gift of the Holy Ghost, as the same had been, received by our blessed Lord upon his ascension unto glory, and by Him shed down upon his church on the day of Pentecost, and by them exercised in all the ways recorded in the book of Acts and the epistles of the holy apostles.”³²

It was important to Irving that the origins of the revival be carefully researched. Irving believed that the people who had come into the experience of tongues and other spiritual gifts, had been influenced by John McLeod Campbell who was in the process of being deposed from his pulpit in Row (Rhu) on the Gareloch for teaching the love of God for all men.³³ Before long Irving was teaching on these manifestations and urging his

Pentecost 1830

congregation in London to seek similar experiences. “It was nearly a year later that Mrs. Cardale became the first person to speak in tongues in a house prayer meeting, and six months after that that Miss Hall became the first person to speak in tongues during Sunday worship in Regent Square Church.”³⁴

In the summer of 1830 Irving sought all possible confirmations regarding the manifestations and events. He hunted “eye and ear witnesses, men of reputation, elders of the church” from the Port Glasgow and the Gareloch area. Irving was determined to leave no “stone unturned in order to come at the truth.”³⁵ The manifestations had been continuing in meetings in the MacDonald’s house and in larger gatherings in Helensburgh. On one occasion Mary Campbell actually wrote in tongues and prophesied. There was beginning to be national recognition and publications regarding the revival. Crowds were gathering from all over Scotland and England. One of the MacDonald sisters wrote that “ever since Margaret was raised and the gift of tongues given, the house has been filled every day with people from all parts of England, Scotland and Ireland.” In Helensburgh “it was recorded that Mary Campbell had attracted 'merchants, divinity students, writers to the Signet, advocates' and 'gentlemen who rank high in society come from Edinburgh’.”³⁶ The people wanted to make their own judgments regarding these events. They were

Pentecost 1830

divided. Some thought that they were genuine and some were convinced that they were counterfeits. The Rev. Robert Story, parish minister at Roseneath, knew the Campbell family very well and he visited Mary Campbell to form his own conclusions. He reported to Thomas Chalmers then Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh. Chalmers was waiting for a first hand opinion. Story reported to Chalmers “I am persuaded you will be prepared to conclude that these things are of God and not of men.”³⁷ Irving received reports from his friends in the surrounding area.³⁸ Irving says that he also received information from “many of the most spiritual members of my flock, who went down to see and hear.”³⁹

Furthermore, “Towards the end of August a party of six of his members led by Mr. John Bate Cardale, a solicitor, travelled North from London and spent three weeks in Port Glasgow to see and hear for themselves.”⁴⁰ Cardale and his party met many of those who had received spiritual gifts and went to many meetings where the gifts were exercised. Irving found that Cardale and two others, Mr. Henderson and Dr. Thompson, were fully convinced of “the reality of the hand of God” in the West Country manifestations.⁴¹ Their report was united and sure in two aspects: the work was supernatural, and the tongues were languages. Since Cardale was a lawyer and Thompson was a physician, the report was received by many.⁴² This was reported in the December issue of *The*

Pentecost 1830

Morning Watch, a periodical that they had instituted to, among other things, report on the revival. In *The Morning Watch*, they said,

These persons, while uttering the unknown sounds; as also while speaking in the Spirit in their own language, have every appearance of being under supernatural direction. The manner and voice are (speaking generally) different from what they are at other times, and on ordinary occasions. This difference does not consist merely in the peculiar solemnity and fervour of manner (which they possess), but their whole deportment gives an impression, not to be conveyed in words, that their organs are made use of by supernatural power. In addition to the outward appearances, their own declarations, as the declarations of honest, pious, and sober individuals, may with propriety be taken in evidence. They declare that their organs of speech are made use of by the Spirit of God; and that they utter that which is given to them, and not the expressions of their own conceptions, or their own intention.⁴³

The personalities of those involved were also

Pentecost 1830

examined.

They are totally devoid of anything like fanaticism or enthusiasm; but, on the contrary, are persons of great simplicity of character, and of sound common sense. They have no fanciful theology of their own: they make no pretensions to deep knowledge: they are the very opposite of sectarians, both in conduct and principle: they do not assume to be teachers: they are not deeply read; but they seek to be taught of God, in the perusal of, and meditation on, his revealed word, and to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.⁴⁴

Throughout the Autumn of 1830 various prayer meetings were held around London in private homes. At these meetings they prayed for “an outpouring of the Holy Ghost.” Some meetings were held at Mr. Cardale’s house. These meetings were not confined to the homes of the members of Irving’s church alone. People from many churches were involved. It is not apparent that Irving took part in any of these meetings. A Miss Fancourt in England was healed on October 20th of 1830. This healing was entirely independent of the healings of the McDonalds and Mary Campbell in Scotland and was taken as a

Pentecost 1830

sign of the movement of the Spirit by those in London.⁴⁵

It was shortly after Cardale's return to London with his party that Thomas Erskine visited Port Glasgow and spent six weeks in the Macdonald's home. In his two publications which followed his visit, *On The Gifts Of The Spirit* and *The Brazen Serpent* Erskine heartedly affirmed the manifestations.⁴⁶ By this time Irving had already decided on the genuineness of the manifestations. Cardale's report, Erskine's publications and a meeting with Mary Campbell served only as confirmations. Irving also took these manifestations as confirmation of his position on the human nature of Christ. He affirmed that the power in Christ's ministry which had been provided by the Holy Spirit and not His divinity was available to the church as well. The manifestations also confirmed to Irving that the return of Christ was immanent. They were also eschatological events.⁴⁷

Irving believed that the manifestations themselves could only have come after his preaching on the true humanity of Christ which prepared the church for them. Irving said that the Holy Spirit "doth not witness to any system of man, Calvinistic or Arminian, or to any ordinance of man, Episcopalian or Presbyterian; but to Jesus, who suffered for us in the flesh, who shareth with us his life and power, and cometh with us in glory."⁴⁸

Pentecost 1830

Drummond says, “Irving’s faith was simple and absolute: he had neither historic sense nor knowledge of the mass of motives and cross-currents which are found in men’s minds and hearts. He was unable to control the current of prophecy he had set in motion.”⁴⁹ In his simplicity Irving had a way with people, especially the crowds. One summer Sunday afternoon shortly after their ejection from the Regent Square Church Irving was preaching to a large band of followers out-of-doors. A lost child was held up for the parents to claim. No one came forth. Irving said, “Give me the child” and promptly held it to his chest as he continued his preaching. He wove into his message the importance of every believer being childlike and at the end of the service the parents who had seen the child in Irving’s arms in the make shift pulpit came forward to claim it. Actions like these endeared him to the people.⁵⁰

Oliphant’s final analysis is most interesting.

It was thus that the agitating and extraordinary chapter in the history of the modern Church, which we have hereafter to deal with, began. It is not in my province, happily, to attempt any decision *as* to what was the real character of these marvelous phenomena. But the human

Pentecost 1830

circumstances surrounding these earliest appearances are remarkable enough to claim the fullest exposition. The first speaker with tongues was precisely the individual whom, under the supposition that they were no more supernatural than other elevated utterances of passion or fervour, one would naturally fix upon as the probable initiator of such a system. An amount of genius and singular adaptability which seems to have fitted her for taking a place in society far above that to which she had been accustomed; a faculty of representing her own proceedings so as, whether wrong or right, to exculpate herself, and interest even those who were opposed to her; a conviction, founded perhaps upon her sister's well-known character, and the prominent position she herself was consequently placed in, that something notable was expected from her; and the joint stimulus of admiration and scoffing—all mingled with a sincere desire to serve God and advance His glory, were powerful agencies in one young, enthusiastic, and inexperienced spirit. And when to all these kindling elements came that fire of suggestion, at first rejected,

Pentecost 1830

afterwards warmly received, and blazing forth at last in so wonderfully literal an answer, it is impossible not to feel how many earthly predisposing causes there were which corresponded with, even if they did not actually produce, the results. In saying so much, I leave the truth or falsehood of the “tongues” entirely out of the question. I do not judge Mary Campbell, much less numerous others who, without the excitement of Miss Campbell’s special surroundings, afterwards exhibited the same power.

51

Irving’s faith was indeed simple. But his unawareness of men’s motives was his weakness. In seeking to understand the entire sequence of events involved both in the West Country of Scotland and in London a critical examination should be applied to each side. Many then and now believe that the entire collection of phenomena was no more than a sort of mass hysteria. Others side with Irving in affirming all the manifestations as genuine and liken them to the precursor of the more recent pentecostal and charismatic movements. If the second opinion is closer to the truth, this writer would add a strong caveat. Drummond’s judgement of Irving as having “neither historic sense nor knowledge of

Pentecost 1830

the mass of motives and cross-currents which are found in men's minds and hearts" ⁵² is very astute and equally applicable to present day movements. Any genuine manifestation of the Spirit of God among post modern Westerners will be accompanied by bogus manifestations which are the result of these "motives and cross-currents." It is nearly impossible to separate the genuine from the counterfeit. The aversion to "enthusiasm" in the nineteenth century complicated this task. This is particularly true concerning the gifts of utterance which are so susceptible to subjective beliefs and opinions. The healings can be genuine, but there is no record in Erskine's day that there was any valid medical confirmation unless we presume that Dr. Thompson's silence regarding specific healings, as he was sent to investigate, is in itself a medical confirmation of supernatural healings.

B. Erskine's Endorsement Of The Manifestations

In his tract on *The Gifts Of The Spirit* and in *The Brazen Serpent* which followed immediately thereafter Erskine had boldly supported the manifestations of the West Country revival as valid expressions of the power of the Holy Spirit for his own day. He opens *The Gifts Of The Spirit* with these words.

Pentecost 1830

IT is very awful and very wonderful to see with what ease and undisturbedness of mind, a man professing to believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, declaring God's judgment concerning all things, can, whilst he reads the descriptions given of Christianity and of the church of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles and the Apostolic Epistles, make the full admission that these descriptions would not apply to the Christianity or the church of the present day. This ease is just the opposite of the peace of God—it is a peace away from God.⁵³

The *Gifts Of The Spirit* treatise is not just a defense of the charismatic gifts by Erskine but a full account of his own thinking on the continuance of the supernatural and the Headship of Christ. However, first he affirms what he himself had witnessed among the people of the West Country in Scotland.

After witnessing what I have witnessed among these people, I cannot think of any person decidedly condemning them as impostors, without a feeling of great alarm. I believe that it is of God—and therefore that those who

Pentecost 1830

lightly scorn them are contending against God. It certainly is not a thing to be lightly or rashly believed, but neither is it a thing to be lightly or rashly rejected. I say again, that I cannot but hail it, as a blessed prospect, that our God, who has so long refrained himself and held His peace, and kept himself concealed—and who has been as it were shut out of His own world for so many centuries, should again shew Himself, and claim the place that is due to him—and discover to man his utter emptiness, and insignificance. ⁵⁴

The statement “I believe that it is of God” is definitive and his commentary regarding rejecting the phenomena is clear and extensive. He then goes on to support “a jealous scrutiny into any particular pretension to miraculous gifts,” but adds that “a jealousy or unbelief of their existence altogether, or of their re-appearance, is quite contrary to the law and the testimony—being nothing less than a form of atheism.” ⁵⁵ Then Erskine links the manifestations to his eschatology. He says that “these things which are now taking place, are just signs of the times.” He notes that most of the interpretation of tongues that had been given, some of which he also witnessed, “tells of the near coming of Christ,” and that “the first word

Pentecost 1830

of interpretation that was given, the first word that broke the long and deathlike silence, was, "Behold he cometh with clouds." He says, "it is a true thing, however strange it may appear to man. The God who made the world is again making His own voice heard in it. And is it not a thing to be desired?"⁵⁶

Erskine discusses the meaning of tongues and interpretation at some length in this tract and refutes arguments against them. He says by way of personal observation
of the unknown tongues,

For the languages are distinct, well inflected, well compacted languages, they are not random collections of sounds, they are composed of words of various lengths with the natural variety, and yet possessing that commonness of character, which marks them to be one distinct language. I have heard many people speak gibberish, but this is not gibberish, it is decidedly well compacted language.⁵⁷

Erskine even takes great pains in *Gifts* to link his endorsement of these gifts to his central concept of Christ as the Head of the body thus showing that he is not intending to merely report his observations of the phenomena but that he has

Pentecost 1830

worked them into his overall theological views. He sees the manifestations as an extension of the ministry of the Head of the Body through the then present Body of Christ. “Christ hath become one flesh with you, that you might become one spirit with Him. He hath tabernacled in your nature,— He is in you as the root is in the branch.”⁵⁸

Similarly, in *The Brazen Serpent*, Erskine affirmed present day manifestations of tongues and interpretation as a sign from God to his generation. Erskine is adamant in his position against empty religion. “Men have *a religion*, instead of *a God*,” he writes, and for this reason “every thing supernatural is rejected.” The people of his own day, he suggests, do not want a relationship with the living God. This causes them to not only “shrink from the thought of the voice of God being again heard on the earth” but also to shrink from the “thought of the personal advent of Christ.”⁵⁹

Erskine sees this attitude as also affecting one of his favorite issues, the necessity for personal assurance which springs from the sacrificial death of Christ. Personal assurance “calls on them to meet God’s eye.” And “they would have no objection to the doctrine of God’s universal love if that love were the benevolence of the philosophers—but they cannot bear the mention of a love of God unto death for every man, that looks every man intensely in the face, and demands from him a continual response.”⁶⁰ All in all this inappropriate attitude among

Pentecost 1830

Erskine's fellowmen causes them, in Erskine's opinion, to dislike "the recurrence of miracles." Manifestations make God seem too "living" to be comfortable. But he affirms in *Serpent* just as he did in *Gifts*, "it is true that miracles have recurred. I cannot but tell what I have seen and heard. I have heard persons, both men and women, speak with tongues and prophesy, that is, speak in the spirit to edification and exhortation, and comfort." And again Erskine links these manifestations to the Second Coming.⁶¹

Erskine's understanding of the tongues manifestation includes two other aspects. Even though he sees it as the "lowest of the spiritual gifts," he also sees it as the most permanent in "the present outpouring." Also, he sees the tongues manifestation as a "sign to unbelievers" and affirms again that he is living in an "age of unbelievers" and links it to Old Testament prophecy: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people." (Is.28:11) For Erskine it is a sign of the age and "it is a sign to those who have mistaken a system of theology, the precept of man, for the spirit of God."⁶²

Erskine's Recantation Of His Endorsement

The earliest record of Erskine's reversal on the matter of these manifestations is in a letter to his cousin, Miss Rachel Erskine, written from Linlathen on 21 December 1833. This is three

Pentecost 1830

years after he so enthusiastically embraced the phenomena as valid expressions of the Holy Spirit as shown above. In this letter Erskine says,

“My mind has undergone a considerable change since I last interchanged thoughts with you. I have seen reason to disbelieve that it is the Spirit of God which is in Mr. __, and I do not feel that I have a stronger reason to believe that it is in others.”⁶³

There is little reason to doubt that the reference here is to Edward Irving. Erskine goes on in this same letter to say, “You know that Mr. Scott is entirely separated from Mr. Irving and his church, believing it, as I understand, to be a delusion partly, and partly a spiritual work not of God.”⁶⁴ Sandy Scott had been Irving’s assistant. There was a lot of turmoil following the West Country manifestations. Much of this turmoil and disunity centered around Edward Irving and the new Catholic Apostolic Church formed by Irving’s followers. In a letter to Mrs. MacNabb in January of 1834, Erskine wrote:

We have had great trial about the spiritual gifts. The spirit which has been manifested has not been a spirit of union, but of discord. I do not believe that the introduction of these gifts,

Pentecost 1830

whatever they may be, has been to draw men simply to God. I think the effect has rather been to lead men to take God, as it were, on trust from others; to be satisfied with God having declared something to another, and not to expect the true fulfillment of the promise, "They shall all be taught of the Lord" . . . I am very much shaken, indeed, as to the whole matter of the gifts. The many definite predictions that have been given and that have entirely failed when tried. ⁶⁵

Erskine could not abide any mediator between the believer and Christ Himself and for him a prophecy left unfulfilled was enough reason to doubt the gift of prophecy. For Erskine, Christology is far more important than pneumatology. Anything, even a manifestation, which can experientially weaken the place of Christ in our relationship with God in Erskine's mind, is unacceptable. Therefore, pneumatology is displaced by Christology. The disunity was amplified in Erskine's mind by the issue of Sandy Scott.

Erskine did not hold the expulsion from the Kirk of Scott or Irving against them. As a matter of fact, that would have been more of a recommendation to Erskine considering his estimate of the condition of the Church of Scotland

Pentecost 1830

at the time. He considered this condition to be “torpid.”⁶⁶ William Hanna comments,

The ten years from 1828 to 1838, from his fortieth to his fiftieth year—intervening betwixt two lengthened visits to the Continent,—formed the most memorable period in Mr. Erskine's life. This period witnessed the rise and progress of what was commonly called the Row or Gairloch Heresy; the springing up in alarm and indignation of the Calvinism of the Church of Scotland, to put its foot upon this movement, and stamp it out; the alleged miraculous manifestations, the healings, the speaking with tongues, the prophesyings at Port-Glasgow; the shooting up into the heavens ecclesiastical of that most brilliant meteor, Edward Irving, and the sad and sudden quenching of the great light in a great darkness, out of that darkness the strange form emerging of a Church, in its order and offices novel, elaborate, ornate, complete. Of all these Mr. Erskine was not only a highly interested spectator; in most of them he was deeply and personally concerned.⁶⁷

Pentecost 1830

In addition to the turmoil there was the issue of inspiration versus organization. Erskine was very close to Sandy Scott and his wife. The new organization of the Catholic Apostolic Church was formed around the personality of Irving himself. The Scotts had come to consider Irving's charisma as what they referred to as "animal magnetism."⁶⁸ They also believed that Irving had given in to the "strength of the ecclesiastical" as a result of the influence of the High Church clergy in London who had sympathized with Irving's "prophetical views." On top of this was the issue of whether "organisation produces life" or whether "life alone can organise." As a result the Scotts had totally separated themselves from Irving and even a last attempt to reconcile failed when Irving told Mrs. Scott, "Mr. Scott or I am in dangerous error. The end will show."⁶⁹ Erskine's confidence in the movement and in the leaders was quickly eroding.

Erskine's confidence in the movement was not, however, directly linked to his beliefs about what should be the conditions within the church regarding manifestations. He goes on to affirm,

This does not change my mind as to what the endowment of the Church is, if she had faith, but it changes me as to the present estimate that I form of her condition. God is our all, and having God, we have lost nothing. These gifts

Pentecost 1830

are but signs and means of grace; they are not grounds of confidence; they are not necessarily intercourse with God; they are not holiness, nor love, nor patience ; they are not Jesus. But surely they shall yet appear, when God has prepared men to receive them. ⁷⁰

This is Erskine's affirmation that the charismatic New Testament manifestations should be a normal part of church life. Erskine does stand with Irving in his reason for the continuation or non-continuation of these gifts: the faith of the church. He insists that such gifts are not "grounds for confidence." When he says that they are "not necessarily intercourse with God," ⁷¹ this is a statement greatly different in zeal from his initial affirmations of them. He sees the fruits of the Spirit as a firmer proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit within the church. However, he continues to believe that these gifts will manifest when the church is properly prepared to receive them. There is no evidence that Erskine ever recanted his belief in the place of these gifts in the church or his confidence that they would one day be restored.

Nor does his rejection of these gifts amount to a total rejection of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the West Country revival. He continues in the same letter to Rachel Erskine,

Pentecost 1830

I cannot believe that there has been no pouring out of the Spirit at Port-Glasgow and in London; but I feel that I have to wait in every case upon the Lord, to receive in my heart directly from Himself my warrant to acknowledge anything to be of His supernatural acting, and I have erred in not waiting for this.⁷²

He continues to believe that the Holy Spirit was poured out in the West Country. His only regret is that he was carried away with his endorsement of the gifts at that time.

Four years later Erskine published the retraction of his endorsement of these manifestations in a special note at the end of the Conclusions to *The Doctrine Of Election*. Here he says that he believed that those who had been involved were most sincere and had a “marked native simplicity and truth of character.” His reference here was particularly regarding the McDonald brothers who were prominent in that West Country revival. He makes it clear that he is referring to “the remarkable manifestations” which he had formerly supposed to be “miraculous.” For Erskine to remain steadfast to such an affirmation after the manifestations had slowed or ceased or had been in some way disgraced by turmoil and self interest would have been difficult. Erskine does, however, affirm his ultimate position when

Pentecost 1830

he says, “ But I still continue to think, that to any one whose expectations are formed by, and founded on, the declarations of the New Testament, the disappearance of those gifts from the church must be a greater difficulty than their re-appearance could possibly be.”⁷³

There was a part of Erskine that hungered for the appearance of such things but could no longer endorse what he had witnessed as genuine. Erskine’s disappointment over the divisions and turmoil in the movement that he had witnessed was taking its toll. Erskine’s continued belief in some type of overall genuineness in the West Country revival can be seen in a letter to Vinet written in December of 1844, seven years after his published denial of the gifts in 1837 and eleven years after his recantation to his cousin Rachel in 1833. He writes,

I am very thankful that you have got any good out of the "Brazen Serpent." During the time, that I wrote it I was conscious of communion with God in my own spirit; and whether the view which I take of the history be just or not, I believe that it contains much of the meaning of Christianity.⁷⁴

It should be noted here that by 1844 Erskine still acknowledged a profound personal spiritual experience during the time of the revival and of

Pentecost 1830

being “conscious of communion with God in [his] own spirit.” In fact, by 1844 he also seems in doubt as to whether his view of that history was “just.” He still affirmed that *The Brazen Serpent* contained “much of the meaning of Christianity.” This could indicate that it was most likely the turmoil and the resulting disunity which immediately followed that revival that turned Erskine against the authenticity of the manifestations.

C. Conclusions On The Impact Of The West Coast Revival And Its Fall-Out On Thomas Erskine

In the end Erskine could not accept the validity of any manifestation which was not accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit, especially Christian love. It was equally difficult for him to see how God could allow such extremes and errors of practice. It was all or nothing. And for Erskine, as far as the manifestations were concerned, in the end it had to be nothing. But his conviction concerning the presence of the Spirit continued not only in his own confession as found in these letters and notes but also in his continued emphasis in his writings throughout his life on an active and dynamic Holy Spirit. The statistical research in chapter six and the appendix of this thesis clearly reflects Erskine’s continuing emphasis in his writings and letters after this period on a Holy Spirit who is the subject of many powerful verbs.

Pentecost 1830

There is a pronounced increase in this dynamism of the Holy Spirit in his writings after the revival which does not diminish even after Erskine's recantation of his endorsement of the manifestations. It seems clear that overall Erskine always attributed a powerful dynamic presence to the Holy Spirit after the West Country revival regardless of his opinion of the then present-day manifestations during the revival.

II. Erskine's Christology Contrasted With Irving's

In this chapter we shall examine the Christology and resulting pneumatology of Thomas Erskine compared to that of Edward Irving as taken from their own writings. Erskine and Irving along with John McLeod Campbell comprised the “influential triumvirate” in nineteenth century Scottish theology.⁷⁵ Christology effects pneumatology. A particularly high Christology, perhaps even bordering on the docetic, can produce a low pneumatology. If it is affirmed that Christ did what he did during his earthly ministry by the power of his own divinity, then the need for the power of the Holy Spirit in his ministry is diminished. However, if it is affirmed that Christ accomplished his entire ministry as a man by the power of the Holy Spirit, then it can be said that the corresponding Christology is lower.

Pentecost 1830

A. Three Men

Edward Irving (1792 – 1834) was a Scottish pastor and Reformed theologian who was put into a position by the circumstances of his day that required him to prove to his own satisfaction that one could be both Reformed and Charismatic or Pentecostal. His writings are clear although antiquated in wording, often using Elizabethan phrasing sounding very much like the King James version of the Bible. He produced much in a short time and was apparently subsequently driven to poor health and an early death by the controversy that he did so much to fuel. Irving wrote as a theologian defending experience. He was deposed from the Kirk in 1833 for heresy regarding the humanity of Christ and died of pneumonia in 1834.⁷⁶

Since Irving died in disrepute, much about him was soon forgotten. Carlyle reports in the autumn of 1866, “He was scornfully forgotten at the time of his death; having indeed sunk a good while before out of the notice of the more intelligent classes. There has since been and now is, in the new theological generation, a kind of revival of him, on rather weak and questionable terms, sentimental mainly, and grounded on no really correct knowledge or insight; which, however, seems to bespeak some continuance of vague remembrance, for a good while yet, by that

Pentecost 1830

class of people and many that hang by them.”⁷⁷ It would be a long time before there was any significant interest in Irving again. Irving’s followers formed the Catholic Apostolic Church, but Irving died shortly thereafter. The continuation of that denomination was a work of Irving’s followers not of Irving himself. Ultimately, Edward Irving is not remembered for his pneumatology but for his Christological position on the true humanity of Jesus. Karl Barth picks up on the theme after reading *The Doctrine Of The Person of Jesus Christ* by Scottish professor H. R. Mackintosh. Barth says that it had been concluded by some that “the Son of God when He came into the world did not then assume a human nature such as this nature was when it came forth from God’s hand, before the fall, before it had in Adam . . . become sinful and mortal. On the contrary, it was a human nature such as was in Adam after the Fall and is in all his successors. . . . The same doctrine was delivered about 1827 by the Scottish Theologian Edward Irving and it led to his excommunication.”⁷⁸ In 1988 Gordon Strachan, published his *The Pentecostal Theology Of Edward Irving* which sparked a present day revival of interest in Irving and his writings.

Irving, like Erskine, hoped to see revival in Scotland and he believed that a recognition of Christ’s true human nature and of his dependence on the Holy Spirit would contribute to this

Pentecost 1830

revival. He sees evidences of revival when he says,

At length, O God, the church hath awaked; but let it not be to the mental impotence of the lunatic, or to the frenzied madness of the maniac. It seems more like the madness of the maniac among the schismatics; but, oh! suffer it not to be impotence of thought and paralysis of feeling in thy church. The Church of Scotland is awaking; her chains of sleep are breaking: O God! may it not be to destroy those her sons who have aroused her out of the sleep of death, in which she might have lain till the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.⁷⁹

Irving's hope for revival in the Kirk is not linked merely to the appearance of manifestations. It is also linked to an understanding of the Person and holiness of the Son manifested in human flesh. Out of this flows the manifestations and the revival that they so desired.

We have the Father ever active in supporting and glorifying his Son, and reducing all things to his dominion;

Pentecost 1830

we have the Son ever active in supporting the fallen creature; we must also have the Holy Ghost ever active in some equally continuous and necessary way of action. And this we exhibit from the first in his generation, which put Holy-Ghost life into the human substance; then in his holy life, which was the life of a regenerate man a continual Holy-Ghost life (Luke i.); in his miracles, and knowledge, and wisdom, which was by the anointing of the same Holy Ghost.⁸⁰

John McLeod Campbell (1800 – 1872) was also a Scottish pastor who was deposed in 1831 for his position on the universal free offer of the Gospel. He labored patiently at his little chapel in Glasgow for many years until he was finally recognized as a theologian with an honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow primarily due to his book *The Nature Of The Atonement* which had been published in 1856.⁸¹ We include Campbell here as he was both a contemporary and a friend of both Irving and Erskine. Campbell communicated with both Irving and Erskine. However, the comparisons in this chapter are primarily between Erskine and Irving.

The statistics in this thesis indicate that

Pentecost 1830

Thomas Erskine (1788 – 1870) does indeed have a strong pneumatology. This is not, however, a traditional Trinitarian pneumatology which is developed by defining and contrasting the persons within the Godhead. Erskine was not interested in this. “The distinction of persons in the Divine nature we cannot comprehend.”⁸² Erskine’s massive references to the actions of the Holy Spirit, especially in his post-revival works, display a decidedly dynamic pneumatology as defined in John McIntyre’s taxonomy of pneumatologies. This is further discussed in the following chapter ten. It is possible that Erskine’s friend, Edward Irving, can provide a more traditional pneumatology as well as some dynamic pneumatology which is a companion to Erskine’s.

Erskine’s biographical information and his intellectual, cultural and theological context is presented in chapters one through four of this thesis. Erskine hungered for the supernatural and for revival in Scotland. Erskine says that the world dislikes the recurrence of miracles, but that it is true that miracles have recurred. “I cannot but tell what I have seen and heard. I have heard persons, both men and women, speak with tongues and prophesy.” He believed that the appearance of such signs was confirming a “great approaching crisis” which was actually the “reappearing of the Son of man upon the earth.”⁸³ He defends the gifts as he had seen them himself

Pentecost 1830

no doubt in the West Country phenomena. “And I would entreat my reader not to throw this averment from him as the raving of an enthusiast, but to compare it with the word of God.” He goes on to say that the gift of tongues, when not accompanied with interpretation, is the lowest of the spiritual gifts but that it was also the only permanent gift possessed by those who were experiencing the “present outpouring” of the Holy Spirit. As the gift of tongues is also given as a sign to unbelievers, Erskine asserts that since the age in which he lives is an age of unbelief that this gift has been given as a sign to the people of his own age. “The gift bestowed is a sign to the age. ‘For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.’ This is a sign to our age.”⁸⁴

Erskine was not adverse to human feelings, but not for the sake of the feelings themselves. In his *Essay On Faith* Erskine talks about “feelings” 56 times. Here he says, “We cannot believe that tidings are joyful to ourselves, unless we see that in them which excites our joy. The matter of joy lay in the birth of the Deliverer. . . .Behold these feelings, and then contemplate the glorious character of God; and let us join in praise to Him who hath condescended, through such obscure avenues, to introduce the light of that character into the soul of man.”⁸⁵ For Erskine the object that excites the feeling is the important thing. He did not endorse the “metaphysical labyrinth”

Pentecost 1830

which an emphasis merely on feelings produces.⁸⁶ Erskine is particularly clear when differentiating between feelings and revelation.

From this metaphysical habit of considering and attending to the mind itself, and the mode in which it is impressed, rather than to the objects which make the impression, arose the division of faith into different kinds; and thus the feelings of men were substituted in the place of the tangible word of revelation. A true faith does not properly refer to the mode of believing, but to the object believed. It means the belief of a true thing. As a correct memory does not refer to the process by which the impression is made, but to the accurate representation of the fact remembered. It means the remembrance of a thing as it happened.⁸⁷

Erskine spends much time in his writings developing his Christology with Christ as the federal Head of a new human nature. He refers to the actions of the Holy Spirit on many occasions. Erskine sometimes sees the living Word as partially filling the role of the Spirit. This can blur the distinction between the Second and Third persons of the Godhead or it can be an expression

Pentecost 1830

of emperichoretic pneumatology.

Thomas Erskine's regard for the greatness and influence of the human conscience is also very high. This could produce some confusion as to the role of the Holy Spirit if not properly understood. This was discussed in detail in chapter eight of this thesis. Erskine's concept of the place of the conscience is the result of his understanding of the "First Bond" of the flesh which Christ has in common with all men. This was covered in chapter seven.

Erskine's progressive conviction throughout his life in a type of universalism also influences his theology. From both God's side and from man's side he can finally find no reason for any eternal separation between God and man. Even though he continually stresses the offensiveness of sin and depravity in the sight of God, his confidence in the inevitable accepting love of God overshadows his concerns about sin and depravity.

88

B. Comparison Of Erskine And Irving

When we compare Thomas Erskine's Christology and pneumatology to that of Edward Irving several things stand out. Edward Irving began his popular publishing career with the release of his book entitled *The Doctrine Of The Incarnation Opened*. This book was composed of a series of sermons which were published at the

Pentecost 1830

request of Irving's parishioners as they had been inspired and helped by his messages on the subject. At the time of their publication there was no expectation of the turmoil that they would produce.⁸⁹ When the objections to Irving's teaching on the true humanity of Christ started to grow, Irving felt it necessary to write two defenses. The first defense was *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature* in which Irving defended the true human nature of Christ and, therefore, the necessity for the power of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus.⁹⁰ This led to charges against Irving that he was teaching that Jesus was in some way tainted by sin. As a result Irving published his second defense, *Christ's Holiness In Flesh*.⁹¹ In both of these works there is a high pneumatology which is expressed both dynamically and traditionally. Irving refers to the Spirit 183 times in *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature* and 283 times in *Christ's Holiness In Flesh*. The passages in these works where there are long clusters of references to the Holy Spirit are particularly rich in pneumatological content.

In *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature* Irving argues for the true human nature of Christ from Scripture, the Creeds of the primitive church and of the Church of Scotland, and from the standpoint of objections to the true doctrine being considered. He then considers what other doctrines might stand or fall

Pentecost 1830

by a lack of understanding of the true humanity of Christ. These include the bearing upon the work of the Father, the work of the Son, the work of the Holy Ghost, the scriptures, faith and union with Christ and regeneration and holiness.⁹²

In laying down the essentials of his Christology Edward Irving first deals with his references to the “sinful properties and dispositions and inclinations to our Lord’s human nature.” He says that when he speaks of this he is speaking “of it considered as apart from Him, in itself.” He is “defining the qualities of that nature which he took upon him, and demonstrating it to be the very same in substance with that which we possess.”⁹³ This is at the heart of Irving’s Christology and the entire purpose of *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord’s Human Nature* is to confirm the true humanity of Christ. Irving affirms that the work of Christ was to “reconcile, sanctify, quicken, and glorify this nature of ours, which is full of sin, and death, and rebellion, and dishonour unto God.”⁹⁴ His chief argument with his detractors is that they believe, according to Irving, that the human nature of Christ underwent a change in the miraculous conception. For Irving this is unacceptable and, in fact, nullifies our salvation. “We maintain that it underwent no change, but was full of fellowship and community with us all his life long, and was not changed but by the resurrection.”⁹⁵ Only the resurrection changed the human nature of Christ.

Pentecost 1830

Irving sees no difference in the nature or quality of regeneration wherever it appears in the New Testament. It is only that Christ received a regenerate “Holy-Ghost life” in his human nature at the moment of conception. This is the same “in kind” as all regenerate persons receive. However, the “measure” of Christ’s regeneration is greater because He had perfect faith as a result of being a Divine Person. Irving holds to the orthodox definition that the personhood of the Son is in His Divine nature and not in his human nature and that the Son is of one substance with the Father.⁹⁶ Irving maintains that the only way to see the Divinity of Christ in action is to accept this position and to realize that the Divine person of Christ prevailed against the rebellious human nature “with which he clothed himself, and under whose load he came.”⁹⁷ This is how salvation was accomplished for humankind. All Christology and soteriology is “a dead letter of fiction, a folly” if this position is not maintained.⁹⁸ Irving says,

This is the substance of our argument, - that his human nature was holy in the only way in which holiness under the Fall exists or can exist, is spoken of or can be spoken of in Scripture, namely, through inworking or energizing of the Holy Ghost: not from the Holy Ghost’s mixed up with either the

Pentecost 1830

substance of body or soul - which is to confound Godhead and manhood - but by the Holy Ghost, under the direction of the Son, enforcing his human nature, inclining it, uniting it to God; even as the devil, likewise a spirit, without mixing in it, did enforce it away from God. And this doth Christ in the salvation of every sinner resist, overcome, and destroy the devil's power and work.⁹⁹

This is the very heart of Irving's position. We see a great deal of similarity to Erskine's Christology here especially in the image of the devil working as the antagonist of the Holy Spirit. However, Irving is more precise in his Trinitarian views. The Holy Spirit works under the direction of the Son in Jesus' own life and struggle against the fallen nature. The Holy Spirit is never "mixed up" with the human nature, even that of Jesus. Throughout his argument in this pivotal work, *The Orthodox And Catholic Doctrine Of Our Lord's Human Nature*, Irving examines how any departure from his position effects the work of each member of the Godhead. "Let it be believed concerning Christ's human nature otherwise than hath been taught above . . . that it owed any of its most holy actions and passions, thoughts and purposes, to any other cause whatever than the personality of the Son, and the Godhead of Father,

Pentecost 1830

Son, and Holy Ghost . . . I will shew the fatal consequences, the subversion of all foundations to which it leads.”¹⁰⁰ He approaches his entire argument in a structured Trinitarian manner.

Regarding the work of the Father Irving says that if we depart from the position that he teaches regarding the true humanity of Christ, “first, it deprives us of all knowledge of God’s inclinations and affections towards us, and defeats us of all heavenly influences whatsoever.”¹⁰¹ He continues,

If Christ, when he became man, did take manhood altered and specially prepared for him, and not manhood as every man hath it; then are God’s affections which were shewn forth to him, no affections shewn forth to us, but the contrary, - they are affections shewn forth to something different from us; and therefore the work done in and for Christ is no signification of any work which God intendeth to do in and for any other man, elect or not elect. . . . It is not the nature offending which is thus and thus entreated, but another different and distinct from it. He is no more the representative of man to teach mankind what is God’s good will towards them. He is no more the *publicus homo*, the substitute

Pentecost 1830

standing in the stead of a race; he is no more the first begotten whose experiences are to be the experiences of all the regenerate people. ¹⁰²

The very nature and motives of the Father are at stake. Furthermore, the work of the Son is similarly effected for the same reason. In order to redeem us our nature must be assumed. The work of the Father and the Son is tied together in the Godhead. He says, “If Godhead in the person of the Son did not embrace our nature, as I and all men possess it, that nature, which I and all men possess, is not yet embraced by God. It is not stooped unto; it is not lifted up; it is not redeemed; it is not regenerated; it is not raised from the dead; it is not seated on the throne of God.” ¹⁰³ Furthermore he affirms that the Father must have a human although unique person to whom he can express his fullness.

But he must have a person towards whom to manifest the ocean-fulness of his being, and this person he found in his own God-head – the person of his own Son; one who would not fail under the severity of his holiness, nor be buried in despair under the hidings of his countenance; one who would not be intoxicated with pride by the beams of his love, not transported into extasy

Pentecost 1830

by the full unction of his Spirit; one whom temptation could not carry from the firmness of his purpose, nor cruelty force from the complacency of mercy. That Person who could thus bear to have emptied out upon him the fulness of Godhead's various affections, could be no less than God, the Son of the Father.¹⁰⁴

Then Irving moves on to the integrated involvement of the Holy Spirit in his Christology and soteriology.

It is in the section regarding the impact of the true humanity of Christ on the work of the Holy Spirit where Irving's pneumatology shines forth. Here in slightly more than four short pages he refers to the Holy Ghost 23 times and to the Holy Spirit once. In a thoroughly Trinitarian statement Irving says, "As the office of the Father is from his secret concealments, the unsearchable abode of his Godhead, to manifest himself unto sinful creatures; and as it is the office of the Son coming out of his bosom to sustain the fulness of the Father's Godhead, and render it into the comprehensible language of human thought, feeling, suffering, and action; so is it the part of the Holy Ghost to furnish him for such an undertaking."¹⁰⁵ Irving sees the origination of all things with the Father and the revelation of the Father as the function of the

Pentecost 1830

Son. It is the function of the Holy Spirit to furnish the Son with the supernatural ability to manifest the Father to the world. Irving goes on to make it clear that the two natures of the Son must not be mingled or confused when he says, "The person of the Son in coming into manhood must not bring with him Godhead properties, though he bring with him a Godhead person: that is, no action which he doth in the manhood must be ascribed to Godhead properties, or else Godhead and manhood are mixed and confused together; which were it allowed would introduce man-worship, creature-worship, and all forms of idolatry." ¹⁰⁶ For Irving, not only is such a confusion of natures inconsistent with orthodoxy, but it also yields idolatry in that it endues the human nature with more than human abilities. In this he make a distinction between the properties of Godhead and the Person of Godhead. According to Irving the abilities of the Son during his humiliation are supplied by the Holy Spirit. Irving says, "With what then doth the Person of the Son serve himself in fulfilling this great work of bringing the fulness of the Godhead into a body, of manifesting God in the Flesh? He serveth himself with Holy-Ghost power which the Father bestows upon him." ¹⁰⁷

Irving believes that in this we see true Divinity and true humanity in Christ. In this humanity all of the intellectual and emotional abilities of mankind are seen. In all of this the

Pentecost 1830

integrity and importance of the Holy Spirit is maintained in an overall Trinitarian theology as expressed in:

And thus, while all the power to redeem is proved to be from God in the person of the Father, and all the activity from God in the person of the Son, all the ability is proved to be from God in the person of the Holy Ghost; and yet no property of the Godhead is mingled with the properties of the manhood: they are kept as far distant as the orb of the invisible is from the orb of the visible, as the orb of the incomprehensible from the orb of the comprehensible, the orb of the uncreated from the orb of the created.

108

For Irving those who deny the true humanity of Christ necessarily, by their own scheme of thinking, routinely mix the two natures of Christ or they mix the human nature of Christ with the divine nature of the Holy Spirit himself. It is easy to understand why Irving would say that they mix the two natures of Christ as this is an age old problem. However, his understanding about mixing the human nature of Christ with the divine nature of the Holy Spirit is more unique. In this Irving is saying that according to this form of the

Pentecost 1830

error it is said that in the incarnation the Holy Spirit so changed the flesh of Jesus so that it was not the flesh of his mother but an entirely different human flesh which was not subject to temptation or human weakness. In this Irving sees the divine nature of the Holy Spirit as being infused into the incarnated Son which is just as great an error as mixing the two natures of Christ himself when he says, "One of two things the opposers of our Lord's true humanity do necessarily: either they mix the Divine nature of the Son with the human, or they mix the Divine nature of the Holy Ghost with the human nature of Christ. . . they effectually mix the divine and the human substances. They confuse Godhead and manhood."

109

Throughout his argument Irving is careful to maintain three concepts. The two natures of Christ must not be mixed. The human nature of Christ must be exactly the same as human nature found in the entire race. Christ's dependency on the Holy Spirit must be the same as our own. Irving says that he is simply maintaining that "the Son, actuateth his human nature pure and unmixed" by the "life or energy of the Holy Ghost."¹¹⁰ Or that he is arguing for "a human nature such as we find it every where else; and a Holy Ghost life in it, which the Son continually useth, and acteth unto the regeneration of it after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness."¹¹¹ And, "I am arguing for the human nature of a completely and

Pentecost 1830

thoroughly regenerated man; for creature substance sustained by a divine person, and of him informed with the power of a new life, which he receiveth out of the invisible Godhead; and useth as God's gift for the purpose of doing his will.”¹¹²

In comparing Erskine to Irving we cannot say that Erskine is not Trinitarian in practice. He makes many references to the persons of the Godhead. He affirms the Trinity while proclaiming the true human flesh of Christ.

He [Jesus] had always access to his Father in the Spirit, that is, in the eternal life, because that life was not under the condemnation; but whilst he bore about with him the natural life, the man Christ Jesus could not appear in the holy of holies. In all this the holiness of God was unspeakably declared and glorified. The holy One of God become flesh, could not stand in the pure presence of God, because the flesh was tainted. And that holy One, by accepting this punishment of sin, testified to the righteousness of the punisher. And he knew what he testified, for he was God, and he was man. He saw the Father's love in its fulness¹¹³

Pentecost 1830

Erskine affirms the Trinity in speaking of the life of God in every man when he says, “The life became light; and, as light, it shines on every man,—and thus the life of God is really given *to* every man. But it is not life *in* the man until he sees the light. Then the light returns into its original character, and becomes *life* again in his soul,—and he becomes a habitation of God through the Spirit,—he has fellowship with the Father and the Son.”¹¹⁴ Erskine affirms the Trinity in his outbursts of admiration for God, “Oh, what a God! What a Father! And this Spirit, which is the Spirit of Jesus, having been given to him as the reward of his work, and is now laid up in him for us, still bears our griefs and carries our sorrows.”¹¹⁵ He affirms the Trinity when he speaks of knowing God in the Eucharist.

It is only in the Spirit of the Son that
we can know the Father. . . .

If we follow the inward word, whilst
yet we know it only as the word of
God, and not as the word of a Father,
he will lead us by it unto the Son, and
into the Spirit of sonship—and then
shall we know the Father, and find the
flesh of Jesus meat indeed, and his
blood drink indeed; then shall we
discern the Lord’s body, and the
Father’s dealing with his body, in all

Pentecost 1830

the Father's dealings with us—and his commandment will be no more grievous.¹¹⁶

Erskine affirms the Trinity in the sanctification process.

Why this—the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, wherever it is received, will do in the members according to what it has done in the Head; it is the Spirit of the Father's "own Son," which trusts the Father, and which sheds out the life of the flesh in Paul, and accepts the punishment in him, even as it did in Jesus himself, and thus makes him also a co-operator with the Father, in condemning sin in the flesh, and a partaker in Christ's righteousness.¹¹⁷

Whereas Erskine affirms the Trinity by his references to the members of the Godhead, he only uses the word "Trinity" once in all of his writings.¹¹⁸

Irving and Erskine are essentially in agreement regarding the functions of the members of the Godhead and in the Holy Spirit's transforming effect upon believers. The differences between them are primarily in the area of their *approach* to the subject and not in their actual

Pentecost 1830

content. Erskine is aware of the actions of the Godhead and reflects them in his discussions of other subjects. Irving bases his discussions on a theological Trinitarian approach. Irving says,

Now behold what a wonder-working person is this Holy Ghost, who doth convey the infinite Godhead into the Son, acting with the limitations of manhood; and in his hands becomes a power capable of converting the creature from its state of rebelliousness and alienation and wickedness, into the state of holiness and love, and being at one with God (at-one-ment)! This office of the Holy Ghost, first to unite the invisible Godhead with the visible Son; and secondly, to furnish the Son for the work of bringing human nature into perfect reconciliation with, and obedience of, God: this, which is the essence of all sanctification of wicked men, is utterly undone upon their ruinous schemes of giving to Christ another substance than that of the virgin.¹¹⁹

Irving's argument rests on his belief that the human nature of Christ was identical to his mother's. In this Irving maintains that this nature

Pentecost 1830

was rebellious and prone to sin in Christ and that the perfect obedience of the Son aided by the Holy Spirit subjugated the human nature to the Divinity of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit working in Christ the man. Although Irving was always careful to maintain that Jesus had no original sin and that he never sinned himself – the subject of his next book, *Christ's Holiness In Flesh* – he steadfastly refused to allow any doctrine that taught that the human nature of Jesus was in any way different than our own. Irving rails against those who would teach a different human nature in Christ when he says, “They bring into existence their amalgam of human and divine natures; and say, Behold it, behold it, how wonderful it is, how unintelligible it is! This redeems us, this reveals God to us. This darkness is the light of God. - Oh it is a most strange delusion, it is a strong delusion.”¹²⁰

Erskine preferred to speak of “fallen nature” instead of “sinful flesh” as Irving so often did. Erskine’s choice, although sometimes still offensive, was a wiser choice because Irving received much criticism for his use of the phrase “sinful flesh” as applied to Christ. Erskine understands Christ as taking our fallen nature especially in regard to his sufferings.

But why was this suffering of our nature in the person of Jesus needful?
It was a *fallen nature*; a nature which

Pentecost 1830

had fallen by sin, and which, in consequence of this, lay under condemnation. He came into it as a new head, that he might take it out of the fall, and redeem it from sin, and lift it up to God; and this could be effected only by his bearing the condemnation . . . So this spectacle of agony and ignominy is just an exhibition of a righteous love of God passing knowledge, manifesting itself to the human nature, in the only way by which that human nature, fallen as it is, can be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and fitted for communion with God, and for participation in his glorious blessedness,—namely, in a way of suffering.¹²¹

Trevor Hart says of Erskine's position on the atonement,

His [Erskine's] doctrine of atonement is one which, whilst it differs significantly from the traditional penal theories of Evangelicalism, cannot be accused of treating the divine justice lightly. Where it differs is in its understanding of just how that justice is satisfied in the work of Christ, and

Pentecost 1830

this stems in turn from a basic difference in understanding concerning who God is. Thus, justice is defined precisely as *the justice of the Father*, a justice which is the very expression of his love for all his creatures, and not, therefore, to be misconstrued as some equal and opposite force held in uneasy balance with it, or (worse still) some more ultimate principle of Godhead than love itself.¹²²

Erskine sees a loving Father sending the Son to take on our fallen nature and by way of suffering redeem all human flesh. Barth also agrees in principle with Irving and Erskine regarding the sufferings of Christ. Christ suffers as “a man” under “the wrath and judgment of the electing and loving God. To be flesh is to be in a state of perishing before this God. . . . *He* stands under the wrath and judgment of God, *He* is broken and destroyed on God. It cannot be otherwise. It has to be like this. His history must be a history of suffering. For God is in the right against Him. He concedes that the Father is right in the will and action which leads Him to the cross.”¹²³ Erskine was a pioneer who, like Irving, has come to be appreciated. Erskine and Irving are in basic agreement in this key area of Christology; the flesh of Christ was one and the same with all human flesh.

Pentecost 1830

When Irving was forced to further defend himself against charges that he taught that Christ was tainted by sin he further developed his Christology and pneumatology in *Christ's Holiness In Flesh*. The heart of *Christ's Holiness In Flesh* consists in what Irving calls Four Propositions which he enumerates clearly.

“Proposition first; the human nature which the son of God took was of the virgin's substance.”¹²⁴

“Proposition second; the human nature which the Son of God took unto himself, was wholly and perfectly sanctified by the Holy Ghost in the act of conception.”¹²⁵

“Proposition third; the human nature thus wholly and perfectly sanctified of the Holy Ghost in the conception, was upholden in the same state, by the same power of the Holy Ghost.”¹²⁶

“Fourth and last proposition; that our Lord's human nature, being wholly and perfectly sanctified in the conception, underwent no process or progress of sanctification, as it needed none.”¹²⁷

Pentecost 1830

This is the essence of Irving's Christology as restated in the sequel to the earlier work. The Second Proposition is of particular importance following on Irving's opening statement that Christ took human nature as he found it but was not responsible for the condition in which he found it. The human nature of Jesus was sanctified at the moment of conception. This distinction alone separates Jesus as the spotless sacrifice from the rest of human nature. Irving maintains that this sanctification is of the same type as found everywhere else among God's people with the single exception that it was effective from the moment of conception in Jesus.

Furthermore, as expressed in the third proposition, this sanctification was maintained throughout the life of Jesus by the power of the same Holy Spirit who originally brought it about. This puts Irving's pneumatology squarely in the center of his Christology.¹²⁸

According to the fourth proposition Jesus therefore required no growth in sanctification in his life on earth even though his sanctification was of the same sort as that which we are required to grow in throughout our lives.¹²⁹

The key to our salvation is in Christ's overcoming work. "This, which is the natural idea of atonement, or reconciliation, hath not only no reality, but even not so much as a meaning, upon any other supposition than that Christ took our fallen nature, with all its

Pentecost 1830

natural and inherent propensities; and overcame these, and brought it into union with Godhead, and hath fixed it there for ever by the resurrection.”¹³⁰

This, however, does not exhaust Irving’s understanding of atonement. He also develops his understanding of his concept of redemption. “Again: if by atonement they understand redemption, which is the word commonly used in Scripture . . . , then, as the word means purchase from bondage, three subjects are involved in it: first, Who is the captive? secondly, What is the bondage? and, thirdly, How is the redemption effected? The answer to the first of these questions is, The will of man is the bondsman. The bondage is the oppression of the devil, the world, and the flesh; and the redemption consisteth in delivering the human will out of this bondage.”¹³¹ The human will is delivered from bondage by the redemption of Christ. This indicates agreement with Erskine’s position when he says,

We are continually in contact both with the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the Devil; these are the two seeds in us, the one leading us to God, the other leading us from him—and every act of our being, inward as well as outward, according as it is done under the influence of the one or the other of these spirits, gives strength and predominance in us to that spirit; thus

Pentecost 1830

the work of *assimilation* is continually going forward; one or the other is continually gaining ground, and when the process is concluded, we shall be found to be wheat or tares, children of the kingdom, or children of the wicked one.¹³²

Additionally, Irving takes to task any who base their theology or Christology on words and not the Person of Christ saying, “theology is not the knowledge of the word, but of GOD: or if it be of the Word, it is of THE WORD MADE FLESH. They speak now-a-days as if truth were still merely in a book, and not realized in a Person.”¹³³ Irving in no way denigrates the price of atonement when he says, “It only remains that we speak of the atonement with relation to the price, the ransom, or sacrifice, by which it was purchased. And this I say, with all orthodox divines, standeth in the death of the Son of God: by which I believe that sin was abolished and an everlasting righteousness brought in; as it is written: ‘By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Christ once for all.’ This act of dying, and in death offering a spotless body, I believe to be the great and principal act of Christ's work in the flesh.”¹³⁴

C. Some Insights From Campbell

Pentecost 1830

McLeod Campbell is not unique among the three in seeing very personal applications of the effects of the Incarnation in the lives of Christians. He sees what he calls “hidden capacities of humanity revealed in Christ.” He asserts that the long concentration on legal righteousness in Protestantism has obscured the real dynamic effects of the life of Christ as it effects Christians and that “they were turned away from seeing God in Christ, so have also been turned away from seeing man in Christ, seeing themselves in Christ, seeing the capacities of their own being in Christ.” For it was “not for his own sake but for our sakes did the Son of God reveal the hidden capacity of good that is in man by putting forth in humanity the power of the law of the Spirit of His own life – the life of sonship.” Campbell quotes Romans 8:3-4 in this regard: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”¹³⁵ If the preoccupation with legal righteousness causes people to forget about the person of Christ, then they are just as likely to lose his humanity as his divinity. Without this it is then not possible to see how the same power of the Spirit which Jesus used to enforce his divine will on his own human nature can be used to enforce that same divine will on any human nature. This

Pentecost 1830

power of the Spirit over human nature is exactly in Campbell's mind the life of sonship. Preacher-like he urges all to apply themselves to learn to see in the revelation of Jesus' humanity what we all are capable of and that the twofold discovery of God and man in Christ will enable us to function at a new and higher level of truth and morality.¹³⁶ This is Campbell the preacher and pastor at his applied best and at the heart of the issues that he believed needed clearing up in his day. Irving's motives were very much the same. Although Erskine was not a part of the established ordinate, his insights and motives resonated with his two companions.

In agreeing with Campbell's understanding of the hidden capacities of humanity as developed by Christ, Erskine develops it still a little further. As Erskine sees Christ as the federal head of all flesh accepting the punishment that that flesh is entitled to, he quotes Christ, "The cup that my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" as being of one mind with God, in hating and condemning sin, and longing for its destruction. He urges "submitting ourselves to the process of its destruction, and setting our seals to the righteousness of God in the process." He recognizes what he calls "the death-pang of the crucified head thrilling through the member, and accomplishing in it what it did in the head." It should be an actual taking pleasure in the mortification of the desires of the flesh. This is an

Pentecost 1830

actual sharing with Christ by the believer in the process that brings about this mortification. And he makes it clear that without sharing in the death pang of the flesh Jesus' followers can not share in the exaltation of the federal head. For Erskine, this removes the entire concept from the usual meaning of substitution when he says,

This is no substitution. It is a great substance—a great reality. No creature that has sinned against God can have fellowship with Him again, except by accepting the punishment of sin” and “Christ suffered then for a purpose directly opposed to the purpose which is implied in the doctrine of substitution, he suffered not to dispense with our suffering, but to enable us to suffer, *as* he did. . . . The atonement consisted in Christ's accepting the punishment of sin as the head of the nature; and the sanctification of his members consists in their accepting it also in the power of his Spirit dwelling in them.”¹³⁷

This reference to the Spirit illustrates that Erskine believed in the influences of the indwelling spirit but his concept of this “great reality” rests primarily on his understanding of the established fact of what is already

Pentecost 1830

accomplished for all humanity and not so much on the changing power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of depraved humanity. Regarding the sufferings of Christ Erskine stands somewhat apart from both Irving and Campbell. Erskine's "death pang" emphasizes a total identifying with Christ by members of his body, the church. For Erskine the suffering is one suffering and it forever puts away the sin of the flesh. Irving sees the atonement as what he calls "at-one-ment" and presents his federal Christology.

'At-one-ment, or reconciliation, is a mere notion, figure of speech, or similitude, until it be seen effected in the constitution of the person of Christ, under these two wills or operations. I object not to the similitude taken from paying debts, nor to the similitude taken from redeeming captives, not to the similitude taken from one man's dying in the room

of another, . . . but the similitudes are, to my mind, only poor helps for expressing the largeness, fulness, and completeness of the thing which is done by the Word's being made flesh, and which is exhibited as done, by the placing of the Godman on the right hand of the Majesty on high, visible

Pentecost 1830

Head, effective Ruler of the created worlds, and of the intelligent creatures which possess them. ¹³⁸

Irving reinforces his federal position saying, “He was the great Head of the regenerate race, the great Base of the regenerate world.” ¹³⁹

D. A Unique Discussion From Erskine

There is another place in Erskine’s writings where his Christology helps define his pneumatology. In a minor later work of Erskine’s entitled *The Divine Son* which is a part of those writings published posthumously as *The Spiritual Order And Other Papers*, Erskine does speak of relationships within the Godhead. This is not done with the intent to develop a pneumatology, but to better define the second person of the Trinity as the title implies. Erskine begins with “What, then, is Jesus Christ? We have been taught to answer, He is the eternal Son of the Father, But what do these words mean? What is the meaning of the *eternal Son of the Father*? We ought surely to ask this question, for we must be sure that if Christianity is a revelation of God, every part of it, especially so marked a feature in it as this, must have a meaning most important for us to understand, because it is connected with the character of God and our relation, to Him” ¹⁴⁰

Pentecost 1830

Erskine continues by seeing the Son as being the font of all goodness and says, “The only goodness and the only intelligence that we can conceive of are human goodness and intelligence, and we are obliged just to expand these into infinity when we would form to ourselves an idea of God. And seeing that we are constrained by reason to acknowledge that all goodness must be in God.” He continues with a sort of a definition of the relationship between the Father and the Son, “we ought not to refuse the suggestion that there must be, as it were, two hemispheres in the Divine nature,—upper and under, active and passive, Giver and Receiver, Father and Son. Unity is not singleness but rather completeness, and love can only, by minds like ours, be considered complete when it has sympathy.”¹⁴¹ This would seem to be an ideal place to consider the relationships within the Trinity as a whole. However, Erskine continues with, “This idea of God as comprehending both the active and the passive of all goodness, distinguished by the personalities of Father and Son but united in one common Spirit, seems to me to give the perfect conception of love and of blessedness in love; and when we add the idea that the spiritual creation stands in the Son, we have the assurance that it also is intended to be included in that fellowship of love.”¹⁴² What is evident here, even though “Spirit” is capitalized, is a diminishing of the personhood of the Holy Spirit Himself. This is an example of how Erskine,

Pentecost 1830

unlike Irving, does not quite present the Spirit on equal terms with the Father and the Son in any formal or theological sense.

The only other reference to the Spirit of God in *The Divine Son* reads thus: “And as he [Jesus] is himself essentially the Truster, the Believer, the Receiver from his Father, so he is on that account the fit channel of the life and Spirit of God to the whole spiritual order; his presence in each individual of that order giving it its filial relation to the Father, and its consequent capacity of receiving out of the fulness of God.”¹⁴³ Here Jesus is the channel for the Spirit of God to enter the entire spiritual order; the Spirit is the presence of Jesus in each person in the order. For Erskine this is no doubt another reference to the “First Bond” discussed in chapter seven of this thesis. Since the Spirit of God is already in each person as a presence, then each person has the capacity to receive the fullness of God which is the establishment of the “Second Bond,” the spiritual bond. Such reasonings do not deny the usefulness or the divinity of the Spirit of God. Erskine’s abundance of references to the Spirit of God and his actions throughout his writings certainly affirm his usefulness and no where does he deny his divinity. However, from all of this there comes forth an overall impression that since Erskine has not approached the Spirit of God in a Trinitarian manner, there is a certain weakness in understanding the Spirit as an co-equal member of

Pentecost 1830

the Godhead. Erskine's dynamic pneumatology shines through because he knows from scripture and experience that the workings of the Spirit are the vitality of the church. But his formal pneumatology is weakened because of his non-Trinitarian approach to the Spirit and because of his belief in the place of the "First Bond" and conscience in man's relationship with God.

E. Conclusions

Erskine and Irving are in agreement regarding Christ as the Federal head of the church. In his federal theology Erskine sees a change in the distribution of eternal life after the resurrection when Jesus becomes the Fountain of life. Erskine says, "He was born of the Spirit, and he lived *personally* by the Spirit, but it was not till his resurrection that the Spirit dwelt in him *federally*. He was raised by the Spirit, and then the Spirit dwelt in him as the Head of the body. And so to know the power of his resurrection, is just to receive that Spirit, which raised him from the dead and dwelt in him as the common Head after the resurrection." ¹⁴⁴

When Erskine makes Trinitarian statements, they are usually typically dynamic. Erskine believes in the believer being filled with the Holy Spirit. He urges all to "come with all boldness and child-like confidence unto God your Father, praying him that he would glorify his Son in you,

Pentecost 1830

by filling you with the Spirit and the life of his Son.” Consistently Erskine reminds us that believing in the “First Bond” of the flesh is what enables us to receive the Spirit. “For it is but a fibre of Christ that is in you until you have his spirit, and you cannot have his spirit until you know the love that gave him into your flesh, and unto death for you.”¹⁴⁵ This is not a particularly high pneumatology because for Erskine the ability to choose the bond of the Spirit is resident in the bond of the flesh. Irving sees a stronger place for the Holy Spirit as reflected in his Trinitarian statements as found above.

Erskine and Irving are not in agreement on one vital non Christological issue, that of universalism. Irving believes in “universal reconciliation” or a free “door of entrance” to salvation. However, after universal reconciliation he believes in particular election. He makes a convincing case that the true humanity and the atoning life and sacrifice of Christ is the basis for both doctrines.¹⁴⁶ He calls universalism “a most damnable heresy” and says that election is no hindrance to the “freeness of our door of entrance.”¹⁴⁷ Redemption is comprehensible and visible to us and election is invisible and incomprehensible and is revealed individually.¹⁴⁸ In other words, it is a mystery that can not be fully understood but he must maintain both in his understanding of scripture.

Pentecost 1830

Erskine died believing in a chance to receive the gospel after death. In *The Purpose of God in the Creation of Man* Erskine says, “Is it a correct description of man's state in this world to call it ‘a state of probation?’”¹⁴⁹ He follows with “I am constrained to adopt the assurance that this purpose follows man out from his present life through all stages of being that lie before him unto its full accomplishment. And, indeed, unless we accept this hope, we must give up the idea that the purpose of God in creating man was to educate him, as it can not otherwise be maintained. . . . There can be no real gospel, no real good news for man, which does not hold out this assurance.”¹⁵⁰ Irving and Campbell departed from the Calvinism of their day along with Erskine. However, Irving and Campbell could not go as far as universalism with Erskine.

Therefore, overall we can see a basic agreement between Erskine and Irving regarding a Federal theology in which Christ is the federal head of the new race. They both affirm the true humanity of Christ in the same flesh as all mankind. They both affirm a salvation wrought by Christ in which the sufferings of Christ hold a central position. Erskine’s “death pang” that resonates through out the entire body is somewhat more extreme than Irving’s acceptance of penal theory. Both Irving and Erskine see an important role for the Holy Spirit in the person and work of Christ. However, Erskine’s belief in the “First

Pentecost 1830

Bond” of the flesh somewhat diminishes the Spirit’s role in salvation. Only Erskine followed the way of universalism in his theology; a position to which Irving was strongly opposed. We can say that Irving was more structurally Trinitarian than Erskine although Erskine has a strong dynamic pneumatology. Irving was always convinced that he was totally reformed and, as a minister, sought to prove this position in all of his writings. While Erskine, not an ordained minister and with considerable Episcopal leanings, had a wider freedom in developing his theology and his pneumatology. It is only fair to say that Irving died at the age of 42 in the midst of great turmoil while Erskine lived to the age of 82 and had many years to consider and reconsider his theological positions. It would have been interesting to see if Irving would have changed or mellowed with more years.

Pentecost 1830

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- ⁵ Irving, Edward, "Facts Connected With Recent Manifestations Of Spiritual Gifts,"
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Pentecost 1830

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- ²⁴ Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology Of Edward Irving*,
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- ²⁶ Drummond, *Edward Irving And His Circle*, 153.
- ²⁷ Irving, *Facts*, 7.
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- ³¹ Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology Of Edward Irving*,
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- ³² Irving, *Facts*, 1.
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- ³⁴ Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology Of Edward Irving*,
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- ³⁵ Irving, *Facts*, 2-3.
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- ³⁷ Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology Of Edward Irving*,
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Pentecost 1830

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- ⁴² Dallimore, *The Life Of Edward Irving*, 111-112.
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- ⁵¹ Oliphant, *The Life Of Edward Irving*, 287-288.
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Pentecost 1830

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Pentecost 1830

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Pentecost 1830

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Pentecost 1830

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