Christology and Original Sin: Charles Hodge and Edward Irving Compared

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Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and Edward Irving (1792-1834) may seem an unlikely pair of candidates for a discussion on Christology and original sin. The surprise is not so much in listening to them under these headings, as listening to them together. Hodge, after all, remains one of the architects of Reformed Orthodoxy, and a bulwark of conservative Calvinism. Irving, like Hodge, was a Presbyterian, but was stripped of office after failing to defend the charge of heresy relating to the sinfulness of Christ. Despite these differences, both theologians share a common heritage which profoundly influences their work. They are primarily Chalcedonian thinkers, committed to a Logos-flesh Christology of one person, two natures. In the work of each we may see an attempt to remain true to the fifth century distinctions of *hypostasis, physis* and *ousia*. At the same time, their progress towards a resolution of the issues raised in this paper is marked by distinctive points of departure.

Hodge affirms the universal imputation of guilt to all humans. Christ, as the head of a new covenant, is the one exception. Being free from original guilt, Christ's humanity is able to resist the lure of actual sin. This emphasis on the uniqueness of Christ limits what conclusions Hodge may draw about general anthropology. Irving, on the other hand, depicts the Son of God as taking on human guilt in the incarnation. From conception, the incarnation is soteriological in its solidarity with fallen humanity. In striving to defend the Cappadocian commitment to the fullness of Christ's humanity, Irving implicates the person of the Son of God only indirectly in Christ's obedience. Instead, the Holy Ghost so possesses his 'soul' that Christ is free to obey. Christparticipates incarnationally in human guilt, therefore, without participating in actual sin.

Charles Hodge

Charles Hodge devotes the greater part of his work on anthropology to a discussion of original sin. As is common in Reformed orthodoxy, Hodge

maintains that original sin is that universal state into which Adam, by his originating act, plunged the entirety of his descendants. We shall see, however, that his theology is in no way merely an echo of past formulations. Hodge breathes nuance and sophistication into the task.

The first humans lived in an idyllic reality of perfect access to God. Partaking of the fruit of the tree of life somehow suspended the action of their inherent mortality. As a result, humans might expect to enjoy eternal life (Gen. 3:22).[1] This arrangement should not be seen as a simple pre-figuring of the new creation. Unlike the future which Christ would win for his people under a covenant of grace, Adam was ruled by a covenant of works.[2] It is a failure of works which is the condition on which God's promises are suspended.[3]

The outcome of Adam's disobedience is one of two-fold privation. Firstly, man is cut off from the Tree of Life.[4] For the first time, on account of sin, death rules the human world: 'death is a penal evil, and not a consequence of the original constitution of man'.[5] Secondly, and most importantly, is the privation of that status of original righteousness which was a gift from God. As a result of that loss 'the tendency to sin, or corrupt disposition, or corruption of nature was occasioned'.[6] This corruption is not something essential to humanity. On the contrary, it is primarily a negative reality. The privation of original righteousness and the withholding of divine influence is sufficient to account for our corruption.

This is because our nature, which Hodge sometimes also calls the soul, is highly impressionable. It is designed to exist in relationship with God, and to be moulded and shaped within this communion. Apart from a governing 'disposition to holiness and God', its susceptibilities lead it inevitably to self-gratification and sin.[7] This does not imply that the Adamic human nature is evil, or that original sin infuses evil; it is merely weak. It cannot achieve a dispostion of love towards God apart from 'a state of friendship with his Maker' for 'it is the result of special Divine influence'.[8]

This influence was withheld as the expression of God's displeasure for the apostasy and rebellion of man. The consequences for Adam's failure extend to the entire human race. Every person derives from Adam a nature which is destitute of any native tendency to the love and service of God.

The fall does not merely result in a depraved constitution. Humans bear guilt prior to any personal sinful acts.[9] There is more to original sin than the agency of individuals. Rather 'the conviction must … have existed in the Church always and everywhere that guilt may be present which does not attach to the voluntary agency of the guilty'.[10] As an example he cites the universal practice of the baptism of infants before they have had a chance to contribute personally to their condemnation.[11] We come into the world already polluted by guilt.

What, though, is the ground of that guilt? Hodge argues that in Romans 5:12 the aorist of *hemarton* means not 'do sin' or 'have sinned', but 'all sinned, i. e. sinned in Adam, sinned through or by one man'.[12] However, this is not to be read in a straightforwardly Augustinian way. While Adam's act may have vitiated his own generic nature, and hence that of his posterity, there is no way in which his sin could be said to actually be the sin of the latter. 'The proposition "all men sinned actually in Adam" has no meaning.'[13] Instead, our federal and natural relations to Adam means that his act was putatively our act. It was not 'actually' our act, but rather all 'were regarded and treated as sinners on account of his sin'.[14] Romans 5:12-21 is seen in the parallel of Christ: whatever Christ has done for his people, they are regarded as having done.[15]

> We did not all literally and actually die in Christ, nor did we all actually sin in Adam. The death of Christ, however, was legally and effectively our death; and the sin of Adam was legally and effectively our sin.[16]

This is justified on the basis of a very tight analogy between Christ and Adam, which must collapse if anything in us is considered to be the basis of the condemnation of which the apostle is speaking. We may contribute nothing to our righteousness in Christ; we need contribute nothing to our guilt in Adam.

Interestingly, Hodge argues that while the sin of Adam is the ground of our condemnation, there is no sense in which his moral guilt is attracted to us. We should feel no remorse for original sin.[17] On Ephesians 2:3, Hodge distinguishes between 'on account of nature' and 'by nature'. 'The assertion is that men are born in a state of condemnation, not that their nature is the ground of that condemnation.'[18] The Scriptures do teach of a depravity which is of the nature of sin and which exposes us to divine displeasure, but all that is asserted here is the condition in which we are born. That is, all humanity is

subject to the penalty of Adam's sin, without any associated moral burden. Guilt, in a moral sense, may only accrue as a result of personal sin.

What of the nature of the incarnation? Hodge parallels Chalcedonian Christology as closely as possible, with a vigorous emphasis upon the true humanity of Christ. In particular, he affirms that Jesus is consubstantial not only with God but also, as to his humanity, with us.[19] That is, 'he has in his constitution the same essence or substance which constitutes us men'.[20] As a result, Christ's body was subject to all the conditions of a human body: pain, pleasure, hunger, death and so on. He was a man of sorrows, of the line of David.

Being truly human, Christ was affected by more than merely physical vitiation. He 'was tempted as we are, was subject to the law which we violated, and endured the penalty which we had incurred'.[21] That Christ had two natures, and was tempted, implies that he must also have had two wills (following the Council of Constantinople). 'As there are two distinct natures, human and divine, there are of necessity two intelligences and two wills, the one fallible and finite, the other immutable and infinite.'[22] Therefore, *pace* the impeccability of Christ, Hodge argues there was at least the metaphysical possibility that he might have sinned.[23]

Hodge's justification for asserting Christ's identity with his brothers is soteriological. Hebrews 2:14-16 proposes that for Christ to act as mediator, he must be of the one nature—flesh and blood, a man—with us. At the same time, he must be sinless, in order to be an appropriate sacrifice. His sinlessness is not, however, in the sense of *non potest peccare*, which would have implied that he was not truly human; for him to really have been tempted requires that he was able to sin in his constitution.[24]

Hodge is critical of the Lutheran conception of the *communicatio idiomatum* which made its way into the Form of Concord, which attributed to Christ's humanity what belongs to divinity. It makes 'the whole earthly life of Christ an illusion … he was omnipotent when an unborn infant'.[25] As a result, it does not allow him to grow in wisdom and stature, and does not allow him to die, and hence redeem us. To deny the real humanity of Christ is to deny the possibility of his redeeming work, his bond of union or sympathy with us.[26]

We are able to see the fine theological line which Hodge draws in his exegesis of *in the likeness of sinful flesh* in Romans 8:3. The precision of Paul's language is not accidental. The form in which the Son of God was incarnate was not merely in the flesh, clothed in our essential nature. Humanity is no longer 'flesh', but rather, as a result of Adam's act, 'sinful flesh.' To have come 'in flesh' implies assuming 'the glorious, impassive nature of Adam before the fall'.[27] This would be soteriologically ineffective. Nor did Christ come *in sinful flesh*. Without the qualifier *'likeness'*, this would imply that his human nature was defiled, contrary to Hebrews 4:15.

Hodge is unclear what is meant here by 'defiled', but from the context it may refer to Christ's innocence in respect of imputed sin and subsequent condemnation. Instead, Paul describes the Incarnation as *in the likeness of sinful flesh,* that is, in a nature 'like' our sinful nature but not itself sinful. 'Christ took our physically dilapidated nature, subject to the infirmities which sin had brought into it.'[28]

So far, while Hodge has applied our humanity to Christ in great detail, we have yet to discover anything about humanity *from* Christ. However, it is in his discussion of original sin that we find a hint at a beginning of a christological anthropology. Hodge martials a broad array of arguments against Augustinian realism as an accurate model for original sin. It is hypothetical; it finds no basis in Scripture; it depends on a kind of Platonic idealism,[29] but one objection in particular is of interest for the purposes of our discussion—

> It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the realistic theory with the sinlessness of Christ. If the one numerical essence of humanity became guilty and polluted in Adam, and if we are guilty and polluted because we are partakers of that fallen substance, how can Christ's human nature have been free from sin if He took upon Him the same numerical essence which sinned in Adam?[30]

Here is the first sign of a move from Christology to anthropology, rather than the reverse. The argument runs as follows: Augustinian realism depends the participation of the essence of humanity in the sin of Adam. Christ is essentially human. Christ would therefore have been inextricably caught up in Adam's sin and found guilty, yet the logic of Hebrews makes clear that Christ was a perfect sacrifice, free from all stain of guilt.

Here the sophistication of Hodge's anthropology becomes evident. He has employed two theological devices which allow him to maintain simultaneously Christ's consubstantiality with fallen humanity and his utter sinlessness. Firstly, by depending upon federal, rather than realistic, hamartiology, neither Christ, nor any human, is directly implicated in the guilt of Adam. There is indeed condemnation and death beyond the original inhabitants of the Garden. However, this is applied on a covenantal basis. All humanity outside Christ is governed by a covenant of works. Christ, as the new Adam, is also the head of a new covenant, the covenant of grace. He occupies a different juridical constituency. That which may be imputed to fallen humanity may not be imputed to him.[31]

Secondly, the consequences of the Fall do not directly alter the essence of humanity. However great the descent from their once lofty position, humans have not become inherently evil. Hodge has been very careful to avoid ontologising evil, and instead speaks in terms of 'privation'. Although Hodge does not himself articulate this to its fullest extent, we may follow the trajectory of his thought. Until his death on the Cross, Christ is never severed from the influence of the Father. Despite inheriting vitiated human nature, the loving embrace of God precludes the susceptibilities of that nature leading to disobedience.

For all of the positives in Hodge's treatment of this subject, ultimately his systematisation cannot hold together. Hodge's dependence on the epochal distinction between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace casts doubt on his ability to shield Christ from the imputation of sin. The appropriateness of labelling God's relations with Adam in the garden a covenant, let alone a covenant of works, has been questioned even by vigorous proponents of federal theology.[32]

Even if we accept this particular covenantal model, Hodge's application swiftly reveals its flaws. The covenant of grace cannot be logically parallel to the covenant of works. They are not two discrete entities which lie chronologically adjacent but discontinuous. Christ, the head of the covenant of grace, was 'born of a woman, born under law' (Gal. 4:4). Either the covenant of grace transcends and incorporates law (that is, law is part of the gracious divine agenda) or the Son of God instantiates grace from within law, freely entering into the

obligations of the law when he takes on human nature. The other possibility is the Son of God instantiates grace from within law, freely entering into the obligations of the law when he takes on human nature. It is because he fulfils these obligations, and takes upon himself the penal burden of those who cannot, that grace is extended to his people. This latter option seems preferable.

If Christ is born under a covenant of works, then it must be asked how he avoids the imputation of Adam's sin. Either he does not participate fully in our humanity in the way Hodge has described or, alternatively, the mode of expression of sin's universality is not, after all, via imputation. Much depends upon Romans 5:12, and Hodge's exegesis of this text, while certainly possible, is not conclusive.

Verbal aspect theory has raised questions about the 'once of all' connotations of the aorist of *hemarton*. It is likely that the tense-form is indicative that the place of this verb is in the background of Paul's argument. If the phrase 'because all sinned' is indeed background, and not the main stream of the text, then it is unlikely that this part of the letter is functioning to articulate a doctrine of either inherited or imputed condemnation.

This perspective is further strengthened by Hodge's own treatment of the text. He argues that the antecedent and referent of *therefore*, which opens Romans 5, is the entirety of the four previous chapters.[33] However, the argument of these chapters in respect of sin is that all, both Greek and Jew, are under condemnation on the ground of their personal sin. Romans 3:23 declares that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', that is, the sin which humans have committed renders them unfit for the presence of the Creator.

What is this sin? It is not an inherited or imputed act. Rather, it is the failure to achieve justification on the basis of works of the law (Rom. 3:20), that is, it is a failure of personal obedience. It seems hard to understand why Paul would delay a far more fundamental source of condemnation to both Greeks and Jews until chapter 5 when a classical exposition of original sin would be much more at home in chapter 2. More significantly, one must wonder how a discussion of inherited condemnation (Rom. 5:12-21) may be grounded in four previous chapters which do not discuss the topic at all and seem to propose something quite different.

As has been noted already in our review of the biblical data, there appears to be an inconsistency in the derivation of a theory of imputation from a tight correspondence between Adam and Christ. Participation in the benefits of Christ is not automatic. It requires the synergistic work of the Holy Spirit *and human step of faith*. If being 'in Adam' is closely paralleled with 'in Christ', ought we not to wonder what personal step is the ground of inheriting his state? Of course, this is not a conclusive argument. Hodge might just as easily respond that our inclusion in Adam is a result of generation.

Whatever defence of imputation there might be, there is sufficient doubt over the covenantal framework and biblical exegesis which Hodge proposes to undermine his basic framework, and give reason to look elsewhere for a more satisfying solution. That is not to say that we must leave everything behind. Hodge's resistance to ontologising evil, and his relational (as opposed to substantial) content of depravity, are tremendously helpful insights. In addition, in the following sections, we shall attempt to remain as true to the Chalcedonian nature of his Christology as we can.

Edward Irving

Irving's anthropology begins with the Son of God. 'When the Creator-God, the Father, proclaims and brings about the high end of creation in creating man and woman, he does so as God the Father who bears witness to the Son',[34] that is, as the Son is the image of the Father, we are made in the Son's likeness. That image, found first in Christ, is only again found in those that are 'renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness'.[35] This is because one of the most important attributes of God which is imaged is his divine freedom. However, fallen humans are only free to be true to themselves through dependence on the Spirit. We are unable to fulfil our potential on our own. Christ, in this sense, is both beginning and end of humankind—that which images and is imaged.[36]

For this reason, anthropology is also teleological. One ought not to look back at the Garden, as if humanity was constituted in some form of static perfection. In fact, it would be incorrect to describe primordial humanity as perfect at all. They were of the soul, rather than the spirit, and therefore not able to receive God as anything more than Creator. They were 'natural', as in 'fleshly', and so incapable of the things of the Spirit of God.[37]

We may only describe Adam and Eve as 'complete' as to their kind. These first humans were not yet capable of eternal life although, had they not fallen, they might have been translated into that capacity.[38] Given the prominence of humanity in God's providence, creation, too, cannot yet be seen as perfect. Perfection is found at the end of time, not its beginning. The full expression of human being is not found in Adam, but in Christ.[39] At the end of time, in Christ, we find the *telos* of human being: the creature exists to reveal 'unto all the creatures the invisible and infinite substance of the Godhead'[40] and to 'body forth God completely in all the features and powers of his invisible Godhead'.[41]

On their own, however, humanity fails to be true to its purpose. In the Fall, humanity ceases to be true even to itself, ceasing to speak for God, and losing the image of God. 'The inner being is deformed and the body, the outer form, destined to death.'[42] Fallen humanity is no longer free—it is caught up, entangled, in its predilection to sinfulness. The blessings of God have become a 'desert place' and our relations with God, self and creation a lie.[43] The human will is now captive to sin.[44] Adam is no longer able to respond to the will of God, but his will is enslaved to 'his natural understanding, natural feelings or bodily senses'.[45] This is a state of 'pure immanence', of bondage to the physical.[46] However, Irving does not ontologise evil. The lie of the human being is no created thing, but is seen only in the light of the true human being, Jesus.[47] Evil is not 'something', an object or entity, but merely the 'state of a creature—the second state of a creature'.[48]

Furthermore, it is not the goal of Adam's sin—the knowledge of good and evil, being like God—which is sinful, but the mode of arrival. God, too, possesses such knowledge, so it cannot be morally repugnant. According to Irving, it must, therefore, be attainable by way of obedience. Following the teaching of Irenaeus it is, in fact, a state of greater human being—to know evil, and then to shun it. Irving does not question whether an epistemological process which is appropriate to God may ever rightfully be appropriated by humans. Fallenness is 'located' in the nature, not the will, which for Irving often seems to equate with personhood. One cannot die unless one is fallen; little children die, but do not exercise their will; so fallenness must not derive from the will. In other words, it is possible to have a fallen nature and die, without ever being disobedient.[49]

Of course, this all depends on what Irving holds to be axiomatic: that suffering and death cannot be experienced by an unfallen creature. For all the degradation of humanity implicit in this tumble from glory, the Fall is part of the divine scheme. God is not surprised by Adam's rebellion. It is 'disobedience both known and foreseen, and permitted by God' and part of the great divine scheme.[50] This follows Athanasius, in that the Creator's plan is not thwarted by human infidelity. Only in the incarnation can God's purposes be achieved; the Fall is a necessary precursor to the incarnation, thus the Fall itself is necessary, without God being the author of evil.

The consequences of Adam's sin is inherent to all humanity. All flesh descended from Adam and Eve is mortal and corruptible. This is a consequence neither of the mode of propagation nor of propagation but of the curse: 'On the day you eat of it you shall surely die.' Irving is thoroughly Augustinian in his realistic model of original guilt. The bodies of all humanity were in Adam and Eve when the curse was given, and so we have inherited their state.

The relation which Irving posits between Jesus' flesh and human nature is robustly consubstantial. 'If Jesus is born in human history to a human mother, then his body necessarily consists of matter that partakes in the fallenness of the world.'[51] The Son of God, becoming incarnate, participates in the general guilt of all humanity. This is apparently a rather obvious conclusion according to Irving, 'that Christ took on our fallen nature is most manifest, because there is no other in existence to take'.[52]

The thought that Jesus might have taken on pre-lapsarian flesh, like Adam in the Garden, strikes Irving as simply rather novel.[53] His flesh, like ours, was corruptible and mortal in its proper nature. The Son did not merely take on the external properties of humanity. Jesus also possessed a 'reasonable soul'.[54] That Christ united himself with fallen flesh shows that the incarnation is not human nature deified, contra Eastern theology, but human nature 'uplifted and upheld by God'.[55] Humans therefore are not led to worship the creature, but invisible God.

Irving argues for an assumption of sinful flesh on both pragmatic grounds, as above, but also soteriological. To claim that Christ's flesh was unfallen is not only a denial of his humanity, but also a challenge to his mediation. There

would have been no merit to his obedience had Christ not borne fallen flesh, with all of its temptations and weaknesses—[56]

> The fallen flesh, thus preyed upon, thus wrestled for, by him who had the power of death and corruption, our Lord must redeem out of the hands of the enemy, and carry into the acceptable and honourable place of the right hand of the Majesty on high: which being accomplished, it was proved that a created substance, in which sin and Satan had power, might yet be wrested out of their hands, and presented blameless and faultless in the presence of God.[57]

If Christ's flesh was any less fallen than ours, we can have no certainty of our own resurrection. Furthermore, Irving vigorously attacks the notion that Jesus' humanity was somehow 'purified' before its habitation by the Son. This leads to Arminianism, wherein believers, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are now ashamed to confess their own sinfulness. Irving also challenges the idea that Christ created a new human nature—

> his substance was the Virgin's, but that the Holy Ghost, in the generation, changed it into a new substance, by purging out all the impurities of the fallen flesh, and fixing it in a new state, wherein it should be liable to all our sinless infirmities, such as hunger, pain and capabilpabilllity of dying.[59]

This approach lacks redemptive insight. If Christ did not take on our fallen flesh, he could have contended only with devil and world, not flesh. For Irving, sin is a 'simple, single, common power…diffused throughout, and present in, the substance of flesh of fallen human nature'[60] and this is present also in Christ's flesh: 'in the flesh of Christ, all the infirmities, sin and guilt of all flesh was gathered into one.'[61] He enters both into our condition, and into the sphere of the age of the power of sin.

Though blameless, Jesus participated in baptism and circumcision to fulfil all righteousness, for he shared with other men in fallen flesh.[62] He was also baptised with the Holy Spirit, possessing in him the powers and gifts for his mission, and growing through him in wisdom and godliness. There was no change in respect of his divinity, but a perfection of his humanity from the

likeness of fallen, sinful flesh, to immortality and incorruptibility.63 Before it can be made immortal, it must first be proved immortal, and so Christ, as a consequence of taking flesh, must die.[64] His resurrection demonstrates his blamelessness, that he had been able to expel the powers of corruption which were in his flesh by nature.[65]

Unusually, Irving also argues that Christ's body did not see corruption, not mediately because it was raised, but directly, on account of his sinlessness. Just as his body, being in life liable to sin, was preserved from sin, so his body, in death liable to corruption, was preserved by the fullness of the Godhead.[66]

The distinction between Christ and general humanity, then, is not in the nature of his human being. Rather, it is in the unity of the Son with his soul, the consequence of which is that the latter is taken possession of by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' humanity is anhypostatic. '[Christ] is not a human person' since 'he never had personal subsistence as a mere man.'[67]

This means, firstly, that since the person of the Son of God supplies the person of the man, Jesus Christ, he is not implicated in the act of original sin.[68] The Son is 'acquitted from all charge of original sin, by the fact of his having not been created' for —

> as Christ was man, and not a man, he cannot be spoken of as a human person, without being brought in guilty of original sin. As a divine person he is clear of it, and no one can impute it to him. His not having natural generation, clears him of it altogether.[69]

This introduces a new element to Irving's hamartiology: human solidarity in sin is not only natural, but personal. Secondly, and as an explanation for his sinlessness in life, the incarnation is not a purely filial act, but is thoroughly Trinitarian, the work of Father, Son and Spirit.[70] Irving's Christology is an articulation of the principle *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the actions of the Trinity in the world are undivided).[71] At the instant the Holy Spirit quickened this new human life, the Son 'in His independent personality', once and forever joined himself to his 'holy thing,' at the command of the Father.[72] The constitution of this entity is unchangeable, save for apparent change occasioned by its growth in power and glory. 'It is the substance of the

Godhead in the person of the Son, and the substance of the creature in the state of fallen manhood, united, yet not mixed.'[73]

Christ's fallen humanity is not sanctified by its unity with the divine nature; that would imply a Eutychian mingling of essences. Being thoroughly fallen, mere apprehension of the Son is not sufficient to make human nature holy. Instead, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies and empowers him even from the womb, which Trinitarian activity manifests Father and Son *in his bodily manhood*.[74] This is why it may be said that he overcame sin 'in the flesh'. Thus, the will of Son, Father and Holy Spirit is made manifest even in fallen flesh. 'He took up the creature in its lowest estate, in order to justify God therein, by proving how good even that state was; verily to prove that it was holy; a part of the scheme of Him whose name and style is Holy, Holy, Holy.'[75]

The Holy Spirit does not merely fill him. Rather, it is the author of his bodily life.[76] The Holy Spirit united itself with his human soul forever on account of the Son having first done likewise. Irving describes it thus: 'the Eternal Son … humbling himself to the human soul, and the human soul taken possession of by the Holy Ghost.'[77] This threefold unity—or rather, a two-fold unity of divine and human, with one part itself distinct in the persons of the Son and Holy Spirit—animated the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although this flesh was fallen, and thus liable to all the temptations which assailed the flesh of fallen humanity, the anointing of the Holy Spirit enabled Christ to resist these temptations.[78]

Colin Gunton approves of Irving's direction, as he sees the alternative as 'some immanent drive, of the kind that would appear to be implicit in Apollinarian or Eutychian christologies'.[79] Gunton argues that there are two benefits of a pneumatologically, rather than christologically, based obedience: (a) it preserves the human relevance of Jesus' sinlessness—just as Christ is free to obey by his Spirit-possession, so may be his followers; and (b) Jesus' obedience is not a deterministic feature of his ontology, but a 'free response to the other'.[80]

Irving subscribes to the Contantinopolitan doctrine of two wills, though it remains unclear what role the personhood of the Son plays. Any act of Christ is incomplete until there have been two operations: 'the Godhead ever

emptying itself into the manhood; the manhood not containing the Godhead, but consenting with harmony to the mind of the Godhead.'[81] Neither nature independently renders action; in every act, both divine and human natures are implicitly involved, the former by contraction, the latter by consent through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a kenotic theology but one which does not involve discarding divine attributes so much as an 'expression of the inner dynamic of the Trinity'.[82]

Because of the real role played by his humanity, Jesus is capable of development in wisdom and maturity. Gunton notes that the progression of Jesus through various stages, and to various milestones, is best understood not by an Augustinian understanding of a substantial possession of Christ by the Spirit, but a personal relation. By following the leading of the Spirit, Christ's true manhood is confirmed. 'Thus he shewed us an example, that we should follow in His steps; and hereby He became the great prototype of a Christian, as He had been the great antitype of all the holy men under the law.'[83]

In comparison with Hodge, Irving presents a far more holistic picture of the solidarity of Christ with his fellow humans. Whereas Hodge labours to establish discontinuity, Irving's theological agenda is focussed on establishing and developing the Son's soteriological incarnation in sinful flesh. The strength of this model is the robustly Trinitarian salvation offered in Christ. The Son is not the sole agent in the incarnation. The Spirit is not sidelined. This reduces the need to construct a sub-narrative, beneath the narrative of the biblical gospels, to explain and interpret the anthropomorphic language in transcendent terms.

Irving establishes Christ's identity with humanity in guilt via an Augustinian realist model of guilt. Christ is guilty, without being implicated in original sin. The weakness of this approach is the way it compromises Christ's suitability as a sacrifice. Jesus may only be offered on the cross as a lamb free from stain or blemish.[84] If he is himself guilty, then it is hard to comprehend how he may be an acceptable offering. That Irving overlooks this should not surprise us—he is deliberately seeking to escape a 'doctrine of debt and payment, of barter and exchange; of suffering, of clearing the account and setting things straight with God'.[85] Salvation is found more in Christ's overcoming of human nature, in and through that nature, by the Spirit, than an atonement on the cross.[86]

Secondly, the person of the Son appears to have faded into the background of the incarnation. In contrast to patristic theology, there is little trace of the *hypostasis* in the active agent. This lies partly in Irving's reliance on Coleridge's over-personalisation of the will. For Coleridge, the will is the very seat of the personality.

Following his teacher, Irving argues that 'the personality standeth in the will'.[87] McFarlane, who has been significantly influenced by both Irvin and Gunton, uncritically summarises Irving's approach: 'Human will is the place and means of redemption … in that it is from the will that human action, purpose, desire for knowledge and exertion of power originate.'[88] This is a significant departure from patristic theology which distinguishes between the willing subject and the will as an idiom of nature.[89] It is also in tension with McFarlane's claim that in Irving's Christology 'the Spirit may possess and anoint the soul of the incarnate Son, but it the Son who, in his humanity, wields the Spirit,'[90] which appears to affirm the *hypostasis* of the Son as the centre of action. Given Irving's (and subsequently, Gunton's) lack of clarity in respect of patristic Christology (especially writers such as Maximus the Confessor), it seems likely that this apparent confusion is also actual.

Irving's model of radical solidarity is aimed at assurance: Christ was really like us, yet conquered sin; we, through Christ, can also have that same spiritual life, and have sin conquered in us. But it undermines assurance at the other end of Christ's history, for he is no longer a spotless sacrifice. He takes on our fallen humanity, but also or guilt, and therefore is polluted. It is not enough to say that this pollution is overcome through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

To deny the necessity of the atoning work of Christ by focussing on the cleansing of the Spirit, and exhausting of sin in the body, ignores the biblical witness (in particular, the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ's sacrificial work as perfect priest and spotless sacrifice is paramount). Ultimately, Irving's attempt at a Christological anthropology, while furnishing us with a reminder of the Spirit's role, is too much like the atonement theology of McLeod-Campbell to stand within the trajectory of Reformed thought.

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ENDNOTES

1. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [hereafter ST], (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), p. 125.
2. This is what Francis Turretin describes a 'covenant of nature', so called not because it arise from any natural obligation which God might have towards man, but from the nature and integrity of man. The law of nature was written on the heart of man, which he was bound to obey. It is a covenant of works because it depended upon his obedience. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 1, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Companerfuy, 1990), p. 574f.
3. Hodge, ST, p. 118.
4. Best seen not as inherently powerful, but a sacrament of God's ongoing gift of immortality. Turretin, Vol. 1, p. 581.
5. C. Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (London: Banner of Truth, 1835), p. 147.
6. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 185.
7. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 186.
8. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 186.
9. Note that it is not merely the act which is at issue here. Hodge maintains that personal sinfulness, which is an outcome of this privation, includes concupiscence. It is not merely acts of the will, but also the impulses behind them, which are sinful. The divine law demands of every human being, under the covenant of works, perfect conformity to the image of God. Sin impulses to evil are clearly in contradiction of the divine nature, they are clearly sinful. Hodge, ST, p.186.
10. Hodge, ST, 191.
11. As also Turretin, Vol. 1, p. 634.
12. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 149.
13. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 151.
14. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 151.
15. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 152.
16. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 152.
17. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 178.
18. Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1856), p. 108.
19. Hodge, ST, p. 388.
20. Hodge, ST, 389.
21. Hodge, ST, 396.
22. Hodge, ST, 405.
23. Hodge, ST, 405.

24. Hodge, ST, 456-7.
25. Hodge, ST, 412.
26. Hodge, ST, 403.
27. Hodge, *Romans*, 252.
28. Hodge, *Romans*, 252-3.
29. Hodge, ST, 221ff.
30. Hodge, ST, 222.
31. Cf. Bavinck: 'The exclusion of the man from his conception at the same time had the effect that Christ, as one not included in the covenant of works, remained exempt from original sin and could therefore also be preserved in terms of his human nature, both before and after his birth, from all pollution of sin. As subject, as "I," he did not descend from Adam but was the Son of the Father, chosen from eternity to be the head of a new covenant.... As a person he was not the product of humankind but himself came to humankind from without and entered its ranks. And since he thus, in God's righteous judgement, remained exempt from all original sin, he could be conceived by the Holy Spirit and by that Spirit remain free from all pollution of sin. Conception by the Holy Spirit was not the deepesessirit and by that Spirit remain free from all pollution of sin. Conception by the Holy Spirit was not the deepest ground and final cause of Jesus' sinlessness, as many theologians say, but it was the only way in which he who already existed as a person and was appointed the head of a new covenant could now also in a human way—in the flesh—be and remain who he was: the Christ, Son of God the Most High.' Bavinck, p. 294.
32. For example, John Murray. Cf. A. T. B. McGowan, 'In Defence of "Headship Theology",' in *The God of Covenant,* ed. Jamie A. Grant & Alistair I. Wilson, (London: Apollos, 2005), P. 189. Barth is particularly critical of this covenantal theology; Barth, IV/1, pp. 54-66.
33. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 145.
34. Graham W. P. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit. The Doctrine of the Incarnation according to Edward Irving* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), p. 78.
35. McFarlane, p. 78.
36. McFarlane, p. 79.
37. Edward Irving, *The Collected Works of Edward Irving in Five Volumes,* Vol. 5 [hereafter CW5], ed. G. Carlyle, (London: Alexander Strachan, 1865), 82
38. Irving, CW5, 81, cited in McFarlane, 96.
39. McFarlane, 94.
40. Cited in McFarlane, 75.
41. Cited in McFarlane, 75.

42. Cited in McFarlane, 102.
43. McFarlane, 108.
44. Irving, CW5, 322.
45. McFarlane, 109.
46. McFarlane, 112.
47. McFarlane, 104.
48. Irving, CW5, 218.
49. Irving, CW5, 213-4.
50. Irving, CW5, 10, 103.
51. Colin Gunton, "Two dogmas revisited: Edward Irving's Christology," in *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995,* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 158.
52. Irving, CW5, 115-6.
53. Cited in McFarlane, 140.
54. Irving, CW5, 117-8.
55. Irving, CW5, 117.
56. Irving, CW5, 127.
57. Irving, CW5, 128.
58. Irving, CW5, 127.
59. Cited in McFarlane, 140.
60. Irving, CW5, 217.
61. Cited in McFarlane, 142.
62. Irving, CW5, 131.
63. Irving, CW5, 133.
64. Irving, CW5, 137.
65. Irving, CW5, 139.
66. Irving, CW5, 140.
67. Irving, CW5, 159. McFarlane is wrong is suggesting this implies that Christ is guiltless. Irving is quite clear that Jesus' fallenness implies an inherited burden of guilt, occasioning death, though he was personally and actually sinless.
68. This is similar to Owen, who may have influenced Irving. 'To have taken his body upon himself by natural generation would have enervated his efficacy, for the contagion of original sin is derived by procreation; his efficacy also depends upon his divine nature, which means that his human nature need not have particular subsistence in and by itself; but he needed to take on all the e 'properties and affections' of his brethren in respect to his human nature.' John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews, Vol 2: 1:1-4:11,* (Indiana: Sovereign Grace, 1960), p. 467.

69. Cited in McFarlane, 150.
70. This was the covenant between the Father and the Son: this was the purpose in Christ: the Father willing it out of very goodness, that He might manifest Himself unto creatures which were to be made, and support the creation in blessedness forever; the Son consenting to it out of very dutifulness to His Father, together with the same goodness unto the creature; and thus the covenant between the Father and the Son being willed and worded, the Holy Spirit, of very delight in the communion of the Father and the Son, to execute what their pleasure is, and likewise of very goodness to the creature, consented to prepare that body, so willed and worded by the Godhead.' Irving, Cgoodness unto the creature; and thus the covenant between the Father and the Son being willed and worded, the Holy Spirit, of very delight W5, 122. Cf. Calvin's purely filial perspective: 'for God's Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us…ungrudgingly he took our nature upon himself to impart to us what was his.' Calvin, 465.
71. Gunton, 'Irving', 156.
72. Irving, CW5, 123
73. Irving, CW5, 123.
74. Irving, CW5, 124.
75. Irving, CW5, 124-5.
76. Cf. Owen. 'The only singular and immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself.' 'The Holy Ghost…is the immediate, peculiar and efficient cause of all external divine operations…'. John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London, 1674), Works, Vol 3, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), pp.160f, cited in Gunton, p. 168.
77. Irving, CW5, 126.
78. Jürgen Moltmann has taken up this 'pneumatological Christology'. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (MN: Fortress, 1992), 58ff.
79. Gunton, 161.
80. Gunton, 162.
81. Irving, CW5, 134.
82. Gunton, 156.
83. Gunton, 163; citing Irving, CW5, 133.
84. 1 Peter 1:19.
85. Irving, CW5, 225.
86. On the other hand, Calvin restricts the soteriological to the sacrifice itself. As a result of his descent from Abraham and David, 'clothed with our flesh he vanquished

death and sin together that the victory and triumph might be ours. He offered as a sacrifice the flesh he received from us, that he might wipe out our guilt by his act of expiation and appease the Father's righteous wrath'. Calvin, pp. 466-7.

87. Cited in McFarlane, 166..
88. McFarlane, 170.
89. Andrew Leslie, (unpublished thesis in partial fulfilment of a BD), 30.
90. McFarlane, 159.