

Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis



Peter Elliott

Edward Irving: Romantic theology in crisis

Peter Elliott
BA, BD, MTh(Hons.)

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
of Murdoch University
2010

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

Peter Elliott

Abstract

In 1822 a young Church of Scotland minister named Edward Irving accepted a post in London and quickly attracted wide upper-class support. He numbered amongst his friends and admirers the political historian Thomas Carlyle and the Romantic poet-philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge. During the next decade, Irving developed views and practices that could be described as millenarian and proto-pentecostal; his interest in prophecy grew and his Christology became unorthodox. He was ejected from his church and hundreds followed him to begin a new group. Within a short period of time, he was relegated to a subordinate position within this group, which later became the Catholic Apostolic Church. He died in 1834 at the age of 42.

This paper examines Irving's underlying Romanticism and the influences on him, including his complex relationships with Carlyle and Coleridge, and then demonstrates how his Romanticism informed all of his key theological positions, often in tension with the more established Rationalism of the time. In ejecting Irving from his pastorate, the Church of Scotland officials were rejecting his idealistic and Romantic view of Christianity. It was this same idealism, with reference to the charismata, that alienated Irving from a senior role in the nascent Catholic Apostolic Church. Although struggling with this relegation, Irving refused to compromise his principles and continued to anticipate a charismatic endowment, despite his rapid physical decline.

In these two main crises of his ministerial career, Irving faced opposition and relegation precisely because of his unique amalgam of Romanticism and Christianity. Irving's ministerial crises offer valuable insight into the wider social and ecclesiastical issues of the early nineteenth century.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The Historiography of Romanticism and Religion in England and Scotland, 1789-1834	4
Chapter 2 An Overview of Edward Irving's Life	31
Chapter 3 An Historiography of Edward Irving	61
Chapter 4 Irving and Coleridge	100
Chapter 5 Irving and the Carlyles.....	172
Chapter 6 The "Ravished Heart": Irving's Romantic Theology	233
Chapter 7 Romantic Theology in Crisis.....	285
Conclusion	319

Bibliography

Acknowledgements

It is intriguing to observe the journey of PhD students: some arrive at the finish line joyless and embittered with grudges against institutions, supervisors, and subject matter. Others are simply exhausted, passionately vowing never again to research anything other than a restaurant menu. I find I have arrived at my own finish line having enjoyed every second of the past three years, and for that I am deeply grateful.

I am profoundly aware that the richness of my PhD experience rests on the contribution of others. Firstly, that of my supervisor, Associate Professor Rowan Strong of Murdoch University, who was also my supervisor for my Master's degree. Rowan's ability to provide supervision that was both light-hearted and gimlet-eyed as I stumbled through his beloved nineteenth century was immensely encouraging. I am grateful also to Dr. Tim Grass for making available the manuscript of his forthcoming publication *Edward Irving: the Lord's watchman*, and to Mrs Barbara Waddington for providing scans of Edward Irving's correspondence.

Along the way, I have been blessed by the generosity of others. In London, I enjoyed the hospitality of Sister Patricia McMahon, a cousin, and her fellow Sisters of Mercy in Tower Hamlets. In Oxford, Richard, Liz and Nat Mortimer graciously lent me their Abingdon home.

Librarians at New College Library in Edinburgh, the British Library and the Bodleian were invariably helpful and efficient. Special thanks to Christopher Hunwick, archivist at Alnwick Castle, Northumberland for allowing free access to the castle

archives. To be handling Irving's correspondence in Alnwick Castle in a tower room that was probably the spot where Sir Henry Percy (Harry Hotspur) was born in the mid-fourteenth century (and coincidentally above the lawn where a young Harry Potter learnt to fly a broomstick) was a heady privilege indeed. Thanks also to His Grace, the Duke of Northumberland, for this opportunity and for permission to use some extracts from the Drummond papers.

Many people along the way have offered encouragement, including staff at Riverview Leadership College, Harvest West Bible College and Vose Seminary (formerly the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia). I would especially like to thank Dr. Michael O'Neil, Dr. Ashley Crane, Dr. Mick Stringer, Dr. Mark Jennings and Robert Andrews in this regard.

Finally, there is my family. My parents, Dorothy and Keith Hill, have been a consistent source of practical help at a time in their lives when they could easily have justified non-involvement. My wife Deborah, who this year will have been yoked to a history-obsessed husband for a quarter of a century, has demonstrated preternatural patience and support. My sons Joel and Jason, both rapidly leaving childhood behind, seemed to understand not only that I enjoyed this undertaking, but also gradually came to accept that someone my age could still be studying.

All of this demonstrates the truth of John Donne's famous line about no-one being an island. Although Donne wrote this long before the Romantic era, it encapsulates a core Romantic insight about history, as well as the reason for the gratitude I feel

towards all those who have contributed to the journey reflected in the following pages.