

Divisions in the 2x2 Church

Divisions in the Two by Two Church

William Irvine

May 17, 2019

1914-1919

Irvine Forced to Abdicate

In 1914, William Irvine, the founder and leader of an international religious movement for seventeen years, was at the zenith of his power and influence—but he was not satisfied. Irvine revealed to Alfred Magowan that *The Testimony*, as he called the Two by Two Sect, "was a great experiment" (Magowan **1956, p. 5, TTT**).

William Irvine's Discontentment. To the Ritzmans, owners of the Fillmore, California convention grounds, Irvine remarked: "The very success of The Testimony never gave me any satisfaction, while to others it seemed to give them the very desire of their heart and many of the most enthusiastic were only a weariness to my heart...I felt for long that The Testimony was not my home or rest" (**Oct. 10, 1920, TTT**).

The Workers' Discontentment. In a fictional play inspired by real events, titled *Outline of a Peculiar People from 1900 to 1931*, Alfred Magowan presented the perspective of two visitors at the Croknacrieve convention:

"First Voice: There are a thousand people in the tent and not one of them dare resist his will. The men on the platform nod to everything he says, whether they like it or not, and when he turns to them for approval, they draw their faces into the appearance of a smile, knowing that their lives as preachers depend on his favor.

Second Voice: How did he get this power over them?

First Voice : He is a strong man by nature, and used to be a mine boss, and never allowed his will to be resisted. He brought the same spirit into this work and uses the same methods in dealing with these people.

Second Voice: Do you think they will ever rebel and throw off his yoke?

First Voice : They are inwardly rebelling now, especially those who sit on the platform with him, but at the present time they can do nothing because he is master of the situation in every way...The others are only poor echoes of his voice, and in his presence are not able to throw off the incubus of fear that almost paralyzes them." (**Magowan 1931, p. 11-12, TTT**)

Irvine's Strange Preaching. Although Irvine's messages had often been noted for their bizarre, belligerent, and even apocalyptic content from early on, Overseers and Senior Workers began, at a 1910 South Australian convention, to be troubled by something new in Irvine. "Wilson McClung hung his head when William spoke. This impression was further confirmed the following year at the 1911 convention which William Irvine again attended" (**Bethel Mission 1910, TTT**). Reportedly, at the Warrandyte convention in Victoria, Australia, Irvine accused the entire congregation of having a bad spirit and sent them home early.

Magowan recalled a 1913 U.S. convention: "What I especially remember about the conventions that year was the oddness of his [Irvine's] preaching...he spoke about stars as other worlds, and held before us the strange possibility of going to them and doing for them the work of saviours as Jesus had done for this one!" (**Magowan 1953, TTT**).

From Jack Stancliff's account "Early History of the Gospel in Bakersfield, California": "William Irvine made the statement to Uncle Willie [Jamieson] and Jack Carroll that he felt like he had gotten beyond the place of needing to pray, and it was then they realized that he had strayed from the lowly way" (**2009**).

Fearing the influence Irvine's strange new ideas might have at the Woodside, South Australia convention John Hardie refused to allow him to speak from the platform. Meanwhile, worldwide, the Senior Worker conspired together so Irvine would have no further opportunities to air his strange ideas.

According to Jack Carroll, Irvine "is also under the delusion that the 'day of grace ended in August 1914,' and that since that date 'the voice of God has not been heard in any meeting on earth.' This means that, according to him none have been truly born-again during the last four and a half years, and that the labors of all the workers in every field has been utterly in vain" (**letter to Brother or Sister, April 16, 1919, TTT**).

1913-1914: Irvine Forced to Step Down. Irvine was the leader of a *great experiment* from his thirty-fourth to fifty-first years, from 1897 to 1914—seventeen years, a position which naturally derived from his role as founder and ultimate authority. As when he was a colliery supervisor, he had ruled over those under him with an iron rod. Eventually, his Senior Workers felt threatened enough they galvanized to mutiny against him. In 1914, Senior workers told him they would no longer submit to his leadership (**Jack Carroll to My Brother or Sister April 16, 1919, TTT**).

Irvine provided three different months in 1914 in which he was removed from leadership. Possibly the different dates reflect his experience of finding himself rejected in one field after another. They were April, August, and September. He mentions, "Six years ago in April, I was rejected and despised and cast out to die, my birthright divided among my children and enemies" (to William Carroll, June 29, 1920 , *TTT*). He reminded Cooney, "Tenth August 1914, the day of my rejection by Willie Gill and you and you will long remember it to your sorrow" (Aug. 19, 1923, *TTT*), and also gave September as the month (Dunbars Oct. 13, 1920 , *TTT* ; to Percy Abbott, Oct. 3, 1930 , *TTT*).

Reasons Irvine Was Removed as Leader. The four reasons most often provided for why Irvine was ousted are: (1) He was guilty of womanizing or immorality; (2) He became too proud and lifted up in himself (3) He was preaching false doctrine; and (4) He became mentally unbalanced. Perhaps it was a combination of these reasons, or something entirely different.

Reason 1: His womanizing or immorality. A recurrent, whispered rationale implied that Irvine's sexual improprieties led to his ouster. Irvine revealed: "It was out of Christchurch, New Zealand, came *The Scandal*... The last time I slept with him, he [Ed Cooney] read a letter to me written by a dog outside The Testimony...on this he slew his Brother" (to Loitz, Aug. 9, 1924 , *TTT*). Irvine neither acknowledged nor denied such lapses. In letters written soon after he was expelled, however, he frequently referred to some unspecified *scandal* and *sins of the flesh* .

For example: "Every tongue, hand or back that turned against me for *my sin* these past seven years must repent and find mercy—or perish to be tormented by the memory of their evil words " (to Willie Abercrombie, March 2, 1921 , *TTT* ; Worker on the 1905 list). "Think of all I did for you and others in spite of *my sins*!... Fancy the labor in building a house for God, and the pain of seeing it become a den of thieves! " (to John Hardie, Aug. 28, 1920 , *TTT* ; Worker on 1905 list and Overseer of NSW Australia). "I had many helpers of all kinds, was much loved, (and over loved by the sister) " (to Friends, Dec 24, 1921 , *TTT*).

Irvine Weir compared Irvine's fall to David, who gave into temptation and committed adultery with Bathsheba. Cooney compared Irvine to Samson: " William Irvine... bore some resemblance to Samson. He was a strong man...till Delilah so influenced him that he put her before God...When Delilah clipped his hair...Samson...found that Jehovah had departed from him, and that he was weak like any other man. 'Tis so with all God's Servants who depart from revelation from God direct, and confer with flesh and blood" (Cooney Testimony 1947).

The Scandal possibly concerned William Irvine's attendance at the New Zealand convention in 1912. Whereas the 1912 Workers list included ten Sister Workers, the 1913 List had none. It seems the Brother Workers had become concerned that women preaching was not scriptural. They had, therefore, decided to continue the Work in New Zealand without the Sister Workers.

Rumor had it that after the convention, all the Sister Workers were sent away until they determined if any were pregnant. The author found no evidence any of them produced a child. Since the Brother Workers' missions produced no converts that year, they recalled the Sister Workers; the following year, 1914, six Sister Workers' names were on the Workers List.

William Hughes, Overseer of New Zealand, wrote a letter to Willie Gill dated February 12, 1913, providing the location and occupation of all the New Zealand Sister Workers in connection with Cooney's lawsuits. The Sisters from the UK had been removed to Australia, and he explained the absence of the others.

It is doubtful The Scandal was the discovery of Irvine's illegitimate son since Archibald was born in 1886 when William was twenty-three, long before his spiritual awakening in 1893; he was nine-years old when his father entered the Faith Mission in 1895, and likely residing with William's parents. It may have proved difficult for Irvine over the long term to completely hide the fact that he had an illegitimate son.

Reason 2: He became overly proud and lifted up. Ed Cooney thought Irvine believed he was better than his Co-Workers as a direct result of the Living Witness Doctrine. Viewing Irvine's downfall as proof that the Living Witness Doctrine was false, Cooney elucidated: "In 1914, God showed me that the pre-eminence William [Irvine] got through this error [LWD] led...to his ceasing to be the humble brother among brethren that he was in the beginning" (to My Dear Sister, May 1930). This would not have been the view of most Senior Workers, however, as they continued to support the living Witness Doctrine.

Alfred Magowan expressed grief over the harsh sentence Irvine received from the Workers:

"I have often wondered if those responsible for exalting our great man in preparation for his casting down, ever repented of giving him that lift which led to his degrading by them?...There are histories to all things; and as there were many things leading up to the final folly of King Saul, so was it also with our *King* William...You saw it forty years ago as violated morality. I have seen it in all the years since as God's answer to unchristian ambition" (to George Walker , Feb. 21, 1954, *TTT*).

"This is what I see: He [Irvine] became exalted and needed to be humbled. His 'sons in the gospel' contributed to his spiritual delinquency by giving him a place that not even a Pope might claim: making him *the spiritual progenitor of all Christians in our time* . They helped to seat him on that most unusual throne ; and would have kept him on it all the days of his life if 'sin' had not intervened to cast him from it " (Magowan to Willie Hughes 1957, *TTT*).

G. Pattison wrote: "And the Workers now in fellowship with William Irvine...increased in their attachment to and respect for their chief's leadership, possibly more so than was good for him or them...when deference, loyalty, obedience, to leadership, etc., goes beyond a certain point, it is very apt to...[be] bad for both sides making the leader a sort of demigod, filling him with notions of his own indispensability and importance, and making of the led ones mere tools and chattels" (G. Pattison 1935, Leaders , *TTT*).

Reason 3: He preached false doctrine. According to this explanation, they ousted him for expounding a new doctrine, twisting the scripture, making predictions, and no longer being guided by the Spirit of God. Jack Carroll explained to Clyde: "for a number of

years, it was becoming...more painfully evident that the Lord was not with him; and in the last two years this has been made very manifest both in his manner of life, letters, and foolish wresting of the scriptures" (**J. Carroll April 12, 1919, TTT**).

"During the last few months, William Irvine has written many letters to Saints all over U.S. and Canada," wrote Jack Carroll, "urging them to sell their homes and farms and invest their money in Railroads, Fisheries, Canneries, Shipping, etc. He...prophecies [sic] a worldwide drought and famine beginning August 1 of this year" (**to Brother or Sister, April 16, 1919, TTT**). Irvine advised his correspondents to "encourage everybody to prepare by buying a little food for three months emergency when they can do it" (**to Edwards and Kerrs, July 9, 1920, TTT**). "Bury and hide. The less you have in men's eyes, the safer you will be (**to Fladungs, July 9, 1920, TTT**).

George Walker was quoted in the September 26, 1921, *Indianapolis News*: William Irvine, a Scotchman, one of the original leaders, is not now affiliated with this group because of a difference over the prophecies of the Revelations."

It was not until late 1918, over four years after he stepped down, that Irvine came to his new understanding of the book of Revelation. He recounted, "Toward Armistice Day [November 11, 1918] for about three weeks, night after night, His Spirit began to open up and put in order the truth we find in Revelation; and since that [time], has increased and become as simple as the gospel revealed in Alpha Jesus...slowly, line upon line, the whole Message or program for the last days of the age has been unfolded" (**to Andrew Walker, Feb. 21, 1929, TTT**).

Reason 4: He became deranged, unbalanced, unfit to lead. Some claimed Irvine had a mental breakdown, "went off the deep end," or as Jack Carroll concluded, was "delusional." No evidence has turned up confirming Irvine was ever under psychiatric care. Until the last few months before his death, he was able to live by himself and was well spoken of by those who knew him personally. Some Workers believed forcing Irvine out of leadership was the only course of action open to them under the circumstances; that the Workers were compelled to do so. While the Workers were not proud of rejecting and ejecting their leader, on the other hand, it is possible they also felt embarrassed or threatened by Irvine's behavior while he was occupying the role of the "Lord's Anointed."

Irvine's Reaction. He did not surrender his position quietly. Severely hurt, Irvine suffered intense rage, despair, and anguish from the rejection and betrayal of his best friends. He viewed them as thieves who robbed him of his kingdom. He reminded Cooney, "If you read the parables in Matthew 20-21, you will find I planted the Vineyard and it has fallen into the hands of wicked husbandsmen" (**March 2, 1923, TTT**).

Stung with indignation, he protested, "while The Testimony claim I was only ONE of the twelve apostles...God surely has given them all their recompense in attempting to steal what God gave me. They put crowns on their own heads and shone by the reflections of what they got from me" (**to Dunbars, Sept. 12, 1923, TTT**).

To Fred Hanowell, he remarked, "those who sat themselves up as leaders of The Testimony and use their horns of authority to hurt others and are claimed by men as leaders...[are] the greatest set of robbers in the world history—who thought they could rob me" (**Aug. 17, 1921, TTT**).

In his anger, Irvine railed to Bill Carroll: "Rejected of the seed in The Testimony...it was grasped greedily...The Jesus Way was stolen, confiscated, misappropriated...I was there to feel it...the victim of the heel bruisers; the theme of the scandal-mongers, and the dirty slut Sisters; the man without a parallel in history, whose back has been plowed upon, who has been vanquished—no fear of him now!" (to Bill Carroll, **June 29, 1920, TTT**).

Irvine disclosed, "During these past years whether I have smoked or worked with my hands, gone to a picture show, or whatever I have been doing, it has only been to deaden the pain and relieve the suffering" (to Ritzmans, **Oct. 10, 1920, TTT**).

Magowan pondered, "The wonder is the man who, in his earlier years so bravely ran, was not driven raving mad when he surveyed his world of friendships falling round his head!" (**Cross Examination 1958, 27, TTT**). "The men who crowned and throned him in their unchristian idolatry stripped and cast him down and drove him forth into the wilderness as one of the strangest scapegoats of the ages" (Parker 1982, 113).

1914: Irvine Returned to America. Irvine retreated to his family in Kilsyth, Scotland. About a month after WWI began in August 1914, Irvine, age fifty-one, on September 12 boarded an unidentified ship at Glasgow for New York. No military records have surfaced for Irvine, although at age fifty-one at the outbreak of the war it is unlikely he would be accepted for service or subject to conscription.

Information about Irvine is scarce during the war years, pieced together by the author through hundreds of comments dropped in his letters. Although forced out of leadership in 1914, Irvine had not yet been expelled from the Sect. The Senior Workers offered him the position of an ordinary Worker or a Friend; Irvine refused both and withdrew. From 1914 to 1918, the Workers warily continued to count Irvine as a brother; one who was out of service. It would be ten years later, in 1924, before they made the break official, washed their hands of him, and shook the dust off their feet.

Irvine wrote: "Those who thought I ceased to be their Father in the gospel, and became their Brother as so many tried to make out...surely are their own condemners...Their attempts to prove that I should not have a right to overlooking of the whole Ark is clear evidence of where they were" (**to Edwards, July 6, 1921, TTT**).

Alfred Magowan relayed, "Writing to me from Jerusalem he [Irvine] said that after...1914, he went to New York...got an old car and drove on to California. And apparently, he took heart again when you [Jack Carroll] and others had that reunion with him in Santa Barbara. Then disheartenment overwhelmed him again, when it was reported to me George [Walker] wrote...that he would have nothing more to do with him" (**to J. Carroll, Dec. 1, 1954, TTT**).

During the war years, Irvine drove around America, where he "sought in every way and place if I could find a man with God in him; and the end of the quest was to find out that what I sought—I was. The cheapest way of travelling in U.S. is by auto...For £100, I got a good machine with tent, blankets, and all I needed. This saved me board and lodging and train fare and enabled me to be free to go anywhere I wanted. I covered twelve thousand miles first year...I sold the machine after three-years' service. I look on it as one of the best and wisest choices I ever made" **(to Mrs. Adams, Oct. 21, 1921 , TTT)**.

"After spending a year in car all over the states, I spent a year [1915-1916] alone in San Diego in a shack," wrote Irvine. "For five years I was in every kind of meeting in U.S....with an honest, hungry heart ready for any blessing they professed to have and only to find out that wickedness was in them all. They could all kill, but none of them could make alive, The Testimony included. And I found less wickedness in a picture show than any meeting I went to" **(to Lees, April 28, 1921 , TTT)**.

Irvine reminisced about traveling to the Dunbars in Placentia, Southern California: "Here we are at the same date, or thereabout, I reached your door in 1916, twelve years ago, after being in the tunnel from Alpha to Omega; from the Jesus of the Gospel, to the Jesus of Revelation 1" **(to Dunbars, Nov. 27, 1928 , TTT)**.

1919: Irvine went to live in Jerusalem. Doug Parker quoted Magowan as to the circumstances leading up to Irvine's move. "In the year 1919 while reading Revelation he thought that the time was at hand for the testimony of the two witnesses in Jerusalem mentioned in the 11th chapter...some of his California friends encouraged him to believe that because of the part that he had played and as a man greatly used of God he might be one of those witnesses. He replied that whether it was that way or not, he would like to be on the spot and he went to Jerusalem and remained there until his death" (Parker, 1982, 113).

Irvine's removal was likely a relief to the Workers, as it placed him far away from their fields and converts. Little did they know how much grief he could and would make for them through the copious letters he produced over the next twenty-eight years of his life. Distance did not hinder Irvine from corresponding and recruiting others. Despite his exile, Irvine obtained and retained many devotees.