CALVINISTS IN CONTROVERSY: JOHN KENNEDY, HORATIUS BONAR AND THE MOODY MISSION OF 1873–74

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Introduction

D.L. Moody came to Edinburgh in 1873 to conduct a mission at the invitation of Scottish Evangelical leaders such as James Hood Wilson and Horatius Bonar. Though the American's style was unconventional, they warmed to him as a person and appreciated the power of his Evangelical preaching which quickly made a major impact on the capital. It soon became clear that the mission thus begun was the most significant evangelistic initiative of the generation and many leading ministers threw all their energies into it. They were thrilled to have discovered a man who could communicate the gospel effectively to the urban masses and lead large numbers to Christian commitment. In view of these most welcome results they were prepared to countenance the innovations which Moody brought to Scottish Evangelical life: the racy, unsystematic, anecdotal style of his preaching, the organ-playing and hymn-singing of Sankey, the introduction of the 'appeal' and the inquiry room. From the Highlands, however, came a voice of dissent. John Kennedy, Free Church minister of Dingwall and the acknowledged leader of the Highland section of the Free Church, published a pamphlet entitled *Hyper-Evangelism: 'Another Gospel' Though a Mighty Power,* in which he condemned the Moody campaign as a departure from Calvinist orthodoxy. Horatius Bonar rushed to its defence and published *The Old Gospel Not 'Another Gospel' but the Power of God unto Salvation.* Kennedy was not convinced and soon there appeared from his pen *A Reply to Dr. Bonar's Defence of Hyper-Evangelism.*

Both Bonar and Kennedy were honoured names within Scottish Evangelicalism. Moreover, they had been closely associated for many years, having taken part together in the Disruption of 1843. When the Free Church had recently been divided over the question of union with the United Presbyterian Church, both had been prominent figures in the conservative or 'Constitutionalist' party. Yet now, apparently suddenly, they were at odds and the tone of their discussion was decidedly acrimonious. To Bonar the Moody mission was a visitation from God which was bringing salvation to thousands and he was personally much impressed by the vigorous Christian life of the converts. Kennedy, on the other hand, was unsparing in his

denunciation of the campaign. A typical Moody convert he described as 'a molluscous, flabby creature, without pith or symmetry, breathing freely only in the heated air of meetings, craving to be pampered with vapid sentiment, and so puffed up by foolish flattery, as to be in a state of chronic flatulency, requiring relief in frequent bursts of hymn-singing, in spouting addresses as void of Scripture truth as of common sense, and in belching flippant questions in the face of all he meets'.[1] Strong words! The very vehemence of Kennedy's language demonstrates how diametrically opposed were the two senior churchmen in their assessment of the campaign. To Bonar the Moody mission was a 'revival' comparable with the notable times of blessing recorded in the past. To Kennedy all the excitement was delusory, no lasting benefit could be expected and the innovations brought by the campaign were subversive of the true Calvinist tradition.

This disagreement proved to be a marker in the parting of the ways between the Highland Calvinism and the Lowland Evangelicalism which had been united in the Free Church. It therefore occupies a place of historical and theological importance and calls for review. Moreover, the discussion is particularly significant as the first sharp disagreement among Scottish Evangelicals over the modern 'campaign' evangelism which was first introduced to Scotland by Moody. Although their pamphlets are somewhat slight, Kennedy and Bonar touch on issues which have recurrently arisen in subsequent discussions and there are several points of contact with contemporary debate. A review of their differences regarding I. the merits of special evangelistic campaigns, II. the theological issues arising from Moody's preaching, and III. their attitudes to the Calvinist tradition, may offer some valuable historical background to contemporary discussions.

I. Campaign Evangelism

The first substantial difference between Kennedy and Bonar was whether a special evangelistic campaign could expect to be blessed by God. Bonar, together with many other Evangelical ministers, had thrown himself into the work of organising the Moody and Sankey campaign and was convinced that God was working in a remarkable way to bring many people to faith: 'Necessity is laid on us to say that, as Christian ministers, we are persuaded that the Spirit of God

1 J. Kennedy, *Hyper-Evangelism 'Another Gospel' Though a Mighty Power: A Review of the Recent Religious Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1874), pp. 21–22.

(and not Satan as [Kennedy] suggests) has been working among us.'[2] The special meetings which were arranged in connection with the campaign he saw as no different in principle from those he had witnessed as a young man when crowds gathered night after night to hear the preaching of William Burns or Murray McCheyne. Kennedy saw the campaign in a very different light. Some of those involved, he granted, were actuated by genuine spiritual feeling. However, 'others, strangers to *stated* spiritual enjoyment in the means of grace, were longing for some change – some excitement to lift them out of their dullness – and for some bustle in which they might take their share of service. Others, still, who knew no happiness in the house of God, and had no desire for his presence, would fain that something new were introduced into the mode of service which they felt so jading. The excitement of a revival would be to them a relief. "Special services" they strongly craved.'[3]

Kennedy scarcely concealed his dislike for any departure from the customary pattern of worship. It would have been infinitely preferable, in his view, 'had the awakened expectations been left to be operated on by the stated ministrations of the sanctuary'.[4] He greatly feared that all the novelty and 'bustle' of the campaign was likely to produce only carnal excitement and that the use of 'ordinary means' would promise much more substantial and lasting results. Doubtless there may have been something of the inbuilt conservatism of an older man in this attitude but there was a serious theological concern underlying it. The issue, as Kennedy saw it, was one of whether conversion was brought about by divine sovereignty or human management: 'Men, anxious to secure a certain result, and determined to produce it, do not like to think of a controlling will, to whose sovereign behests they must submit, and of the necessity of almighty power being at work, whose action must be regulated by another will than theirs. Certain processes must lead to certain results. This selfish earnestness, this proud resolve to make a manageable business of conversion-work, is intolerant of any recognition of the sovereignty of God.'[5]

Of particular concern to Kennedy in this regard were the 'sudden' or instantaneous conversions which were a feature of the Moody and Sankey campaign. He was aghast that people were accepted as converts

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2 H. Bonar, *The Old Gospel: Not 'Another Gospel' but the Power of God Unto Salvation. A Reply to Dr. Kennedy's Pamphlet 'Hyper-Evangelism'* (Edinburgh, 1874), p. 50.

3 Kennedy, *Hyper-Evangelism*, p. 23.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

simply upon an affirmation of faith at the close of an evangelistic meeting. Real repentance, argued Kennedy, was a process which required some considerable time to be accomplished: 'The work of conversion includes what we might expect to find detailed in a process. There can be no faith in Christ without some sense of sin, some knowledge of Christ, such as never was possessed before, and willingness, resulting from renewal, to receive Him as Saviour from sin. If a hearty, intelligent turning to God in Christ be the result of conversion, it is utterly unwarrantable to expect that, as a rule, conversion shall be sudden. Indeed, the suddenness is rather a ground of suspicion than a reason for concluding that the work is God's.'[6] The pattern of 'sudden' conversions which marked the Moody mission appeared to Kennedy as further evidence that it was a matter of human management rather than the sovereignty of God. Conversion was God's work which in due time would be manifested by its results and it was presumptive for anyone to pronounce that conversion had occurred simply on the basis of a verbal profession of faith. This was 'to commit the credit of true religion to cases which have not been proved'.[7]

Bonar replied to this with the biblical argument that all conversions recorded in the New Testament were sudden, the theological argument that all conversions must be sudden if they are the work of the Holy Spirit, and the practical argument that complete certainly about conversion is not possible at any stage and that joy cannot be restrained when all the evidence suggests that a conversion has occurred.[8] To these considerations he added the irenic argument that conversion may occur in different ways and that tolerance and forbearance are required in order to recognise the diversity of God's work. In choosing the means by which he will work he is not restricted by our standards of orthodoxy: 'He wrought not only by the Calvinist Whitefield, but the Arminian Wesley.'[9]

Bonar's broader, more eclectic approach may be explained, at least in part, by the context in which he was placed. Industrialization and urbanization had taken a devastating toll in alienating working people from the life of the church. The paramount need of the day, from the perspective of urban ministers like Bonar, was for missionary work which would lead to the recovery of the 'lapsed masses'. The old pattern of parish life was patently ineffective to win and hold the

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
7 *Ibid.*, p.5.
8 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, pp. 34, 50–51.
9 *Ibid.*, p.10.

great urban populations and so even the most conservative ministers became open to new methods and willing to compromise on inessential matters.

In Dingwall it was different. The church largely retained its hold on the communal life of the people and there did not appear to be any need at all for a new missionary approach. Kennedy greeted the introduction of Sabbath schools with hesitation and hostility on the grounds that they would not be needed if all families were in their place in church every week![10] His coining of the rather unfortunate term 'hyper-evangelism' suggests a fear that evangelistic zeal was being taken too far and was causing the urban ministers to lose a proper sense of proportion. In Dingwall the traditional pattern remained effective and it was not apparent why evangelism should be given the kind of over-riding priority which might cause valued elements in the Calvinist tradition to be neglected or even jeopardised. If unbelief and alienation threatened the church then the answer was to uphold all the more firmly the inherited tradition which had proved itself in the past. For Bonar and his colleagues in the urban south, however, the time seemed ripe to form a broader alliance and to allow for new approaches in evangelism, providing only that the central elements of the Gospel were sounded forth. To organise special evangelistic campaigns was not, for Bonar, to deny the sovereignty of God but rather, in humble dependence upon that very sovereignty, to seek to meet the missionary demands of changed times. The contrasting contexts were certainly a contributory factor in producing a difference of perspective. The resulting discussion moved on from the basic question of the validity of such campaigns to some of the deeper theological questions which the Moody mission had provoked.

II. Faith, Repentance and Assurance

The difference over the 'sudden' conversions which characterized the Moody mission led Kennedy and Bonar to explore two issues which have surfaced repeatedly in Scottish theological discussion: the priority of faith over repentance in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), and the nature of assurance. On the question of the relation of faith and repentance Kennedy was concerned by the absence of a 'law-work' among mission converts. For true conversion to occur, he argued, there must be a time when people are required to 'consider the claims of God as Lawgiver and Judge, in order that they

10 See A.P.F. Sell, *Defending and Declaring the Faith: Some Scottish Examples 1860–1920* (Exeter, 1987), pp. 29–30.

may feel themselves shut up to His mercy as Sovereign'.[11] Without thorough application of the law there could be no conviction of sin and without conviction of sin there could be no conception of gospel grace. This 'law-work' in Kennedy's view, was conspicuously absent from the preaching of the Moody mission: 'A call to repentance... never issues from their trumpet.'[12]

Bonar directly challenged the idea that there could be no true conversion without a law-work and pointed out that 'in the Acts of the Apostles we have many specimens of apostolical preaching to promiscuous multitudes, yet in not one of them is the law introduced. The apostles confined themselves to the glad tidings concerning Christ and His cross. Christ crucified was that which was preached for conviction and conversion.'[13] Repentance had many times been preached from the platform of the Moody mission but it was given its proper place as the fruit or the result of faith. To argue that repentance must precede faith appeared to Bonar to be a dangerous species of 'preparationism' since 'the repentance which does not come *from believing* must be simply that of the natural conscience'.[14] In support of his position Bonar appealed to John Calvin, John Davidson, James Melville, Thomas Boston and *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* and argued that it was Kennedy with his insistence on the necessity of a law-work preceding conversion who was out of step with the true Evangelical tradition.[15] He quoted at length from Calvin's *Institutes* to demonstrate the Reformer's conviction that 'repentance follows faith and is produced by it'. Bonar notes especially Calvin's vigour in opposing the contrary view: 'Those who think that repentance precedes faith, instead of flowing from or being produced by it, as the fruit by the tree *have never understood its nature*' (Bonar's italics).[16] Kennedy's insistence on the need for a (preferably lengthy) period of repentance prior to conversion revealed, in Bonar's view, a failure to grasp the evangelical character of repentance.

Bonar brought forward this argument without having any thought of challenging the theological tradition of Westminster Calvinism to which both he and Kennedy belonged. He was no theological innovator or iconoclast. In his dissertation on Bonar's writings B.R. Oliphant concluded that, 'His theological thought substantially

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11 Kennedy, *Hyper-Evangelism*, p. 10.
12 *Ibid.*
13 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, p. 28.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
15 *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.
16 *Ibid.*, *cf.* Calvin, *Institutes* 3:3:1.

followed the ebb and flow of the general tradition of Scottish Calvinism, and in particular the "frozen orthodoxy" of the Scottish school of Evangelicalism of his own day'.[17] In his defence of the Moody mission Bonar had no intention of departing from that tradition. His judgement may be open to question but he had satisfied himself that the message proclaimed in the Moody mission 'is the teaching of the Westminster Confession and the Shorter Catechism'.[18] This forms a marked contrast to the work of more recent writers who have taken up the question of faith and repentance and have sought to demonstrate a fundamental cleavage between Calvin and the later Westminster tradition.[19] Perhaps further attention requires to be given to Scottish evangelical theologians like Bonar who took the 'Calvin' view of faith and repentance but without entertaining any sense that this brought them into conflict with the Westminster Confession and federal theology.

The doctrine of assurance is another area where such a discontinuity hypothesis has been advanced but again Bonar resisted Kennedy's objections without wishing to challenge in any way the Westminster tradition. Kennedy was concerned that in the Moody mission faith was being reduced to mere belief and that on the basis of their assent to certain propositions people were urged 'at once to conclude that they are saved because they have so believed'.[20] Not only did this reveal a superficial and inadequate understanding of faith (which involves *fiducia* as well as *assensus*) but it also offered a quite mistaken ground for assurance. The problem, wrote Kennedy, was that 'assurance is regarded as the direct result of faith, or as essential to its exercise. A consciousness of faith is itself deemed a sufficient ground of assurance. There is no place at all allowed to an attestation of faith by works.'[21] To Kennedy, assurance of faith was a much more subtle and elusive matter than the simple confidence in the truth of the gospel which the 'revival' held forth as the ground of an assured hope of eternal life. Objective assurance as to the truth of the Word and the trustworthiness of Christ he regarded as an altogether different thing from the subjective assurance that he himself had

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17 B.R. Oliphant, 'Horatius Bonar 1808–1889: Hymn Writer, Theologian, Preacher, Churchman: A Study of His Religious Thought and Activity' (Ph. D., University of Edinburgh, 1951), p. 125.

18 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, p. 58.

19 See, *e.g.*, M.C. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1985).

20 Kennedy, *Hyper-Evangelism*, p. 12.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

genuinely trusted in Christ.[22] The latter could be achieved only by self-examination: 'It is the accrediting of faith by works which alone can form a basis for the steadfast assurance of having passed from death to life.'[23]

In response, Bonar pointed out that the faith of the Moody converts *had* been attested by works: 'family worship begun; gaiety given up; balls and parties refused; prodigal sons brought back; profane swearing lessened; the idle beginning to work; medical students offering themselves to the work of the Lord; many a dying testimony to these meetings; communicants greatly increased, both in quantity and quality.'[24] However, he was also anxious to defend the mission teaching that faith led directly and immediately to assurance: '"Peace with God", as the *immediate* result of a believed gospel, is what the apostles preached. "Peace with God" not as the result of a certain amount of experience or feeling, but as flowing directly from the light of the cross, is that which we are commanded to preach as the glad tidings of great joy to the sinner.'[25] On this point Bonar did not draw on the Evangelical tradition going back to Calvin which could have been used to support his point,[26] but he made it clear that he was prepared to defend theologically the immediate assurance offered in the mission preaching and to resist any tendency for protracted difficulty in obtaining assurance to be made a norm of Evangelical experience.

III. Highlands, Lowlands and the Calvinist Tradition

Despite these differences on fairly central issues in Evangelical preaching both Kennedy and Bonar identified themselves unreservedly with Scottish Calvinist orthodoxy. The difference between them arose, it may be argued, because Kennedy was determined to uphold one particular form which that tradition had taken whereas Bonar took a sufficiently broad and generous approach as to allow him to describe Moody's teaching as 'thoroughly Calvinistic'.[27] The Highland Calvinism of Kennedy, on the other hand, had formed a much more strictly defined pattern of religious life. It was taken for granted, *e.g.*, that conversion was a process which took some time to

22 See, *e.g.*, J. Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* (Edinburgh, 1861), p. 124.

23 J. Kennedy, *A Reply to Dr. Bonar's Defence of Hyper-Evangelism* (Edinburgh, 1875), p. 34.

24 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, p. 52n.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

26 See , *e.g.*, Calvin, *Institutes* 3:2:6, 15.

27 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, p.59.

be completed. We can understand Kennedy's dismay at the 'sudden' conversions of the Moody mission when we appreciate that in Highland Evangelicalism a convert was not accepted until his faith had been authenticated by a godly life. John MacInnes records that 'in Skye, three years was regarded as a suitable probationary period. By then it would appear whether the convert was a hypocrite... or a true child of God.'[28] Similarly, with regard to assurance, the belief was well-established among Highland Christians that assurance was a quite separate matter from faith and could be obtained only with great difficulty. This had produced in the Highlands an almost melancholy religious doubt and self-questioning which was generally not found in the rest of the Church. As William Taylor observed, 'In other districts it is not uncommon to hear the language of appropriation and high assurance from the lips of carnal men: in these Highlands, such language was seldom heard even from true believers.'[29]

Kennedy wrote as the acknowledged representative of a mature and consolidated religious tradition which was characterised by such distinctive features and was not without a certain intolerance. Bonar recognised that the difference in their assessment of the Moody mission could be accounted for by the Highland-Lowland divide: '(Dr Kennedy's) Northern experiences seem to unfit him for appreciating the religion of "the Southron", as he designates us of the Lowlands.'[30] The Highland leader's hostility to the Moody mission came as no surprise to Bonar since 'he has not seen his way to believe in any of those former Southern awakenings by which most Scottish Christians have been gladdened'.[31] This stern disapproval must be placed in the context of staunch adherence to a distinct and peculiar religious tradition. In the Highlands it was expected, *e.g.*, that godly men and women would have the gift of 'second sight' and of prophecy. Kennedy in his writings had made much of such phenomena.[32] Might his hostility to the Moody mission be based on the absence of such distinctive features of Highland religion? Bonar suspected as much: 'His standard differs from ours. His point of view is not at all the same as ours. He claims certain things which we do

28 J. MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1951), p. 217.

29 W. Taylor (ed.), *Memorials of the Life and Ministry of Charles Calder Macintosh* (Edinburgh, 1870), p. 19.

30 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, p. 13.

31 *Ibid.*

32 See *ibid.*, pp. 16–19.

not. He demurs to some things to which we do not.'[33] The controversy, as Bonar saw it, brought to light not only Highland hostility to a particular campaign but a lack of sympathy with religious life in the Lowlands as a whole: 'it is...the theology of the Lowlands that Dr. Kennedy has summoned to his tribunal, and against which he utters such hard impeachments.'[34]

Bonar was accurate in his judgement that behind Kennedy's strictures lay the fact that the character and ethos of Highland Calvinism was quite distinct from even the strictest Calvinism of the Lowlands. Certainly they had enough in common with Lowland Calvinists to join them in the Free Church in 1843, but the history of that Church cannot properly be understood without an appreciation that the Highlanders brought with them a highly distinctive religious tradition which they were determined to maintain. As James Hunter observes, 'In the history of the popular religious movement in the Highlands the Disruption of the Church of Scotland was a largely fortuitous event.'[35] Highland Calvinism had its own history and its own tradition and its connection with the nineteenth-century Free Church was somewhat incidental. Kennedy's primary loyalty was not to the national denomination to which he belonged but rather to the 'religion of Ross-shire'. Indeed at one stage he floated the idea of a new church being formed – 'a Celtic Church of Caledonia'.[36] Separation from the Established Church, in a more or less organised form, had been endemic throughout the Highlands in the first half of the nineteenth century and, while most of the dissenting groups adhered to the Free Church in 1843, there is no doubt that the people retained their independent outlook.

What was becoming apparent in the controversy between Kennedy and Bonar over the Moody mission was that the two streams of Evangelicalism, Lowland and Highland, which had come together in the formation of the Free Church in 1843 were separating again. While the establishment of new Highland denominations in 1893 and 1900 occurred ostensibly for ecclesiastical and constitutional reasons, behind these lay the determination to maintain a distinctive *religious* tradition. Archibald MacNeilage, one of the leaders of the Highland minority which declined to enter the United Free Church in 1900, admitted frankly that 'one subordinate thing which made him stand

33 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
35 J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 103.
36 J. Kennedy, *The Distinctive Principles and Present Position and Duty of the Free Church* (Edinburgh, 1875), p. 30.

out with the men who were standing out from the Union was that every man and woman known to him personally to be a man of prayer was opposed to the Union'.[37] Presumably what he meant by this was that everyone whose piety took the form characteristic of Highland Calvinism was opposed to the Union. The ecclesiastical action was taken, in part at least, in order to maintain that particular religious tradition. Since that time Highland Evangelicalism has, to a large extent, gone its own way. The open disagreement between Bonar and Kennedy in 1874 may therefore be seen as a marker indicating the parting of the ways between Highland Calvinism and Lowland Evangelicalism and may serve as a useful point of reference in any doctrinal or ecclesiastical discussions between Highland and Lowland Evangelicals which are aimed at mutual understanding.

Conclusion: On the Use of the Telescope

The value of special evangelistic campaigns, the relation of faith and repentance, the nature of assurance, the distinctiveness of Highland spirituality – these have been recurrent themes in Scottish theological discussions in the years since 1874 and on each of them the controversy between Kennedy and Bonar offers a valuable historical perspective. More generally, and perhaps more importantly, the controversy raised a question of what might be called a sense of proportion. Both Kennedy and Bonar lived and died Westminster Calvinists. What divided them was the determination of the one to maintain intact a particular well-defined religious tradition and the willingness of the other to adopt a more open, eclectic and tolerant approach. Historically the judgment of Bonar that Moody's teaching was thoroughly Calvinistic may well seem naive since the campaign now appears to have been a turning point in the transition from the old Calvinism to a less doctrinal Evangelicalism with quite different emphases.[38] Nevertheless there is a cogency in Bonar's sanguine view of the new emphases in Moody's preaching. His argument was that emphasis on one truth does not necessarily involve denial of others:

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37 *Ross-shire Journal*, 7th December 1900, Speech of Archibald MacNeilage at Strathpeffer.

38 Carnegie Simpson, *e.g.*, commented of Moody that 'His preaching of "a free Gospel" to all sinners did more to relieve Scotland generally – that is to say, apart from a limited number of select minds – of the old hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of election and of what theologians call "a limited atonement" and to bring home a sense of the love and grace of God towards all men, than did even the teaching of John MacLeod Campbell'. P.C. Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy* (London, 1909), I, p. 408.

'When writing on one subject, an author confines himself to that; so that, if he had written nothing more, inferences might be drawn unfavourable to his soundness, especially by those in whose minds one idea so predominates as to destroy the proportions of all the rest.'[39] A proper sense of proportion was what Bonar was struggling for and what he found lacking in Kennedy's approach. There were features of the Moody mission which he too found objectionable, but he was prepared to lay these aside as insignificant when viewed in proportion to the central matter of the preaching of the biblical gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Kennedy declined to accept this sense of proportion, commenting of Bonar: 'He inverts the telescope when he looks at anything connected with the movement, which he cannot approve.'[40] The question is, however, who was looking through the right end of the telescope?

The problem with Kennedy's refusal to accept Bonar's sense of proportion was that every element in the familiar tradition appeared to him to be equally important. There was some justice in Bonar's complaint that Kennedy would not approve of any movement until he was satisfied that it carried all the hallmarks of the 'religion of Ross-shire'! He was persuaded that the whole pattern of religious life carried in every part scriptural and absolute authority. This led him to object, *e.g.*, to the practice of 'silent' prayer which he had noted as a feature of the campaign meetings. The practice of engaging in private (silent) prayer on entering the public assembly was not familiar to Kennedy and he argued that it was unscriptural on the grounds that Christ commanded that when we pray we should enter our closet and shut the door.[41] In his reply Bonar had little difficulty in demonstrating the absurdity of the argument that Christ's command to pray in the closet precludes prayer in other situations and the perversity of condemning silent prayer in Christian meetings.[42] The point demonstrates the lengths to which objection may be carried where there is no proper sense of proportion. Kennedy was intent on resisting every innovation. In his view the whole of the familiar tradition could be defended biblically and there could be no question of any compromise on matters of lesser importance.

Bonar set out in a different direction. His pamphlet is essentially a plea to allow for diversity. On conversion he was willing to allow that God brings people to himself in different ways and he was determined to resist the imposition of any one prescribed pattern.

39 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, p. 25.
40 Kennedy, *Reply to Dr. Bonar*, p. 37.
41 Kennedy, *Hyper-Evangelism*, p. 30.
42 Bonar, *The Old Gospel*, pp. 61–62.

Likewise, might there not be different paths by which believers come to assurance of their salvation? Some may accept the assurance which is immediately available in the word of the gospel. Others may pass through a long struggle before reaching a position of certainty as to their salvation. Highland Calvinist spirituality could certainly be honoured but it could not be granted an exclusive authority. On the other hand, he did not wish to claim that the Moody mission was beyond reproach. It may have been deficient in many respects but God is pleased to use even deficient instruments: 'He speaks through stammering tongues, and does his mightiest things by bruised reeds.'[43] Where the main substance of the Evangelical message was being preached with power and effectiveness Bonar was prepared to rejoice in that and give lesser attention to differences which he judged to be of lesser importance. He stood with Kennedy on the ground of Westminster Calvinism but he was determined to 'use the telescope' to gain a proper sense of proportion. The Moody mission was taking the biblical gospel to the urban population of Scotland. That was the central vision, and commitment to that great cause must not be undermined by reservations on matters which, proportionally, were of relatively little importance. Kennedy used the telescope differently. He could scarcely discern anything of authentic gospel preaching in the Moody mission while its objectionable features loomed large in his sight. Their failure to agree on what was the correct sense of proportion was what ultimately divided Bonar and Kennedy. These discussions on 'the use of the telescope' reveal a difference of approach which has remained influential in the subsequent history of Scottish Evangelicalism. Even when people stand together on the ground of Westminster Calvinism their perspectives may differ radically when they use the telescope in different ways.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 22.