

## Review

# Hyper-Evangelism : "Another Gospel"

by

*John Kennedy, D.D. of Dingwall*

A Review by Raymond A. Kemp

Those of us who have followed closely the *British Reformed Journal's* account of the life and writings that Calvinist stalwart from Dingwall, Dr. John Kennedy (1819-1884), are delighted the newly formed "James Begg Society" are publishing his generally unfamiliar *Man's Relations to God*. This glowing ember added to a growing Reformed fire has inspired a further look at Kennedy's best known polemical writing, *Hyper-Evangelism: "Another Gospel." Though a Mighty Power*. All page references are to the Banner of Truth magazine May 1957.

In the present state of infirm Reformed preaching when the cancer of Arminianism has gnawed almost every Reformed doctrine, the life of Calvinistic orthodoxy depends on a returning to the theology of God's faithful of yesteryear. They bequeath to the Reformed church an incomparable treasury of exegetical and Scriptural antidotes to excise the malignancy of "well-meant offers" and other man-designed ego builders. In this respect, a former Secretary of the Sovereign Grace Union, the Rev. Henry Atherton, could, in 1927, make a note concerning Calvin's usage of the word "offered", and he entered this as a footnote on page 31 of the Sovereign Grace Union's 1927 reprint of "Calvin's Calvinism", the Reformer's "Treatise of the Eternal Predestination of God". (This edition also now reprinted by the Reformed Free Publishing Association of Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.). Atherton pointed out in this footnote that "offered" came from the Latin *offerre* - "to present, to exhibit or set forth." Remembering that Latin was the Academic language of Calvin's day, we can only accept this definition - the meaning in the confessions -, and not that which teaches that God *sincerely desires* the salvation of all who hear the gospel, including the reprobate. (Cf. Alan Baird : "*The Westminster Standards and the Gospel Offer*", in *British Reformed Journal* No. 10, page 9). In the true spirit of Calvin and the Reformation, therefore, Kennedy's *Hyper-Evangelism*, though small, is such a treasury, its reading such a returning to the theology of God's faithful of yesteryear.

While Finney may have invented *revivalism*, Moody and Sankey were amongst its best known salesmen. Their campaigning in Britain attracted much support, not least from Scots Presbyterians, and as the momentum rose so too did the need to "try

the spirits". Kennedy was scathing in what he regarded as an "innovation" in traditional, Protestant, Reformed preaching. This "innovation" manifested itself not only in altar calls and "inquiry rooms," but in a preaching which advocated and popularized the *offer* of the gospel to *all* men. Kennedy was branded with the opprobrious title of "hyper-Calvinist" because he held to a Biblical proportion the preaching of God's sovereignty in salvation, that is, the sovereign, *active* choice of God alone in salvation (John 6 : 44; 15 : 16). We believe that in Kennedy's second objection to "Hyper-Evangelism" - i.e. "*It ignores the sovereignty and power of God in the dispensation of His grace*" (p. 8ff) - not only could his then contemporary Arminian and pseudo-Calvinist readers have learned much regarding true Reformed preaching and evangelism, but there are many still who should not imagine it inexpedient to lay hold of this critique of unscriptural evangelism by the one known as the "Spurgeon of the North." Alas, we can fairly conjecture that today's neo-Calvinists, those master-surfers on the seas of double-speak and egocentrism, who have gone far further adrift on (what John MacLeod appropriately calls) the "ebb-tide...[of] out-and-out Calvinism" would find the distinctly Reformed hue of Kennedy's tract even more unpalatable today than their Marrow-Amyraldian-Arminian forefathers of the 1870's. In this section, Kennedy knows nothing about a gospel *offer*. Rather he speaks the Biblical language of the "call of the gospel" (p.8), which, unlike *offer*-theology, does justice to the definition of the gospel as divine efficacy (Romans 1 : 16).

While our subject had a Biblical conception of God's sovereignty and man's depravity, his opponents were deplorably ignorant of such elementary Reformed positions, though, sadly, many were Presbyterians and signatories to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. How is it possible to reconcile an *offer* of the gospel to all, while preaching God's sovereignty and man's total depravity ? Of course, it cannot be done. If the *offer* or invitation is to all men, including the reprobate who reject the invitation, then God is not sovereign, for, then, contrary to the Scriptures, His Word returns to Him void. (Cf. Isaiah 55 : 11). Moodyism was teaching in Kennedy's day, as most preaching proclaims today, that God desires the salvation of all and in the gospel Christ is *offered to all*. If this is so - remembering that Christ is rejected by many - then the result is a powerless, begging Jesus who would like to save all, but cannot. This is *not* "the **power** of God" (Rom. 1 : 16), *not* the gospel, but "another gospel". The late Rev. Henry Atherton denounced the practice of *offering Christ equally to all* as "hawking" Jesus. In this respect one notes too how a mature Calvin *condemns* this notion of "Christ being offered equally to all" in a polemic against one Pighius in these forthright terms :

"Pighius himself will confess that there is need of illumination to bring unto Christ those who were adversaries to God; but he, at the same time, holds fast the *fiction* that *grace is offered equally to all* but that it is ultimately rendered effectual by the will of man, just as each one is willing to receive it." (Emph, mine R.A.K.)

Kennedy's gospel was "the *power* of God unto salvation", which sharply differed from the idea of the gospel being the "power of man unto salvation" contained in a resistible offer to all men. Theirs was "another gospel" according to Kennedy. The sinner was left unaware of his sinfulness, hopelessness and depravity, and "*Without this they can have no conception of gospel grace*" (p.5). Rather man was told of his power - power greater than that of the sovereign God Almighty : power to accept or repel God's offer to them. Is it not surely the case that "conception of gospel grace" is lacking in preaching today because grace is regarded as nothing special, nothing particular nor exclusive; not especially for the elect - but for *all* men, including the reprobate who reject the gospel ? John Kennedy makes no mention of a *common grace* which gives a less than totally depraved nature. To preach total depravity - when "total" means *total* and "depravity" means *depravity* - excludes the theory of a *common grace* and vice versa, as Donald Macleod, wittingly or unwittingly, revealed in his sad but informative work. ( Prof. Donald Macleod, Professor of Theology at Free Kirk College Edinburgh, in his book, "Behold Your God", Christian Focus Publications 1990, pp 125-142.) Why, in the preaching of this unscriptural gospel, is little made of man's absolute depravity, God's absolute sovereignty in salvation as in all things, and the absolute need for repentance ? The reply was, and still remains, that man has responsibility : he is an "intelligent being" and preaching total depravity treats "men as inert matter, to be wrought upon, but never to be active. This is not to be preached to sinners....lest they fold their heads and sleep:. Kennedy answers this objection :

And how do you propose to treat them ? *Are you to hide from them what they must know, ere they can ever act as intelligent beings in dealing with their souls' condition ?* Are you to set them to work, as if they are what they are not ? Is this your way of urging them to act as becomes responsible beings ? ( emph. Kennedy's ) (p.10).

Not only were sinners being deceived, preachers were deceived themselves by not preaching the "whole counsel of God" lest it place obstacles to sinners responding to the *offer* of the gospel :

You do so [refuse to preach the total impotency of man] that you may have hope of success. You have *no faith in the Spirit as God*. You cannot bear, therefore, to discover that there is a great work for Him to do; and you cannot endure to feel dependent on His love, for you cannot trust in it as the love of God; and if you think of it as Divine, you know you must also think of it as sovereign. And you would fain account the work to be done as not too much for your own power of persuasion; for you are ambitious of having it done yourselves, as well as hopeless of having it done by the Lord. And yet, forsooth, you are the men who have faith, and those who differ from you are the dupes of unbelief. Yes, you are men of faith, but yours is faith in men. The man who can cry in faith for life, with a valley of dry bones before him, is the man who has faith in God. (p.10 - emphasis added).

And so in this demolishing style Kennedy countered the "innovation", whether

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from outright Arminians like Moody and Sankey, or those Presbyterians turned crypto-Arminians, the imbibers of Marrowism and Amyraldianism.

The second part of the tract, sub-headed "hyper-Evangelism, A Mighty Power," though much shorter, is nevertheless Reformed orthodoxy at its best. The "unscriptural devices" condemned included uninspired hymns, instrumental music, the "inquiry room" and the corruption of prayer. But it is especially his dealing with prayer which again unveils Kennedy's continuing pertinence. God's acknowledged sovereignty in prayer was jettisoned by the melodramatic atmosphere of prayer meetings - meetings negating and contradicting Christ's command to pray secretly (Matt. 6 : 6). They were "factories of sensation", and those who went to pray "openly" went "to be seen of men". Sadly, although "the device [was] directly opposed to the mind of Christ, [it was] lauded as if nothing could be better". Was this increase in prayer not welcome ? No. "They who forget to do it where Christ required it to be done, are the persons most likely to do it where it can only be a bit of will-worship and formality" (p.20).

As Hugh Williams pointed out, ( Cf. Williams, "Profile of a Presbyterian Minister: John Kennedy of Dingwall, "Spurgeon of the North", British Reformed Journal issue No.11 ) Kennedy's legacy in the Highlands has remained, as has the ever-increasing liberal legacy of his opponents in the rest of Scotland. Therefore, cannot Kennedy be read with profit by all today ? Your reviewer has laboured for hours on the advice and implications of this short tract for Reformed Evangelism, and can say that in recommending its contents he has seldom witnessed such a mixture of simplicity and scriptural profundity.

### Editor's postscript.

We are most grateful to our good friend Mr. Kemp for the above review, and would urge our readers to look out for a reprint of this important work by Kennedy..

By way of interest, it is an opportunity here to point out to our readers what very few people know concerning Kennedy's work on "Hyper-Evangelism". The tract amounts to about 21 pages A5 size in the edition reviewed above, but in fact occupied about 31 pages of a whole book of Kennedy's polemic writings of some 170 pages or more published perhaps in the 1870's or early 1880's. This book is rarely known about today, having been carefully swept under the carpet out of sight for over 100 years. As if "Hyper-Evangelism" itself is not dynamite enough, the rest of the volume is even more explosive, utterly demolishing the attempted defence of Moody-Sankeyism and the Free Offer that Bonar (yes ! the famous Bonar....Calvinist so - called !) put out in an attempt to rebut Kennedy ! Suffice it to say that Bonar gets thoroughly rebutted....Kennedy knew no mercy when he saw the Gospel and the glory of God as being at stake! No wonder Kennedy's book has been carefully ignored and forgotten by the modern neo-Calvinist faction!

With respect to this whole volume of Kennedy's polemics, well, our readers should, as they say, "watch this space". (DV).