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Dwight L. Moody in Ulster: evangelical unity, denominational identity, and the fundamentalist impulse*

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Abstract

The American evangelist Dwight L. Moody visited Ulster on three occasions – 1874, 1883, and 1892 – and his modern, respectable version of revivalism offered a welcome alternative to the ambiguous legacy of the 1859 Ulster revival. Moody stimulated an outpouring of interdenominational activism and may have contributed to a fundamentalist impulse amongst evangelicals. His legacy in Ulster, as elsewhere, was to energise evangelicals but at the expense of weakening the ability, perhaps even the desire, of church members to adhere to denominational principles. In that sense, both so-called ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘modernists’ in Northern Ireland in the 1920s were Moody’s heirs.

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During the Victorian period, the American Dwight Lyman Moody was ‘the most celebrated evangelist of the age on both sides of the Atlantic’.¹ With his associate, the soloist, Ira D. Sankey, Moody made his reputation during a highly successful campaign in Britain and Ireland that began in June 1873. By the time he returned to the United States in the summer of 1875, Moody had created the template for modern professional revivalism.² His campaigns focused on urban areas and were well-adapted to the business ethos of the age in their thorough planning, extensive publicity through the press, and effective mobilisation of the resources of local churches. Moody’s priority was the conversion of souls, and a distinguishing feature of his missions was the after-meeting inquiry room where personal counselling was given to the religiously anxious. His appeal was enhanced by the fact that he was not a clergyman and had received no formal theological training. Business-like and down-to-earth, his earnestness and humility made powerful his gospel addresses. He preached a straightforward gospel that concentrated upon ‘Ruin by sin, Redemption by Christ, and Regeneration by the Holy Ghost’.³ His emphasis on the love of God avoided theological controversies and appealed to protestants from across the denominational spectrum. This was reinforced by Sankey’s solos of simple contrasts, prodigal themes, and music-hall melodies; ‘Moody preached the gospel and Sankey sang it’.⁴

In his combination of an irenic creed and mobilisation of the resources of protestantism to achieve conversions, Moody was a vital figure in the consolidation of evangelicalism as the belief system of the majority of protestants worldwide by 1900. Furthermore, his adoption of a pessimistic reading of the End Times, known as premillennialism, and the connection between revivalism and holiness, was symbolic of an otherworldly move amongst evangelicals and important in shaping conservative evangelicalism in the early twentieth century.⁵ Yet, because the conversion of souls was paramount, Moody was a pragmatist who worked with, not against, the churches. Before conducting a campaign, Moody insisted on the formation of a local organising committee that reflected the denominational diversity of the area. His missions were to be united missions, and they acted as a solvent of denominational identities. Alongside a high-view of the Bible and his premillennialism,

Moody's interdenominational appeal was an important element in the emergence of what Geoff Treloar calls a 'fundamentalist impulse' in North Atlantic protestantism.⁶ Fundamentalism became a recognisable movement in the United States only after the First World War, and even then Moody was appropriated by both sides of the so-called 'fundamentalist versus modernist' controversies of the 1920s. Moody's biographer, James Findlay, noted that his life both reveals 'the beginning of the fundamentalist movement within evangelical protestantism' in America and 'how pressures both internal and external began to tear the evangelical denominations apart in the last years of his life'.⁷ Owing to this ambiguity, Michael Hamilton has argued that Moody was not the grandfather of fundamentalism but of interdenominational evangelicalism. This movement prioritised evangelism and spiritual formation, and though it was opposed to 'modernism', its extensive membership were not crusaders against error. Inspired by Moody, smaller groups within individual denominations did, however, take up the crusade, and the tension between 'denominational traditionalists' and 'interdenominational evangelicals' contributed to the failure of fundamentalism within mainstream protestantism in the United States in the interwar period.⁸

How are these themes relevant to Ireland, and particularly to the northern province of Ulster, home to the only protestant majority in any of the four Irish provinces? They matter because George Marsden has argued that fundamentalism – 'militantly anti-modernist protestant evangelicalism' – was a distinctly American phenomenon, except, perhaps, for Ulster.⁹ Social and political scientists have claimed that an influential version of Ulster fundamentalism emerged in the 1920s and became prominent with Ian Paisley later in the century. What made it distinctive was the interplay between evangelicalism and opposition to any weakening of the place of Northern Ireland (formed in 1921) within the United Kingdom.¹⁰ Unfortunately, historians of religion in Ireland have not examined in detail the potential origins and development of fundamentalism before Paisley.¹¹ This raises the question – how does Moody and his modern revivalism in Ulster relate to the 'fundamentalist impulse' noted by historians of evangelicalism and the interpretations offered by social scientists? Can the attraction of Moody's brand of modern revival be reduced simply to the political needs of evangelicals? Moody visited Ireland on three occasions, in 1874 (September to November), 1883 (31 December 1882 to February 1883, and October and November), and 1892 (August to November).

Irish historians have ignored these visits, except for the first; Janice Holmes has thoughtfully examined his visit to Dublin and there is a summary of the impact of his Belfast visit on Presbyterians, the largest protestant denomination in Ulster.¹² The same is true for studies of Moody, which move quickly from Scotland to England, overlook Belfast, and only briefly mention Dublin. Yet Ireland mattered to Moody. On his first visit to the United Kingdom in spring 1867, he made contact with the Christian Brethren in Dublin and was introduced to dispensational premillennialism, whose principal architect was the former Church of Ireland clergyman, John Nelson Darby.¹³ Furthermore, his Irish visit in 1874 received considerable coverage in contemporary accounts, including one published in New York and compiled by two Irish Presbyterian emigrants, George Hay Stuart and the Revd John Hall.¹⁴

The purpose of this article is to examine the campaigns of Moody in Ulster in order to assess the potential relationship between his interdenominational focus and the emergence of a form of Ulster fundamentalism. It begins with an overview of Moody's three visits to Ulster. This includes an examination of the religious, social, and political background, especially the ambiguous legacy of the Ulster revival of 1859, and how Moody offered a respectable alternative revivalism that could be used to respond to contemporary challenges. The following section considers how Moody's visits stimulated interdenominational cooperation and the main social groups he appealed to. The article concludes with an examination of the criticisms of Moody's brand of revivalism and his legacy in shaping the outlook of both fundamentalists and their opponents in 1920s Northern Ireland.

I.

The revival of 1859 reenergised evangelicals, produced thousands of conversions, and temporarily transformed the moral life of protestant Ulster.¹⁵ It also gave Ulster an important place in the experience and understanding of revival amongst evangelicals further afield. For instance, it was owing to the demand of evangelicals in America that the Revd William Gibson published the most notable contemporary account of the revival, *The Year of Grace* (1860), and Henry Grattan Guinness, the famous evangelist and advocate of 'faith missions', published in Philadelphia his personal experience of the revival in Ulster.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the subsequent decades, 1859 became the

standard throughout the United Kingdom by which revivals would be judged.¹⁷ Evangelicals in the twentieth century continued to highlight the significance of the Ulster revival, most notably the leading figure of revival studies, J. Edwin Orr.¹⁸ Yet during and after 1859, the religious populism unleashed made Presbyterians, the chief promoters of the revival, uneasy. In particular, they were discomforted by the emotionalism and physical manifestations that characterised some of the conversions and which challenged a Calvinist understanding of salvation. On that basis, the Revd Isaac Nelson claimed that 1859 was *The Year of Delusion* rather than Gibson's *The Year of Grace*.¹⁹ Most made their peace with these phenomena as minor accompaniments to the work of God, but there was a lingering sense that 1859 was not quite the respectable revival Presbyterians had been expecting since the 1830s.²⁰ This was aggravated by the growth of smaller denominations after 1859, such as Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and various forms of Christian Brethren, who demanded a more warm-hearted commitment from their members. Against the backdrop of overall population decline in Ulster, the number of self-described Presbyterians and members of the Church of Ireland declined between 1861 and 1911, though they continued to represent around 26% and 22% of the provincial population respectively. By contrast, both Methodists and those listed as 'Others' in the census increased in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population. In 1861 there were 32,030 Methodists in Ulster accounting for 1.7% of the total population; by 1911, there were 48,816 representing 3.1%. Similarly, those in the 'Other' category rose from 20,443 to 53,881, and as a proportion of the overall provincial population from 1.1% to 3.4%.²¹

The ambiguous legacy of the revival complicated evangelical responses to the challenges of the mid-Victorian period. Owing to the expansion of linen manufacture and shipbuilding, the population of Belfast mushroomed from 75,308 in 1841 to 255,950 in 1891; by 1911, it contained a quarter of the population of Ulster and was the eighth largest city in the United Kingdom.²² This growth created significant social problems as the infrastructure struggled to meet the needs of the expanding population. The sectarian tensions of the Ulster countryside were also imported into Belfast – Catholics made up 32% of the town's population in 1871 – and produced often-deadly sectarian rioting. For the churches, the polarisation of Belfast into godly and ungodly ghettos was increasingly worrying.²³ Challenges to traditional positions were also evident amongst the respectable

classes after scientific naturalism had been proclaimed in Belfast at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in August 1874. In his presidential address, John Tyndall railed against clergy who presumed to pontificate on scientific matters and called on a new breed of professional scientists to wrest control of cosmological theory from religious authorities.

Unsurprisingly, protestants – and Catholics – were aghast at such a declaration of war and responded in kind to Tyndall’s alleged materialism.²⁴

The spiritual uplift of 1859 and the challenges confronting evangelicals produced a desire for religious revival. In 1871, the Revd H. M. Williamson, minister of Fisherwick Place Presbyterian congregation in Belfast and a steadfast support of Moody, claimed that a special outpouring of the Spirit was necessary to revitalise those within the Church and to win new converts. By such a two-fold work, ‘and by it alone, will the church be made able to cope with, and overcome the wickedness, worldliness, and infidelity of the age’.²⁵ A similar upsurge of interest in revival was discernible amongst the clergy of the recently-disestablished Church of Ireland. Writing in March 1874, one correspondent noted that a ‘great and blessed change is coming over our national protestantism’ and ‘a mighty religious movement ... is fast spreading in Ulster’. With the sanction of the Archbishop of Armagh, a special mission had recently begun at St Mark’s in the city led by the Revd Robert Hannay, Vicar of Belfast. There had been an ‘overflowing’ attendance of Presbyterians, Methodists, and Independents. Hannay’s sermon was ‘simple, earnest, practical, and evangelical. John Wesley never preached a better revival sermon.’²⁶

The sense of expectation was intensified by news of Moody and Sankey’s successful five-month campaign in Scotland, which began in Edinburgh in November 1873, before moving to Glasgow in February 1874. The campaign was such a success because it reduced tensions within Presbyterianism caused by the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 and helped the churches respond to the challenges of urban and industrial growth. Moody’s ‘words and manner provoked a sense of assurance in times of uncertainty’.²⁷ The Presbyterian newspaper in Belfast, the *Witness*, announced on 3 January 1874, ‘Glad tidings from the city of Edinburgh!’, and pleaded, ‘Shall we have no droppings of this heavenly dew in Belfast?’²⁸ To answer that question, accurate information about the Scottish awakening was necessary. The Belfast press regularly reprinted articles from

Scottish titles and individual clergy visited Scotland. In February, the Revd William Park gave an account of his own visit to his Rosemary Street Presbyterian congregation; the following month, the Revd George Wright reported on the Scottish revival at the Ebenezer Congregational Chapel, Newry, and the Revd Jonathan Simpson addressed the First Presbyterian Church, Coleraine, about the ‘religious awakening’ under Moody and Sankey.²⁹ The most significant clerical deputation to Scotland was that of Williamson and Robert Watts, professor of theology at the Presbyterian College, Belfast, and the foremost British exponent of the Calvinist theology of Princeton Theological Seminary.³⁰ On their return from Edinburgh in January 1874, Williamson and Watts issued ‘an invitation to all the ministers of the different Evangelical denominations to meet and consider whether anything should be done’, and a committee was formed to organise a daily noon-day prayer meeting.³¹

As the Scottish campaign became widely known, Presbyterian evangelicals began to discuss revival and the legacy of 1859. The Revd W.B. Kirkpatrick encouraged his fellow Presbyterians to pray for a similar awakening in Ireland to empower the church in its struggle against formalism, worldliness, and Catholicism. Though they could plead that ‘*God’s former visitation of mercy*’ in 1859 had produced permanent results, that revival contained much ‘human infirmity and imperfection’ and they ‘naturally fell into some mistakes in our mode of dealing with it’. Given this mixed legacy, Kirkpatrick urged his readers to ‘plead with God that He may revive His work in the midst of us, and give us wisdom to distinguish between the true and the false, between the precious and the vile’.³² At the regular meeting of the Synod of Derry and Omagh, Professor J.T. McGaw of Magee College, Derry, discussed his own visit to evaluate Moody and Sankey. In the course of his address, he noted the ambiguous legacy of 1859 and, without hesitation, described the Scottish revival as a genuine work of God. McGaw distinguished between the two awakenings by noting the ‘absence of all unnecessary excitement, and of the physical accidents’, in Scotland. This was, in part, because the American evangelists attracted the middle and upper classes who had remained largely unaffected by the Ulster revival. Overall, McGaw found ‘nothing novel, startling, or sensational in the movement – it was just the old means of grace better organised, used with better system, and specially blessed of God’.³³

In Belfast, practical preparations for the visit of Moody and Sankey in September were the responsibility of the local organising committee that had been active since January. This committee was a powerful symbol of evangelical unity and the two clerical secretaries were William Park and the Methodist minister, Joseph William McKay.³⁴ Prior to the mission, it had secured suitable venues and mobilised the hundreds of volunteers needed to facilitate the mission. It also sought to harness the power of the press. From the outset, the *Witness* offered the most extensive coverage. Part of the reason was to extend the reach of the mission, and on the suggestion of the committee and Moody himself, the publishers agreed on 9 October to ‘give every facility to all who desire to aid in thus telling what the Lord is doing’.³⁵ Of course, the extended coverage also boosted sales, and the local secular press soon expanded their own coverage. The following week, the *Witness* reported that a double volume of copies had sold out, and that a special edition containing only the reports of the meetings had sold by the thousand.³⁶ The organising committee was also concerned that the inquiry rooms would be infiltrated by ‘improper or incompetent’ counsellors.³⁷ As a consequence, Park issued tickets to ministers who then signed and gave these to Christian workers to prove their trustworthiness, a practice that was taken from Scotland and would be repeated in subsequent visits.³⁸

Moody and Sankey’s first visit to Ulster ran from 6 September to 18 October 1874. Belfast was the focus, though meetings by their associates were held in neighbouring towns and they spent a couple of days in Derry where the work was continued by the Scottish evangelist, and later close friend of Moody, Henry Drummond.³⁹ Every day there was a noon prayer meeting, a Bible reading led by Moody, and a large evangelistic service in the evening with overflow meetings in smaller venues. In addition, there were meetings specifically for women, men, and children, and a number of open-air events were organised. As for attendance, one Edinburgh newspaper reported, ‘All the meetings were crowded, and many were unable to gain admittance. The meetings were the largest ever witnessed in Belfast in connection with evangelistic matters.’⁴⁰ Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Independent, and Baptist ministers from urban and rural Ulster attended to show their support. The audiences comprised ‘people of all classes’, merchants, ‘students, shopkeepers, young men and old, a multitude of ladies’, all of whom were ‘in a state of deepest expectancy’.⁴¹

American audiences were informed that since ‘the great revival of 1859 Ireland has never been so deeply and extensively moved’. There was no ‘great physical excitement’ or ‘outward signs’, rather, ‘the Spirit has been pleased to move more silently, and touch the tender chords of the heart’.⁴² This impression of religious sobriety was a reflection of Moody’s efforts to avoid sensationalism, and it is significant that he made no mention of 1859 during his visits to Ulster. A striking feature of his preaching was his repetition of a series of well-rehearsed and widely-published addresses that avoided references to local issues; a reading of those recorded in the Ulster press in 1874, 1883, and 1892 confirms that pattern. Sermons preached in Belfast could have been delivered anywhere, and entire addresses delivered in one city frequently reappeared wholesale in another. Because Moody’s approach was meant to be universal, he tended not to adapt his message to the locale, except in superficial references. The logistics and presentation of his Ulster campaigns, widely reported in the local press, are therefore broadly representative of his approach elsewhere.

Though Moody could have been anywhere, local circumstances contributed to the mission’s success and shaped how his universal message was reported and interpreted. For instance, his lack of reference to the 1859 revival sidestepped the troublesome religious populism that worried respectable evangelicals in Ulster. Furthermore, his refusal to comment on local matters enhanced his appeal to evangelicals throughout Ireland, especially amongst the protestant minority in the southern provinces, who hoped his perceived neutrality would be a means of converting the Roman Catholic majority.⁴³ A number of observers in Ulster noted that Moody and Sankey were an antidote to Tyndall’s materialism. A correspondent to *Times of Blessing*, the principal Scottish record of Moody’s 1874/5 campaign, commented upon the wonderful weather for the meeting in Botanic Gardens on 8 October. This was clearly an answer to prayer, ‘given in a city where a materialism which denies the existence of a God who hears prayer has recently been so loudly asserting itself, but where it has also been receiving the best of all answers, in the unmistakable movement through the country of the living God’.⁴⁴ A satirical column by ‘Barney Maglone’ in the *Portadown News* interpreted Moody and Sankey as a direct response to Tyndall. Those concerned about religion, ‘have brought over the Ammerican Unscientific ones. Mr Moody is to put down Tyndall, and Mr Sankey to put down Huxley, an’ the two together to put down the infidelity of the whole Assosheation’.⁴⁵

The success of 1874 meant supporters were eager for Moody and Sankey to return. In October 1882, an interdenominational committee, chaired by Robert Watts, met to prepare for their week-long visit in February the following year.⁴⁶ Such were the crowds on the first day that Moody's daily Bible Reading was moved to St Enoch's, the largest protestant church in Belfast. The single evening evangelistic service that had proved sufficient in 1874 was replaced by two evening services each accompanied by overflow meetings.⁴⁷ Williamson attributed the success to the spiritual hunger produced by the 'months of horror and darkness and bloodshed through which we have passed as a nation', a reference to agrarian disorder in southern Ireland and the murder in Phoenix Park, Dublin, of the newly-appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland and a senior civil servant in May 1882. The general impression in Belfast was that 'the whole town was stirred as it probably has not been for many years, if ever, on the subject of religion'.⁴⁸

Political developments also provided the backdrop to Moody's final visit in 1892 as protestants united against the threat of a second attempt to introduce Home Rule to Ireland.⁴⁹ Unlike Moody's previous visits to Ulster, the focus was not solely on Belfast and Sankey was absent, though Moody was accompanied by the soloist, J.H. Burke, as well as A.W. Vance and his wife. The visit began in Derry and moved to Strabane, Portrush, Coleraine, and Ballymena.⁵⁰ In Belfast, the organising committee had secured the large pavilion erected in the south of the city for the recent Ulster Convention held in opposition to Home Rule and had deliberately replaced the political mottoes and symbols with biblical texts.⁵¹ The committee had been formed in November 1891 under the chairmanship of Thomas Sinclair, a prominent lay Presbyterian and one of the principal organisers of the Convention. Evangelical unity was symbolised by the appointment of three honorary secretaries – the Revd Charles Seaver, Archdeacon of Connor, the Revd James Waddell, Newington Presbyterian, and the Revd Crawford Johnston, the Methodist Belfast Central Mission – and the inclusion of the general secretaries of the YMCA, the Church of Ireland Young Men's Society, and the Central Presbyterian Association.⁵² The *Belfast Telegraph* reported an 'extraordinary' attendance of around 16,000 individuals. Rather than politics or amusement, the numbers demonstrated the religious feeling of the community; 'the people of Belfast are more deeply swayed by the principles of Evangelical Christianity than by any other influence'.⁵³ Moody claimed that 'his meetings had never

been better reported than since he came to this city and that the Press was a mighty power for good'. The *Belfast Telegraph* reporter claimed that Moody's comments showed his 'practical common sense'; others had attempted to ridicule the press, but he 'has too much wisdom, and is too much a man of the world to fall into any such mistake'.⁵⁴ Such was the success of the Belfast mission that Moody 'very heartily' agreed to remain for another week.⁵⁵ After Moody left, the campaign was continued by the Scottish evangelist, the Revd John McNeill. After a sluggish start, the final week of McNeill's four-week mission promised, 'to eclipse anything in the nature of evangelistic services conducted in this city in recent years'.⁵⁶

II.

As elsewhere, Moody's campaigns in Ulster reenergised evangelicals and promoted unity in evangelism to the non-churchgoing working classes. Moody and Sankey offered a form of revival that honoured the spirit of 1859 without its disconcerting features. They embodied a business-like approach to religious life that appealed to middle-class evangelicals, and Moody's presentation of a common evangelical creed brought protestants together. The Ulster journalist and author, F.F. Moore, noted that Moody was, 'an excellent, straightforward preacher, of a style that was rightly supposed to make a powerful appeal to people who wanted to hear an American preacher'. Moody was no theologian, 'but he was as earnest as anyone could be in repeating to people what they had heard a thousand times before'. Reflecting on the symbiotic relationship between the preacher and his audience, Moore remarked, 'They wanted sincerity, they wanted to be interested, and they wanted to be made to feel that they wanted to be good. Messrs. Moody and Sankey gave them all they wanted, and, as a consequence, wherever their preaching and singing went on, attentive thousands were present.'⁵⁷

As one Methodist writer noted, the 'permanent benefit' of the 1874 mission would 'depend largely on the spirit in which this movement is followed up by the different churches'.⁵⁸ The initial signs were positive, and by the end of the year evangelistic meetings had multiplied across Ulster. According to the Revd T.Y. Killen, the American evangelists had mobilised the laity to service in Sunday schools, prayer meetings, and evangelistic effort; as a consequence, the 'news of the

awakening is being carried by ministers and others to our smaller towns and villages and country parishes'.⁵⁹ In County Armagh, a series of meetings was held in Portadown Town Hall in early December, and in nearby Lurgan, special services for working men were held in Shankill Parish every Wednesday evening.⁶⁰ In mid-December, 'the wave of religious fervour' that began in Belfast had even reached 'phlegmatic Enniskillen'.⁶¹ Special evangelistic services and union prayer meetings continued into 1875, including in Monaghan town where they were championed by the Revd J.A.A. Allison, a Church of Ireland clergyman.⁶² In February 1875, the *Witness* provided an overview of the continuing work throughout Ulster; in all areas, it was marked by denominational cooperation and lay involvement.⁶³

The same was true in Belfast. William Park informed British evangelicals in November 1874 that the revival was progressing, though its form had altered. The single evening meeting had been replaced by a multitude of services in local areas, including specially-constructed mission halls that attracted the working classes and the non-churchgoing population. Young men were running cottage meetings in various parts of the town, and a female evangelist addressed a meeting of around four-hundred working-class women on a workday evening.⁶⁴ The Revd John White, minister of the First Congregational church in Belfast, was 'delighted' to report 'that God is greatly blessing all the protestant churches in Belfast'. There was 'a spirit of brotherhood and union among the ministers and people of different denominations' that White had not seen before. 'We all rejoice in each other's prosperity, and all are reaping a rich harvest of blessing.'⁶⁵ In September 1875, evangelistic services, 'similar to those attended by such gracious results during the visit of Messrs. Moody and Sankey', commenced in Donegall Square Methodist Church and would in subsequent weeks 'be addressed by leading ministers and laymen of the various evangelical denominations'.⁶⁶ As a consequence of these efforts, Park judged that the 'spirit of union and brotherly love amongst all denominations' was a conspicuous legacy of Moody's visit. 'Independents, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Methodists held their own views as firmly as ever, but he also believed there never was less sectarianism in Belfast than at that moment.'⁶⁷

It was believed that evangelical unity was necessary in order to reengage the working-classes who no longer attended church. Did it succeed? The scholarly consensus is that Moody primarily

affected those already connected to church life. John Kent has gone further and suggested that Moody had little impact on the working-classes in Britain and that the message he preached was a form of social control.⁶⁸ By contrast, John Coffey has argued that Moody did influence the working class, representing a brand of American democratic populism that challenged traditional understandings of politics, and whose religious and moral seriousness inspired the political campaigns of nonconformists and William Gladstone.⁶⁹ Middle-class churchgoers were certainly prominent in Belfast audiences. A report of the outdoor meeting in Botanic Gardens on 8 October 1874 suggested an attendance of around 30,000. There was ‘a marked absence of the indifferent and careless element of society’ who usually attended such meetings, and the audience, most of whom had brought their own hymnbooks, were marked by ‘seriousness and earnestness’.⁷⁰ Likewise, the men who attended a meeting in Rosemary Street were described as ‘evidently belonging to the middle and upper classes’, and the appeal of the American evangelists to young men such as these was frequently noted.⁷¹

Yet Moody and the organising committee directly engaged non-churchgoers from working-class areas. For instance, those who attended the men’s meeting in Rosemary Street on 11 September 1874, ‘were mostly shopkeepers and mechanics, and a large proportion such as do not regularly attend churches’.⁷² On the first Sunday of the campaign, a large open-air meeting was held in the working-class area surrounding Agnes Street and attracted around 25,000.⁷³ As an experiment, an evening meeting was held exclusively for women who worked in linen mills and warehouses. Well before the scheduled time, ‘the streets around were packed with a dense mass of women’ who flooded into the meeting and the three overflow services in nearby churches.⁷⁴ Similarly, the gates of St Enoch’s were opened later at an evening meeting so ‘that the working people might have a better opportunity of being accommodated. A very large proportion of the audience was, therefore, of the industrial classes.’⁷⁵ In February 1875, the Revd Dr Robert Knox told a meeting in Liverpool that Moody and Sankey had produced striking results in industrial Belfast. He claimed that in ‘one factory, one young woman on an average was converted every working day’, whilst in two other factories there were forty and sixty-seven young male converts. ‘These factory men are going to the lowest parts of the town, holding prayer-meetings, and distributing tracts. Even the street Arabs have taken to singing Mr Sankey’s hymns in place of profane and ribald songs.’⁷⁶ The Belfast Town Mission in December 1875

reported that the effects of the revival had been sustained and the uniform testimony of the missionaries was ‘to the fact that the influence of the awakening has been very precious and abiding among many of the poor, both old and young’.⁷⁷

By the following year, the reports were less fulsome and some noted the decline of religious fervour. Many remained faithful, ‘while others, who seemed to start in the heavenly road, have gone back to the world and are worse than ever’.⁷⁸ This pattern would be repeated in 1883 when concern was expressed about a lack of engagement with the urban working class. One correspondent to the *Belfast Telegraph* in February 1883 observed that Moody and Sankey were ‘doing their work among the respectable portion of the community’. The protestant clergy ‘should go a little lower in society’s strata’ to reach ‘the perishing outcasts’ whose working hours prevented them from attending the currently ‘fashionable’ meetings.⁷⁹ Several missionaries of the Belfast Town Mission reported in March ‘that the poor people were unable to get admission to the meetings of Messrs. Moody and Sankey’.⁸⁰ Similarly, the committee of the Town Mission noted that the Moody campaign in 1892 affected only the fringes of the socio-economic groups they targeted.⁸¹

In many respects, this was a reflection of the fact that Moody and Sankey were itinerant evangelists and only stayed in a location for a short time. Their legacy, therefore, may be seen to better effect in encouraging home-grown evangelistic activity that directly affected the working class. Indeed, Moody stimulated lay agency amongst the working classes themselves, though, as the following section shows, with mixed results for the churches. When Moody died in December 1899, the *Witness* observed that since his visit in 1874, his methods, including week-long missions and mission services, had ‘found a recognised place in the policy and working of all protestant Churches’. When these were ‘wisely and prayerfully worked as occasional adjuncts and complements of an earnest, living ministry, good results invariably follow’. To illustrate this point, the work of the Belfast Central Mission (1889) and the Shankill Road Mission (1898) were cited.⁸² Both offered religious and practical care to the working class and were formed by steadfast clerical supporters of Moody, the Methodist, Crawford Johnston, and the Presbyterian, Henry Montgomery.⁸³ Belfast also remained an established stop-over for American evangelists. Reuben A. Torrey and Charles McCallon Alexander conducted a mission in May 1903 that produced 10,000 registered converts and was

attended mainly by working class male shipyard workers and female linen operatives.⁸⁴ In autumn 1911, J. Wilbur Chapman held a total of 135 meetings between 29 September and 10 November in Belfast, Bangor, and Derry. It was claimed, ‘Never before in Belfast or Bangor, even among a people so peculiarly susceptible as they, had there been a more profound emotional impression or more abiding results from any similar meetings ever conducted in those cities.’⁸⁵

III.

Despite his success, Moody was not without his critics, especially amongst those who were not evangelical. In February 1883, for instance, the Revd J.C. Street, the Unitarian minister of one of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian congregations in Belfast, offered an assessment of Moody’s theology. In Street’s opinion, it was neither Calvinist nor Universalist, but ‘American’ in its focus on self-help and personal decision; in short, it was a ‘poor, halting, illogical, imperfect theology’.⁸⁶ More problematic for evangelicals, many of the clergy of the Church of Ireland were known for their lukewarm attitude and it was claimed that only three or four had associated with the 1874 campaign in Belfast.⁸⁷ When Moody visited Armagh in September 1892, the Methodist *Christian Advocate* expressed ‘deep regret’ that no Church of Ireland clergyman was present; yet more evidence ‘that the men who talk most about the evils of the disunion of protestantism are almost altogether responsible for its continuance’.⁸⁸ Some detractors criticised the American character of the evangelists and how they threatened respectable notions of behaviour. In September 1874, ‘An Episcopalian’ admitted that Sankey had ‘a fine voice’, though his ‘style of singing and emphasis are simply vile, combining the worst faults of ordinary Presbyterian congregational singing with some additional American beauties’, most notably ‘peculiar nasal drawls of a most excruciating kind’. Meanwhile, Moody’s ‘language and style are those of an uneducated Northern American’ and whose address ‘was simply a rambling jumble of texts’. To ram home the point, the correspondent contrasted the ‘true intellectual treats’ of the British Association with ‘the sensational puerilities of Messrs. Moody and Sankey’.⁸⁹ In a similar vein, a member of the Church of Ireland from Banbridge criticised Moody’s lack of formal training and urged both to return to ‘the sick beds of the poor in New York or in Chicago ... That would be

more humble and, I believe, more really productive of good than strolling about in Europe with a tenth-rate organist'.⁹⁰

Anglican critics were especially concerned about the impact of revivalism on church order and the status of the ordained clergy. In response to a letter from William Park in November 1875, the editor of the *Belfast News-Letter* defended its criticism of Moody and Sankey by citing the testimony of, amongst others, the Bishop of London, John Jackson, and Professor John Rogers of the Presbyterian College, Belfast. The *News-Letter* was not opposed to revivals or missions as such, but protested against the 'infringement of the ministerial office' and the 'irreverent reference to the sacraments of the protestant Churches'.⁹¹ The *Belfast Telegraph* described their rival's intervention as 'altogether unworthy of a journal which is in the habit of preaching protestantism and the cause of the Evangelical Churches'.⁹² The *Portadown News* attributed the criticisms to Church of Ireland prejudice. Its editor claimed that the *News-Letter* 'is nothing if it is not episcopal', and that it deemed so-called protestant Dissent 'vulgar and irreverent'.⁹³ Furthermore, it would alone never reach the masses with the gospel as it spoke from a position of privilege; 'It is not the religion of the poor. It is the religion of respectability.'⁹⁴ The *Northern Whig* wondered why 'our local Tory contemporary' had launched such 'an ungenerous, ludicrous, and contemptible' attack on the unoffending and earnest individuals they had supported while they were in Belfast.⁹⁵ The *News-Letter* had attacked Moody and Sankey 'in a manner which is almost unprecedented in honourable journalism, and which has disgusted nineteen-twentieths of the protestants of Ulster'. The *Whig* took the view that Moody and Sankey had been assailed 'because they have not lent their abilities to propagate wretched sectarian strife'.⁹⁶

Criticism also came from Presbyterians. This mattered because Presbyterian ministers were conspicuous in their support for Moody and Sankey and because Presbyterians were the largest protestant denomination in Ulster. The Americans certainly offered a means of addressing the problems associated with industrialisation and urbanisation, but at what cost to Presbyterian principle? The issue had already been raised in the Free Church of Scotland, the denomination to which Irish Presbyterians were most attached, and reactions to Moody in 1873-4 had revealed divisions within the church between 'Highland Calvinism' and 'Lowland Evangelicalism'. For instance, Horatius Bonar

saw Moody's campaign as a divine visitation and was prepared to accept Moody's preaching style, innovations in public worship, and the inquiry room. On the other hand, the Revd John Kennedy of Dingwall strongly objected to Moody's departure from Calvinist orthodoxy and Presbyterian practice.⁹⁷

Since the late 1860s, a dispute had been brewing within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland about whether traditional unaccompanied psalm singing should be augmented by instrumental music and hymns.⁹⁸ The General Assembly in 1873 agreed an uneasy truce between the two parties, yet the tensions remained and were rekindled by the visit of Moody and, especially, Sankey. A correspondent to the *News-Letter* said he would watch 'with no small degree of interest' if ministers attended meetings with Sankey's harmonium. 'If it is wrong to worship God in the sanctuary with the aid of a musical instrument it cannot be right to promote a revival of religion with a similar accompaniment.'⁹⁹ The same author noted that those ministers who had allowed Sankey to play the harmonium in their churches had consistently voted in favour of instrumental music, and that they had 'the sympathy and support of all the intelligent Presbyterian laity in Belfast'. This contrasted with the 'persecution' of the Revd A. C. Maclatchy who had been forbidden by the General Assembly to use a similar instrument in his Enniskillen congregation. If Maclatchy was brought to account before the Assembly, he would be joined by Moody's Belfast supporters, including Williamson, Park, and the Revd J.S. MacIntosh, the convener of the Assembly's Psalmody Committee.¹⁰⁰ Predictably, in March 1875 the Presbytery of Belfast launched an investigation into the use of the harmonium during Moody's visit. After a five-and-a-half-hour meeting, it was concluded that Williamson and Hugh Hanna of St Enoch's 'had no intention' of undermining the 1873 truce, 'and had simply lent their churches to the United Committee in charges of Messrs. Moody and Sankey's services'. A resolution was passed by twenty-eight votes to eighteen expressing regret that the actions of these ministers had been misunderstood and that no further action was required owing to 'the peculiar circumstances' of the meetings.¹⁰¹

In addition to public worship, many associated with the Purity of Worship Defence Association were concerned that Moody's message undermined the Calvinist theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. These

concerns had been expressed by the Revd Francis Petticrew at the Synod of Derry and Omagh in April 1874 and would be repeated in the periodical he edited, the *Christian Banner*. There were two main concerns about revivalism – that salvation had become too easy and that Moody had inspired a legion of un-ordained evangelists who would promote the growth of ‘sects’. An article in January 1876 expressed disappointment that many of those who had professed conversion in 1859 and 1874 had either reverted to their former lives or had not become useful church members. The *Banner* attributed this to ‘mistaken views of faith and repentance’, and the lack of interest in promoting discipleship. This could be explained by the desire of revivalist supporters to enumerate conversions and the call on sinners to simply believe rather than repent. Repentance was a work of the Holy Spirit and entailed a complete orientation of the individual from sin and towards God’s grace in Christ; it was not ‘an act completed in a few minutes at a prayer meeting – it is a continuous duty to be performed’.¹⁰² A Reformed Presbyterian who was broadly supportive of the American evangelists, nevertheless thought it appropriate to criticise the focus on instantaneous conversion; ‘To turn the church ... into a registry office for spiritual births, where the age, the place, and every circumstance is fixed, I cannot but regard as the weak point in Mr Moody’s teaching.’¹⁰³

This allegedly easy form of salvation was disseminated by untrained lay evangelists, and the stimulus Moody gave to lay agency came at the price of weakening commitment to denominational principles. As a consequence, there was deep concern about the growth of ‘sects’, those listed as ‘Other’ in the Irish census. Varieties of Brethren were especially feared, and the *Christian Banner* expressed its sorrow about ‘the wrecks of many of our best specimens of young men on the rocks of Darbyism and Plymouthism’.¹⁰⁴ In a letter to the *Northern Whig* in October 1874, Q.E.D. feared that ‘we shall reap a crop of communistic sects, and imperil the fixed principles and tested order of our good old Presbyterian Kirk’.¹⁰⁵ There was also a growing concern about the adoption of the methods of modern revivalism by the denomination. In March 1889, the Belfast Presbytery directed that an association of lay workers was to be formed in each congregation to carry out evangelism.¹⁰⁶ The *Christian Banner* was broadly supportive though it was concerned that the presbytery had given no guidance about the qualifications of the evangelists, the conduct of the meetings, or the theological errors that might be propagated. For instance, ought the services to include inquiry meetings, and ‘all

the machinery which Methodists have been wont to employ for getting up revivals', as well as 'hymns of a sensational, light and unedifying character'? An amendment addressing its concerns had been rejected by a large majority of the presbytery, and the *Banner* was at a loss to account for the acceptance of resolutions that 'might have been passed by an Episcopal Synod, a Congregational Union, or a miscellaneous meeting of Plymouth Brethren'.¹⁰⁷

It was widely believed that the regular and steady work of denominations was being undermined by sensationalism and a desire for immediate results. F.F. Moore observed that this Moody-inspired 'spasmodic, forced-draught, intensive-culture form of regeneration has its effect, but this effect is not lasting'.¹⁰⁸ During the 1883 Belfast campaign, one Presbyterian writer sympathetic to Moody was concerned that many expected abundant blessing only when 'special agents' were employed. Respectable churchgoers encouraged this diminution of routine Christian work by selfishly attending these special events and acting 'like sponges, absorbing every mercy themselves, apparently thinking of nothing beyond their own personal gratification, at an exciting religious service'. There was a danger of confusing emotionalism with genuine experience and thus rejecting as ineffectual the steady work of grace.¹⁰⁹ Friendly critics of Moodyite revivalism used criticism as a means of calling on their churches to do better at spreading the gospel. The *Witness* in December 1904 reflected on how to deal with spontaneous revivals and special missions led by travelling evangelists. Generally speaking, 'angry opposition' and 'an assertion of Church orthodoxy and clerical privilege' would only exacerbate the problem. The proper response was to ensure that evangelism was given its rightful and prominent place in the church and amongst the clergy. 'The experience of our oldest and most successful ministers is this – that revivals and missions by strange evangelists produce no such satisfactory and permanent results as the long-continued, systematic, faithful, earnest pastorate of a true man of God.'¹¹⁰

Moody's influence blurred the lines between evangelical and denominational identities, and between supporters and opponents of modern approaches to theology, a process that had its origins in the 1859 revival.¹¹¹ This was evident in W.T. Latimer's turn of the century assessment of Irish Presbyterianism published in the *Christian Banner*. In Latimer's opinion, widespread interest in religious feeling rather than faith now characterised the denomination, especially in urban areas where

the better-off gained it from culture and the poor from itinerant evangelists. He lamented the decline in theological knowledge this signified, yet he acknowledged that there was ‘more genuine piety’ amongst the evangelists and that he preferred ‘the misdirected enthusiasm of the wildest “revivalist” to the cold formality of the “higher critics”’.¹¹² Yet those sympathetic to aspects of modern theology were also influenced by Moody, including those within the Free Church. Indeed, two of these so-called ‘believing critics’ from Scotland, David Smith and James Strahan, were both professors at Magee College, Derry. They acknowledged Moody’s role in producing ‘an enlightened evangelicalism’ and saw Henry Drummond, Moody’s close friend and co-worker, as embodying the ideal connection between evangelical piety and openness to critical scholarship; Strahan specifically noted Drummond’s visit to Derry in 1874.¹¹³ To complicate matters further, Drummond had been criticised for his too-easy acceptance of Darwinian evolution by Moody’s more fundamentalist-inclined associates in the United States.¹¹⁴

The blurring caused by Moody was evident in 1927 when Professor J. Ernest Davey was tried for heresy on accusations of being a modernist.¹¹⁵ Davey’s father, Charles, was the minister of St Enoch’s, a respected evangelist, and a supporter of Moody’s 1892 mission. During his trial, Ernest Davey testified to his own evangelical experience under the watchful care of his father as a means of explaining his acceptance of modern theology. At the same time, his principal accuser, the Revd James Hunter, had also been involved in 1892 and had sought to extend the influence of the Moody and McNeill mission as a means ‘of reaching and influencing the non-church-going population’.¹¹⁶ Hunter and those others who accused Davey of modernism likewise adhered to evangelical experience but struggled to convince their fellow Presbyterian evangelicals that Davey had departed from doctrinal orthodoxy. As a consequence, Davey was exonerated, in part because he embodied Moody’s emphasis on evangelical experience.

Moody was a man for all seasons. During his three visits to Ulster, the lack of references in his addresses to local events, including the 1859 revival, confirms his practice elsewhere. As a consequence, it was the reaction of host communities to Moody that is perhaps more telling. In that regard, Moody’s impact in Ulster conforms to the pattern seen elsewhere. Just as Moody offered

comfort and security to Presbyterians in Scotland after the catastrophe of the Disruption and the upheavals of industrialisation, so he offered evangelicals in Ulster a means of addressing unprecedented urbanisation, the challenge of scientific naturalism, and growing demand for Irish Home Rule. Moody also appealed primarily to middle-class churchgoers. He challenged them to make their conduct match their profession of conversion by deepening their devotional lives and undertaking religious activity in the service of others. His scrupulous avoidance of religious and political controversy, and his insistence on interdenominational cooperation, saw the proliferation of united evangelistic effort throughout the region. This, however, was often at the expense of weakening commitment to distinctive denominational principles and practices. In particular, Moody divided Presbyterian evangelicals in Ulster as he had done in the Free Church. Those who emphasised confessional fidelity wanted to support Moody but felt that some of his techniques threatened Presbyterian procedure and Calvinist theology. As in the United States, Moody's legacy in Ulster can be seen on both sides of the controversies in the 1920s. Those who charged Davey with modernism were part of a strong evangelical culture of evangelism and spiritual formation inspired by Moody; those sympathetic to Davey were equally drawn to the 'believing criticism' of Moody's close friend, Henry Drummond. Often evangelicalism in Ulster is seen as adrift from the broader movement and easily reduced to opposition to Irish nationalism. By contrast, a study of Moody in Ulster demonstrates that they were part of the evangelical mainstream and conformed to the experience of modern revivalism elsewhere. Interdenominational evangelicalism may not be as eye-catching as fundamentalism and political division, but it was culturally and religiously of great significance for evangelicals in Ulster.

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