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Wesleyan Theological College
Montreal

Report of the Committee of the
Board of Governors

in re

Rev. Professor Workman, Ph.D.

1907

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The Committee appointed by the Board of Governors at its annual meeting, held April 29th, 1907, to "consider the doctrinal attitude" of the Rev. Prof. Workman, Ph.D., begs leave to report as follows—

Your Committee organized on the 6th day of May, 1907, and adopted Rules of Procedure, by which Dr. Workman should be duly notified of each meeting of the Committee, and if he could not attend he should be advised of the action of the Committee in his absence, and any remarks he might make thereon should be entered in the records; and further, when the report of the Committee should be completed, copies of the report should be sent to him, and to the Governors, and the Board should be advised to give him a hearing when it would consider the report. Dr. Workman was duly informed of the Rules of Procedure thus adopted.

A second meeting of the Committee was held on the 13th of May to which Dr. Workman was invited, but as he did not appear, the secretary telephoned him, and he replied that he declined to appear before this Committee until after the session of the Annual Conference. Shortly after the session of the Montreal Conference, on the 14th of June, another meeting of the Committee was being arranged when the secretary called up Dr. Workman to know if it would be convenient for him to attend, and in reply he stated that he did not intend to appear before the Committee.

Whilst we expect that Dr. Workman will in time have sufficient opportunity to address the Board as a whole, it is quite evident that such a course cannot give the thoroughness of enquiry which is so desirable in the interests of Dr. Workman as well as of the College, and which was anticipated when this Committee was appointed.

We have, however, as a Committee, obtained ample information of Dr. Workman's doctrinal views, on certain cardinal doctrines, to present a definite report, and we submit the following as a result of our deliberations. *Exact statements made by Dr. Workman are shown by quotation marks.*

THE QUESTION OF MIRACLES.

First—On the subject of Miracles we report the following facts: Prediction, in scripture, is regarded as a miracle of knowledge, but Dr. Workman states, "There is no specific prediction in the Old Testament personally referring to Jesus," thus rejecting the most important factor in Old Testament prophecy. He says "There is no reference to the Messiah in that chapter (the 53rd of Isaiah) and there is no prophecy of a suffering Messiah in the Old Testament."

The miracle of the Virgin Birth of Jesus he regards as a myth like that concerning Buddha. At the Theological Conference held last January, when the paper of Prof. McBride was read in which he declared the belief in a miracle was as impossible as the belief in a centaur, and that faith in the resurrection of Jesus could only be explained by some vision. Dr. Workman publicly stated his full agreement with the positions taken by Prof. McBride in this paper.

These facts permit the reasonable conclusion on our part that Dr. Workman agrees with the rationalistic position which seeks to eliminate every supernatural element in the Scriptures, and so is opposed to the view commonly held in the Methodist Church and taught by its Standards of Doctrine.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

Second—On the subject of the Holy Scriptures, we find that the genuineness of the Fourth Gospel, with the exception of a few "Johannean elements," collated by Wendt, is practically denied by Dr. Workman. A significant proof of this is given by him in rejecting the story of the Baptist's declaration "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," a view of a suffering Messiah which, he says, "had no place until the second century." Thus by one startling negation he substantially denies the reliability of the Fourth Gospel, and its testimony to Christ as the victim slain for our sins. Dr. Workman in explaining this later has further said: "There is no reason to believe the term 'Lamb of God' was in use at the beginning of Christ's ministry, but it came into use some time after his death, perhaps in the time of St. Paul." There is here such a treatment of the Fourth Gospel, one of the bulwarks of Christian doctrine, as to destroy our faith in its reliability.

On the subject of Messianic Prophecy, Dr. Workman has reaffirmed the views which were objected to by the Regents of Victoria University, and which caused such unrest in the church seventeen years ago, in his recent work on "The Servant of Jehovah." Dr. Burwash in a review of this work has joined issue with him on this question. While appreciating the scholarly diligence of the author, he notices the disappointment which Dr. Workman's position will give his many friends, and controverts his position. Dr. Burwash says: "So far from being 'not strictly Messianic prophecies' these 'passion prophecies' or 'servant prophecies' are the very culmination or climax of the wonderful line of Messianic prophecy"; and, "The historic culmination of all such vision is to be found only in Christ."

Thus in various ways Dr. Workman by his teachings undermines, we think, the Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures as taught by the Standards of the Methodist Church.

THE TRINITY.

Third—On the subject of the Trinity and the Deity of Christ Dr. Workman says: "I believe the doctrine of the Trinity to be a New Testament doctrine, and I teach it as a New Testament doctrine." This important statement is not accompanied by any explanation, and is not consistent with other statements made by him. It might be taken in quite another sense—for instance, the Sabellian or Modalistic view of the Trinity which denies that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead, and yet holds to a trinity of manifestation, viz: in God the Father, in the man Jesus by his wonderful life and teachings, and in the Holy Ghost as merely the influence of the spirit of the Father; all of which is much below the scriptural view of the Trinity, and contrary to the Standards of all the orthodox churches of Christendom. Dr. Workman has also said; "I do not believe in the doctrine of the trinity, at least in the term." This statement, taken with other contributory facts, such as his repudiation of the teaching of the *Te Deum* and his treatment of the person of Jesus, makes his claim to believe in the Trinity to appear entirely inconsistent. When Dr. Workman was asked if he believed in the Deity of Jesus as distinguished from his Divinity, he declined to state that he believed in the Deity of Christ. He rejected the distinction between the two Greek terms for Deity and Divinity—theotes and theiotes—a distinction which represents respectively the essence of Deity and Divine qualities or operations. This distinction is illustrated in Romans I. : 20, "His eternal power and *godhead*," (theiotes=Divinity, as manifested in creation) and Colossians II. : 9, "In whom dwelleth all the fulness of the *Godhead* (theotes=Deity) bodily." Surely the Being of whom this is said must be of the Divine essence. On being questioned further on this point, Dr. Workman significantly claimed that nowhere in Scripture is Jesus called God. This contention can only be made by one who puts others than the most obvious meaning into the prologue of John's Gospel, and rejects many passages elsewhere which attribute to Christ the acts, prerogatives and attributes of Deity. Theodore Parker, a brilliant Unitarian in his high praise of the man Jesus declared: "This Galilean youth strode before the world whole thousands of years, so much of *divinity* was in him. In him the godlike and the human met and embraced and a divine life was born." Thus the word "divine" is used by many Unitarians concerning Christ. Similarly Channing, another eminent Unitarian declares his faith in the *divinity* of Christ, but is candid enough to explain his meaning. He meant by divinity, godlike qualities, but not the divine essence. It is noticeable that Dr. Workman's terms are similar to those used by Parker, Channing, and other Unitarians though appearing to express orthodox contents.

In his treatment of the atoning work of Christ, Dr. Workman claims that Jesus suffered only "participatively" for the sins of the world. The natural and inevitable inference from this argument is that any human being who suffers "participatively" for the sins of others, and so produces a redemptive influence, is as really making atonement for sin as Jesus. The difference must be only one of degree. Thus, his entire argument on the atonement indicates that Dr. Workman does not regard Jesus as a Being, one in essence with God.

To us it seems self evident that no one can consistently declare his faith in the Trinity while denying or even doubting the Deity of Jesus.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN.

Fourth—On the subject of Sin, Dr. Workman has stated that "Every man is born in innocence and freedom from sin." Any remedial influence therefore from the atonement upon irresponsible childhood must be denied, for, according to Dr. Workman, the atonement seems to be only a moral influence to bring free agents into harmony with God. He holds that "The narrative in Genesis says nothing about any curse being pronounced upon his posterity by the sin of Adam." He openly stated in the last General Conference that he had refused to use the part in our Ritual for Baptism which declares that "all men are conceived and born in sin." In a lecture delivered at Renfrew, in March last, and later at a meeting held in the McGill Y.M.C.A. he taught the same views. He rejects the terms "Original Sin" and "Total Depravity" although these are clearly defined in our Standards of Doctrine. We think this view of Sin might be legitimately described as that of the Pelagians; with them "The individual is everything, the race nothing. Every man comes into the world in the same moral state as Adam. He falls through influence and example and he saves himself in the same way. Death is a natural occurrence, not a penalty." Such views of sin and of man's corrupted condition we regard as serious. If sin is only an accident or necessity in the stages of evolution, it can never be regarded with horror, and it requires no expiatory atonement. Such teaching can only result in both doctrinal and ethical decline.

THE ATONEMENT.

Fifth—As to the great fundamental doctrine of the Atonement we regret that here we discover the widest latitude on the part of Dr. Workman. He defines expiation as an influence exercised upon an offender to bring him into harmony with God. Such a definition could hardly be accepted in the Divinity school of any orthodox church. The contrast is very marked between this definition and that say of Pope, who says: "The atonement must be viewed as a vicarious satisfaction of the claims of Divine justice or expiation of the guilt of sin and propitiation of the Divine favor." In fact the very term "atonement" used in the sense in which Dr. Workman uses it, can only be misleading to the unwary. We must protest

against this latitudinarian use of theological terms which have a recognized and distinctive meaning.

In further illustration of the position of Dr. Workman, we quote two expressions. He says: "Sacrifices are not a Divine institution" and also "God did not command sacrifice" although they are specifically and emphatically so described in the Old Testament and explained in the New, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews which has ever been regarded as the key to the Old Testament symbolism. All evangelical christians recognize with precious faith that symbolic sacrifices in the Old Testament, and the Lamb of God in the new, constitute the life and heart of the Gospel. Dr. Workman in alluding to the sacrifice of Abel said of it as of all sacrifices: "Each offering is received according to the spirit in which it is given, and not as necessary to the forgiveness of sins." He said also: "The parable of the Prodigal Son shows how Jesus taught as to what was necessary for man to do in order to get right with God." That is, this parable, which it should be remembered illustrates primarily repentance, and has no reference directly to atonement, is regarded by Dr. Workman as showing that the atonement in an evangelical sense is not necessary to salvation. He has stated: "There is no New Testament passage that teaches that man could not be forgiven without the sacrifice upon the cross"; also, "I find no passage in the Bible that teaches that God needs to be propitiated"; also "I do not regard the death and suffering of Jesus as necessary to make it possible for God to forgive sin." In the Intercollegiate Conference held last January in the presence of a large company of students and Professors of different denominations, he repudiated the evangelical view of the passage "To give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. xx : 28) by holding that the word "ransom" simply means "an offering of service acceptable to God by virtue of the excellent spirit in which it is given, and having no reference to the securing of pardon for sin."

Dr. Workman in his work on "The Servant of Jehovah", recently published, explains that in his opinion, that great evangelical chapter the 53rd of Isaiah, including such a pathetic view of the sufferings of Christ, as "He was despised and rejected of men"; "He was wounded for our transgressions", etc., does not at all refer directly to our blessed Lord. What then is his interpretation? These passages he holds relate to the pious minority of Israel after the captivity, here figuratively called the "Servant of Jehovah." This remnant of Israel suffering on account of the unfaithfulness of their fellow countrymen are thus "expiating" the sins of Israel. On page 136, he says: "When the prophet speaks of the servant as having been made a guilt-offering, he means that the loyal Israelites were permitted to suffer both on account, and in behalf of the disloyal Israelites." So also he treats other passages in Deutero-Isaiah which are regarded by evangelical authorities as definitely pointing to Jesus as the suffering Messiah. Although his mode of interpretation is not in

issue here, we cannot help noting how the imagination must be drawn upon to show a correspondence between the sufferings of Israel in captivity and the vivid picture given in the 53rd of Isaiah, or how in any important sense the sufferings of the remnant really produced a penitence on the part of sinning Israel leading to a reformation in their religious life. Many things must be accepted as historical on insufficient evidence to make this theory workable.

But our chief interest here is in Dr. Workman's use of the word "expiation", which is continually treated in a sense entirely different from that found in our Standards of Doctrine. On page 205 he says: "Here he (the prophet) teaches plainly that this sin was expiated through the voluntary endurance by the loyal Israelites of the chastisement which was necessary, not to render God propitious, nor to influence Him to forgive their disloyal brethren, but to make them realize their guilt and feel their need of forgiveness." The permissible inference from this is—If I suffer patiently the ills resulting from my neighbor's wrong-doing and it leads to his becoming penitent, I "expiate" his sin. Expiation is thus simply the suffering on the part of the good of the consequences of the sins of the bad. Thus, for instance, the wrong-doings induced by the liquor-traffic are expiated by the suffering it brings to the sober. The sober here may be described as the Servant of Jehovah bearing the guilt offering of the drunkard. There is no relation in all this to the satisfying of the demands of justice. God needs no satisfaction to enable him to forgive. On this basis Dr. Workman interprets the numerous quotations from Isaiah in the New Testament as instances merely of accommodated application.

We have mentioned already that he rejects as unreliable the narrative in John's Gospel of the Baptist declaring as to Jesus "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and holds that the idea of a suffering Messiah had no place until the second Century. No wonder then that his interpretation of the atonement would differ from that of the orthodox churches. Dr. Workman's view as stated by himself is: "I believe Christ's atoning work consists in the life He lived, the teaching He gave, and the death He died in loving obedience to the will of His Father to affect the reconciliation of man to God." Such a definition would consistently fit into Unitarian soteriology, but could not be accepted in any orthodox church. Under such a definition, Buddha or Confucius could be regarded as atoning saviours of men, if their lives and teachings and death but led men to penitence.

We have referred already to Dr. Workman's denial of the Virgin Birth of Christ, and we note the statement he quotes from Beet that "The Virgin Birth is no essential part of Christians apologetic." Combine these views with others of Dr. Workman and what is the result? Jesus is a man, born of ordinary human parentage, living a noble life, working no miracles, but dying a heroic death. Even with such a picture before the mind of the apostles it seems to us

incomprehensible that they could say: "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins," and "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree."

One great Sösinian or Unitarian creed prepared in 1605 A.D., teaches as follows: "The view that salvation was secured by Christ's suffering and death is false and pernicious. The Scripture teach that God forgives sin gratuitously, and the idea of satisfaction is at complete variance with a free gift. The word "redemption" in the new Testament does not contain any notion of satisfaction." It seems evident that Dr. Workman's view harmonizes with this creed, and certainly diverges far from the Standards of Doctrine of the Methodist Church.

It follows from the foregoing, that if the views Dr. Workman holds and advocates are to be taught by our ministry, we must separate ourselves from the great scriptural doctrines which have made Methodism so mighty as a moral and spiritual force. There is significance in the fact that not a single great evangelist of any church can be named who has entertained and preached these views. Any evangelistic movement attempted with such doctrines could only result in failure.

We have not overlooked the fact that Dr. Workman bases his claim to be in harmony with the Standards of Doctrine of the Methodist Church, on the principle that "The Standards of Doctrine are to be interpreted by the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures by the Standards of Doctrine." This we regard as a totally inadmissible postulate. If this principal were admitted it would leave the church not as a coherent organization founded on a great system of faith but an aggregation of ministers and their followers having as many varieties and shades of doctrine as there are ministers. Every ordained minister has as much right to claim the privilege to make Standards of Doctrine according to his own interpretation of Scripture as has Dr. Workman, and if this were allowed we would soon have the utmost confusion and chaos.

We are fully aware that some statements in this report might be modified by explanations made by Dr. Workman. If so, this only shows how desirable it was that he should have met the committee as proposed by the Board of Governors, in a friendly conference, and he could then have given his statement in any form he preferred. At the same time quiet, personal interchange of views would have given us an opportunity to have discussed many other important doctrines, such as the efficacy of prayer, the belief in personal immortality, and the question of future retribution about which we have received some reports of his divergence from the accepted doctrines of Christendom.

We are not unmindful of the demand there is in some quarters for progress in theology, and with that demand in a broad sense, we are in the fullest sympathy. We however agree with that eminent scholar Rev. W. T. Davison in an article in a recent number of the

LONDON QUARTERLY REVIEW, when he says: "Rejection of vital spiritual authority means bewilderment, confusion, anarchy and the return of chaos. In some quarters to-day the largest concessions are made to assailants of the faith, and on the slightest pretexts, the cargo and gear of the ship are jettisoned with a light heart as if every surrender of traditional belief meant an advance towards the freedom of the truth."

We do not wish this Board to commit itself to a blind devotion to the letter of the creeds, but the serious responsibility rests with this body to determine whether a wide divergence from the fundamental and vital doctrines of Christianity can be condoned in a Professor employed to teach in the Theological College under its charge.

It is with deep and prayerful realization of this responsibility that we present to you our report.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

On behalf of the Committee,

C. T. SCOTT,
Secretary.

MONTREAL, Aug. 31st, 1907.