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CORRESPONDENCE

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REV. DR. TAYLOR AND REV. DR. HAWES.

From the Connecticut Observer.

MR. EDITOR.—I send you the following correspondence, with the request that you will publish it in the Observer. My object in writing to Dr. Taylor was to draw from him a statement of his views respecting some of the leading doctrines of the Bible; and while I cannot but express myself much gratified with the candor and frankness with which he has made the statement, I indulge the hope that the publication of it will serve to allay apprehension, and have a happy influence upon the cause of truth and piety.

Yours truly,

J. HAWES.

HARTFORD, Jan. 23, 1832.

My Dear Brother,—In your late visit to this city to assist in the services of the protracted meeting held in the South Church, I had an opportunity to hear you preach several sermons on some of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and was much gratified to find that your views of these doctrines are so entirely accordant with those which I have long supposed to be held by the great body of evangelical ministers in this State and in New-England. You was especially full and explicit on the doctrine of man's entire moral depravity, and his consequent dependance on the Holy Spirit for regeneration. I see not how the orthodox doctrine on this subject could have been stated with more clearness than it was by yourself in parts of several discourses which you delivered here to crowded and deeply solemn assemblies. Your views of the sinner's dependence on divine grace did indeed appear to me to be such as not to supersede or destroy his own agency, nor lessen his obligation, nor at all to extenuate his guilt for neglecting to do what God requires of him, and what, as a moral agent he is every way qualified and bound to do. His dependence, if I rightly understood your statement of it, is a dependence of his *own creating, growing out of voluntary perverseness of heart*, or disinclination to serve God, and which, while it leaves him a complete moral agent, and therefore without excuse for neglecting his duty, suspends his salvation on the good pleasure of God, or renders the interposition of the Holy Spirit absolutely necessary to his conversion. All this, I must think, is right and scriptural, and the only effective way of preaching the doctrine of man's dependence. If this doctrine is so preached as to set aside human agency, or make man the mere passive receiver

er of a divine operation, the practical effect, as it appears to me, must be to quiet conscience and lay the sinner down secure in his sins.

But though the discourses you delivered here fully satisfied me, and I would trust, all others who heard them, of the correctness of your views on the doctrines above alluded to, you are quite aware that there are not a few in the community who, from some cause or other, are apprehensive that you are not sound on these doctrines; and much alarm has been expressed, lest, as a teacher of theology, you should introduce heresy into our churches.

Now, my dear Brother, while I highly appreciate the feeling which watches with discreet vigilance, over the purity of our doctrines, and is ready to sound the alarm whenever there is any real departure from the faith once delivered to the saints, I cannot but feel that you owe it to yourself, to the Institution with which you are connected, and to the christian community in general, to make a frank and full statement of your views of the doctrines above mentioned. I would especially desire you to express your belief in regard to the nature and necessity of the Holy Spirit's influence in regeneration. Is that influence essential to the repentance of a sinner; in what sense is it special? To render my inquiry definite, I will quote one of the articles in the Confession of Faith adopted by the church of which I am pastor. "We believe that all men *may* accept of the offers of salvation freely made to them in the gospel, but that no one *will* do this except he be drawn by the Father." Is this your belief? A clear and full expression of your sentiments on this point cannot fail, I am confident, to relieve the minds of many who are now suspicious of your orthodoxy, and tend to perpetuate the harmony and peace which have so long and so happily distinguished the ministers and churches of our denomination.

Affectionately yours,

J. HAWES.

YALE COLLEGE, Feb. 1, 1832.

Dear Brother,—I thank you for yours of the 23d ult. in which you express your approbation of my preaching during the protracted meetings at Hartford. This expression of fraternal confidence is grateful to me, not because I ever supposed that we differed in our views of the great doctrines of the gospel, but because, for some reason or other, an impression has been made, to some extent, *that I am unsound in the faith.* This impression I feel bound to say, in my own view is wholly groundless and unauthorized. You think however, that I "owe it to myself, to the Institution with which I am connected, and to the christian community, to make a frank and full statement of my views of some of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and that this cannot fail to relieve the minds of many, who are now suspicious of my orthodoxy."

Here I must be permitted to say, that the repeated and full

statements of my opinions, which I have already made to the public, would seem to be sufficient to prevent or remove such suspicions. The course you propose, however, may furnish information to some who would desire it before they form an opinion, as well as the means of correcting the misrepresentations of others. I therefore readily comply with your request, and submit to your disposal the following statement of my belief on some of the leading doctrines of the gospel. I believe,

1. That there are three persons in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

2. That the eternal purposes of God extend to all actual events, sin not excepted; or, that God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, and so executes these purposes as to leave the free moral agency of man unimpaired.

3. That all mankind in consequence of the fall of Adam, are born destitute of holiness, and are by nature totally depraved; in other words, that all men, from the commencement of moral agency do, without the interposition of divine grace, sin and only sin, in all their moral conduct.

4. That an atonement for sin has been made for all mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ; that this atonement was necessary to magnify the law, and to vindicate and unfold the justice of God in the pardon of sin; and that the sinner who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is freely justified on the ground of his atoning sacrifice, and on that ground alone.

5. That the change in regeneration is a *moral* change, consisting in a new holy disposition, or governing purpose of the heart as a permanent principle of action; in which change the sinner transfers the *supreme* affection of his heart from all inferior objects to the living God, chooses him as the portion of his soul, and his service and glory as his supreme good, and thus in respect to moral character, becomes a *new man*.

6. That this moral change is never produced in the human heart by *moral suasion*, i. e. by the mere influence of truth and motives, as the Pelagians affirm, but is produced by the influence of the Holy Spirit, operating on the mind through the truth, and in perfect consistency with the nature of moral action, and laws of moral agency.

7. That all men, (in the words of the article of your church,) *may* accept of the offers of salvation freely made to them in the gospel, but that no one *will* do this, except he be drawn by the Father.

8. That the necessity of the influence of the Holy Spirit in regeneration results solely from the voluntary perverseness of the sinner's heart, or disinclination to serve God, which, while it leaves him a complete moral agent and without excuse for neglecting his duty, suspends his actual salvation on the sovereign will of God.

9. That the renewing grace of God is *special* (in distinction from

that which is common and resisted by the sinful mind) inasmuch as it is that which is designed to secure and does infallibly secure, the conversion of the sinner.

10. That all who are renewed by the Holy Spirit are elected or chosen of God from eternity, that they should be holy, not on account of foreseen faith or good works, but according to the good pleasure of his will.

11. That all who are renewed by the Holy Spirit, will, through his continued influence, persevere in holiness to the end, and obtain eternal life.

Such is my faith in respect to some of the leading doctrines of the gospel. These doctrines I preach; these I teach in the Theological department of this Seminary; these, I have repeatedly published to the world. With what truth or justice any regard me as a 'teacher of Theology introducing heresy into our churches,' the candid can judge.

But it may be asked, whether after all, there are not some points, on which I differ from my brethren generally, or at least, from some of them? I answer—it would be strange, if any two men should be found to agree exactly, in all the minute matters of religious opinion. With respect however, to what is properly considered the Orthodox or Calvinistic SYSTEM of doctrines, as including the great FACTS of Christianity, and as opposed to, and distinguished from, the Unitarian, Pelagian and Arminian *systems*, I suppose there is between the Orthodox ministry and myself an entire agreement. In respect to comparatively minor points, and philosophical theories, and modes of defending the Calvinistic system of doctrines, there has always been, as you are aware, a diversity of opinion with freedom of discussion, among the Calvinists of this country, especially in New-England; but which has never impaired their fellowship or mutual confidence. To these topics of difference, greater or less importance has been attached by different individuals. In respect to some of these, (and in respect to them, I suppose myself to agree with a large majority of our Calvinistic clergy) I will now briefly, but frankly state what I do *not*, and what I do believe.

I do *not* believe, that the posterity of Adam are, in the proper sense of the language, guilty of his sin; or that the ill-desert of that sin is truly theirs; or that they are punished for that sin. But I do believe, that by the wise and holy constitution of God, all mankind in consequence of Adam's sin, become sinners by their own act.

I do *not* believe that the nature of the human mind, which God creates, is itself sinful; or that God punishes men for the nature which He creates; or that sin pertains to any thing in the mind which precedes all conscious mental exercise or action, and which is neither a matter of consciousness nor of knowledge. But I do believe that sin universally is no other than selfishness, or a *prefer-*

ence of one's self to all others,—of some inferior good to God ; that this free voluntary preference is a permanent principle of action in all the unconverted ; and that this is sin and all that in the scriptures is meant by sin. I also believe, that such is the *nature* of the human mind, that it becomes the occasion of universal sin in men in all the appropriate circumstances of their existence ; and that therefore they are truly and properly said to be sinners *by nature*.

I do *not* believe that sin can be proved to be the necessary means of the greatest good, and that as such, God prefers it on the whole to holiness in its stead ; or that a God of sincerity and truth punishes his creatures for doing that which he on the whole prefers they should do, and which as the means of good, is the best thing they can do. But I do believe, that holiness as the means of good, may be better than sin ; that it may be true that God, all things considered, prefers holiness to sin in all instances in which the latter takes place, and therefore sincerely desires that all men should come to repentance, though for wise and good reasons he *permits*, or does not prevent the existence of sin. I do *not* believe that it can be proved, that an omnipotent God would be *unable* to secure more good by means of the perfect and universal obedience of his creatures, if they would render it, than by means of their sin. But I do believe that it may involve a dishonorable limitation of his power to suppose that he could not do it.*

I do *not* believe that the grace of God can be truly said to be *irresistible*, in the primary proper import of this term. But I do believe, that in all cases, it *may be* resisted by man as a free moral agent, and that when it becomes effectual to conversion, as it infallibly does in the case of all the elect, it is *unresisted*.

I do *not* believe, that the grace of God is necessary, as Arminians and some others maintain, to render man an accountable agent, and responsible for rejecting the offers of eternal life. But I do believe, that man would be such an agent and thus responsible, were no such grace afforded, and that otherwise ' grace would be no more grace.'

I do *not* believe, that it is necessary that the sinner in using the means of regeneration, should commit sin in order to become holy. But I do believe, that as a moral agent he is qualified so to use these means, i. e. the truth of God when present to his mind, as to become holy at once ; that he is authorized to believe, that thro' the grace of the Holy Spirit, this *may be* done ; and that except in so doing, he cannot be truly and properly said to *use* the means of regeneration.

* The question is not whether God, all things considered, has purposed the existence of sin rather than to prevent it ; but for what *reason* has he purposed it? Some affirm this *reason* to be *that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good*. Now what I claim, and all that I claim is, that *no one can prove this to be the reason why God has purposed the existence of sin, and that some other may be the true reason*, without affirming what the true reason is.

I do *not* believe, that we are authorized to assure the sinner, as Arminians do, and some others also, that the Holy Spirit is always ready to convert him. But I do believe, that we are authorized to assure any sinner, that it *may be true*, that the Holy Spirit is now ready to convert him,—‘that God PERADVENTURE will now give him repentance,’ and that thus, in view of the possible intervention of divine influence, we remove what would otherwise be a ground of fatal discouragement to the sinner, when we exhort him to immediate repentance.

I have dwelt the more on some of these particulars, because much pains has been taken by some individuals, to make the impression, that I have departed from the true faith respecting the influences of the Holy Spirit, even denying his influences altogether. So far is this from the fact, that as you well know, no one attaches higher importance to this doctrine than I do; preaches it more decisively, or appreciates more highly its practical relations and bearings. In my own view, the power of the Gospel on the mind of the sinner very much consists in the two great facts of his complete moral agency as the basis of his obligation, of his guilt and of his duty;—and of his dependence on the sovereign grace of God, resulting from his voluntary perverseness in sin. Without the latter, we could, in my opinion, neither show the Christian what thanks he owes his Deliverer from sin, nor awaken the sinner to flee from the wrath to come. This doctrine seems to be indispensable to destroy the presumptuous reliance of the sinner on future repentance, as it shows him how fearfully he provokes an offended God to withhold the grace on which all depends. At the same time one thing is indubitably certain, viz. that God never revealed the doctrine of the sinner’s dependence on his Spirit, to prevent the sinner from doing his duty at once. God does not call sinners to instant compliance with the terms of life, and then assure them, that such compliance is utterly out of the question and to be wholly despaired of. The opposite impression however, is not uncommon; and it is an error not less fatal to immediate repentance, than the fond hope of repenting hereafter. Both are to be destroyed; and he who does not preach the gospel in that manner which tends to destroy both, preaches it but imperfectly.

In the earlier revivals of this country, great prominence was given in the preaching, to the doctrines of dependence, in the forms of regeneration, election, &c. This was what was to be expected from the Calvinistic preachers of the time, in view of the prevalence of Arminianism. In the more recent revivals however, a similar prominence seems to be given to moral agency, in the forms of present obligations to duty, its present practicability, &c. The preaching, thus distinguished in its more prominent characteristics, has been undeniably owned and blessed by the Spirit of God, although we are very apt to believe, that what is true of one kind of preaching at one time, must be true of it at another. Now I believe, that

both the doctrines of dependence and moral accountability, must be *admitted by the public mind*, to secure upon that mind, the full power of the Gospel. I also believe, that greater or less *prominence* should be given to the one or the other of these doctrines, according to the prevailing state of public opinion. When, at the earlier periods alluded to, the doctrine of dependence was dwelt on chiefly, (I do not suppose exclusively,) the public mind believed enough, I might say too much, concerning the free moral agency of man, and had not so well learned as since, to pervert the doctrine of dependence to justify the waiting attitude of a passive recipient. And then, both doctrines told with power on the mind and the conscience, and through God, were attended with great and happy results. But the prominence given to the doctrine of dependence in preaching was continued, until if I mistake not, it so engrossed the public attention, and so obscured or weakened the doctrine of responsibility, that many fell into the opposite error of quietly waiting for God's interposition. Hence, when this prevailing error is again corrected by a more prominent exhibition of man's responsibility in the form of immediate obligation, &c. the power of both doctrines is again combined on the public mind, and we see the same or even greater results in revivals of religion. Nor would it be strange if the latter kind of preaching should in its turn prevail exclusively and so long, that the practical influence of the doctrine of dependence should be greatly impaired, to be followed with another dearth of revivals and a quiet reliance of sinful men on their own self-sufficiency. On this subject, I have often, in view of the tendency of the human mind to vacillate from one extreme to the other, expressed my apprehensions. In some of my brethren whom I love and respect, I see what I esteem a *disproportioned* estimate of the importance of preaching dependence; in others whom I equally respect, I see what I regard as a *disproportioned* estimate of the importance of preaching moral responsibility. In regard to myself, I can say that I have aimed in this respect rightly to divide the word of truth, and that those discourses in which I have best succeeded in bringing the two doctrines to bear in their combined force on the mind, have been more blessed to the awakening and conversion of sinners, than almost any others which I preach. When both doctrines are wisely and truly presented, the sinner has no resting place. He cannot well avoid a sense of guilt while proposing to remain in his sins, for he sees that he is a free moral agent under all the responsibilities of such an agent, to immediate duty. He cannot well presume on his resolution of future repentance, for he sees that sovereign, injured grace may at once abandon him to hopeless sin. He is thus shut up to the faith—to the immediate performance of his duty. In accordance with these views, I aim in my instructions to those who are preparing for the ministry, to inculcate the importance of a consistent, well proportioned exhibition of the two great doctrines of the sinner's depend-

ence and responsibility, that in this respect they may hold the minds of their hearers under the full influence of that Gospel, which is the power of God to salvation.

I have thus stated more minutely perhaps than you anticipated, my views and opinions. I could wish that they might be satisfactory to all our Orthodox brethren. I have no doubt, that they will be to very many, and to some who have been alarmed by groundless rumors concerning my unsoundness in the faith.—With respect to what I have called *leading doctrines*, I regard these, as among the cardinal truths of the christian system. They are truths to which I attach the highest importance, and in which my faith is more and more confirmed, the more I examine the word of God.—To *some* of those of which I have spoken as *comparatively minor points*, I attach a high importance in their practical bearings and doctrinal connections. They are points however, in regard to which there is more or less diversity of opinion among the Orthodox; and as it is not my intention nor practice to denounce others as heretics, merely because they differ from me in these matters, so I should be pleased with the reciprocation of the like catholicism on their part.

Yours affectionately,

NATHANIEL W. TAYLOR.

REV. J. HAWES, D. D.

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