
Correspondence Between Professor Willard C. Fisher and President Shanklin.

Source: *The American Economic Review*, Mar., 1913, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar., 1913), pp. 255-258

Published by: American Economic Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1828324>

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CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PROFESSOR WILLARD C.
FISHER AND PRESIDENT SHANKLIN.

Wesleyan University, President's Office,
Middletown, Conn., January 27, 1913.

My Dear Professor Fisher:—The press far and wide contains articles relative to remarks in reference to the churches of the country reputed to have been uttered by you in a recent address in Hartford. I desire to know whether or not you have been correctly reported. If you have been incorrectly reported, will you please give me an exact statement of what you did say?

Sincerely yours,

WILLIAM ARNOLD SHANKLIN

Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.,
Economics and Social Science,
January 27, 1913.

My Dear Dr. Shanklin:—In reply to your letter, just received, I would say that the report of my remarks before The Get Together Club in Hartford last Wednesday evening was substantially misleading. Partly by the omission of qualifying statements, which made the setting and shaped the interpretation, partly by ascribing to me words and statements which were not mine at all, and, perhaps, partly by the striking headlines, which raised brief incidental remarks into the prominence of the principal theme, the original report, upon which apparently many newspaper quotations and comments have been based was—I should judge—decidedly unfair. This judgment of mine is confirmed in some degree at least by the fact that the paper in which the report appeared was constrained by criticism in Hartford to offer me an opportunity to make corrections. There was, however, a large underlying element of truth in the report. I did not say that I would “throw Sunday wide open”, nor anything else of closely similar meaning. But I did say that I would allow very great freedom of Sunday observance, allowing a man pretty nearly anything that did not disturb the religious or other use of the day by others. I did say that I saw no religious inconsistency in a man's having an “uproariously good time” on Sunday; but I added that there should be no disturbance of religious or other uses of the day by others. I did say that I would, or that “I believe that I would” close up the churches temporarily as an experiment. But I stated my reasons with emphasis, because so many good religious people have come to think of church going as a great part or the whole of religious duty, and because, if there were no churches open for a time, these people would be constrained to turn to more important religious duties, of kindly service and the like. Just here I quoted the declaration of James as to the meaning of religion pure and undefiled.

The above will perhaps enable you to judge for yourself as to

the degree of accuracy with which I was reported; but, for a slight amplification of what I have just written, I am enclosing a copy of a letter¹ which I sent in correction of the first report and which was printed in the paper first reporting me in its issue of last Saturday morning, January 25.

Of course, not even all of what I am now placing at your disposal can make entirely clear my general attitude as to Sunday observance;

¹This letter is as follows:

To the Editor of The Courant:—

The developments of the day make it desirable that you print more about my Wednesday evening address before the Get-Together Club than the few words you asked for last evening. Friends and others speak and write to me in great variety of emotions; quotations have started their run through the general press; and my poor remarks will be made the subject of pulpit discussion. I spoke with deliberate seriousness, just as I thought and have thought for years, and I have not the least wish to qualify what I have said; but the surprising prominence that has come to my remarks through your paper makes it worth while that interested persons should know both what I said and, in part at least, why I said it.

I have always gone regularly to church and considered myself essentially a religious man, and I spoke in the interest of true religion. But my understanding of religion and religious duty is not, apparently, the most widely prevalent one. There is no manner of doubt that, according to the lives of most people in our time and community, attendance at church is a large part of religious duty, perhaps the chief part; while the lives of not a few imply that is the full duty. Now, my notion is that attendance at church, at so-called religious "services," is of very slight and subordinate importance, of no importance whatever except as a means to something else.

In this, as in all other matters of religious, moral and social principle, I make large use of the Bible; and it will be worth the while of my critics to look through their Bibles with care before they reject my statements and denounce me. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Nothing here, and very little elsewhere, about attendance at formal religious "services." Yet we all know men and women who consider themselves, as their neighbors, or at least most of them consider them, religious people, just because they go regularly to church, although they neither do justly, love mercy, visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, walk humbly with God, nor keep themselves unspotted from the world.

Of course, there is a natural human tendency in all this. Notoriously the militiamen, especially the captain, considers himself a warrior; but few others do, unless he is something more than a mere militiaman. And the error of his pretensions is evident upon a little thought.

Of course, militia drill has its place and justification but not as full substitute, or a large substitute, for military "service." What would we say of men who professed a zeal for military service in a country where hard and dangerous fighting was to be done on every hand, and who yet limited their military "service" to weekly dress parades, or in closer symbolism, weekly military concerts, where, in all possible splendor of buttons, braid and shining metal, they listened to the rattle of drums and the blast of bugle charge, then went back to the quiet and safe enjoyment of their homes? Certainly no warriors these. If dress parades and military concerts were abolished, they might cease to call themselves soldiers or go to war.

but it is probably quite enough to make you to see how and in what light I stood last Wednesday evening. And that, I am sure, is all of your present want.

Very sincerely yours,

WILLARD C. FISHER

Wesleyan University, President's Office,
Middletown, Conn., January 27, 1913.

My Dear Professor Fisher:—Your letter of this date is just received. Even after consideration of your explanation of your position, I find it difficult to believe that any one with a just appreciation of the work which the churches have done and are doing for the religious and moral life of the community could seriously propose the closing of the

I have never condemned church-going, never even in my own mind, except as it takes the place of something more important. A good part of those who do justly, love mercy, visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and keep themselves unspotted from the world, find that reverent attendance at church is a great aid to a humble walk with God. But it is too obvious for proof that in the minds, as in the lives of many, mere going to church "service" is taken for a good portion of religious duty, and this, too, by people whose impulses and instincts are genuinely religious. And my thought has been for a long while that, if such people of true religious impulses were shut off for a time—whether for a few years or for a shorter period is not the main point—from church-going, they would turn into the much important duties, duties of mercy, kindness, sacrifice, and the like, for the help of brother man, duties, these, which are recognized more or less, but are commonly thought of as aside from religion, whereas they are the very heart of religion, the Christian religion at least, so far as the relation of man to man is concerned. "Bear ye, one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Owe no man anything, save to love one another; for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law."

As to the "uproarious good time" on Sunday, I said emphatically that I would not allow anybody's Sunday practices to disturb others. As to the suggestion that there may as well be a day of general uproar and tumult, that is none of mine. I have even sympathized with friends, living on good roads in the country, who protest against the unbroken succession of toots, blasts, screams, and other more modern noises which come from the autos of good religious people—among others—who, having done their religious duty at "divine service" in the morning, make the country-side hideous in the afternoon.

Suffice it to say further as to noise and quiet on Sundays and in religion that this thought of Sunday as necessarily to be kept quiet because religion must be solemn silence, all that is a modern and narrow development. All religious people who have added to their duty of church-going a fair attention to the Scriptures, will recall how commonly "shouting" and "loud noise" are mentioned as part of early religious functions.

Indeed, it is as accurate as a single brief statement can be made to say that our whole notion of Sunday observance, what we call "the American Sabbath" as against the continental, is an outgrowth of the Puritan movement in England, and that earlier times and other lands show centuries of humble walk with God, just dealing, love of mercy, kindly visitation upon the afflicted, all these quite as good and pure as ours. But that is another story.

WILLARD C. FISHER.

Middletown, Jan. 24, 1913.

churches, even as a temporary experiment. I am constrained to the conviction that your attitude in the matter is so far out of harmony with the spirit of the college, which, though in no wise sectarian, is and always has been profoundly in sympathy with the Christian churches, that your continuance in your present official position is undesirable for the college, or for yourself. I feel, therefore, compelled to request you to offer your resignation.

Most sincerely yours,

WILLIAM ARNOLD SHANKLIN

Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.,

Economics and Social Science,

January 27, 1913.

My Dear Dr. Shanklin:—Of course I shall respond at once to your request for my resignation. Here it is. It is given cheerfully and, as I trust, in full appreciation of the situation. I do not express, I do not even undertake to frame for myself a judgment as to what I might think the correct course for the college to take in such a case. But my judgment is not needed and it might be biased. I am, however, free enough from prejudice to see very clearly that a college with the history and the constituency and support of Wesleyan is not exactly the place for a man who holds such views as mine and who can not suppress them. I leave the college, therefore, without a trace of ill will toward anybody connected with it. Indeed, I go with the warmest wishes for the institution to which I have given the twenty best years of my life.

Very cordially yours,

WILLARD C. FISHER

Wesleyan University, President's Office,

Middletown, Conn., January 27, 1913.

My Dear Professor Fisher:—I have your favor, resigning from the faculty of Wesleyan University. I hereby relieve you from your duties, pending the presentation of your resignation to the board of trustees.

I shall recommend that your salary be paid in full for the present academic year.

Appreciating your spirit of good will to the college, I am,

Most sincerely yours,

WILLIAM ARNOLD SHANKLIN