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John Allen Chalk

1-29-1971

From/To: Charles Van Eaton (Chalk's reply filed first)

Charles Van Eaton

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January 29, 1971

Dr. Charles Van Eaton
Department of Economics
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Dear Chuck:

Thank you for such a sensitive letter. I don't know when I have enjoyed reading a letter as much as I did yours. It said, in such a convincing way, that you loved me and I thank God for that.

Today I received a letter from the Park Street Elders. I think it must have been the most sensitive and spiritual letter I've ever received from an eldership attempting to get a new preacher. I have tried to convey my gratitude to the Park Street Elders in a return letter. I hope that you can, as the opportunity presents itself, also assure them of the profound respect that their letter created within me for them. I appreciated so much them writing. It was not a form letter. It was a very personal letter three pages in length, single-spaced.

I appreciate your perception of the situation regarding "Midnight Cowboy." I am continuing here as long as the Lord allows or wills, but I must say, in all honesty, that each day presents a new opportunity and a new encouragement to run. My concerns and questions are much deeper than whether the brethren appreciate me or not, although that must have some psychic impact. I believe that the problem is much bigger than that. Although I accept your view of the institutional church and find it to be the same one I hold, I nevertheless find less and less opportunities to minister the Word freely. I see no reason to continue without the freedom to pursue the ministry of the Word. In fact, as some perceptive friends of mine have observed, my problem and the tensions I create within the institutional church are because of my commitment to Biblical theology and to Biblical truth.

The only reason I continue to preach at Highland is because of my daily response to what I believe the will of God is. I know that in response to His will, I will be provided the necessary strength and power to persevere. Please pray for the wisdom needed, first of all for a viable ministry of the Word here, and secondly, for my openness to God's will in every area of my life.

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Page 2, Dr. Charles Van Eaton

I pray for God's great use of you there. I believe you are in a place where you can minister with great effectiveness. Let's stay in touch.

Your brother,

John Allen Chalk

JAC:lc

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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

January 20, 1971

Department of Economics

Dear John,

While some few months have passed since "Midnight" dawned, I gather that the storm is not yet passed. I must admit that I knew nothing of Ira Rice or his doings. It is wonderful what eleven years hidden away with the Non-Sunday School brethren can do for your nerves.

I am going to make a comment about your leaving or staying with Highland St. and about a statement you made in your letter to me:

First: While I personally want you here, I feel that you must hang-in where you are. The Devil must not have the victory. You will draw fire simply because you are what you are and because you are at Highland. So long as the Elders support you in your service to the Lord you have nothing substantial to fear from the Ira Rices (by "substantial" I mean in the sense that your opportunity to make useful contacts with many brethren will not be excluded). It is only when the Elders fail to stand with you that you will be reduced. If you left now it might appear to prove the Devil's case. In no case, however, can Ira Rice or any other man separate you from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus. While we hold this as a sure and steadfast hope, there is a need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves; there are such things as Christian battle tactics; now is the time to stand your ground not retreat.

(An an aside concerning my spelling: please remember that I did not receive an Associates of Art Degree from FHC for that very reason)

Second: You said in your letter that you were not sure about your continuation as a preacher for the "institutional" church. I understand exactly what you mean. I have been at war with the "Institutional Church" since high-school days. I believe that the problems of the "institutional church" occupy the greater part of Paul's epistles. According to Social Psychologists, there is an almost inexorable tendency for humans to codify and structure every idea which gains more than one adherent in a given place. This behavior seems to serve a useful purpose: it sheilds its members from having to take any serious thought about views outside the wall. In my judgement the Church of Christ Church is absolutely no exception to this. Yet where do we go? I at one time thought that I would have

to leave the CofC completely. This is not the answer. The answer, I believe, lies in lifting the Church, bodily, over the wall and into the world (Into the world-not of the world). We have made the church everywhere into a worship society when it is in reality and according to scripture (I Cor. 12:7-12) a fellowship of men and women who are all alike struggling with the problem of sin in our lives. In order to bring this home we are going to require a demonstration of our belief that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision (read: Code, Gospel Advocate, Gospel Guardian, Christian Colleges, Post-Pre-A- or anything else Millennial views, Pro or Anti Orphan Homes, etc.) or uncircumcision counts for anything, but Faith Which Works Through Love. One way to demonstrate this belief is to dismantle the institution with all its appendages (both physical, as the institutions, and mental, as the various opinions which we have raised to the level of scripture) by taking the church back into the homes, the store-front holes in the wall, the prayer groups in the factory and in the colleges. This does not mean that we abandon the congregation but rather that we give it life by making it the center of every aspect of our lives, the point to which we retreat for succor before we go out again to serve. We might encourage a select group ~~from~~^{of} our congregation to establish satellite groups in the more desperate parts of the community. In all these things there must be complete respect given to the autonomy of the local congregation to pursue whatever program it can whereever it is located.

Really John, how could I ever leave the church as an institution, even though I dearly wish to leave it as an "Institution". Suppose I found several who wanted to start something better? What would we do? We probably begin to meet somewhere regularly. We would commune in the Lord's Body and Blood; we would sing, probably without an instrument since they are expensive and bulky and probably ~~no one~~^{NO ONE} could play one well enough. Sooner or later someone in the group would lovingly ~~write~~ compile in one little stapled-together little volume the songs we seem to sing most. The question of admitting others to our group would have to be met; we would require no more than what we believe the Bible requires- and no less. What do we have? A congregation. When does it become an "Institution"? As soon as we become aware that there are others like it and decide to get together with them to discuss our problems, etc. One meeting leads to another and another. Soon someone suggests that we publish a newsletter and encourage the establishment of other groups just like us. Before long an invisible, but non-the-less stringent, set of rules is drawn up. We wake up to discover that we are right back where we started.

Ira Rice and his helpers cannot be completely stopped. They can only be made ineffective by letting the Holy Spirit have Its way within every congregation and individual who wants to be Saved. The physical trappings have been a snare and a delusion. God does not dwell in temples made with hands--even Church of Christ temples..It is not enough to

drive the money changers out of the temples; we must make sure that we are not trying to build temples and make God dwell in them in the first place.

I am not saying that large congregations are bad; in fact I am not talking about physical size at all. I am talking about a mental set--the concept of the church as anything other than a family brought into existence by the love of God. This mental set is carnal and is, therefore, always at war with the Spirit. My fear is that too many of the men who have considerable access to the brethren through the colleges, papers, etc. do not know enough about the nature of Man to know that this war is always going on. They have helped create this "Institution" through their well-intentioned labors. Now they are laying claim to the right to chastise any brother who behaves in any way they interpret as a threat to the "Institution". In their minds they are completely right. The problem is simple; their minds are wrong and have been-in most cases-from the beginning.

I love you. You deserve better than this long erratic mental aberration from me. Keep the Faith.

Chock