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From: Jody Hawkins (letter from Dwaine E. Denning enclosed)

Jody Hawkins

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December 1, 1965

Mr. John Allen Chalk
542 North Washington
Cookeville, Tenn. 38501

Dear John Allen:

We are not asking that you answer the enclosed letter, but are merely sending it to you to read and for your reaction. It seems that you had written to him before and perhaps this is your answer.

We would like to thank you for helping with the answering of the questions sent previously.

Yours in Christ,

HIGHLAND CHURCH OF CHRIST

Jody Hawkins
secretary to E. R. Harper
John Allen Chalk  
Herald of Truth  
c/o Highland Church of Christ  
Abilene, Texas  

Dear Bro. Chalk,

Thank you very much for your thoughtful response to my note on the Herald of Truth presentation of "worship." You are quite right to point out the dangers of reaction. As James Thurber said in his parable about "The Bear Who Could Leave It Alone," it is just as bad to lean too far over backwards as it is to fall on your face. However, I think that some good, hard thinking about the matter will show you, as it has me, that a concept foreign to the real meaning is in the mind of practically everybody who uses the term "worship." I know that this was true with me until about five years ago, when a challenge to debate was given me, the subject being certain proprieties or improprieties in "worship;" and in getting ready for my arguments I tried to define every term in the proposition according to God's Word. I found that my concept of "worship" was in error, as well as my opponent's.

Bro. Chalk, I have nothing but derision for attempts to establish definitions by recourse to dictionaries or encyclopedias, when engaged in by people who are trying to restore the Lord's Church to its primitive simplicity. When I became aware of the fact that my concept of "worship" was identical to that of almost all religious persons, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Unitarians, etc., I began to realize that perhaps my thinking was in need of modification. I am sure you are aware that about 99% of those who use the term use it in the sense of "worship service." What the assembled congregation does from 11 to 12 o'clock on the Lord's Day morning is "worship." Signboards and newspaper notices all over the land support people in this concept. You started out very well in correcting this misapprehension in your program by relating the term to "adoration." "Adoration" doesn't express it all, but it is a very good start. It agrees with Jesus in John 4, in relating worship to "spirit and truth." Yes, these are abstractions. Jesus made it very plain that worship was henceforth to be in an entirely new realm, whereas it had in the past been in "this mountain" and "in Jerusalem," in the future this was not to be true. Relating "worship" to a definite time and place materializes once again what Jesus attempted to spiritualize. This is a very old tendency in religion, and I do not think that it is too disgraceful to do what everybody else does—as I certainly did in this area—as long as one does not know any better. But being alerted to the possibility of error brings with it the necessity to track down the truth. This is hard to do, especially in our presently-divided Restoration Movement, where so many of the three dozen groups have a "party line" or "official position" which must not be departed from, subject to actual persecution. This is indeed to put one's self under the ban of Matthew 15:9: In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men...
It has helped my understanding a great deal to remember that "worship" in the Scriptures is the use of the rhetorical device metonymy, the transfer of idea from one term to another associated with it. Jesus used a number of rhetorical or literary devices, similes in the Parables, metaphor in establishing the Lord's Supper, metonymy in the promise that "the scepter should not depart from David." In worship, the much more understandable effect is given to show the cause. But, such is the desire of so many people to materialize the spiritual, to follow the Pharisee in making righteousness to consist of what one does, that God's graciousness in employing this device has allowed many of us—perhaps most of us—to relate "worship" so completely to the effects that the cause is forgotten. In fact, it is locked outside by the "plans" or "patterns" or even "laws" of "worship" which are endemic among Church of Christ groups, each of which has its own "plan of worship" formulated not only to keep the brethren in line but to erect walls of partition from others whose "worship" follows a different "plan" and therefore is not "in spirit and in truth." I am sure your acquaintance with the various Church of Christ sects or divisions is such that you will realize that this is true. This is my reason for bringing the matter to your attention. You have a golden opportunity to strike perhaps the shrewdest blow for unity which can be struck.

Our "good ol' King James" compounds confusion by failing to distinguish between proskuneo and latereu in translation. One of your references to me (your letter is in Scottsbluff in a notebook I forgot to bring home—I teach in Platte Valley Bible College as well as preach for the Church of Christ here in Bridgeport) quoted a Scripture which said "worship" but the word was latereu. "Service" is a much better translation of latereu. Actually, this is only one of the areas where the Restoration Movement is using the language of Ashdod, and perhaps more than in its beginnings the "restoration of a pure speech" is needed today. When there are three dozen divisions among "us," it is obvious that we are NOT "speaking the same thing."

Worship as an emotion may be compared to love. I think of worship as love and adoration, mingled with awe, holy fear, and homage. (I also think that the usual Church of Christ "plans" or "patterns" or "laws" of "worship" are considerably less than adequate to express all of these things, let alone to be them.) I have been happily married for twenty years, and I like to remember my wife's birthday, compliment her appearance, take her out to dinner on our anniversary, and greet her when I return from Scottsbluff each day—if, that is, she is home. But these expressions of my love for my wife ARE NOT LOVE ITSELF. Love can be present when none of these more or less "traditional" expressions are to be found. The papers spoke the other day of a woman who shot her husband and then sobbed "Oh, I loved him so..." A friend of mine observed that he could have done with less love and more life. Conversely, the presence of all the "traditional" manifestations of married love do not guarantee that love exists at all. These may be counterfeit for completely selfish reasons, as countless people have found to their sorrow. A polite and attentive suitor may become a beast in marriage. Transferring these ideas to the emotion of worship, a person may feel worship in his heart in other places than in church, though I try to discourage this--too much of "the worship of God in nature" harms worship and service in the assembly—and he can very easily come to the church house, rigorously obey everything in the "plan" or "pattern" or "law" of "worship" in vogue among his brethren, AND NEVER HAVE WORSHIPPED IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH AT ALL.
If my position on this matter is reactionary, it is because I feel that Christendom generally, and churches of Christ particularly, have gone to an extreme position in making it almost impossible for the average church member to feel genuine, spiritual worship in his heart at all. He has been offered a substitute—service—for worship. My acquaintance with the various Church of Christ groups is fairly extensive, and I charge all of us with coldness, hardness, lack of real warmth. Most of my friends are deeply suspicious of anything "emotional." Is our hard attitude on "worship!" an important reason for this? I think that this is true. Is this hardness and coldness the reason for a serious "leakage" into Pentecostalism and "Holy-Ghost Revivalism?" I believe that it is. I emphasise strongly that in my own thinking I am trying to keep worship and service in proper and Scriptural relationships to each other and to other aspects of Christian responsibility. But sometimes it is necessary to re-act strongly in order to gain the necessary momentum to over­throw an extreme position.

I am sorry to have taken quite a while to answer your gracious letter, but your letter came just after I left to hold a meeting in western Wyoming, and I have had the usual problems of getting caught up after my return home. I do Challenge you to think this through. You are in a very good position to do the case of Christ a great deal of good. The "traditional" concept of worship is inaccurate, and it has greatly contributed to division among the Church of Christ groups by creating "laws" to justify divisions where our God never intended that divisions exist. The situation is not your fault, nor is it mine. I can trace this thing back, historically, to the "law of faith" which M. C. Kurfees developed to shore up his argument that instrumental music in "the worship" is "sin." This same argument has been applied to other potentially divisive issues, with more division the inevitable result. Thus Unity of the Spirit has been debased and degraded into attempts to produce unity by law, which can never work. It is not the law-abiding citizen who is forever conscious of the law, but the criminal. The law does need to be there, but it is the whole force and impact of the Christian attitude that faith transcends law. Yet M. C. Kurfees would force us all to acknowledge a "law" of "faith!" This is a flat contradiction of terms!

Bro. Chalk, a study which has taken several years cannot be put into a few words, or pages for that matter. I think that you were on the right track in the first part of your program. It isn't your fault that your "raising" took over from there. Practically everybody thinks of "worship" as "worship service." But I submit to you the desirability and practicality of being just a little bit suspicious of a religious idea or attitude which practically everybody holds. Far too many of these are of the Devil, and they do the Devil's own work. You have a golden opportunity to do considerably more than to support and maintain a traditionalist viewpoint which has created, main­tained and intensified division. I don't know about your immediate circle of friends, but mine are appalled at the measure of the Restoration's failure in recent years. It is time to find out, once again, what the idea is all about. A movement for unity finds itself in 150 years the most divided reli­gious body in the country, if not the world. What is wrong? This is one area of wrong. Please study it thoroughly!

In His love,

[Signature]