

RESOLVING DISSONANCES

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO STAFF HARMONY

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This is the second in a series of articles following the conference "Common, Uncommon and Holy Ground" sponsored by the AGO Committee on Denominational Relations.

"Sir, we would see Jesus." The Greeks who came to worship at the feast (John 12:20-21) had one thing on their minds: to see Jesus. Those who come to worship 2,000 years later come with this same need. As worship leaders, we are called to enable the kind of worship that reveals this God who, alone, matters. We are called to enable worship that lifts us beyond ourselves to the One who will, in the encounter, awaken us to our true identity, freeing us to be who we are created to be. When we feel ourselves wrestling with interpersonal relationships on the church staff, threatened by disagreement, varying opinions, challenge to authority, and change itself, we need to remember what we are called to do. Then we must refocus our human, narcissistic tendencies, turning our gaze upward and outward.

Though Johann Sebastian Bach may disagree, it seems as if the heat has been turned up on the issues surrounding music in worship. Because we find ourselves living in a post-Christian culture, a secular society whose gods are many, we can no longer assume that God and the church will be obvious choices for those we seek to serve. As church attendance decreases, the anxiety levels rise. In an attempt to provide easy answers, music often becomes the explanation for empty pews. "Just change the style, and they'll come." Musicians, on the defensive, adopt a victim stance. This can lead to an anxiety-produced projection of negativity onto others (choirs, for instance!) and the development of opposing camps among parishioners. Frightened, insecure clergy abuse power and assign blame, taking on the role of dictator. Non-relationship is the result; this can even lead to emotional abuse if the person in the position of power is deeply insecure. The possible scenarios are endless in these difficult relationships as we react to the anxiety we feel around us. Seeing through the particular set of glasses our life's experience has provided us, we see what we expect to see and hear what we expect to hear. The battles begin and genuine dialogue, which is the only road to resolution, is sabotaged.

Breaking down the barriers begins when we take a good look at ourselves, asking who we are and what our role is in a conflict. Self-knowledge will help us to ask the right questions when we find ourselves at a stalemate. "What are the power plays going on here? Are my feelings of being manipulated accurate in this situation or intensified because of past experience? Am I compromising my integrity or being resistant to change? Do I legitimately feel like a child here, or am I merely expecting to? Am I identifying self with my job so completely that I lose objectivity? Does my need to control blind me to the other person and his or her unique gifts?" We need to invite God to be our spiritual partner as we embark on our individual journeys of discovery. This is a necessary part of the process of learning to work together and deal with the tensions that divide us.

The goal is a partnership, with its members yoked together by the acknowledgment of a common faith and a shared commitment. Even as we need to have a strong sense of ourselves, we also need to articulate our common ground, the absolutes on which we can agree. Each partner needs to discover the strengths of the other(s) and acknowledge the areas of respect that can lead to mutual empowerment. Trust comes with time—time spent learning to feel safe with one another. That time needs to be characterized by constant communication and development of listening skills. The hectic pace of our lives (sometimes an excuse) should not preclude time to play and laugh together, including retreats that build community through the opportunity to see one another apart from the functions that help define each member as "other." This is the stuff from which conflict resolution can come, enabling us to be honest in the face of differences and to reach acceptable compromises that move us to new places.

To protect such new places, we need to pray together. It is difficult to pray together and remain angry! We need to be accountable to each other and learn to speak the truth in love. We need to be pastoral with each other and sensitive to the unique stresses of each of our jobs and of our personal lives. When we find a relationship impossibly entangled, we need to find the courage to ask for outside, objective help. When there are complaints, we need to speak di-

rectly to one another. All this does take time, but it is time well spent. As we work at it, we can model for our people that God does work through us and between us.

When do we let go? Not all relationships work, and we need to be able to meet that challenge, too. When respect is missing, our work is undermined, our call is diminished, and our gifts wasted. When we begin to sense a loss of integrity about what we do, God can be calling us to take the risk of change. Such a decision is difficult, but it can be the right choice when all attempts at communication fail.

Musicians and clergy alike need to remember that the work they do is vital to a meaningful worship experience for all who come, expecting to see Jesus. Though we musicians have farther to go, we have come a long way in understanding that the Word is expressed in many ways in our corporate worship. Neither clergy nor musician is the Messiah! The world is clamoring for the message we have to share, and so the stakes are higher than ever for us to speak as one. It is no longer a case of the Prince in the Pulpit or the Prince at the King of Instruments! (The language itself reveals the decadence!)

My years of music ministry have been filled with a great variety of relationships, some difficult and some grace-filled. I have been sustained through difficult times by moments of confirmation that God is being revealed in the music that I am helping to offer, by continuing self-analysis, and by acceptance of personal responsibility. It is not possible for any of us to do this alone. Psychoanalytic training has taught me that triangulated relationships can prevent intimacy. But the musician-clergy dyad must actually become a triangle, including God, who alone can enable the spirit of creativity to flow. Within the relationship that is grounded in a common faith, each person offers, and helps enable the other to offer, the gifts of their ministry to God, to each other, and to those who come to see Jesus.

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