



November 24, 2008

Practical Tools

Vern Sanders

Operator...give me information!

Got A Minute?

Can we overlook the masthead just this month, or at least broaden its interpretation? What you are about to read is not necessarily Practical Tools. For a good dose of that you would be well served to attend one of the many wonderful conferences in January such as Music Atlanta (look to the left) or the Atlanta Choristers Guild Conference.

<i>John Yarrington – Kenny Potter</i> <i>Martha Shaw – Deborah S. Rice</i>	<i>January 23-24 2009</i> <i>Atlanta, Georgia</i>	
ATLANTA CHAPTER <i>of the</i> CHORISTERS GUILD	<i>For Information Click Here</i>	

On the other hand, what follows may be new information that will turn out to be very practical in your own ministry. If you are reading this without having read my introductory email, I want to reiterate. When Doug Lawrence [let the cat out of the bag last week about my book](#), it was a bit premature. I am still in what might be called the draft stage, even though my publisher is...ahem (not for publication!)...screaming at me to get it done yesterday. What you are about to read is, in a sense, the introduction to the book, under a working title (you know how publishers are...the title may get changed in order to sell more books). The other, perhaps unstated, problem, of course, is that once this information "goes live" two things happen: First, I can't get it back, even if, as a draft, I change my opinions later based upon more information, and Second, the possibility exists that someone who is also working on such a book will rush it into print to beat my deadline, and therefore make

mine somewhat irrelevant, or, at the least, an afterthought (Hey! I heard that...it could happen!).

So this is a tease, in television parlance. Doug has forced my hand (he's been listening to me talk about this book for years, and probably just got to the point where he wanted me to put up or shut up). So I'm going to ask you to do at least one of the following things after you read the excerpt below:

First, if you are motivated, click on one of the response links in the Final Thoughts section which follows the excerpt. Each of the links will send me an email. Depending upon the link, you can send me an email that says "Quit wasting your efforts and get back to giving me Practical Tools" or "I like it; I'd read it" or "I really like it and I'd like to buy it" (if you send me one of these emails, I'll respond with a really good pre-publication offer to do so). I'd really (no really!) like to know what you think.

Second, if you have a "worship wars" story to tell, click on the "I've got a story to tell" link and send me the story via the email that is generated from the link. I can't guarantee that any or all of the stories will be used, but it will be helpful for me to hear how the worship wars have impacted you and/or your church, from both pastors and musicians, as well as those who do not consider themselves in either of those categories. Ready? Away we go...

Pastor versus Musician: The Real Worship Wars?

Why? Why? Why?

Why write this book? It is a question I've asked myself many times over at least the past ten years. There are so many books out there about the so-called worship wars, why another one?

For one thing, I am a veteran with the scars to prove it. I've got my stripes – earned over forty years of service. My service medals include working as an accompanist, an associate musician, lead musician, worship designer, program builder, and mentor. My campaigns have taken place in two countries, each of which exhibited a different culture – sometimes subtly different, sometimes extraordinarily different. I've served in the liturgical church, and the free church; the former of which was sometimes "freer" than the latter, and the latter sometimes more "liturgical" than the former.

As of this writing, as close as I can remember, I've served with nineteen pastors, both senior pastors and associates. I've served churches in the city, the suburbs, a regional center, a megalopolis, and in towns of 10,000. One of those churches was a cathedral, one was so small that, on a particular Maundy Thursday service, when the choir got up out of the sanctuary's folding chairs to sing an anthem, the remaining congregation was the pastor, her husband, and one other person. As a director of school and community choirs, I have, with my choir, appeared as a guest music provider in scores of churches more.

But that's not the only reason. As editor of a music publishing company that primarily served the church "market," I have watched the definition of "standard repertoire" for the church – both choral and instrumental – change significantly.

And there is more. As publisher of Creator Magazine I have the opportunity to speak with hundreds of church musicians and pastors at a time in conference settings, thousands each week through Monday Morning Email, and one on one with colleagues on a regular basis. So I've seen a lot, heard a lot, and listened to reports of, watched, or been a part of numerous "battles."

The prose on the subject of the worship wars is extensive, and tends to fall into two categories. Most of the writing is, at the least, an attempt at teaching: Biblical foundations of worship, contemporary interpretations of Biblical foundations of worship, deconstruction of books about the foundations or interpretations of Biblical worship, and so forth. It is hard to imagine a church musician who is serious about his or her role who has not been exposed to, and learned from these writings.

The second, and smaller, set of materials can be described best as apologetical expositions of repertoire superiority and/or cultural relevance. Most often market driven, if not market copy generated on behalf of new product, this latter category has generated the most controversy. It is this body of writings that produce the most passion, and which has become the argumentative turf over which most people believe the worship wars have been and are being fought.

Unfortunately, history indicates that repertoire superiority and cultural relevance are subjective opinions, the truth of which only emerges after considerable time. There is not a person reading these words who cannot think of a piece of music, be it classical, sacred, pop, jazz, or ethnic, which seemed to be great once upon a time, and now is considered to be passé. No matter how passionate one's initial feelings for that music, it seems, now, to fall short somehow. It is particularly ironic that, in a market driven environment, that is a good thing: the marketing maw must continually be fed, and champions of a this-is-clearly-the-most-wonderful-style often need to alter their allegiance when the new-next-best-greatest-style needs to be sold. At the same time, the cultural half-life of "hip" or even "relevant" has gotten shorter and shorter as a result of the continually extending reach of the media, and their need to fill dead air with something – anything.

As a result, the core value of the worship war arguments seem to be able to be reduced to "is too" and "is not," or perhaps I should say "mine is better than yours." Since we (as of this writing) have no idea what the worship music of either the Old or New Testaments actually sounded like, it is easy to claim Scriptural authenticity for any worship music. All of the light and heat are thus reduced to circular arguments.

Which brings me back to this book, and why I felt the need to write it. If the worship wars reduce themselves, as I believe they do, to the level of playground discussion, why did/do/are we fighting in the first place/still?

The answer, as it often does, comes down to control. It is the famous Abbot and Costello question: Who's on first? (By the way...I've listened to that routine many, many times, and never heard the name of the right fielder. Odd isn't it?) Ultimately, control is about the ability to make the decisions – to have the "final answer." It is about accumulating the resources to be the one in charge. It is about the need to be the arbiter of taste. When control is at stake in a church setting, it comes down to whether God is on your side. Is it

any wonder why this can be a battleground? Is it surprising that congregants are asked to "choose sides?"

From this distance, having endured them, I believe that this generation's "worship wars" (because history shows clearly that this is not the first time repertoire superiority and/or cultural relevance have been battlegrounds in the church) are better described as "civil wars." Lack of tolerance, unwillingness to participate in true discourse, the tendency to shout rather than listen, and the dismissal of any viewpoint other than one's own as stupid, foolish, or heresy, is not about worship, or repertoire, or cultural relevance. It is about winning. In the process, civility, trust, and patience have been overwhelmed by rudeness, cynicism, and combativeness.

In the worship wars, the old proverb has become twisted into "do unto others before they do unto you."

In the course of this book, we'll take a look at how we got here – how the roles of pastor and musician have changed significantly over the last half century. We'll also take a look at a number of snapshots of ministry models and styles in an attempt to understand why and how the musician and pastor might see things differently. Finally, we'll present a view of what it might be like when the conflict is over and, hopefully, the kingdom is victorious. For the reasons stated above, this book is not filled with a collection of Scripture passages, either as verification or to be explored. Neither does it take up the cause of a particular repertoire style or espouse a corporate culture as superior. Instead, I hope to show that when pastor and musician work together in an atmosphere of trust and belief in the other's judgement, the worship (and civil) wars will evolve into an extended peace with honor and prosperity.

Final Thoughts

OK what do you think? Click on one of the response possibilities right now before you leave MME, please. Then, if you can and will, click on the "I've got a story" link to share your own tale. Finally, if you are so motivated, link to this MME on your facebook, twitter, or personal website. I'd be grateful.

[Quit wasting your efforts and get back to giving me Practical Tools](#)

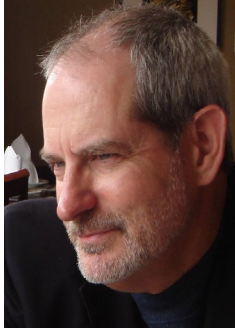
[I like it: I'd read it](#)

[I really like it and I'd like to buy it](#)

[I've got a story to tell you](#)

Have a blessed (American) Thanksgiving We'll return you to your regular programming next month.

Blessings.



[Vern Sanders](#)

Vern is the publisher of Creator Magazine. He has served in some form of church music and worship leadership for 40 years in a variety of denominations both in the US and in Canada. He is currently Director of Worship at First Presbyterian Church, Grover Beach, California. Vern regularly consults with churches and church leaders. Click on his name above to email him.

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