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May 18 2009



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Professional Tools

Doug Lawrence

Quote

"**B**ecause things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are." —Bertolt Brecht

Scripture

"**A**s soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything. —2 Chronicles 31:5

Prayer

Lord, lead us in ways of righteousness. Help us to learn to seek your face. Move us from selfish agendas to ways of serving you more passionately. Make of our distractions a place of rest and security in Your presence. We would see Your face. Amen

Leadership

Ooh, we got your attention!

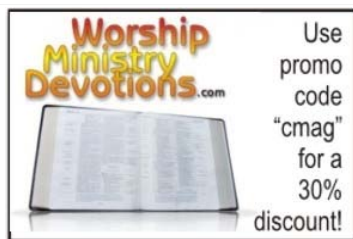
Well, the April discussion concerning possible inappropriate use of the terms **traditional vs. contemporary** labels for worship got a fair amount of attention. We'll show you some of the responses we received—they may be helpful to you. They certainly confirm the need to keep this discussion in the mix as we look to the future of the church. Last month, in addition to publishing the article online for **Creator** readers, I posted links to it on **FaceBook** and **LinkedIn's Church Consultants Group**. You will read samplings from all these sources.

First, though, I need to clarify what I've learned about the practices of "traditional" and "contemporary" worship—it may surprise. Like you, perhaps, I have always refused to be placed with one group or the other.

When it comes to traditional... (his tongue planted firmly in the right cheek, he said...)

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- Gloria Patri? (Only when forced—there are many ways to accomplish the same Trinitarian intent)
- Doxology? (Only sometimes, but almost always something doxological in its place)
- Robes? (Sure, yeah...whatever.)
- Four-minute, slow, organ preludes? (Not for the past 22 years)
- All verses of every hymn preceded by a full verse intro? (I won't mess with the theology of a hymn, but I'll sure mess with 6 verses that don't at least contain registration and key changes—nah, I lied, I never do 6 verses of anything unless it's a Taizé service—then I do all 57 :-)
- Announcements in the middle of worship? (Over my cold, dead body)
- Pass It On as a "chorus" to introduce "contemporary" music into the traditional church? (Probably not—yuh think?)

When it comes to contemporary... (his tongue planted firmly in the other cheek, he said...)

- Napkin charts? (Sure, why bother helping lay musicians learn to read music?)
- Top 10 CCLI songs? (Sure, those are the best ones to use--no matter what! :-)
- 50 minute teachings? (Talk to your pastor about that one, but not if you value your job)
- Songs written by church members or...you? (Be very careful and apply the same standards you would impose on any other song selections)
- Worship "sets" instead of worship moments? (Four songs might be a set, but they also might go... well,...nowhere)
- Is excellence a good thing? (Not according to many out there in ConferenceLand...)

O.K., here's some thoughtful feedback about last month's article...

"The significant worship wars are between God-focused worship and a host of God-avoiding activity; not in what instruments are played to accompany congregational song. In my experience here with a host of evangelical churches, the word "contemporary" doesn't even help to describe style very well, except that it probably means there is a rhythm section somewhere in the room. But some churches with a very "with it" contemporary ethos have a full orchestra and a 90-voice robed choir. And the sung worship at some very liturgical churches is led by a guy in flip flops with a Taylor guitar, sipping latte between songs and prayers. Go figure. I am equally frustrated by "celebrative worship" as a descriptor. As much as those terms are problematic, it is often necessary to describe the format and ethos of corporate worship, isn't it? Not a week goes by that some church calls looking for a Minister of Music/Worship or some worship leader/musician calls looking for a ministry position. It isn't enough just to say we are looking for worship that is Christ-centered, Spirit-led, Scripture-rich, led by a godly man or woman who is mature in the faith, well-trained musically, missions-minded, experienced in ministry, confident and charismatic, yet humble and teachable, focused and flexible." — **From Carl "Chip" Stam, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY**

I would have to agree with most of your thoughts, and they don't drive me to argue about anything. =) Where this discussion leaves me is with a big "OK – then what now?" I've never liked any labels like traditional or contemporary – and yet I know that if I'm asked to coordinate or lead a worship service – I can only create what my limited talents and gifts will allow me to create unless God chooses to bless me by surrounding me with people that have other amazing gifts. And many churches that are smaller than ones I've had the privilege to serve at don't have the luxury of "team talent." When left with that reality – I think the tension between the two (or three or four) styles unravels quickly. You may have a few people that can only play one style of music and an organist and/or choir that can only play one style of music and, I think this is key, nobody to help coordinate the differing styles. When left to my limited capacity in the worship service I coordinate – there won't be a classical piece that only sounds good with a choir and an organ. And not because I don't appreciate it, but because that resource is not usually available to me and even if it was, I wouldn't always know what to do with it. One of my highlight moments this past year was our recent Easter service where we asked the choir to join the "contemporary" service. After four years of doing this – it finally seemed to

fall into place and make the most sense. But there's no way it would have worked as well as it did without a person like Brian [Mann] helping us to navigate the waters of bringing the differing styles together. I can, and did, make some attempts without Brian – and I'm sure those attempts planted some good seeds for where we are today – but it leads me to believe that it takes some serious gifting (not just effort) to bring various musical styles together and bring them together well. That's not to say we shouldn't try our best with what we have, but it's definitely not easy. I could provide many examples of ill-fated attempts in my first year or so here at Grace – but all of them lead me to my next thought. I think that the final hurdle is the leaders themselves. I'm absolutely convinced that if the respective leaders of the traditional and contemporary services intentionally sit down and work to build relationship and dialogue even beyond the usual working relationship, good things can happen. As we all know, this is much easier said than done. And maybe this is where the bigger question is looming. Is it only about musical style or is it also wrapped up in leadership style? I don't know the answer to this question, but I have a sense that the rift between the two worship expressions is heightened by differing approaches to leadership. I'm all for doing away with labels and for trying to create an expression of worship that is multi-faceted and diverse. But it can't be done on paper or with clever planning. It takes relationship of all parties involved. It takes true celebration of the various gifts that are assembled on any given Sunday. It takes a commitment to doing away with looks of disgust or disdain when something is a little different than expected. It takes pastoring and patience beyond what any of us are capable of doing in our own strength. God – please help us as we try to help Your people worship You and only You. — **Ben Kuykendall, Worship Leader, Grace Presbyterian Church, Houston, TX**

* * *

Thank you so much Doug...I agree with you so much...we are simply tearing apart our church by labeling...thank you again, and blessings... —**Jason Stewart, Shively Baptist Church, Louisville, KY**

You are dead on with the labels...only it runs much, much deeper than just worship music. Within just a few minutes of meeting someone new, we can completely size them up and place them in a nice convenient box.

- Baptist, Methodist, or non-denominational?
- Sunday School or Small Group?
- Purpose-driven, Emerging or Post-modern?
- Seeker sensitive or seeker targeted?
- Coat and tie or Hawaiian shirt and jeans?
- Contemporary or Traditional?
- Alternative rock or praise music?

It's the society we live in, and it's made its way into our churches. We're not comfortable unless we can size up the other person and get a handle on their personality. Yes, it's all wrong. If Christ were here today, I believe He'd be giving us a heavy dose of Matthew 23. Here's what God told the Israelites, his chosen people: "I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me? Do you know what I want? I want justice—oceans of it. I want fairness—rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want." (Amos 5:21-23 from The Message). —**Todd Billingsley, Todd Billingsley Music and Media Productions, Studio City, CA**

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I agree with you[r] view of the contemporary & traditional. Forget the dictionary definition, these terms in our churches are relative to each congregation. I find nowhere in scripture that tells us to divide over musical preferences. With that said, this is an observation that I made over the years. This is a generalization... many of the churches within my denomination (SBC, I cannot speak for other denominations) I sense that the real issue at times is that there is a group within the church that does not think that the current leadership (Minister of Music) can do the job of doing multiple styles. The perception is at times that the individual can only do or only likes one style. Of course this is perception, however, perception is the reality that we all deal with in leadership. I do not prescribe or practice the idea of different services for different groups of people. I believe many times in addition to the above, decisions are made pragmatically. The traditional service pays for the contemporary service. So, leadership at times

will make the decision to divide so that they can fulfill what they believe to be the best for the current situation and so that they do not lose. "I'll get mine & you get yours. Don't bother me and my service & I won't both you and your service." I have heard this stated by several different churches. This is not what the body of Christ is supposed to do or model for the lost world. —**Dr. Danny Koonce, Minister of Music, FBC Douglasville, Ga**

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Next time, Doug writes about (help us!!) ...authenticity.

Do we honestly think that people don't know the difference between real and fake?



Don't miss this!



Doug Lawrence

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Doug has been a consultant to church leaders for 35 years and is anxious to be helpful to you in leadership, musical, and staffing considerations. Please click on his name above and email him. He's available to consult on the phone as well.

At a recent church musicians and pastors conference...

"Having seen the damage that style labeling often wreaks on churches, I encourage intelligent church leaders to develop a lexicon that belongs to their church. My 40+ years of ministry have taught me some important lessons. The most significant one is that re-inventing the church is often an endless recital of futility—go ahead and do the hard work—make it a wonderful and mysterious process." —DL

Next week...

So, next week, **Vern Sanders** is going to spring an important idea on you. As a prelude to that plan, go to <http://www.mkd-arc.com/homes/mksolaire/video.php> and watch a modern-day housing miracle. Is it traditional or contemporary? Who cares--it works! AND, it's part of a movement that is creative and inventive--like **Creator Magazine**

readers. :-)



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