

CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION

Why is the Church struggling with effectiveness?

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Living and teaching in North Texas the past six years has, among other things, made me very aware of foundations. I had never lived where there are so many foundation problems; foundation repair companies abound and commercials regularly point out that foundation trouble is often hard to detect and admit; but there are tell-tale signs like sticking misaligned doors, cracks higher up on walls and uneven floors. The solution is to examine the foundation, get an engineering report and prop up the foundation to level things out again, often at considerable cost! (Of course, their particular brand of correction is the best; the other guys don't know what they're doing!) *They go on to point out that ignoring the problem isn't a solution as it is sure to get worse threatening the integrity of your most significant investment, your home!*

Jesus and the Apostles had a healthy regard for foundations. In Luke 6:48 Jesus references the importance of laying a good foundation right down to 'the rock'. Failure to do so would result in the house falling when the storms came. Jesus then refers to Himself as 'the rock' in Matthew 16:18 where His Church will be established and built against which nothing and no power in existence can prevail! Peter, who was present to hear these words from Jesus later with apostolic authority, says in I Peter 2:6-8 that this rock is the primary building place for God's people who are themselves 'living stones' made alive by the power of the resurrected Christ. In yet another foundational reference, Paul in I Corinthians 3:9-15 reminds us as the Church that we are built upon the foundation of Christ and we are to be careful to build with integrity! As a building of living stones built on 'The Rock' with an eternally secure foundation we, as the people of God are given a clear assignment in I Peter 2:9 to "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." A direct scriptural call to worship! To help carry out this mandate the Church through the ages has developed 'the Song'; the songs of praise, redemption, proclamation, instruction, lament and rejoicing. Beginning with Exodus 15: those called out of darkness and slavery have been singers of 'the Song' of the redemption that God has provided and 'the Song' goes on in the present and throughout eternity future without ceasing. As musicians in God's Church we are privileged to be the custodians and perpetuators of 'the Song'. We are charged to be historians, interpreters, performers and teachers of the heritage while adding to the existing store the newly creative song of the present, living, vital song of the people of God. We must honor our heritage while encouraging and perpetuating authentic expressive forms to keep the eternal Truth of God relevant, contemporary and connected

to the biblical/theological foundations that are as eternal as God Himself. Church musicians are responsible to keep 'the Song' and 'the Church' connected!

The evidence that there are flaws in the foundational underpinnings, not unlike the troubles in N. Texas buildings are the sticking doors, cracked walls and uneven floors within the community of the Church. Consider this evidence. Theological grasp among those who have been 'in Church' for years is alarming low; don't assume people know much about God just because they have been in church for decades! Beyond basic "belief in Jesus to be saved and then don't fear death and hell" very little doctrine is believed and obeyed. Teaching adult Sunday School which I've done for many years I have discovered that when I venture into theological constructs that involve more depth of understanding the students get lost very quickly. (Is this evidence of uneven floors?) When statistics are evaluated divorce and other sins of sexual abuse are as common within the church as anyplace else, could this be cracked walls? Easy believeism is all too common in today's church. "Got Jesus?" is as likely to be seen on a sign as "Got Milk?" Jesus is another commodity to be marketed and delivered. Just 'sign here', get baptized and you're in. Doctrinal/biblical teaching is considered too stuffy and uninteresting; (dare I say boring!) Advices like "keep it positive"; "help people make it from week to week"; "don't speak of negative things like sin and hell" are very commonly heard even among those who as leaders should know better. The drive to be big and 'successful' is greater than the drive to accurately represent God and His thoughts expressed in His Word. We are content with half-truths; we willing speak of love, grace, prosperity and forgiveness without mentioning His wrath, peerless purity and coming judgment. Are we trying to refashion the foundation? Will the Church Triumphant be built upon "cultural relativism"? Is it really more important to get people 'to church' than to instruct them in the truth of God which they may find offensive and convicting?

A very significant objective of 'the Song' through the ages has been the teaching of doctrine to secure a well-maintained foundation. One of the ways N. Texans are encouraged to aide foundation health is to keep the ground around the structure damp enough; seriously dehydrated soil is a major contributor to foundation failure. Historically 'the song' of the Church has been a major source of spiritual moisture. The major response prayer-stories surrounding the birth of Jesus the Messiah that originally came from Mary, Zacharias, the Angels and Simeon in Luke 1 and 2 have become the Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria and Nunc Dimittis set to music throughout Church history in the current style of the period of musical development. To this day these reminders are sung annually in the Christmas season. Of course, the Church got this tradition from its Jewish roots as from the Prophets and through the Psalms has come the story of God's ongoing dealings with mankind. Since failure in the Garden of Eden mankind has been rebellious and God has sought restoration of fellowship and worship. Man repents then rebels; worships God and then worships self or some other idol. The cycle seems unending, sin must be judged, God's holiness must remain unstained, but God is merciful

all the way to sending His only Son to secure our redemption. This has come to be known as the ‘metastory’ and can best be rehearsed and remembered through song. Life experience has confirmed the fact that we remember what we sing more readily than practically any other means of communication/stimulation. Within the metastory is a place for each of us as we become reconciled to God through Christ, we find our own name included in each of His promises. We sing songs about Abraham, Moses, Daniel and Jesus, Paul, Stephen and the Kingdom (to name just a few); songs of ultimate peace and triumph just to get our individual and collective minds around God’s amazing and wonderfully redemptive works.

The foundation is secure and unchanging; the Chief Cornerstone referenced in both testaments is Christ Himself; (Isaiah 28:16, I Peter 2:4-6). The Church’s health and ministry is tied directly to how well we build upon *that* foundation. If the foundation is allowed to crack it will be because we have not kept it well maintained, or we have decided to create a foundation of our own making which we declare to be more relevant to the culture with a message ‘they’ would be more willing to accept—or perhaps we have decided that a foundation isn’t all that critical after all! There are “dynamic tensions” in the foundational structure of our heritage and doctrine—these must be recognized and embraced so the tension draws us together otherwise the tension will pull the Church apart. Tension is not a new concept in the workings of God; in fact throughout creation both material and redemptive we see the principle at work. It seems obvious that God works both intentionally and in-tensionally.

In creation we observe the tension of magnetic fields. Under the electron-microscope we see the tension inside the atomic structure, if these forces were not pulling on each other the thing would fly apart. In the heavens we see evidence of the magnetic pull of gravity holding the planets in their places by the force exerted by their “planet partners”. Whether peering through a microscope or a telescope, we come eye to eye with the tension within natural creation. When we study of the attributes of God, all of which come into play in His redemptive plan there are the inevitable tensions between mercy and justice and between peerless holiness and a love for the sinful world. Grace and mercy seem poles apart from judgment and punishment yet the truth of God is revealed within this tension. There truths pull on each other within the Trinity in perfect balance, one is never allowed to dominate the other and God’s integrity is never threatened. We all depend on the magnetic balances maintained in space—if the balance in tension between heavenly bodies gets out of whack, we simply collide, blow up and are no more as earth creatures! Theological balances are of equal importance; take the age-old soteriological debate over election and free choice—our problem has been that we see a solution in one particular direction and push it so far that another denomination must be formed to draw the battle lines. Each combatant has his own set of scriptures which prove him right! Still it goes on, do we choose Christ or does He choose us? The answer is apparently “yes!” This is only one of many possible examples of the problem.

The principle is “if you take a solution far enough you create a problem larger than the one you are attempting to solve.”

What are the foundational principles of balance that should guide music ministry as we engage the 21st century? We must learn the lessons of the past and embrace the inevitable tensions presented by the future. The answer is NOT isolation from the opposing pole so as to avoid tension! Our society has a horrific fear of tension, relieve the tension at all cost—compromise is the order of the day. Where is the next pill so I won’t feel so much tension? Tense muscles, tension headaches, tense relationships, etc are all so negative that somehow we become convinced that the solution is isolation. When I suggest we should embrace the tension it sounds untenable, who would want to do that? I submit that Christian leaders ought to be out front in finding the balances that relate eternal objective truth to relativistic post moderns. This is a call for “in-tensional” ministry!

THE PAST PULLS ON THE FUTURE and THE FUTURE ON THE PAST
(This keeps the present upright, balanced)

For 2000 years the Church has developed a rich heritage of tradition and song wherein there is real value. Mixed in was heresy and conflict which created tensions of great proportions and destruction. Remember, hell’s agenda thrives on conflict and division with the intention of frustrating the worship of God! However, precisely because of the conflicts, much wonderful thinking was done and a great store of music was created. Suffice it to say, the past has tremendous influence upon us all and to isolate ourselves from it will rob us of the benefits our fathers have bequeathed. Likewise, the future beckons us enter it with enthusiasm, creativity and expectancy; it is filled with possibilities and new ways of taking the eternal story of creation and redemption to the entire world using every modern means of communication and transportation! To isolate oneself into the past may create great museums and monuments but it does little more than make one nostalgic for the good old days. We may think, “It must have been good to live in those days, things were so much more simple and moral—life must have been much easier for them! I don’t see why innovation and new music is so important”. A short study of history will reveal more of the extreme difficulties and what it was really like. Others may say, “I’m a 21st century Christian, I need a ‘cutting-edge’ church that really speaks to me, and I could care less what went before my time, that musty old music with organs and stuff isn’t me—I live for today and the future, we have to reach THIS generation the past is gone!”

How does one lead a church with such divergent groups of ‘thinkers’? Is one of them just all wrong, do they need to be separated so they won’t resort to violence against one another? Has the older generation become useless with nothing of value to say? Is the post-modern, immerging-seeker-driven ‘thinker’ to be discounted as unanchored and

anti-Christian? Do we need them both, or should anybody over 60 be asked to vacate the church so we can move forward? Of course, if they go we really need their money to keep going, how can we compromise so they will keep giving so we can survive? Commitment is a concept many seniors understand and a concept most post moderns want nothing to do with—wouldn't it be wise to keep them together and in communication? Doesn't Scripture recommend youth being taught by age and experience? (Titus 2:) Is the 'one body' concept Paul so frequently addresses still in place in 2007? (Romans 12:4, I Corinthians 12:). Are Christians to be known for their love and forgiveness above all? (John 13:34-35.) Since this is true, the tensions between tradition and innovation; between youth and age; between the old and the new are to be managed in the biblical balances so the best health of the foundational truth is preserved. When we relieve the tension by creating "traditional and contemporary" services, or new churches with no tradition to live down to, it may provide a short term solution but it doesn't make for "one body!" True growth will come when tradition pulls on innovation which will enable love, forgiveness and genuine commitment to one another to be realized. (I John 1:5-7) This isn't the easy way, but it is the biblical way! A family which always tries to relieve the tensions instead of dealing with them is destined for real trouble with sibling wars and parental divorce. Giving each kid his own iPod and earphones doesn't help them learn to coexist—they must work through their own issues and learn from one another. The past has so much of value which will anchor an individual, family or church with the significance of the foundational root structure. The future has so much of possibility and innovation waiting to be discovered by youth and age alike—it will take patience and diligence but the tension should be a binding force bringing the body of Christ closer together. Whether it tears apart or binds together is up to us as leaders; are we leading or following what people seem to want or demand? True leadership challenges us to deal with the inevitable tensions and turn them into teaching points! The foundation must be maintained. We must not sacrifice our identity as the People of God on the altar of cultural relevancy or any other 21st century strategy. We MUST NOT move from the Rock to the Sand Jesus refers to in Luke 6 or our ministry will quickly fall when the storms strike it. As the Sunday School song we probably all sang as children taught us: "The foolish man built his house upon the sand—the rains came down and the floods came up and the foolish man's house went CRASH!"