

CAN YOU HELP DEVELOP A POLICY ON CHURCH MUSIC?

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In most churches today music, not doctrine, is the great divider. There is nothing more people have stronger opinions on than the songs or hymns that are sung in the church. In my own church we have agreed on a policy of diversity – with a view to having something for everybody. On the one hand, we have a first-rate electronic organ, on which the celebrated organist Carlo Curley has been pleased to play on more than one occasion. Yet, on the other hand, we also have several first-rate worship bands. Its many years since we had a traditional choir – and yet we have recently created a Gospel choir, which enhances our worship from time to time. We happily use Baptist Praise and Worship every Sunday, and yet at the same time we delight to sing the latest songs projected on to the big screen.

In the light of this diversity I had a go at developing the following statement of music policy:

Thank God for traditional hymns! They unite young and old, and are often a great medium for confessing the faith. Their vary age is a great reminder that down through the centuries men and women have put their faith in God – and not found him to be wanting. We would be the poorer without the riches of the past.

Thank God for modern worship songs! They make a delightful balance to some of the older hymns. There is no one kind of church ‘hymnody’ – variety is needed. Calvin got it wrong when he said, ‘The music of hymns should not be light and sprightly; it should have weight and majesty, and should be a marked difference between the music which is played to delight men at table and in their homes, and that of the psalms sung in church and in the presence of his angels’. Provided music can be a vehicle for worship, then it is valid for worship.

Thank God for music! What a difference music makes to life. However, in worship music is not an end in itself. Rather music is a vehicle for worship. The style will vary to enable the people of God in all their variety to express their praise and adoration, their confession and penitence, their dedication and commitment.

Thank God for church musicians – and for the many instruments they play. Although in our music-making we strive for excellence, this quest for excellence should not deter the encouraging of others from contributing to the worship of God. Indeed, one of the roles of the more experienced musicians is to train up the next generation of church musicians.

Although ministers have overall responsibility for all aspects of the church’s worship, inevitably they look to the church’s musicians for help and advice, not least in ensuring that the church’s music reflects a variety of styles appropriate to the various age-groups and tastes present within the church.

How’s that for starters? I look forward to hearing from my critics as to how I might improve on it. I’ll then have something to take to the next church meeting!