
The Church is a Symphony!

An article for the Cathedral Times from Sam Candler's sermon of [September 10, 2023](#)

"If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."
(Matthew 18:19)

What, then, does it mean to "agree"?

One sense is that if I agree with something, that something "pleases" me. It gives me pleasure. That chocolate cake "agrees" with me; it gives me pleasure. And if I "agree" with a person, this agreement gives me pleasure. That old meaning, however, has developed further when applied to our opinions and doctrines. Now, we say that, if our opinion or belief statement is only exactly the same as that of another person, do we "agree" with that person.

Okay. But it is not the way this gospel passage, from Matthew, speaks of "agree." In Matthew 18:19, Jesus uses a special word when he says, "if two of you *agree* on earth..., it will be done for you ...in heaven."

The word that we translate as "agree" is really the Greek word, "symphoneo." Now, that word sounds a lot like another word we use in English, doesn't it? Yes! It is the same word as "symphony!" "Sum" means "together;" and "phonos" means "sound." A symphony, then, is sounds coming together.

When Jesus says that "if two of you 'agree' on earth, it will be done for you in heaven," he is using the word "symphoneo." ...Symphony! Wow. And what is a symphony? It is an elaborate musical piece of many, different notes! Many different rhythms and measures and themes and melodies. And not everyone plays, or sings, the same note!

Jesus is describing the effective church, where people come together in his name, as a symphony! If a church is to be in "agreement," in the way that this passage speaks of "agreement," the church will be like a symphony. Not everyone plays, or sings, the same note! And even if two instrumentalists do play the same note, they are played in different rhythms!

And, yet, the piece holds together. It is in agreement. It gives the world the agreeable pleasure of harmony and direction. That is a model for the church, too!Jesus calls us to a church where two or three are in agreement together. But the word is "symphony." The healthy and effective churches, the beautiful churches, are not those where everyone is playing the same note!

Another way to say this is that the Church is not supposed to be "Johnny One-Note." The Church is not supposed to be monotone. It is not supposed be everyone playing the same thing. Instead, we are playing different notes. We are singing different lines. We are moving in different rhythms! Churches are different notes, different lines, different rhythms, and all in harmony. Not everyone is going to sing the same line you are singing.

....And that diversity, that broad arrangement of gifts and treasures, is how the church changes the world. In the name of Jesus, a loving and caring and generous Jesus, we agree with a tremendous variety of ministries; and we do not, personally, have to be in lockstep with every one of them.

...We can present Jesus, the Christ, in all manner of diversity and variety. We can present Jesus, the Christ, as a symphony, a symphony of beautiful and different sounds, all sounding together, for the salvation of the world.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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