

A Partnership of Two is Inherently Unstable

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Category: Partnership

These posts are meant to spark conversation and community reflection here on the Cape Town 2010 Global Conversation page. I welcome readers' responses - and so allow me to come out straight away to my point.

I believe that partnerships of only two parties are inherently unstable. A story first, and then more on why I believe this is so.

I attended two weddings yesterday. One was at a Presbyterian church, the other, a Pentecostal church. At both of these, the presiding pastors emphasized that the Christian concept of marriage holds that marriage is a covenant between three parties: the man, the woman, and God.

Perhaps this point seems obvious, that marriage is more than between just a man and a woman. No Christian view of marriage would say that the couple is left on their own to make their marriage a successful union, a partnership that lasts and can well serve each other, the family, church and society.

The theological truth we hold across differing traditions is that a marriage partnership depends on a third party, the Lord himself, to survive and thrive. Moreover, a hopefully rock-solid marriage partnership depends on an even wider community, being well integrated into the nurturing and commissioning community of faith.

Can a marriage make a go at it with just the two? Sure. Is a partnership of two still a partnership? Yes. But does two make it sufficiently stable to stand against the inevitable challenges?

Ecclesiastes 4:12 counsels us about the dramatic difference of more-than-two: "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (New International Version)

Isn't it interesting that the original community, the God-Community, was a partnership of three - Father, Son and Spirit -, not two?

I've witnessed many church-to-church and organization-to-organizational partnerships turn sour. Despite their good intentions, many have become inwardly-focused and sought mostly to benefit each other to greater and greater levels; the initial outward purpose of partnering was nearly lost.

On the other hand, most partnerships I've known that have made a point of starting out with a minimum of three ministries involved have discovered that this gave them a very positive dynamic.

With three, a community develops. Leaders in these kinds of partnerships say frequently that a community of three or more keeps them outward-focused and insulated from many of the dynamics that plague partnerships of only two groups.

I've seen this so reliably that I've arrived at my conviction, that partnerships of only two organizations are inherently unstable. Just having two in a partnership seems to leave open a "back door" for a host of ills to find their way in, to the detriment of the partnership.

Unfortunately, the most prevalent form of Christian partnership is probably that between two parties - say, between a church and another church, or a church and an organization, or one ministry and another ministry.

My point: Christian attempts at partnership are given a substantial boost toward a successful mission

if they are multi-lateral, not bi-lateral.

Please share your responses, or if you wish, simply take a short poll on this at <http://poll.pollcode.com/8hOJ>