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BROADCASTS OF CHURCH SERVICES

On The Spot or From A Studio?

[It has been pointed out before that discussions at meetings are very rarely reported by "The Listener," but when the 31st Wellington Anglican Diocesan Synod set apart time to discuss religious broadcasting, we sent a staff reporter. The debate was chiefly on the presentation of religion from a broadcasting studio as against relays of actual church services. It ended with a decision to ask a special committee to consider the whole question of religious broadcasting, to investigate the use made by the Church of the time and facilities already available and, if thought advisable, to seek the co-operation of the Director of Broadcasting (Professor J. Shelley), in conducting experiments.

* * *

A FLOW of ideas on how to make religious broadcasting effective and comprehensive at the listening end was started by the Diocesan Committee on Religious Broadcasting. This committee presented a resolution urging that clergy whose churches were wired for broadcasting should be asked to make their pulpits available to any visiting preacher who, in the opinion of the committee, would advance the work of the Church by being given the opportunity to broadcast his message.

Explaining this proposal the Rev. A. C. F. Charles told members of the synod that radio for the Church was in the hands of the central religious advisory committee of representatives of the churches which broadcast in New Zealand. The committee worked in close touch with the broadcasting officials. There was a local committee in each of the four main centres also, he said.

"Now, this committee feels strongly that when radio plays such an important part in propaganda, the Church should lose no chance of propagating the Gospel. It is seeking the approval of the synod in any negotiations which result in the broadcasting of messages by leaders of Christian thought who may be visiting the Dominion. For instance, a week-end visitor to Wellington might well broadcast when an Anglican church is on the air," he said.

The Bishop Appalled

Strong criticism of some broadcasts was made by the Bishop of Wellington (the Rt. Rev. H. St. Barbe Holland). "I am appalled at the quality of religious

broadcasting in New Zealand," he said. "It is of intense importance in the immediate post-war years that we should do everything we possibly can, as a Church, to make our broadcasting what it ought to be."

The next speaker, Harold Miller, stressed quality instead of quantity. Rather than press for more time on the air, he said, the Church should make the fullest use of the time it already had. "There are some," he said, "who hold that there should be more religious broadcasts, but I doubt the wisdom of that very much. It strikes me that some of the people who listen to the services on Sundays must be amazed and appalled at the tide of exhortation—some of it of mixed quality—that is poured out." (Members: Hear, hear). He seconded the motion.

The Bishop mentioned that there was a diocesan committee in existence. It was, he said, in its infancy and the resolution was its first baby squeak. "This matter is both important and urgent," he added, recalling that he had had a great fight in the general synod to have a provincial committee on broadcasting set up. "What is done to-day will be of the greatest interest to that committee when it meets in August."

Search for "Personalities"

The Rev. M. L. Underhill urged studio broadcasting as against relays from churches. "We want our finest twenty-three men for our twenty-three diocesan broadcasts," he said. "Radio technique is a gift and we should look for preachers who possess it. We should record the speakers and thus test their microphone technique. There is no question about it; we must have radio personalities—and they are extremely rare. In fact, I doubt whether we have any in this country. And, another thing; I would like to hear a Maori speaking English, not just because he is a Maori, but for the pleasure it would give Pakehas to listen to him. As far as I know, personally, no Maori preacher has been asked to speak during the past year."

Mr. Underhill moved an amendment to the resolution on these lines: That the synod ask the committee on religious broadcasting to approach the NBS, asking that all the broadcasts of religious services in the diocese be done in a studio and only in the Cathedral church on three or four important occasions in the year, also that the committee search the diocese for good radio speakers—Maori and Pakeha.

All who broadcast had their voices and voice production tested by a committee and the broadcasting station manager passed the final judgment, said the Bishop.

Taking his suggestions further, Mr. Underhill said that a man might have a good brain; a good voice, and a good message; but he might completely lack a radio personality. It was his idea that a Maori, speaking in English, might sometimes be asked to broadcast—also a Maori choir could go on the air.

"What we think may be fit for public worship may not be at all fit for private worship," continued Mr. Underhill. "I would suggest the use of the conversational and not the preaching voice, speaking as if to the people at their own firesides. After all, Cranmer was not thinking of radio when he drew up the book of Common Prayer. There is much beautiful recorded music which could be used, with a male quartet and perhaps a choir now and then."

Mr. Underhill amused the synod when he concluded by saying that he was not a family man, but he was sure that it was not usual for married people to gather their families round them every Sunday and give short chats about immorality.

Arts with a Difference

When he spoke supporting Mr. Underhill, Canon D. J. Davies referred to what he called two irreconcilable arts. These, he said, were conversation and public speaking. They could not be reconciled. "When he is on the air a man must rid himself completely of the old idea that he is addressing a large and unseen audience or congregation. Rather must he regard himself as chatting to one or two persons in a purely conversational way. Why, if I addressed my wife as I would a congregation, I would probably not be in my pulpit on the following Sunday," he said. "What sounds perfectly sincere in the pulpit might appear to be insincere in private conversation or on the air. If we can find the man with a radio personality and hand the broadcasting over to him, we will do a splendid work from the religious point of view. Personally, I find that, after all these years, I still suffer from what I call 'micro-phobia.'"

What Do People Want?

Approaching the discussion from the home rather than the church end, the