

Broadcasting Religious Services

THE QUESTION OF METHODS

In our issue of November 18 we gave a summary of factors bearing upon the broadcasting of religious services. We have received a communication from the Anglican Broadcasting Association of N.Z. (Inc.), Auckland, in that connection which makes it necessary, in order to give readers a full appreciation of what we did say, to reproduce our original article, together with the Association's comment thereupon and our reply to points raised in same.

WHAT WE DID SAY.

With the question of the broadcasting of religious services now somewhat prominent, a brief explanation of the position may be opportune.

In response to numerous requests the Broadcasting Company has endeavoured to accede to what would seem to be the simplest solution of the problem, namely, a fair rotation of the various principal denominations with no two of the same denomination on the air at two of the New Zealand stations on any one Sunday night. This would seem to be easy to arrange, but in practice it has failed.

At best this solution would please only a small percentage of the minority of listeners throughout New Zealand who have valve sets. Only a small percentage of those with valve sets would be concerned with any particular service. So it follows that the number of listeners to whom the rearrangement of the services would be a satisfactory solution would be very small. The great majority of listeners have crystal sets, and these listeners would not be concerned by the regrading. Also, it may be pointed out that even some of those listeners with valve sets in the cities would find it impracticable to tune in to the station they wanted if their own station was on the air. These facts show that very few people would benefit from such an arrangement, even if it could be satisfactorily carried out.

As a matter of fact it would break down at once. The same number of denominations do not broadcast from each station. In two cities there are five, in two seven. In certain cases a church, while strong in one city, is too weak in another to be able to broadcast. Where it has a strong membership it is fully entitled to a turn, but as the number of broadcasting churches is not the same a set rotation cannot be followed. Then, also, it has been found that in numerous instances churches cannot or do not want to take their turn and a church of another denomination has had to fill the breach. Thus it might happen that two, three, or even four stations might be broadcasting services by the one denomination on the one night. The default of one church to take its turn throws the whole rotation out of order and when this happens repeatedly it is not possible for such an arrangement to last.

AN INDEPENDENT ROTATION

All that the Broadcasting Company can do is to be undenominational in this matter and to work each station independently, giving each church a turn regardless of its numerical strength; but the churches do not always desire to be broadcast in the order arranged. Some prefer to arrange amongst themselves, for various reasons of their own—perhaps because of special (such as anniversary) services—and others again have been very indifferent in taking advantage of the opportunity to broadcast their services.

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH PROPOSAL.

One can take it as a further tribute to the power of broadcasting that the Church of England is now considering the erection of a transmitting station for the purpose of broadcasting religious services.

The Church of England has been very slow in recognising the value of broadcasting as a means of disseminating the Gospel and has not availed itself of the opportunities which the company has offered it. Other churches have gladly accepted every chance to broadcast, and this state of affairs has resulted in the impression getting abroad that the Broadcasting Company has been differentiating against the Church of England. Nothing, of course, could be further from fact. The Broadcasting Company has been, is, and will be absolutely impartial.

The Broadcasting Company will certainly state its case to the authorities in regard to the application by the Church of England to secure a broadcasting license, and that will be tantamount to protesting against the granting of the application. It is in the interests of all listeners that such a station should not be erected. If a license were granted, the purpose of the Act would be departed from and a precedent would be set, so that every denomination and sect in New Zealand would seek a license. The result would simply be chaos and it would seem unlikely that a license for such a station as the Church of England people are thinking about will ever be granted. By far the great majority of listeners have crystal sets of poor selectivity, what would be the result when several such stations were broadcasting simultaneously?

It will be far better for all concerned if the Church of England will agree to work in with the other churches in regard to the broadcasting of services. For months the Broadcasting Company has had under consideration a proposal for reaching a working basis among the principal denominations. The Broadcasting Company is quite impartial in the matter of which church service it broadcasts. It thinks that it is up to the various religious denominations to agree amongst themselves as to the best way to take advantage of the great power which has been placed at their disposal for spreading the Gospel. The Broadcasting Company could do no more than it has done and can do no more in an impartial way than it offers to do.

The first conference between the various churches will be held in Christchurch this month, and it is to be hoped the Church of England will send a representative, and that an amicable arrangement will be arrived at, when the Broadcasting Company will be only too pleased to lend what help it can.

THE ANGLICAN ASSOCIATION'S COMMENT.

We wish to enter a vigorous protest to your article on "Broadcasting Religious Services" appearing in your issue dated 19th inst., containing as it does an attack on the Anglican Broadcasting Association of N.Z. (Incorporated), and we ask that you give our reply the same publicity as your attack.

Your article is not a fair statement of facts. The Anglicans, who form over 40 per cent. of the listeners, cannot be described as "a small percentage of the minority of listeners," or as "a very small number." You state that if the Anglicans had a station of their own many would find it impracticable to tune in to it in the cities. We can only describe this as a deliberate distortion of fact. With a crystal receiver and one valve 1YA station is being tuned out night after night and other stations tuned in by the undersigned. This is quite a simple matter for valve sets. You would apparently like crystal owners to believe that their sets would be useless in a centre where more than one station was broadcasting simultaneously. There is one overwhelming answer to this. Other cities, such as Sydney, are operating two A stations and several B stations, and crystal owners benefit by the choice of programmes they can tune into. Surely what can be done there can be done in New Zealand!

Your statement that "it is in the interests of all listeners that this station should not be erected" is another statement made without any evidence to support it. It must be evident to all listeners that it is to their advantage to have a wide and varied choice of programmes to tune into. Every station within range is an added incentive to take out a license. In N.Z. the Radio Broadcasting Coy. hold the monopoly in receiving 25/- out of every 30/- license issued, which on the latest figures runs to over \$40,000 per annum. On top of this financial monopoly they are trying to establish a huge and complete monopoly of all broadcasting in this Dominion, in spite of the Postmaster General's repeated announcements that they have no right to claim such a monopoly. Undoubtedly the company would welcome the advent of new up-to-date stations, which would bring increased license fees to them, if it were not for the fact that the Radio Broadcasting Co. is afraid that if such stations proved their worth, the public at some future date might demand that this huge financial monopoly come to an end.

Your statement in heavy type regarding the slowness of the Church of England to recognise the value of broadcasting is absolutely amusing to those who know the facts. We have been very much alive to its importance, for we have, for some considerable time past been in touch with what is being done elsewhere by churches owning their own stations. Moreover, we have as a Church, through His Grace the Archbishop, repeatedly asked the Broadcasting Company for a better service, but our applications have simply been side-stepped, as will be seen if we have to publish our full correspondence.

We, therefore, very much regret the attitude you have taken up, and can simply assure your readers that we are not in any way antagonistic to the Radio Broadcasting Company or any other company or private individual who may erect and operate broadcasting station. We are out to fill a want which the Radio Broadcasting Company is not called upon to fill. We are an incorporated society of churchmen who are willing to put our hands in our pockets to reach the great mass of members of our Church who are involuntarily cut off from organised religion.

Yours faithfully,
The Anglican Broadcasting Assn.
of N.Z. (Inc.),
Cecil A. B. Watson
President.
H. M. Smyth,
Hon. Gen. Secretary.

OUR REPLY

To this statement we would make the following categorical reply:—

(1) Our article was not an attack upon the Anglican Broadcasting Association, which was not in fact mentioned. It was a simple, straightforward review of the facts and factors bearing upon a matter of important Government policy of moment to listeners.

(2) We nowhere described the Anglicans as "a small percentage of the minority of listeners," or even as "a very small number." Our reference in that context was not to the Anglicans at all, but was a general reference to those who would be affected throughout New Zealand—(See the actual article). The statement in our correspondent's letter that 40 per cent. of all listeners are Anglicans may or may not be correct. It is apparently founded upon the census figures of the proportion of Anglicans in the population, but there is not the slightest guarantee that the same percentage holds good in the number of listeners. It might, as a matter of fact, be greater, or even very much less—our point is that the information is not in existence, and it is quite impossible to assume that the census proportion obtains in the general body of listeners. It is a matter of common knowledge that, in the census returns, as in the army, many of those who are nothing in particular return themselves as Anglicans. We say this in no unkindly spirit, but as a sheer matter of common-sense fact.

(3) We did not state, as written: "you state that if the Anglicans had a station of their own, many would find it impracticable to tune in to it in the cities." If our reverend correspondents will refer to our article they will see our statement was: "The great majority of listeners have crystal sets, and these listeners would not be affected by the regrading. Also it may be pointed out that even some of those listeners with valve sets in the cities would find it impracticable to tune in to the station they wanted if their own station were on the air." This portion of the article merely referred to a rearranging of services and had no reference to the proposed Anglican station.

Further, our statement was "even some" and that is converted into "many" in our friends' letter; our statement referred to the well known fact that some valve sets in cities are unable to tune in other stations while their local station is on the air. This is particularly the case with 2YA, which is 10 times stronger than 1YA. Our statement is correct and remains correct and we invite our reverend friends to be courteous enough to withdraw and apologise for their comment that our statement was "a deliberate distortion of fact." We will not be so unchristian as to return their allegation in relation to the warping of our words which we have pointed out.

(4) The suggestion that the Broadcasting Company is afraid of the prospective competition of the Anglican broadcasting effort may be left to take care of itself.

Our review of the situation was made without any concern for the Broadcasting Company's individual interests but was simply undertaken in line with our conception of our duty to safeguard the general interests of all listeners. Whether the license is granted to the Anglicans will depend entirely upon the Government, and is a matter for its policy determination. After giving consideration to the matter, and particularly after having perused the booklet issued by the Anglican Broadcasting Association, we reached the conclusion that the institution of such a broadcasting station upon the air in New Zealand would be definitely a retrograde step, as introducing propaganda, inviting reply thereto, and generally creating disharmony on a subject which should be free therefrom. We therefore wrote the article we did. The reply of the association confirms our conviction that the adoption of such propagandist methods in the field of religion, however they may be gilded with the pill of entertainment, would not be desirable.

(5) Our correspondents take us to task for stating that "The Church of England has been very slow in recognising the value of broadcasting as a means of disseminating the Gospel, and has not availed itself of the opportunity which the company has offered them."

In replying to this our correspondents adopt the rather common Auckland failing of assuming that Auckland is New Zealand. There are other cities in New Zealand besides Auckland, and our statement was a general statement, which is true to the fullest degree. The absence of Anglican services from the programmes of other stations in New Zealand has been marked, and since our inception we have received numerous letters from readers commenting upon this fact, and assuming that the deficiency was on the part of the Broadcasting Company. That absence has not been due to the Broadcasting Company. It is not our place to go any further into the matter at this stage, but it is open to our correspondents to make their own inquiries in relation to other centres and enlarge their knowledge.

There is, further, one suggestion in this portion of our correspondent's letter which must be strongly repudiated. It says: "We have repeatedly asked the Broadcasting Company for a better service, but our applications have simply been side-stepped, as will be seen if we have to publish our full correspondence." We have no knowledge whatever of the correspondence referred to, but we regard the suggestion that there is anything in that correspondence that should not be published as quite unworthy, and we would suggest to our correspondents that they take the earliest opportunity of publishing it. We and our readers would

prefer full frankness rather than the subtlety of innuendo.

In our opinion, the greater frankness with which this matter is discussed the better, because then our readers will be able to understand the objective of our friends. The objects of the promoters of the Auckland Anglican station are set out in their own booklet to be:

- (1) The broadcasting of church services, especially for the young, the sick, the aged and isolated;
- (2) Scriptural and other religious instructions;
- (3) Lectures on church history, etc.;
- (4) Propaganda for the Church's social work;
- (5) Information on parish and general church news;
- (6) Good church music;
- (7) Special messages from prominent church people.

The point immediately apparent here is that of general propaganda. Under the terms of its license, the Broadcasting Company must avoid all propagandist and special debatable matter. In line with that restriction, its activities are confined to a dissemination of religious services, which it has endeavoured to do on a basis perfectly equitable to all denominations.

But the Auckland Anglicans say in their booklet, after referring to the restriction upon propaganda:

"There is only one escape from this position, OWN AND OPERATE OUR OWN STATION, and so long as we receive no share of the license fees, we can put out whatever we like as freely as the man on the soap-box, and we have the same chance of holding or losing our audience that he has. The urgency of the matter lies in the fact that only a limited number of high-power stations will be licensed in each centre, and UNLESS THE CHURCH GETS IN EARLY our chance of owning and operating such a station will be lost."

A further extract of interest is this:

"We are convinced that, from a churchman's point of view, the present position is very undesirable. Thousands of our people are actually listening in all over the country to all sorts of dissenting (and lately, to anti-Christian services) because there is nothing else to listen to."

Such terms and phraseology, strike in our ears, at any rate, a jarring note. We do not imagine that the other churches will welcome either the language or the tone employed towards them, while the charge of disseminating anti-Christian matter is so serious that we invite the Auckland Anglicans to be a little more specific so that the matter can be investigated further.

The importance of the dissemination of religious services as a social service is beyond question. The issue raised by our friends, however, goes beyond that. They would seem to be not so much concerned with the dissemination of religious services, because that is already being done on a basis which it is the desire of the Broadcasting Co. to make as fair and equitable as possible to all denominations. The aim is confessedly a propagandist one, and having regard to the care taken by the Government that this new medium of broadcasting should not be sullied by partisanship, we are satisfied, in the general interests of listeners, that the proposal in question is not to their advantage.

We have excised from our correspondent's letters a final paragraph which suggested we are not responsible for our own views. We are, wholly and solely—Editor.

WEATHER REPORTS

With the recent vagaries of the weather, the nightly weather report has been greatly looked for by listeners, particularly country listeners, to whom prompt advice of the weather indications and prospects is of definite value in enabling them to handle their stock to the best advantage. Realising this, particularly in the sheep-shearing season, the Broadcasting Company has arranged with Dr. Kidson, of the Meteorological service, to extend that Department's service by providing forecasts for both Saturday and Sunday evening. The Saturday evening forecast is issued at the usual time, as near to 9 o'clock as possible, and on Sunday evening between the church service and the succeeding musical programme.

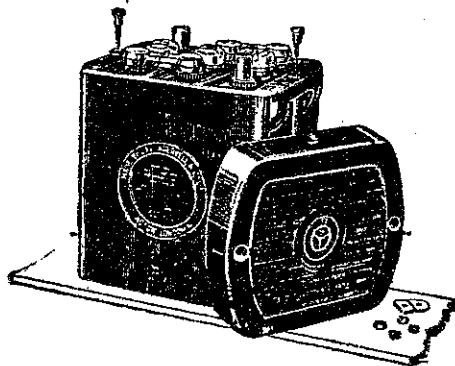
In addition to this nightly forecast, it has been the practice to give in the news session a very full and admirable report on the weather from the columns of the "Evening Post." This report is of definite value, and has been specially appreciated by country listeners, who have not wished to stay up to 9 o'clock in order to secure the weather report.

Popular enthusiasm for wireless in the Argentine has developed to such an extent that there are now approximately 150,000 holders of receiving licenses. The majority possess crystal sets, but valve receivers are coming in to favour.

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