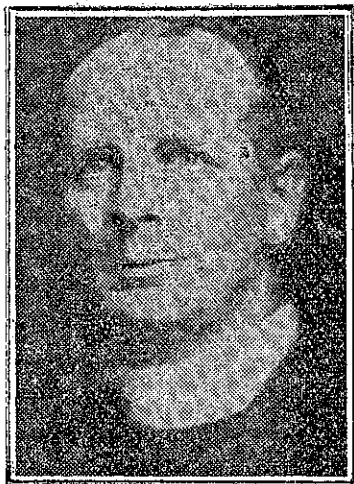


What Broadcasting Means To Me

Ordinary Church Service Too Long To Be Broadcast



Says Canon Percival James, of St. Paul's Pro-Cathedral, Wellington, in this article. He makes suggestions, too, for the reorganisation of church broadcasts.

What broadcasting means to me? Well, I have been concerned mostly with the microphone end. I have not yet permitted myself the luxury of a

receiving set. That enjoyment will probably be reserved for my years of retirement and ease. The microphone is a comforting instrument. If a man speaks distinctly everything else is done for him—the regulation of the volume of his tone and all the rest to make him audible to an unseen multitude.

Do you prefer being broadcast from church or studio? In one respect it is easier from the church. The preacher forgets the microphone in the presence of his seen audience, he forgets the unseen, and he is therefore likely to be more easy and natural in his delivery. Studio speaking is a cold-blooded business at first.

Do you think that the broadcasting of church services has affected attendances? Not greatly—during the last few years congregations generally have been increasing. Some who were occasional churchgoers have doubtless taken to "radio religion," which can never be a worthy substitute for the common worship of God in His house. But the counter-vailing gain is overwhelming. Religious people who are cut off from church, aged, infirm and sick people and hundreds in the backblocks are able to join, in a sense, in religious services. The mass of letters one receives is ample testimony of the value of the broadcasting of the services.

Are you in favour of the present system of broadcasting of church services? By no means. In fact I am much concerned about it. I think that presently listeners will insist upon reforms. When listeners voted some time ago in England, church services were first, I seem to remember, in their preference. The vote in New Zealand put them almost last. I suppose I have done as much church broadcasting in New Zealand as anybody, though I have never sought to be broadcast—I have always been asked. My former church, St. Mary's Cathedral, in Auckland, was amongst the first (if it was not the first) Anglican churches in New Zealand to allow its services to be broadcast. When I came to St. Paul's we were at once asked to come into the 2YA rota and we did. For two years our evening service was broadcast every Sunday by 2ZW until that station came to an end. We gathered a very large unseen congregation. But, all the while, I have felt that our system is much inferior to the English system.

To what are you opposed? To the broadcasting of the average church service. The ordinary church service is too long to be broadcast. The B.B.C. allows 50 minutes and that should be the maximum. The attention of an unseen congregation cannot be held for longer. Moreover, it is not easy to reconcile the claims of the regular church congregation and the unseen congregation and the latter suffers. Also, the person who wishes to attend his own church service is likely to be the person who also wishes to hear the broadcast service and he should have the opportunity. I hold strongly that services should not be broadcast during the ordinary church hours.

Do you mean that services should be broadcast from the studios? Not necessarily. Some might be; but what I

have chiefly in mind is that the broadcast service should be a special service in church, as in England. Then the service could be entirely adapted for the listeners-in. The clergy and the organists and choirs would willingly render this service. You know that no remuneration is asked or desired. This new method of evangelism is a definite part of our work, so far as and so long as there is the demand from a great body of listeners. I consider that there ought to be two services broadcast every Sunday—one for children and one for adults. A further advantage of my suggestion is this—a greater number of clergy could conduct these services and preach. It is not possible to "wire-up" more than a comparatively few churches. The ministers of those churches only are heard, for other ministers are at that time conducting services in their own churches.

The present system has grown up in a haphazard way. When many churches began to claim the right to have services broadcast the former Broadcasting Company formed church committees in the chief cities. These committees consisted of one representative from each denomination, selected and appointed, I believe, by the company itself. The New Zealand Broadcasting Board has continued this system. Thus a religious body which numbers less than one per cent. of the population has equal representation with one which numbers more than 40 per cent. in the "give and take" of these committees. The smaller churches have displayed the fault of the Dutch "in giving too little and asking too much." Here is the 2YA quota for 1935. Out of 104 broadcast services only 23 are allotted to the Church of England—half of what ought to be allotted if a just proportion were given. For years there have been strong complaints from our listeners. I notice that our Presbyterian friends are complaining—with almost as strong cause as our own. This matter should be rectified, and a new scheme should be devised to come into operation in 1936.

How could this best be done? By putting the whole of the arranging of broadcast services into the hands of one man—as they do in England. It works admirably there and without friction. But this man should be given adequate powers and not interfered with. He could do so much. Listeners in England are given courses of first-rate lectures, which acquaint them with the rapid progress of present-day religious thought. Some of these courses have been published. Two books, especially "God and the World Through Christian Eyes," have had a large circulation. We could do something of the same kind here, in a more modest way perhaps, and I am sure it would be welcomed. But I do not think that the present church committees, as now constituted, could handle such an enterprise effectively.

Can you think of a man suitable for the job of sole organiser of religious broadcasting? Several; but perhaps the New Zealand genius is not favourable to a dictator. The next best thing would be a committee of three—but they must be the right men.

What about controversial matter in broadcasting? I have not found the regulation very irksome and I have been scrupulous in observing it. But while I have much sympathy with the regulation and its intention I think that the harder way is the better way, i.e., to give reasonable freedom for the expression of opinions, so long as they are not seditious or offensive to the general mind of decent people.