

DID I JUST HEAR "JESUS"
ON THE RADIO?

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There is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States. That phenomenon is known as "Christian Radio". But haven't we had Christian Radio for a long time now? Our churches have been broadcasting Sunday morning services for a long time now. So how can we call Christian Radio a new phenomenon?

The new development on the airwaves is more than just a Sunday service broadcast to those who don't happen to be in church on a given Sunday morning. There are Christian Radio stations cropping up all over the United States that will play nothing but Christian music. They will air nothing that doesn't have a Christian perspective. They have Christian talk shows. They even have Bible studies.

What's more impressive is the fact that they do all of these things seven days a week. Some of them even 24 hours a day. There are two such radio stations in the Milwaukee listening area: WVCY 107.7 FM in Milwaukee, and WKSH 1370 AM from Sussex. These two stations both claim to be Christian Radio but they have radically different views on what is Christian and therefore acceptable for air time, and what isn't. WKSH is a contemporary Christian rock station. The manager at WVCY wouldn't dream of playing anything with an electric guitar even remotely related to it. He feels that guitar music brings with it drugs, fornication and apostasy. WVCY stands for Wisconsin Voice of Christian Youth but the program director at WKSH feels that the youth who would

like an alternative to the "secular" radio stations won't listen to the programming on WVCY. He feels that if you want to reach the kids you have to play rock music.

Still, both are Christian radio stations and both are doing their best to serve Christian youth in the best way they know.

Christian Radio has basically two purposes. The first is to spread the Word of God to those who would otherwise never hear it. The second is to strengthen those who are already in the family of God and need some sort of support or an opportunity to grow.

Evangelism over the radio is not by any means a new concept. Almost as early as radio became popular, preachers took advantage of the airwaves and began to spread the Gospel to an audience they could only dream about reaching before. In the early thirties Dr. J. Vernon McGee was already on radio programs in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1941 he started a Sunday afternoon program called "The Open Bible Hour". And he has been on the radio ever since.

In 1949 Dr. McGee moved to downtown Los Angeles and he felt that he absolutely needed a radio program to effectively run a downtown church. The program he started was a hit and church attendance started to skyrocket. The attendance at the Church of the Open Door reached 3000+ on Sunday mornings, 2000+ on Sunday nights, and over 1500 for his Thursday night Bible studies.

From there he began to broadcast his program on tape to other cities and to date he has over 1000 separate broadcasts around the world. He is heard in 28 different languages; and he is broadcasting on every continent except Ant-

arctica. Dr. McGee is "firmly convinced that radio is a crash program in these days for getting out the Word of God." He says, "Seriously, I am convinced today that radio now can reach the world with the Gospel. It can go into places in our country, in our own nation, in our states, in our cities, in our communities where no one else can go."

Dr. McGee receives an average of 100 letters a month from people who say they have accepted Christ as their Savior from listening to his program. That's quite a success story. Unfortunately, Dr. McGee is a Baptist. He regularly teaches on his program that baptism is an ordinance commanded by God with absolutely no power to save or work faith. He lashes out against those who baptize babies or preach that the power of God is in the sacrament to work faith in that child. He teaches decision theology. He is a millennialist from the very roots of his being. It's sad to think that for many people Dr. Vernon McGee is the only contact they have with God's Word.

His success story, while unsurpassed as far as I know, is by no means atypical. A Mr. John D. Jess started a program around Quincy, Illinois which had evangelism as its sole purpose. In 1939 he was heard on only one station. Today The Chapel of the Air is heard on 178 stations with over 350 releases.

The Moody Bible Institute in Chicago started a much more ambitious project. They wanted to start radio stations that would play nothing but Christian material. Today the Moody Broadcasting Network "is a multi-faceted operation with

owned and operated radio stations, a 24-hour satellite network, many taped productions, and a large number of live call-in programs.... MBN presently services 140 radio stations directly by live satellite broadcasting."

The purpose of most of these radio men is evangelism. They want to reach people with the love of God and bring them to faith in Christ. They have basically two different methods. Dr. McGee in his "Through the Bible" radio ministry takes different sections of scripture each day and talks about them making applications that he hopes will reach the listener and lead him to come to Christ and be saved. There are others who do the same thing. Chuck Swindoll and John McArthur both have Bible-talk programs. They are both gifted speakers and usually have very interesting and biblically sound messages. They also both regularly make appeals to "make your decision for Christ! Say yes to him today!"

While we can applaud their efforts to spread the Gospel by every available means, we have to worry about the messages people are getting about God and how they can be saved. Very little emphasis is placed on sin and grace. Usually the emphasis is placed on the sanctification aspect of one's life. Chuck Swindoll's messages are very good and insightful for someone who has already come to faith and wants to learn more about what the Bible says from an interesting speaker (unless he starts talking about the millennium or baptism. He is anything but Biblically sound on those points). He goes to the original languages and presents a message that really hits home. But for the person who has no idea of how much he has

offended God and how much he needs a Savior from his sin, most of these radio preachers have little to say. From the messages he hears on most of the radio programs, he would come to the conclusion that he can choose to believe in Christ as his Savior if he wants to. And if he does choose to believe, God will then owe him a good life and all the blessings promised in the Bible.

The other type of evangelism that is regularly employed on the radio waves consists of stories. These stories are usually pretty predictable but yet they are usually interesting enough to hold your attention to see what happens to the poor sch~~uck~~ who is in such a jam, or whose life is beyond hope, or who has nothing left to live for because nobody loves him or pays any attention to him.

The answer is always the same. Some Christian finds him and tells him about all the love that he can have if he only believes in God and accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior. The emphasis is not on sin and grace here either. The purpose of these programs is "If someone realizes that his life is empty, we hope that he will find out that his life can be filled to overflowing through the love of Jesus."

There are also children's programs with stories aimed at children of all ages. The stories are the same but the victims and the heroes are children and the situations are such that children can imagine these things happening to them.

The reason that these programs zero in on the emptiness of life outside the pale of the church is that they realize

every human being's need to be accepted or to be secure. They are trying to give people a reason to want to become a Christian without having to tell them that they are sinners. That would be bad for ratings. Moody Broadcasting is really big on this story-type format. They have about ten different stories scattered throughout the week with all different titles and all different characters.

WVCY is the station you want if you want to check out this type of Christian radio. They have talk shows on at all hours of the day. The best program in my opinion is Chuck Swindoll's "Insight for Living" weeknights at 9:00 p.m.

If you would rather listen to music, then it depends upon which type of music you want to hear. If you want to hear traditional Gospel music and classical music then WVCY is your station. If you want to hear contemporary Christian rock music then you'll have to switch your radio to the AM side of the dial and tune into WKSH. Both stations try to serve young people but the station manager at WVCY states, "We do not use some of the so-called contemporary music which has little substance and, in some cases, even less music in it." I'm sure he'd find many people who would agree with him in his evaluation. Unfortunately, not many of them would be young people.

WKSH, or KS 14 as they like to call themselves, has a completely different format than WVCY. They don't have the Bible study programs or the evangelism shows. The format they use is almost identical with the popular secular rock stations in the area. They are not a 24-hour station but they

do start at 6:00 a.m., so they start early enough ^{so one can} to listen to them on the way to school or work. They feature almost all music for the length of their air time with a few call-in talk shows thrown in. They even have an all-request lunch hour for those who want to hear particular songs.

It is not within the scope of this paper to comment on the relative worth or quality of the music that they play. All I want to do is let you know that they are playing it. They play a pretty good mix of the new songs and artists, although most of it is pretty soft rock. There isn't much acid rock Christian music around I guess.

They promote concerts for Christian artists and act for all the world like a regular radio station. There is only one difference: They play Christian music and the disc jockeys aren't afraid to mention the name of their Lord or to confess their faith in him.

No matter which station you listen to, the advantage of a Christian station is the fact that it does help keep your mind on the Lord Jesus and the fact that he does care about you more than on Sunday mornings. It's nice to hear ^{about} Jesus on the radio. And if kids have to listen to rock music (and they all will tell you they do) then I would just as soon have them listen to Christian rock music. Then when they learn the words and sing them, they'll be doing something constructive. As far as the Bible-study programs go, they can be heard with benefit to the listener, but he/she must be willing to be like the Bereans checking everything that is taught with the standard of God's holy word.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

All the material used in this paper is taken from correspondence, telephone calls, direct quotes from radio programs, and otherwise unpublished material. If the reader would like to check on the validity of any statement in this paper or would like some help in doing some deeper or related research, a simple phone call to either or both of the radio stations mentioned in this paper will provide an excellent start. Both radio stations were very cooperative and informative.

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