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Radio Biblical Drama

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RADIO BIBLICAL DRAMA

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Practical Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
Darrell Duane Helmers
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OUTLINE

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I. Introduction.

"For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours."¹

The man of God faces the world with the Gospel of Jesus. He seeks the means and methods for making his message clear and available to his fellow man. Before him lie the scientific marvels of the ages, given by the Master Inventor, that all nations might receive the Gospel Message. The man of God selects the media that permit him to reach the greatest number of people in the best possible way.

The man of God then develops these media to the best of his ability.

Radio is one of these media.

This study is concerned with only one phase of the Church's use of radio, Radio Biblical Drama. By this is meant simply the dramatization of Bible Stories (episodes from the Bible), and the expansion of individual Biblical Texts. This study will not include the strictly moral or

1. 1 Cor. 3:21.

ethical stories which are based on Biblical principles, but only those stories which have their foundation in Christ as the Savior from sin and the Author of the New Life.

The author became interested in radio several years ago in connection with studies in Audio-Visual Education at Columbia University, New York City. At the same time he assisted in the production of Bible Story Recordings, acting as a Sound-Effects Man for Associated Metalcrafts, Inc., of Philadelphia. After returning to Concordia Seminary, he wrote a number of dramatic scripts, religious and otherwise, for Radio Station KFUP in St. Louis, which were produced in the series entitled, "The Christian School of the Air."

Radio, particularly radio drama, reaches millions of Americans every week, leaving an indelible impression upon them. This medium has not been exploited by the Church, for instead of adapting itself and its Message to the medium, the church has forced the radio medium to adapt itself to an inflexible system of "preaching." In facing radio, the church has both an opportunity and an obligation, not only to radio and the unchurched, but also to the glorious Message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This study will present an evaluation of present radio programs, the present religious radio situation, and the writing, selection and adaptation of a Bible Story. The writer has consulted materials deposited in the St. Louis Public Library, the Libraries at Concordia Seminary and

Washington University, and personal files for a constructive approach to Radio Biblical Drama. While such materials are necessarily limited, they indicate the problems and solutions inherent in Radio Biblical Drama as an intelligent, forward-looking approach to the Church's use of radio.

II. Radio in the Present Day Scene.

In 1912, John Coleman, a Pittsburgh wireless experimenter, was playing with a Ford spark coil while recovering from an illness. Unknowingly, the signals went out over his wireless set. Quite some distance away, Dr. Frank Conrad, of the Westinghouse Engineering Staff, picked up these signals on his small receiving set. Dr. Conrad was intrigued, and traced the signals to their source. The two unsuspecting pioneers became fast friends, and soon began experimenting with Communication sets.

By 1919, Dr. Conrad was using phonograph records for signals on his sending equipment. As receiving sets became somewhat more popular, he soon received requests to play certain records at certain hours. Groups were gathering at the homes of those fortunates who owned receiving sets, and they wished to be entertained. In order to accommodate these requests, Dr. Conrad set the first broadcast time, and announced that he would play records over the air on Wednesday and Saturday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30.

Dr. Conrad and his two sons, however, soon tired of playing records continuously. So they devised other forms of entertainment: local talent for readings, and primitive forms of the modern radio drama. But there were still no regular broadcast hours. The novelties continued until the

performers became tired, hungry, or ran out of material.¹

This was the inauspicious beginning of radio broadcasting in America. From this casual hit-or-miss beginning it grew into one of the most lucrative and complex systems that America has ever known. The fortunate experimentation of two men led to the network system of broadcasting which provides thousands of Americans with an occupation, and which now forms an integral part of the American way of life.

The Availability of Radio to the Listener

The hors d'oeuvres of the past two generations have today assumed the proportion of a steady and constant diet. Today radio reaches out and engulfs the American people with its criss-cross of continent-spanning networks. At the first of the year 1940, twenty-eight million American homes were equipped with radio, eighty six per cent of all American homes. The remaining fourteen percent were not without radio, however, for they could enjoy the hospitality of other homes, the drug store, the gas station and the country general merchandise store.² A more recent survey shows that ninety five percent of all homes in America have at least one radio.³

And they use this piece of equipment! It is estimated

1. Donald W. Riley, Handbook of Radio Drama Techniques, pp. 1-2.

2. Paul F. Peter, "The American Listener in 1940," in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, CCXIII (January, 1941), 2.

3. John W. Bachman, "Surveying Religious Radio," Today, IV (January, 1949), 13.

that thirty one million radio families are waiting eagerly each day to listen to their radios.⁴ In our present generation the radio is one of the staples of family entertainment and perhaps unforeseen education, for it is in almost constant use in the home.

One writer estimates that children who have access to receiving sets listen from two to five hours daily.⁵ The International Journal of Religious Education estimates that "The average American child spends more than fourteen hours every week in front of the loudspeaker. Our children actually spend more time listening to the radio than they do at any other single occupation except sleeping."⁶

Adults also spend much time listening to their radios. The surveys indicated that eighty two and nine-tenths per cent of all radio families listened to their radios at some time each day. The same survey found that the home radio set was used four hours and twenty two minutes per day. Rural families used their sets four hours and forty seven minutes per day, and urban families used theirs four hours and nine minutes per day.⁷

To make the statistics even more meaningful, suppose that one listened to a radio program fifteen minutes per day, six days a week. This would mean one and one-half hours of

4. "Preacher on the Air, by the Listener," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXII (December, 1943), 124.

5. Peter, op. cit., p. 12.

6. Raymond K. Beals, "Making Radio a Family Experience," The International Journal of Religious Education, XXIV (February, 1948), 13.

7. Peter, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

listening per week, six and one-half hours per month, or, seventy eight hours a year. The time consumed seems insignificant when considered on the daily basis, but it amounts to two working weeks each year.⁸ The American Public has the radio, and listens to it.

Radio's Offering to the Listener

During the week of March 6, 1938, the Federal Communications Commission made a study of all programs broadcast by all American Radio Stations. The results indicated that more than 62,000 hours of programs had been offered; that approximately one-third of the time was used for advertising purposes; and that slightly more than one half of the time was used for music. When the rest were analyzed, it was found that 9.1 per cent was drama; 8.5 per cent, news and sport; 8.8 per cent, variety; 5.2 per cent, religious; 2.2 per cent, special events; and 2.3 per cent, miscellaneous. The remaining 11.4 per cent considered only talk programs.⁹

Morton Wishengrad studied the dramatic offerings of radio broadcasting and made the following evaluation:

With a few saving exceptions the creatures of the daytime serial inhabit an intellectual slum, a world of "organ bridge" and the dramatic pause, where trouble is attenuated and the paragon is generally "John." The technique of the soap opera has been stamped out by the newspaper comic strip and prefabricated by the true-confession pulp magazine.

Radio's night-time drama is better but it is equally derivative. It is more sophisticated than the day time serial to the same degree that the slick-paper magazine is more sophisticated than the pulp product. But with a few outstanding exceptions it springs almost entirely from the crime thriller, or some diluted Hollywood opus, or the Sunday Supplements, resembling each of its examples, but less satisfying than each, and somehow meaner.¹⁰

8. Sherman Paxton Lawton, Radio Drama, p.7.

9. Peter, op. cit., p. 15.

10. Morton Wishengrad, The Eternal Light, p. xiv.

This condemnatory evaluation will become clear and seemingly justified as we now dip into the listener interest-rating surveys to find the type of program preferred by the listening audience.

The Program Preference of the Listening Audience

In 1948, according to Broadcasting Telecasting, the top ten evening programs were: Jack Benny, Lux Radio Theater, Charlie McCarthy, Fred Allen, Phil Harris-Alice Faye, Fibber McGee-Molly, Bob Hope, Amos 'n' Andy, Walter Winchell and Godfrey's Talent Scouts. In the five-day-a-week program the listing was Arthur Godfrey, Breakfast Club, Grand Slam, Big Sister, Helen Trent, Rosemary, Ma Perkins, Our Gal Sunday, Guiding Light, Wendy Warren and Aunt Jenny. The ten top programs of Saturday and Sunday daytime were The Shadow, Quick as a Flash, Stars Over Hollywood, Theater of Today, Let's Pretend, Tue Detective, Grand Central Station, Junior Miss, Counterspy and House of Mystery.¹¹

The preference seemed to lie with comedy, music and some form of drama, as the programs were selected by the listener. But this should be noted: no religious programs were listed, and this was particularly mystifying when the top ten programs for Saturday and Sunday daytime were studied, for the peak load of religious programs was on the weekend.¹²

11. "Benny at Top," Broadcasting Telecasting, LVI (February, 1949), 42.

12. Waldo Abbot, Handbook of Broadcasting, p. 96.

Individual surveys were carried on in certain sections of the country with particular attention given to the devotional program. In one interview survey conducted, the people were asked to rate fifteen different program types in order of preference. The devotional program, the major religious program of the present day, was placed, on the average, in thirteenth or fourteenth position.¹³ The telephone surveys, which sampled the actual listening, revealed that weekly devotional broadcasts had comparatively few listeners. As a matter of fact, the devotional program had even fewer listeners than the program which preceded it on the same station.¹⁴ In general then, the evidence revealed that the typical religious program, the Devotion, which is heard on the Monday-through-Saturday schedule, had very few listeners.

But these same telephone surveys revealed that musical and dramatic religious programs, such as "Hymns of all Churches," "Light of the World," "The Family Theater" and "The Greatest Story ever Told" reach audiences worthy of the mass medium.¹⁵

The Influence of Radio in the Secular Field.

The charge is often advanced that radio has value in the field of entertainment only, and has no great

13. Bachman, op. cit., p. 14.

14. Ibid., pp. 14-15.

15. Ibid., p. 16.

influence on the customs and social duties of the American public. While no one will deny radio's contribution to entertainment, its power in the community should not be underestimated.

The social importance of radio has grown with the development of the industry. The advent of radio has brought to the American listener social forces not available to him previous to that time. . . . It is significant to note that with the increase in the number of radio sets in the United States, there has been a one hundred per cent increase in the number of ballots cast in the national elections. It is not contended that radio is completely responsible for the increase in the number of citizens who exercise their franchise, but certainly radio's influence has been great in bringing direct to the public the candidates and their supporters' discussion of the issues involved.¹⁶

It should be clearly recognized that radio has assumed a vital place in the American life. It is no longer a fad or fancy, that soon will fade from the picture. A medium has arrived, is a recognized and tested social habit, for,

Radio is no longer the novelty it was up to very recently, when the seeming miracle of voice and music coming into the home via invisible ether waves was sufficient to command the interest of the listener regardless of the quality of the program. The novelty has worn off; we now accept radio as we accept air planes, talking pictures, and other scientific marvels. . . .¹⁷

Radio is an established force, and as such, is to be seriously regarded as one of the forces that molds American

16. Peter, op. cit., p. 6.

17. James Whipple, How to write for Radio, pp. 6-7.

public opinion and social customs.

An example of radio's weight and prestige as a community factor is demonstrated by newscaster Lyle Van's campaign via WOR against the ticket chiseling racket which brought action by the New York City Council strengthening the city's licensing law. Councilman Edward Vogel of Brooklyn admitted that his introduction of the amendment came as a direct result of Van's disclosures on the racketeering and that the adopted amendment should be called the "Lyle Van Bill."¹⁸

The Advantages Inherent in Radio Broadcasting

As the art of broadcasting developed, and as daring and unique forms of radio appeal were invented, it became apparent that radio carried within itself certain inherent advantages, not granted specifically to other media.

The very fact that radio became such a familiar and accepted American custom witnesses to the enormous advantages of radio over other media. There are several advantages which demand our attention here, and in the fore we find this, that radio appeals more to the emotions than to the intellect. Psychologically, our emotional drives are stronger than our intellectual ones, and radio radio peculiarly adapts itself to the emotional side of man.¹⁹ The intellect is not disregarded, however, but the emotional is so suited to radio that educational features are flavored and sugar-coated with varying emotions that the audience might more easily listen and swallow.

18. "Newscaster's Campaign Changes License Law," Radio Daily, XLVI (February 15, 1949), 3.

19. Albert Crews, Radio Production Directing, p. 14.

Radio also provides a very personalized message. In the case of radio drama particularly, because of the imaginative creation, the radio listener creates in his own mind, in terms of his own experience, the character, setting and details of the action. This extremely personalized message enables the listener to live the program more thoroughly, to experience the action more vividly, to appreciate the setting more intensely, and to live with the characters more intimately.²⁰

Radio also has an immediacy and speed not granted to other media.²¹ On-the-spot coverage of events is possible, and the dramatic is given to the listener while it remains drama, and not news. Intermediate means are not necessary for the listener; he can be reached with the latest happenings, with the world's outstanding music and drama, in the fraction of a second, whereas he may be unable to scan the latest newspaper, play his own records or read the latest novels and short stories. Radio becomes available with the turning of the knob, and the speedy and immediate message pervades the atmosphere of the home.

Many are now familiar with the station break given at the present time by the Columbia Broadcasting System: This is CBS, where ninety nine million people gather each week, the Columbia Broadcasting System. While this is

20. Lawton, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

21. Everett C. Parker, Elinor Inman, and Ross Snyder, Religious Radio What to do and How, p. x.

easily recognized as an advertising blurb, it undoubtedly contains an element of truth, and demonstrates aptly an enormous advantage of radio over every other media: radio has the audience! It does not cater to a specific clientele, but reaches out and grasps the attention of everyone from the cradle to the grave. And they listen, as we have seen earlier in the Chapter.

The great literature of the ages also lies open to radio; it can sift and collate, expand and compress, for "The principal problem is not scarcity of material, but the selection, adaptation and presentation of material in such a way as will contribute most effectively. . . "22

Radio is peculiarly adapted to that form of teaching in which the lesson to be learned is a by-product of a life-experience. Through this scientific marvel, the dead past may be made to live again and the cultural wealth of the ages brought to all men everywhere.²³

The Limitations of Radio Broadcasting

As there are advantages, so there are also disadvantages in radio broadcasting; radio is faced with certain limitations inherent within itself. It finds itself within certain confines beyond which it cannot go.

Primary among these limitations is this: radio plays to one sense only, for the visual has no part in radio. The scene of the drama or action exists only in the mind

22. Cline Koon, The Art of Teaching by Radio, Bulletin 1933, No. 4, p. 32.

23. Ibid., p. 29.

of the listener, and since it is the listener's own creation, it must be directed and guided into the desired channels.²⁴ Only the oral, the auidial, is perceptive in radio; all that is broadcast must be heard, for it cannot be seen.

It follows from this then that radio is not an ideal medium for expressing that which is inherently visual.²⁵ One has only to compare the radio description of a baseball game or parade with actual presence at the game or parade to realize the limitations. Again, the pageantry, glorious color and general atmosphere of the Tournament of Roses is not experienced by the radio listener in as high a degree as it is by the individual who is present. Certain actions and scenes become clear only when seen, and radio provides, in such cases, an unsatisfactory vicarious sensation.

Radio also finds itself confronted with the problem of making complex action clear to its audience.²⁶ As each listener creates the scene in his mind, the counter-current of plot and sub-plot tends to confuse and retard the mental vision. At best, the listener is given a series of individual "snapshots," individual scenes, which, when placed together logically, form a composite picture. The producer of the radio program strives to present simple

24. Ibid., p. 28.

25. Grews, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

26. Ibid.

scenes, to make the action and plot clear; the listener demands those simple scenes, lest the image be incomplete or distorted.

"The psychological effect of the crowded theater and the holiday mood are absent. . . "27 as the program is aired. In the theater or movie, a laugh or a tear in the audience will stimulate other laughter or tears.²⁸ But not so in radio. Here mass-psychology is almost totally absent. At the present time, many audience-participation programs are in vogue, in an attempt to counteract this limitation.

Nor is the listening audience itself any great help to the radio broadcaster. The appeal to one listener may mean boredom to another. Certain experiences will color the imagination of one, and still another will receive no mental image whatsoever. The prime element here is distraction.²⁹ The listener is met within his own world, a world of numerous distractions. The doorbell sounds, friends visit, the telephone rings, children play, and all will cause the listener to lose the thread of the program. Here is radio's greatest obstacle: the bored, shifty, distracted and "individual" individual.

Time itself provides a curb for the radio broadcaster.³⁰ The casual night-at-the-movies-or-opera spirit

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27. Koon, loc. cit.
 28. Lawton, loc. cit.
 29. Crews, loc. cit.
 30. Ibid.

is lacking, and the program producer must pack his theme and plot into the unalterable fifteen or thirty or sixty minutes. Curtain-time is at the split-second, and the assigned period cannot be lengthened. Between the opening and closing the program has its confines; it must tell its story and then very coldly "get off the air."

Within these confines we also find the radio dramatist. As radio is limited, he is limited; as he is limited, so radio is limited. The radio dramatist himself acknowledges that

It is very difficult to write radio plays. The radio dramatist must know the techniques of play construction, prepare the play so that it can be broadcast effectively, and understand the listener mind and methods of appealing to and holding attention and interest. Without gorgeous scenic effects the author's lines and the actor's skill must produce the desired mental reactions. Therefore, an even greater knowledge of psychology is needed by the radio playwright than is needed by the stage playwright. With a few well-chosen lines giving only the base essentials, the radio playwright must rely upon the ever-revolving stage of the imagination of the audience to create the scenic effects and set the invisible stage.³¹

Radio, like the tiny acorn, has grown into a mighty oak, casting its shade over the millions of the American people. As they possess their own radio sets, the program offerings become available with a twist-of-the-wrist, These listeners practice discriminatory dial selection, as they have decided likes and dislikes in their program selection. The results upon the listener are not in the

31. Koon, loc. cit.

field of entertainment only, for radio has proved to be a powerful force in the shaping of public opinion and the stimulation into action of the forces of government.

Radio, with its inherent advantages and limitations, has arrived; it is a powerful medium which cannot be ignored.

"God in God" of the American people. In the words of the survey,

It is notable that only 5% of the people think of God as intimate relative to their own lives. The remainder seem to regard Him as an impersonal, abstract element that designed the stars and administered the laws of gravitation.

Not all Americans have a specific belief about death and eternity, for,

The professed belief in some kind of afterlife, the former death as final extinction, and the refusal to express an opinion. Most of those who said they believed in life after death expressed a pleasant expectation of reward for a good life and reunion with loved ones.

There were several other important evaluations from this survey: a) nearly three-quarters of the American people did not automatically connect religion with their judgments of right and wrong, b) eighty per cent, or eight out of every ten Americans felt that the problems confronting America and America could be solved by complete adherence to the laws of God, and c) eighty per cent, or eight out of every ten

Survey by Dr. Vernon Barnhart, "God and the American People," in The American Signal, Summer 1941, pp. 1-10.

III. The Present Role of the Church in Radio.

In 1948 the Ladies' Home Journal sponsored a nationwide survey in an attempt to find the reality of the "faith in God" of the American people. In the words of the survey,

It is notable that only 26% of the people think of God in intimate relation to their own lives. The remainder seem to regard Him as an impersonal abstract element that designed the atom and administers the laws of gravitation.¹

Nor did Americans have a specific belief about death and eternity, for,

73% professed belief in some kind of afterlife, 15% foresaw death as final extinction, and 12% refused to express an opinion. Most of those who said they believed in life after death expressed a pleasant expectation of reward for a good life and reunion with loved ones.²

There were several other important conclusions from this survey: a) nearly three-quarters of the American public did not consciously connect religion with their judgments of right and wrong, b) eighty per cent, or eight out of every ten Americans felt that the problems confronting America and Americans could be solved by complete adherence to the Law of Love, and c) eighty per cent, or eight out of every ten

1. Lincoln Barnett, "God and the American People," in The Reader's Digest, condensed from the Ladies' Home Journal, LIV (January, 1949), 33.

2. Ibid., pp. 33-34.

Americans actually believed that they were following that Law of Love.³

Howard Gray Bartling summarized the spiritual condition of the American people in this manner:

Apathy in religious worship is rapidly diminishing attendance of Church and Sunday Schools.

Conditions in this country are changing. We are faced with readjustment, not only of our own social and business lives, but also of our spiritual existence.

People are in a disturbed mental state. Destructive forces are steadily lining up to combat the principles and teachings of religions in these turbulent times. Chief among such forces are Communism; Governmental decrees; atheism; and the pleasures of a fast moving, restless and hysterical world. The combination of such factors has caused our people to lose interest in their churches and religions. Religion, in fact, is facing one of the most important battles it has ever waged for its existence.

This is a most startling situation when we consider that our children, the future leaders of this nation, are unconsciously absorbing communistic teachings antagonistic to religion, law, order and morality. The effect of this pernicious influence must be nullified.⁴

John W. Bachman wrote, "We know that many of those homes (of the 95% of the American homes that listen to the radio) are unchurched, many are seldom visited by a pastor, and many have little access to religious publications."⁵

Present Religious Radio Programs

What is being done to combat this spiritual deficiency of the American people? The schedule of the religious radio programs at the present time includes some extraordinary

3. Ibid., p. 36.

4. Putting the Bible on the air, p. 7.

5. Bachman, op. cit., p. 13.

Biblical Drama.

One of the most familiar of these is the "Light of the World." This religious program is produced by

Trans-American and is commercially sponsored by General Mills over a National Broadcasting Company hookup. It was first broadcast in March, 1940.⁶

"This is far more than a radio program. . . . It is an opportunity for us all to spend the essential message of love and forgiveness and mercy. . . we bring you nothing new; we merely put a modern frame around truth which is timeless."⁷ In these words of the author and editor Fulton Oursler, the American Broadcasting Company, under the sponsorship of the Goodyear Rubber Company, plugged its newest show, "The Greatest Story Ever Told," on January 24, 1947."

Early in 1940 the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the British Broadcasting Company invited Miss Dorothy Sayers to write a cycle of radio plays on the life of our Lord. The twelve programs, entitled, "The Man Born to be King," were presented once each month during the year 1942 and again at shorter intervals in 1943.⁸

On Easter Day, April 6, 1947, the Columbia Broadcasting System presented what was announced as Radio's first Passion Play, "The Son of Man." The selections from

6. Louis Minsky et al., "Religious Broadcasts," Education on the air, Josephine H. MacLatchy, ed., Thirteenth Yearbook of the Institute for Education by Radio, 249.

7. "Gospel for Radio," Newsweek, XXIX (February 3, 1947), 64.

8. Fred Eastman, Christ in the Drama, pp. 151-152.

the King James Version were made by Archibald MacLeish, poet and former Assistant Secretary of State, who also wrote a brief introduction. The occasion was a special, single religious broadcast.⁹

"The Eternal Light" is produced each week by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in behalf of American Jewry. It is generally conceded to be not only one of the best religious programs on the air, but also one of the leading dramatic shows in all radio.¹⁰

"The Radio Edition of the Bible" might also be mentioned, which is commercially sponsored, but it is important here to make the following observation with respect to these outstanding religious programs: only the program "The Eternal Light" is the undertaking and accomplishment of a religious body! All others were either sponsored by the network itself or by commercial interests.

The church is in evidence on the networks, however. But its contribution lies chiefly in the realm of the devotional-type program. According to one survey, "64 per cent of the programs of the Councils of Churches reporting are devotional in character--which means their principal element is talk."¹¹ As we have seen in the previous chapter, the peak load of religious programs on

9. "Witnesses of the Resurrection," *Newsweek*, "XXIX (April 14, 1947), 80.

10. Parker *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 ff.

11. *Ibid.*

the American radio station lies between ten and twelve o'clock on Sundays.

Following this same line, the "Family Worship Hour" was recently transcribed for use all over the country.

In the words of Wilbert E. Scheer,

The Family Worship Hour broadcasts feature a fifteen-minute daily devotion consisting of prayers, inspirational music, and quiet meditations presented with complete anonymity. All speakers, the choir, and the announcers submerge their identities in order that listeners might feel the presence of no one but Jesus. The program is not identified with any denomination but is designed for all who want to have within their home a family worship centered about Christ.¹²

The Attitude of the Church toward Radio

With its constant emphasis on only one aspect of the radio medium, the "talk", the church has ignored completely the time element of the program from the listener's point of view.

A recently completed survey of broadcasting by Councils of Churches in the United States shows that the bulk of weekday programs, which constitute over 50 per cent of the total religious programs on the air, are broadcast during the morning and early afternoon hours. . . . There is no daily religious broadcast presented by any of these Councils in the period from 5:30 PM to 10:00 PM.¹³

Nor has the church taken cognizance of the audience. Fifty per cent or more of the religious programs on the air were scheduled at a time when the audience was composed

12. Wilbert E. Scheer, "Family Worship Hour," The American Lutheran, XXXII (January, 1949), 26.

13. Parker, et al., op. cit., p. 5.

almost entirely of women. And yet, the Councils of the Churches did not report a single weekly program series conducted by or for women!¹⁴ The pulse of the audience was not considered as the Church faced the radio medium.

As the church views the limitations and advantages of radio, as it undertakes its program of Message-sending, as it considers its own program offering, it will see the bitter truth of the survey and analysis of Everett C. Parker:

In most religious broadcasts, there is too much talk -- that is, preaching and exhortation -- and too little use of other radio techniques of proved effectiveness, such as dramatization, forums, round table discussions, and great music. The talk is not only excessive in quantity, but, on the average, not very good in quality. The religious program too often impresses the critical listener as being a cheap show, with too much sentimentality, too little artistry. . . .¹⁵

In an attempt to explain the low listener interest rating of its devotional programs, and to justify its present use of radio, the charge has often been levelled by religious leaders that the devotional programs were scheduled at such times that few people were able to listen.

There is an element of truth in this charge. But it must be remembered that the broadcaster considered only the low listener interest rating, and scheduled the

14. Ibid., p. 6.

15. "Religious Radio Programs Need Much Improvement," The Christian Century, LXI (February 16, 1944), 197.

programs accordingly. In advertising circles, a religious program of the devotional nature is considered the most undesirable spot on the schedule, and most advertisers object to having their programs follow one.¹⁶ Because of the low listener interest rating, broadcasting executives scathingly refer to devotional programs as "audience dissipators."¹⁷ It is, of course, an open question as to whether or not the time schedule would improve the listener rating of the devotional program. But this will still not eliminate the previous charge that religious programs are "cheap," with too much "talk."

The spiritual condition of the American people is such that the church must recognize its duty. But again, to recognize the duty, and to fulfill it, these are objects of different colors. The attitude of the church, of its leaders, toward radio is, one might say, an attitude of indifference. The duty has been recognized in part, perhaps, but the result has been the over-exaggerated emphasis on the "talk." The audience in radio has been completely disregarded, and leaders for and in religious radio have not been trained. This attitude of the church has been adequately summarized in the following:

16. C.M. Crowe, "Religion on the Air," The Christian Century, LXI (August 23, 1944), 974.

17. Bachman, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

In spite of the fact that the radio affords the most powerful medium of mass influence in history, with opportunity to reach a vast, heterogeneous audience untouched by conventional Church activities, its use by religious leaders has been lamentably unintelligent and ineffective. The typical preaching and devotional type programs have a rightful place on networks and local station schedules but they need much improvement and they need to be supplemented by other types of religious broadcasts. Regardless of how popular a preacher may be, these programs often lack the common touch, the dramatic mass appeal which is the genius of radio.¹⁸

Such sentiments are not peculiar to one writer, however, for another criticizes in this manner:

Back of the failure to develop or show cognizance of the spiritual aspect of what goes over the radio is not only indifference to the spiritual aspect of our life and culture, but an antipathy to it, unconscious, I believe, in most instances, but conscious in enough instances to be important. No person informed on radio will deny that there has been little, if any, consideration given to the spiritual aspects of this extra-ordinary invention and development.¹⁹

The Duty of the Church to Radio

This attitude of the church shows a neglect of duty. The radio has added a new dimension to the ministry, and has widened the scope of the influence of the religious group. The church no longer exists within the four walls of a building, and the minister no longer is pastor only to those whose names are on the membership list of his church. The radio demands that all become ministers

18. Crowe, loc. cit.

19. George H. Payne, "Radio Programs Throttle the Spiritual," America, LVIII (October 16, 1937), 28.

to the total community. Radio emphasizes that the church is not an exclusive institution for the benefit of registered members only, but is the Christian Gospel and Christian people penetrating the surrounding life of the community.²⁰

Radio offers the Church a greater opportunity to carry out the command of Jesus, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations. . . ." ²¹ The radio will not and cannot replace the church and the group-spreading of the Gospel-Message, but it will and can prove to be one of the most effective media ever given to man. The failure to use such a mass medium in an intelligent and constructive manner implies a refusal to carry out the command of Jesus to teach all peoples!

More concretely, the church has a duty to present the Gospel to three types of listeners: a) those who approve of religious broadcasts, b) those who are indifferent but not unfriendly, and c) those who are positively hostile to religious programs.²² The church serves the first group, after a fashion, seeking to lead them to a higher level and to confirm and establish those who are already favorable to its message. But the Church has neglected its duty to the other two groups,

20. Parker et al., op. cit., p. ix.

21. Matt. 28:19.

22. Dorothy L. Sayers, The Man Born to be King, p. 11.

who find that they can live without God, for whom the language of religion has lost its meaning, who have a great ignorance of the Christian faith, and yet, who still are dissatisfied with materialism.

In actually assuming its responsibility the Church then will beam its message of help to the emerging vitalities of our age: the veteran and his family, the working man, the manager class, the farmer, adults in the first ten years of married life, the puzzled and caught present generation of young people, the school children of junior and high school age, and family groups.²³

As the church thus undertakes to fulfill her duty of teaching all the nations the Gospel of Jesus, it is essential that she first re-examine the word "teach." By this is meant the controlling and regulating of experience so that the "learner" is guided into the desired channels of facts, events, attitudes and emotional responses. The church has emphasized only the "preach" experience, and has ignored the other aspects and possibilities. The church has been unconscious of the possibilities radio offers in applying the "teach-command" of Jesus to its listeners.

In attempting to clear the spiritual darkness from the American people, the church has neglected the

23. Parker et al., op. cit., p. 5.

possibilities of radio almost completely. It has emphasized only its concept of "teach," "talk" and "preach," without seriously considering the opportunities offered by radio itself. In this manner the ray of light which can pierce the darkness has been shaded and diffused, so that many are unable even to see it. Radio Biblical Drama is one means among many for the lifting of the veil which masks the religious radio programs of the present day.

IV. Advantages and Types of Radio Biblical Drama

Radio Biblical Drama is an important and necessary means which must be considered as the Church undertakes to "teach" the Gospel. It should be noted, however, that it is but one of many possibilities in the radio medium. Radio Biblical Drama heads the list of the following possibilities: religious music programs; advice on personal problems; spot announcements with facts and sayings; miniature five minute talks; religious episodes and prayers; sermons; reviews of religious books; great religious dramas; religious news broadcasts; dramatizations of current religious novels; religious stories for children; and social action topics.¹

Advantages of Radio Biblical Drama

Radio Biblical Drama deals with a variety of topics, covers a wide range of life-experience, and thus presents, in many cases, the Christian attitude toward, and answers for, real living problems. The basic motivations for human conduct never change; only the scene, characters and situation remain in a constant state of transformation. Many will become acquainted with the Word of God through

1. John K. Hough, "The Greatest Story Ever Told," in Education on the Air, O. Joe Olson, ed., Seventeenth Yearbook of the Institute for Education by Radio, p. 342.

interest-catching Radio Biblical Drama, and God Himself has promised that His Word will not return void.

Closely allied with this is the entrance of the Word of God into unchurched homes. Many who will turn off the Devotional program will listen to the dramatized Bible Story, because it is drama. And the underlying message will enter the ear and transfix the heart. Here is an entrance into that home which cannot be reached in any other way or manner.

These dramatizations of the Bible will also give the blind, the bed-ridden, and shut-ins something that heretofore has been denied them. They can hear the spoken word, feel the drama, visualize the characters and settings, and absorb the lessons imparted.²

Children receive their share of Gospel-Message also, for the seemingly un-living creatures of another age are suddenly human beings, in understandable human situations. They speak human words, and bring a freshness and vitality into the Bible Stories as children know them.³ The three to five hours of daily listening then is utilized by the Church. Truth enters the mind, and replaces the former attitude of fable and story.

The testimonial letters received by various producers of Radio Biblical Drama demonstrate forcibly the value

2. Putting the Bible on the Air, p. 14.

3. Rita Benton, The Bible Play Workshop, p. 14.

of this technique. Here is a letter a father wrote about a test program for "The Radio Edition of the Bible":

We have, according to my personal knowledge, within the past fifty years, distributed many kinds of Biblical literature to the four corners of this earth, in our attempts to interest everyone in the Bible.

It has indeed been most disappointing that more children's interest could not be awakened. We have tried to make the printed religious literature for children more appealing, and we have used beautifully illustrated and splendidly colored books so that their childish minds might more thoroughly grasp the stories, and become interested in them. But, I long ago decided that it was too much to expect of their childish minds, until one Sunday, when the test broadcast of a Bible Story came into our home over the radio. I sat and watched the reactions of my children. The result was gratifying to me.

My children had frequently heard us read about the Biblical characters who were to them, I assume, purely fictional personages because they could neither be seen or heard, and consequently were more or less mythical people who lived in a dim and a hazy past beyond the comprehension of their little minds.

The Bible Story broadcast that Sunday to which I refer, enabled my children to actually hear the voices of those characters they had read about, and who had been described to them at Church and Sunday School. Consequently, they had been instantly changed from fictional, mythical personages into apparently real, live, pulsating people, and the truths of the Bible and its stories were more indelibly printed.

It is my candid opinion that those proposed Sunday Broadcast Stories which are so cleverly arranged, judging from the ones I heard, will constitute the greatest step forward in the way of religious education. They are impressive, interesting, thrilling, convincing and more forcibly emphasized than anything that has been advanced in the past 50 years.⁴

But the influence of Radio Biblical Drama does not stop with children. A British listener wrote this to

4. Putting the Bible on the Air, pp. 13-14.

Dorothy Sayers:

Your play, *The Man Born To Be King*, is quite changing the atmosphere in our house, and where there has been resentment and criticism, we can feel it all dying away in the presence of Christ. I am sure this is true in every home where this program is heard.⁵

Types of Radio Biblical Drama

There are numerous variations within the field of Radio Biblical Drama. It is not limited to a single program which is entitled "drama," but rather it contains countless possibilities which enhance this valuable technique of "teaching." It will be impossible to explore every technique available in Radio Biblical Drama; only basic patterns will be considered, which then radiate into innumerable patterns and variations. The most important of these basic patterns are: First Person Narration, Second Person Narration, Third Person Narration, the Dramatic Narrative, Narration-Dialogue Alternation, and the "You are There" dramatic production.

First Person Narration

PAUL: I am Paul, a Jew, born in Tarsus, but brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed in the Law of our Fathers, and zealous for God. I was a Pharisee, and lived after the strictest sect of our religion. I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus. And this I did. I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, and punishing them oftentimes, I strove to make them blaspheme;

5. Eastman, loc. cit.

and I cast my vote against those that were put to death. And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities. Then -- I journeyed to Damascus, with the authority and commission of the chief Priest, that if I found any that were of The Way, whether men or women, I might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, that as I made my journey, and drew nigh to Damascus; that at midday there suddenly shone from heaven a great light round me. . . .⁶

This type of drama utilizes one of the most effective kinds of narration. The listener gets the impression of meeting someone who knows what he is talking about.⁷ As a matter of fact, he meets the character who is directly involved in the action, and in this manner is able to receive a clear and vivid first-person account of the episode. Great characters are able to tell their own stories, explain their own emotions and actions, and the listener is able to see, feel and evaluate as if he were present with the character.

Second Person Narration

NARRATOR: Your name is James Cohen. Age, 16. Color, white. Hair, black. You're not tall and not heavy...you weigh about a hundred and thirty pounds. You live in America, on this street, 163 Melrose Avenue.... you and your father and mother.... in this small cottage. It's June 28th, and you, Jimmy Cohen, are going swimming. Arnie is going with you, Arnold Kaplan that is, your friend from next door. There are a number of beaches in South Boston, and you and Arnie have

6. "Proclaim on the Housetops," from The Radio Edition of the Bible, quoted in Parker, et al., op. cit., p. 148.

7. Parker et al., op. cit., p. 148.

decided to go to South Beach. Already you can feel the sand between your toes... the warm sun tanning your shoulders. You close your eyes and see the clear, cold, sparkling water.

You, Jimmy Cohen, are going swimming! This is going to be a wonderful day! You agree to meet Arnie in five minutes, and rush up the steps to your home... your hand fumbles with the lock... the door comes open, you rush through...

SOUND: DOOR SLAMS

And you yell...

JIM: Mother? Mother? D' Y'know where m'towel 'n'trunks are? Arnie and I are going swimming!

NARR: Your mother comes out of the kitchen, drying her hands on the corner of her apron, a question on her lips, but you hurry on with...

JIM: It's all right, Mum. Arnie has been there before...⁸

Second Person Narration was developed during the war by writers of the Columbia Broadcasting System in the series, "The Man Behind the Gun." This technique employs the "you" and "your" approach: "You do this," "You say that." The use of this kind of narration is really an invitation to the listener to identify himself with the actor, to become the person who is experiencing the action.⁹ The use of the present tense augments this experience, for the listener does not find himself listening, but experiencing.

Third Person Narration

CHRONICLER: Now believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, insomuch that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches,

8. Darrell Helmers, "Neighbors All," unpublished ms.
9. Parker, et al., loc. cit.

that as Peter came by, at least his shadow might overshadow someone of them. But the High Priest, and all that were with him, were filled with indignation, and called the council together, and all the Senate. (MURMUR IN) And laying hands on the apostles, they had them brought -- but without violence, for they feared the people. (MURMUR UP, THEN QUIETS)

PRIEST: We commanded you not to teach in this name: and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

CHRONICLER: Peter answered:

PETER: We must obey God rather than man. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus who was crucified. Him did God exalt to be a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things.

CHRONICLER: The Council, when they heard this, were enraged, and minded to slay them. . . 10

"There are many kinds of Third Person Narration available to the radio writer. Probably one of the most common is the impersonal Voice, (listed on the script as either narrator or announcer) who introduces the program, shifts the scenery between episodes on radio's imaginary stage, and then sums up or recapitulates before the signing off of the program."¹¹ This will perhaps become ever clearer in the light of the following example:

SOUND: COINS CLINKING AS DROPPED INTO A BOX

NARRATOR: Do you hear that, boys and girls? You're right, that's money dropping into a box... pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, fifty cent pieces --- your money and mine. Every time those coins jingle, they carry a certain meaning... food to someone starving, clothing to someone freezing, medicine to someone dying. Every time these coins jingle, they ring out a message of help

10. Ibid., p. 149.

11. Ibid.

for some poor helpless person. Listen:
 SOUND: COINS DROPPING INTO BOX: INTO DOOR SLAM
 MALE VOICE I: (URGENTLY) Nurse! (LOUDER)
 Oh, Nurse! . . . 12

THE Dramatic Narrative

NARRATOR: When the Lord God created Adam and Eve,
 He made them holy --- perfect --- they could
 do no wrong. Then He planted a Garden in Eden,
 and placed Adam and Eve in this Garden. He
 gave them careful instructions regarding
 the care of the Garden:

MUSIC: CHORDS, BUILD UP BENEATH

NARR: (RHYTHMICALLY TO MUSIC) Of every tree of
 the Garden thou mayest freely eat....
 but of the tree of the knowledge of good
 and evil --- thou shalt not eat of it,
 for on the day when thou eatest thereof,

MUSIC: STING

NARR: Thou shalt surely die! (SLIGHT PAUSE)
 So Adam and Eve cared for the Garden of
 Eden. And they ate of the fruit of the
 trees in the Garden, but remembering
 God's command, they avoided eating of
 the fruit of the tree of the knowledge
 of good and evil. . . . 13

The Dramatic Narrative is nothing more than a
 dramatic reading with a musical background. The music
 creates and emphasizes the mood, and the narrator carries
 the burden of the entire program. This program technique
 is of note particularly for it requires a limited cast.
 This by no means affects the appeal of the program, how-
 ever, and in certain Bible Stories it is very often preferred
 over the other techniques available. The Dramatic Narrative
 has become popular in young children's programs, in order
 not to complicate the action and confuse the children
 with numerous characters and sub-plots.

12. Darrell Helmers, "The Helping Hand," from The Christian School of the Air.

13. Darrell Helmers, The Fall into Sin, unpublished ms.

Narration-Dialogue Alternation

NARRATOR: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. God said: "Let there be light!" And there was light.

MUSIC: STING, OUT FOR

NARR: And God saw that the light was good, and He called the light day.

MUSIC: LIGHT MELODY, UP AND UNDER

MOTHER: (OFF) Tommy! It's time to get up! Come on!

TOM: (YAWNS) But I'm still sleepy, Mother.

MOTHER: (CLOSER) You can take a nap later in the morning. (PLEADING) Oh, come on! It's really a beautiful day out.

MUSIC: SIMPLE CHORDS, OUT FOR

NARR: And the darkness God called night.

MUSIC: SOFT LULLABY, UP AND UNDER

MOTHER: Tommy, it's getting late. Night is the time for little boys to be in bed.

TOM: Will you hear my prayers, Mother? . . . 14

This technique employs a third person narrator, but he alternates with dialogue, and thus a present-day, understandable explanation is provided for the words of the narrator. The entire drama is made up of these alternations, or, if you will, explanations by dialogue of the words of the narrator. Certain Bible Stories lend themselves to this technique very readily, and are valuable, not only for the explanation given, but also for the interest-stimulation to the listener.

"You Are There" Dramatic Production

SOUND: TELETYPE MACHINE

NARR: Today we turn back the hands of time to the

14. Darroll Helmers, The Creation of the World, unpublished ms.

year 29 A.D. -- to the country of Palestine -- to the city of Jerusalem. (SLIGHT PAUSE) And now, imagine that you are going with us in memory to Jerusalem, where members of the KFUCO News Department are waiting to describe for you some of the things that happened in the year 29 A.D.
COME IN, JERUSALEM!

VOICE (REPORTERS) SLIGHTLY MUFFLED, AS IF SHORTWAVED

REPORTER 1: This is Jerusalem. We have set up our KFUCO microphones here in beautiful, golden Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine... Jerusalem, the city of the Jews... Jerusalem, teeming with people, people who are choking its narrow, twisting, winding streets.

We speak to you from our vantage point in one of the towers of the Fortress Antonia, looking out over the city of Jerusalem. The window from which we view the scene is some sixty feet above the ground. The city of Jerusalem lies at our very feet... sprawled out before our eyes.

Jerusalem is not a large city. Reportedly it covers only about three hundred acres.... which would make it about three-quarters of a mile long, and a half mile wide. It is built on four hills---each of which forms a corner of the city. Fortress Antonia is built on a hill in the North-east corner of the city. Directly in front of us, on the slope of the South-eastern hill of the city, is the most magnificent building we've ever seen. It is the famous temple. It rises -- terrace upon terrace -- surrounded by massive walls, a glittering spectacle of marble and gold. . . 15

This "You Are There" technique has become popular in the last several years on CBS, and recently the title was changed from "CBS IS There" to "You Are There." This production is of particular value in the realm of setting and realism. The listener is unaware that he is receiving a rather thorough description of past places and events as

15. Darrell Helmers, "Time Returns," from The Christian School of the Air, February 27, 1948.

the reporter retreats into the past and offers its history as present news. The listener sees through the eyes of the reporter on the scene, and even imagines that he is helping make the news! The realism of the production carries with it a spice that makes it palatable to all age groups of the listening audience.

The foregoing are but a few of the endless variations possible in the presentation of Radio Biblical Drama. Different stories will lend themselves more easily to one or the other of these basic types of drama, depending to a great deal on the ingenuity and capabilities of the writer. But these techniques are available, and are different enough, one from the other, to provide an interesting, stimulating and varied approach.

The techniques available for Radio Biblical Drama, for spreading the Word of God, are limited only by the abilities and intelligence of the writer and producer of the program.

V. Basic Considerations in the Writing of the Radio Drama

Every drama has basic fundamentals which must be present if it is to have the label "drama." These are: title, theme, plot, conflict, characters, beginning, middle and end.¹ Remove any of these unremovables and the drama sags and disintegrates. Within these essentials the radio playwright works; they are as necessary to his successful script as are the intelligence, ability, pen and paper which he utilizes.

General Principles of Writing

The guideposts for attracting and holding the attention of a radio audience, and for producing a successful radio drama are numerous. Among the more important of these are the following: 1) Catch listener attention in the first twenty seconds, by novelty sound, theme music, interest-challenging statement or provocative dialogue; 2) In the first minute of the script arouse the curiosity of the listener in what is to follow; 3) Direct the program to the audience most likely to be listening. Keep in mind what the majority of the listeners are likely to be doing while listening to the program. Try to fit the program to the supposed mental state of the listeners; 4) Keep in mind the limitations of listeners both in terms

1. Whipple, op. cit., p. 10.

of vocabulary and experience. Don't ask listeners to make mental expeditions too far beyond the range of their power;

- 5) Include listener participation, if it is nothing more than keeping time to music, laughter, using paper and pencil, or, even more valuable, an emotional response, a desire to 'do something about it;'
- 6) Visualize scenes and people before beginning the action, that is, set the stage;
- 7) Establish each voice and sound clearly. Listeners should not be left wondering who a speaker is or what a sound is. Motivate beforehand all future behavior of a character;
- 8) Make each line of dialogue as short as possible and to the point, without hurting characterizations or dramatization;
- 9) Write the script so it 'flows.' Even more essential than on the stage or in a moving picture, because of the limited time and holding power, the lines of a radio script should advance the plot or the subject matter steadily toward the climax;
- 10) Include variety in the script. No actor or group of actors should be asked to carry a scene longer than interest in a particular situation can be maintained, about two minutes;
- 11) Remind the listeners continually of others present in the individual scene, even if they are not speaking;
- 12) Prepare the listeners for sounds and actions in advance; that is, if the Indians are coming, anticipation of the sound of hoofbeats must be built up in advance;
- 13) Write the dialogue so the characters speak in character, for residents of a particular place

should speak like residents of that place; 14) Prepare the listener at the beginning for any offer which is used at the close of a broadcast; 15) Make the directions for the Production Director and the Music Director ample and clear.²

There are also certain unwritten laws for the playwright in the number of characters which he is to employ in the drama. The entire production should contain no more than six characters, if possible. At no time should there be more than four characters involved in a single conversation. The voice and vocabulary contrast should then make the character individualistic, so that he or she can be instantly distinguished by the listener. The characters are also to be real, and not burlesqued, and it is well to give each character a suitable, characteristic expression of words, which tie in directly with the whims, habits and total personality projected through the radio speaker. The problem of minor characters must also be faced, and here the dramatist follows the rule that minor characters are introduced and used only when they are needed for the development of the plot and dramatic action.³

In writing for radio, sound words must be used wherever possible. Certain words, generally adjectives, lend themselves admirably to radio, and among them are the following: "gay," "sparkling," "scintillating," "delightful,"

2. Abbot, op. cit., p. 10; Parker, et al., op. cit., pp. 71-98

3. Abbot, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

"dreary," "gloomy," "haunting," etc. Sound words create the desired picture in the mind of the listener and demand no further elaboration.

No better example of such words can be found than in the opening lines of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." "During the whole of a dull, dark and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the cloud hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher." In one sentence Poe has said more than the average writer would say in several pages. He has set his stage, created his atmosphere and forecast something of his story. The words in this sentence are so carefully chosen that their every sound is indicative of the mood of the play.⁴

The radio drama, because of its brevity, should not have too many scenes that cause confusing transitions, nor should it have too many acts. Before the writer begins the script, there must be a carefully planned outline of the plot either on paper or in his mind, listing the scenes and the action. The problem is to be developed in the first scene, and each of the ensuing scenes should then create or remove the obstacles to the successful solution of the problem. The final scene then should provide the solution to the problem.⁵ The play need not necessarily provide a "happy ending," the solution may be completely negative, depending entirely upon the desired emotional response in the listener. The dramatist

4. Gwendolyn Jenkins and William E. Knepper, Drama on the Air, p. 16.

5. Abbot, op. cit., p. 106.

constantly works in the knowledge that it is difficult to maintain listener-interest in a specific scene with specific characters any longer than two minutes.

The transition from scene to scene, which will be discussed briefly in this chapter under "music" and "sound effects" demands a stroke of genius from the dramatist, although it often appears to be simply accomplished. It is the duty of the transition to shift the action from one scene to another in time, location, or both, and advance the story structurally, all the while making it easily comprehensible to the listener-audience. Five general methods of transition are available in the radio drama:

1. Atmospherically by music;
2. Expositionally by music;
3. Acoustically by sound effects;
4. Dramatically by voice-fades;
5. Directly by a cued-pause (dead air).⁶

The playwright indicates his idea and preference on the script, and very often the production director and the music director abide by the thought, unless it does not provide the desired effect.

Almost every radio drama uses some form of an impersonal narrator. Oftentimes he provides the transition from scene to scene and act to act. The danger for the radio writer comes, however, not in the use of the narrator, but in leaving too much important action to be explained by him. It is axiomatic that the narrator can

6. Max Wylie, Radio Writing, p. 72.

set the stage for the scene, but within reason he is not to develop the plot or explain the moods or situation. More concretely, the narrator is to explain action which cannot effectively be put into dialogue; he is to summarize incidental action; he is to summarize action which covers a long span of time; and finally, he is to give the details of settings, time, shifts and costumes.⁷ If the narrator plays a more important role than this in the radio drama, he ceases to be a narrator, and becomes instead an important member of the cast of characters in the scene.

The beginning of the play, whether it is in the words of the narrator, or of a character, or in some other form of introduction, is of vital importance. During the first moments the listener decides whether he wishes to remain tuned to the station, and he should be put in the right mood to cooperate in the reception of the plot that is to follow.⁸ No radio drama has ever been rescued by a good last scene. If the beginning does not hold the attention, there will be no listeners around for the climax. Thus the radio dramatist pitches hard for the opening scene or the opening block of narration. This must be arresting. It must capture the listener, hold him, and promise good things to come.⁹ This can be accomplished by any one of several ways: the swift development of a situation, a powerful atmosphere, an intriguing or unfamiliar

7. Lawton, op. cit., p. 36.

8. Abbot, op. cit., p. 107.

9. Wishengrad, op. cit., p. xxiii.

setting, an authentically familiar setting, or by a striking characterization.¹⁰ The following excerpt was the beginning of a highly successful radio drama:

(SOUND OF A CAT HISSING AND SNARLING...KICK)

VOICE: Scat!

NARRATOR: He was the meanest man in town.¹¹

In a single line the narrator has done a job of character interpretation and of opening the drama, which might have required a lengthy scene to accomplish in dialogue.

The radio dramatist labors within the confines of these general writing rules. They become, with practice, his second nature, which are almost unconsciously applied to his radio writing. He must, obviously, follow these rules if his contribution is to be of a worthwhile nature. It should be remembered, however, that these considerations come only with practice, and are not the innate possession of any writer.

Music in the Radio Drama

The functions of music in the radio drama are these: to aid the imagination in setting the scene, to heighten the dramatic effect, and to keep the listener's attention focused on the program.¹² Although music produces its own intoxication, it is only a frame. It should not call attention to itself except when it is assuming the function of a character in the drama, e.g., except when music is

10. Wylie, op. cit., p. 14.

11. Parker, et al., op. cit., p. 145.

12. Ibid., p. 185.

featured alone, or is "in the clear."¹³ The use of music for music's sake, for the pleasure of the listener, is totally absent in the dramatic program. The music which is available to the radio writer can be classed under these three headings: Opening, Background and Transitional.

On the radio, the preceding program is always the prelude. The program must get under way immediately, and the "opening" music, if it is used, must compel attention. It should be bright, strong, attractive; it should say to the listener: "Wake up! Listen to me! I'm the start of something worthwhile!"¹⁴ The radio writer should indicate the type of music he thinks is necessary, and should also provide the warning for the transition from the opening music to the opening words of the script. The organ, recording, transcription, choir or orchestra should be faded down slowly to the proper level of background for the speaker. The opening music must never be dropped suddenly or illogically from the volume spotlight to background level.¹⁵ While this is the problem primarily of the music director and the engineer, the writer should also indicate such necessary music fades on the script.

"Background" music can be used in many ways to enhance a program's effectiveness. But its use must always be artful, not a trick resorted to in the hope of making the program seem better than it really is. Sometimes a

13. Wishengrad, op. cit., p. xxxii.

14. Parker, et al., op. cit., p. 194.

15. Ibid., p. 195.

speaker's voice may be backed by music; but far too often the effect is theatrical rather than dramatic.¹⁶ Background music should always consist of tone, not melody. A familiar melody will set the listener's mind to following the music instead of the words being spoken.¹⁷ If the music is lively, or if it is full of music figures, it will call attention away from the words to itself. In the competition that will follow, the listener will be aware of neither, but only of the conflict.¹⁸ While the playwright will again indicate his preference either for or against background music, the decision as to where it will be used will ultimately depend upon the program director.

In the "transition" music, bridge or mood music, melody and theme are highly important. Shifts of mood between one scene and the next can easily be indicated by changing from one theme to another, generally by starting with "theme one," intermingling "theme two" with it, then concluding with "theme two" alone. Sometimes even the simple device of shifting from one key to another will effectively indicate the transition, the lapse of time, or the change of mood.¹⁹ This type of music should seldom exceed thirty seconds, or the mood is destroyed, and the transition loss irreparable.²⁰

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Wishengrad, op. cit., pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

19. Parker, et al., op. cit., p. 196.

20. Whipple, op. cit., p. 45.

If the radio dramatist is to indicate the type and kind of music he prefers in his script, he must be familiar with the numerous possibilities. Radio has its own peculiar terminology for the various classes and types available: comedy music, elegaic, exotic, festive, dramatic (agitato), dramatic (andante), impressive, light-graceful, love themes, nature themes, neutral, religious, slumber and children's themes, special characters and situations, speed (hurries), moods of the sea, and triumphant.²¹ These are the general classifications into which the radio writer dips to indicate his preferences in transitions, background and opening music on the dramatic program.

Sound Effects in the Radio Drama

The intelligent use of sound effects enables the listener to be present in imagination wherever the writer desires him to be -- in the jungle, aboard ship, at a baseball game, in an automobile wreck or high above the skies in an airplane. They enhance the dramatic action -- and create an effect of realism. . . .²²

There is a primary rule for sound effects which every radio dramatist must learn thoroughly: if sound does not clarify a piece of stage business, if sound does not emphasize or fix a spoken line, if sound does not intensify the atmosphere, it does not belong in the script.²³ Perhaps the best rule for the writer to follow is that he is to use a sound effect only when it is absolutely

21. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

22. Ibid., p. 37.

23. Wylie, op. cit., p. 39.

necessary. With the exception of those sounds which identify themselves, as footsteps, doors opening and closing, the sounds must be identified in advance. This identification in advance neutralizes the effect of surprise upon the listener-audience.²⁴

As the dramatist indicates the sound cues on his script, there are several "don'ts" which he must observe. He must never use adjectives or adverbs in the sound cue, unless those adjectives and adverbs qualify either perspective or volume. He must never use a sound cue to indicate the physical action or intention of a character unless the action is already under way or the intention already known. He must never use the word "denote" in a sound cue.²⁵ The program director and the sound effects engineer provide an effective curb on the use of the sound effect by the writer, but the production will be easier and more influential if the writer observes the simple rules given above.

Dialogue in the Radio Drama

Dialogue is the last consideration in this Chapter, not because it is of little importance in relation to the other subjects discussed, but because it is the most important consideration of all. Dialogue is the continuity of the program, which is bound together by the music and sound effects. It is almost impossible to write dialogue

24. Wishengrad, loc. cit.

25. Wylie, op. cit., pp. 41ff.

the way it is spoken, and the writing of dialogue seems to be an ability that has been reserved for only a few chosen dramatists. The radio drama, with its clever and stimulating use of music, with its same use of sound effects, and with a clearly defined and presented plot, will be unsuccessful, if the dialogue is poorly written.

In the script, the dialogue has certain basic functions. It must explain the action that has gone before. The present action, which the audience cannot see, will also be explained. The thread of the action which is to come will also be unravelled. But more directly, the dialogue carries the action forward, and in doing this it may and will emphasize some item in the setting, create the mood of the program, call attention to the properties to be used and re-emphasize some characteristic of a player.²⁶

Good radio dialogue should sound like a pair of boxers trading blows, short, swift, muscular, monosyllabic. Each block of dialogue and each scene must create its own tensions. The conflict need not be violent, it need not be physical; it may be latent or implied; but there must be a continuous opposition of resolution and irresolution, thesis and antithesis.²⁷

As the playwright pens the lines of his characters, he must keep the listener-audience in mind, with the idea of creating the feeling that such a person as this character might speak these lines. It is often well for

26. Lawton, op. cit., p. 81.

27. Wishengrad, op. cit., p. xxvii.

the author to pretend that he is a character in this situation he is creating: "If I happened to be John in this situation, what would I say?" "If John said that to me, what would I reply?" In keeping with this the phrases and phrasing will become original, and trite slang and stereotyped expressions will be avoided.²⁸ Much rewriting will also be avoided if the author reads the lines aloud as he writes them, and listens for the general effect on the ear.

Success in dialogue can be attained only if the dramatist reviews carefully the following rules, before beginning his script:

1. Use short sentences;
2. Employ variety in sentence structure;
3. Employ variety in speech length;
4. Refer to the "Business" (sound effects), thereby making the scene more natural;
5. Allow no lines which do not further the scene;
6. Let action frequently accompany the lines;
7. Keep action in the present tense;
8. Employ ear gestures: the predictive line.
E.g., "I wonder what Mary is doing?"²⁹

When all the dialogue has been completed, and before the script is put into its final form, it is well for the author once again to test the dialogue. Certain pertinent questions which he can ask himself, as he reads the lines aloud, are: Does the written line mean anything? Does it clearly convey the meaning? Could it be understood if spoken in the dark? Does it say what it has to say with

28. Lawton, loc. cit.

29. Ibid.

the least possible fuss? Is it actor-proof?³⁰ It is only through constant repetition in the application of these rules, through constant rewriting and constructive self-criticism that the radio dramatist is able to produce an authentic life situation replete with living dialogue.

Writing is not an easy task, and the successful author constantly reviews his own accomplishments. Many times he stores a script, allowing it to "age," and at some future date he hauls it out and examines it carefully. The formal writing of the script thus becomes the climax of a continuous activity, an activity which subconsciously influences his writings, as he strives to pen thoughts and actions into a truly living situation, containing living characters, who speak living lines. When the dramatist has realized this, he will then allow music and sound effects to assume their rightful places in the radio scripts as means for furthering and enhancing the contemplated situation.

30. Ibid., p. 83.

VI. Selection and Adaptation of the Bible Story

In Radio Biblical Drama the author is bound to the Bible as the source of his writings. Needless to say, he must be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of both the Old and New Testaments. He must understand the prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament, and the revelation of Jesus as that Messiah in the New Testament. He must understand the background of the peoples, their language and customs. He must have a complete "theology" as he contemplates the writing of a Radio Biblical Drama.

Selection of the Bible Story

There are two possibilities in the selection of a Bible Story: the expansion of a story as it is found in the Bible, and the story built around a text, the story itself being an invention.¹ On the one hand, the entire framework of the plot may be given the playwright, and on the other he may find only the theme given, around which he must construct his own plot.

In selecting either the story or the Biblical Text, the playwright must, as was mentioned previously, consider the time the program is scheduled. If produced on the air within the hours of nine and four, the drama must have a distinctly feminine flavor, and is to be geared

1. Hough, op. cit., p. 337.

emotionally for the woman listener. If scheduled for presentation during those hours that children listen, the drama must be beamed to the likes and age level of children. If scheduled during the evening hours, the drama must carry an appeal to the entire family group: the tired father, the dish-washing mother, the home-working child.

The preference of the radio audience itself is an important criterion in the selection of the Bible Story for dramatic production. Upon examination of plot types that are popular in radio plays, it is found that the preference and tendency is toward the thriller-type plot.² This does not necessarily mean action-thriller; the drama may thrill and stir the emotions much more subtly. Further, the audience demands that the plot should not be complicated. The listener can read a chapter in a book twice, see a stage play or a motion picture twice, but the radio drama is presented only once.³ Thus a plot is preferred which develops a single, simple idea, an idea which appeals to the listener's interests and experiences. The audience demands that the radio drama have purpose and familiarity, purpose to justify listening, familiarity to make it ring true.⁴

Since, if in a series, not all people will hear all, each play must also be a logical unit. It has to be a

2. Abbot, op. cit., p. 105.

3. Whipple, op. cit., p. 13.

4. Abbot, loc. cit.

logical unit in a series, and yet a logical unit in itself. The characters and the plot structure have to be consistent, yet each installment has to be a play in itself.⁵ It would be sheer folly for a Bible Drama series to feature the "Crossing of the Red Sea," and follow it with the "Raising of the Daughter of Jairus." There must be a thread, a continuity, which ties the programs together into a integral whole, while leaving the individual program a concrete entity.

The length of the program is another important consideration in the selection of the Bible Story. Fifteen minutes is often too limited a period for the proper development of characters, plot and situation, and short, choppy scenes are apt to result, creating the impression of haste, ambiguity and confusion. A few simple plots can be effectively developed in fifteen minutes, but most situations and Bible Stories require a longer period.⁶ A more complex situation will demand a half-hour production, and the dramatist must select and develop his Bible Story according to the time allotted.

When considering Radio Biblical Drama, the question of Old or New Testament source continually faces the author. The Old Testament contains many of the stories of the action-thriller plot that lend themselves easily to adaptation for children listening. The New Testament offers a greater opportunity in constructive "Gospel-Message," however,

5. Sayers, op. cit., p. 29.

6. Whipple, op. cit., p. 51.

for it permits the dramatist to bring the life of Jesus to the listener-audience in a sharp, living reality. The Old Testament offers the author many types not available in the New Testament, and there are certain vital stories and texts which are unique to the New Testament. The main thread of every Bible story will be Christ and His redemptive work, irrespective of which Testament the stories are taken. The story of Abraham will carry the thread of the promise of Christ; the drama on the text, "A new Commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another," will also bear the theme of "Christ," and His power to turn men from evil to good.

The author makes the final decision in the selection of the Bible story, after he has considered these ingredients. It is possible to write and produce good Biblical drama without knowing any of the foregoing, but if the Bible drama is to benefit the listener, if it is to be the means of accomplishing and not the end of the accomplishment, the selection of the Bible story will be the result of the most careful and penetrating study.

Adapting the Bible Story

The dramatist's real work comes with the writing of the script. Once he has selected the story, or the text, he now has available the framework of the plot, or at least the theme of the drama. Basic to his writing is that he must perceive what motivated the original writer.⁷ He must

7. Wylie, op. cit., p. 219.

scan the results of those motivations carefully, and then translate those motives and actions into a drama which will be understandable to the listener. The sympathies and antipathies of the original writer flow through the mind and pen of the adapter to the script; from the script they flow to the actors and actresses; then out to the listener audience. Essentially then the adapter is one who transplants from one media to another; he looses the printed page from its confines of "book."⁸

Equally as important, the adapter-author functions as a simplifier, as one who boils down both plot and characters into a well-rounded human situation. The plot is unravelled and those portions are chosen which are essential to the thorough development of the theme. The story is stripped to a bare recital of the main facts, those that are really essential to the telling of the story. Economy also demands that the author sacrifice most of the characters of the plot who are not essential to the main plot action.⁹

Jeremiah Speaking Today, Daniel in the Lion's Den, Israel Crossing the Red Sea; the adapter functions as a human mechanism through which this ageless material passes, and by whom it is changed from an unrealistic Mid-Victorian tale into a winning struggle of real people against overwhelming odds.

8. Ibid., pp. 178-179.

9. Lawton, op. cit., p. 31.

The matter of Biblical unwieldiness is one of the prime concerns of the adapter. Can certain portions of the story be eliminated? Can dialogue be compressed? Adapters have laid down three general rules when faced with the problem of story compression: 1) Verbiage may be decreased, since it is the function of the adapter to reveal the meaning of the story; 2) All dialogue must necessarily be compressed; and 3) By careful selection of phrase and figure, the beauty and magnificence of the original is to be preserved, insofar as it is practicable and the adapter is able.¹⁰

This problem of compression can best be understood by scanning the Story of Job, as written by Margaret Sangster:

- 1 JOB:---My heart is singing, and my spirit rejoices!
- 2 JOB'S WIFE.---Indeed, my husband, your face is like a light. I have never seen you look happier.
- 3 JOB.---And why shouldn't I look happy, my dear? I am rich and powerful and my children love me and---
- 4 JOB'S WIFE.---Where are the children?
- 5 JOB.---Our eldest son is giving a feast. It is his birthday and he has gathered together his six brothers and his three sisters, and they make merry---
- 6 JOB'S WIFE.---Why weren't we invited?
- 7 JOB.---We are old and they are young. Youth turns to youth---and age to age. They will be better off for our absence.
- 8 JOB'S WIFE.---I suppose you are right, Job--- (PAUSE) But I can't help wishing that we were with them.
9. JOB.---Why?
10. JOB'S WIFE.---Call it intuition, if you will. But sometimes I have a presentiment of evil. Sometimes I think that our gladness cannot last---

10. Wylie, op. cit., p. 201.

11. JOB.---Why do you think that, my wife?
(PAUSE) God has hedged us about with His love, and has touched us with His mercy. Why should our gladness disappear?
12. JOB'S WIFE.---I don't know. (PAUSE) But sometimes I have a feeling that Satan sees us and envies us as he walks up and down upon the earth---
13. JOB (laughing).---What a very strange idea! You women!
14. JOB'S WIFE.---Don't laugh, dear husband. Satan is all powerful! When he stretches out his hand---
15. JOB (interrupting).---God is more powerful than Satan. He will not suffer harm to touch us.
16. JOB'S WIFE.---I hope you're right, Job. (PAUSE) Oh, I wish I had your faith and trust---
17. JOB:---I wish that you had, my dear! (PAUSE) Faith is like spring water in a desert place--- and trust is like a green tree in an oasis---
18. JOB'S WIFE.---You talk like a poet, Job--- no one would ever think---(She breaks off) What is that dust cloud, my dear, upon the horizon?
19. JOB.---I see no cloud.
20. JOB'S WIFE.---My eyes are stronger than yours, I fancy. (PAUSE) The cloud is coming nearer and taking shape. (PAUSE) It seems to be a man, riding---
21. JOB.---You're right, my wife---I see something too.
22. JOB'S WIFE.---It is a man, and he is riding furiously. (PAUSE) Are you expecting a message from someone, Job?
23. JOB.---No, I'm not expecting any message. My affairs are in perfect order.
24. JOB'S WIFE.---The man is drawing close. (PAUSE) His horse is in a lather, and his garments are torn. (PAUSE) Oh, I wonder---
25. JOB.---The poor fellow seems distraught. Perhaps he's met with disaster.
26. JOB'S WIFE.---Perhaps.
27. Biz.---Sound of a horse's hoofs, drumming upon a hard road. They come up toward the mike. . . closer and closer.
28. JOB.---It's unwise to ride so fast--- someone should warn the man. (PAUSE) It's dangerous---
29. JOB'S WIFE.---See, Job, the man's face is streaked with blood. (PAUSE) Oh, dear---I felt that something was going to happen.
30. JOB.---Now, wife, don't borrow trouble---
31. Biz.---The hoofbeats come up, loudly, on the mike. The horse comes to a sudden stop and the rider leaps to the ground with a little thud.

32. RIDER.---I bring tidings, O Job!
33. JOB.---What sort of tidings? (his voice takes on a note of deep concern) Why, man, you're fainting. (PAUSE) Easy---now---
34. Biz.---Pause.
35. RIDER(Faltering).---Don't bother with me---I---I'm all right.
36. JOB.---Get him a cup of water, wife.
37. JOB'S WIFE.---I'll get it at once. (She starts to fade) I'll hurry---
38. RIDER.---I need---no water---
39. JOB.---But you do. (PAUSE) Why are you in this sad state, anyway?
40. RIDER (sobbing suddenly).---It was the Sabeans. Your oxen were plowing, and the asses were feeding beside them, and the Sabeans---
41. JOB.---There---there. (PAUSE) Take it more slowly. (PAUSE) Here is my wife with the water---
42. JOB'S WIFE (fading in).---Take this, poor man.
43. RIDER.---Many thanks. (There's a pause as he gulps the water) I'm better, now.
44. JOB.---Then tell me your news quietly. You were saying something about the Sabeans.
45. RIDER.---Yes, I was. They have stolen your oxen and your asses---and they have slain your servants with the edge of the sword. (PAUSE) Only I am escaped to tell you---...¹¹

In dealing with the entire problem of adaptation, and particularly with the necessity of compression, the author is able to simplify and organize his material more completely if he utilizes the following steps: 1) Try to summarize the story in one or two sentences; 2) Decide which scenes can best be told by: a) keeping the original lines, and b) putting the action into new lines for the actor, narrator or sound effects; 3) decide which scenes and characters are really necessary for the telling of the story; 4) Decide what must be known about each character to understand their actions; 5) Find if all the necessary

¹¹ Margaret Sangster, Living Dramas of the Bible, quoted in Wylie, op. cit., pp. 202ff.

elements of the characters are in the original, or must new lines be created?; 6) Decide what facts about the setting are important to the plot and mood of the play; 7) Know the time limitations of the program: ten minutes, fifteen minutes, or a half hour; and 8) Select more material than is needed and then cut to conform to the time limitation.¹²

In certain Bible Stories, the adapter is faced with the problem of expansion, rather than compression. In this technique it is assumed that the plot is incomplete, or that only the theme is available and the plot is lacking. One of the simplest illustrations of expansion of the Bible Story is the story of Jonah. In the Book of Jonah, Jonah's response to the final question of Jehovah is missing. This answer would make the true conclusion of the story. The adapter seeks the correct conclusion, and examines the final verses of the Book carefully. After this study he will see that it can be safely presumed that Jonah will accept Jehovah's will, which is to spare Nineveh. Thus the ending may take this form:

GOD: Thou was angry with the worm.
 JONAH: Yea, O Lord. I was exceedingly angry.
 GOD: And thou didst have pity for the gourd.
 JONAH: I had great pity for the plant--for it was a shade over my head.
 GOD: Thou didst have great pity for the plant for which thou didst not labor; which came up in a night and withered in a night.
 JONAH: Yea, O Lord.

12. Lawton, op. cit., p. 30.

- GOD: Yet in Nineveh there are more than six score thousand men and women, and little children weak with the weakness of mankind, who cannot discern between their right hand and their left. And there are also herds of patient beasts in the field. Should thou not have pity for them even as thou pitied the gourd which has perished in the night?
- JONAH: But Lord, these people are not my people, they are not Your people. They are full of deceit and hypocrisy. Their presence is a mockery---
- GOD: Jonah---Jonah---art thou still blind? Dost thou not know after the wondrous thing I have shown you, that I am a just God -- that I am a God to all peoples: Is it not better that their penance be believed, that these Ninevites shall be shown good and evil, than that they should be destroyed in their weakness and ignorance? Speak truly, Jonah---
- JONAH: Thou hast shown me the truth at last, O Lord, my God, and I am a miserable man unworthy to be Thy servant.
- GOD: Speak, Jonah, shall I destroy Nineveh?
- JONAH: No, my Lord, spare it---spare it that I may go within the gates and preach the glory of the Lord God of Jehovah.¹³

Every radio Biblical Drama is the result of compression and expansion in some form or another. The two cannot be separated, for one part of the plot must needs be expanded, another part compressed. Very often the adapter will find materials which he cannot put effectively into scene form. The opportunity then comes to compress the materials and make them clear by means of a narrator, who becomes a sort of story telling announcer.¹⁴ He will also provide the bridges to link the episodes, which must be in keeping with the drama theme and plot. The trifles will also be observed

13. William N. Robson, Living Dramas of the Bible, quoted in Wylie, op. cit., pp. 181-182.

14. Lawton, op. cit., p. 30.

carefully. In the Biblical setting, a yoke of oxen would be driven not with with a whip, but with a goad. And yet the lash can be heard on the air, whereas it would be useless to ask a sound-effects man to stand by, making a noise like an ox-goad.¹⁵

Expansion and compression in Radio Biblical Drama are performed with the "total story" in view; the adapter does not insert his own theological likes or dislikes, but he sets down the story itself, viewed, however, within the complete panorama of Holy Scriptures.

Within these two general considerations the adapter finds certain restrictions. It is generally conceded among radio adapters that the technique is to keep the ancient setting, and to give the modern equivalent of the contemporary speech and manners.¹⁶ To adorn the drama with the "thee" and "thou" of the Jacobean idiom, except in certain cases, is utter nonsense. While they may inspire a certain awe, they do create a mental bloc, and the listener tabs the drama as being "story," "fable," or some such uncomplimentary thing. But even in this there is a limitation for the adapter, for he must get at the original meaning of the original language and faithfully reproduce that to the best of his ability. The language used in the ancient setting is to be translated into a language that is free of the modern slang and trite sayings, and is to be such that the drama

15. Bayers, op. cit., p. 26.

16. Ibid., p. 24.

may slide easily into the language of prophecy.¹⁷ Present day colloquialisms can be used only when they lend reality to the action and emphasis to the lesson.¹⁸

No adapter may, for any reason, tamper with the prejudices and feelings of the original or with those of any character created by the original author. These are sacred to the first writer; they cannot be outraged at any time; they cannot be neglected; they cannot be subjected to a new interpretation.¹⁹ This demands intense study by the adapter before he begins the writing of the drama. The wise adapter will also keep his presentation affirmative, and will not resort to the ridicule of other denominations or beliefs. His prime purpose is to tell a story, a story that carries its own theme and conflicts. The application of that story, the emotional feeling aroused, depends entirely upon the listener-audience.

It has long been debated whether it is wise for the Radio Biblical Drama to portray the voice of God or Christ. Many claim that it is offensive to reverent people, and so should never be employed. Others contend that it lends reality to the action and drama, and should be an essential part of the drama. In an effort to appease both, adapters have agreed that in Radio Biblical Drama the voice of Christ should be used sparingly, and that the script then should adhere to the words taken directly from the sayings

17. Ibid.

18. Hough, loc. cit.

19. Wylie, op. cit., pp. 178-179.

of Christ.²⁰

Under these conditions, sub-plot becomes rather hazardous. It will rarely be found in the Radio Biblical Drama. For the sake of perspicuity, the adapter must invariably eliminate the sub-plot and thus simplify the main plot.²¹ Any by-play tends to confuse the listener and attract attention away from the main theme, plot and characters. But the adapter is restricted in that he cannot obliterate that sub-plot which is essential for the furtherance of the plot; neither can he create in its stead a new sub-plot in order to give the main theme a "unique twist."

As noted in a previous chapter, the adapter is also restricted by the number of characters in the drama. Experience has shown that there may be any number of bit characters in a script, but that more than four or five leading characters will create confusion. In an attempt to avoid this ambiguity and confusion, the author restricts the number of characters.²² Again, he cannot, under any circumstances, create an imaginary main character to assume the habits, sympathies and dislikes of an omitted main character. Distortion or ridicule is not permitted for any character, and the story is always told as simply and appealingly as possible.

20. Hough, loc. cit.

21. Wishengrad, op. cit., p. xxv.

22. Ibid.

Dorothy Sayers, the author of the series, "The Man Born to be King," used two years in the selection and adaptation of the Bible Stories used. During this time she amassed a considerable theological library, as she endeavored to find the original meaning of "Christ" and His "Work." As she looked back upon this period of writing and study, she made the following observations: 1) Any adapter of Biblical Drama must have a complete theology and must not be loose, sentimental and inconsistent; 2) The dramatist must rid himself of all theological intentions: his duty is to tell a story to the best of his ability, and the drama must not be subordinated to theology; 3) New Testament Stories, and Old Testament also, which deal with the life of Christ, demand a special skill and understanding. The history and theology of Christ are one and the same thing. His life is Theology in action, and the drama of His life is dogma shown in dramatic action.²³

The Completed Bible Story Script

This study now concludes with an example of the completed Bible Story script, into which have been incorporated all the principles set forth in the previous chapters, and which is also set up in the accepted "final" script form.

23. Sayers, op. cit., p. 20.

"TIME RETURNS" -- No. 1

Cast: Narrator
Reporter I
Reporter II
Reporter III
Reporter IV
Joel
Marcus
Male Voice
Friend

Sound: Teletype Machine
Short-wave fade on voices
Crowd Noise
Marching Feet
Scrape of clothing against rock
Cloth Tearing

Script: by Darrell Helmers

"TIME RETURNS" -- No. 1

SOUND: TELETYPE MACHINE

NARR: Today we turn back the hands of time to the year 29 A.D. -- to the country of Palestine -- to the city of Jerusalem. (SLIGHT PAUSE) And now, imagine that you are going with us in memory to Jerusalem, where members of the KFUD News Department are waiting to describe for you some of the things that happened in the year 29 A.D.

COME IN, JERUSALEM!

VOICE (REPORTERS) SLIGHTLY MUFFLED, AS IF SHORTWAVED

REPORTER I: This is Jerusalem. We have set up our KFUD microphones here in beautiful, golden Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine...Jerusalem, the city of the Jews....Jerusalem, teeming with people who are choking its narrow, twisting, winding streets.

We speak to you from our vantage point in one of the towers of the Fortress Antonia, looking out over the city of Jerusalem. The window from which we view the scene is some sixty feet above the ground. The city of Jerusalem lies at our very feet...sprawled out before our eyes.

Jerusalem is not a large city. Reportedly it covers only about three hundred acres.... which would make it about three-quarters of a mile

(MORE)

REPORTER I:
(CONT)

long, and a half mile wide. It is built on four hills---each of which forms a corner of the city. Fortress Antonia is built on a hill in the Northeast corner of the city. Directly in front of us, on the slope of the Southeastern hill of the city, is the most magnificent building we've ever seen. It is the famous temple. It rises -- terrace upon terrace -- surrounded by massive walls, a glittering spectacle of marble and gold. Diagonally across from us, perhaps a half mile away...is the so-called "UPPER CITY" where the rich and wealthy have their palaces. The Fourth Hill is to the extreme right of us. There we see the palace of Herod...looking out over the city like a huge watchdog. Between these four hills, and directly below us lies the "LOWER CITY." Here one finds the bazaars, the shops and markets. Here you can see the shoemaker pounding his sandal, the tailor plying his needle, the carpenter, the worker in brass and iron.

We've mentioned Herod...that is, King Herod. He's the top man here in Palestine. Off to our right we can also see the palace of Pontius Pilate. He's the Roman governor of this province. Incidentally, the Romans have really rebuilt Jerusalem. You find many buildings and shops here that

REPORTER I: resemble those of Rome itself. (PAUSE)
(CONT)

Jerusalem is quiet now. On this Thursday evening the people are celebrating the Feast of the Passover. Every Jewish householder in this city is now seated at his table with his family, eating the Passover meal. The Passover, as you may know, commemorates Israel's deliverance from the Egyptians some fifteen-hundred to two thousand years ago. It's becoming dark now, and from our KFUCO microphone-stand here at Fortress Antonia we can see thousands of tiny lights. These are the lights of the Passover candles that shine through the open windows of the houses. They remind one of thousands of tiny fireflies.... (OMINOUSLY) But something is stirring here in Jerusalem...All week we've felt it--a kind of ominous undercurrent that seems to be sweeping through the city. But this much we do know. It all stems from the presence here of Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, in Galilee. From what we've been able to learn since we arrived here a week ago, the TORAH (that is the BOOK which the Jews say has been given them direct from God), this TORAH promises that the God of the Jews will send them a Messiah, a Savior! Most of the people are agreed on the purpose of this Messiah. He will free their country....and will be their

(MORE)

REPORTER I: king! According to the word of many people we've
 (CONT)
 interviewed, they are of the opinion that this
Jesus from Galilee is the Messiah. For a report
 on His activities in Jerusalem, we take you now
 to another member of the KFUCO News Department
 stationed somewhere in the "Lower City."

(CUT ABRUPTLY)

SOUND: CROWD NOISE UP AND UNDER

REPORTER II: This is the KFUCO News Department reporting from
Lower Jerusalem. We're standing with our backs
 against the walls of the great Temple in Jerusalem.
 The Jews have completed their Passover meal, and
 are now streaming out of their houses. These narrow
 streets are literally packed with people. You
 can hardly move; if you get out in the center of
 the street, you are swept along with the crush
 of the crowd.

During the past few days there's been a change in
 the people's attitude. The Romans, and even King
 Herod himself have treated the Jews cruelly with
 murder, torture, and every kind of "strong-arm"
 treatment imaginable. But the Jews have borne it
 patiently....though at times they have rebelled.
 They live in fervent hope that the Messiah, pro-
 mised in their TORAH, will come soon and drive
 out the hated Romans. (SLIGHT PAUSE) Beside me

(MORE)

REPORTER II: stands a storekeeper, Joel Bar Mattan by name.
(CONT)

We're going to ask him a few questions. Joel, did you see Jesus of Nazareth enter Jerusalem last Sunday?

JOEL: Yea... I saw Him. I even helped welcome Him!

REPORTER II: Can you tell us more about it, Joel? What happened?

JOEL: Rumor had it that Jesus of Galilee (He claims to be the Messiah, you know) was coming here to Jerusalem. So, most of the people gathered outside the city to wait for Him and welcome Him. When He came riding up--on a donkey--we all...yes, myself included...put our cloaks on the ground to make a carpet for him. We even cut branches off the palm trees and strawed these in His path. We sang the Messiah's song, too...

REPORTER II: The Messiah's song? And what is that?

JOEL: "Hosanna to the Son of David...Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

REPORTER II: The people were joyous then? They were happy?

JOEL: Oh, yes, we were overjoyed...It was beyond our fondest dreams...we celebrated...thinking He was truly the Messiah.

REPORTER II: Why, then, in the short space of three days, has there been such a change in the people? Look at them: their grim, unsmiling faces don't seem

(MORE)

REPORTER II: to indicate the presence of Israel's Savior.
(CONT)

JOEL: We have found that this Jesus isn't the Messiah!

REPORTER II: But last Sabbath you were so sure...and now...in three days, you reject Him...

JOEL: (INTERRUPTING) We were fools----utter, complete fools! We thought about it later....Is the Messiah to come with only a dozen followers? Will the King of our nation ride into the city on a Donkey? And then...everything He has done---since He entered Jerusalem---is contrary to the conduct of a king. He walks about the streets, preaching to the lowly beggars. He goes into the Temple, and drives out the priests who sell the animals for sacrifices....DOES HE DO ONE THING ABOUT THE ROMANS? NO! DOES HE FREE OUR LAND FROM THIS EVIL AND HATED CONQUEROR? NO. HE IS AN IMPOSTOR!

REPORTER II: Aren't there some prophecies about the Messiah in your religious book? Let's see, you call it---

JOEL: ---The TORAH?

REPORTER II: Yes, the TORAH. Isn't there something in there about the Messiah---so that you can be certain whether or not this Jesus is an impostor?

JOEL: We-ell, the Rabbi taught us one...It goes like this: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Jerusalem... behold, thy king cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding..." But these

(MORE)

JOEL: -
(CONT)

are words! Mere WORDS! The Messiah...the King of the Jews...will enter Jerusalem...his carpet the bodies of these Romans! He will free us from them so that--- (CUT OFF)

REPORTER I: We're going to interrupt momentarily...We here in Fortress Antonia have just received word from one of our reporters stationed near the house in which Jesus of Galilee and his followers have gone to eat their Passover meal. Without further delay we're going to switch you to our KFUC reporter stationed on the street called Hachilah.

SOUND: LIGHT CROWD NOISE

REPORTER III: This is the KFUCNews Department. At this moment we are standing in a doorway...two houses away from the building in which Jesus of Galilee and His disciples have been meeting for some time now. Although the other householders of Jerusalem have completed their Passover meal long ago, Jesus and His followers are still inside the building. However, we should like to report that about a half hour or so ago a man came out of the house. He seemed to be very angry and his face bore a look that seemed intent upon some act of vengeance. He didn't see me as he passed, but I just happened to think, as he rushed by, could he be a disciple of this Jesus?

We're trying to cover every possible move Jesus

(MORE)

REPORTER III: makes--or His followers--so I sent one of my
(CONT)
men to follow him. After this man (the angry
fellow we were describing) left the building,
he turned about, faced it, raised his fist high
in the air, and cursed the house and everyone in
it. Then he gathered his cloak around him,
covering even his face, and went...Oh, just a
moment. There's a man standing across the way.
He's been there since shortly after we set up
our microphone here. It may be that he knows
something about what's going on here tonight.
Let's see if we can get him over to our micro-
phone. (LOUDLY) FRIEND? OH, FRIEND?

FRIEND: (OFF) Yes?

REPORTER III: Tell me, friend, do you know this --this Jesus
of Galilee?

FRIEND: (FADING IN) Yes, I know him.

REPORTER III: Do you think he is the Messiah of the Jews?

FRIEND: I don't think it, I know He is the Messiah God
has promised.

REPORTER III: Do you feel, then, that He will free your
people from the Roman rule?

FRIEND: No. Our Messiah has not come to give freedom from
the Romans, but to bring us spiritual freedom,
freedom from the guilt of our sins against God.

REPORTER III: Tell me, my friend, are you a follower of this
Jesus?

(MORE)

FRIEND: A follower, yes; a disciple, no. You see, I was crippled...and He healed me. He performed this miracle in a public place so that all could see. Truly only the Messiah could do such a thing.

MALE VOICE: (INTERRUPTING, PANTING) Excuse me, sir. KFUCO courier reporting, sir.

REPORTER III: What is it, man? Speak up!

MALE VOICE: I...I followed the man (the angry fellow) who left...the building...and...and he went to the palace of the High Priest...even now...even now... there is some business afoot...I saw ...from my hiding place, the priest give him thirty pieces of silver. (CUT OFF ABRUPTLY)

REPORTER I: We here in Fortress Antonia have just received news from the palace of Herod that a company of soldiers has been alerted. At this very moment they are leaving the palace of the High Priest. So far we've been unable to find out where or why they are going. (ABRUPT CHANGE OF THOUGHT) Just a moment, please. (PAUSE) Another report has just been handed me. The company of soldiers is proceeding to the Mount of Olives...to arrest Jesus. We don't know what the charge is yet, but we've had one of our KFUCO reporters stationed near Herod's palace. He's been ordered to contact

(MORE)

REPORTER I: us as soon as he has anything news-worthy to
(CONT)
report. Wait a minute. Yes, here's his signal.
So, now we take you to our KFUCO reporter
somewhere between Herod's palace and the Mount
of Olives.

SOUND: MARCHING FEET, CROWD NOISE

REPORTER IV: This is the KFUCO News Department. Before us
is the strangest group of men we've ever seen.
As we look ahead there are, I should judge,
about two hundred soldiers...armed with swords
and staves...carrying torches and lanterns atop
long poles. Behind them...that is, right next
to us...are well over a hundred townspeople,
stragglers who are curious as to the errand of
these men. Directly in front of me is the
Roman Commandant. Marcus is his name. He's
the Captain of this company of Roman Soldiers...
(LOUDLY) Captain, hold up a minute, sir.
(SLIGHT PAUSE) I know your orders are to capture
this Jesus of Galilee...but...are there any other
details...

MARCUS : Well, once we've taken him...our orders are to
bring Him to the palace of the High Priest.

REPORTER IV: What is he charged with, Captain?

MARCUS: That I don't know. I don't make the orders,
I only see that they're carried out!

(MORE)

REPORTER IV: But from reports I have heard, this Jesus is a peaceful man...a carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee...and ...well...you do have more than two hundred soldiers...

MARCUS: Orders! I know I could do the job with two men... or even by myself... but the High Priest thinks the followers of Jesus will fight. By the beard of Mars! Doesn't he know that we're Romans, that fighting is our business?

REPORTER IV: Tell me... this Jesus..what does he look like?

MARCUS: I cannot say. All I know is, He's a Jew.

REPORTER IV: You mean..you... you actually came out here to capture a man you can't even identify?

MARCUS: Oh, we've made provision for that. The guide of our company is a fellow named Judas Iscariot... there he is...up there...in front of the men. The fellow with the long, black cloak and bushy hair. They tell me he's one of the followers of Jesus. Much as we appreciate information on those who are enemies of Rome, I still despise any man who'd turn traitor.

REPORTER IV: This Judas...Judas Iscariot..he betrayed Jesus?

MARCUS: Sold Him out to the High Priest for thirty pieces of silver!

REPORTER IV: Excuse me, Captain, and thank you for the interview. (LOWERS VOICE) Ladies and gentlemen,

(MORE)

REPORTER IV: we are now entering a small garden on the side
 (CONT) of the Mount of Olives. This Garden is called...
 I believe..the Garden of Gethsemane. It's about,
 I should judge, about seventy steps square.
 It's covered with rocks and olive trees. The
 company of soldiers has already entered the
 Garden. Then men have been detailed to
 search every possible hiding place...

SOUND: CROWD NOISE UP BRIEFLY

REPORTER IV: Now, (SPEAKS LABORIOUSLY, PANTS, AS THO CLIMBING)
 if I can just climb this rock..I'll be able to
 follow the action more closely, and I won't be
 in the thick of it in case there's a fight.

SOUND: BRUSH OF CLOTHING AGAINST ROCK; SOUND OF CLOTH
 TEARING; FEW 'GRUNTS.'

REPORTER IV: Oh, oh. There goes our new tunic...Well, we'll
 have to put that on the expense account. (PAUSE)
 Now, let me see...what's been happening...
 (PAUSE) That must be Judas, the traitor,
 walking out there in front of the soldiers.
 Over there is another group of men...a small
 group..standing there..waiting...and watching as
 the soldiers approach. In front of this little
 band there stands a man with the most unusual
 face I have ever seen. It has a look of rugged
 manliness and at the same time an expression of

(MORE)

REPORTER IV: understanding and kindness. I wonder if this
(CONT)

is the Jesus I've heard so much about...

And now, Judas steps forward and greets this kindly figure. (ELATEDLY) Yes..yes, it must be Jesus. Judas has just said, "Hail, Master," and kisses Him on the cheek. What a horrible betrayal! (PAUSE) I wonder what Jesus will do? Why, he's walking out to meet the soldiers!

SOUND: STOP CROWD NOISE

REPORTER IV: Jesus is speaking to the men. The answer is...

and (EXCITEDLY).. wait a moment, the ... the soldiers in front...they, they fall backwards to the ground! Now, they're talking again, but one of the followers of Jesus has drawn his sword. It looks like there'll be a fight. But what chance do so few have against so many? He strikes out...there's the first blow... and one of the soldiers...no its someone else... lies stretched out on the ground....first blood goes to the followers of Jesus...but.....

(WHISPER) the Roman soldiers have drawn their swords...they stand ready...waiting for the command of Captain Marcus...(SLIGHT PAUSE).. Wait....this ...this man who must be Jesus.. he steps in front of the man holding the sword...and he is forcing...yes...forcing his follower to

(MORE)

REPORTER IV: put his sword back into its sheath. What sort
 (CONT)
 of a man is this, who braves the swords of the
 Roman Soldiers? And now..now He leans over the
 man on the ground...He touches him...the man...
 the man rises to his feet, and HIS WOUND HAS
 DISAPPEARED. What kind of a miracle is this?

SOUND: BEGIN CROWD NOISE

REPORTER IV: The soldiers have completely surrounded Jesus.
 And all his companions are running for their lives.
 They've disappeared completely, the cowards...
 and Jesus is the prisoner of the Roman soldiers.
 (CUT ABRUPTLY)

REPORTER I: This is the KPUC News Department reporting
 from Fortress Antonia. We've just received word
 from the palace of the High Priest that Jesus
 has been captured, and is to be tried either
 late this evening or early tomorrow morning.
 Now, there are many questions in everyone's mind.
 Is this Jesus truly the Messiah? This power of
 healing, is it divine power? Is it power from
 God? We've talked with those who have actually
 been healed by this Jesus, who insist that He
 is the true Messiah, and we've talked with others
 who insist he is nothing more than an impostor.
 The next few hours will tell the story....

SOUND: TELETYPE MACHINE

VII. Summary

A new medium of communication has arisen within the last forty years, which has gradually shed the chains of novelty and assumed its rightful educational position. In spite of the opportunity presented in radio, the church has, to a large extent, neglected this relatively new radio medium. It has forced the medium to adapt itself to the church's rites, ceremonies and "talks," instead of exploiting the medium in carrying out the command of Jesus to spread the Gospel. In view of these distressing conditions, this study attempted to show the Radio Biblical Drama as a logical forward step in a religious approach to radio.

The study, based on materials available at the Libraries at Concordia Seminary and Washington University, the St. Louis Public Library and personal files, was developed in a series of five steps:

The first step was an analysis of radio in the present day scene. After a brief discussion of the origin of radio broadcasting, the following points were noted: a) radio is available to the majority of the American families; b) radio's offering to the listener-audience is intellectually meager; c) the listener-audience has a specific program preference, with religious programs

ranking among the lowest on the surveys conducted; d) radio has a definite influence in the secular field; e) radio broadcasting carries within itself certain inherent advantages; and f) radio also contains certain limitations.

It then became necessary to examine the role of the church in present day radio. Although the spiritual condition of the American people was found to be deplorable, the church has not utilized the radio medium, in its fullest extent, for a positive Gospel-Message thrust. The majority of the outstanding religious programs being aired were not church-sponsored, as the church evidenced an almost complete indifference to the possibilities of the radio medium.

The next step in the study was the introduction of a positive note, and Radio Biblical Drama was advanced as one means among many by which the church could effectively utilize the radio medium. The following advantages of Radio Biblical Drama were discovered: a) many will receive an acquaintance with the Word of God; b) the Word of God will reach unchurched homes; c) the Drama will carry a special appeal to the sick, blind and bed-ridden; and d) it will also carry a definite appeal to children. The study then listed and characterized the various types of Radio Biblical Drama: a) First Person Narration; b) Second Person Narration; c) Third Person Narration; d) Dramatic Narration; e) Narration-Dialogue Alternation; and f) the "You Are There" Dramatic Production.

The fourth step dealt with certain basic rules in the writing of the Radio Drama. The more important of these were concerned with: a) the number of characters; b) the choice of words; c) the number of scenes; d) the scene transitions; e) the narrators; f) the beginning of the play; g) music; h) sound effects; and i) dialogue.

The final step of the study undertook the selection and adaptation of the Bible Story, included a completed Bible Story Script. The evidence indicated that the selection of the Bible Story depended upon: a) the time the program was scheduled; b) the audience preference; c) the time length of the program; and d) Old or New Testament source. The adaptation of the Biblical Text or Story was found to principally a problem of compression or expansion, with each enforcing certain regulations and permitting certain privileges on the part of the adapter-writer. The final script embodied the foregoing principles, while giving an accepted format for a final radio drama script.

Thus the study showed that Radio Biblical Drama is an important essential in the Church's use of radio. It is a program that is practical and possible, if adequate and successful playwrights are selected for the writing of the Dramas. But it should also be noted that Radio Biblical Drama is one consideration among many in an intelligent, religious utilization of the radio medium.

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