

The New Age of Evangelism: Fundamentalism and Radio on the Canadian Prairies, 1925-1945

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The pairing of radio with what is commonly regarded as “fundamentalism” in Canada has been recognized in a general manner, but is rarely detailed beyond the exploits of William Aberhart. Too often radio is viewed as simply another vehicle for fundamentalists (and others) to promote themselves and their message; few have seriously examined the significance of this new media in terms of its influence on the message and behaviour of those who utilized it. From its meagre amateur beginnings in the mid-1920s, fundamentalist broadcasting had achieved a new standard of professional production by 1945, a situation which both reflected and contributed to the efforts of fundamentalism to shed its negative stereotypes and incorporate itself within a broader sense of evangelicalism.¹

The Canadian prairies offered a somewhat unique environment for the development of religious radio. Unlike Toronto’s T.T. Shields who faced a number of complaints from listeners regarding frequency interference from powerful American stations, western stations generally had clearer reception.² The scattered and often isolated agrarian population base has often been cited as a explanation for the appeal of religious radio,³ but such generalizations can easily be overstated. Perhaps the rapid development of a network of Bible Schools across the prairies helped to lay the groundwork for the type of “transdenominational” activity which became an important feature of fundamentalist religious broadcasting.⁴

Undoubtedly a combination of circumstances and events gave radio a prominent role in the cultural activity of the Canadian prairies. However,

it should not be assumed that the use of radio was simply a natural or logical extension of the impressive array of evangelistic outreach endeavours organized by fundamentalists. Considering their previous attacks on the frivolous and possibly immoral activities associated with the theatre and movies, it is somewhat surprising to see fundamentalist preachers sharing the airwaves with programmes like “Amos and Andy” or “Music for Moderns.” Unlike other forms of evangelism such as Bible schools, professional campaigns and correspondence courses which all had their roots in nineteenth-century evangelicalism, radio was a completely new technology with which fundamentalists were forced to come to terms. By the early 1940s, the use of radio had become a staple method of evangelism among a number of groups who clearly aligned themselves with the fundamentalist movement in the 1920s. In many ways the adoption of radio played an important role (symbolically and practically) in shifting the orientation of fundamentalism towards a broader sense of evangelicalism and thus deserves to be recognized as a significant element in marking a “new age of evangelism.”⁵

Fundamentalism and Evangelism

The first obstacle in understanding the relationship between fundamentalism and radio is defining the frequently maligned term, “fundamentalism.” Perhaps the most commonly accepted meaning has been developed by George Marsden, who identified the movement as a loose confederation of those espousing a “militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism” which was influenced by a wide variety of sources including revivalism, pietism and Scottish Common Sense philosophy.⁶ While Marsden’s perspective has found wide acceptance among a number of Canadian historians, John Stackhouse has recently argued that fundamentalism thus defined “was not in fact central to Canadian evangelicalism.”⁷

This limited study cannot hope to provide an extended discussion of the definition and role of fundamentalism in Canada. However, if one shifts the focus of historical pursuit from the religious controversies of the 1920s to the “cultural forms” constructed by fundamentalists, especially in the area of evangelism, it is difficult to relegate fundamentalism to an insignificant hinterland. In this respect I agree with Virginia Brereton who argues that the parameters of fundamentalism, often confined to Calvinist or Reformed circles, should be broadened to include Holiness and Pente-

costal groups who, although not always accepted by “traditional” fundamentalists, clearly aligned themselves with fundamentalism against the growing threat of modernism.⁸ Certainly in terms of evangelism, cultural forms such as radio transcended theological boundaries.

While “militant” in its resistance of “modernistic” ideas such as evolution and Higher Criticism, fundamentalism was not simply an “Old Light” negation of progressive liberal theology. Cultural revitalization within a Christian context was the goal of both modernists and fundamentalists, but the means to this end divided protestantism because the assumptions and methods of liberal “reform” conflicted with the prescribed course of “revival” or “awakening.” Where liberals attempted to keep Christianity relevant by adapting to the “new historical situation” of an encroaching secular society, the emerging fundamentalists believed that any accommodation was sacrosanct and needed to be countered with a true “revival” based on personal religious experience. Fundamentalists were not simply reacting to modernism in a negative way, but were also promoting their own concept of revitalization through a wide variety of evangelistic techniques.

Of course promoting a revival within a secular world meant that fundamentalists needed to find a means to engage the world in evangelism while at the same time remaining separate from it. The professional evangelistic campaigns of figures such as Dr. Charles S. Price were popular in the early 1920s, but by the end of the decade were being severely criticized both within and without for their sensationalism in style and advertising. Questions regarding financial accountability plagued many campaigns, and if the growing censure upon them were not enough, the onset of the Depression years assured that this technique would not be able to sustain its former grandiose standing. The impressive degree of “small scale” evangelism surrounding the expanding network of Bible schools was more effective and acceptable in methodology. Despite periodic outbreaks of isolated “revivals,” these efforts were generally ignored by the mainstream media and, by extension, mainstream society. Although they defended their theology in the face of a growing apostasy of mainline churches, fundamentalists had been unable to achieve a spiritual revival on the scale of earlier “Great Awakenings.” The advent of radio, however, offered new hopes, and new dangers, in this pursuit.⁹

Fundamentalists and Radio

The first non-experimental regular radio station to be established in North America was station KDKA in Pittsburgh. Within two months of going on the air in 1920 it also carried the first religious broadcast by transmitting a church service from Calvary Episcopal Church. By 1925, over 600 stations were operating in the United States and more than 60 of these were licensed to religious organizations.¹⁰ Although Canadian commercial broadcasting began at practically the same time with a Montreal station, XWA (later CFCF) in December 1920, the expansion of radio in Canada was much slower. The number of commercial stations operating in Canada fluctuated greatly between 1922 and 1929 from a low of 46 to a high of 84, and a great majority were underpowered compared to the strength of the signals being produced south of the border. However, it is clear that the Canadian public was enthusiastic about the new medium as the number of receiving licenses jumped from less than 10,000 to close to 300,000 in the same period.¹¹ This number is almost certainly under-representative, since many people likely did not apply for or renew the \$1.00 license that was technically necessary to operate a radio receiving set.¹²

When William Aberhart broadcast his first message over CFCN Calgary in November 1925, few could have anticipated the enormous influence that would be wielded by a single lay preacher within his broadcast area. Through a number of popular schemes, such as selling different classes of “memberships” for his “radio church,” Aberhart was able to raise enough capital to build the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute in 1927. By 1939, enrolment in the Institute’s “Radio Sunday School” had reached 9,141.¹³ After he was elected as Premier in 1935, Aberhart found that constantly returning to Calgary for broadcasting was difficult and decided to inaugurate a Sunday evening programme from Edmonton. This venture was greatly feared by many churches who felt that their evening services would suffer,¹⁴ and one Presbyterian minister informed the Premier that his own wife had threatened, “let the church go[,] I [will] remain home and listen to Mr. Aberhart.”¹⁵

The eventually-named *Back to the Bible Hour* was punctuated with gospel songs, short dialogues and dramatic representations, although the most elaborate of the latter did not develop until after the introduction of Social Credit when characters like “Professor Orthodox Anonymous” and

the “Man from Mars” made their appearance. However, despite the generally recognized importance of Aberhart’s broadcasts, the encroachment of economic ideology in his religious programmes illustrates their uniqueness. Many fundamentalists took exception to these political activities and therefore it is questionable as to whether or not Aberhart can be regarded as typical of fundamentalist broadcasting.¹⁶ It is perhaps more enlightening and more accurate to examine some of the lesser-known broadcasting carried on by other fundamentalists between 1925 and 1945.

Transmitting the Gospel: CHMA

One of the most unique enterprises in the field of religious radio was the establishment of radio station CHMA in Edmonton by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. A young radio hobbyist, Reuben Pearson, from the small town of Gwynne (southeast of Edmonton), had recently been converted to the Alliance. The Superintendent of the Western District, J.H. Woodward, gave the amateur engineer permission to experiment with this new technology in the basement of his house. By 1927 the Alliance was prepared to enter the field, applying for a broadcasting license and ordering its equipment from Cleveland, Ohio. Unfortunately, by this time, attitudes towards religious radio in Canada had soured.

Although CHMA did serve as the only religious radio station in Canada for a period of time in the early 1930s, they were far from being the first to use this format. It is often forgotten that the real “pioneer” of religious radio in Canada on a national scale was the International Bible Students Association (Jehovah’s Witnesses), which operated four stations across the country. However, concern was being raised by the government about the high number of complaints being received over the “unpatriotic and abusive” content of the IBSA broadcasting.¹⁷ In 1927, P.J.A. Cardin, Minister of Marine and Fisheries (the department where radio regulation was originally assigned), revoked all four licenses. The controversy that followed prompted the government to consider seriously not only the role of religion on the air (an issue which quickly faded into the background), but also to evaluate the entire state of radio in Canada through the Aird Commission of 1928. When the final report was released, the commission recommended that a full public broadcasting system be established along the British model. Religion received only a sparse comment suggesting the implementation of “some regulation which would prohibit statements of

a controversial nature and debar a speaker making an attack upon the leaders or doctrine of another religion.”¹⁸

A by-product of this controversy was that many station managers became increasingly wary of religious content. In Woodward’s opinion, “Jehovah’s Witnesses killed all gospel broadcasting,”¹⁹ and within this air of uncertainty it is not surprising that the Alliance’s application for a license was rejected three times. Finally, with the interjection of A.M. Carmichael, Member of Parliament from Kindersley, Saskatchewan, a broadcast license was granted and following a memorable experience getting the radio equipment through Canadian customs, station CHMA made its broadcasting debut Easter Sunday, 17 April 1927.²⁰

With only a 125 watt transmitter, CHMA shared its frequency with four other Edmonton stations (reduced to three after the IBSA station had its license revoked). The onset of the Depression made it difficult for the Alliance to maintain its equipment, but when it attempted to sell in 1930, the recently-elected Bennett government was in a wake of indecision over the Aird report and blocked CHMA from transferring its license.²¹ After revoking the IBSA stations and only reluctantly approving the Alliance application, the situation had now reversed itself with the government effectively forcing Alliance to stay on the air. Despite the difficult times, the medium must have had an impact; not only did it continue broadcasting, but when the Great West Bible Institute closed down in 1930, CHMA also moved into its own broadcasting centre in downtown Edmonton upgrading its transmission to 250 watts.

Sunday was the busiest broadcasting day for the young station in an age when the total weekly broadcasting period was split up among the different stations sharing frequencies. A Sunday morning service often started off the day, followed by a radio Sunday School produced by the Great West Bible Institute. A brief programme of religious music preceded a commentary on current events in light of prophecy. The hour from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. featured recorded gospel songs for the *Hospital Hour*, followed by *Missionary Radiographs* and the *Children’s Story by Aunt Dora*. The day wrapped up with *By the Fireside* Sunday nights.²²

The entrance of the Alliance into the business of broadcasting meant more than simply an expanded outreach for the Christian and Missionary Alliance in central Alberta; it also opened the doors for a number of other groups to embark on their own radio ventures. CHMA reserved most of Sunday and about an hour per day over the rest of the week for Alliance

broadcasts, but eagerly rented out the remaining time to other religious organizations. For a small fee (one year they only totalled \$280), CHMA broadcast shows for a wide variety of groups, including the Pentecostal Assemblies, Lutherans, Holiness Movement, Nazarenes, Regular Baptists, Western Union Baptists and a number of others.²³ While low in power, CHMA was strong enough to carry remote broadcasts from the Alberta Baptist Bible Academy in Wetaskiwin and the *Camrose Lutheran Hour*.²⁴ Although not all who purchased time on CHMA were necessarily “fundamentalist,” the majority of these were at least strongly evangelical in character.

Despite the general success of CHMA, new governmental regulations by 1934 made it impossible for the Alliance to upgrade adequately their equipment to the required standards. The station was sold and eventually converted to the 5,000 watt CFRN, but in settling this transaction, the Alliance negotiated the right to book six and a half hours of airtime every Sunday. As it did when it owned the station, the Alliance sold what time they did not need or could not fill to other denominations.²⁵

As religious broadcasting evolved between 1925 to 1945, two different but not exclusive conceptions of radio were being developed over how this media could and should be used in a religious context. Originally, the most common expression of religious radio was the broadcast of live church services, a practice carried on by both “fundamentalist” and “modernist” churches. Many fundamentalists viewed radio as representing a vaguely-defined extension of existing congregations, although Aberhart was the only one to go so far as to offer a series of radio “club” memberships.²⁶ CHMA was initially very active in this field as well. Out of a total of 250 hours of broadcasting in one year (1933), CHMA transmitted 88 church services from a variety of denominations (50 were from the Alliance’s Beulah Tabernacle alone).²⁷ The Alliance even experimented with a radio communion service, advising listeners to have bread and wine by their receiving set.²⁸

Gradually, however, congregational extension began to take a second place to the idea that radio could best be used as a tool for evangelism. But reaching the unconverted through the airwaves called for a different approach and style than simply re-broadcasting church services. A whole new format was necessary to making the gospel message more appealing.

The Re-making of Religious Radio

Briercrest Bible Institute began broadcasting the *Young People's Hour* over Regina's CKCK in 1936. Originally students rose at 4:30 a.m. Sunday mornings to make the trek to Regina in time to put on their show, but by the end of 1937 a remote amplifier had been installed at the school. The *Young People's Hour* opened with the school's venerable founder, Henry Hildebrand, greeting the audience while students sang a popular gospel song in the background. A short prayer was spoken and followed quickly by more gospel songs, variously led by the choir, quartet or soloists. The gospel songs were an invaluable element in fundamentalist broadcasting, providing smooth transitions between different sections of the programme or serving as a background for a closing prayer.²⁹

In addition to offering their musical talents, students often supplied dramatized conversations to convey simple messages. At times the *Young People's Hour* was the scene of a "classroom lecture" (all scripted) where students debated theological issues and answered questions with Hildebrand showing all the true light.³⁰ This dialogue portion of the show was later standardized as a conversation between two students, "Jean" and "Homer" who turned everyday events into analogies of salvation:

Jean: Well there is something about good news that thrills one.

Homer: Like hearing about an inheritance that you've fallen heir to. That would be thrilling enough for me.

Jean: But Homer, I know some good news which is more thrilling than that. It is a message of love and forgiveness to the undeserving and guilty . . .³¹

The style of religious broadcasting had changed dramatically from the early days of CHMA when re-broadcasting church services was the dominant format used to reach into the community. The refinement of these techniques added to the appeal of religious radio, but it also made parts of these broadcasts practically indistinguishable from contemporary secular programming.

The trappings of the broadcast should not overshadow the fact that the heart of the programme was the sermon or devotional message. The

majority of Hildebrand's radio sermons illustrate common fundamentalist themes of redemption, atonement, grace, dispensationalism and the Second Coming. Although militant tones did not dominate his broadcasting, occasionally the radio preacher could be very spirited in his exposition:

Some have thought and lived as though a Christian was put into a band-box immediately after his conversion and labelled for heaven – marked, “This side up? Handle with care, please” . . . Does the Bible picture the Christian as a spiritual loiterer or as a sluggard sound asleep? Far from it. The apostle Paul described the Christian life as the life of a warrior . . . The Christian is not called to a holiday, but a campaign . . . There is a war on, the world, the flesh, and the devil, yea all the forces of darkness are arraigned against him . . .³²

Hildebrand often employed popular anecdotes and analogies to get his point across, but while vague references to the heresy of some “religious professors” were common, Hildebrand was careful never to criticize personalities or congregations directly.³³ This type of rhetoric was rarely offered as serious exposition or critique, but was rather employed to generate listener interest in a subject for the purpose of evangelism. The sermons of H.C. Gardner's *A.B.I. Gospel Hour* was similarly oriented towards a very general invitational message of salvation.³⁴

Appeals for monetary support were generally treated very delicately by fundamentalists. Hildebrand felt uncomfortable with this aspect of the programme and avoided it when possible:

. . . let me remind you friends in radio land that this broadcast is supported by the free will offerings of our listeners. This is the first time this season that we are making mention of this pressing need to you. But since the Young Peoples' Hour is passing through a time of severe testing, I felt at liberty to lay this work upon your heart.³⁵

Gardner made similar, if somewhat starker, appeals by noting “it is hard to pay the radio bills unless donations come in.”³⁶ Compared to the elaborate fund-raising schemes of Aberhart, it would appear that fundamentalists more commonly relied on a much simpler approach by employing a direct but brief appeal to the general public.

W.E. Mann claims that the reasons mainstream churches were slow in realizing the potential of radio were the internal tendencies toward

“conformity, respectability, careerism, and centralization of policy,” in addition to the fact that by the time they were ready to enter the field of radio, the best time slots had been long occupied by fundamentalists.³⁷ However, mainstream churches did periodically broadcast services even prior to Aberhart’s entrance to the field and at one time the United Church operated its own radio station in Vancouver. More credit should be given to the style of programming developed by fundamentalists; while some remained committed to only broadcasting church services, many fundamentalists realized that something different was necessary to utilize the evangelistic potential of radio. Instead of simply relying on active worship with the inevitable spots of dead-air during the sacraments, the offering, or waiting for lectors to reach the pulpit for Scripture readings, fundamentalists produced shorter, smooth-flowing programs that presented a simple format of gospel songs, prayers, and a short but direct message. By the early 1940s, this technique had been fine-tuned to a new level of proficiency.

The Professionalization of Religious Radio

Both Prairie Bible Institute and Briercrest Bible Institute supported a unique “Evangelistic Campaign by Radio” led by California evangelist Dr. Oscar Lowry in 1938. Starting in Regina and then moving to Calgary, Lowry preached twice daily on weekdays and on Sunday evenings for six weeks. CFCN apparently charged him double the standard commercial rates for his half-hour period early in the morning, putting the cost of air time at \$3,000 for the full period. However, within the six weeks spent at Calgary the virtually unknown preacher received 5,700 letters and a gross income of more than \$10,000.³⁸ That Lowry could make such an impact in an area blanketed by a variety of religious broadcasts was remarkable. One listener commented that Lowry’s campaign “wasn’t just a ‘preaching program’ like Aberhart, but something warm and encouraging and helpful in spiritual growth.”³⁹

Repeated requests to continue the broadcasts led Lowry to invite an acquaintance from California to come to Calgary. C.A. Sawtell was a studious graduate of Moody who founded the Sunrise Gospel Hour in 1939 along with Trevor Kelford, a charismatic soloist, and pianist Brian King. King was soon replaced by a young pianist from Calgary, T. Elgar Roberts. Broadcasting weekday mornings and Sundays, the show was an

immediate success. However, friction developed between Sawtell and Kelford in 1941 over the signing authority of the radio contracts.⁴⁰ Sawtell left the broadcast and Roberts accepted a call to serve as musical director at Beulah Alliance Tabernacle in Edmonton, where he was involved with music on the remnants of CHMA broadcasting. Soon after, Sawtell moved to Edmonton and reunited with his pianist in founding the *Heaven and Home Hour* on CFRN.

In the meantime, Kelford sold his interests in the *Sunrise Gospel Hour* and a small Christian bookstore to J.D. Carlson, who was serving as pastor of Beulah Alliance at the time. Carlson was an ex-orchestra leader and a talented musician with a programme loosely patterned after Sawtell's, but was generally more informal in nature. In 1947 Carlson reported that he received over a hundred letters a day in the summer and 300 to 400 during the winter.⁴¹

Both Carlson and Sawtell employed innovative fund-raising schemes, often involving religious tracts or books. Both programmes made appeals supporting inter-denominational societies like the China Inland Mission and the Sudan Interior Mission, whose missionaries often made guest appearances. Sawtell inaugurated a very successful "Fifty Club Plan" whereby people were able to pledge twenty-five cents a week to support the personal needs of a missionary in the field.⁴² Sawtell also encouraged memorization contests, offering various books and tracts as prizes.⁴³

Sawtell and Carlson both gained minor celebrity status in Alberta and surrounding areas, which was indelibly enhanced by their willingness to answer the many requests they received to visit the communities within their broadcast area. On weekends, both evangelists conducted campaigns in surrounding small towns to encourage revivals which occasionally led to the establishment of new churches.⁴⁴ One participant commented that these campaigns were "a highlight . . . the country people were thrilled to meet personally those 'voices' that had been such a blessing to them."⁴⁵

Lowry's campaign and its resulting spin-offs marked the professionalization of religious radio in western Canada in the early 1940s. Radio was no longer viewed as congregational extension or even as simply one more method of evangelism; it had become a full-time occupation for a new class of "radio preachers" like Carlson and Sawtell. According to Roberts, in order to maintain the hectic and constant schedule of broadcasting, at least \$100 needed to be in the mail bag every morning to pay for the airtime and a staff of four to five people.⁴⁶ This was in sharp contrast

to the early 1930s when Pearson reported that CHMA had been able to reduce their costs to a spare four dollars per hour of broadcasting.⁴⁷ Sawtell held semi-annual audits of the *Heaven and Home Hour* which was incorporated in 1942 with a seven-member Board to govern it.⁴⁸ Everything from the musicians to the accounting had been raised from the shaky amateur beginnings of individual congregations or Bible institutes to a slick, professional business-like venture. Even CHMA (now under CFRN) as an early proponent of broadcasting church services had shifted its programming by 1945 to a collection of easy-listening evangelistic-style shows such as the daily *Chapel Chimes*, and Sunday evening's *Evening Meditation* and the *Fireside Hour*.⁴⁹

The Medium and the Message

L.E. Maxwell of Prairie Bible Institute hailed Lowry as “one of those few present-day evangelists who has remained loyal to his call . . . having avoided the pitfalls into which evangelists so often stumble.”⁵⁰ Maxwell never outlined exactly what he meant by “pitfalls,” but like many other fundamentalists he was excited about the potential of the new medium. Professional evangelism had been criticized for its sensational methods, but up until the mid-1920s it at least had kept fundamentalists in the eye of the mainstream media. Following the Scopes “Monkey” Trial in 1925, however, fundamentalism was tainted with images of anti-intellectualism and backwardness. With the exception of Shields and Aberhart, few fundamentalists could hope to attract the kind of secular press coverage that had intently followed the highly-touted urban campaigns preceding the Scopes debacle. As Stewart Hoover notes, “[fundamentalism’s] problems were partly, then, problems of communication. It had lost its ability to command public attention.”⁵¹ Radio offered a vast and immediate audience that did not “filter” the message or image presented by fundamentalists. Carlson and Sawtell became minor celebrities within their broadcast areas, and through the radio American evangelists such as Charles Fuller and Paul Rader had also regained the “superstar” status accorded to the earlier vintage professional evangelists.⁵²

The religious content of the fundamentalist message was not unaffected by the new medium. Theologically little had changed, but the tone of radio broadcasting in comparison to early professional evangelism or print media was decidedly different. Government regulations meant that

attacking popular targets like Catholicism or the United Church could not be a part of fundamentalist radio rhetoric. Even “modernism” per se was rarely mentioned on the air. When liberal theology was criticized, it was generally couched in ambiguous and vague terminology, such as Henry Hildebrand’s comment that “I fear that some religious professors may know much about being tempted, but they know little about temptation.”⁵³

Fundamentalists were not, however, simply following government recommendations in shifting their message. With the exception of Aberhart, few directed any polemics against these restrictions, which may suggest that fundamentalists were aware that radio was a “delicate” media that needed careful consideration, regardless of legalities. Unlike the religious press which was shamelessly employed to expose and attack the evils of modernism, Catholicism or adventist sects,⁵⁴ the use of radio meant that fundamentalists could attack little more than vague references to “worldly” or “carnal” pleasures. Even these denunciations are somewhat ironic considering how “worldly” the fundamentalist broadcasts had become. Mann notes that their programming was “similar in character to successful secular broadcasts such as soap opera drama, mystery stories, cowboy and jazz music.”⁵⁵ Fundamentalists were even becoming adept at employing the popular jargon associated with broadcasting; Winnipeg evangelist Zelma Argue equated the reception of spiritual gifts with listening to “God’s ‘radio’ . . . getting tuned in to the ‘waves.’”⁵⁶

Exactly what effect the use of radio had on fundamentalism is difficult to judge. The presentation of a general evangelical message without the schismatic overtones of earlier fundamentalist controversies undoubtedly attracted many listeners from mainline churches. While some may have felt attracted to fundamentalist denominations, many others clearly saw nothing wrong with maintaining traditional denominational ties while at the same time financially supporting a “fundamentalist” broadcast (a term rarely heard on the airwaves), especially one that proclaimed to be inter-denominational.⁵⁷ It is conceivable that radio converts attracted by a moderated message would in turn exert a moderating influence on the movement, but it is more likely that radio was only one of many factors involved in shifting fundamentalism towards its general orientation as “neo-evangelicalism” in the 1940s.⁵⁸

The behavioral patterns of fundamentalism were affected in other ways as well. Radio was an expensive enterprise which eventually required elaborate schemes to finance effectively. Although some, like Hildebrand,

were uncomfortable with this aspect of evangelism, the growth of “pan-professional” radio preachers standardized this methodology. At one point, Kelford had even asked people to send in any gold items they had, from teeth to frames for glasses, which could be melted down to finance the show.⁵⁹

This fund-raising style, combined with the increasingly prominent emphasis on “entertainment” items like chatty dialogue and gospel songs would appear to make radio evangelism a good candidate for the types of criticism directed at professional evangelism. While some preachers were attacked for financial accountability by critics outside fundamentalist circles, there was very little reproach from within. In attempting to engage the world through evangelism, fundamentalism found itself being conditioned to certain cultural trends that they had rejected less than twenty years previously.

Conclusion

Radio marked the “New Age” of evangelism for a number of reasons. Although fundamentalists had innovatively adapted other forms of evangelism, radio was the first to be uniquely pioneered by fundamentalists since there was no nineteenth-century evangelical precedent for comparison. The original justification for radio was that it could reach invalids and others that were isolated or otherwise prevented from receiving regular services. CHMA’s mission was to present “the Message of the Gospel in Music and in Song especially to remote places where there is no church or witness of the Gospel, to homes and hospitals where listeners are unable to attend a house of worship.”⁶⁰ In effect, however, religious radio became a separate and additional component to the religious culture of Western Canada, rather than a selective replacement for regular worship. Daily professional programmes gave many people a method of religious participation outside of their regular church life. Since the messages were broad and general rather than heavy-handed with doctrine, many saw no contradiction between attending a church while at the same time supporting a radio broadcast which was often sponsored or produced by another denomination or an inter-denominational organization.⁶¹

The use of radio also marked a different way of thinking about the methodology of evangelism. Since the rise of professional evangelism,

concerns had been raised about adopting too much of a “sensational” or “worldly” style and therefore fundamentalists were adamant in separating themselves from secular entertainment and frivolities. However, maintaining a sense of integrity while still being able to attract crowds was not easy.⁶² But by the early 1940s fundamentalist perceptions of society had shifted somewhat as fundamentalists found a new home on the radio. The new media was effective in spreading the gospel, but this wonderful new technology also played questionable music such as jazz and offered humorous entertainment like Amos and Andy. By trying to engage mainstream culture in order to evangelise it, fundamentalists had been forced to accept a different way of thinking about the world. The categories of “sacred” versus “secular” shifted its boundaries to allow for media like radio to become morally neutral. By redeeming the medium, fundamentalists were able to rationalize increased broadcasting of “Christian” (or sacred) shows in order to balance the secular message of the growing entertainment industry.⁶³

Quentin Schultze has argued that the fundamentalist/evangelical entrance into radio marked the creation of a “mythos of the electric church” which involved a “grafting” of technological optimism to a sense of Christian progress. Assuming that the gospel could be spread like a consumer product, Schultze criticizes evangelical broadcasters for overlooking the complexity of human communication.⁶⁴ Clifford Christians similarly claims that evangelicals were “devoid of a theory of culture” and were “inarticulate about the symbolic character of cultural forms.”⁶⁵ While it is difficult to argue with these assertions in light of the recent scandals that have marred the field of television evangelism, it would be unfair to place too much blame on fundamentalism for not recognizing the cultural associations of radio since their broadcasts obviously predated the rise of modern media analysis. Nor did they necessarily treat their conception of culture “glibly”; the encroachment of “modern” methods had been a prominent concern within the movement since its inception.

In a sense, many fundamentalists did realize that radio represented more than the words being preached over it and welcomed this means to bring fundamentalism closer to a broader sense of evangelicalism. From being outcasts following the public controversies of the mid-1920s, many realized that radio was a method of re-inventing the movement along a broader evangelical base without the previous attachments of negative militancy. Joel Carpenter argues that “progressive” fundamentalists used

radio to encourage a new surge of panevangelical cooperation which eventually emerged as the “neo-evangelical” movement.⁶⁶ Radio marked not only a “new age” for evangelism, but pointed fundamentalism towards a new era of general acceptability within the context of a re-forming evangelical movement.

Endnotes

1. Much of this paper is based on my M.A. thesis “‘Culture of the Soul’: Fundamentalism and Evangelism in Canada, 1921-1940,” University of Calgary, 1994.
2. Few have written about Shields’ involvement with radio, but static interference was a constant concern to his “phantom” station CJBC (see “Radio File,” Jarvis St. Baptist Church Archives).
3. See W.E. Mann, *Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), 119, 128-129.
4. The fact that many of these schools were actively involved in broadcasting might suggest that this relationship was more than coincidental.
5. The relationship between radio and the emergence of a broader evangelical coalition in the United States has been explored by Joel A. Carpenter, “From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984). Joel Carpenter was gracious in allowing me to view a draft of a work in progress, currently entitled *Revive Us Again: The Recovery of American Fundamentalism 1925-1950*, notably chapter seven which focuses on the role religious radio played in promoting pan-evangelical cooperation.
6. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4.
7. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 12.
8. Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God’s Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 165-170.
9. How these overlapping stages of evangelism related to each other and to the broader fundamentalist movement is examined in more detail in “Culture of the Soul.”

10. See Dennis N. Voskuil, "The Power of the Air: Evangelicals and the Rise of Religious Broadcasting," in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academic Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 70-75.
11. "The Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting," 11 September 1929, 26-27.
12. Frank W. Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting, 1920-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 6. The best study of the early (pre-CBC) days of radio is Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).
13. David R. Elliott, "The Dispensational Theology and Political Ideology of William Aberhart" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1975), 89.
14. Petitions from the Anglican church in Athabasca and the Presbytery of Edmonton both requested that the timing not interfere with regular services (F.D. Roxburgh to W. Aberhart, 5 December 1935; C.H. Conquest to W. Aberhart, 23 December 1935, Premiers' Papers, 69.289/1161, Provincial Archives of Alberta [PAA], Edmonton).
15. Rev. R.S. Stevens to W. Aberhart, 14 January 1936 (Premiers' Papers, PAA, 69.2389/1161). This letter is also published in *Aberhart: Outpourings and Replies*, ed. David R. Elliott (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta), 159-160.
16. *Aberhart: Outpourings and Replies* includes some notable examples of this (see especially an address by the President of Prairie Bible Institute, J. Fergus Kirk, entitled, "Social Credit and the Word of God," 109-122).
17. See Wayne Schmalz, *On Air: Radio in Saskatchewan* (Regina: Coteau Books, 1990), 37-42; and Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting*, 30-31; and Vipond, *Listening In*.
18. "Royal Commission," 11.
19. J.H. Woodward, "The History of the Western Canadian District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance," transcribed address, 11 (Beulah Alliance Church, Edmonton).
20. According to Woodward, the Alliance had not realized that Canadian duties on the goods would entail close to 50% more in additional costs. After mentioning that the station was to be set up in the Great West Bible Institute, the customs agent declared that since it was to be used for educational purposes, no duty would be necessary ("History of the Western Canadian District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance," 12-13).

21. J.H. Woodward, "District Superintendent Report", April 1930, 1 (Beulah Alliance Church).
22. This section on CHMA's programming has been greatly aided by the work of Terry Rosenau's unpublished research paper "Rev. Charles H.C. Jackson: A Buffer Between Giants" (on file at Beulah Alliance Church). See also *Edmonton Journal*, 28 January 1928, 8; and 9 March 1929, 16.
23. In 1931, CHMA broadcast from 28 different churches (see "18th Anniversary: Radio Gospel Broadcasts from Beulah Tabernacle, 1927-1945" [Beulah Alliance Church]).
24. "18th Anniversary" pamphlet (Beulah Alliance Church).
25. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 121.
26. This scheme is outlined in the "Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute Calendar," ca. 1928, Aberhart Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, 69.230/1a, 12.
27. Reuban Pearson, "Radio Report," 17-22 April 1933, 1 (Beulah Alliance Church).
28. *Edmonton Journal*, 10 March 1928, 9.
29. On the role of gospel songs within the fundamentalist movement, see James Opp, "Gospel Songs and the Emergence of Twentieth-Century Fundamentalism," *The Christian Librarian* 36, No. 4 (1993): 105-107.
30. H. Hildebrand, "Walking In The Light," 1 (Hildebrand Radio Sermons, Briercrest Bible College Archives).
31. *Young Peoples' Hour*, Programme 12, 29 November 1942 (taped copy from Briercrest Bible College Archives).
32. Henry Hildebrand, "Conquerors through the Blood," 1 (Hildebrand Radio Sermons, Briercrest Bible College Archives).
33. From Hildebrand's notes, it appears that even the word "modernism" was rarely (if ever) mentioned over the radio.
34. Selected recordings of the *A.B.I. Gospel Hour* are available at Gardner Bible College.
35. *Young Peoples' Hour*, Programme 13, 21 January 1945 (Taped copy from Briercrest Bible College Archives).
36. *ABI Gospel Hour*, "Churches and the Church," n.d., Gardner Bible College.

37. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 132-133.
38. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 122. Some of these letters were from Saskatchewan, and although they arrived during the Calgary campaign, most of these were likely responses from the previous campaign in Regina. Samples were printed in the Prairie Bible Institute journal, *Prairie Pastor* 12, No. 1 (January 1939): 3-11.
39. Correspondence with Gene A. Friesen, May 1994.
40. Interview with T. Elgar Roberts, April 1994.
41. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 125.
42. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 124.
43. Correspondence with Gene A. Friesen, May 1994.
44. At least one Alliance church (Barrhead) was founded in this manner, following a community hall meeting by Carlson (Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 126).
45. Correspondence with Gene A. Friesen, May 1994.
46. Interview with T. Elgar Roberts, April 1994.
47. "Radio Report," 17-22 April 1933, 1 (Beulah Alliance Church).
48. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 123.
49. "18th Anniversary" pamphlet (Beulah Alliance Church).
50. *Prairie Pastor* 12, No. 1 (January 1939): 2.
51. Stewart M. Hoover, *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 40.
52. Fuller's "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" was established in 1942 and was carried by a variety of stations in Canada. For more on Fuller, see George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 13-16.
53. H. Hildebrand, "Conquerors through the Blood," 2 (Hildebrand Radio Sermons, Briercrest Bible College Archives).

54. See for example L.E. Maxwell's denunciation of the United Church journal *The New Outlook* in *The Prairie Pastor* 5, No. 2 (February 1932), 4-11. This also indicates that "militancy" was not unique to Aberhart and T.T. Shields as suggested by Stackhouse (*Canadian Evangelicalism*, 11-12, 20-45).
55. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, 133.
56. Zelma Argue, "God's Radio", *The Revival Broadcast* 1, No. 1 (December, 1923). The radio analogy extended not only to the name of the paper, but also to its logo which included crackling electrical lines and the title.
57. This may have been the case with my great-grandmother, Mary Chilton, who was a Scottish-born Presbyterian and later member of the Claresholm United Church. According to records kept by Charles Pearce, she is listed as having given \$1.00 to the Prophetic Bible Institute (presumably to support the broadcast).
58. In some contexts, "neo-evangelicalism" refers specifically to members of the National Association of Evangelicals established in 1942, but it is also a more general term to describe a section of American fundamentalism which was "convinced that if the voice of fundamentalism could be tempered slightly, evangelical Christianity could 'win America'" (George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991], 64). Although Canadians lacked the organizational structure of the NAE, this study suggests many fundamentalists had clearly started to downplay previous controversies and broaden their appeal in a similar fashion (see also Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition," and Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*).
59. Interview with T. Elgar Roberts, April 1994.
60. "18th Anniversary" pamphlet (Beulah Alliance Church).
61. Even the denominationally-sponsored programmes often presented a very "inter-denominational" type message. The Alliance pledged to promote "a bond of friendship between church organizations for the promulgation of the Gospel in the providing of Radio Broadcast time to other denominations" ("18th Anniversary" pamphlet [Beulah Alliance Church]).
62. This theme is explored in "Culture of the Soul." An excellent example of the internal criticism directed against professional evangelism is R.E. McAlister's comment that, "The Church doesn't need to copy after Hollywood . . . Did [Jesus] ever cater to worldly men or worldly principles in order to accomplish His end - Absolutely No" ("A Sceptre of Righteousness," *Pentecostal Testimony* [November 1929]: 5).

63. This point is made in Quentin J. Schultze, "The Mythos of the Electronic Church," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4 (1987): 249.
64. The primary article outlining Schultze's argument is "The Mythos of the Electronic Church." These ideas were expanded in "Keeping the Faith: American Evangelicals and the Media," in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).
65. Clifford G. Christians, "Redemptive Media as the Evangelical's Cultural Task," in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, 331-332.
66. Joel A. Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition," 10-12.

