

5. The Good Earth

In the very early years of television, some of its producers spoke of it, with bated breath, as an entirely new art-form. It was all about the marriage of pictures and sounds, in an immediate way, unlike the film which, as we have seen, had to be processed and edited down to its final form. But, in those far-off days before the invention of video-tape recordings, all programmes using electronic cameras were 'live' and a regular mystique grew up around their coherent and continuous use.

At that point, some of us were involved in a highly visual programme in the crypt of Glasgow Cathedral, surely the most photogenic under-church in Christendom, with its massive pillars, fan-vaulting, and powerful-looking architecture. This programme was indeed to be 'pure television' and we went to work on the superb architecture of the place, matching it with what was to us the appropriate music and speech.

Next morning, at our coffee-break, there was the inevitable post-mortem with other producer-types, some of whom had loved the programme, but the majority of whom were a little puzzled by what we were seeking to do. Nevertheless there was an animated and highly technical discussion about camera-angles, slow-tracks, artistic slow-fades and a perfect welter of such esoteric terminology. All through this highfalutin' discussion, a journalist called Andy Cowan-Martin sat silently at the end of the table while the debate raged around him. Noticing his silence one of us asked him if he had seen this epic programme. 'Aye!' he replied. 'What did you think of it?' Andy's neck swelled visibly, then he erupted with, 'I'm getting sick and tired of television producers producing television programmes for the edification of other television producers!' He was certainly

right about that epic and about many more from that day to this.

One of the genuine problems of communication today is that in some areas it becomes so specialized that only the experts know what it means. A classic example of this is to be found in the field of architecture where architects will award each other prizes for technical brilliance while the person who has to live and work amongst their products finds his environment depressing and even dehumanizing. Witness the vast high-rise flats in many a city throughout the world. Once upon a time, each nation had its own, distinct, domestic architecture. Today the high-rise products of Glasgow, Amsterdam, Nairobi and Sydney all look exactly alike. And many of our Scottish housing estates built since the war can best be described as in a Neo-Barlinnie style—ugly, prison-like buildings, seen from the outside, but often splendidly modern and comfortable within. I should hate to have to live in them. And that is how many of their dwellers feel about the boxes in which they must rear their families and surround them with home-comforts.

David Low, the famous cartoonist between the Wars, evolved several favourite characters who became immediately recognizable as representatives of a point of view. There was, for example, the stout and walrus moustachioed Colonel Blimp, the epitome of bone-headed reaction against any progressive idea. At the other end of the ideological scale, there was an enormous draught-horse, an overgrown and overfed Clydesdale which represented the ponderousness of the Trade Union movement. Politicians and dictators too strutted across Low's scenes. Inevitably there was the common man himself. A small, neat, bewildered little fellow—some said it was Low's picture of himself—who was always at the receiving end of whatever ills the other characters were perpetrating. He was long-suffering and helpless, for he apparently could not lift one little finger in his own defence.

I sometimes remember Low's Little Man when I think of the average television viewer. He too, when he switches on his set, is at the mercy of this enormous entertainment and information

medium which has evolved over the years. Faraway people in faraway and extremely sophisticated places choose what he will see and how it will be presented to him. Sometimes these programme-makers give him what they imagine he wants to see, especially if the programme they control is a mass-audience programme, for example, being put out by the BBC and being fiercely competed with for his patronage by a similar programme on the ITV network. Mass appeal is the motto and that often means the lowest common denominator. Thus the BBC can, after the event, confidently proclaim that, in a given week, they had the highest viewing audience—25,000,000 no less, and this for that curious combination of feminine charms and a cattle-market, The Miss World competition. Those producers who protest most loudly that they are 'giving the viewer what he wants' invariably produce programmes which may well have mass appeal but are often of the lowest possible taste. What, in fact, they are doing, is giving *some* of the viewers what they want, and what they imagine they want, rather than having any complete certitude in the matter. The Little Man sits at home and watches and thinks his own thoughts without any real redress.

Other producers are involved in an even more hazardous pursuit than this. They are determined to give the viewer what they are convinced he *should* want, whether he likes it or not. They *know* what is good for the Little Man. So if their picture of him adds up to a conventional, ordinary middle-class sort of a person, they will seek to liberate him from his ordinariness by shocking him out of it, one way or another. In this laudable intention, they are almost entirely unsuccessful for the Little Man merely gets angrier and switches over to the other channel, too often to find, alas, that they are at it again over there! For it is one of the peculiarities of television competition between the BBC and the ITV companies, that they compete against each other with like kinds of programmes. Only in that way, they believe, can they get the biggest audiences. Thus wild west film competes with wild west film, family serial with family serial, pop stars with other more glittering pop stars. So, one of the great arguments produced in the early nineteen-fifties in favour of commercial television, that it would offer a

genuine alternative to the rather ponderous programmes of the monopolistic BBC, has, in the event, proved to be completely false. Indeed, the only true alternative to the rat-race for viewers at popular viewing times is offered by the other public service channel, BBC-2, which was what the BBC wanted to create twenty-five years ago, thus eliminating the necessity for commercial television. For the BBC had competed most successfully for a decade within its own radio system, with Home Service, Light Programme and Third Programme. And its radio producers were brought up to compete as fiercely as any television-types, particularly Home Service versus Light Programme.

What does our Little Man want to see, anyway? There are probably as many answers to that as there are Little Men! But we can deduce some things about him. First of all, he is in his own home, by his own fireside. In all probability his wife is with him, and even some others of his family. He has not chosen to go out to the theatre, nor yet the music hall, the concert hall, nor the cinema. He is at home after a hard day's work and he wants above everything else to be entertained. By the magic of television, he can have the theatre, the music hall, the concert hall and the cinema, all at his own fireside and in the bosom of his family. But chiefly, especially in the earlier part of the evening, up to around 10 o'clock, he wants to be amused, to laugh and to enjoy his entertainment. Nothing too serious as yet, just a pleasant, friendly relaxing hour or so before bed.

At a comparatively early stage in its development, the BBC enunciated its three main aims as: 'To inform, to educate and to entertain.' The Little Man puts the last first. After all, he has probably just acquired an expensive colour-set, he has paid his increasingly high licence and it is his right to be entertained. So anyone who wants to inform or to educate him had better do it in an entertaining way, whatever his programme, and this by no means leaves religion out, as we have seen. All of which poses considerable problems for the producers, many of whom, by their youthful years, their educational and cultural backgrounds, not to mention their personal moral and political standards, have little in common with our simple-minded hero in his domestic setting.

Both BBC and commercial television have their means of finding out about what viewers think of their programmes. Indeed the BBC had a complete and extremely capable Audience Research Department working on this aspect of consumer research for many years before the coming of television. There is widespread ignorance of how Audience Research works. In hundreds of meetings, up and down the country, the *second* question I was—and am—asked, was always, ‘How does the BBC know how many viewers it has to any given programme?’ This is a fact which, in itself, reveals a certain amount of scepticism in various directions. Incidentally, since no doubt the same query has arisen in readers’ minds, the *first* question, especially in Church gatherings, was always, ‘How do you select churches and ministers for broadcasts?’ No matter how thorough and painstaking one’s answer, it was invariably followed up with a paean of praise about their own kirk and minister: such is the immense local loyalty one finds throughout the land!

Audience Research really works like the Gallup or any other Opinion Poll, but in retrospect. A.R. does not speculate; it asks, quite simply, ‘What programmes did you watch last night?’ and if you cannot remember, the interviewer will produce a list of last night’s programmes from both *Radio Times* and the *TV Times* to jog your memory. At least 3,000 opinions are taken in this way every day and they are taken from a complete cross-section of society, all classes being represented. The result is a *quantitative* figure which represents a reasonably close approximation to the total number of viewers watching the given programme.

The *qualitative* reaction to the programme, the percentage of liking or disliking, is calculated in a similar but rather more complicated way, yet one again familiarly used by the pollsters, although of course, as with the quantitative figure, not a matter of speculation, there being a positive answer to each question asked. Thus, if I saw, after a given *Songs of Praise* programme, that it has received an A.R. Figure of 25 and an Appreciation Index of 70, I knew that 25% of the adult population of Scotland had watched that programme and their enjoyment of it was quite high, since it had gained 70 marks out of 100 for appreciation. Such figures are

a valuable guide to producers as to the size of audience and their reactions to any given programme.

Should the producer wish an even fuller reaction in depth, he then requests a special Audience Research investigation into a programme or series of programmes. For this purpose, he sends off to A.R. Department a questionnaire which will cover such points, let us say, concerning the above *Songs of Praise*, as (1) Total number of viewers; (2) Their social and educational background; (3) What percentage of them were church or non-church goers; (4) Which hymns were the most popular of the ten sung; (5) What they thought of the two new hymns, the religious pop group and the children's choir taking part in the programme; (6) What was their overall impression of the choirs and congregation that took part; (7) Their impression of the presenter of hymns; (8) Any other comments they might have on this or other programmes in the series.

Such an investigation, carried out at regular intervals, can give a great deal of information as to how given programmes are received. But it is still easy for the producer to read into them what he really wants to see. It depends upon the degree of his commitment to his particular subject and interest.

Professor William Barclay, the most brilliant 'common-man's' communicator of our generation, credits an old woman in his first and only parish of Trinity, Renfrew, with opening his eyes to the nature of Christian communication. She had been seriously ill over a winter, during which time he had visited her regularly. Came the spring and a day when she said, 'I'll be back in kirk on Sunday. Thank you for visiting me so faithfully.' Then she added, 'But I've a question to ask you. Why is it that when you were beside my bed, or at the other side of the fire, I understood every word you said or put up in your wee prayers. But, man, when you're in yon pulpit of a Sabbath you're away over my head!' Barclay was deeply distressed by her observation. How dare he preach above the head of such a one whom he had come to recognize as one of the saints of God. He turned to the Gospels, seeking an answer in the teaching method of Jesus. So his quest which came to such splendid fruition, began.

As we have seen, in Jesus's stories, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, we have his teaching method at its simplest and most penetrating. 'The trouble with the New Testament' said Dr Archie Craig on one occasion, 'is not the parts of it I don't understand; it's the parts I do!' The Prodigal Son communicates its meaning to all levels of intellect; to the university Professor of Moral Philosophy, to the daily help who cleans out his study—and to both with equal impact. We established in our first chapter that our worship, in Scotland, of what one might call the 'Intellectual Pulpit' has become a burden to the direct communication of the Word; for all of us, in Jesus's terms, must become like children properly to apprehend the truth. Yet there is profound adult truth in the Prodigal Son and such stories. We have to translate our truth into human, non-academic and often non-intellectual terms—except on the very few occasions when our audience is of academic, theological and intellectual equals, in which case we can let our polysyllabic hair down to our heart's content.

Let us have another look at our Little Man—and his wife—to whom we are trying to communicate something of Christ and his Glory at 6.15 p.m. on a Sunday night, the time when both BBC and ITV channels are devoted to religious programmes. Let us come at him through another medium, the Sunday newspapers which lie scattered around him and discarded by now. In Scotland in February 1975 he bought the following:

1,250,000	copies of	<i>The Sunday Post</i>
760,000	„ „	<i>The Sunday Mail</i>
400,000	„ „	<i>The Sunday Express</i>
500,000	„ „	<i>The News of the World.</i>

This makes a grand total of just under 3,000,000 copies of non-literary, popular Sunday papers. In the same month his more educated brethren took approximately:

145,000	copies of	<i>The Sunday Times</i>
80,000	„ „	<i>The Observer,</i>

making 225,000 copies in all, being about 7% of the total. Let us note in passing that this also is not far off the 'educated' per-

centage of those watching television at 6.15 p.m. on Sunday nights.

Again, consider some figures for the daily press in Scotland, for February 1975, with figures given to the nearest 1,000.

<i>The Daily Record</i>	620,000
<i>The Daily Express</i>	450,000
<i>The Dundee Courier and Advertiser</i>	130,000
<i>The Aberdeen Press and Journal</i>	112,000
<i>The Glasgow Herald</i>	105,000
<i>The Scotsman</i>	86,000

Readers of *The Scotsman*, the middle-classes of Edinburgh and those parts of the country which see the Scottish Establishment as being centred on the capital city, are astonished to discover that well over 1,300,000 of their countrymen prefer papers with a newsy, folksy, non-cultural approach.

One other observation concerning the ordinary man and his wife who make up the vast bulk of the Sunday 6.15 p.m. audience. He is, socially, industrially and politically, very much more important in this last quarter of the twentieth century than he was in the first or the second, even the third quarter. He it is who is to be found in the masses of the Trade Union movement whose influence now far exceeds anything we have ever known before in this country. The future of our country, its prosperity or its decline, lies firmly in his hands with all their new-found bargaining power. If once the so-called intelligentsia were considered the most important target for religious dialogue this is no longer true in terms of an over-all strategy for evangelism. It is the soul of the common man which is up for the highest bidder and some there be who are bidding with the highest of material stakes.

What I am trying to say is that the best programmes for the 6.15 p.m. space are of what one might term 'Prodigal Son' type of religion, the programmes which communicate, equally, at all levels. Inevitably those of academic-intellectual background will complain that such broadcasts are lacking in theological content. Inevitably those who produce such programmes know that they are being criticized by those who complain. The one kind of criticism which hurts the Scottish minister more than any other is that he is

theologically inadequate, such is the prestige we still place upon our heavily academically-orientated training for the ministry.

'The speed of the convoy,' one of my old professors used to say when advising us on sermon-content, 'is the speed of the slowest ship.' But so often our Little Man and his wife have no say in the matter whatever. In actual fact religious programmes are planned and produced, sometimes as the result of a flash of inspiration which sparked off discussion between like minds in a religious staff discussion. Sometimes they arise from the highly critical comments of an agnostic, anti-religion colleague on the broadcasting authority staff; sometimes arising from the deep doubts, longings and ideals of the individual producers concerned; sometimes as a result of the ideas or protest of official religious advisers. The inevitable result is that the number which hit fairly and squarely on the Little Man's target are, as the film industry has it for its more fanciful works, purely coincidental. What we desperately need is more information about our Little Man, his circumstances, his needs, his problems, his fears, his hopes, his joys, his sorrows. With that picture in mind, we can begin to build programmes for him, whether these programmes are people he understands (and who understand him), or programmes which show him himself, 'as God sees him', as the Gregorian Sacramentary collect has it.

In Scotland there is no anti-clericalism nor hostility towards religion such as are experienced in other countries. The Little Man, and even more so his wife, want to believe, want to belong. Indeed they will normally identify themselves with a church when asked if they belong to one, simply on the basis that the one at the corner of the street buried their grandmother when she died last winter. Or the minister is the local school or industrial chaplain, belongs to the bowling club, is good at Burns Suppers, or almost any other non-theological but essentially human reason you can think up.

Somewhere down the line, there is a reason for his alienation from actual churchgoing. Often it is because of what he supposes is some moral fault—he drinks too much on a Saturday night being one of the most frequent of them. Somehow or other the church, for him, is a place 'for good folk', and not, as Ronald

Selby Wright used constantly to say in his Radio Padre years, 'a reformatory for sinners'. Yet again some simply do not want to be reformed in any way; they are, as they say, 'fine pleased with themselves'. However misguided we may feel them to be, at least they are honest about their attitudes.

He may have little time for the Established Church but, as a typical ironworker reminded me many years ago in a wartime air-raid shelter, 'If we've no' time for yer kirk, that's no' to say we've no' time for yer Jesus'. William Barclay tells how he once walked into a slippyard pub in Dumbarton seeking cigarettes when he was in the midst of his eight-year stint of television lectures. He was at once recognized and the pub erupted around him, welcoming him and asking him questions. Television has brought into ordinary, non-church homes our best communicators with a popular appeal. They are watched, discussed and appreciated by large numbers of non-church people. More than once, in conversation with garage-hands, barbers and everyday folk, I have initiated a conversation on religious broadcasting which invariably ended with: 'I never go to kirk, but I always watch *Songs of Praise* and Professor Barclay.' (Or any one of half a dozen of the common man's favourite communicators. It is doubtful if there are more than half a dozen of them.)

He is looking for a communicator who is human and shows his humanity, not by any gimmicks but by his understanding of the situations in which he and his wife live and move. It must also be attractive humanity, slightly larger than life, perhaps, but nevertheless with complete integrity for the meretricious takes in no one. Above all, despite many of the theorists in this matter, he expects his communicator to be a man of God, not parading it but inevitably revealing it in what he says and in his attitudes. Our Little Man's standards, although deceptively simple, are, in fact, of the very highest and he turns away from those who do not soon reveal them.

So much for the 6.15 p.m. man and his wife. There is much abuse heaped upon this space by agnostics in the broadcasting business, by the 'heavy Sundays' arts critics, by ministers who blame the space for their empty churches. 'The God Slot' it is

slightingly called, or 'The religious ghetto' or any one of half a dozen terms of opprobrium by those who maintain their reason for attacking it is that it is a 'protected space' (in actual fact, its protection disappeared over two years ago), a period of programmes in which viewers have religion thrust down their throats, whether they like it or not, and that on both BBC and ITV channels at the same time. There is a curious, anti-religious inconsistency in all this. For on most Saturdays in the year viewers on the main BBC and ITV channels are forced to watch sporting events, not for an hour and ten minutes, but for anything up to four hours at a stretch. Again, nightly, from Mondays to Fridays, viewers must watch news and current affairs for at least an hour around six o'clock each evening. All programmes of specialist and indeed universal interest have fixed spaces, and competition being what it is, as we have noted, the BBC and ITV compete with like against like for the large audiences, then boast somewhat childishly afterwards about their success in this respect. So far, neither the BBC nor ITV have shown any inclination to depart from the regular 6.15 p.m. space, although there were various pressures from within their establishments that they should do so a number of years ago. Religion always gives an air of respectability, and, after all, its programmes are cheap to produce compared with light entertainment and drama. A cynical comment, you may feel; believe me a true one too, certainly in days gone by, when, in Scotland, the hour's worship of a church service cost around £100 of 'above the line costs'.

Let us now consider more closely viewers' reactions to religious broadcasts, the response they make to what they see. It is possible to set this out in terms of Audience Research and Appreciation Indices such as we examined earlier. Many investigators today would not be satisfied with any other kind of consumer research. Such clinical examination can be of immense help in determining the content and style of particular broadcasts directed to specific sections of the community, but in the sphere of religious broadcasts, especially those showing forth the Christian religion, our standards of evaluation must go much deeper into a man's being than the merely scientific.

John Reith, the founder of the BBC and the master-architect of public service broadcasting, invited the sculptor, Epstein, to create a statue to be set at the heart of British Broadcasting. It still stands within the main entrance to Broadcasting House, London, the headquarters of the BBC. It is a statue of The Sower, the old-fashioned sower, hand in basket, about to scatter the seed abroad. Underneath, on the plinth, there is the subscription: 'Deus Incrementum Dat', 'God gives the Increase'. On the roof above, there is another inscription which reveals that this Temple of the Muses and Arts is dedicated to Almighty God and the prayer is expressed that it will flow whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely and of good report. Thus John Reith saw the generality of programmes going forth for the enrichment and blessing of all those who listened, that through them man's understanding would grow in width and in stature, God Himself encouraging such development of human experience.

The Sower was chosen because it is Our Lord's figure taken straight from his completely modern Parable of Communication. The longer I was involved in religious broadcasting, both in sending out the programmes and carefully watching and assessing the reactions and results arising from them, the more certain I became that every time a genuine religious broadcast went out through the cameras and the microphone, this Parable of the Sower was being re-enacted all over again.

A whole category of viewers and listeners would prove to be utterly untouched by it, however powerful or inadequate it might be. Folk who often turned on the television set with the electric light and left it on until both were switched off again at bedtime. So far as a religious broadcast, or indeed any other kind of programme was concerned, they made not the slightest, lasting impact or impression. Any good seed being sown was indeed swept off the pathway through their hearts the instant it landed there.

Other viewers reacted more favourably. A hymn learnt long ago, some pastoral problem carefully dealt with, an act of kindness or compassion revealed by word of mouth or visually on film, would touch the heart, as indeed all our hearts are constantly

touched when the Word goes forth in sermon, in deed, in witness. Such viewers warm to what they see and hear. They even make promises to themselves about what they will do about their reactions, such as going back to church, making up the quarrel which is eating at their peace of mind, saying their prayers again—they give way to a score of positive but almost wholly emotional reactions. As the New English Bible says, however, 'they have no staying power', and before the evening's programmes have run to their end, they have long since forgotten the sudden vows they made.

According to the Parable, the next category combines three in one. The growth of the Word is choked by 'The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things'. Many who view are so burdened by anxieties and by stress that they simply cannot believe that the Jesus who bade all such come to him for relief, is really making the same offer to them. Or there are some obsessed with a great cause, social, compassionate or political, seeking perhaps to do the work of Christ and his Kingdom, but without any understanding that it is, in fact, his work which they are doing, though often rejecting his Church and being highly suspicious of Christians and their motives.

In our materialistic society with its endless pursuit of money and what it can purchase, some viewers react to any religious programme as being against what they claim they are enjoying in life. Jesus is hard indeed in his condemnation of the blindness which wealth brings to a man's judgement. 'You cannot serve God and Money,' he says bluntly. He sadly shakes his head as the rich young ruler turns away from him. He warns his disciples about the erosion which wealth brings about in the real values of life. He reserves his most scathing story for the Rich Man who turned aside from the Poor Man at his gate. All in all, a rather terrifying condemnation of the values which have grown up in our society, where, as they say, money talks, and no trade and no profession, with the honourable exception of the Christian Ministry, any longer seems to be free from the desire to possess more and more of this world's treasure.

'The lusts of other things,' says the Authorized Version, 'all

kinds of evil desire,' translates the New English Bible, make up the third class of the category which chokes the growth of Word. The old gods and goddesses too are abroad in our world again today. They leer at us from television screens in the privacy of our own fireside. They display their wares across every bookstall and the modern cinema screen. However much the pundits, some churchmen amongst them, may feel that modern man is set free from the old sexual taboos, it would appear to many, including parish ministers, that the more liberated modern man becomes, the more his life becomes a tangle, the more the growth of The Word, in Christ's sense, is choked. The Church has to think out, clearly and firmly, where she stands in terms of the New Morality which in some parts of the land is rapidly becoming the Old Immorality. Jesus, in a comprehensive passage, does not separate sexual immorality from other attitudes. He states quite vividly what in his opinion defiles a man: 'From the inside, out of a man's heart, come evil thoughts, acts of fornication, of theft, murder, adultery, ruthless greed, and malice; fraud, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance and folly; these evil things all come from inside, and they defile the man.' That list takes in most of the Ten Commandments and adds sins of the mind such as malice, envy, slander, arrogance, folly, all of which, according to Our Lord, choke the growth of the Word. No television viewer obsessed or possessed with such thinking can ever receive the Word, except it cuts him to the quick of repentance.

So far, we have gone through five classes of viewers without any lasting success. There has been no increase. There is a warning in this. Some imagine that the Mass Media can achieve more for Christ's Kingdom than the Missionary Church. That there is some exciting, undiscovered formula, which, when sought out, will sweep people into that Kingdom. Even a manipulation of their minds and hearts. A near-magical winning of their allegiance. Television and radio are certainly on the frontiers of men's belief and unbelief. They have access to countless numbers of people who would not even read a religious article in a newspaper. As we have seen, there are types of programmes which can attract them and appeal to them, but ultimately all such have an

integrity which shows forth the truth without any slanting or titivating or gimmickry. For these are rejected in themselves and there is enough rejection without it being the rejection of the second- and third-rate.

The parable finishes on a cheering note, for there is good earth and good seed and a worthy harvest. What kind of harvest? A harvest of men and women in need, finding their needs supplied through Jesus Christ and his Church. We spoke earlier of the documentary film, *Highland Parish* and made the point that 75 letters were received as a result of its transmission. Let us look more closely at the letters. The vast majority were straightforward 'Thank you' letters, expressing appreciation of the programme, claiming some link with that lovely parish, or even, as happened in a number of cases, enquiring for a local address in order to spend summer holidays in the vicinity. Two or three letters raised religious questions which were comparatively easily answered. Two were of vital importance.

One came from a young man in prison, his life at the cross-roads. As he watched he saw the minister's deep concern for young people and wondered if that face on the screen might be able to help him. So he wrote a letter to him. In the minister's own words, 'Two years and at least two hundred letters later, that young man was received into the full fellowship of the Christian Church.' A comment, surely, which shows, not only the reality of the pastoral ministry which confronts those who show forth the Word in various forms in front of camera and microphone, but also the extra costliness of such a ministry in terms of time and perseverance.

The second letter also came from a young man, not in prison and some years older. A go-getter of a young business man who had been going places in such a hurry that he had crashed his business, his home and all about him. His letter was followed within a day or so by an appearance at that Highland manse. When he left it, he had made a commitment of his life to the Lord Christ. Today, years afterwards, he still uses the minister as his father-confessor.

In his *Coping with Life* series, Hugh Douglas once talked simply and to the point about 'The Road from the Isles', the situation in

which parents with young children find themselves as they return from the glorious family holiday during which they have all had a wonderful, uninterrupted fourteen days together. The dullest weekend in the year is the first one home from such happiness. In the course of this programme he showed a photograph I once took on a Highland road of a pile of grit, to be used in icy and slippery weather, with the sign beside it, 'Grit for Roads'. It endorsed the point that he was making, that there are times when the only thing to do is to get down to the grind of living, and, through perseverance, often to discover the road is easier with God's presence along its miles.

Two years later, on holiday on Iona, an unknown woman came up to Hugh Douglas and said: 'My husband, my daughter and I saw your programme about Grit for Roads in precisely the circumstances you described. We were just back from holiday. But my husband had been told, only the day before, that he was suffering from an inoperable cancer which he had hidden from us. In despair, we turned on our television. At the end of your programme, we decided that that was how we were going to live for the time still given to us together. They were the happiest months of our lives together. Then when he had gone and I was on the point of cracking, a letter came from a dear friend who was in on our secret. All it said was, "Remember now—Grit for Roads!"'

I have deliberately selected these individual cases from the thousands of which I know. Every successful broadcast—in the Parable of the Sower's sense—produces its crop of letters, many of them from people with no serious church connection. The ministers who took the Christmas Day Services on both BBC-Scotland and Grampian Television at the end of 1974 were completely swamped by letters, from all over the United Kingdom, expressing both appreciation and a tremendous sense of need. One of them who has been doing television broadcasts for the best part of 20 years, said that he has never known such a flood of letters and he has never known such need expressed in them. Whatever else may be true of religious broadcasting, it is a fact that it uncovers an immense amount of pastoral neediness at all

sorts of levels. At least a proportion of programmes must be designed to meet this need. And that means much more thought should be given to the follow-up necessary in order that such cases may be properly helped.

But Pastoralia is by no means all. Media which open the way for the Christian Gospel into the homes of our whole society must always be seen as of vital, missionary importance. The churches pay a deal of lip-service to this principle, but there are few signs of them showing the urgency, for example, of my friend Matthew Ogawa of Japan. Matthew broadcasts a Christian half-hour on Japanese Radio once a week. He is broadcasting into a completely non-Christian environment. His programmes always conclude with an address to which enquirers and others interested in the broadcasts may write. Certainly within the week of having received any letter, from any part of Japan, two Christians from the nearest local Christian congregation will be on the door-step of all the letter-writers offering them help and further understanding of the Christian Faith.

The late Lord Reith was greatly exercised over what we call 'follow-up' when he wrote a foreword to Melville Dinwiddie's book, *Religion by Radio*. He said:

'Religion by radio—probably relatively the most ineffectual or anyhow the most inefficient of all the sectional activities of broadcasting.'

I must confess that when I first read these words, my heart sank within me. Did he really mean that religious broadcasts were as bad as all that? But then I read on to discover that:

'The comment above about ineffectualness and inefficiency of broadcast religious activities is not to any extent chargeable to the transmitting end—conception, planning, mounting, execution; nor to the receiving end as such. It did and does apply to follow-up—or rather lack of follow-up, at the reception end.'

Reith then proceeds to hammer home his point with characteristic bluntness.

'Here millions of pounds worth of advertising have been done for the churches free—from the very beginning, and against

indifference, ridicule, opposition, the Christian religion was given positions of privilege which no protest or petition by the churches could have secured for them. Nor did they realize what was required by way of follow-up and encouragement to those whose interest had been revived. If they had, there might have been a national revival on a scale hitherto unimagined.'

Only for one brief period, during the years of the two Radio Missions and the development of the Tell Scotland Movement, was there any real attempt at follow-up in Scotland. It may be significant that the communicant membership of the Church of Scotland steadily rose in those years, reaching its peak in 1957 which was also the peak year of Tell Scotland. There has been a steady, unarrested decline ever since with the Kirk well over three hundred thousand members fewer since that date.

John Reith's dictum should be taken to heart by the churches, for they all tend to take the powerful ally of Religious Broadcasting for granted. Perhaps if they had to pay for it, as happens in some parts of the world, or had it completely excluded from the screens, as is the case in most Iron Curtain countries, or subject to the stiffest political and theological censorship as one finds in yet a third part of the world, they might give more thought to it. Every day, and several times a day, on radio, the Christian religion, presented in various forms, is freely available in every home in the land, church or non-church alike. Every day too, and particularly at peak periods on Sundays, the same is true of television. It is entering the homes of those people in a parish who never darken a church door. They are at least being kept in touch with the basic truths of the Christian Faith. One must ask the question, what if there had been no religious broadcasting over the years? Inevitably our country would have become a more pagan one than is even the case today.

The Churches pay lip-service acknowledgement to the millions of pounds of 'free advertising' as John Reith described it, which the broadcasting authorities give in and through their religious broadcasts. But, sadly, one must record, the great majority of

occasions on which they have expressed opinions or shown interest, have been those when some particular broadcast has given offence. Then the protest tends to be loud and clear. Never is there serious, constructive thought given to the ways in which religious broadcasting's entry into a myriad homes can be used for the advancement of Christ's Cause; seldom does any thoughtful church group or committee express ideas which might be translated into worthwhile programmes. It is all left to the professionals, in the case of the BBC, and to the advisers chiefly, of ITV. But, in a democracy and in terms of broadcasting designed to serve the public therein, in the oft-quoted aphorism, 'Broadcasting is too important to be left to the professionals!'

It may well be diffidence on the part of churchmen which gives rise to this reticence. It may also be the perfectly understandable inferiority the amateur feels in the presence of professionals who deal in a highly complicated, technological instrument which must be mastered before a single word can go forth from it. But such self-distrust must be mastered, however daunting the situation. There will always be peculiar difficulties in the task of co-operation with the professional broadcasters. One can easily become their prisoner or victim through sheer lack of specialist knowledge. But churchmen must, with persistence and understanding, seek to co-operate with the whole range of religious broadcasting, if any benefit is to be gained from its wide and penetrating skills.

At the present time, both the BBC and the ITV methods of appointing their Advisory Committees militate against this constructive co-operation. For both Broadcasting Authorities (and the ITV companies too), appoint their own advisers. The danger here is that, in an understandable attempt to preserve their own freedom, the Authorities select the kind of people, clergymen and laymen, who will support their on-going policies of Religious Broadcasting. It is entirely fitting that the broadcasters should appoint men and women who understand the media and have experience of them. But not all of the advisers should be appointed in this way. I have had experience of Advisory Committees ranging from the BBC plus ITV's prestigious Central Religious

Advisory Committee, through our own Scottish R.A.C., to a wide variety of bodies at home and abroad, down to small ITV programme company A.C's, and the recently evolving commercial local radio scene. It has become my considered opinion that the churches themselves should be in the position to appoint up to say 45% of the Advisers. Such a proposal would be fought tooth and nail by the Authorities, especially the BBC for I know how jealous the Corporation is, both of her independence and the independence of her own professionals, but I do not see how genuine churches' involvement can happen without the churches being directly committed to it.

There have already been complaints by individual members of the Central Religious Advisory Committee that that august committee tends to be used for rubber-stamp purposes for BBC policies and I regret to report that in my time there were at least two resignations from the Scottish Religious Advisory Committee largely for the same reason.

There is much more churches' involvement in local radio, BBC south of the Border, and the independent commercial companies of Radio Clyde and Radio Forth, here in Scotland. In both the latter instances, church teams of planners and, in the case of Radio Forth, producers too, are co-operating with the professional staff to make programmes. The enthusiasm of these church groups and their sense of involvement is at a much deeper level than anything I ever experienced in BBC Advisory Committees, with the honourable exception of the Gaelic Sub-Committee of S.R.A.C. Grampian Television, based in Aberdeen and serving a large part of Eastern Scotland, has recently evolved a similar, equally enthusiastic churches' involvement.

Religious Broadcasting within the BBC—and, notably within the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Swedish, Danish, Dutch and other European systems—is organized and produced in precisely the same way as the output of any of the other departments. Its staff are recruited, selected and trained according to the normal methods of staffing. Most production posts are open to both ordained and laymen. BBC Appointments Boards are seeking suitable staff possessed of the mystical quality known as 'Producer-

potential'. In both radio and television but more especially the latter, production staff have to combine the oil and water of artistic insight with an ability to master the complicated mechanics. Canon Roy Mackay, with whose policies I quarrelled more often than not when he was London's Head of Religious Broadcasting, once said truly that: 'On the whole it is easier to take a theologian and to teach him the mechanics of television, than to take an able layman technician and teach him the necessary theology.' Quite a number of Appointments Boards demonstrated the truth of that statement, even when the majority of their constituent members were able laymen themselves.

Once inside the Corporation, the former parish minister or priest finds himself in a wholly secular atmosphere. Indeed it will not be long before he discovers that many of his colleagues openly reject his standards of Christian belief and practice. On his first Training Course, he will find himself the only ordained person in a group which includes some exceedingly bright boys and girls from Oxbridge, with a few of them politically 'left of Mao'. He will have to defend his faith against brilliant questioners while striving to show them that he is not one whit behind them in his enthusiasm for television and all that goes with it. He returns from his course immensely stimulated and determined to show that he 'knows the score' in terms of his new profession. The real danger to his work and calling may now become that he will turn into a first-class questing producer who sloughs off his Christian ordination.

This is a circumstance which applies to more of the ordained than those who find themselves working in religious broadcasting. Increasingly nowadays, as the church seeks to forward her mission in the secular areas of society, men find themselves in 'worker-priest' situations. Proudly they begin to call themselves 'secular Christians' and soon find themselves in danger of losing their Christian identity. P. T. Forsyth, that ever-modern Scottish theologian, vividly and aptly described this situation not long after the turn of this century when he wrote:

'An ultra-liberalism in an historic religion like Christianity has

always this danger—that it advances so far from its base as to be cut off from supplies and spiritually starved into surrender to the world. If it is not then exterminated, it is interned in a region ruled entirely by the laws of the foreign country. Gradually it accommodates itself to the new population and is slowly absorbed so as to forget the first principles of Christ. It comes to live in a religious syncretism which is too much at home with the natural man to bear the marks of the Lord Jesus.’

Sadly I have seen more than one able and talented young minister or priest lose his way in this respect. If he has been a sensitive person at all, the loss of direction has been followed by both mental and moral breakdown. The pressures upon the religious in secular occupations are certainly terrific. The churches ought to be much more aware of them and especially to care for and to seek to cherish all such. Often, often they are in lonely jobs, bereft, with their wives, of the support and strengthening with which a congregation surrounds its minister.

This separation from the churches they have been called to serve can often penetrate so deeply that their work as well as their lives comes into a position of isolation. We recall that it was Dr James Welch, the farthest-sighted and the most prophetic of all the Heads of Religious Broadcasting with whom I was associated, who declared that ‘Religious Broadcasting is the hand-maid of the Churches’. He began the fight against the appearance, even in those far-off days, of ‘BBC Religion’. When a popular, pre-war broadcaster, Canon Elliot of St Michael’s, Chester Square, was building up a ‘church of the air’ around his regular and popular mid-week services, Welch had him removed from the air on the grounds that there was no health in such a movement. Even the Prime Minister of the day, Neville Chamberlain, a Unitarian, was prevailed upon to intercede for the man concerned. ‘Either he goes or I go,’ insisted the doughty Welch—and won his point and stayed. ‘Extra Ecclesiam non salus est’ was his basic principle and one which, even in these changing days, alone can bring balance, sanity and health to Religious Broadcasting.

But the church should be wide open to receive the insights of the

religious broadcasters. After all, it was two Radio Missions which gave rise to the most impressive movement within the churches' evangelism so far in the second half of the twentieth century. There may be other and different insights of importance in the days ahead. But there will be no true future for them, either in the realm of Religious Broadcasting nor in the life of the churches unless genuine co-operation and two-way involvement is part and parcel of the strategy of both. Both Religious Broadcasting and the churches should be giving a great deal more thought and action to this area, instead of drawing further apart, as I suspect, at least in some respects. Both must cast off their pride, professional or otherwise, and begin to learn from each other in new ways. Otherwise there will be 'BBC Religion' and 'ITV Religion' too with the Christian scene in Britain becoming even more fragmented than it already is through the divisions of the churches.

What would David Low's Little Man make of all this strategy whirling round his unsuspecting head as he sits in front of his telly to be entertained? No doubt his originator would produce two archetypal figures to prance or lumber around him. A Religious Broadcasting Unicorn, and a Churches' Mammoth. Whatever the pressures from both Unicorn and Mammoth the Little Man must always be treated with respect, his human dignity preserved and his eternal destiny made a matter of constant concern.