

THE FOREIGN BROADCASTS OF THE BACK TO GOD HOUR

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When we speak about the foreign broadcasts of The Back to God Hour, we refer to those broadcasts which are aired over radio stations outside the United States and Canada. A look at the "Station Log" reveals that the Christian Reformed Church broadcasts the Word of God in many parts of the world and in two languages beside English --- Arabic and Spanish. Each language represents a different culture and presents a unique challenge. But whatever language is used, the church must proclaim the whole counsel of God against the background of the specific culture to which the message is directed. The heart of the message must be the "word of the cross," the message of salvation and reconciliation. Because man's predicament is always the same, this message is always relevant.

The radio station set-up as it exists in the United States, and to a certain extent in Canada, is not duplicated in most of the countries of the world. To us, a radio station is either commercial or educational. But in the rest of the world, broadcasting is usually controlled by the state. It may be modeled after the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and thus enjoy a great amount of freedom and autonomy. It may merely be a propaganda mouthpiece as is the case in most of the communistic and semi-free countries of the world. In a country which grants a great measure of autonomy to its broadcasting agency, the larger denominations receive their quota of the time allocated to religious broadcasts. Thus in England, churches such as the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist are given the privilege of using BBC domestic and overseas broadcasting facilities. In countries in which the state exercises monopolistic control over broadcasting, Christians seldom have the privilege of proclaiming the Word of God over the air.

However, in certain countries, both commercial stations and state-owned stations are permitted. This provides the Christian Church with the possibility of airing its programs over the commercial stations. Also, some countries have granted Christian organizations the right to build and operate missionary radio stations. This is a great open door for the spread of the gospel. In God's providence, several of these stations have been established in the last 25 years.¹ Frequently missionary stations are less expensive than commercial stations. Because their owners are interested in the spread of the gospel, they offer their facilities to broadcasters on a cost basis.

But the facilities available for foreign broadcasting are not as many as those available in the United States and Canada. Nevertheless, even though the countries which make missionary stations available are relatively few, we need not conclude that foreign broadcasting does not have a wide outreach. The audience reached by foreign broadcasting facilities is often very large because of the use of short wave. Thus, several countries are covered by one powerful station located in a strategic area of the world. The large audiences reached by foreign short wave broadcasting of the gospel do not exist in theory only. Our actual experiences in The Back to God Hour office point to the fact that foreign broadcasting is a very effective tool of missions --- even when restricted to the short wave bands.

¹ See Appendix, Table # ____ for a list of missionary stations and their locations.

Often we who live in North America fail to realize how the habits of other peoples differ from ours. We live in giant countries with thousands of miles separating our shores. Our radio listening habits are provincial, even though we have our big networks in the USA and our CBC in Canada. The growth of FM radio makes us even more community-centered people. But overseas a majority of the countries are rather small. For example, you can cross my homeland, Lebanon, in about two hours by car from north to south --- if you do not get involved in an accident! The smaller the country, the more international one's interests become. Therefore, radios sold in Asia, Africa, South America and Europe have short wave bands as well as the medium wave band we call Standard Broadcast. People are accustomed to listening to London, Paris, Moscow and Washington even though they may be citizens of Jordan, Morocco, Sénégal or Zanzibar. The audience for a short wave missionary station is large and real whether it be based in South America, West Africa, or the Far East. No matter how nationalistic the people of the world may be, and no matter how suspicious of foreigners they may have become, they remain faithful listeners to short wave radio stations. They have a deep suspicion that their state-controlled stations are not telling them the whole truth about their problems and the world.

Another factor to be considered in assessing the importance of foreign broadcasting is the increasing number of radio sets which are being made and sold. In the Arab world alone at the end of 1963, the United States Information Agency estimated the number of radio sets at 5-1/2 million. There are approximately 80 million Arabic speaking people in North Africa and the Middle East, or approximately 16 million families. This means that practically one out of every three families in these areas has a radio set. Most likely the other two families listen to the radio too since there is little privacy in these lands and the volume of the radios is generally high. If the present trend continues one half of the families will have radio sets by 1970. The advent of the transistor radio has caused an upward surge in the number of sets sold in the underdeveloped parts of the world. Families living in villages do not have to wait for the electric power to reach their hamlets before they can join the "elite" which owns radios. Flashlight batteries do the job. Competition between U.S., European and Japanese radio makers has brought the prices of radio sets within the range of the common people of Africa, Asia and South America. As a missionary from Africa once put it: "In our area, nationals would rather have radios than shoes!"²

The powerful influence of short wave stations over large areas, the listening habits of foreign nationals, and the increasing availability of radio sets indicate the tremendous challenge that confronts the church in the broadcasting of the gospel overseas.

I. English Foreign Broadcasting

In 1965, the English foreign broadcasts of The Back to God Hour will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Though many Christian Reformed churches and individuals felt the need for extending the English broadcast beyond the United States and Canada for many years, their vision could not be realized until 1955 when the English messages began to broadcast over station HCJB in Quito, Ecuador. Then, thanks to the generosity of a Christian Reformed business man, The Back to God Hour began its foreign broadcasting venture. The responses

² See Appendix, Table # ____ for information on set distribution.

were very encouraging. Letters came from many parts of Europe and Asia. But the growth of these foreign English broadcasts depended upon the vision and generosity of churches and individuals. No quota funds were or are allocated for foreign broadcasting. Nevertheless from a single missionary station the foreign broadcast grew so that at present 24 stations in 11 different countries and areas carry the English broadcasts. The stations are found in: Australia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Monaco, Formosa, Guan, Korea, Panama, Philippines, Puerto Rico and Liberia. In a certain sense, our English foreign broadcasting is a domestic venture --- as far as our sister churches in Australasia are concerned. Our messages go to the peoples of Australia and New Zealand as their message in cooperation with the Christian Reformed Church. Ten of the radio stations which carry the foreign broadcast are standard broadcast stations in Australia. Our sister churches find the radio ministry of our church a great and effective arm of their local and national evangelistic work.

Broadcasting the gospel in foreign lands in English is important because this language has become the international language of the world. Countries such as Australia and New Zealand have English as their mother tongue, and other countries look to English as their international language. In some countries such as India, English is the only language which the educated can use to communicate with one another when they come from the various provinces of their sub-continent. English is taught as a second language in Russia, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and many other countries. English is still used in government circles in countries which were formerly part of the British Empire.

Programs are prepared for foreign distribution with great care. Not all programs broadcast in America are suitable for overseas transmission. Programs that are related only to Canadian and American problems are not sent overseas. Programs that deal with national sins of our Western and/or American culture, must be carefully edited before they are sent to foreign stations. This must be done so that Communists and others will not be given material with which to distort our image in foreign lands. Unfortunately, there are Christian broadcasters today who are doing great damage because their programs are frequently tirades directed at the United States government. The goal of such programs seems to be the defamation of responsible leaders, and the Christian message is apparently a facade behind which they operate. While the Reformed heritage has always asserted that the gospel must be made relevant for all areas of life, we do not believe that it is proper to invade other areas of life in an illegitimate way. Foreign listeners do hear a Christian criticism of all aspects of life on The Back to God Hour, but they need not listen to our self-criticism in detail. As the French proverb puts it, "We must wash soiled clothing at home."

While we must recognize the different cultural backgrounds of other nations, we may be sure, at the same time, that those who are equipped to understand English are, to a great extent, capable of understanding our programs which come out of an American/Canadian context. Wherever Western civilization has gone, it has brought both blessings and harm. The most striking characteristic of present-day Western culture is its radically secular nature; as a result, people coming under its influence overseas are secularists at heart. Their problems are like ours. Those who hear our foreign broadcast in English may be either the products of Protestant or Roman Catholic missions, or still members of their old faiths. But whether Christian or pagan, they are caught in the tremendous changes which are taking place in our world. Christians are

being tempted to renounce their faith and pagans are being left without any faith at all. Using radio, literature and native agents, Communism is seeking to take over all the newly independent countries.

It is against this background that The Back to God Hour beams its messages in English. These sermons are heard by students and merchants, by government officials and leaders. These messages proclaim the sovereignty of God over all, His ever-working providence, His mighty work of redemption accomplished in the center of the world and in the fullness of time. The Christian Reformed Church speaks today to thousands of people in other countries and offers them the only hope of mankind: Jesus Christ the Lord. It proclaims the great Christian hope: the coming of the Savior at the end of time and the beginning of God's eternal and glorious kingdom. But our message must be a balanced one. We seek to emphasize that the Word of God has a great deal to tell us about the here-and-now; therefore, both Law and the Gospel must be proclaimed. Every aspect of human life must be brought under the scrutiny and judgment of the Bible, our only standard for faith and life and action.

Much could be said about the English broadcast in foreign lands. But our foreign work includes two other languages at present. We must consider the work done in those areas as well. One last comment: our outreach in English should be expanded as opportunities arise. For foreign broadcasting which relies on short wave bands to be effective must be both extensive and intensive. The only way to achieve this is to accept every opportunity which the Lord brings to our attention.

II. The Arabic Broadcast

Three years after the beginning of our English foreign broadcasting, a second milestone was reached with the initiation of the Arabic broadcast. On October 3, 1958, a 15-minute message was beamed to the Arab world in the Middle East. It was entitled "The Law of God and the Love of God." The international scope of The Back to God Hour was enlarged and new areas of responsibilities were added. Since this work coincided with my entry into the Christian Reformed ministry, I am taking the liberty to add some personal notes to this section. I had the great privilege of being brought up in a Protestant home. My father was the pastor of two congregations first at my birthplace in Selaucia near Antioch. Later he served at the port city of Alexandretta (now known as Iskenderun since Turkey took it over from Syria in 1939). My primary education was mostly taken at a British mission school, where French, English and Arabic were taught. With the annexation of the province of Alexandretta to Turkey, most of the Arabic speaking people migrated to Syria and Lebanon.

After a brief sojourn in Beirut where our family acquired Lebanese citizenship, we were forced by circumstances to return to Syria. There, I attended a French school run by Roman Catholic brothers known as the "Brothers of Christian Schools." Syria at the time was a part of the French Empire. There was no future for any young man unless he mastered French. This explains why my secondary education was taken at "Collège de Saint Joseph." From an education that was British-oriented, I had to adjust to a French one. Though reading and spelling were much easier in French than in English, French grammar was more complicated and difficult

to master. Furthermore, every Christian student at the Collège had to attend mass every other day. The longest day of my life was the first day I attended mass in the “chapelle.” But I learned a great deal at Saint Joseph Collège, in the non-academic areas as well. I could see the great departures from the truth which have accumulated in Rome. The non-Christian elements submerged the Christian faith in the life and thinking of Roman Catholic students and teachers. While I knew that the basis of Roman Catholicism was wrong, yet I learned to admire their consistency, especially in matters of education. This has influenced me tremendously in my late decision to join the Christian Reformed Church. For I had not found many Protestant churches which took their faith seriously before I discovered the Christian Reformed Church --- through The Back to God Hour. More of that later.

I would have completed my French education in 1946, but the French were forced out of Syria in 1945. Therefore I had to transfer to the Syrian Government College to finish my student career. This turned out to be a very good move. Before this all my learning had been in foreign languages. I did learn Arabic, but only as a language. Now I had to learn everything in Arabic. Furthermore, I was in an Islamic atmosphere. I even sat under a Muslim sheikh in a course entitled: “History of the Arab-Muslim Civilization.”

When the French departed from Syria, they left an educational vacuum. Even though I had no specific training in teaching, I was more or less “drafted” into the profession. After four years of teaching, the call for the gospel ministry became clear and irresistible.

My seminary training brought me to the USA. Three years were spent at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During those years of preparation, I came to love and appreciate the Reformed faith. The publications of The Back to God Hour, *The Banner*, and other publications of the Christian Reformed community made me aware of the existence of a Protestant church which was consistent with the basic teachings of Scripture. After graduation, ordination to the gospel ministry and marriage (I had met my wife in Canada while doing student work), I returned to the mission field. But independent Syria was not to allow missionaries the freedom necessary for the evangelization of its citizens. After two years of work mostly in connection with mission schools, I immigrated to Canada. There I met the Christian Reformed Church, and before too long I was seeking entrance into the Christian Reformed ministry. This meant coming to Calvin Seminary for one year of training and orientation.

It was January 1958, while preparing myself for an examination by Classis Minnesota South that a letter came to me from the then-director of the Sudan Interior Mission. The Rev. G. Playfair, having heard of some translation work I had done, asked me to consider the field of Arabic broadcasting from radio station ELWA of Monrovia, Liberia, W. Africa. At last I could see the various lines of God’s providence converging on me with this challenging task: the proclamation of the gospel to the Arabs by means of radio! Having discussed the matter with the Rev. Henry Evenhouse, I was sent to The Back to God Hour Radio Committee to acquaint them with the tremendous challenge of radio missions among the Arabs. On May 28, 1958 the Radio Committee adopted the proposed Arabic broadcast and recommended it to the Synod of 1958. Synod approved the work and the Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church, of which I was a member while at Calvin Seminary, called me to the work.

How must one preach the gospel to the Arabs? Most of them are Muslim. They belong to an anti-Christian faith. For 13 centuries, they have held to the Koran as the eternal and uncreated Word of God. They look to Jesus Christ as a mere prophet. They deny the Sonship of our Lord. They do not accept the fact of His death on the cross. The Trinity to them is a blasphemous doctrine. Man is not sinful in Islam. He merely sins. Sin is not inherited from Adam. It is mostly weakness and ignorance. For every distinctively Christian doctrine, the Muslim has a substitute which denies it. Historically, Islam has displaced Christianity and to this very date it is the most successful religion in Africa (numerically speaking).

Islam is an awesome religion to contemplate. Historically, Christian missions have been the least successful among the followers of Muhammad. But we must not face Islam as if our spiritual arms are human. When the Lord opens for us a mighty door such as radio to proclaim His Word, we cannot say for one moment that the outcome of the work is doubtful. We have the gospel, the Word of the cross, the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. At the outset of any mission work, and especially among Muslims, we must be fully aware of the tremendous power of God's Word under the blessing of His Holy Spirit.

During the first two years of Arabic radio work, we had one 15-minute program which was aired every Friday evening to one part of the Arab world. Some of the messages were adaptations and translations of Rev. Peter Eldersveld's English messages. Thus, a series on the Ten Commandments was produced. Another dealt with the summary of the Christian faith. While preparing the messages, not only the Muslim majority had to be kept in mind, but also the Eastern Christian minority as well. These people, who are the descendants of the early Christian churches of the area, have never been blessed with a Reformation such as the Western churches had in the 16th century. Eastern Christians belong to over 16 various communions, some orthodox, others catholic and others heretical. All these groups have lost the pure preaching of the Word. Special messages in Arabic have to be written for them also.

Since an important element of our entire broadcast ministry is the production of Christian devotional and sermonic literature, the Arabic broadcast has endeavored from then beginning to complement the work of radio by a well organized Arabic literature work. Copies of the broadcast sermons were printed and sent to mission fields. A book for Family Worship was also printed in Lebanon based on 12 different English *Family Altar* booklets.

The first two years of Arabic work were very difficult. There was no tangible response from the areas reached. Not that the gospel was not being heard. But it was utterly strange for Arab ears to hear Arabic messages, not about the Koran, but about the Bible. It was not Allah's prophet Muhammad who was being mentioned, but the Christ of God, the crucified, dead and risen Savior who was being proclaimed to the Arabs. They hesitated to take a pen and write. They were very well aware of the dangers of contacting a Christian minister, even though he happened to be one of them linguistically and culturally. And so from October 1958 to December 1960 only 3 letters were received!

Christmas 1960 was the most exciting Christmas of my life. Already at the May 1960 meeting of the Radio Committee the green light was given for the expansion of the Arabic

ministry. We were going to accept the challenge of the more powerful transmitter that station ELWA was installing, and with the availability of a daily program to the Arab world. During the summer and fall of 1960, I began the preparation of daily programs. These were to be systematic expositions of the Word of God. The Bible which was unknown to the Muslims was to be expounded to them in their sacred tongue. For the sake of variety, a special program on the history of the early church was prepared for Saturdays. On Sundays, sermon programs were aired. It was in response to this intensive type of radio ministry as well as to the fact that Arabic Christian literature was offered, that letters began to arrive from all over the Middle East. By the end of 1961, 473 letters were received. In 1962 the highest number of letters was reached: 1895!³

In expounding the Word of God to the Arabs, whether they be Muslims or Eastern Christians, we have one of the best ways of acquainting them with the rich heritage we have. Reformed Christians are heirs of the historic, Biblical Christian faith. A Reformed Christian cannot be sectarian or narrow minded. The Word of God is the most precious possession he has. He loves it. He is not afraid of it. The more he works with the Word, the more he is convinced that the fathers of the Reformation have left us a balanced and relevant faith in their creeds which they wrote with their blood. As the Bible is expounded, that wonderful plan of salvation is made known to the listeners. The Word of God is not regarded from a legalistic standpoint such as the Jews, Muhammadans and traditional Christian churches have regarded it. God's special revelation is redemptive. It prophesies the coming of the Savior, it heralds His actual coming, it expounds the meaning of His redemptive work on the cross of Calvary, and it points to the goal of history: the coming again of the Son of God. All the exhortations and moral precepts of the Scriptures cannot be separated from the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. The center of Scripture is the Person and work of Jesus Christ. With these Biblical and confessional bases, we approach the task of communicating our Reformed faith to the world of Islam --- in its Arab sector. To make this work better known as to some of its details I am now taking the liberty of sharing with you some of the methods used in the handling of Bible books and passages.

In expounding the book of Romans, for example, the listeners are acquainted with the traditional division of the book. Chapters 1-8 deal with the great subject of the justification of the ungodly by the just and holy God and for the merits acquired by Christ Jesus on the cross. Chapters 9-11 deal with the problem of Israel's unbelief. Chapters 12-16 deal with the life of service and gratitude that the justified live for the glory of God and the welfare of their fellow men.

Muslims have a very high regard for Abraham. They refer to him as the "Khalil of Allah" i.e., the friend of God. He is the father of the Arab nation. He is the model believer. In an age of idolatry, he worshiped the one and only true God. We are very thankful that the Holy Spirit led Paul to refer to Abraham in the first part of Romans. Abraham is our model believer, too. We Christians believe that he was the friend of God. He was a giant of faith. His personality was a towering one. But, whence his greatness? How did Abraham, our father, please God? The Bible says Abraham believed God and this was counted for him as righteousness. In other words, Abraham's trust and faith in God was the basis for his success.

³ See Appendix, Table # ____ for response in 1964.

Abraham believed the promise of God. The Almighty told him that from his descendants one was to come through whom all the nations of the World would be blessed. If we want to please God, if we want to win His approval, if we really desire to experience the forgiveness of our many sins and trespasses, we must walk in the footsteps of Abraham. We must believe God. There is only this difference. Abraham looked into the future with the eye of faith and believed in the coming Savior. We look back into the past, and with the eye of faith, we must believe in the One who did come and who did die on a cross outside the walls of the Holy City. When we believe the basis of the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord. If we refuse to walk in the footsteps of the patriarch, what can we expect but the wrath of God?!

One of the basic differences between Islam and Reformed Christianity concerns the doctrine of sin. In Islam sin is a superficial matter. It is more accurate to say that Islam teaches about sins, but does not recognize the existence of an inherited, indwelling sin. Neither the guilt nor the corruption of our first parents is recognized as part of our human heritage. This superficial concept of sin leads the Muslims into many spiritual troubles. They tend to become very legalistic. Their religion actually becomes not so much faith in Allah and his mercy, but a frantic piling up of good works to balance off the bad ones. But the basic question of the origin of these bad deeds and the reason they are universal are seldom faced. Some of the mystics in Islam (The Sufi) have gone beyond the limits of Muslim orthodoxy and have sought to win the pleasure of God and His mercy through their devotions and ascetic practices. But whether a legalistic, orthodox Muslim or a mystic, all Muslims labor under the uneasy feeling that they have not performed enough good works to offset the bad works of their life.

When the Reformed missionary expounds the doctrine of sin as set forth in Romans he knows that he is expounding the true and most realistic account of the source, scope, nature and cure of man's propensity to do evil, which the Bible calls sin. Muslims hate idolatry. But how do they account for it? Paul, the inspired apostle of God, gives us in the opening chapter of his letter to the Romans the explanation of man's idolatry. Idol worship exists because man is a fallen creature. The fall of man (unlike its caricature in the Muslim account) has brought ruin and chaos into the universe. Man worships the creature rather than the creator because his heart and mind are darkened by sin. There is no power that can overcome sin, no human power. Not even revelation – apart from redemption – can help. Even if man knows the perfect will of Allah, he lacks the will to perform it. There is only one power that overcomes sin. This is the power of Christ. He commands us to go out and proclaim His Word. He tells us to tell the whole truth about man and his spiritual plight. He promises salvation to all those who believe. This salvation which we talk about is an actual rescue from sin, it is a real liberation from evil, it is a mighty emancipation from the clutches of Satan. This is why our preaching is called the preaching of the gospel, the Injeel. We have good news, wonderful news. God offers to effect a mighty deliverance from sin and He sends His Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of men to receive this Good News.

As the successive chapters of Romans, Corinthians and the rest of the New Testament epistles as well as the Gospels are expounded, the Arab audience is fully acquainted with the whole counsel of God and its bearing upon our 20th century life within the context of the Arab world.

Reference has already been made to some variety in daily programming being offered on Saturdays in the form of stories from the early history of the church. Another program was later initiated for Saturdays entitled: Bible Doctrines. The listeners are acquainted with the teachings of the Reformed faith as summarized in the Heidelberg and Geneva Catechisms. These lessons are always taught with actual references to the scriptural passages which teach these doctrines. Throughout all our work, we must hold up the supreme authority of scripture. Even though Muslims believe that our present Bible is not the authentic one we may not become over-sensitive about this point. They have never read our scriptures. Their judgment is an inherited prejudice. We have the authentic Word of God. We have centuries of human history behind us, all of which supporting our faith in the reliability of our Bible. Whatever we teach is Bible-centered and Christ-related.

On the Lord's days we have been airing half-hour programs since 1962. These are either translation and adaptation of our English language radio ministers' programs or specifically prepared for the Arab audience. Whichever the case may be, the Christian faith is proclaimed in a relevant way and offered as the only faith for the new age the Arabs are entering upon, now that they are free from foreign rule. In our presentation of the eternal Word of God, we point time and again to the fact that our only hope is to recognize the God of the scriptures and accept His plan of salvation and freedom. Whether the sermons are doctrinal, topical, or expository, they have this one thing in common: they present the gospel to ears and hearts which have seldom if ever heard of it. We are dealing with people who have either lost the gospel or who have never known it according to the pure Biblical faith. The message proclaimed on the Lord's days is a message that is relevant to the Arab because it is the message of Christianity in its best form. We say this in all humility and with no spirit of arrogance or superiority. We have a total message for the total man, since Reformed Christianity is total Christianity. We proclaim our faith with boldness and love. Our attitude is friendly and irenic (i.e., peaceful). We are fully aware that every person in our radio audience within the vast Arab world is living in the "times of ignorance," if he or she does not know Christ as Savior and Lord. We approach these people with sympathy and plead with them to place their trust in the one who really saves, in Jesus the Messiah of Allah.

Reference has already been made to the letters which began to arrive from the Arab world. First, there was little response. But now that the broadcast is well known, the responses are very encouraging and significant. The broadcast messages go out from Africa. The mailing address is also in Africa. Our listeners are told to write to us care of Box 220, Khartoum, Sudan. This is the post office box of the Sudan Interior Mission. The mission staff at Khartoum is to be commended for their wonderful cooperation in air-mailing to us thousands of letters. When we answer the mail we do reveal the fact that we are operating from North America. This has not disturbed any listener. Some may respond directly to our Chicago address. But the majority keep on writing to us in care of the Sudanese address. It costs much less to mail a letter from one Arab country to another. It does not take a knowledge of English to address us in the Sudan.

Every listener writing to the Arabic broadcast for the first time receives a form letter printed on an 11¢ airmail. This letter thanks the writer for writing and informs him that the requested pieces of Arabic literature are on their way by surface mail. Furthermore more information is offered regarding the daily programs. Writers are asked to keep in touch with the office, especially when they change their addresses. It is surprising to note how many people

actually change their addresses even in far-away Arab countries. Americans are not the only people on the move. We are all living in a fluid world.⁴

It is sometimes said that the Reformed faith and The Back to God Hour programs which proclaim it, appeal only to certain people. This is not true. Our responses from all over the world prove the fact that we appeal to all sorts of people. This is brought to our attention time and again as we go through the Arabic mail responses. Muslims and Christians respond. We appeal to Protestants and non-Protestants alike. We receive letters from village people and city dwellers. Young and old write. The cultured university students, both in their homelands and in Western Europe, as well as the young scholars of elementary schools express their joy in discovering Saatu'l-Islah (The Reformation Hour --- our Arabic name). Why do we appeal to various types of people? Simply because the Reformed Christian is totally committed to the Word of God. People today are hungry people, spiritually hungry. We hear often about the physical hunger that plagues the world. But we should not forget the other type of hunger. When the Bread of Life is proclaimed, people respond. Furthermore, the Reformed Christian handles the Word of God aright. We proclaim the Word according to the apostolic way. We are no innovators. We merely walk in the footsteps of those great teachers of the Church: Peter, John, Paul and the rest. We believe that the Holy Spirit has guided the true Church throughout the ages and that men like Augustine and Luther, Calvin and Knox have marched also in the way called apostolic. As mentioned earlier, the Reformed Christian is not sectarian at all. He is equipped by his heritage to speak to all and to communicate to all the unsearchable riches of Christ.

When we come to consider statistically the responses to the Arabic broadcasts we find that Eastern Christians outnumber the Muslims in their letters. Naturally, many an Eastern Christian regardless of his confessional basis, regards this broadcast as his. "This is our broadcast," as an Assyrian Christian wrote from the Republic of Iraq. At last, here is a station and here is a program which magnify the Christ of God! We want to know more about the faith. This Reformation Hour is offering us Arabic books. We want to see what they contain. From one person to another the word spreads about the Arabic broadcast on the 19 meter band (around 15.2 megacycle). Eighteen forty five GMT or eight forty five PM Cairo time becomes an important moment of the day in many an Arab household. This is the time to listen to the proclamation of the Kitab, Kalimatu'llah (the Bible, the Word of God).

Hardly any mission work among Muslims was undertaken in the long years that passed between Muhammad's "call" to the apostleship of Allah and the beginning of the 19th century. Even though many valiant missionaries spent their lives in the lands of Islam, yet their labors did not bring much visible fruit. Muslims have not been willing to listen to the claims of the Messiah. Many of the converts from Islam were won during the early days of missions (19th century). With the rise of nationalism in our century, fewer Muslims came in contact with missionaries. Thus we have the unique place of radio in the proclamation and communication of the Christian faith to Muslims.

But the response from Muslim listeners,⁵ even though much less numerically, is very significant. We have finally brought into existence a new situation. We are not talking at

⁴ See Appendix P. ____ for a copy of the Arab letter.

Muslims. We are communicating with them. They hear and consider. They gather courage and write. They express their joy in discovering a program that brings the Word of Allah. They request the books advertised over the program. Sometimes they ask for the Injeel (their word for the New Testament).

To date only two Muslims, among hundreds who have written to us, have asked to have their names taken off our regular Arabic mailing list. One objected to our Trinitarianism. Another together with that same objection warned us of the doom that awaits all who proclaim the deity and saviorhood of Jesus the Messiah. This does not mean that Muslims are easily converted by radio and the printed page. Neither radio nor the printed page takes the place of the missionary in person. But radio and literature are ideally suited in the first phase of the Muslim's interest in Christianity. A radio set is neutral. It is under the command of its owner. The Muslim tunes in to the Arabic speaking preacher who announces the Word of God. The Muslim listener does not engage immediately in argument. He cannot. He may write or postpone the writing of the letter. Finally he takes that step. But the majority of the mail received from Arab Muslims indicates that these people are more interested in learning about our faith than arguing with the proclaimer of the faith. Even when questions are raised, they are coached in friendly expressions and the desire is to learn rather than criticize. This does not mean that Muslims in general approve of our work. Neither does it mean that they are becoming more tolerant of the claims of the gospel. But it does point to a certain change in the attitude of some Muslims toward religions and ideologies other than their own. These are the people who have taken the trouble to get in touch with the radio voice of the Christian Reformed Church.

Occasionally letters are received from Muslims who are under the impression that the program itself is Islamic! This may sound extremely puzzling. But it does point to this very sad fact: many Muslims are not even aware of the existence of Christian Arabs. They cannot conceive that an Arab may be anything but a Muslim. When they hear a religious program in Arabic they quickly jump to the conclusion that it must be an Islamic program. But this misunderstanding is not due only to ignorance. It also points to the fact that the Christian faith, when presented from the Biblical perspective, is not actually as incomprehensible to the Muslim as we may sometimes imagine. The traditional Muslim concept of Christianity is so full of prejudices and myths that when they hear a proclamation of authentic Christianity, some fail to recognize it as such. But should this disturb us? After all, are we not called upon to present the true image of the faith we love and cherish? And is it not wonderful that Muslims are coming to realize that Christianity, when rightly explained and expounded, is not after all as "wrong" as they had thought! In our responses to such letters which fail to recognize our Christian identity, we explain tactfully the fact that we are a Christian church which is proclaiming the Word of God and not actually "what you thought us to be." We then invite such people, knowing us as we truly are, to write and ask for our literature, if they so wish. Some write back, others do not.

In our explanation of the nature and scope of the Arabic broadcast several references have been made to the literature which is offered over the air. Some Arabic literature is of the sermon type. Sermons are available for distribution in pamphlet form or in booklets. The devotional book, *Family Worship* (based on English *Family Altars*) has also been printed and

⁵ See Appendix, P. ____ for samples of Arabic response.

distributed. Finally, books on the study of the Bible are to be published. To date the *Epistle to the Romans* has appeared.

The literature of The Back to God Hour Arabic broadcast has been warmly received by Muslims and Christians. Around 250,000 individual sermon pamphlets have gone out since 1958. Over 10,000 sermon booklets have also been mailed. A second printing of the devotional book had to be undertaken, and almost 9,000 copies are in use in many a home. Nine thousand copies of *Romans* were mailed in less than one year!

Besides the fact that our literature complements the radio ministry, it is also a proof of the seriousness of the Christian Reformed Church as she undertakes her radio ministry. It shows that we are really interested in the spiritual welfare of people. We recognize the limitations of radio and seek additional helps to spread, expound and apply the Word of God. An expression of altruism, impresses less-favored people very much. We do bring them the free gospel freely. They can contribute nothing financially to us in return. They just say: "shukran" i.e., thanks.

A complete and up-to-date file is kept for all those who are on the mailing list. Every listener is given a number which indicates also the time of his or her first writing to us. This is tremendously important for the sorting of mail in order to separate letters from new listeners from those written by "old" listeners. The correspondence that is carried on with our Arab friends has something of a routine nature in it. But this is not its sole characteristic. We have many "old" friends who write to us and give us their evaluations and suggestions. All these letters are filed for possible future reference. Every letter also is a reminder of the fact that the Lord reigns, that no matter what people may have done or may do in the future to the mission work of the Church, yet "The Word of God is not bound." We do have a line of communication with the Arab world. All the credit belongs to the Lord, in Him alone we glory!

The temptation in our work may be to view it from a narrow perspective. But our faith does not allow narrowness. We have a cosmic outlook, a hopeful outlook. Our work, radio and literature and personal correspondence, is only a small part of the mission work of the church among Muslims. We are still pioneering. We are waiting and praying for a breakthrough. Not a breakthrough in new methods or policies. Not a re-interpretation of the gospel which takes from it its redemptive core. We are not waiting on man, nor is our trust in man. We are waiting on God. He has entrusted us with the message. He has given us once for all the faith to proclaim. But as Lord of history and of nations, we are waiting on Him to hasten the day when within Islam a change may take place. We are patiently looking for the dawn of religious freedom within the lands of Islam. We hope that, when a convert from Islam comes forward and embraces the Christ and receives Holy Baptism, his life may be spared. We are waiting for the time when a true national Christian church may come into being composed of former Muslims in Muslim lands. We do not know how long we will have to wait. We live by faith, not by sight. Hope is an integral ingredient of our Christian life and work. But we are not wrong if we venture to say that most likely we are close to the dawn of that day. No human factor leads us to say that. New Muslim states, both Arab and non-Arab, all assert their Islamic foundations and incorporate the Koran into their legislative systems. The hopeful note is derived from the very fact that hitherto closed doors are now open --- via radio and the printed page. Furthermore, actual Muslim responses are being received. Are not these adequate signs that the Lord is

causing wonderful things to happen in our days? Should we not be humbled by the thought that He is using us, as well as others who are still faithful to Him, in this exacting task!?

Many Christians, after hearing the story of Islam and its challenge wonder about their part in the mission to Muslims. They may not be able to speak Arabic or Urdu or Malay to proclaim the gospel to Arabs or Pakistanis or Malayans. It is not impossible to learn these or any other Muslim languages. But even if we are not given the talents or the call for specific mission work, we can all pray with us and wait with us, we who are called to work among Muslims. We need warm Christian fellowship. The work among Muslims is a lonely work. Not entirely lonely, for we work under the guidance of the Lord and His Spirit. But we need the fellowship of the saints in our working and praying and waiting. We need genuine concern for the followers of Muhammad. For we missionaries go not in our own name, but we are sent by Christ and through the Church of the Lord to proclaim the glad tidings of great joy.

Our labors are not in vain when we work among Muslims. We know that God and His chosen among all races and nations. We do not know them, He does. He sends us to proclaim the Word of the cross. And since His Word cannot be bound, like Paul of old we may also say:

“Therefore, (we) endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they also may obtain salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (II Timothy 2:10)

III. The Spanish Broadcast

Our English foreign broadcast began in 1955. Three years later, the Arabic broadcast was initiated. The youngest venture in our foreign broadcasting is the Spanish broadcast known as “La Hora de la Reforma.” Our Christian Reformed churches, sensing the need for the proclamation of the gospel to Spanish speaking people within their communities as well as in Latin America requested Synod that a Spanish broadcast be started. Rev. John Boonstra, a native of Argentina, and a minister of our denomination, was asked by the Radio Committee to prepare translations and adaptations of English sermons in the Spanish language. At present we have 52 programs dealing with the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer as well as various other subjects.

Actual broadcasting of the Spanish programs began in 1963. It is too soon to make an adequate evaluation of the progress thus far achieved. But we have sure indications that the Spanish programs, like our other foreign broadcasts, are filling a very important vacuum in the life of the listeners. At present, the Spanish programs are aired over domestic stations in Florida, California, and Illinois. There are large Spanish speaking groups, Cubans as well as Mexicans, who are thus reached with the message of the Reformed faith. In Central America, La Hora de la Reforma is broadcast on radio stations in the following republics: Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Panama. In South America, the powerful missionary station HCJB broadcasts our Spanish messages twice a week on several short wave frequencies as well as on one local standard broadcast band. The last mentioned station began to air La Hora de la Reforma as of March 1964. It is hoped that before too long, our Spanish programs will also go over the Trans World

radio station which is being build in the Netherlands Antilles island of Bonaire off the shores of Venezuela.

Responses have come to the Spanish broadcast from almost all over Spanish speaking countries in the Western Hemisphere, Cuba included. Again, the general appeal of the Reformed faith has been demonstrated. All sorts of people have written to say how pleased they are with the discovery of the messages of the Iglesia Christiana Reformada. Roman Catholics and Protestants, office workers, and professors at universities, young and old, write us in their warm Spanish way to say how blessed they have been with the programs. They request our literature (which is the sermons printed in pamphlet form) not just for themselves, but also for distribution to others.

Latin America is going through a tremendous phase of social and economic changes. The old order is being challenged by the realities of the present-day situation. Castroism is making its inroads among the intellectuals and the poor. Both Moscow and Peking beam their broadcasts not only in Spanish and Portuguese (Brazil is Portuguese speaking) but also in the native dialects of the Indian tribes. Christians in Latin America feel challenged to bring their faith into the arena of modern life. But they find themselves hampered by interpretations of the faith which make it seem relevant only to the world-to-come. This explains why the Reformed faith, which acknowledges the importance of the here-and-now as well as the hereafter, makes a unique appeal to the concerned Christians of Latin America. As the first 13 messages were being beamed to the Spanish speaking people, they set the tone for the entire broadcast. (These were the same first messages that initiated the Arabic broadcast). Just a few lines from the original in English will be adequate to show you their appeal: "So there are two good reasons for studying the law of God . . . First, if you have never been to Mt. Calvary, you will never get there unless you go by way of Mt. Sinai. You must know the justice of God before you can have His mercy. . . And, secondly, if you have gone to Mt. Calvary by way of Mt. Sinai, you will want to go back again and see what kind of man God wants you to be. His law will become the pattern for your life, only now you will see it more clearly in the light of the Cross. Those two tablets of stone will become two powerful principles which govern you in your service of God, for you will always remember that the Christ of Mt. Calvary looked over to Mt. Sinai one day and said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." From *Law and Love*, Dr. Peter Eldersveld.

Before too long, we trust that the Spanish broadcast would have become a regular program with perhaps a daily ministry to the hungry masses of Latin America. Our experiences in the Arabic broadcast have taught us that a daily ministry in foreign languages and on short wave bands is a very effective means for the spread of the Word of God.

Twenty-five years ago, the Christian Reformed Church launched its denominational radio ministry. It was both domestic and English. Now, the ministry of The Bank to God Hour is both international and in three languages. May we all be willing and eager to expand this ministry of the Word of God, by radio and the printed page, so that in all the major languages of the world,

the voice of the Christian Reformed Church may be heard, proclaiming the everlasting gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He alone is the hope of mankind!