

Japan puts Her Case to the League

Manchukuo, hence Japan's recognition of Manchukuo—and hence, it is to be hoped, the world's recognition of Manchukuo.

E. H. ANSTICE.

[Editor's Note. BLACKFRIARS publishes this article, not because it has taken sides in the Manchurian quarrel, but because it recognises that the Japanese case has been inadequately presented in this country.]

BROADCASTING CATHOLICISM

THERE has been a good deal of discussion lately about religious broadcasting. Some people will not have wireless at any price, think it is undermining our lives like the rest of the mechanical inventions, and would not have Catholics touch the accursed thing. Unless wireless is in itself wrong—and the example of Vatican City seems to settle that—there is a good deal to be said against the withdrawal of Catholic broadcasts, but it is not the purpose of this article to try to say it. Other people object to the way it has to be, or at any rate is, done. They criticise the matter of broadcast sermons, and resent what they regard as interference with Catholic worship. Father Martindale has several times explained, and again recently in *The Southwark Record*, that Catholics are free to present the whole faith, but the impression seems to remain that they do, in fact, water it down for wireless audiences.

Like most discussions, this is best—if not most warmly—argued by people with knowledge, and the knowledge required is not perhaps possessed by the ordinary layman. He knows what his own acquaintances think of Catholic broadcasts and what he him-

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self feels about them, but no more. Priests like Père Lhande, of Radio-Paris, and Father Martindale really have some chance of judging of the effects of their talks, and the clergy are the best judges of the material considered suitable for wireless audiences. But there is a line of approach to the whole subject that is within the competence of anyone who has done a good deal of listening-in and is prepared to think a little, and I am not sure that the most has been made of it. It is an exceedingly simple approach, but I hope to show that it goes a very long way and, indeed, is not so much a line of approach as a key-position. It begins by considering the nature of the medium used in Catholic broadcasts. By 'medium' I here mean any means of communication. Words are a medium for the orator, pen and ink for the writer, paint for the painter; and, more widely, the stage is a medium, and the cinema, and the wireless. In short, it is the thing you use, with all its conditions, to 'put it across.' Every medium has its peculiar advantages and limitations. The cinema can do things that the stage cannot do, and it cannot do some things that the stage does very well. And it can, I think, be said that successful use of any medium depends very largely on due observance of its limitations. They constitute the difficulty of the work, but they give it its special quality, and they must not be ignored or evaded. This is a standing temptation in all mediums—it must not be confused with simply trying to do something that has not been done before—and it has given us a kind of statuary that is no longer admired, as well as pictures that tell a story, and organs that bark like dogs and cry like babies. One result of hankering after something that the medium will not do is that it is not made to do all it can. Early silent films were haunted by the ideas of the stage, and they were always trying to get the same effects, despite the difficulties inherent in the

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medium. In consequence, plays, usually adapted from stage plays, presented in the cinema seemed 'not as good as the play.' In time, the cinema came to be used as a separate medium, not fitted to do just what the stage could already do, but full of possibilities that the stage did not possess. It has risen to the level of an art where and in so far as it has absolute loyalty to itself. Thus in a recent review of the work of Robert J. Flaherty, the producer, he was praised for having 'really established the dramatic film as an art of its own, having nothing to do with any other art, performing a function that no other art could perform.' The tag about seeing difficulties as opportunities or opportunities as difficulties is absolutely true here. There will always be people who see the conditions of their medium only as limitations, and do all they can to refuse to accept them; and their work will always be imitative, a second-best to its original, false, and unreal. Others accept with regret, and then you have the dreary effect that comes from having done the best possible in rather unfortunate circumstances. Only to those who accept all the conditions of their medium with enthusiasm will it yield its full possibilities.

Broadcasting as a medium has limitations that are all its own. Some affect the broadcaster, others the listener. As I am here concerned only with things that the listener can verify, I deal only with the latter. They are obvious, but they lead to important conclusions. In the first place, the loud speaker appeals to only one of the senses, and all the listener's attention has to be concentrated on the speaker's voice. This has its advantages, for the voice is certainly capable of peculiar power when thus isolated. But I think most people would agree that it involves a certain strain. You cannot listen-in without lessening of attention for so long as you could watch a play. Concen-

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tration brings fatigue sooner. Further, the voice itself becomes more important. Mannerisms have exaggerated force, and the tone, modulation, and style of the voice are of first consequence.

Secondly, the listener receives a broadcast in his own surroundings. When you say that he uses only one of his senses, it does not mean that he has temporarily lost the use of all the others. They are all functioning as usual, and the ordinary circumstances of his life are, through them, in competition with the loud-speaker. The voice at the microphone has nothing to help it; it has to secure the listener's attention against a host of minor distractions.

And, lastly, the listener hears as an individual. Normally, he is, at most, one of only a few people in a room; and even then he is alone with the voice. Other audiences in hall or theatre or church tend to weld into one thing and respond collectively to appeal. The individual member is not moved or persuaded as an individual. He sways with the mass, and the successful actor or orator is he who succeeds in creating this sympathetic unit out of its separate elements. Wireless does not do this. The listener gets little or nothing from other listeners. Even deliberate organisation does little to alter it: 'the appeal of wireless is to the individual rather than to the group' (*The Listener*, November 2nd, 1932), and the vast audience is no audience at all in the old sense of the word. The broadcaster does not really address an audience of five hundred thousand; he talks to five hundred thousand separate people at the same time.

These conditions of the medium call for a special technique, and in almost every kind of broadcasting the development of that technique has advanced and it still fast advancing. The more successful it becomes, the less it is noticed by ordinary people. When it is perfect, the result is so satisfying that listeners do not

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realize how much study of the medium has gone to produce it, how close a consideration of what it prohibits, allows, and enables. But a comparison of methods at once shows how much progress has been made. For example, there can be no doubt that plays written for broadcasting are better to listen to, as plays, than broadcasts from a theatre. There may be other reasons for preferring theatre broadcasts, just as some people prefer a relay of opera because they like to listen to the music without the distraction of the stage; but the dramatic effect is not so good. 'Of course, you really want to see it,' people tell you. Or again, I fancy most people would agree that an experienced speaker talking into the microphone is more effective than a relay of a public speech. There may be some particular interest in hearing the public speech, it may be more of an event, but it has not so strong an effect on the individuals listening-in. In the one case they are enabled to *overhear*, in the other they listen. It is easier to remain detached from what you overhear. But these comparisons only hold good if the broadcast proper takes full account of the conditions of the medium. If the wireless play is simply a reading of a stage play without setting or costume, then it will be far inferior to the real thing. If the wireless speaker merely delivers a platform speech into the microphone he will certainly be less effective without the visible audience and the audible enthusiasm. Better far to overhear a speaker warmed by a real audience than listen to a public speech carefully delivered to an audience that does not in fact exist. A letter from a broadcast speaker in a recent number of *The Listener* shows that this is not mere imagination. 'My original speech,' he writes, 'was returned as being absolutely unsuitable in every respect for a talk! I was asked to re-write it as if talking to a man sitting by my side in a bus.'

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All this may seem very remote from the question of religious broadcasting, but evidently the medium is the same and the conditions it imposes are the same whatever is transmitted. Success—success in instructing or exhorting, just as much as success in amusing—still depends largely on the right use of the medium. Every other kind of transmission has found its feet and is coming out of the experimental stage, and it would be lamentable if religious broadcasting were to remain tentative and reluctant. It would surely be better to leave the microphone alone than challenge unfavourable comparison with the steadily improving secular items in the programmes. And this insistence on technique does not lack informed support. Père Lhande, whose ‘causeries religieuses’ from Radio-Paris are so well known, dealt with it as long ago as 1927. In the preface to his ‘radio-sermons’ for that year he already noted most of the points I have tried to recall. And he drew from the facts a conclusion of the utmost consequence for Catholic broadcasting: ‘Il fallait donc trouver un genre nouveau de prédication, spécialement adapté par le ton, le style, la durée, aux conditions très particulières de la radiophonie.’ And he goes on to speak of ‘cette modalité originale de prédication, le *radio-sermon*, c’est-à-dire une *causerie religieuse* brève, vivante, adaptée, plus *parlée* que *déclamée*, émise en une heure favorable à l’intimité du foyer.’ In other words, Père Lhande was able to conclude from the very nature of broadcasting that certain things were not suitable for it; and I suggest that while we are discussing whether certain things *ought* to be broadcast, we might better consider whether in fact they *can* successfully be broadcast. First of all, the sermon. Some Catholic listeners are apparently disappointed with the ‘sermons’ they hear on the wireless. They seem to be judging them as sermons—that is, as sermons of the kind they would

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expect to hear in church. But Père Lhande concluded, and what has here been said is to the same effect, that the sermon is not suitable for broadcasting. 'L'accent solennel ou doctoral d'un grand sermon . . . détonne dans le salon ou la salle à manger. Il faut ici plus d'intimité, plus de brièveté aussi.' Anybody who has followed, say, the relay of the conferences from Notre Dame will, I think, be of the same opinion. This is not to say that people do not get good from wireless sermons; doubtless they do; or that there may not be good reasons for relaying sermons of special importance. But the sermon proper is not the best way of reaching the ordinary listener. It belongs to the pulpit. The form, the manner, the very voice, employed in pulpit oratory have been developed from centuries of preaching to congregations collected together in churches. Heard in the circumstances in which they are generally received by the ordinary listener, they fail of much of their effect. And what has been said of speeches applies here too: the relay of a pulpit sermon is only *overheard*. It is only a second-best to actual presence in the church. Yet some at least of the atmosphere of the church is overheard as well. But the deliberate broadcast of a pulpit sermon to a large number of scattered individuals, each listening in his home, with no congregation, no religious setting, nothing but the mere voice to do what was never meant to be done by the voice alone, this evidently takes too little account of the special conditions imposed by the medium to be likely to be fully effective. Broadcasting does call for a special kind of 'sermon,' just as it calls for—and has produced—a special kind of secular 'talk.' It is idle to criticize the 'radio-sermon' as if it were a sermon. The perfect 'radio-sermon' would not be suitable for preaching in church; the pulpit sermon is not suitable for broadcasting. From this particular point of view, and I am not here concerned

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with any other, Catholic broadcasters have to face exactly the same problem as actors and lecturers. They have to find the methods to suit the medium in which they are working. Both Père Lhande and Father Martindale exemplify this in their broadcasts, and it is significant that in recording lay disappointment with broadcast sermons the editor of *The Southwark Record* should have said, 'True, they usually add that "Father Martindale, of course, is different."' This also referred to the matter broadcast, and this I shall mention later.

As much, and more, might be said of another very vexed question, the relaying of Catholic services. Surely it is not unreasonable to ask again whether they are technically suitable for broadcasting. Whether desirable or not, they could, in the nature of things, never be anything but a second-best. Here again there may be special circumstances, when there is good reason for relaying a service. It may be an historic occasion (like the Eucharistic Congress), when the relay is not proposed as a substitute for normal Catholic worship. Or there may be special conditions in the listeners (such as the sick or aged), which make the second-best better than they once would have dared to hope for. But normally the relay of a service does no more than let people overhear something in which they are not directly concerned. If they are healthy Catholics in normal circumstances, they might just as well sit on the wall outside the nearest Catholic church and listen to the singing. If they are not Catholics, it must be largely incomprehensible. And this at once brings in the question of the wireless audience.

Even a speech has to be suited to its hearers; how much more a talk, which is essentially saying something to somebody. The wireless audience is wider and more heterogeneous than any other in the world. A man who would never set foot in a church may listen

out of curiosity to things he would otherwise never hear. It is so little bother to 'see what it's like'; it does not commit you in any way; and it is so easy to switch off if you get fed up. Thus people can be reached who are not otherwise touched, and reached in their homes, not in an unfamiliar atmosphere, not 'in public.' There is real gain in this. But do such people listen? Well, Père Lhande was able to write (in 1929): 'on peut dire qu'à l'heure actuelle l'immense majorité de nos auditeurs du dimanche est composée tout au moins d'indifférents'; and Father Martindale (*The Month*, January, 1931): 'I definitely hold that when we are speaking *via* the B.B.C., we are speaking to an overwhelming preponderance of non-Catholics.' This fact does tend to reinforce the argument against the pulpit manner. It also has important consequences in regard to the matter that is broadcast. A Catholic listener is not really competent to discuss this aspect of the question unless he has had opportunity of knowing the effect of religious talks on a number of non-Catholic listeners. Besides, Father Martindale has dealt with it again and again, and a brief and clear statement of his views appeared in his letter to *The Southwark Record* of September last. But both the French and the English priest whom I have so largely quoted agree from a wide experience that broadcasting does afford an immense opportunity of reaching the non-Catholic. 'Prenez donc garde,' said Père Lhande in one of his 1930 *causeries*, 'prenez donc garde, chers auditeurs qui vous qualifiez de mécréants! . . . Gare même, c'est moi-même qui vous en avertis! . . . à la Fée Radio qui, pour vous faire entendre à midi une voix pas du tout féminine, n'en pourrait pas moins être pour vous une voix sirène—mais, si je puis dire, une sirène du Bon Dieu! Sauvez-vous! tournez le bouton! . . . Mais non! . . . Vous ne le tournerez pas, ce bouton!' And they don't

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switch off. ' Nous avons dit ailleurs que l'impression ainsi obtenue ne s'est pas bornée de la pure sympathie, mais qu'elle a eu des résultats tangibles et définitifs.' Anyone who is curious to learn more of the actual results in France can find a great deal of information in the series called ' L'Évangile par-dessus les toits.'

But if religious services are not suitable for broadcasting and ' radio-sermons ' are particularly directed to a non-Catholic audience, where do Catholics come in? Is there to be nothing for them? For if religious broadcasting must be narrowed down to the *praeparatio voluntatis* of which Father Martindale writes, the only place for a Catholic seems to be at the microphone end. The answer must be a mixture of personal opinion and guesses and hopes, for it lies, for the most part, in the future. A Catholic can, of course, learn much from broadcasts which have primarily an apostolic purpose. But he can normally get his religious instruction and exhortation in the usual ways. He can worship in church, and say his prayers, and get what advice he may need. He should not be dependent on his loud-speaker for these things. And as things stand, at least in England, there is not much for him. But that does not mean that broadcasting might not come to play an important part in Catholic life. After all, Catholic broadcasting may still be in its infancy. The microphone may yet be made to serve other purposes. It is true that each listener listens as an individual, but it is also true that broadcasting can broaden his horizon immeasurably and make him more aware of the whole of which he forms a part. It can do much to kill self-satisfaction and complacent ignorance, and it can give him quickly news that it is important that he should know. Thus, for example, it has enabled the Pope to speak direct to Catholics throughout the world, Vatican City to give religious news daily, and *Poste Parisien* to bring Catholics in touch Sunday by

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Sunday with Catholic works of various kinds. It all tends to make people feel that the Church is greater than themselves or their parish, and show them what the Catholic world is doing. And when the uses to which broadcasting is already put for secular purposes are considered, it is difficult not to dream dreams. If all kinds of theories on every sort of subject can be sent from one end of Europe to another, could not there be more inter-communication of Catholic ideas? If the B.B.C. thinks it worth while to keep a speaker moving about Europe to tell English listeners what other nations are doing and thinking, is it an impossible dream that wireless may one day serve to tell Catholics more about their fellow Catholics abroad? There is so much that might be done. There is the difficulty of language, of course, and the other difficulty of state control. They may be insurmountable; but if an Englishman can, any Sunday afternoon, listen to advertisements in his own language from a foreign station, they may yet be overcome. Whether these and other possibilities are expedient there are wiser people to judge. One thing seems to me certain. Whatever attitude Catholics may adopt towards broadcasting, one should be ruled out altogether. A writer in *BLACKFRIARS* said not long ago: 'the broadcasting of religious matter can be condoned.' It can't. Nothing could be more disastrous than a mood of regretful condonation in face of the keenness and energy of the secular broadcaster. Either we must leave it alone, or we must give our very best. Catholics have every reason to be proud of what has already been done, for some Catholic broadcasting has been as good as anything of its sort. But if the Church is not to leave this immense field untouched, there is much to be done yet. It is not likely to be achieved regretfully.

A. E. H. SWINSTEAD.