

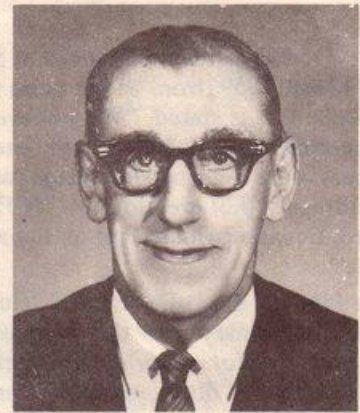
Early Days of Gospel Broadcasting

IN THE PHILIPPINES

Cyril H. Brooks

The time: evening of December 7th, 1941. The place: radio studio in downtown Manila. The half-hour program of the "Gospel Messengers" was just about to go off the air but the clock showed they still had another minute. The broadcaster picked up a card, handed to him earlier that day, - "A perfect Convoy of Dreadnaughts". On this card were printed seven verses, each with "Fear not". In that remaining minute the broadcaster read: "Fear not, I have redeemed thee." "Fear not, I am with thee." "Fear not, I am thy shield." "Fear not, the Lord thy God will not fail thee." War was raging in Europe and rumours of war abounded in the Far East. With those words of assurance the "Gospel Messengers" went off the air - for good, stopped by outbreak of war in the Pacific and the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Unknown to those in the radio studio, at that very moment, convoys of carriers and planes were already on their way to bomb Pearl Harbor and points in the Philippines.

The recent 25th anniversary (1948-1973) of Gospel broadcasting from Manila by the Far East Broadcasting Company reminded the writer of those Gospel programs before World War II. Since not so many are around to recall those days, it may be of value to recall and record the beginnings of Gospel broadcasting here in the Philippines.



My memory has been refreshed by going through copies of "The Philippine Evangelist", a monthly magazine published in Manila from 1932 to 1941. Possibly this article may stimulate further research into the early days of missionary radio broadcasting. In that connection, may I digress for a moment to an island far removed and very different to the Philippine Islands.

Radio, or wireless (as it was often known then) was in its infancy in 1923 when Mr. Arthur Gook, a Brethren missionary in Iceland, had a vision of using it in his work, where it was very difficult to visit outlying churches. With a wireless transmitting outfit in either Reykjavik or Akureyri, and receivers in other chapels, Gospel services could be held simultaneously all over the island. "A very satisfactory licence" was granted by the Icelandic government in 1927, and after a number of delays, broadcasting began in December, 1927. While the primary purpose was to reach listeners in Iceland, the transmitter proved to be very efficient and reception was reported from as far away as England, New York, and even California, 4300 miles away. Broadcasting continued in spite of problems with electrical power until 1929. In that year the licence was revoked because of the opposition of an unfriendly government official.

In an article in "Echoes of Service" March 1959 (from which these facts are culled) it is stated, "We believe the pioneering efforts of Mr. Gook and his helpers were one of the things which encouraged the erection of HCJB in Quito, Ecuador which went on the air in 1931."

In January 1934, Dr. Paul G. Culley, then a missionary with the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, commenced a fifteen-minute, Sunday evening program over KZRM, Manila. So far as we know this was the first live Gospel program here in the Philippines. Some programs from the United States, such as Old-fashioned Revival Hour and Lutheran Hour were released but these were, I believe, a few years later. The managers of the radio station were apprehensive of adverse reaction from listeners or from Roman Catholic hierarchy. So at first there was to be no preaching. However each hymn was introduced by a brief comment and possibly those sermonettes were more effective than a sermon would have been at that point.

A note in "The Philippine Evangelist" April, 1934 indicates the response: "Many expressions of appreciation have been received for the program of the Gospel Singers, broadcast from Radio Manila. Not only from all parts of the Philippines but also from other lands, letters have been pouring in. One card from the Colonial Secretariat, Hong-Kong, the writer 'regrets that the time allotted is not longer.'" After a break during the hot season, the program was resumed as a half-hour program in June, 1934. In August a lady wrote from Australia, telling of excellent reception - as clear as Bendigo, a hundred miles away!"

The following year the Culley's left

**Our serialized story
"SKYWAVES" by
Gleason H. Ledyard
will be continued
in our next issue,
which will carry the
9th installment.**

for furlough and the program was taken over by Dr. Russell Bradley Jones, then pastor of the First Baptist Church, Manila. Since Dr. Jones was a gifted speaker but not a singer like Paul Culley, he insisted there would have to be preaching. By that time the program was popular and there had not been the unfavorable reaction, so this was approved. Some of Dr. Jones' early messages were published in "The Philippine Evangelist." The issue of September, 1935 has a message by this writer, delivered over station KZRM on February 24th, 1935. I recall that Dr. Jones had asked me to give the message that evening. My nervousness at facing a microphone for the first time was aggravated by a sore throat and husky voice but Dr. Jones wouldn't let me beg off! It wasn't a very auspicious start to radio broadcasting and little did I then foresee the future share I would have in radio ministry.

At the Manila Carnival in February 1936 we had a Bible booth. One of the

visitors there was an American visiting from Guam. He reported that a large number, about a thousand people, there wait for the Sunday evening broadcast of the Gospel Messengers from Radio Manila. Dr. Jones left for furlough in March, 1936 and turned over the responsibility for the program to me. This was continued until that Sunday in December, 1941, except for a little over a year of furlough, 1937-1938, during which time other friends carried on the program.

Only the Lord knows the real results of these broadcasts in the lives of men and women. The files of correspondence from those days were lost or destroyed during the war. However two instances of encouragement still linger in the memory. One was a letter from a young wife who had become very despondent because of many problems and was about to take her life. Then she heard the "Gospel Messengers" quartet singing, "All this I have borne for thee, what has thou borne for Me?" It was the voice of God to her and she found peace and joy trusting in Christ. Shortly before the war, contact was made with another young lady. When we visited her we tried to lead her to Christ as the One who could help her in her problems. It was all too new for her to come to a decision then. After prayer with her, we saw the tears flowing as she exclaimed, "Never in my life have I heard a prayer like that!" I was a bit ashamed that it sounded so ordinary to us but she was accustomed to formal, memorized prayers. Contact was lost because of the war but twenty years later, after a Gospel service a lady approached me. Her face seemed familiar but I could not place her until she told me of that visit and also that now she is believer in Christ.

A note in "The Philippine Evangelist" in November 1938 shows there had been no charge for radio time until then when the station began charging religious programs. It was a work of faith and the Lord always supplied the needs, whether of finances or personnel. For a time three nationalities were represented in the mixed quartet. That was before the days of tape-recorders so all programs went on the air live. One evening the station advanced our program time by fifteen minutes at short notice. It had not been possible to notify all the participants. As a result the pianist and some of the singers sauntered in quite casually just before we were given the mike. I thought we would have to change the format and start with the message!

One Sunday evening in 1940 an American sailor on a submarine in Manila Bay tuned into the Gospel Messengers. He was a discouraged Christian because he hadn't found Christian fellowship on shore nor a Gospel program on his radio. The spiritual uplift from our program that evening caused him to write to us. That contact later led into another area of Christian service for the Brooks family as their home became a servicemen's home. One who was helped spiritually at that time was a young Air Force man, named Jesse Miller. After World War II, Jesse and his wife were led into work among U.S. servicemen overseas. This developed into the forming of Overseas Christian Servicemen's Centers Inc., with centers in different countries in Asia and Europe.

During 1941 there was usually a contingent of servicemen in the studio when "Gospel Messengers" went on the air. Their interest, prayers and fellowship were a great encouragement. So

that evening of Dec. 7th, 1941 we did not realize how much we were all soon going to need the assurance of those "Fear not" verses. The fellows left the studio to go back to their ships and stations. For some of us, civilians, there was to be Japanese occupation and internment camp. For some of them, the three years of war in the Pacific; for others, the horrors of Bataan, the Death March and Japanese prison camps; and for others, death or missing in action. Whatever happened, the promise was true - "Fear not; I am with thee."

One closing footnote - the Japanese took control of the radio stations that had been built again under their direction after being silenced before they entered

Manila. Some Filipino pastors were invited to preach on Sundays and of course they were expected to conform to the Japanese propaganda. An old friend and a former student in my classes, the late Dr. Santiago Cruspero had taken a most courageous stand for Christ. He was ready to preach the Word but not to give out propaganda. Once he was invited to give a radio message and the first he submitted was disapproved by the Japanese. Unknown to them he then came to me for advice. I thought it rather ironical that I, an "enemy alien", should help him in that situation. Without compromising the truth of the Word, we succeeded in preparing a message which was approved for broadcast.

THINK IT NOT STRANGE

Think it not strange then, pilgrim neither faint,
much less indulge in murmuring and complaint,
if what you meet with in your heavenly road
is hard to bear; since all is planned by God
His child to train in wisdom's holy ways,
and form a chosen vessel for His praise.
Now we are slow those ways to understand;
but let us bow beneath His mighty Hand,
sure that His wisdom over all presides,
His power controls and love unerring guides.

J.G. Deck.

