

CHRISTIAN BROADCASTING'S IMPACT ON 20TH CENTURY AMERICA

Commercial radio broadcasting began in the United States in 1920.

The documented advent of Christian broadcasting can probably be dated to January of 1921 when KDKA broadcasted a Sunday service from the Pittsburg (PA) Calvary Episcopal Church. That church was chosen simply because one of the radio engineers was a choir member. The pastor, leery of the new medium, declined to participate, so his associate Lewis Whittemore preached the message.

A more enthusiastic, evangelical start can be traced to June of 1922 when Paul Rader, founding pastor of the brand-new Chicago Gospel Tabernacle, preached via the radio tower newly installed by Mayor Thompson on top of the city hall building. He said of radio broadcasting, "It can push out the walls of the biggest church and reach the unsaved man."

Calvary Baptist Church (Manhattan, NY), under the leadership of the very "fundamentalist" John Roach Straton, claims to be the first American congregation to have its own radio station & to regularly broadcast its services. I could not substantiate this activity any earlier than 1923, so it looks like both Pittsburgh & Chicago beat out New York in regards that "honor."

Liberal preachers quickly adopted this new medium to expand their social gospel message in direct competition with the conservatives.

By 1925, religious (mostly "Christian") organizations owned 10% of the American radio stations. Many non-Christians & liberal "Christians" of the time railed against this influence.

By 1931, half of the American households had radios. Religious programs multiplied.

In 1933, Dr. E.F. Webber, an associate of Paul Rader, began ministry in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, including six-days a week radio broadcasting that in the mid-1940s would cover parts of five states – thus, the "Southwest Radio Church."

In 1937, Charles Fuller (the 1947 founder of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA) established a nation-wide radio broadcast called "The Old Fashioned Revival Hour." By the mid-1940s, he had 20 million listeners each Sunday – about 14% of the country's population.

Commercial radio broadcasting actually began in New York City in the Summer of 1941. It expanded to a few more big cities during WWII, but it didn't really take off throughout the country until the 1950s.

Some of the most successful radio ministers (both liberal & conservative) expanded into or switched over to TV during the very late 1940s and early 1950s. You might recognize some of the names which made the most of TV:

- Billy Graham Crusades broadcasted from 1951 onward
- Fulton Sheen's "Life is Worth Living" (1951-1957) & The Fulton Sheen Program (1961-1968)
- Rex Humbard's "Cathedral of Tomorrow" (1952-1982)
- Oral Roberts' nationwide revival meetings (starting in 1954) & his "Abundant Life" program (beginning in 1957) & quarterly prime time specials (1969-1980)
- Pat Robertson's "Christian Broadcasting Network" (1960-present) & "The 700 Club" (1966-present)
- Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" (1970-2006)
- Jimmy Swaggart's weekly telecast (1971-present)
- Lester Sumrall's "World Harvest Television" (beginning in 1972)
- Paul Crouch's Trinity Broadcasting Network (beginning in 1973)
- Jim & Tammy Faye Baker's PTL Club (1974-1987)
- D. James Kennedy's "The Coral Ridge Hour" (1974-2007)

All types of crimes in American began a sudden increase during the early 1960s. Many Bible-centric Christians pointed to the fact that the removal of Bible reading & prayer from American public schools happened right around that time. They blamed the adoption of liberalism. (The execution rate also dropped suddenly around the early 1960s & bottomed out around the later 1960s.) The historical peak of all types of crimes was reached in the early 1990s.

Some Christian Groups That Began Impactful Ministries During The 70s & 80s

- Focus on the Family (1977-present) by James Dobson
- Moral Majority (1979-1989) by Jerry Falwell & D. James Kennedy
- Family Research Council (1983-present) by James Dobson & others
- Christian Coalition (1988-present) by Pat Robertson & others

The Clinton Administration (supported by a Republican majority House elected in 1994) promoted the idea of more police officers, put some tougher enforcement laws on the books & increased the execution rate. (The execution rate peaked in late 1990s, but began dropping during the Obama Administration.)