



**WARD, Mark. *The Lord's Radio, Gospel Music Broadcasting and the Making of Evangelical Culture, 1920-1960*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017, 295 p.**

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All the phenomena derived from American Christian broadcasting have not received all the attention they deserve from researchers in historical studies and social communication. There are not usually many specialists who dedicate their time to immerse themselves in the contexts of Christian communication, one of the key themes to understand the ideological regeneration of Protestant conservatism, the missionary strategy of ecclesiastical organizations, the diffusion of traditional cultural elements and the institutional management capacity of activist congregational movements. There is a very small research community in Canada and the United States, made up of an easily identifiable academic network. Mark Ward Sr.<sup>2</sup> has been one of the most recognizable academic profiles for decades for his large number of publications and his feverish cooperation in scientific events.

The book has a fairly descriptive title: *Lord's Radio, Gospel Music Broadcasting and the Making of Evangelical Culture, 1920-1960*; it was Published in Jefferson, North Carolina by McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.<sup>3</sup> It is made up of 295 pages, distributed through a section of thanks, the preface, the introduction,

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<sup>2</sup> He graduated in Philology and English Literature from the University of Virginia; He completed a Master of Communication at Spring Arbor University. He received his doctorate from Clemson University, through the Rhetoric, Communication and Information Design. He is currently an Associate Professor at the University of Houston-Victoria, in the Department of Communication and Cultural Studies. He teaches curricular content related to Christianity and the media. He is part of the academic commission of the Journal of Communication and Religion and the executive council of the Religious Communication Association (RCA). He has a long list of publications behind him related to religiosity, Christian popular culture, communicative rhetoric and the world of the media. Among his latest books, the two volumes of *The Electronic Church in the Digital Age: Cultural Impact of Evangelical Mass Media* (2016) and *Organization Communication: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2015) stand out.

<sup>3</sup> An American publishing group founded in 1979 by businessman Robert Franklin. Despite not having many decades of experience, McFarland & Company has been a benchmark in the academic world since the mid-1980s. In the last decade, despite the serious problems the publishing world has been going through, the group has managed to expand the number of collections and increase its turnover in all formats. Its business strategies are based on thematic specialization, the contracting of reduced editions and direct sales to libraries linked to higher education institutions throughout the North American region. Although they have published in many areas of the social sciences and humanities, their collections and scientific journals on historical studies, linguistics and literature stand out.



five chapters, the epilogue, a chapter of notes, the documentary sources and the indexes. The contents fit perfectly into Professor Ward's research sequence, both for its methodological format and thematic spectrum. The first four chapters are structured around a temporal sequence established by decades. The fifth chapter focuses on unconventional Christian intellectual production and the creative process of evangelizing songs through practically unpublished case studies. From a methodological point of view the book is impeccable, as on each page you can perceive the meticulous work done by the author.

The introduction outlines the trajectories of the Protestant movements and the philosophical currents of thought from the colonial phase to the present moment in an attempt to classify the key factors for understanding everything that happened in the great American Christian family due to the emergence of electronic communication. A notable emphasis is made throughout this section to define concepts and terms of Christian history and culture to give more fluidity to the chapters that make up the body of the book. This effort is made through a review of the moments of transformation and adaptation. The historiographic reflections on how the perception of missionary efforts and confessional rhetoric has evolved through the great works of academic reference of the last decades, have a strong load of theoretical synthesis.

The first chapter, "The Twenties. Prophets and Pioneers," addresses the initial phase of American Christian broadcasting. Possibly, it is the most difficult period for research, and Professor Ward circumvents the problem of the absence of sources and establishes comparative references to guide the historical account. These lines speak of the technical chaos in which the visionary preachers of that time had to carry out their communicative work. Research shows how radio waves were the channel for rituals and sermons in those early years. Recording studios also contemplated the need to include the cultural manifestations of the ecclesiastical community: music, songs and elements of nineteenth-century oral tradition. Musical messages became one of the most used resources in specialized communication on religious themes.

"The Thirties. Preachers and Programs" is the title of the second chapter. Contrary to the previous decade, preachers and communication professionals had to perform their functions within complex business structures and in a context of broadcast regulated by federal law. The golden years of American broadcasting shaped a period of growth in business strategies in which there was less and less time



for improvisation. The preachers with a radio presence acted as representatives of confessional collectives. The pastoral work was carried out within a kind of consensus and the music edition sought to reach and please as many consumers of radio programming as possible. The creation of radio products intended for audiences of different age ranges and religious tendencies was sought. Biblical readings were accompanied by restrained interpretations and contractual reflections on the society of the 1930s. There were many voices opposed to this way of doing radio, which set new evangelization strategies outside the radio production circuits.

The 1940s were a period of great transformation for Christian broadcasting. At the beginning of the decade, the model of consensus and moderation, built by the representation structure of the Federal (later National) Council of Churches, continued to be very valid. In the middle of the decade, those excluded from the waves were organized through a strong network of cooperation institutions and confessional conventions. Those voices, which had remained in the exclusion until then, were positioned for the most part within the belief system of Reformed Protestantism. In this sense, the third chapter has a fairly descriptive and syncretic title: “The Forties. Crusades and Conventions.” The ideological change in American society at the end of the decade, motivated by new political and geostrategic scenarios, was the perfect breeding ground for the propagation of the discourse of evangelical preachers. Its communicative model was slowly making its way and became a tool of evangelization and propagation of a new Christian cultural model, which had different interpretations of tradition and the concept of morality. In this new format for the production of radio content, music was used to create a great psychological and empirical impact on audiences.

The generalization of television in American homes during the 1950s led to a significant decrease in the consumption of radio programming. The costs of accessing radio spaces were moderated and many individuals and Christian communities were able to access content production. Broadcast times were significantly extended for radio content specialized in religious themes. The fourth chapter, “The Fifties. Words and Music,” analyzes the consolidation of a radio model and the production of musical content from specific case studies: John Paterson, Stuart Hamblen, Ira Stanphill, Moise Lister, Bill Gaither and Gloria Gaither. The value of this publication, among many other issues, lies in the study of themes and personalities that do not enjoy much follow-up among historians of social communication and cultural



studies. In other words, Professor Ward focuses on some thematic areas that are practically unexplored. This study involves the dissection of a large number of documentary sources.

In the fifth chapter, “Other Notable Songwriters,” an attempt is made to highlight the existence of individuals who did not have much impact on the producers of their time, but who had a long, productive career far from traditional models. The people mentioned on these pages are: Alfred Ackley, Benton Ackley, Eugene Barlett, Virgil Brock, Blanche Brock, Albert Brumley, Avis Christiansen, Cleavant Derricks, Thomas Dorsey, Merrill Dunlop, Vep Ellis, Phil Kerr, Haldor Lillenas, Harry Loes, Audrey Mieir, George Schuler, Oswald Smith, NB Vandall, Charles Weigle. Most of these songwriters and music composers are unknown even to researchers who have a certain affinity with the world of religiously specialized media. The author has had to make a great effort to classify all the information and analyze this entire volume of narrative records.

The author, in the epilogue of the book, displays a series of reflections and statements about what the 1950s meant for the world of Christian communication. Not only are the great figures of the time explored in depth, but the basic programming formats are also analyzed, which laid the foundations of the entire televangelist culture in subsequent decades. It is emphasized that television was of great use to corporations, but was never able to fully cover the work done by radio stations and programs. As far as music and musical messages are concerned, radio has continued to have a great impact on audiences and has continued to generate content in subsequent decades. All the institutions linked to the world of Christian radio broadcasting have always shown great creativity and originality, and in the same way, they have been the guarantors of an old and deeply rooted cultural tradition that resisted disappearing. Radio programs generated a vortex between past Christian culture and aspirations of the growth of church organizations.

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