

# Radio Programming Roles

Chapter 3 – Dimensions of our Message  
by Frank Gray



# Introduction

This booklet is the third chapter of Radio Programming Roles (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) and is made available here in a stand-alone volume. The other chapters of the book are also published as chapters in their own right.

The other volumes are as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Part 1: Roles Summarised
- Chapter 1 – Part 2: Appealing to a Wide Audience
- Chapter 1 – Part 3: Appealing to Middle Distance Listeners
- Chapter 1 – Part 4: Other Useful Roles
- Chapter 1 – All Fourteen Roles (Parts 2-4 above)
- Chapter 2 – The Gray Matrix
- Chapter 4 – Incarnational Radio
- Chapter 5 – Finding Answers
- Chapter 6 – Using New Technology

The entire book is not yet available in printed form but the whole contents can be found on the Web at <http://radiatoroles.com>.

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# 3 Dimensions of the Message

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## *What We Need to Say, to Be — and to Do*

Defining the message is something that we rarely bother about — because it is assumed that we all know. So nobody asks! This is especially true of Christians involved in media.

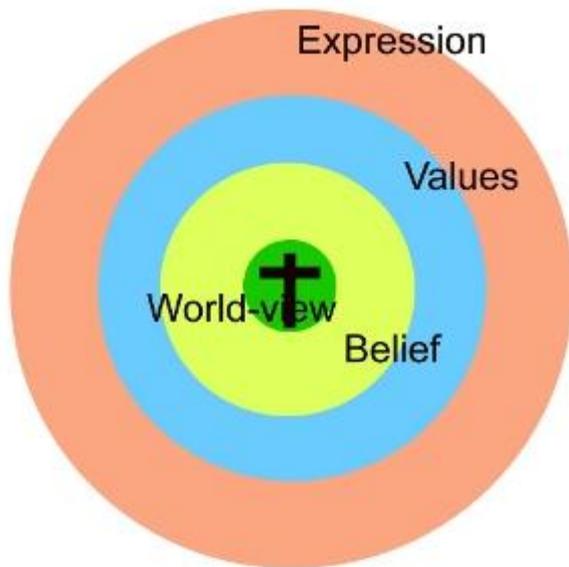
It is not because Christian media folk are not well-trained in theology. It has more to do with the nature of their work and their frequent need to build bridges of understanding between Christian faith on the one hand and a disinterested, unbelieving and sceptical public on the other. It has to address journalistic issues, the commentary on everyday life and people, and their real life issues. The art of the broadcaster is to put together and deliver a broadcast that brings the Good News to listeners. This needs to be done in such a way that listeners can understand it and enjoy it in the context of their everyday experiences and interests.

Broadcasters coming from sheltered Christian family backgrounds may fail to understand the general lack of interest their audiences have in the Gospel or anything Christian — especially in materialist and post-modern society. They may be unaware that the person-in-the-street cannot even understand what they are talking about. The result is that Christian broadcasters sometimes sound disconnected. They sound as though they come from another planet simply because they don't speak the same street language or want to talk about interesting things. Today in post-Christian countries we cannot even assume people have any basic understanding of Christian belief or have ever heard about Jesus. How can we talk about Jesus as a radical revolutionary whom we idolise and adore?

Much could be written about the Message but this is not the place for lengthy discussion. The context of this book suggests that we do best to confine our analysis of the broadcast message to four distinct components.

Our Message is shaped by many things — and is also a lot bigger than we may think! In fact we could say it is multi-dimensional and has many layers...

Let us look at the "onionskin" model... based upon a model developed by anthropologists. It attempts to show how our behaviour and belief systems fit together and determine how we relate to each other as individuals. It also includes the ways in which we express ourselves.



**Figure 1**

At the centre is our underlying **Worldview** — the way we interpret and decode the world around us. This worldview is closely related to our **Beliefs** which provide structure, definition and detail.

Our lives are built upon the **Values** we hold — and these are shaped by our beliefs. They define what we consider important about living and our relationships.

Our values become visible through our **Expressions** . These are most evident in the way we behave and in our attitudes. They are also demonstrated by the things we write, the things we make, our art, etc.

Media have a lot to do with Values and Expressions. That is what people are most interested in. They become the foundation for a lot of our meaningful communication and lead on to questions about what we believe and our underlying worldview.

Take a look at the concentric circles, like the layers of an onion, as we examine these more carefully:

### **World-view:**

As Christians our foundational understanding of a creator God shapes the way in which we look at our world. For example, because we believe the universe — and our planet Earth — was designed it means we will see things differently from those who believe we are here by chance. Knowing that we are created by God we have a sense of worth as well as a sense of destiny. While rejecting Darwinian evolution we do not find science at odds with biblical truth but consistent with it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Psalm 111:2 *Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.*

We have a respect for each other as equals. We also humbly recognise our own fallen nature and the fallen world order of which we are a part. We have a strong sense of history — where we came from and where we are going. We also know there is more to life than the visible, material world in which we live as temporary residents. Though it is temporary we also recognise that what we do with our lives matters. We are individually accountable for our actions and judgment awaits us. Inevitably people who share this world-view see life very differently from those who do not.

### **Belief:**

Christian belief is built around our knowledge of God who has revealed himself to us through his son Jesus Christ who came to die for us to save us from our sins. Through the process of believing in him we become children of God and are in-dwelt by His Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus is King and that His Kingdom will have no end. One day Jesus will return and take us to be with him — for eternity. The core of this belief is perhaps summed up best by Paul's words: Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>.

### **Values:**

Our personal values are derived from our belief system and world-view and shaped by our knowledge of Jesus Christ and the perfect example that he provided for us to follow.

If we see our world as created by a loving God we will take better care of it — and also enjoy it more. If we view other people as made in the likeness of God — just as we are — then we will treat them with respect and equality — regardless of race, wealth, religion, social standing, whether male or female, slave or free. If we see that what we have is entrusted to us by God our provider then we will see the importance of material wealth in a different light.

If we recognise the sovereignty of God we will have a better understanding of our own self worth as well as our responsibility toward him.

### **Expression:**

The manner in which we express ourselves is varied and complex. But it is directly connected to our Values, our Belief system and World-view. It is inevitable that we live out what we really believe (and not necessarily what we say we believe).

We express ourselves in a variety of ways — through our behaviour and attitudes as well as through our creativity.

### ***Behaviour***

Inevitably our values strongly influence our behaviour. What we truly believe is reflected by the way we behave. If we believe there is no God then we behave as if there is no God, without Christian values or a Christian world-view.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 20:21

Most important for the Christian is the fact that this is what people see in us. If we relate to people with warmth and compassion then they will be drawn to us. On the other hand if we are cold and judgmental we inadvertently communicate the message that we are heartless people who may say we care, while in reality we don't. Our actions will speak much louder than our words and all our stated beliefs.

### ***Attitudes***

Our attitudes are the software of our behaviour and are more often expressed through our views and our body language. Very often these things communicate more about us than the planned communication. Our behaviour and attitudes are the benchmarks by which people judge us. Jesus said as much himself when he said that a good tree brings forth good fruit... Our emotions are also tied to this. Emotive outbursts of frustration and anger reveal a lot about what is going on inside of us and of the extent to which we enjoy inner peace.

### ***Creative expression***

This is demonstrated through the things we make, draw, paint or write — or through drama and dance. In other words, the arts serve as a vehicle for creativity in its varied forms — and all of them show something of what is going on inside of us.

Thus we have a cascade of influence from the inside out:

- Our worldview provides the basis for our beliefs
- our beliefs shape our values and
- our values determine our expression: creativity, behaviour and attitudes — what people see, hear and feel about the Gospel as expressed through us

It is interesting to note that we could equally draw similar sets of circles for other belief systems and ideologies. The centre circle could, for example, summarise the worldview of animists, atheists, Buddhists, existentialists, Hindus, Muslims — or even post-modernists and materialists. We would then see how, with this central worldview and belief system changed, values and expressions would also change significantly as a direct consequence.

Through the regular reading of the Bible all these things become ordered in our minds and our whole outlook is renewed and refreshed. This is the transformation through the renewal of our minds that St. Paul talks about<sup>3</sup>.

By this means our worldview is reinforced, our beliefs are defined and sharpened, our values become like those of Jesus Christ, and our expression radiates God's character, creativity and love.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:2

## ***The Media and Values***

If this is true then it has profound significance for us as Christian broadcasters. This is because broadcasting, and the mass media in general, is one of the principal means by which values are instilled and reinforced in a society and culture. This is why mass media are so powerful and why we as Christians need to wake up to this fact and exercise influence as part of our God-given responsibility.

Mass media shape — and continue to shape — our values as part of an on-going process. Nowhere is this seen more eloquently than in areas where television has been dominant for so long. A steady diet of western materialism is being drip-fed to people on a daily basis. Through the mass media we learn about current fashions in clothes, music and lifestyle. We also learn what is acceptable behaviour and what is politically correct. Sadly, we are seeing many traditional values being swept aside as other things assume greater importance. This is happening globally as secular materialism floods in, spearheaded by satellite television, movies and pop music.

Mass media today — especially radio and TV — have become the marketplace for the gossiping of information. The talk-show is where people tune for the latest hot topic of conversation. Soap operas portray certain lifestyles and opinions — conveying the idea that everyone is doing this or that, or buying this or that, etc. Scriptwriters defend themselves by saying they are reflecting life. Our job is to portray life in a balanced way, not only as it is, but also as it could be in Christ.

Radio and television too are about values. And this needs to be understood by us all. But how do many of the secular values expressed via the media compare with Christian values? Let's make two contrasting lists for the purpose of illustration:-

### **Secular:**

Power, Glamour, Success, Wealth, Popularity, Fame, Sexual freedom

### **Christian:**

Humility, Servant-hood, Forgiveness, Equality, Freedom, Chastity, Integrity, Gratitude, Honesty, Justice, Mercy

As we evaluate what the media are telling us – and as we engage in the daily lives of non-Christians – then we begin to understand how wide is the gap between Christians and their lifestyles, and those who are not. The problem with making two lists is that it tends to polarise values into two separate and mutually exclusive camps. In practice this is not the case because in real life things are not clear cut. Secular media often present good values to some extent — some of them we would characterise as Christian. Happily God's general grace extends to all cultures to some degree because civilisation has found that certain basic good values are beneficial to society. Justice, for example, is something we often hear talked about (in some countries more than others!). Hollywood movies, for example, sometimes reflect strong Christian values as well as many that are not.

In some cultures that have not been influenced by Christianity, however, certain values (such as forgiveness) may be completely unknown outside of the Christian community. Some primitive cultures, on the other hand, may have a strong sense of community reflected in extremely low levels of crime. Christian programs may also be found sharing some of the secular values listed above. The intent of this may be to illustrate the point, or through allowing non-Christians to share their views and opinions. It is worrying, however, when Christian programs inadvertently share the same secular values - unintentionally.

### ***How are these values shared?***

Music is perhaps one of the most popular forms by which values are expressed and shared. Songs reflect popular culture well but also exert great influence on younger people in particular. And together with the music goes the lifestyle of the singer.

News, too, reflects values. It is largely about conflict, the violation of the norms of society and controversial events. Conflict of any kind is brought on by the conflict of values. Politics is about values and the compromise of values.

Business reflects values and ethical or unethical practices. Pay settlements, national or state lotteries, wealth, exploitation and greed all reflect values. Ignoring the poor and needy reflects unacceptable values placed on the human life.

Personal interviews also tell us a lot about a person's values as people tell about their life and their experiences, or justify their actions and decisions.

Christian broadcasters can talk about many of the same things, but reflect perspectives on the news that the secular broadcasters may not share. This may be because it is politically correct to do so, or because news tends to be more marketable when it is sensational rather than balanced, or sensitive. "Just find me some blood!" was the cry of one US news anchorman reportedly caught on camera during the peaceful revolution that toppled Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines in 1986. The fact that praying nuns were kneeling in front of army tanks was not such sensational news, and the fact that it was Praying People Power went largely unreported by the world's press - and hence unnoticed.

It would be wrong for Christians to promote the glamour of the rich and famous — or applaud the lifestyles of rock and movie stars as role models. Jesus always took sides with the poor, helpless and insignificant. He was so ordinary and unspectacular that if there had been mass media in his day he would not have had a press gathering. That is, unless they reported on one of his miracles, or his confrontational showdown with the traders in the temple or with the religious leaders.

It has been suggested that the world's values are the Christian's values inverted. Christians applaud what the world despises, and vice versa. Grace, mercy and forgiveness do not make the headlines. Even the words themselves are rarely heard outside of the Christian context. Humble people get on with their lives, unnoticed and unreported..

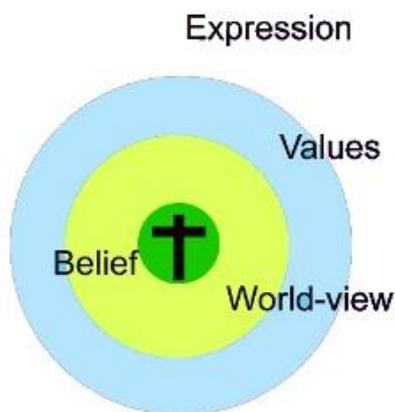
In much of the world commercial and economic considerations take precedence over moral or social issues. Bad news is suppressed if it is perceived as upsetting the economy, if it is harmful to tourism, or if it treads on the toes of politicians.

In the post-Christian western world secular media paint Christians and the Church as antiquated, out-of-touch bigots who are out to destroy fun. Few would link the soaring divorce rates, or instances of teenage pregnancies in the post-Christian world, to the erosion of Kingdom values that has brought on these social problems.

This is where Christian media need to come to the rescue and provide balanced, thoughtful insights while advocating change. Media offer all the potential for responding to this crisis since awareness of the predicament is also two-pronged. As media people we should be more conscious than others of the dangers — and opportunities — posed by media influence. We are in trouble as a Christian community when God's people adopt secular values for themselves. Even more important, as media people, is the great care we need to exercise as gatekeepers in not passing on secular values without realising. Yet how often this is done...

### *The Incomplete Message*

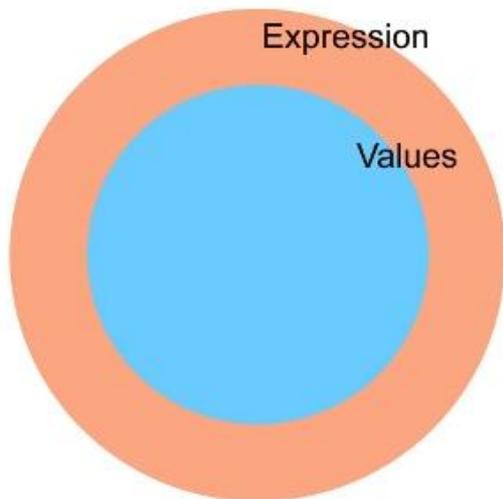
Sadly the beautiful model described in Figure 1 is only the ideal and does not describe the reality. If we had it all together that is how our beliefs, world-view, values and behaviour/attitudes would hang together as part of an integrated whole. The problem is that for various reasons our message is invariably incomplete or partial. It does not present the whole picture. A more realistic diagram might look like this:



**Figure 2**

This suggests that what we are saying is heavily belief-centred and has very little to say about values, behaviour and attitudes. It is a very doctrinal message that has very little practical application or relevance within our culture.

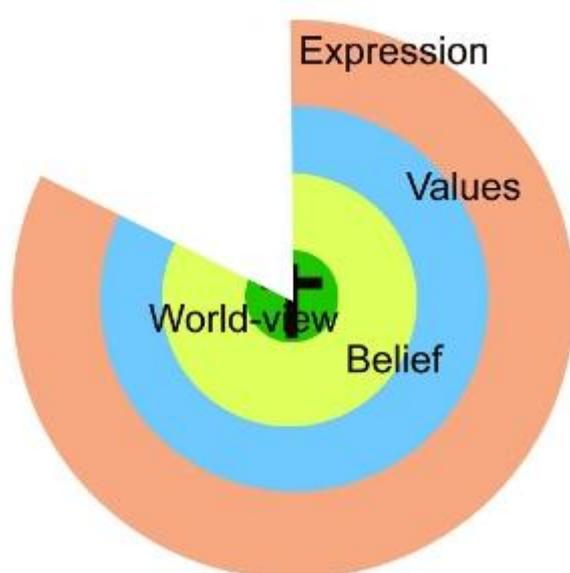
A second set of circles might look like this:



**Figure 3**

This set describes a situation that is the opposite of the first set above (Figure 2). It portrays a picture of a lot of social activity and community issues but falls short of pointing listeners to the centre, the Source. This may be because of environmental constraints, but hopefully any such constraints could be compensated for through the efforts of Audience Relations or off-air activities.

A third set of circles describes a somewhat different picture as shown in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4**

This diagram suggests that at the centre of our beliefs there are some basic flaws. Our belief system, when measured up against the teaching of the Bible, is incomplete.

Because of these flaws our whole message tends to be disfigured and incomplete. Perhaps our understanding of the Person of Jesus Christ emphasises certain aspects (e.g. his sense of justice) but does not pay much attention to other aspects (such as his compassion and mercy). Or it may emphasise the need for spiritual renewal but fails to take into account the practical outworking.

There are also various combinations of these three sets that may more accurately represent the reality.

### ***Implications for our Programming***

An examination of our programming in the light of the above may reveal shortcomings. It could show that we have not balanced out faith and actions, for example. Or we may discover that there are inconsistencies between our dogma on the one hand and our integrity and attitudes on the other. It may reveal that there are parts of the Gospel we choose to avoid because they could upset our supporters or station management. It may also reveal certain aspects that we talk about repeatedly while we overlook others.

We may also discover we are more racially biased than we had thought, or that we pay more attention to the rich and famous than we do to the poor, outcasts and underprivileged.

If any of these is the case then we need to see how we can make changes.

As broadcasters we exercise enormous influence, and impact the spiritual lives of many — either by what we say, or by what we don't say (perhaps more important). This means that we could be sharing an "incomplete" Jesus, one that has been fashioned by our own experience, our denominational background — or our culture. If so we are not being true to the Gospel of the Kingdom. This gives us much food for thought as we work to portray an accurate picture of Jesus Christ to a listening world.

What this means in practice could be the subject of much discussion. The Radio Roles web-site<sup>4</sup> is a good place to open up these discussions - or even in one-on-one e-mails.

### ***Jesus Christ at the Centre***

The obvious needs to be stated: Jesus Christ needs to be at the centre of all we are and do if we are truly going to be Kingdom-people. The centrality of Christ is of necessity the foundation of biblical Christianity — by definition. It is through Jesus Christ that we know God. To define it even more closely we might add that our focus is the Risen Christ – the living Word of God.

Saying this does not mean that each program we make needs to speak explicitly about Jesus Christ. He is present, and the values he taught us, are to be found in all our programs. The guiding principle is this: *all that we say — and all that we are —*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://radioroles.com>

*should point in some way toward Jesus — and emanate from Him.* He should be honoured by everything we say and do as Christian broadcasters.

But this needs clarification too:

- it does not mean that we only allow Christians to speak on the air
- it does not mean we only allow Christian music (what do we mean by that anyhow...?)
- it does not mean we only allow Christian, but not secular or anti-Christian, viewpoints to be expressed
- it does not mean that we have to mention Jesus or God in every program we make or every broadcast that goes out

All these things are permitted so long as Christian truth shines through in a spirit of fairness, openness and balance, and with objectivity. This means that we will be salt and light in our community and also spread the "aroma of Christ" through our broadcasts.

The apostle Paul writes eloquently about this in his letter to the church at Colossae<sup>5</sup>. Jesus is at the heart of everything in the created order. He supersedes everything, transcends everything and in reality holds everything together. He is Lord of Creation.

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<sup>5</sup> Colossians 1:16-20

## Postscript

If you want to engage in further discussion on this topic kindly visit the Radio Roles web-site using either the Contact Us tab or the blog.

You can also read up more about The Gray Matrix at the dedicated web-site:

<http://thegraymatrix.info>

## Further Information

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