

Progressive faith on the FM dial?

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Driving in northern Indiana one recent evening, I came to the conclusion that religious broadcasters pretty much own the FM band in this part of the country. One station was playing contemporary Christian music, another gospel music. And three different stations were airing [James Dobson's radio program](#). Dobson, formerly of Focus on the Family, was touting a [new novel he has coauthored](#), which fictionalizes all the bad things supposedly resulting from a decline in the American birthrate.

In my last pastorate I created a minor stir in one sermon when I observed that the biggest divide I detected in the congregation was between those folks who listened to National Public Radio and those who listened to one or more Christian stations. One congregant was offended because she didn't think you have to choose: she listened to both. Another detected my bias for NPR, and he let me know about what he perceived as NPR's "liberal bias." Mostly, my observation led to friendly conversation and reflection.

Scanning the FM band that evening while driving, I wondered why, among all those religious radio stations, there isn't at least one that represents an incarnational gospel—rather than an Americanized version of Platonic Christianity. What is needed on the airwaves is a voice that speaks for justice, peace, care of the earth, inclusion, civil discourse and the commonweal.

Christians with this kind of conviction pretty much talk to each other, the proverbial preaching to the choir. Why not speak to the masses about a different kind of Christianity than that represented by the so-called religious right?

Would anyone listen to such a religious broadcast? Could it get the support it would need to sustain itself? One friend pointed out to me that noncommercial radio and TV programs are "post-paid media": people only contribute to them after they've heard them and agree with the message they're hearing. The most responsive people are often the ones who are angry or afraid about something. "Promoting good attracts less money than defeating evil," my friend astutely commented.

Radio broadcasting may be passé. As another friend pointed out to me, what I'm looking for in radio—a progressive voice—is now happening in online radio and podcasting. True enough. But I suspect that such media mostly attract people who already agree with the message they are consuming. That's not the same as reaching people who scan the dial in search of something to listen to in order to pass the time out on the highway.