



August 18, 1977

77-146

Jon's Multiple Voices 'Talk
About Things That Count'

By Bonita Sparrow

FORT WORTH (BP)--Can a Missippian with a drawn-out Southern drawl possibly make good as a rock music disc jockey?

And can a Christian in that kind of environment--traditionally filled with agnostics and disinterest in things religious--be effective?

"You bet," said Jon Rivers, the morning man of Fort Worth's KFJZ-FM (Z-97) Radio, which is ranked first with young people in the Dallas-Fort Worth market by market researchers. Rivers, 27, married with three young daughters, wears long hair and a beard. The kids who hear him identify with him. And when he says a good word for God, they believe him.

He's been saying lots of good things for God for a couple of years now. He's the host of "Powerline," the popular radio show the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission produces and syndicates on 905 stations.

"'Powerline' is a success," he said. "When you're on a program that's on close to 1,000 stations in this country and heard around the world on the Armed Forces Radio network, you've got to be going with a winner," Rivers, a man of multiple voices for the Radio and Television Commission, declared.

He also hosts the commission's "Streams in the Desert" show for wall-to-wall good music stations and announces for "the Baptist Hour," the commission's oldest program. He changes his announcing style and on-the-air name for each show--"something professional announcers do all the time to help the audience identify with the show," he said.

"In 'Powerline' there's a more energetic, faster-talking sound kids recognize," he said. "It's brighter. For 'Streams' the voice is low-key, very quiet and thoughtful, a one-on-one type of sound. The 'Baptist Hour' voice is more what I really sound like in an interview/announcer situation, somewhat conversational.

Rivers became involved with the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission a couple of years ago. "The commission's radio department uses professional announcers for their programs because it gives more polish to the finished product," he said. "The 'Powerline' host they had been using was unable to continue. A broadcaster I work with recommended me. I auditioned and after a detailed interview where, among other things, they asked me about my Christian beliefs, I was hired. I tape the show when I've finished my shift at the station."

Rivers is known as "Brother Jon" to the millions of teenage "Powerline" listeners. Many of them identify so closely with him that often letters written to the show are addressed to him. Thousands of letters and decisions for Christ pour in from "Powerline" listeners.

He also is pleased about the response to the show from his peers in the profession. "An awful lot of disc jockeys in secular radio really like the show," he said. "They all know about it. Until I started hosting 'Powerline', when I talked with people in airplanes we'd exchange the usual information--What do you do? I'm in radio. That's nice, where? and I'd give the station call letters and that was about all there was to it.

"But now, when I say I also host a show called 'Powerline' for Southern Baptists, these same people perk right up. Just about everybody's either heard the show, or heard about it."

A lot of Rivers' fellow disc jockeys ask if he really believes the strong Christian messages he reads on each show.

"If I didn't believe I wouldn't do it," Rivers said earnestly. "I realize disc jockeys have a lot of influence on their listeners and I don't want to lie to the kids who listen to me. If there's something in a script I don't understand, or question, I talk with Claude Cox (the show's writer and producer) and we clear it up."

Being "Powerline" host gives Rivers a particular thrill. While he was stationed in Jacksonville, Fla., with the Marines, he worked free at a radio station to gather broadcasting experience.

"They used 'Powerline' and liked it so well even though it's a once-a-week show they'd run the same show six nights a week until the next one came in. I thought it was really a neat show."

Rivers, a native of Pine Grove, Miss., has always liked music. "My father was a bass singer in a quartet and we'd go to all-night singings, so I know about gospel music," he said. "I picked cotton to buy my first radio and later a cheap set of drums with which I won the Tippah County (Miss.) Fair talent contest two years in a row. We'd listen to Memphis WHBQ during the day and to WLS, Chicago, at night. Now that 'Powerline' is on WLS I can hardly believe it's me."

He has a word for "Powerline" critics who decry the rock music format of a Christian-oriented show.

"If you don't play the kind of music the kids want you won't get the audience you need to reach," Rivers commented. "As a professional disc jockey, and long before I became 'Powerline' host, I recognized that the music on 'Powerline' is the best of its kind. The listeners can hear hit songs, but on 'Powerline' they hear only the hits that are consistent with the Christian way of life."

He paused. "That's true," he added earnestly. "And sometimes it's really hard. At any given time, out of the top 10 records in the nation, 'Powerline' averages being able to play about three.

"We go even further than that," he said. "As far as we can, we look at the lives of the performers whose music we're using. If somebody has openly disagreed with things the Bible says, then we don't want to play their music or records."

Rivers is sensitive to criticism that disc jockeys are considered "agnostics and almost of the devil" by some people. He touched the silver cross he always wears.

"I wear this cross because I want people, in the business and out, to know where I stand," he said simply. "I'm not trying to prove anything, but I do want people to know that I, for one, believe it when I say that Christ really did live and that he lived a perfect life so he could die to cover all our imperfections.

"One of my goals in this business is to form an organization of Christian disc jockeys, somewhat like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I have some Christian disc jockey friends and none of us like some of the lyrics in some of the songs we have to play on secular stations. And we don't care for a lot of the things that go on at conventions.

"Perhaps, if we could join forces, we could do something about some of the objectionable song lyrics. I like positive music and I like to talk about positive things. I think it's important on the shows I do to talk about things that count. That's not old-fashioned, it's just realistic."

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

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August 18, 1977

77-146

Does TV Have Unlimited
First Amendment Protection?

By David Wilkinson

NASHVILLE (BP)--Does television enjoy unlimited freedom under the protection of the First Amendment which decrees: "Congress shall make no law...abridging freedom of speech or of the press...?"

"No" is the nearly unanimous response of Southern Baptist state paper editors, who as journalists and as Baptists consider themselves strong supporters of the First Amendment.

"The First Amendment does not give unlimited rights to television broadcasting," declared Lynn P. Clayton, editor of the Kansas-Nebraska Baptist Digest.

Emphasizing "unlimited" as the key word, Clayton said that "responsibility in freedom has always involved responsible limitations."

"The public owns the airwaves," he explained. "The Federal Communications Commission has been charged with the responsibility to make sure that each television station uses the airwaves for the public good and welfare."

Although interpretations differed somewhat, Clayton's response represented the consensus of state paper editors who responded to a three-question survey prepared by the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Editors of 20 of the denomination's 33 state publications, covering SBC work in 50 states, responded.

The question of television's relationship to the First Amendment is central both to this country's tradition of freedom of expression and to the ongoing debate over TV's responsibility to present morally healthy programming. The editors found precise answers difficult in light of the need for both responsible programming and the protection of First Amendment rights--which are hard to gain and easy to lose.

In the Christian Life Commission's survey, all of the editors agreed to some extent with Clayton's assessment that television does not have unlimited rights. Some, however, hesitated to give unqualified answers, and two indicated indecision on the issue.

The survey also showed general agreement among the editors that laws should bar certain things from television broadcasting, but the journalists gave contrasting opinions on the question of allowing local viewing areas to determine their own standards for television programming.

In answering "no" to the question of unlimited rights, James Lee Young, editor of Colorado's Rocky Mountain Baptist, claimed that "with freedom comes responsibility. No one in this country in the field of journalism," he added, "has unlimited rights when it comes to freedom of speech."

Jack Harwell of the Georgia Christian Index concurred, adding, "TV is free to be responsible, not to be destructive. Parents and children have freedoms also; one is to be protected from garbage being dumped on the den floor by a TV set."

Donald T. McGregor of the Mississippi Baptist Record sees a distinction between television and newspapers.

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"Unlike a newspaper, which has to pay for newsprint on which to print its product, television beams its message and its product through airwaves which belong to the public," McGregor said. "Therefore, it should not expect to be able to exercise the same freedom of expression that a newspaper would. It should not even enjoy the same freedom of expression that a movie house might expect."

Bob Terry of Missouri's Word and Way, J. Everett Sneed of the Arkansas Baptist News-magazine and Julian Pentecost of the Virginia Religious Herald qualified their "no" answers to the survey's first question.

"There are certain areas where freedom must be protected," wrote Terry. "Basically, this is in freedom of the press to report on television or radio, as well as the print media, what is going on in the world and the involvement of personalities in those events. But to say the 'freedom of speech' clause provides a blanket of immunity around television is beyond any conclusion I can presently reach."

Sneed offered a similar opinion, while Pentecost drew a distinction between freedom of speech and unlimited rights. The freedom of speech clause included in the First Amendment, he said, "was not intended as license to use the pornographic and the profane."

Responses to the second question, "What specifically should be barred by law from television broadcasting?" ranged from "anything that would fall under the Supreme Court definitions of obscenity" to "anything that promotes lawlessness or immorality either directly or indirectly." One editor added parenthetically that "anything rated 'R' at the movie house should not be shown on the tube--even after it's edited."

John Roberts of the South Carolina Baptist Courier commented that "anything that is not a topic of conversation in polite society" should be barred. "Anyone who does not understand where this line is drawn needs exposure to polite society," he said, adding that he would ban "shady references to body functions, off color jokes, approval of immoral life, and the flaunting of sexual promiscuity and unnatural sex."

Young commented in his response, "To deal with issues in a documentary sense portraying a man's condition, good or bad, in a proper light, but again using good taste, is a different thing than idealizing and lending endorsement to conditions and patterns of living that contribute to the demise, rather than the progress of the human species."

Editors divided most on the third question: "Should a viewing area be allowed to determine its own standards for television programming?" Nine said "yes," another nine voted "no," and two remained undecided.

Most of the editors indicated that the viewing public should determine "good taste" in programming, and several expressed hope that television would regulate itself voluntarily, instead of waiting for governmental intervention or controls.

Speaking in favor of local community controls on television, C. R. Daley of the Kentucky Western Recorder emphasized that "in a free and democratic society people have the right to decide what is to prevail among them--as long as it is constitutional and not in violation of the laws of the land. Self-rule is a valid principle for communities."

Young said, "While there are still dangers in local control of programming, where a few might gain control and dictate what could be shown, I would think the general public can have considerable influence over what is presented. I prefer to see local citizens have a voice in what is presented for possible viewing in their homes."

Harwell offered a contrasting opinion. "There is no such thing as 'regional morality,'" he said. "What is wrong in New York City is wrong in Phoenix, Atlanta or elsewhere."

Most of the editors, including Harwell, who said "no" to the question, felt that local controls over broadcasting content would be unrealistic, even though the idea may sound good in theory.

"Given the technology of today, it's impractical to believe that different standards of programming could exist for various parts of the country," said Terry. He supported greater participation of citizens' panels at regional and national levels to provide dialogue between writers, producers, television executives and the consumer public.

Regional standards are "totally unrealistic" according to Harwell because "local stations are too completely dependent on national networks for much of their programming."

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Dallas Church Authorizes
Ordination of Woman

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
8/18/77

DALLAS (BP)--The second largest Southern Baptist church in Dallas has voted to accept women deacons, and also has authorized Pastor A. Douglas Watterson to proceed with plans to ordain Mrs. Martha Gilmore to the ministry to serve as a chaplain.

The 6,200-member Cliff Temple Baptist Church will become Texas' fourth Southern Baptist church to ordain a woman minister if the ordination council approves.

Meanwhile, across town, the pastor of the nation's largest Southern Baptist congregation, W. A. Criswell, said his church would "never" ordain women.

"The Bible has a definite prohibition against it. It explicitly says that a minister shall be the husband of one wife (Paul's advice in I Timothy)," said Criswell, pastor of the 19,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas.

"When a woman can meet that qualification, she can become a minister."

About 20 to 25 Southern Baptist churches have ordained women to the ministry. In Texas, women have been ordained by First Church, Austin; Broadway Church, Fort Worth; and Willow Meadows Church, Houston.

Watterson said that the ordination council of ministers from Cliff Temple and the Dallas Baptist Association would consider Mrs. Gilmore's theological perspective in late August.

"We know she's female; so, we're not going to debate that," he quipped.

Watterson said that pending approval of the council, the church would proceed to ordain Mrs. Gilmore about mid September.

He said the church, which serves an inter-racial area of Dallas, voted without debate to consider all qualified persons, regardless of sex, for positions as ministers or deacons in their church.

Watterson said the Cliff Temple Church voted to ordain women without asking for his recommendation. He feels many Southern Baptists agree with Criswell and many also adhere to Paul's instructions: "Suffer not a women to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

However, said Watterson, some other Southern Baptists have come to believe that the Apostle Paul's advice was "socially conditioned by the conditions of women in Biblical times."

Most members of Cliff Temple, he thinks, prefer Paul's words in Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ."

Mrs. Gilmore, a member of the Cliff Temple Church since childhood, asked the church to ordain her as a minister to serve as a chaplain in jails and hospitals.

She said she requested ordination after she became a teacher at a Dallas County jail and began to feel a "sense of call" for women as chaplains.

"I had to decide whether the call was in a psychological or spiritual setting," she said. "But because people are spiritual, I knew I couldn't counsel without spiritual dynamics."

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A 1957 graduate of Baylor University, she is a former school teacher who served in the Dallas school district's pilot program for continuing education for pregnant girls. With her husband, Jerry, an attorney and former Dallas city councilman, she pushed for state laws for vocational training for pregnant girls.

She was recently named assistant director of the intern program at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, where she is completing a master of theology degree.

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Board Adds Literature,
Changes Pricing Formula

Baptist Press
8/18/77

RIDGECREST (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, in their semiannual meeting here, approved a proposed Home Bible Study Series to provide study materials related to television and radio broadcasts.

Scheduled for release in September 1978, pending agreement with the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, the curriculum will be offered free to broadcast audiences. A monthly manual is planned to present Bible material, background facts, enrichment material and life application ideas relating to Bible passages taught on the air.

Trustees also approved a "Bible Book Study Commentary" for use beginning April-June 1979, to provide additional resources for adult and youth teachers using the Bible Book Series.

A Spanish edition of "Sunday School Adults" was approved to provide Convention Uniform Series Sunday School materials beginning in September 1978, for adult class members in Spanish speaking Sunday Schools. The edition resulted from agreements reached with the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home Mission Boards in an attempt to better meet the needs of Spanish speaking people in the United States.

Trustees approved changes in the church literature pricing formula which will result in an average 10 percent increase in literature rates effective in April 1978. The last literature rate increase was implemented by the board in April 1976. Since that time the Sunday School Board has absorbed inflationary costs of 11 to 13 percent. When the rate increase is implemented, the board will have completed two full years without a rate increase, said James W. Clark, the board's executive vice president.

According to a recent survey, Clark said, the board's literature prices "will remain highly competitive with other publishers in the religious field."

"Moderate rate adjustments" were also approved by the board, Clark said, for first-class hotel rooms, apartments, and air conditioned rooms at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center; Chaparral rooms at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center; and conference service fees, effective June 1, 1978.

The conference centers, owned and operated by the Sunday School Board for the Southern Baptist Convention, "do not break even in their financial operation," Clark explained, "since facilities have to be maintained on a 12-month basis but most of the occupancy occurs in a three-month period. The rate adjustment is an attempt to cover some of the losses incurred in these training facilities."

Trustees also authorized the board to furnish information regarding its work and interpretation of its literature to any educational institution requesting that information within the limits of personnel, time and budget.

In other action, the trustees approved the budget of \$77,000,000 for the fiscal year 1977-78. Re-elected for a second term as officers for the board of trustees were Presnell Wood of Dallas, chairman; Marvin Sharpton of Nashville, vice-chairman and chairman of the board's executive committee; and Melvin Harris of Nashville, secretary.

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