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Dear Subscriber,

About a year after I finished college, I got a job at National Public Radio. It was an entry-level position, editing interviews that other people had done with various artists, writers, musicians, actors, and other creative people. Soon after starting that job I realized that despite the fact that I had been raised in a very solid church with good biblical teaching, I was not really prepared to deal with the sorts of intellectual challenges I was facing in such a “post-Christian” setting. Not that my own faith was challenged; I don’t remember ever being tempted by doubt. But there were many questions I couldn’t answer and many issues I didn’t understand as well as I thought I needed to in order to have any kind of leavening influence in such a setting.

So after a couple of years, I decided to go to seminary. I never had any plans of becoming a pastor. At the time, I thought that, when I finished, I would try to find a job where I could teach and help prepare lay people to confront the issues that had been baffling me at NPR.

While I was in seminary, I did some free-lance work for NPR, including working with the poet John Ciardi on a series of charming commentaries about the origins of American slang and idiomatic expressions. Ciardi is still probably best-known for his mid-1950s translation of *The Divine Comedy*, but in the last 20 years of his life or so, he spent a great deal of time researching the history of words and phrases (and debunking various folk etymologies). For the entire time I was in seminary, I was John’s producer on a series of 5-minute commentaries called “A Word in Your Ear.”

Every few months, I would spend a long weekend with John in a recording studio in New York or Washington. There was little casual conversation between sessions; he was so caught up in his research that every conversation ended up with a long, fascinating, but one-sided ramble about how some slang term had metamorphosed over the course of centuries. But we were close enough to share an occasional personal comment. When I finished my seminary studies, I announced that fact to him, and received a sort of blessing from him. “Congratulations, Ken,” he intoned in his distinctive, rumbly bass voice. “You’ve just spent two years of your life studying dead languages, ancient manuscripts, and arcane theories about invisible things, and now you intend to try to get people to pay you to tell them what they should think. Good luck.”

As it turned out, I looked in vain for the sort of teaching position I had envisioned when I started seminary. But after some very interesting providential events, in the fall of 1979, I accepted an offer to come back to NPR and work on a new program called “Morning Edition.” John Ciardi’s commentaries became a weekly feature on the show, so we still got to work together for some time.

Trying to get people to pay one to tell them what to think is, of course, the lot of many vocations, including teachers and pastors, but also many journalists. The ones who get paid the most end up being called “pundits,” but they are also the easiest to ignore, since their comments are valued as much for the quotient of entertainment as truth or wisdom.

My own vocation has evolved into something between teaching and journalizing. Back in the mid-1980s, after having left public radio, I started to give serious attention to how journalistic forms were influential shapers of worldviews, and realized that the kind of teaching I had set out to pursue years earlier may in fact be best realized in a magazine rather than in a classroom. But throughout that time, I have continued to believe that contemporary Christians desperately need to grow in understanding about their culture.

Shortly after MARS HILL AUDIO, was launched ten years ago, I worked with our board of directors in developing a mission statement: "To produce creative audio resources that encourage Christians to grow in obedient wisdom concerning the cultural consequences of our duty to love God and neighbor." I have continued to believe that the various components in that statement are configured properly to meet the needs of our time. Coupling obedience with wisdom is especially important, since I would be very disappointed if I believed that all of this work is merely so much intellectual entertainment.

If that were the case, it would also make it that much harder to ask for your support. While I probably enjoy intellectual entertainment more than most (which is why I loved John Ciardi's work so much, and felt a great sense of loss at the time of his death in 1983), I am committed to this work because I hope to contribute to significant adjustments in the lives of individuals, families, churches, and communities. I believe that many of the dominant cultural institutions and many of the entrenched cultural assumptions of our moment in history are deeply disordered, and I lament the extent to which many Christians and many churches have accommodated that disorder. The biblical mandates to "keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27) and to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24) seem to require the sort of task outlined in our mission statement.

I continue to be grateful to the hundreds of generous supporters who have sustained this work. We try not to pester you very often for support, but we do rely on it, and since the end of the year is a prudent time to make tax-deductible donations, please consider MARS HILL AUDIO as you plan those gifts.

Finally, let me note that the cards and letters (yes, and even the e-mails) that you send to tell us how a specific interview or knowledge of the work of one of our guests helped you in some way are a great source of encouragement. One of the things I don't like about my work is the detachment from my "students." After all, if people are paying good money to be told what to think, it's nice to know every now and then that they think it was money well-spent.

I hope the Advent and Christmas seasons are times of rich reflection and joy for you and those close to you, and that the coming year will contain many unexpected blessings, as I am sure it will.

Gratefully,



Ken Myers