



International

A report on the explosion of Christian broadcasting by Kenneth MacHarg



To those unable or unwilling to discern the difference, international Christian broadcast stations may seem like an extension of the maligned TV evangelists in the United States and thus subject to the same scepticism. But to the sensitive ear, a distinction can (and should) be made among all religious broadcasters and between specific programs.

For the most part, Christian broadcasting on the international bands is carried out by church-related groups which transmit programming as a part of their mission to the people of the world. This is in stark contrast to numerous Christian stations in the U.S. which are operated solely as business ventures and return a handsome profit.

Those stations heard internationally which broadcast religion on a profit basis are also few, but include WRNO in New Orleans (which reportedly generates the majority of its revenue from this type of programming), Africa # 1 in Gabon and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Company. Broadcasting internationally on the AM band is the Atlantic Beacon, heard widely over the Southern United States from the Turks and

Caicos Islands at 1570 kHz. It is owned by the Coit Drapery and Carpet Cleaners firm.

There are even a few government stations which broadcast religious programming primarily because it reflects a part of the culture of the host nation. This style can be found on the BBC World Service, Radio RSA, the Voice of South Africa, and the Voice of America.

The Pope's Radio a First

Missionary broadcasting on the international bands goes back to February of 1931 when the inventor of radio, Guglielmo Marconi assisted the Vatican in establishing "The Pope's Radio." Vatican Radio, as it is known, has existed primarily for service to the faithful. It has never been particularly interested in evangelization. The heyday of Vatican Radio was during and after World War II when the station was instrumental in helping reunite separated families. In more recent years, however, Vatican Radio has been criticized for being rather stale, theological and not open to the exploration of dissent within the Catholic Church.

Another Roman Catholic station is Radio Veritas, operated by Philippine Catholics with



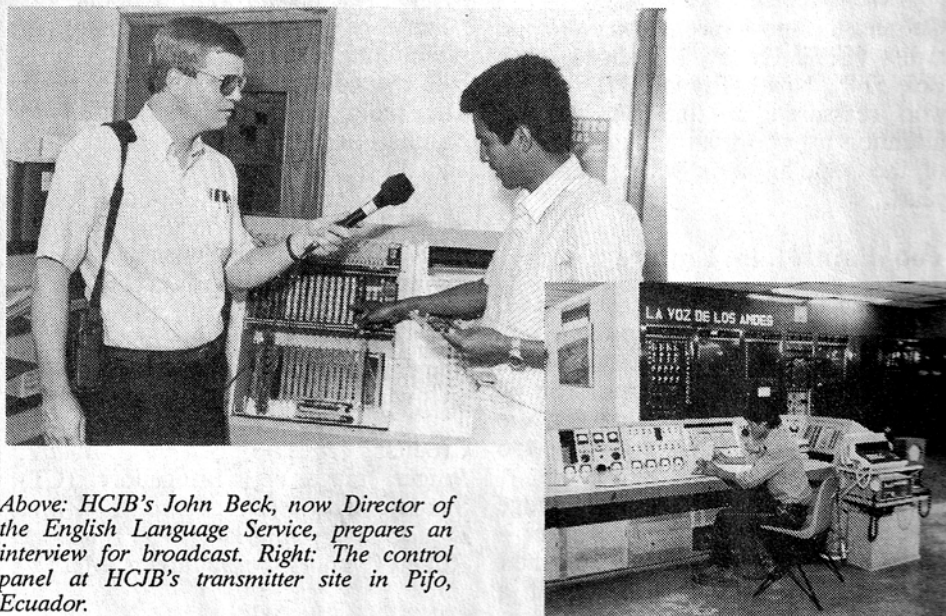
financial help from supporters in Europe. Veritas, perhaps because of its distance from Rome, is a little less staid and more prone to delve into issues of the moment. Much has been made of the role of Veritas during the overthrow of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos.

With the exception of a few small stations in the Third World like Radio Catolica Nacional in Ecuador, the remainder of the major international Christian stations are Evangelical Protestant operations. But even then there are theological and stylistic differences.

Ecuador Giant Reaches the World

The oldest, best known and probably most progressive of the missionary stations is Quito, Ecuador's HCJB. Known as "The Voice of the Andes," this giant reaches 80% of the world's population from one transmitter site. Cumulative power is over a million watts. In addition to offering traditional Christian programming from outside sources, HCJB has led the way in developing innovative shows containing a Christian atmosphere and message but which emphasize other topics.

Typical is the *DX Party Line*, a thrice weekly program for shortwave enthusiasts which devotes but a few minutes to any overtly Christian message. Other popular releases such as *Musica del Ecuador*, *Passport*, *Musical Mailbag*, and *Saludos Amigos* follow the same philosophy. The people at HCJB who develop these programs believe that such offerings will attract a larger audience. Listeners, they feel, will be more receptive to a "soft sell" approach



Above: HCJB's John Beck, now Director of the English Language Service, prepares an interview for broadcast. Right: The control panel at HCJB's transmitter site in Pifo, Ecuador.

Voices of Faith

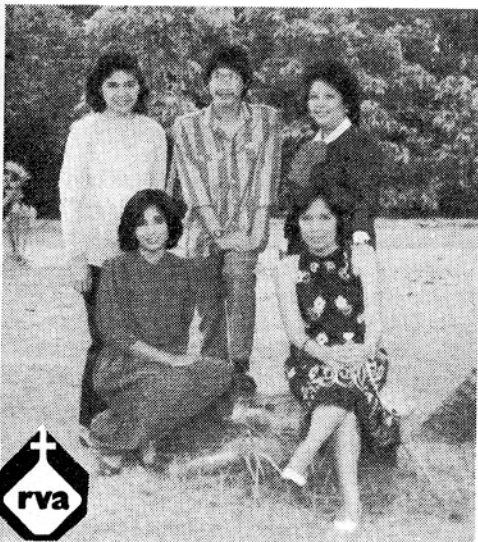
than to the more traditional "sermon sandwich" (a sermon surrounded by two hymns). The format has proven to be effective. HCJB regularly ranks within the top ten stations in listener popularity polls.

HCJB (the call letters stand for "Heralding Christ Jesus' Blessings") was founded by the late Dr. Clarence Jones. Jones felt called to use radio on the mission field, and, on Christmas Day, 1931, signed on the air with a 250 watt AM transmitter and an audience estimated in the dozens. Later, shortwave was added in an effort to reach the more rural parts of Ecuador. The station soon discovered that it began receiving reception reports from other parts of the world and later expanded its international efforts. HCJB still broadcasts on AM and FM in Ecuador, and today has two stations in Panama and a string of AM/FM stations along the Texas-Mexico border.

In all of its language services, the Voice of the Andes seeks both to carry its message to the non-Christian and provide education and nurture to the believer.

Among the firsts from HCJB were: the cubical quad antenna, initial Christian broadcasts into the Soviet Union, and the discovery of the "Quito effect"--the principle that the equator--despite early predictions--is one of the most efficient locations for reaching the entire world by radio.

Seventeen years lapsed until the next international Christian voice came on the air. Shortly after World War II in 1948, three men joined forces in California to establish the Far East Broadcasting Company.



...if we walk in the light, as
he is in the light, we have
Fellowship one with
another, and
the Blood of
Jesus Christ... Cleanses
us from all sin. JOHN 1:7

RADIO INTERNATIONAL
BOX 1 VALENZUELA, MANILA, PHILIPPINES



Far East Broadcasting Company

The three originally planned to start their work with a facility in China (which would have eventually been confiscated during the Chinese revolution). Instead they received an unlimited permit to construct their station in the Philippines. Thus, FEBC-Manila took to the airwaves in 1948 with the primary purpose of bringing "Christ to the World by Radio." The emphasis remains on Asia. Today FEBC stations ring the globe.

Early on, FEBC acquired a station in San Francisco formerly owned by General Electric (hence the call letters KGEL) for transmission to Latin America and the Soviet Union. Later, largely through support from interested persons in England, FEBC in the Seychelles Islands came on the air to serve India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as Africa and later the Middle East. More recently FEBC established KFBS in Saipan to also reach Asia and has assisted in the operation of a station in Aruba where shortwave facilities are reportedly under consideration for the Americas.

The Stories we could tell...

Remarkable stories abound of the effectiveness of these and other Christian missionary radio stations. There was the providential meeting of an FEBC missionary and some Russian emigres at the Manila airport at a time when, due to lack of response, FEBC was considering dropping Russian language broadcasts. When the refugees learned the man was with FEBC, they spontaneously encouraged the station to continue the broadcasts and

affirmed that thousands of people in the USSR listened regularly.

Several years back when an 80 year old Christian statesman from China visited the U.S. he told this writer that it was the broadcasts from FEBC which kept the Christian Church alive in China during the Cultural Revolution. And the Slavic Gospel Association, the organization responsible for providing most of the Christian programming to the Soviet Union, says that in 1983 80% of those baptized into Christianity in the Soviet Union became Christian through foreign broadcasts.

Theologically, FEBC is much akin to HCJB. Because of its initial task of reaching communist-dominated nations, however, it has taken a more strident anti-communist stance.

Students Start a Station

It was the idealism of youth that was responsible for the founding of ELWA in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1954. Several students at Wheaton College felt a call to reach the people of Africa by radio. Finding their youth and lack of contact a hindrance, they turned to the Sudan Interior Mission (now known as SIM International) for support. Eventually they merged their efforts with SIM.

The students and their families hacked a transmitting site out of the jungle near Monrovia from which Christian programming would eventually reach most of Northern Africa and the Middle East. (For a period of time ELWA also broadcast due west across the Atlantic to South America).



With the nationalization of Lutheran operated ETLF, by the Ethiopian government in 1977, ELWA took on an increasing responsibility for broadcasts to the Muslim population of northern Africa. Of all the missionary stations, ELWA (the call letters stand for "Eternal Love Winning Africa") is probably the most conservative in its theology and practice. Staff members sign a fairly strict code of behavior and belief. Several missionary staff members reportedly resigned in the early 1960s when ELWA began broadcasting contemporary (folk and rock) Christian music. (By contrast, HCJB supported contemporary Christian music both then and now.)

The programming on ELWA strongly reflects its African location. With the exception of a few syndicated programs, most of the broadcasts are produced specifically for the station using local African voices. Seldom will an American or European missionary be heard on the air regularly. The theory is that such programs will appeal more to the indigenous population.

Perhaps because it is the only major Christian station operated by a mission whose primary emphasis is not radio, ELWA's growth has not kept pace with the others. Now, though, through a cooperative effort with HCJB, TWR and FEBC, known as "The World by 2000", ELWA is working to expand the number of languages in which it broadcasts and to increase utilization of its existing transmitter capacity.

In the same year as ELWA took to the air several thousand miles to the north the Voice of Tangiers began directing Christian programming at Spain and the rest of Europe. Later moving its base to Monte Carlo, the effort became known as Trans World Radio (the initials also stand for "Telling the World of Redemption") and developed into a global network of stations.

Trans World Radio: A Major Success Story

Some of TWR's transmitting facilities are rented while others are owned outright by the mission. TWR has also pioneered international Christian broadcasting by powerful medium wave transmitters, such as those at Monte

Carlo, Swaziland and Bonaire. Today TWR covers the earth from five locations: Europe from Monte Carlo; the Middle East and Northern Africa from Cyprus; the sub-continent from Sri Lanka (where shortwave was just recently added) Asia and the Pacific from KTWR on Guam; and the Americas from Bonaire.

When it first took the air, TWR's main interest was in broadcasting teaching programs and worship services. In the past decade, the stations have developed more original programming, such as the Bonaire's popular *Morning Sounds and Caribbean Nitecall* -- both a gentle mix of music, news and inspiration. One could characterize TWR as being evangelical with a bit more conservative programming philosophy than HCJB or FEBC.

These are the "big four"-- the best known of the international Gospel broadcasters. But there are others which must be noted, even though briefly.

Local and Regional Broadcasters

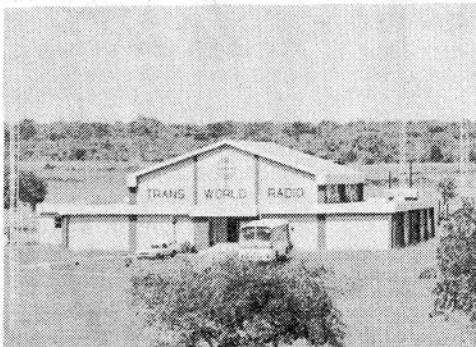
Many mission groups established local Christian stations as part of their outreach to a particular nation. Some of them added shortwave primarily to reach the more remote areas where the AM or FM signal would not go. Among those which can easily be heard in North America are:

--TIFC, *Lighthouse of the Caribbean/Faro del Caribe* (5055 kHz). Operated by Latin American Mission from a small building and a dipole antenna in a suburb of San Jose, Costa Rica.

--HRVC, *La Voz Evangelica, Tegucigalpa, Honduras* (4820 kHz). This outlet is operated by the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Board.

--TGNA, *Radio Cultura, Guatemala* (3300 kHz). Operated by Central American Mission.

--4VEH, *Cap Hatian, Haiti* (4930 kHz). Operated by OMS (formerly known as Oriental Missionary Society, before that as China Inland Mission). This station has a large listenership among Haitian refugees in the Bahamas and Miami. Its operation has been sporadic in recent years.



In the same way that Radio Earth is a program service, not a separate station, there are two groups which at least began as a program service, although one now owns its own stations as well.

--IBRA (*International Broadcasting Association*) is owned by 3,000 Swedish Pentecostal Churches. It places programming on *Radio Trans Europe in Portugal* and *Radio Mediterranean in Malta* as well as purchasing time from FEBC stations and other local groups.

--Adventist World Radio began with one hour of time in 1961, and now has developed stations of its own in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Guam. It continues to purchase time from broadcasters such as Radio Trans Europe and Sri Lanka. AWR is a ministry of the Seventh Day Adventists who observe Saturday rather than Sunday as their Sabbath and emphasize the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Their flagship program is the *Voice of Prophecy*, which can be heard on many U.S. stations.

With the lifting of the freeze on the construction of new shortwave facilities many groups in the U.S. have placed stations on the air. These include:

--WINB: Actually an older station on the air since the 1950s located in Red Lion, Pa. This fundamentalist outlet was associated early on with renegade Presbyterian minister Carl McIntyre. His vitriolic broadcasts condemning the U.S. government led the FCC to reconsider the wisdom of licensing privately owned shortwave stations. That freeze lasted until 1979. Today this station continues to broadcast very conservative programming and a good deal of beautiful music fill.

--WYFR: A true success story, Family Radio began international broadcasting by purchasing time on the old WNYW (Radio New York Worldwide) which at the time was owned by the Mormon Church. Later, Family Radio purchased the facility (which was located in Massachusetts) and moved it to a swampy cattle pasture north of Okeechobee, Florida. Continued expansion and an exchange of broadcast time with the Voice of Free China in Taiwan has made this ministry heard worldwide. Programming is very traditional with Bible readings, traditional music, and numerous teaching programs.

--KNLS, *Anchor Point, Alaska* has been on the air for several years but is rarely listened to regularly in North America because their target area is the Soviet Union and China. Programs are produced in a Sunday School wing of the Chestnut Blvd. Church of Christ in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, a suburb of Akron. KNLS, the New Life station, is operated by people related to the Churches of Christ, a loose knit federation of congregations with a Fundamentalist persuasion.



Change and the Unchangeable

David Craig,

Religious Broadcasting, BBC World Service

My secretary stared at me incredulously. "You mean you're leaving television to go to BBC and make religious radio programs? You can't be serious! You're mad! But I was and perhaps I am!"

As a cadet in the Voluntary Service Overseas, straight from school, I remember my first evening in Africa, listening to the chimes of Big Ben against the unfamiliar chorus of crickets and mosquitos. So there was a certain inevitability in coming to Bush House.

Religion, like politics, is one of those areas where everyone has a view, feels strongly, and usually disagrees with most other people! This is reflected in our mailbag. Letters come from South Africa trying to defend apartheid on religious grounds; from the Gulf complaining that we allow Christians a voice, from tax-exiles in various havens demanding that the BBC reflect the religious life of Britain by transmitting only Anglican services.

We receive more than our fair share of anonymous letters which reveal attitudes of such entrenched prejudice that they make me tremble for any hope of future co-existence. And, of course, we receive letters of appreciation: some particular contribution to *Reflections* has hit just the right spot and could we send a script? We could and we do!

Sometimes the treatment of a particular story gives someone a fresh insight into a problem. Occasionally, a listener confesses to having come cloer to God.

But what is religious broadcasting all about? How different is it from any other sort of broadcasting? At one level, there is no difference. There is no justification for a bad program on the grounds that it is religious.

I want religious programs to be taken seriously. I want it to be seen as an integral part of all area of broadcasting. I don't want it to depend on a legacy of goodwill, an historical tolerance for making religious programs. I want religious programs to stand up and be counted as good programs: making points, effectively reflecting issues and making a contribution to people's understanding of themselves and God.

Nothing, including religious programs, can remain unchanged forever. nevitably they have to move forward. The formats of ten years ago might not be the best vehicle for today's material. Some subjects unmentioned then need discussion today. Venereal diseases would hardly have been talked about in a religious program of ten years ago. With the relentless progress of AIDS

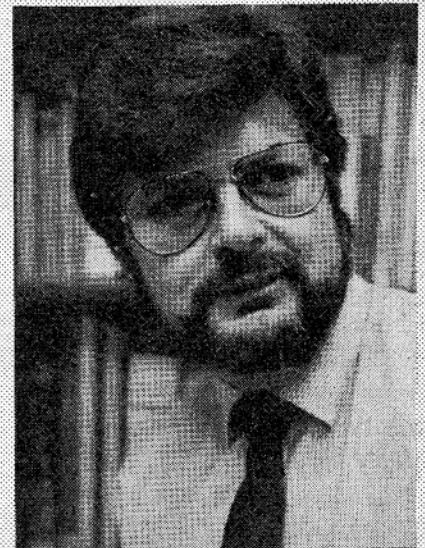
throughout the world, it now demands attention not only from an ethical viewpoint, but from a pastoral and informative one.

Religious programs must meet the needs of the audience. They are not a closed box that we open Sundays and briefly during the day for *Reflections*. Religion is such an essential part of life that commitment to one religious tradition or another has countless implications for the way we regard ourselves, our neighbors and our world.

More than ever before, religious broadcasting has to reflect religious life, with all its variety. The challenge of representation is the challenge of developing people's religious awareness of one another.

For the BBC World Service, the program *Religious Services*, with its regular visits to churches around the country, is an essential part of worship on the World Service. But there are other ways of using the airwaves. Shared experiences, intercessions, Bible study and letter writing are all ways of bringing people closer together, and closer to God. There are some of the areas we at the World Service will be exploring in coming months.

So what is religious broadcasting all about? Religious broadcasting is about the constant challenge of broadcasting itself: to strive to improve the standard of contributions while ensuring that what is said is accessible to a wide audience. And that is one of the great excitements of religious broadcasting!



What is religious broadcasting all about?

—KVOH: Related to the King of Hope station in Lebanon, this fairly new station in Van Nuys, California, is operated by George Otis with ties to the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship a pentacostal layman's group. The station went on the air with a refurbished HCJB transmitter and a stated purpose of educating those who are already Christian. Future plans include a station located on board a ship off Southeast Asia and a facility in Palua, Philippines.

—WHRI: World Harvest Radio is situated in a cornfield near Indianapolis, but the studios are farther north in South Bend, Indiana. Pentecostal TV preacher Lester Sumrall operates this facility which offers a good deal of contemporary Christian music and some paid time programming as well as sermons by Dr. Sumrall. When asked how this station might compare to HCJB a spokesman once said "it is more conservative and more pentecostal." (HCJB is not a Pentacostal station).

—KCBI, Dallas: This station began with big promises but now seems to operate only on week-ends. Its format vacillates between country music and soft contemporary Christian music. It is related to the Criswell Bible Institute and First Baptist Church in Dallas. The pastor, W. A. Criswell, is one of the key leaders of a group of theologically fundamentalist people who have worked to take over the more moderate Southern Baptist Convention in the past decade. KCBI has no official relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention.

--WCSN: *Some might not immediately recognize the World Service of the Christian Science Monitor (nor its sister station KYOI in Saipan) as a religious station. But these outlets, as well as the highly respected Christian Science Monitor newspaper, are actually owned by a subsidiary of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston. This Christian sect was founded by Mary Baker Eddy with a particular emphasis on Christian healing and prayer. Mrs. Eddy founded the newspaper as an objective voice in the age of yellow journalism in the United States. As with the newspaper, the World Service on shortwave carefully separates religious commentary from news programs. Religious programs are primarily broadcast on the weekends.*

--WMLK: *This spunky sect deserves admiration. The Assemblies of Yahweh took an abandoned gas station and a used 50 kw AM transmitter and turned them into an international shortwave outlet located in Bethel, Pennsylvania. Programming from this unusual pentecostal sect consists primarily of the sermons of one Elder Jacob Meyer who uses Old Testament themes to tie his group into the Jewish heritage of Christianity. The programs are marked by Meyer's frequent references to God as Jehovah. The Assemblies do not celebrate Christmas. Meyer's programs are also placed on a number of AM outlets, including 50 kw Jesuit-owned WWL in New Orleans.*

Bright Future

What about the future of Christian broadcasting? In *International Radio Broadcasting: The Limits of the Limitless Medium*, Dr. Donald Browne says, "If there is a growth industry in the field of international broadcasting, clearly it is religious broadcasting."

Christian efforts to reach the world show no sign of diminishing. WHRI has installed a new 500,000 watt transmitter, the stations working on the "World by 2000" project are selecting up to 150 new languages in which to broadcast and FEBC is reportedly considering the establishment of a shortwave base in Aruba. HCJB has a permit for a station in Hawaii and announced in a December mailing that they are working with other groups to consider establishing outlets in Africa and the South Pacific. TWR recently added shortwave from Sri Lanka and a million watt AM transmitter at Monte Carlo.

HCJB's parent, the World Radio Missionary Fellowship, has established a transmitter construction facility in Elkhart, Indiana, to build new units for itself and partner groups. And Radio Rhema, a New Zealand Evangelical group, recently received a permit to construct an international station in Tonga in the South Pacific.

In addition, other groups are considering entering the fray. The World Bible Society near

Nashville has employed an engineer to put two new stations on the air, one in the Pacific for China and one in Europe beamed to the USSR. Both outlets will feature nothing but Bible readings. Another commercial broadcaster in Nashville has a permit to develop a station which he says will offer time to "those who can't get on other stations." Whether that means we can expect 24 hours a day of faith healers and money raisers on World Wide Christian Radio from Nashville remains to be seen. A third group, New Covenant Ministries of Jacksonville, Florida, has plans for their own station.

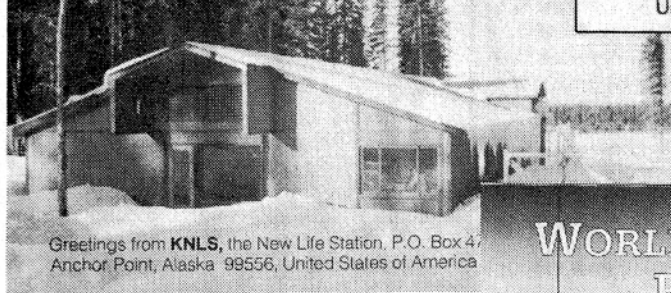
All of this activity leaves only the question of the effectiveness of international Christian broadcasting. Part of the answer depends on one's initial attitude toward Christian Broadcasting efforts. Certainly it is a continuing topic of conversation by missionary broadcasters around midnight cups of coffee or tea.

One thing is certain--the response from listeners speaks for itself. The following quotes are taken from over 1,000 letters sent to HCJB's *Saludos Amigos* program since July, 1985.

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND-"For a long time I was searching like wandering around in a wilderness. Happy to say I have found myself through listening to the Voice of the Andes."

TAMPIR, N.SEMBILAN, W.MALAYSIA - "I'm a 21 year old Indian girl... at one of the local universities here. Living in a country whose official religion is Islam can sometimes be pretty tough, but thanks to radio stations like HCJB our lives are blessed"

Anchor Point, Alaska
KNLS
The New Life Station



Greetings from KNLS, the New Life Station, P.O. Box 47, Anchor Point, Alaska 99556, United States of America

BRIESEN, EAST GERMANY-"I heard the music by Sandi Patti. I am sorry we cannot buy here in East Germany records with gospel songs or music like this. So, I recorded the music with my cassette I wrote this that you know there in America and the rest of the world that in a communist country like we have (East Germany) live Christians too."

OAXACA, MEXICO-"We are missionaries. It is encouraging to get to hear Christian programming as we don't get much here."

FLUSHING, NEW YORK USA-"Through your program and HCJB I have given up a 17 year drug and alcohol habit!"

Christian broadcasters know their efforts are heard and appreciated, and have meaning to millions around the world. ■

Kenneth MacHarg, an ordained minister, is one of the world's leading authorities on international Christian Broadcasting. He is host of the weekly "International Friendship Show," *Saludos Amigos*, on HCJB.

That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else.
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WORLD HARVEST
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WHRI
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