

Transmission by Satellite Marks 50-Year Gain in Radio Religion

By DONALD JANSON 28 JAN 71
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WASHINGTON, Jan. 27— Fifty years ago this month two radio technicians, one a Jew and the other a Roman Catholic, stood among members of the Calvary Episcopal Church choir in Pittsburgh to see that the first religious broadcast on a commercially licensed station, KDKA, went smoothly.

Tonight some 500 producers and broadcasters of religious programs marked that anniversary at the annual convention of the National Religious Broadcasters by beaming their closing program around the world in the first international religious broadcast to be transmitted live by satellite.

The broadcast over Intelsat facilities was but the most dramatic event in a quiet explosion taking place on the nation's

radio airwaves. Over the last few years, religious broadcasters have bought up more and more radio time to beam their messages to increasing millions across the land.

Now, television is also becoming a media of mounting importance to religion. And both forms of broadcast com-

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munications are helping to create financial, as well as religious, rewards.

"In contrast to churchgoing, broadcast religion has become the growing edge of religion," says Benjamin Armstrong, executive secretary of National Religious Broadcasters.

From the small beginning 50 years ago in Pittsburgh, the religious broadcast business has grown to the point where the national group's members beam 500,000 programs a year for the avowed purpose of spreading the Christian gospel. Many of the programs go to all parts of the world, broadcast in 100 languages. The national group, an affiliate of the National Association of Evangelicals, has 40 overseas stations. Seventy-five broadcasters produce programs for their overseas networks.

Sees Gains on Television

Paul Freed, president of Missionary Trans World Radio, said that relay by satellite would greatly increase the fidelity of the programs and the size of the worldwide audience. "We hope to begin monthly live broadcasts soon," he said. "Weekly, then daily broadcasts, will follow."

Fifty broadcasters now use the superpower transmitters of Trans World Radio abroad, including the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the Lutheran Laymen's League, producer of "The Lutheran Hour."

The weekly "Lutheran Hour," for example, is carried on 1,500 stations in the United States and abroad. Three years ago

the program was on 300 fewer stations. Five years ago ratings indicated it reached 20 million persons, against 30 million today.

While the figures are smaller, the growth rate is similar for the Rev. Billy Graham's "Hour of Decision," "The Baptist Hour," the independent "Back to the Bible Broadcast" from Lincoln, Neb., the Nazarene Radio League's "Showers of Blessing," and scores of other religious programs.

About 85 per cent of all religious broadcasts in this country are the work of evangelists or the evangelical wings of the major Protestant denominations, all members of the national group. Three-fourths of all religious broadcasting throughout the world is done by members.

Roman Catholic and Jewish broadcasters have separate organizations.

Some Are Excluded

Excluded because they do not meet the national organization's code of ethics are such right-wing preachers as the Rev. Billy James Hargis of Tulsa and his Christian Crusade, and the Rev. Carl McIntire, whose 20th Century Reformation Hour is carried over some 600 stations weekly.

Members are not permitted to emphasize "undignified" appeals for funds or to attack the political or doctrinal views of others. The message must be religious and positive rather than political or negative.

"We have dedicated our talents and energies to the utilization of radio and television for the evangelization of the world," Eugene R. Bertermann of the Lutheran Laymen's League reminded members of the broadcasting group in his presidential address last night.

While aggressively evangelical churches are increasing their annual budgets for broadcasting, other denominations are decreasing theirs in line with declining membership and income.

Cities Are Main Target

Growth in membership in the broadcasting group; from 107 to 400 in four years, no longer comes primarily from the Bible Belt, and the Bible Belt is no longer the prime target area of religious broadcasters. The heavily populated metropolitan centers are.

Most new members, Mr. Armstrong said, are in or near the major cities and on the Eastern Seaboard.

But he said that the advent of cable television would prompt a new surge of religious broadcasting in smaller communities with five years.

The growth of religious television broadcasts is as marked as that in radio.

"This Is the Life," weekly

dramatic slices of life with a spiritual dimension, sponsored by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, began on three stations 20 years ago and now appears on 470 stations in the United States and abroad, reaching an audience estimated at five million viewers.

Mr. Graham's specials, for three days or more at a time about three times a year, buy prime time on some 280 stations for \$1-million a telecast.

"The response always had been sufficient to cover the cost," said Theodore Dienert, Mr. Graham's son-in-law, an account executive for Walter F. Bennett & Co. of Philadelphia, which handles the evangelist's advertising. He said his father-in-law was considering starting a weekly television show.

"You Always Get It Back"

"At first religious broadcasters were scared of the high cost of television," said Marion G. Robertson, owner of the first television station to devote half its air time to religious broadcasts.

The station is WYAH-TV in Portsmouth, Va. Mr. Robertson, a Yale Law School graduate, began broadcasting in 1961. He has since added religion-oriented radio stations in New York, Virginia and Colombia, and in two months expects to go on the air in Atlanta with a second television station.

He estimates at \$1-million the initial cost of putting a high-powered, color, ultra-high-frequency television station on the air.

"You always get it back," he said, expressing a faith in popular response to the gospel that appeared to be universal at the four-day convention.

Mailed donations are the financial foundation for many religious broadcasters, whether they aim programs at the "unsaved," as Mr. Graham does, or seek to "build up the saints," as do many other broadcasters.

Switched to Television

One member on the speakers' platform tonight who strives for converts was the Rev. Natty Rex Humbard, evangelist pastor of the Cathedral of Tomorrow in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

Mr. Humbard, a 51-year-old

Arkansan, dropped radio evangelism in favor of television 18 years ago. He started with one station in Cleveland. Now he broadcasts his Sunday service from the 5,400-seat Cathedral Auditorium of some 15 million viewers over 272 stations in the United States and Canada.

His guitar picking, the gospel singing of his wife and others, and his Fundamental evangelism bring him \$5-million a year in small contributions to pay for the broadcast time he buys. Most of the 272 stations have been added in the last three years.

He told a visitor the other day that he was unhappy to be unable to buy prime evening time, no matter what the premium, as Mr. Graham does. Few stations will sell it to him. Many network stations will sell him nothing at all, preferring their own sustaining religious programs.

Most of Mr. Humbard's colleagues in broadcast evangelism make the same complaint. They settle, if necessary, for time purchased on ultra-high-frequency stations.

For Mr. Humbard in New York, this means WPIX-TV at 7:30 A.M. Sundays.

Too Early to Break Even

"It is too early in the day for us to break even with donations from New York viewers," said his public relations counsel, David Beaver of the Don M. Heskett advertising agency in Akron. "But Rex will never drop it because it considers New York a mission field."

The Cathedral of Tomorrow has other ties to New York. It owns two Brooklyn businesses—Unity Electronics and the Real-Fonn Girdle Company. Together they produce only a small part of the Humbard ministry's income.

"Only 10 per cent of the people in the country go to church," Mr. Humbard said. "Ninety per cent stay home on Sundays. I didn't have any visions or hear any thunder when I decided to build a large church and put its simple service on television. That is where the people are. Television is the most powerful media in communications for taking the church to the people."