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Life is Beautiful (Życie jest piękne). A Short Study of a Radio Reportage Series of the Głos Ewangelii Foundation

Introduction. Purpose and methodology

“Faith is actually born from listening,”¹ said Henryk Dedo and Waldemar Kasperczak of the Głos Ewangelii foundation, which partly explains the level of engagement and the radio activeness of the organisation in preparing numerous audio reports² documenting the trying fortunes of various people who experienced much,

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1 D. Biczysko, “Wiara przecież rodzi się ze słuchania.’ Rozmowa z Henrykiem Dede i Waldemarem Kasperczakiem, reportażystami Fundacji Głos Ewangelii”, *Głos Ewangeliczny. Kwartalnik Kościoła Ewangelicznego Chrześcijan* autumn 2006, p. 26 [Unless indicated otherwise, English versions of quotations were translated from Polish].

2 Due to space limitations, we omitted in this text a discussion of radio reportage as a genre. To find out more about the radio report, vide E. Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, “O reportażu radiowym”, [in:] *Reportaż w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym*, K. Stępnik, M. Piechota (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2004, pp. 115–123. To read about the genre identity of the radio report/reportage and its divisions, vide idem, “O reportażu radiowym, jego pochodzeniu, definicji i próbach podziału”, [in:] *Seminarium reportażu radiowego poświęcone*

such as former drug addicts or alcoholics, i.e. people who at some point of their lives underwent profound changes. We became interested in the activities of the Foundation after listening to radio reports by their collaborating authors which were showcased during major radio competitions in Poland and abroad. We wanted to learn whether in contemporary media space there is a place for work referred to as a religious reportage or a reportage with a mission, i.e. programs serving the purposes of evangelism³ and reaching people using the Word of God. The question is particularly important as the areas in which the subject of our article operates are broad. They cover the presence not only in the media, but also the activities of the clergy, evangelism in penal facilities, and organising anti-drug meetings and camps for teenagers.

Two series of reports published on a CD entitled *Życie jest piękne*⁴ (Life is beautiful) formed the basis of our analysis. The research method we applied in analysing the material and presenting the conclusions was the interpretation and analysis of selected audio culture texts.⁵ In synthesising the results, our discussions with the employees of the Głos Ewangelii Foundation proved helpful.⁶ We divided the reports in the *Życie jest piękne* series into several thematic groups (witnesses to history, addictions and dangerous spirituality, happiness in life, praise of

prezentacji i dyskusji nad radiowym dokumentem artystycznym, Kazimierz Dolny, 19–22.10.2003, pp. 33–50; K. Klimczak, *Reportaże radiowe o krzywdzie i cierpieniu*, Primum Verbum, Łódź 2011; idem, "Reportaż radiowy – definicja i podziat", *Acta Universitatis Lodzienensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 2011, issue 1(14), pp. 123–133; M. Białek, *Polski reportaż radiowy. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Scriptorium, Poznań–Opole 2010. To read about the core of the radio report, vide J. Jankowska, "Sztuka reportażu radiowego", [in:] *70 lat Polskiego Radia*, Polskie Radio, Warszawa 1995, pp. 101–111; P. Czarnek, K. Klimczak, "Rola muzyki we współczesnym reportażu radiowym", *Acta Universitatis Lodzienensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 2012, issue 3(17), pp. 171–181; M. Kaziów, *O dziele radiowym. Z zagadnień estetyki oryginalnego słuchowiska*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1973. The narrative nature of the radio report was discussed by: J. Bachura-Wojtasik, K. Sygizman, "Autonarracje w reportażu radiowym", *Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna* 2016, issue 12/4, pp. 107–120.

3 Radio as the medium used for evangelism was discussed by, e.g. fr. A. Lewek, "Mass media w służbie ewangelizacji", *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 1998, issue 2(36), pp. 92–97, and fr. R. Śpiewak, "Obecność katolickich treści religijnych w mediach publicznych po ustawie medialnej z 1992 roku", *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne* 2018, issue 1(27), pp. 170–171.

4 „*Życie jest piękne*”. *Inspirujące reportaże*, produced by the Głos Ewangelii Foundation, issue partners – Mobilna Parafia and Materna Communications, 2014; „*Życie jest piękne II*”. *Inspirujące reportaże*, produced by the Głos Ewangelii Foundation, issue partners – Mobilna Parafia and Materna Communications, 2016.

5 Due to the limited length of the article we did not discuss the contents of the reports in full, nor did we analyse or interpret them. We provided only our conclusions.

6 A telephone conversation between the authors of this article and Waldemar Kasperczak conducted on 12 July 2018. The recorded conversation is kept by the authors.

creation, personality, travel/mission journeys, and family). All the reports featured the issue of God or faith – some in a straight-forward manner, others less so. This seems to be in line with what Waldemar Kasperek said: “We want to talk about God in a wise and accessible manner; that’s our mission.”⁷ The analysed material enabled us to put forward the thesis that religion is not the basic topic of the reports recorded by the GE Foundation.⁸ Their shows have an evangelistic nature, they carry hope, the Gospel, the message and mission by raising topics from various thematic areas, often connected to one another. When she discussed the phenomenon of religiosity in contemporary press reports, Barbara Bogołębska also noted a similar phenomenon of thematic intertwining.⁹

We employ the following structure in the article: we begin with a presentation of the topic and the selected methodology, we then proceed to define the GE Foundation, from its beginnings in 1965 until now, indicating the various areas of this independent producer’s activities. The notion of a religious report, the presence of religious threads and God in the discussed works is preceded by a discussion of the *Życie jest piękne* series. In the summary, we indicate the general qualities of the style of the reports of the GE Foundation.

The *Głos Ewangelii* Foundation. A historical outline and a specification of the organisation

25 December 2018 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the first broadcast of *Głos Ewangelii z Warszawy* via the Trans World Radio in Monte Carlo.¹⁰ It was the first show of this kind in the whole of the Eastern Bloc. *Głos Ewangelii z Warszawy* operated within the contemporary Zjednoczony Kościół Ewangeliczny (United Evangelical Church),¹¹ and the board’s intention was from the very beginning to conduct mission and evangelism activities, which the organisation fulfilled with much success. Waldemar Lisiecki, the chief editor at that time, stated that “there even emerged church communities established by persons who had their

⁷ A telephone conversation between the authors of this article and Waldemar Kasperek...

⁸ We use the abbreviated form GE interchangeably with the full name of *Głos Ewangelii*.

⁹ The researcher wrote: “the thematic variant of religious/denotative journalism coexists with other types of journalism. B. Bogołębska, “Religijność we współczesnych reportażach”, *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne* 2018, issue 1(27), p. 37.

¹⁰ Then the shows were broadcast on a daily basis, except Fridays, from 5:15 to 5:30 p.m. at 31 MHz. Additionally, five times a week the show was rebroadcast at 8:45 p.m. at 41 Mhz due to popular demand. Vide M. Balcerak, *Współczesne formy ewangelizacji na przykładzie Fundacji „Głos Ewangelii”*, a master’s thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Bogusław Milerski, professor of ChAT, Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna w Warszawie, Warszawa 2014, p. 39. The thesis was released to the authors.

¹¹ Vide ibid., p. 37.

first contact with the Gospel through those shows and thus they began their path towards God.”¹²

The initial years of broadcasting the evangelical shows were hampered by censorship. “Both written texts and the audio shows recorded later on had to be sent to a censor at Mysia St. in Warsaw,”¹³ stated Henryk Dedo and Waldemar Kasperczak. Once approved by the censor, the shows were broadcast from the Trans World Radio mission centre in Monte Carlo. After 1989, when the media market underwent a transformation, the operations of *Głos Ewangelii* also changed; formally speaking, in 1996, it became a foundation established by the Good News Broadcasting Association in the United Kingdom, Kościół Ewangelicznych Chrześcijan w RP and Kościół Chrystusowy w RP.¹⁴ GE shows were already broadcast by 7 commercial radio stations, and by 1997 the number grew to 19 and two foreign stations.¹⁵ The evangelical and mission reach of the Foundation increased each year. Today, a total of 54 radio stations broadcast the reports created by this independent producer.¹⁶

Much has also changed in production terms. Manual editing using analogue tapes is long gone and digital sound processing is now used, while the masses broadcast in the initial years of the operation of the organisation were replaced by other audio forms, such as radio reports, interviews, and radio drama. Despite the many changes which have occurred in the organisation throughout the years, what has not changed is the principle of “preaching the Gospel using the airwaves and bringing hope to people,”¹⁷ said Henryk Dedo, chairman of the GE Foundation.¹⁸ Currently, radio reports are the organisation’s flagship product. In this article, we focussed on select reports, though we believe that other areas of the Foundation’s operation should at least be mentioned, and the same applies to its various forms of evangelism. The organisation’s areas of evangelical operations cover all types of media: radio, television, and the internet; the Foundation also conducts publishing activities. Evangelism is conducted via the PA system in correctional facilities and

¹² M. Welman, “Fundacja ‘Głos Ewangelii’. Nieść nadzieję”, *Słowo i życie* 2006, issue 4, p. 30.

¹³ D. Biczysko, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁴ Vide M. Kwiecień, “50 lat działalności radiowej Głosu Ewangelii. Słowo drąży serca”, *Słowo i życie* 2015, issue 4, p. 30.

¹⁵ Vide M. Balcerak, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁶ Vide 2013 Information Bulletin of the *Głos Ewangelii* Foundation. It is worth mentioning that approx. 99% of the shows are broadcast by commercial radio stations. “The shows are released in a barter: air time in exchange for a completed report,” the article stated. M. Welman, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁷ D. Biczysko, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁸ Henryk Dedo collaborated with *Głos Ewangelii* until 1983. In 1983 he was appointed director, and at the breakthrough moment, i.e. in 1996, when the *Głos Ewangelii* Foundation was officially registered in the National Register of Foundations, he became its chairman.

jails. The foundation personnel deliver classes in addiction prophylaxis at schools and youth centres (in response to requests by teachers and parents, the Foundation started the programs *Młodość bez narkotyków* [Youth without drugs] and *Żyj poza klatką* [Live outside the cage]), and they organise youth camps. A detailed description of all the operations of the GE Foundation can be found in the study by Magdalena Balcerak.¹⁹

As for the Foundation's strictly media-centred operations, one should also list, apart from the radio reports, a series of 15-minute-long radio shows devoted to Bible studies prepared by Henryk Dedo (broadcast on a weekly basis). Another form of disseminating the word of God and hope among contemporary listeners is the series of very short (approx. 100-second-long) series of discussions entitled *Kropla wieczności*²⁰ [Drop of eternity] which was started a few years back; it provides ethical and religious musings. The Foundation also produces Bible radio drama and radio novels in instalments. Another area of GE's activities is the production of television documentaries, e.g. *Bandyta*, *Metr nad ziemią*, *Adwokat ulicy*, and short-form documentaries *W klatce*.

The characteristics of the *Życie jest piękne* report series

The *Życie jest piękne* series was inspired by a friend of the Foundation, a businessman, and a loyal listener. The man, who closely shares the principles of the GE and admired its mission resilience, asked the Foundation to prepare a CD with reports which he could give to his clients. Being a regular listener and having his favourite shows, he suggested a few titles, and requested the Foundation's editors to develop other ones. "We treat this CD as a kind of showcase," said Waldemar Kasperekzak, which is why it "included, in our opinion, reports most valuable in terms of content and developed with the highest technical skill."²¹ Thus in 2014, the first part of the series came to being, which included fourteen shows. Two years later, as a result of another listener request, the Foundation published the second edition of *Życie jest piękne*, which consisted of eleven reports. Kasperekzak assured that a third part was due in 2018. When selecting the shows, the GE Foundation's editors did not follow

¹⁹ Vide M. Balcerak, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *Kropla wieczności* is a series of shows from Australian radio. The GE Foundation has been translating them for Polish listeners since 2010, five times a week. In response to the needs and the lifestyle of contemporary listeners, the GE Foundation signed a contract with Materna Communications for the latter to create a free mobile app (available on Android and iOS) for receiving those short audio news shows inspired by the Scriptures. Vide <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=pl.com.materna.muam.kroplawiecznosci&hl=pl> [accessed on: 31.07.2018].

²¹ A telephone conversation between the authors of this article and Waldemar Kasperekzak.

any thematic category or the fact that a report received an award²² (though there are a few which did²³). The selection criterion was, based on long-term experience, the sense that a given show was valuable in terms of its content and form.

Thematic categories in the reports in the *Życie jest piękne* series

The two-disc series of reports discussed in this article consists of twenty-five shows in total. For the sake of clarity, we decided to introduce a classification, with the most emphatic criterion being that which referred to the themes (prevalent topics) addressed by the authors of specific reports. As a result, we created six separate categories which together encompass all the shows.²⁴

Witnesses to history

The set of seven reports classified under this category refers in various ways to the theme of the Second World War and its consequences. The Polish-Jewish relations and the stories of Jews during the Second World War and the occupation, as well as in the following period, were discussed in the reports: *Kto uratuje mojego Henryka*, *Zvi*, and *Marsz Żywych*. The *Nie jestem w stanie zapomnieć* and *Nasza wspólna historia* reports raised the issue of the difficult Polish-Ukrainian relationships, and

²² Ibid.

²³ The shows included in the *Życie jest piękne* publications were appreciated by many and awarded at various competitions. The *Adwokat ulicy* [Street Attorney] report received, during the Lubostroń 2008 national competition of radio reportage and report and radio drama workshops, a distinction in the category monologue, documentary, community report "for the depth of its humanistic message and its technical qualities", and in 2012 it won first prize during the 7th Polonijny Festiwal Multimedialny "Polskie Ojczyszny 2012"; the *Bombka szczęścia* [Bauble of happiness] report received the Witold Zadrowski award in the première of 2009 category during Ogólnopolski Konkurs Reportażystów Melchiory; in 2010 the *Boguś* report during Ogólnopolski Konkurs na Artystyczną Formę Radiową received the Grand PiK special prize, the audience award and it was nominated in the première of the year category during Ogólnopolski Konkurs Reportażystów Melchiory 2009; the *Szepty dzieciństwa* [Whispers of childhood] report received the special award during Międzynarodowy Konkurs Artystycznych Form Radiowych Grand PiK 2013 and the special award in the competition for the Grand Prix of KRRiT, it was nominated to Melchiory 2013 and it received the 3rd prize during 29th Międzynarodowy Katolicki Festiwal Filmów i Multimediorów, and in 2015 it represented Polish radio shows during Prix Italia in the independent producer category; the *Kowal cudzego szczęścia* [Forging other people's happiness] report received the Grand Prix of KRRiT also in 2015.

²⁴ The division is somewhat linked to the typology proposed by the authors of the shows themselves in reference to the shows included in the *Życie jest piękne* CD part 2 (it includes the following thematic groups: history, society, dangerous spirituality and drugs, missions, crime, family). Source: <http://www.mobilnaparafia.pl/pl/biblioteka/zycie-jest-piekne> [accessed on: 1.08.2018].

the Volhynia massacres and Operation Vistula, while the remaining two classified under this category, i.e. *Opowieści wujka Józefa* and *Pan jest pasterzem moim*, presented general recollections from the Second World War.

Addictions and dangerous spirituality

This category includes six reports on drug addiction: *Tatuś co wybierasz?*, *Postanowienie sześciolatki*, alcoholism: *Boguś*, and the occult: *Świat odlotów*, as well as reports on the criminal fortunes of their subjects: *Zabij go albo zmień* and *Młody wilk*.

Happiness in life, praise of creation

This is the smallest of the classified groups, and it gathers reports which presented the positive, bright side of life. It includes the *Szepty dzieciństwa* report, a story of an elderly man who loves bees and the entire Creation, and the eponymous *Życie jest piękne* report on drawing happiness from every little part of the surrounding world.

Personality

The two-CD series includes reports on outstanding persons, people who achieved extraordinary feats, who are role models, and who often inspire their communities. Such was the case of Artur Pawłowski, the subject of the *Adwokat ulicy* report, who in Canada offered help to the homeless and those in need, including spiritual support. Ilona Rosiek-Konieczna, a medical practitioner and the subject of the *Kobieta roku* report, offered similar help for drug addicts and the homeless, but in Poland. Finally, Robert Grenia, the subject of the *Kowal cudzego szczęścia* report, has for the last thirty years been providing help to those in need in his neighbourhood.

Travel / mission journey

This category includes reports documenting the travels of their subjects, and presenting the recollections related to them. The *Siostra Michaela od dziury w moście* report discussed the calling of sister Michaela Pawlik OP, a Polish Dominican, to serve the poorest, who for fourteen years served as a nurse in a mission in India. That was also the destination of the subject of another report entitled *Ta co chodzi z aniołami*; during her journey she helped the dying learn about the spirituality of the country. Then, the *Honia – dziewczyna Ugandy* report is a story of the journey of Honorata Wąsowska, a young Polish woman, to Uganda to offer help to orphans in need.

Family

The core of the reports classified in this thematic category is family, the relations between family members, usually parents and children, often complicated, as in the *Bombka szczęścia* report – an extremely moving and emotional story of a woman whose dad was taken away from her when she was a child, or in the *Uczę się miłości*

od dzieci report, which presented the tragedy of a maturing boy, paradoxically in this situation, in a Christian family. The final two reports: *Odrobina miłości to za mało* and *Do prawa, do lewa* addressed the problem of foster care.

Presence of God and religious motifs in the series

Among its purposes, the GE Foundation includes the evangelical mission, which is fulfilled, e.g. by addressing various often difficult topics in the radio reports. And despite the fact that religion is not, as Waldemar Kasperczak stressed,²⁵ a superior value (which was proven in the conducted analysis – religion is not the core theme of any of the reports), one can find various religious traits and motifs and references to God, very often resulting from the paths that the subjects of the reports have taken. The Foundation's reports have a somewhat ecumenical nature. They feature traits which refer to Christianity and its various denominations (and the latter are prevalent, e.g. *Adwokat ulicy*, *Postanowienie sześciolatki*, etc.), but also Judaism (*Marsz Żywych*) and Hinduism (*Siostra Michaela od dziury w moście*). The listeners can learn about the rules applicable in all of those, learn about prayers, religious song, and fragments of the Bible.

Religion is present in the reports in various ways, e.g. as one of the topics (e.g. *Siostra Michaela od dziury w moście*), as a structural element of a report (the Bible story of the prodigal son constitutes the basic component of the structure of the *Boguś* report; a similar function is served by the *Our Father* prayer in the *Uczę się miłości od dzieci* report).

The presence of God also varies throughout the reports. Usually, God appears somewhat in the background of the stories. In most reports, God constitutes an important point of reference in the lives of the subjects (e.g. *Młody wilk* and *Ta co chodzi z aniołami*), but in some God is only slightly visible, being referenced only in passing (e.g. *Kobieta roku*, *Do prawa, do lewa*, *Marsz Żywych*) or is absent altogether – those reports are the rarest (e.g. *Nasza wspólna historia*). The moment when God appears in the reports is determined by the subject's fortunes, though it also depends on the structure of the report, as developed by the author. Sometimes the initial words already offer a declaration on the role of the Creator in the subject's life (e.g. *Ta co chodzi z aniołami*) and it is maintained in the following minutes of the report. In other instances, the initial declaration marking one's relationship with God is very quickly contradicted, often for various reasons, such as pain caused by "righteous Christian parents" (*Uczę się miłości od dzieci*) or by peer pressure in the subject's environment (*Młody wilk*). Most often, though, God appears near the climax of a report as the originator of a breakthrough, a major change (e.g. *Tatuś co wybierasz?*).

²⁵ A telephone conversation between the authors of this article and Waldemar Kasperczak...

The image of God coming from the *Życie jest piękne* report series is just as diverse. Its role in the lives of the subjects may be classified according to several basic categories, which, however, are not mutually exclusive; they rather supplement each other and thus create a more complete image of the Creator. Those include the following forms of the presence of God:

- God the saviour and liberator, e.g. *Kto uratuje mojego Henryka, Zvi* (also responsibilities towards God in the latter), *Pan jest pasterzem moim, Nie jestem w stanie zapomnieć* (in the latter, also God as the one who enables people to forgive);
- God as support and source of hope, e.g. *Adwokat ulicy*;
- God as the basic agent, “the grand writer”, the basic determinant of life, e.g. *Opowieści wujka Józefa, Życie jest piękne, Marsz Żywych* (in the latter, also doubts as to the existence of God), *Ta co chodzi z aniołami*;
- God the agent of change (the final instance of appeal for the subjects), e.g. *Świat odlotów, Zabij go albo zmień, Boguś, Tatus, co wybierasz, Postanowienie sześciolatki, Młody wilk*;
- God full of love, agent of goodness, who should be thanked, who provides care, e.g. *Bombka szczęścia, Honia – dziewczyna Ugandy, Do prawa do lewa, Ta co chodzi z aniołami*;
- God in nature, e.g. *Szepty dzieciństwa*.

Conclusion

It would be difficult to classify the radio religious report other than based on the criterion of its genre. The core of the variety includes reports focussed on the search for the meaning of existence, reports which are filled with – like religious films – spiritual and symbolic meanings.²⁶ The radio documents of the GE Foundation are not always explicitly related to religion and God, yet they “possess a considerable surplus of meaning, extra-contextual accompaniment, and a special line opening it to readings of a religious nature,”²⁷ they exert an emotional effect on listeners, and often evoke “numinous emotion”.

A common feature of the reports collected in the *Życie jest piękne* series is their mission nature, which is not equivalent to religiosity. That mission nature is present in the positive response to the question of whether life is truly beautiful posed on the cover. The fact of placing emphasis on the content of the message relates

²⁶ Vide T. Sobolewski, “Poszukiwanie sensu”, [in:] *Ukryta religijność kina*, M. Lis (ed.), Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, Opole 2002, p. 12.

²⁷ M. Kempna, “Religijność jako paratekst. Na obrzeżach teorii filmu religijnego”, [in:] *Pogranicza audiowizualności. Parateksty kina, telewizji i nowych mediów*, A. Gwóźdź (ed.), TAiWPN Universitas, Kraków 2010, p. 247.

to the fact that the voice of the subject is the main element there. Music appears to “break” the oral story, to create a place for listeners’ reflection or to stress the mood of a scene. The Foundation’s reports tried to record the stories in spaces related to the subjects’ lives, so the sounds built an emphatic audio set of specific locations. Yet neither the music nor the audio effects moved to the foreground. They were only elements which enriched the word. The reporters avoided recording their own voices by removing their questions from the recordings and refraining from adding any author narration (apart from the *Adwokat ulicy* piece). Their shows were linear, having a cause and effect structure, and the dynamics of the stories were defined by the fortunes of the subjects. Their fortunes proved that sometimes, despite many obstacles, life is beautiful.

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Życie jest piękne. Szkic o cyklach reportaży radiowych Fundacji „Głos Ewangelii”

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia reportaże radiowe przygotowane przez Fundację „Głos Ewangelii”. Cykle reportaży *Życie jest piękne* zostały zanalizowane i zinterpretowane pod kątem tematyki, zastosowanych środków dźwiękowych oraz obecności wątków religijnych i Boga. Wybrany materiał audialny pozwolił również na wskazanie ogólnych cech stylu reportaży Fundacji „Głos Ewangelii”.

Słowa kluczowe: radio, reportaż, misja, religijność.

Life is Beautiful (Życie jest piękne). A Short Study of a Radio Reportage Series of the Głos Ewangelii Foundation

Summary

The article discusses the radio reports prepared by the Głos Ewangelii Foundation. The *Życie jest piękne* series was analysed and interpreted in terms of the themes, the sound effects used, and the presence of religious themes and the notion of God. The selected audio material also enabled the researchers to indicate the general qualities of the reporting style of the Głos Ewangelii Foundation.

Keywords: radio, report, mission, religiosity.

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