

Court Sides With Trinity Broadcasting Network in Lengthy Licensing Battle

The ruling came after eight years of litigation that cost TBN \$40 million and threatened its future, says founder Paul Crouch

Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) has won an eight-year licensing battle that founder Paul Crouch said threatened the Christian broadcasters' future. Crouch said he was delighted with a federal appeals court ruling that brought an end to the "nightmare" that cost TBN more than \$40 million.

Most of the money, raised in special appeals, went to buy out competitors who lodged competing applications when licenses at five TBN stations came up for renewal. Crouch called the practice a form of "legalized extortion" that he feared could have followed at other stations because of a dispute with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the government's broadcast licensing body.

The competing applications were filed after TBN ran into trouble with the FCC over its Miami license in the early 1990s. The FCC took the license away because it said TBN had used a minority-controlled company to circumvent regulations limiting national ownership of stations. TBN argued that its dealings had been aboveboard, and the FCC rules—which allowed ownership of up to 14 stations if two were minority-run—were vague.

TBN took its case to the U.S. Court of Appeals, appearing in

Washington, D.C., in February. In May, a three-judge panel ruled that the FCC's denial of Trinity's license renewal in Miami is vacated, meaning the case is struck from the records.

Crouch said that the verdict was a complete exoneration of TBN.

"It's expunged

this whole thing from the files of the court—a bit like when Jesus forgives us our sins, we are justified, just as if we have never sinned." There had been "great rejoicing, great relief" at the verdict, he said.

The drawn-out legal action had been "terribly debilitating," Crouch said.

"If we had lost Miami it would only have been a matter of time before others would have filed against us any time a license came up for renewal." TBN's protest over the situation led to a change in the law that now prevents competing groups that could benefit from being bought out from objecting to license renewals.

Yet TBN grew through its years of legal troubles. The network now has 1,400 TV stations worldwide, with another 5,000 cable stations in the United States.

Crouch said he believes TBN was singled out for the licensing challenge because of anti-Christian sentiments from the FCC.

Crouch also defended TBN's recent agreement with the Chinese

government that allows the network to broadcast by satellite with the possibility of a wider audience in the future. Critics said the move ignored human-rights violations in China, but Crouch said that attitudes to Christianity were changing in the country.

“There is still religious persecution, but let’s push it in the right direction by congratulating them on their new openness at the top, and it will in time flow down to the lower echelons of government,” Crouch said.

Crouch said he met with a Chinese ambassador earlier this year who wanted to know more about Christianity.

“I said: ‘If you will look just at the pure teachings of Christ and not what some religion teaches about Him, in some ways Jesus was a communist. He said, “Feed the hungry, clothe the naked.”’ That really got his attention.”