

Living by the Law Helps TV Station In Canada Spread Gospel

A national broadcast rule means Canadian viewers from diverse religions hear about Jesus on Trinity Television

Thanks to a tough television-broadcast rule in Canada, many Canadians from faith backgrounds other than Christianity have come to Christ, says Willard Thiessen, president of Trinity Television, a Winnipeg-based Christian TV station.

The reason is simple—Canadian Christian stations must use one-seventh of their airtime broadcasting programs from other faith groups and secular productions. Trinity Television, which last September launched a subsidiary station called Now TV in Vancouver, began in October 1976 as a single show called It's a New Day. Since then, it has gathered force as one of the country's few Christian stations, prompting many to come to faith in Christ, including Hindus, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists.

"We have many Hindus, Muslims, etc., who call Now their station because we air shows about their particular faith," Thiessen said. "What eventually happens is they start watching all the Christian shows, too. Many are convicted when they hear about Christ, and then give their lives to Him.

"We're happy to have other faiths watching our shows. God often uses adversity and what appears to not make sense to bring His purposes forth," he said, and added that many viewers of Now TV are telling friends of the same faith to watch the station.

Until 1993, government regulations allowed Christian shows to be aired but prohibited 24-hour Christian stations. Countless petitions to expand the scope of Christian television and appearances by Christian programmers before the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) finally wore the CRTC down. New regulations, which require Christian stations to air at least 18 hours, or one-seventh, of "other" programming during a 126-hour broadcasting week, were introduced in 1993.

All Christian television stations in Canada are required to be nonprofit. Funding comes primarily from advertising or sales of commercials, sale of airtime to other ministries, and donations.

Trinity Television's *It's a New Day* is a one-hour news, teaching and prayer program for the converted, and airs on local secular stations. It has produced several Christian children's shows, which air predominantly in the United States.

Now TV is a 24-hour channel that can be viewed primarily in Vancouver and the rest of the province of British Columbia. Its viewers are predominantly non-Christian and most are women ages 25 to 54.

Its programming includes *Pure Sex and Relationships*, a show about God's plan for sex. The program airs on Sunday nights at the same time as a contemporary, secular sex show with a call-in format in which callers discuss anything to do with sex. *Pure Sex and Relationships* features John and Helen Burns, a married couple who discuss sex within its biblical boundaries.

A Christian comedian renowned on secular comedy shows and clubs hosts another show on Now TV. Movies with Christian values are followed by on-air discussions. The station broadcasts 60 Minutes, Dateline and Primetime, following each with call-in discussions.

“We’re trying to be geared to the culture and willing to do things that are on the edge to relate to people,” said company vice president Jeff Thiessen. “We want to hear the common people’s views.”

He also hopes to garner some government grants for the eventual production of Christian shows and movies. The Canadian government recently pumped large sums of money into the TV programming and movie-production sectors. Government money provides 80 percent of grants for new material. Broadcasting heads of TV stations provide the other 20 percent.

“We want the grants so we can make movies and shows which are relevant to the Christian message,” Thiessen said. “Programs that are getting viewers on the journey to being saved is what we want to show. In the past, we’ve been frustrated by the fact that most government dollars aren’t accessible to Christians.”

Willard Thiessen envisions Now TV eventually being broadcast coast to coast. It will be available via satellite dish within a few months, he said.

—Josie Newman