

ORAL PRESENTATION

CRTC HEARINGS ON RELIGION IN BROADCASTING

Based on the written submission: Genuine Canadian Content: Fair Access to Broadcasting for all Worldview Streams in Canadian Society.

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1. I appreciate the CRTC's willingness to launch a full public review of its policies on religious broadcasting. I also thank you for this opportunity to share my views and ideas with you.

2. My oral submission is premised on the idea that all programming reflects some type of religious assumptions. Or if you prefer, religious and secular programs equally reflect unproven worldview assumptions about the character of humanity, the nature of the world, and the purpose of life. "Neutral" programs reflect these unproven worldview assumptions just as much as "religious" programs.

Nor can the distinction between religious and neutral programming be sustained on the argument that religious worldviews are passionately held and might lead to conflict or violence. The twentieth century is filled with examples of wars, violence, injustice, and mass killings that resulted from "secular" worldviews such as fascism, communism, and nationalism.

Thus, I am arguing that it is inaccurate, and perhaps religious discrimination, to deal with religious broadcasting separate from so-called mainstream broadcasting.

3. When and if the CRTC dismantles this "separate" policy for religious broadcasting, it will have to develop an overall policy framework that does justice to the major worldviews that live within the people of Canada. This framework will ensure genuine Canadian content. The following points outline some of the questions and issues that this policy framework must answer.

4. The first issue, in my view, will be to distinguish between "special broadcasters" and "general broadcasters." In my view, educational, church/evangelistic, and political party broadcasters by their very nature develop programs that reflect concerns in one particular "area of life" and thus are best called "special broadcasters." "General broadcasters," on the other hand, develop a full range of programming--e.g. public affairs, entertainment, educational, and other types of programming--that reflect "one

view of all of life." Thus the wide range of programs developed by "general broadcasters" can reflect different and sometime contradictory "views of all of life," e.g. Protestant, Catholic, socialist, or liberal worldviews.

CRTC policy should offer fair and equitable opportunities for "special broadcasters" that want to air the views of particular [Christian, Islamic, Hindu, etc.] churches, [socialist, liberal, nationalist, etc.] political parties, or different educational groups to society. This should be a small proportion of the overall available airtime and resources.

The CRTC should develop a second policy that provides fair and equitable opportunities to all "general broadcasters" to the airtime and other resources necessary to broadcast a full range of entertainment, public affair, educational, and information programming that reflects a major worldview stream in our society.

5. The idea of neutral broadcasting institutions, or neutral board members in both public and commercial broadcasters, will have to be rejected. No single worldview within our society can claim to be above the worldview divisions. The liberal notion that "reason" is the only reliable and neutral guide to truth because it transcends divisive religions has been discredited in much contemporary philosophy.

Liberalism argues, for example, that broadcasters founded on religious or ideological worldviews require adherence to a moral code while "neutral" broadcasters such as CBC are value-neutral and simply encourage individual freedom without a moral code. This is incorrect for at least two reasons. First, institutions designed to allow full individual freedom have an implied moral code, namely a code that obligates the institution to act in protection of individual freedom. Second, this type of institution will also have to limit full freedom for individuals because without institutional moral requirements the institution would de facto promote anarchy, i.e. the freedom for employees to do as they will. If this were the case these institutions would self-destruct. These "liberal" institutions, just as institutions founded on a worldview, seek to enhance and improve human freedom in society by developing an implicit moral code that limits some internal individual freedom. Therefore, the proper distinction, I would argue, is not between neutral broadcast institutions and broadcast institutions with a moral code, but between the different kinds of moral codes adopted by different broadcast institutions.

6. The CRTC will also have to reject the idea that "neutral or rational" board members in the dominant Canadian broadcast organizations transcend the religious or ideological divisions in our society. All people necessarily interpret other worldviews from out of their own worldviews. Thus, it will be necessary for the boards of both private commercial and the public broadcasters to contain representatives of the major worldview streams in our society in order to treat this diversity fairly. The composition of these boards should proportionately reflect the composition of society at large.

7. The question, then, is what mechanism can be used to obtain a true representation of Canadian society in the boards and programming of our major broadcasters? The

current mechanisms of a commercial-minded or public-minded board does not work. That is, these boards have not allowed the major worldview approaches to be equitably represented in the programs Canadians see and hear. Some form of participatory democracy is need to allow Canadians to have a hand in directing, not only consuming, radio and television programs. The CRTC should experiment with new mechanisms that would allow the diverse worldview streams in Canadian society to find expression within Canadian broadcasting institutions.

8. What criteria should a religious, social, political, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic worldview group need to meet in order to qualify for airtime as a "general broadcaster?"

A "general broadcaster" should:

(a) demonstrate that it has the numerical strength to support a broadcasting organization, e.g. a reasonable minimum number of listeners or viewers to support a radio and television program or broadcast organization.

(b) show its worldview leads to a demonstrably different "product" from other existing broadcasters, e.g. Catholic, aboriginal, or socialist programs.

(c) be able to produce the full range of programming that "general broadcasters" normally produce.

(d) show that its programming does not advocate the violent overthrow of the social and political order, propagate hatred against a racial group, or attack religious freedom.

9. Public financial and other resources for broadcasting should allocated in such a way that the various worldview approaches in broadcasting are able to present their programs to the public in proportion to their relative strength in the entire community.