



Manning on the "Word in the World" set.

Lights. Camera. Action.

Sharing God's Love
Through Media

In a small studio about an hour east of Los Angeles, the on air light blinks and the cameras move into position as the host awaits his cue. It seems like just another day in the television capital of the world, but what makes this production unique is that host Michael Manning is a Society of the Divine Word priest and the program “*Word in the World*” is produced by Wordnet Productions, a Catholic television ministry.

“*Word in the World*” is the only Catholic program on Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), the world’s largest religious television network, where it averages approximately 200,000 viewers each week. It’s also the only Catholic program on the American Forces Network, which broadcasts to the majority of U.S. military bases overseas.

In order to understand the ministry of Wordnet Productions, one needs only to look at its founder, Father Michael Manning, SVD.

Humble Beginnings

Most people don't associate being a television personality with the Catholic priesthood and neither did Manning, at first. "I wanted to be a missionary priest to China," explains Manning, "but in my training I spent a year teaching school, became attracted to teaching and thought that's what I would be doing."

Manning entered the Society of the Divine Word novitiate in 1961, and earned degrees in philosophy, theology and received a Master of Fine Arts in Theater from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He went on to teach in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and the Watts area of Los Angeles before moving into vocation work.

"It was kind of a conflict," Manning explains, "wanting to use mass media, wanting to use my theater background, and not being able to do that as a vocation director." After hearing about a priest who had a local television program on a cable network, Manning approached him and offered to lend a hand. Within a week, he was hosting his own television show. "It was a good experience," Manning remembers, "it was, in many ways an apprenticeship, learning to look at the camera, get the points

down in a certain amount of minutes, dealing with guests and how to conduct an interview." The show ended a year later, but by that time Manning was already bitten by the television bug. And that is where Wordnet Productions began.

Wordnet Productions officially got its start in 1978. The goal was, and still is, to try and get the Gospel, through television, to as many people as possible. "We are trying to use mass media as a way of transforming people's lives and bringing God into their lives," explains Manning, "and we're doing it because of the base that we have with the Society of the Divine Word. There's always been this charism of using mass media with the Divine Word Missionaries." That charism stems from the Society of the Divine Word founder, Saint Arnold Janssen, who used the mass media of the day, a printing press, to communicate to the masses. (See *Founding of the Society of the Divine Word* on page 18.)

Bottom left: Father Soney Sebastian, SVD, giving direction to Manning while Sister Jeanne Harris, OP looks on.

Bottom right: Manning overlooking the editing process.

Next page: Wordnet Studios in San Bernardino, California.



Our Mission

Embracing the transforming power of the Gospel, we communicate the Word of God to all people through media in the spirit of the Society of the Divine Word.

Manning has always been interested in interfaith dialogue, and was part of the radio show *“Religion On the Line”* out of Los Angeles in the 1990s. The show featured Manning, in addition to a minister and a rabbi, discussing then current issues. Today, while Wordnet is a Catholic organization and *“Word in the World”* is a Catholic production, Manning and crew are not just targeting the Catholic population. “That’s a very important distinction,” Manning explains, “we’re very concerned about interreligious, interdenominational sharing and letting people see that sharing God’s love isn’t exclusive to the Catholic world.” He looks at being part of the TBN network, a traditionally Christian-based network, as an opportunity. “I hope I’m making a bridge,” relates Manning, “and allowing a greater understanding of the Church that I love.”

Father Manning continues to carry on Janssen’s tradition by using television and the Internet to spread the Gospel. “I always have a great joy of being in a church and talking to live people,” relates Manning, “but I do know that when I’m on television I am able to reach a much, much larger amount of people.”

Despite a heavy production schedule and speaking engagements, Manning finds time to write. He is the author of numerous books, including *“Pardon My Lenten Smile,”* *“Questions and Answers for Today’s Catholics,”* and *“Fifteen Faces of God,”* to name a few. In addition, he has authored a couple of children’s books and a variety of pamphlets. He has been a guest on several national television shows including, *“Larry King Live”* and *“The 700 Club”* and even made an appearance in the 1991 Hollywood film, *“Guilty by Suspicion.”*

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Wordnet Productions is a member of Christian Brothers Services Risk Pooling Trust. “We’ve got property and a great deal of equipment that’s very, very expensive,” states Father Michael Manning, “we come to Christian Brothers Services (CBS) with a real reliance on their ability to be able to help us with all those things. I’ve always experienced a prompt response from CBS.”

Wordnet Productions Today

In addition to the “*Word in the World*” program, Wordnet also produces and Manning hosts, a four minute, daily application called *iGod Today* which provides thoughts on spirituality and words of inspiration. *iGod Today* goes out to 70 countries and receives an average of 13,000 hits each month.

“*Titans of the Bible*,” “*Called to Love*,” “*Shout Praise*” and “*Parables of Jesus*” are just a few of the documentaries Wordnet Productions has produced over the last several years. Incredibly, all of the production work is done by a team of nine people, supplemented by freelance production staff.

Funding for creating and producing the programs, app and documentaries can be challenging and as a mission-based studio, Wordnet Productions relies on contributions, grants and benefactors to continue their ministry. TBN allows each program broadcast on their network to use three minutes time to make an appeal for money. Wordnet’s appeals generally come in the form of an offer, a book or other item as a gift for a donation. Benefactors help fund the documentaries that Wordnet produces and other ministries, dioceses and organizations can rent the studio and production equipment at moderate rates.

Looking to the future, Manning and his team are experimenting with a 24-hour Catholic television station on the web.

“Nowadays with webcasting, the reality of getting the word out and going completely around the world is very real and very possible,” relates Manning, “but that’s really what television, what media, is about. It’s about getting into the lives of people who are going to church and those who are not going to church and sharing with them the blessing of what it means to be forgiven, and accepted, and living in the promise of peace and the victory of heaven.”

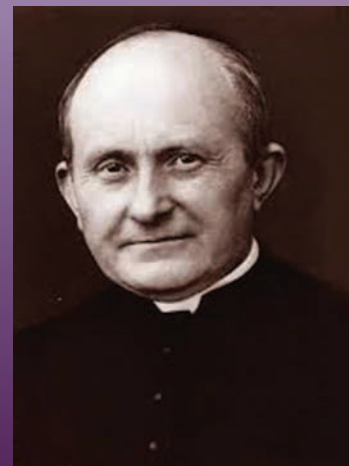
It’s not surprising, after spending time at the studio and getting to know Manning, that he is sincere in his wish for his viewers when he closes each program and *iGod Today* app by saying, “May Jesus love for you, always.”

The simple phrase that appears on Wordnet Productions materials and literature sums up the work of Manning and his staff perfectly, ‘sharing God’s love through media’. And indeed, they are. ☀

Founding of the Society of the Divine Word

In 1861, Arnold Janssen was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Münster, in Germany. Father Janssen’s first assignment was as a teacher of science and math at a secondary school in the diocese. Twelve years later, Janssen gave up teaching to concentrate on missionary vocations and spreading the Word of God throughout the world. Janssen encountered resistance from his superiors due to the changing climate in Germany, including the passage of anti-Catholic laws, the ban on religious schools and the expulsion of priests and imprisonment of many bishops. A few years later, Janssen emigrated to Holland where he founded an Order for priests and named it, The Society of the Divine Word. Using the technology of the times, he started a printing press and continued to publish a monthly magazine, “*The Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*” as well as other publications.

Janssen never went to the missions himself; however, he guided the missions until his death in 1909. He was canonized in 2003. ☀



Saint Arnold Janssen, founder of the Society of the Divine Word.