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PBS Bans New Religious Programming

Interestingly enough, the PBS board also voted to allow affiliates to air religious programs on digital TV channels and websites so long as PBS programs and the PBS brand name are not included. This could give some stations an option for extra income, for example by leasing unused digital TV channels to religious broadcasters. The PBS board apparently just wants to keep itself from being associated with programming that it considers "sectarian."

The *Post* mentioned several stations that should be able to keep broadcasting the kind of programs that PBS wants to avoid in the future: "KBYU in Salt Lake City, which is operated by an affiliate of the Mormon Church; KMBH in Harlingen, Tex., operated by the local Catholic diocese; and WLAE in New Orleans, operated by a Catholic lay organization." Also, "WHUT, operated by Howard University in the District, won't be required to drop its telecasts of 'Mass for Shut-Ins,' " though the Archdiocese of Washington had negotiated a contract with another station and may have to move if it can't get out of the contract.



The religious antipathy shown by PBS is nothing new. Some might even argue that no station benefiting from public funding should be able to espouse one religious viewpoint over another because it is forcing taxpayers to subsidize a belief system they do not personally hold. But the federal government's support of PBS means that all taxpayers are already forced to support shows with which they might disagree, be they programs on global warming, evolution, or the value of certain antiques. So long as there is no favoritism of one religious denomination over another, why single out religion to be banned from the public forum? In a sense, this is forcing taxpayers to subsidize a bias against religion.

Yet even this argument misses the heart of the matter. What about the Constitution? Nowhere in the Constitution is the federal government authorized to be funding one TV station over another. If this were the case, the Founding Fathers, being unable to conceive of today's technology, would undoubtedly have written into the Constitution an authorization to fund a federal newspaper. Instead, they established constitutional protections for freedom of speech and freedom of the press that included freedom from government coercion in any form, even government funding.

In these times of record deficits, few consider that the best way to rein in spending and balance the budget is simply to rein in the federal government's unconstitutional activities. Discontinuing funding for public broadcasting is one of those ways. Besides, broadcasting can only remain truly free and in the hands of the public when it is not looking to Uncle Sam for a handout.



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