

PBS RELIGION BAN CARRIES A STENCH

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) has banned member stations from carrying new religious TV programs; the few existing ones can continue. Catholic League president Bill Donohue reacts to this news:

The stated reason for censoring new religious programming goes like this: (a) a ban on sectarian programming has been in place since 1985 but was never enforced, (b) PBS started to review its rules last year when the transition to digital TV was being contemplated, and (c) PBS expressed concerns that having religious programming may imply official endorsement. None of these reasons is persuasive.

A rule not enforced is a non-starter, much like jay walking statutes in New York—everyone knows that non-enforcement means it's legal. Citing church and state concerns is pure bunk: there is no federal law banning religious programming by PBS. As for the review being sparked by the move to digital, the record shows that more was at work than this.

In December 2005, PBS aired a few shows with mildly religious overtones that angered its anti-religious members. Renee Fleming sang Christmas songs in between comments made about the importance of Christmas; a three-part documentary retracing the routes taken in the first five books of the Bible, "Walking the Bible," aired; a month later, a documentary with a veneer of religious trappings was shown about two teenagers in rural America who pulled themselves out of poverty; and a year-end Pledge Drive featured Dr. Wayne Dyer, a self-help guru opposed to organized religion who nonetheless carries "spiritual baggage." It was after these shows aired that PBS Ombudsman Michael Getler felt the heat and the in-house conversation began.

It never takes much to push secular buttons, but caving in to the voices of intolerance is shameful. That the religious gag rule is taking place in the age of Obama is not something that has escaped our notice. The stench is unmistakable.