

THE POLITICS OF PBS

Hiding the truth about something is just as dishonest as telling a lie. Last month, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was guilty of both forms of dishonesty.

On May 1, Catholic League president Bill Donohue attended a private screening of "Islam vs. Islamists: Voices from the Muslim Center" and was impressed at how the film shows that most Muslims are not terrorists. PBS officials consider the film to be "alarmist," though, and have refused to air it.

The only thing alarmist about this film is PBS—a public entity that takes taxpayer money for an allegedly public service but spikes a documentary that does not accord with its politics. In the insular world in which PBS officials live, the real Muslims are Islamists—radical extremists who want to kill the infidel (read: mostly Jews and Christians). Yet this documentary demonstrates that most Muslims are not extremists. Which begs the question: Is PBS anti-Muslim for trying to censor this look at the way most Muslims live?

Pope Benedict XVI was unfairly criticized last year for citing Islam as a religion that too often allows reason to become unbuckled from faith. "Islam vs. Islamists" offers proof that he was right. It also shows, as the Holy Father understands, that most Muslims do not incline to violence.

By casting extreme Islamists as unrepresentative of Muslims, "Islam vs. Islamists" is able to do more to generate positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Western world than anything PBS has previously aired. Yet so far PBS has kept it off the air, thus contributing to the ugly stereotype that most Muslims are machete-wielding thugs.

PBS had no qualms, however, about airing the docudrama, "The Secret Files of the Inquisition," on May 9 and May 16. What many people have heard or read about the Catholic Church

during the Inquisition just isn't true—that's what honest historians say—but this mattered little to PBS. It advertised "The Secret Files of the Inquisition" on its website with an eerie black background depicting all the "T's" as crosses. All that was missing was Dracula's voiceover. "For over half a millennium a system of mass terror reigned," the PBS website said. "Thousands were subject to secret courts, torture and punishment." This is plainly dishonest.

As British historian Henry Kamen has shown in his magisterial work, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, almost all the conventional wisdom about the Inquisition is wrong. By comparison with secular courts at the time, the Inquisition's methods were more humane, e.g., defendants could be represented by an attorney. Edward Peters, another student of the period, says, "Modern historiography has completely blown the old Inquisition propaganda out of the water. No one seriously contends that hundreds of thousands or millions were killed, or that the Protestant countries were any more humane than Spain was."

Indeed, scholars today refer to the old school mythology as "the Black Legend," a tale of anti-Catholic lies spun by Elizabethan England. No wonder that in 1994, BBC/A&E aired "The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition."

Of the approximately 125,000 cases tried by the Spanish Inquisition, 1 percent resulted in the death penalty. Of the so-called witch hunts, where women were burned at the stake, secular courts executed 50,000 (not all of whom were women); fewer than 100 were killed by the Inquisition.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once compared the killings that took place in the Soviet Union in 1937 and 1938 to those that took place during the Spanish Inquisition. He found that 20,000 were killed per month in the U.S.S.R. and 10 were killed per month during the Inquisition. But don't look for such comparisons on PBS. To do so might get in the way of the

truth.

So there it is—PBS denies the public a positive glimpse into the lives of everyday Muslims, while airing an anti-Catholic smear flick. It's hard to miss the politics behind the programming decisions made at PBS.