How the news affects our thinking

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Driving cross-country I often pass cattle feed lots. Their unforgettable smell lingers in my mind for miles. As curious as I am, however, I've never had the urge to stop my car, get out and plunge into the muck.

Yet every evening, millions of good Americans walk into their living rooms and dive into something that is just as putrid as that feedlot. In our urge to "be informed" we make a serious mistake. We turn on our TV sets and listen to the network news.

The danger isn't that we'll believe everything they say. Most of us aren't that stupid. The danger is that, for all our cynicism, we will still let them control us.

First, they control us by making us angry. When we get angry, we do one of two things. We express our anger by doing or saying something stupid and thus hurting our cause. Or we spend our time fighting the anger and doing little else. In either case they win.

Second, by focusing on them we let them frame the debate. Abortion, for instance, is usually argued at the level of "women" and "freedom of choice." Are we really dumb enough to believe that a movement dominated by the likes of Edward Kennedy cares about women? And in what area other than pornography are the liberals for "choice" rather than government regulation.

Third, listening to such a powerful and sophisticated source intimidates us. We feel alone and begin to doubt our convictions. We keep silent when we should speak out.

The Nazis knew this. In March of 1933 they staged a "Day of the Awakened Nation." The day ended with a radio speech by Hitler that was introduced by a commentator who noted that "at this very moment into all of East Prussia" church bells were ringing in support of the kind of national unity that Nazism was bringing.

Were they ringing? As a mere German citizen, you might know that your local church bells were silent. Yet there it was, over national radio, the sound of church bells. You and your little church must be an isolated minority. What could you do against Hitler?

Actually, church bells weren't ringing anywhere in Germany. Both Catholic and Protestant churches refused to participate in the celebration. The cowardly news media, in contrast, was offering Hitler virtually no opposition. They simply pulled a recording of church bells out of their sound effects library and manufactured a news story. That kind of thing still goes on.

Listen to biased news day after day, week after week, and, rebel though you will, you'll still develop a distorted view of the world. Poisoned by this mental food, our spiritual and moral health will sicken.

Last and most important, listening to slanting news twists our thinking. Computer specialists have a term for it: GIGO or "Garbage In, Garbage Out." The meaning is simple. The best computer in the world can produce no better results than the data it is given. If the data is garbage, the results will be garbage.

The same is true of our minds. Listen to biased news day after day, week after week, and, rebel though you will, you'll still develop a distorted view of the world. Poisoned by this mental food, our spiritual and moral health will sicken.

How can we protect ourselves? Nazism offers a warning. It did its best to convince Germans to buy "people's radios" so insensitive that they would only pick up German stations. It didn't want them getting the truth from England and France.

Our opponents play a similar trick. They make it as easy to listen to them as flipping on a television and putting our minds in neutral. Catching a news or issues-oriented program on your local Christian station or getting publications from pro-family and pro-life groups takes more effort. But that difference is the difference between being informed and being dangerously misinformed.

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How far should we take this? I'd suggest setting a four-to-one ratio between good and bad sources of news. If you watch network news for half an hour, spend two hours that same evening reading something like the *AFA Journal* or listening to Focus on the Family. If time gets short, cut back on Dan Rather instead of Dr. Dobson. If you get tempted to compromise, remember the old slogan for the Negro College Fund, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Don't waste yours on trash.

Will that make us ineffective? Hardly. During World War II, the British Broadcasting Corporation did a survey to discover, in those days before television, whose voice was recognized by the most people. First, of course, was Prime Minister Winston Churchill. But the name that came in second was a surprise. It was C. S. Lewis, the Christian author.

With the nation in a desperate struggle for its existence, how did an Oxford professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature become so well known? Not because he was an avid fan of what was contemporary and fashionable. Indeed, as friend George Sayer notes, C. S. Lewis "would never buy a newspaper" because he had "better things with which to occupy his mind." Lewis himself put it this way: "You don't need to read the news. If anything important happens, far too many people are sure to tell you about it." Lewis became well known for the "better things" he had occupied his mind with, things he explained in his popular radio series on the basic truths of Christianity.

We need to be equally realistic. There are better ways to spend our time than listening to news about the derailment of far distant freight trains. And when that news comes with a bias that is rabidly pro-abortion and supportive of tax-funded religious bigotry, we need to look at it the same way we'd look at a dip in feed lot muck. We can't stop others from lying, but we can keep their lies from sticking to our minds.

Tax dollars fund PBS propaganda

By Lowell Ponte
Reprinted from L. A. Times

Editor's Note: Lowell Ponte is a former radio commentator and talk-show host on Pacifica radio station KPFK. He is currently a roving editor for Reader's Digest magazine.

I wish I could say "three cheers" for Howard Rosenberg's concern about what he calls "self censorship" at PBS because of its rejection of the "P.O.V." [Point of View Series] pro-gay, activist, anti-Catholic documentary STOP THE CHURCH. ("New 'P.O.V.' Flap Finds PBS at the Edge of Timidity," Calendar, August 14.) Alas, the hypocrisy of his selective indignation merits at most one faint cheer.

Public libraries have almost universal support across the political spectrum despite their use of taxpayer money to purchase many controversial books. This wide support comes because libraries provide great diversity of books—right, left, gay, straight and otherwise.

Everybody's views get fair representation. But if a library began using its entire budget to purchase and promote only right-wing or left-wing publications, this tilt would soon spark protests . . . and if the bias persisted, protesters would start demanding that no more taxpayer dollars be spent to advance such narrow ideology.

The Public Broadcasting Service has practiced "self censorship" for decades; 99% of its social and political documentaries have tilted to the left. In effect, diversity of viewpoint has been shut out of PBS documentaries except in rare cases. PBS refused to air an award-winning documentary about Stalin's deliberate starvation of more than 13 million Ukrainians . . . until William F. Buckley Jr. threatened to make a major public issue of the refusal.

PBS refused to air an award-winning documentary about Fidel Castro's systematic imprisoning and torturing of gays in Cuba. . . until public complaints overturned this refusal. Rosenberg is familiar with these and many similar instances where documentaries critical of the left were stifled and denied airing—and he knows full well that these brief examples where protest broke through the censorship at PBS are rare exceptions to the iron ideological rule of PBS bosses.

In THE MacNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR and most weekly programming, PBS airs a far greater variety of viewpoints. But even in weekly programs, this taxpayer-supported network at times seems to deserve a new name, the Moyers *Narrow*-casting System (MNS), with many hours of many weeks each year devoted to the Lone Star homespun welfare-state socialist claptrap of this former propagandist for President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Some of these vast expanses of public air time given for Moyers' personal whims and prejudices should be redistributed to the "intellectually homeless" who now are discriminated against and denied air time—to make room for libertarian, conservative and other alternative and fresh points of view that have long been "self censored" and excluded in PBS documentaries.

Why have we heard nothing from Rosenberg about this other censorship or about the lack of diversity in social documentary viewpoints at PBS? Where was his moral outrage over censorship when liberal U. S. Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee that ultimately oversees PBS, blocked any consideration or open debate of a bill that would have required an impartial nonpartisan study to analyze whether there was a political and ideological bias in PBS programming? Like Dingell, Rosenberg knows that any such study would expose an overwhelming tilt to the left in PBS documentaries paid for by taxes squeezed from the majority of citizens who voted for President Bush.

Public forums supported by taxpayer dollars such as PBS are supposed to be open to voices from all points of the compass, not just to those who share Rosenberg's liberal political inclinations. If Rosenberg wants to protect everybody's free speech, then he should write a column insisting that PBS documentaries become a soapbox where many different points of view from across the spectrum can be heard and seen.

It's time to end the segregation that has made PBS social documentaries the exclusive plantation of the "Looney Left" and a few politically correct special-interest groups; it's time we integrated PBS and made its documentary air time a place of genuine diversity, like the public library. It's time to end *narrow*-casting at what was supposed to be the Public *Broad*-casting Service.

Secular media stories fan flames of Jewish leaders' complaints

A series of animated children's Bible stories on videotape has national Jewish leaders outraged. "This series puts anti-Semitism into the 21st century," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Foundation in Los Angeles. Secular media reports have played up the attack on the Christian ministry which produced the tapes.

The first tapes of Dallas-based Family Entertainment Network's "Animated Stories From the New Testament" were released for sale three years ago but have attracted wider attention since several cable channels began broadcasting a 30-minute "infomercial" in April.

Critics charge the cartoons show Jews who don't convert to Christianity as having large noses and frightening features, while Jews who convert are drawn with handsome characteristics.

"The Jewish characters in the 'infomercial' I can only describe as horrific and at times grotesque in both the drawings of the characters and the backdrops used to emphasize their evil nature," said Arthur Teitelbaum in Miami, southern area director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. "It's a reminder of Nazi propaganda."

Stephen Griffin, chief operating officer for Family Entertainment Network, said he was taken aback by the criticism. "I would just like to say that we're sorry if we've been offensive to our Jewish friends," said Griffin. "That was never our intention." He said several changes in the half-hour commercial have been made already and more will be made if necessary.

The series of 12 tapes, based on the King James version of the Bible, were designed to send an ethical message to children, Griffin said. "We've had lots of kids look at this, and in talking to the children afterward I don't get the impression they're coming away with any negative idea of Jews," he said. "They come away with an idea of what's right and what's wrong."

Griffin said negative characters in the series are depicted in typical cartoon fashion. "If we look at all the bad guys, then I guess that captain Hook from 'Peter Pan' and the wicked witch from 'Snow White' would be Jewish because they have big noses," Griffin said.

While secular media have given the incident big play, it is interesting to note that there is still almost no coverage of the anti-Christian bigotry regularly shown on television and in movies. *AP, 9/1/91*