

BOB GREEN, LCMHC

LICENSED CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR

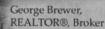
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Whose Book? BY LIBBY POST

LYNN AND I SETTLED IN RECENTLY TO watch the premiere of The Book of Daniel on NBC. Our interest was piqued by the network

promos and everything we had heard about the show. There's a gay male leading character, a lesbian supporting character, a gay screenwriter and the American Family Association has called upon its membership to call their local NBC affiliates to pull it from the air.

Anything with that kind of set-up was worth

The show stars Aidan Quinn as the Rev. Daniel Webster, an Episcopal minister. Quinn, by the way, was one of the first Hollywood actors to tackle the AIDS epidemic in the 1985 TV movie An Early Frost, a groundbreaking undertaking twenty years ago.

A multi-dimensional man of the cloth, Webster gives unconventional sermons, counsels wouldbe married couples who then decide to just live together and grapples with church hierarchy. all the while struggling to be a good father and husband. At the same time, he's got a Vicodin problem and has an on-going and honest dialogue with Jesus Christ.

NBC describes the show as provocative, edgy and compelling. The American Family Association describes it as anti-Christian - another cog in the wheel of their perceived war on Christianity.

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According to the AFA website, Webster is a drug-addicted Episcopal priest whose wife depends heavily on midday martinis and who regularly sees and talks with a very unconventional white-robed, bearded Jesus, They go on to describe Webster's family as including a 23-year-old homosexual Republican son, a 16year-old daughter who is a drug dealer, and a 16year-old adopted son who is having sex with "the

In their usual myopic style, they forget to tell you the greyer areas of the story line: that the gay son is grappling with the loss of his twin brother and hasn't conveyed a political affiliation yet, only that he doesn't want to be a "gay poster child." That the daughter got busted for selling pot to finance the publication of a comic book and has promised not to do it again. And that the adopted son isn't sleeping with the bishop's daughter, he's actually in love with the daughter of one of the church elders.

But beyond these little inaccuracies, the AFA has asked its members to use this information and call the NBC affiliates in their area with a message to cull the program from its broadcast roster. Additionally, AFA members are asked to call the program's advertisers and tell them to yank their advertising. While the AFA hasn't come out with a full-fledged boycott, it is once again using heavy-handed tactics to try and erase the lesbian and gay community from our culture and society - not to mention keep folks from seeing a complex portrayal of a Christian minister.

Let's not forget, these are the same people who boycotted Disney because the company provides domestic partner benefits and sponsors Gay Days at Disney and who recently targeted Ford because of its pro-gay philanthropy and marketing.

Like past actions, they weren't that successful this time around either. Less than a handful of stations capitulated. Almost all of them, not surprisingly, are in the Bible Belt.

WTWO in Terre Haute, Indiana, KARK in Little Rock, Arkansas and four stations in Kansas owned by Emmis Communications have pulled the show. In a statement, KARK defended pulling the show by saying, "As broadcasters using public airwaves and leaders in the community, we don't believe it's in the best interest of our community to air a program that a large number of our viewers find deeply offensive." Considering that WB42, the WB affiliate in the Little Rock market, decided to air the show and has since been besieged with threats, KARK unfortunately may be right about their viewers.

Juxtapose KARK's statement with the response from Jeff Lee, the General Manager of WBIR in Knoxville, Tennessee, which did air the show. "We at WBIR find ourselves in a no-win situation. Regardless of our decision, some of our viewers will be upset. We don't like upsetting even one viewer. The Book of Daniel is a TV program - that's all. We think you should make up your own mind as to whether or not to watch any TV program."

WIS in Columbia, South Carolina came to a similar conclusion. Mel Stebbins, the Senior VP and General Manager said, "We believe we have a greater responsibility to air the program to viewers who are interested in seeing it than we have to those who want us to censor content they find objectionable."

While the AFA attempts to claim victory, the hundreds of affiliates across the country that did air The Book of Daniel far outweigh the few that did not. They, like Lee and Stebbins, recognize it is just a TV show, and we're old enough to decide what we do and don't want to watch. Besides, the book that really matters is the one titled Neilsen Ratings. That will decide the real future of The Book of Daniel. ▼

Libby Post is the founder of OutMarketing.biz, president emeritus of the Capital District Gay and Lesbian Community Council, and founding chair of the Empire State Pride Agenda. Her commentaries can be heard Thursdays on WAMC public radio in Albany.