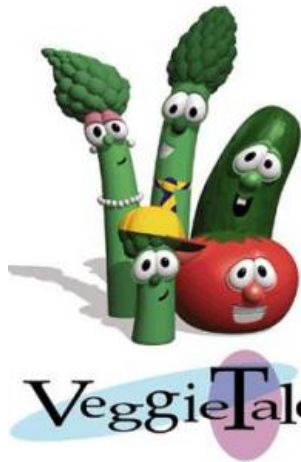


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## Bob the Tomato Gets Censored

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NBC has bought the rights to the VeggieTales series, but the distinctive content of the popular cartoon phenomenon is being removed by orders of the network's program standards officials.

Bob the Tomato's signature sign-off line, "God made you special and he loves you very much," was replaced with "Thanks for coming over to my house, kids. See you next week."

According to *The Los Angeles Times*, the network first claimed that the cuts were due to time constraints:

*After first blaming time constraints as the reason certain references to God were cut from a popular children's television series, NBC on Friday acknowledged that the edits were made because the network did not want to appear to be advocating any religion. The new statement came in the wake of mounting criticism from advocacy groups that questioned why NBC had asked the creators of "VeggieTales" to take out the references.*

*"NBC is committed to the positive messages and universal values of 'VeggieTales,' " the statement said. "Our goal is to reach as broad an audience as possible with these positive messages, while being careful not to advocate any one religious point of view."*

In other words, the use of language as generalized as "God made you special and he loves you very much" supposedly "represents any one religious point of view."

Is NBC seriously concerned that any significant percentage of the nation's parents believe that God did *not* make their children special? Do they not want their children told that God loves them very much? Just what "one religious point of view" does this represent?

In reality, this represents the fear among the media elite that any reference to God will transform them into religious broadcasters. That frightening thought led an NBC executive, Alan Wurtzel, to tell *The New York Times*, "We are not a religious broadcaster." Who knew?

As the paper reported:

*Mr. Wurtzel said NBC did not believe it had deleted the show's religious message; he said the network had bought the rights to "Veggie Tales" because of its positive religious themes but that it did ask for changes to comply with its standards.*

*"We are not a religious broadcaster," he said. "There are universally accepted religious values that we do think are appropriate," but the promotion of "any particular religion or a particular denomination" is not allowed.*

*"Clearly the show has religious themes," Mr. Wurtzel said. "It puts forth some very specific religious values. We had to make a decision about where it went further than we considered appropriate."*

Again — what “particular religion” or “particular denomination” is being advocated here?

One of the creators of the series balked at the cuts. From *The Los Angeles Times*:

*But “VeggieTales” creator Phil Vischer said he feared that it would be difficult to make the series as secular as the network wanted it to be. Vischer said the editing was more extensive than expected, requiring the show’s producers to take out certain episodes’ references to God, such as “Remember kids, God made you special and he loves you very much.” “We have some stories that work fine but not 13 shows in a season,” he said. “When the first edit notes came back, I thought, ‘This is going to be difficult because the stories were going to fall apart.’ This has implications for ‘VeggieTales’ which would have been nice to talk about in the beginning.” Vischer said trying to change the show’s Christian message ran counter to the show’s expressed mission. “It’s a mistake to pitch ‘VeggieTales’ as just values because fundamentally it’s about God,” said Vischer, noting that the show was slated to fit into the network’s “literacy and values” time slot. “It’s nothing against NBC. It’s just that they want to please everyone.”*

Well, with major news coverage in the nation’s leading newspapers, NBC clearly isn’t pleasing everyone. The VeggieTales certainly do not represent a cartoon catechism of the Christian faith. The censoring of Bob the Tomato is an indication that “God” may well be the most controversial word spoken on television.

Sorry about that Bob. NBC fears that Bob the Tomato is a zealot — a clever televangelist seducing children with his radical theology of God’s love — and with his theology made less threatening by his vegetable charm. Larry the Cucumber was evidently unavailable for comment.

Many news sources contrasted the decision about VeggieTales with the network’s decision to run a special starring notorious pop star Madonna — a special that may feature her in a mock crucifixion scene. Is NBC willing to offend millions of Christians with a mockery of the cross? Stay tuned.

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