

AGENCYSPY

OpEd: CBS Made a Bad Decision Running the Focus on the Family Ad

By Matt Van Hoven on Feb 07, 2010 12:51 PM

We asked a number of people a bunch of questions about the Super Bowl. Here's [John Maxham](#), [ECD](#), [Cofe & Weber United](#).

There's been a lot of controversy surrounding University of Florida quarterback **Tim Tebow's** upcoming Super Bowl spot, purportedly carrying a pro-life message. Many people are just fine with CBS's decision to allow Tebow's message on air, invoking reasons of free speech, etc.

Here is why I think it's a bad idea.

As an American tradition, the Super Bowl has always served as a great unifier. It's a few hours in which folks from different walks of life, income groups and political persuasions can put aside their differences and come together over chips and beer to watch grown men pounding the bejeebers out of each other on the field. Afterward, of course, we're free to go back to our disagreements and worldly concerns. But for one Sunday afternoon/evening, it's an oasis from the discord of modern life.

For a nation that is perpetually divided on so many issues, I think there's a societal value in that.

For me, the issue has never been about free speech. Of course Tim Tebow has the right to express his views on abortion. But, as a private company, CBS also has the right to screen out messages that could alienate large segments of its audience. Clearly, they don't think that risk is very high in this instance. I'm not sure I agree.

There is no doubt that advocacy groups are knocking on the doors of media outlets with larger and larger sums of money. This might be a tempting prospect to broadcasters in a down economy where traditional advertisers have been scaling back. The question is whether allowing them in represents a smart business decision during a media event like the Super Bowl, where the goal is to appeal to the broadest audience possible.

To be clear, I'm not on the same political page as Tim Tebow. And perhaps some would contend that fact clouds my judgment on this issue. But I can honestly say, if CBS were giving a pro-choice group equal time, I'd still cringe at the prospect. My concern is that once this line is crossed, more and more political and special interest groups will see the Super Bowl as a new form of bully pulpit from which to vent their various agendas.

Advocacy certainly has a place in the American media landscape. But I liked my Super Bowl the way it was - free from the political claptrap and where the most controversial thing was a bad call or a wayward nipple at the half time show.