

FAITH IN YOUR WALLET

Is it a gift, is it a tithe or is it an indulgence being sold?

The way in which some American religious TV stations have asked for money has caused many people not to wish to see these tele-evangelists on British TV. Many Christians would agree.

Unfortunately the current British ban on any fund raising by religious organisations, including responsible fund raising, on our television channels has had some unforeseen consequences. It could be the case that unless there is a change in the regulation in the UK that we could well find that there is no Christian TV broadcasting industry in this country.

Ofcom (Office of Communications) is looking at how broadcasting is going to be regulated in the future and asked for the views of Christian and other organisations on whether it is right for religious programmes and/or services to appeal for funds on-air.

The **Christian Broadcasting Council (CBC)** has said that it believes that Christian and religious broadcasters, including any ministries appearing on the radio station or TV channel, should have right to appeal for funds in a responsible manner. They underlined the word responsible.

Some overseas religious broadcasters have played upon the susceptibilities of the vulnerable, in ways that are very similar to 'the selling of indulgences' in the Middle Ages. For instance there must be no indication that by a ministry or broadcaster offering their financial supporters an 'Access to Heaven' credit card that ownership of such a card guarantees access to eternity on the Day of Judgement. By way of historical and biblical support for this assertion Martin Luther condemned such practices and Jesus quoted from the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Jeremiah saying, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "* Matthew 21:13 (New King James Version)

Already radio stations like **Premier Christian Radio**, which have not been banned under the current codes, have shown the way forward with responsibly worded appeals for funds.

Due to the historic restriction on religious TV broadcasters appealing for funds some channels have departed the UK and now up-link from other countries in order to raise funds. Most viewers do not understand the difference in the current regulation between Israel, Spain and the UK that bans UK-based **Revelation TV** for asking for funds in a responsible way while channels such as **God TV, TBN and Wonderful TV** are able to ask for funds only because they up-link to satellites from countries outside the UK.

Ofcom proposed various options in their document called "Consultation on the proposed Ofcom Broadcasting Code" regarding TV stations appealing for funds. All of them would disadvantage UK-based satellite TV religious channels to different degrees compared to the continental up-linked channels. Ofcom has a role in supporting an environment that encourages a wide variety of UK-based broadcasters, including Christian and religious channels, and therefore CBC has proposed an Option Four or the CBC Option.

This CBC Option would remove the prohibition on appealing for funds on all specialist religious services such as **Revelation TV, UCB TV** and the **Vision Channel** while maintaining the restriction on appealing for funds for individual programmes on mainstream channels like **ITV1** until after 31st December 2012. The reason for choosing the end of 2012 is that Ofcom has chosen that date as the date when all analogue TV transmissions will be switched off. From that date onwards TV channels will only be able to be received via digital means – cable, Freeview or satellite – therefore not giving undue advantage to the five main TV channels.

This CBC Option would enable the financial health of UK-based Christian and religious broadcasters to reach a situation whereby they are not disadvantaged compared to channels up-linking from overseas. It has been suggested that there may well be a case for Ofcom to

influence future trans-European TV regulation, known as **TWF** (Television Without Frontiers) Directives, so that responsible fund raising becomes the norm across the area of the footprints of European-based satellites.

The ability to raise funds on-air is vitally important for Christian broadcasters. Christians, both individuals and organisations, commonly support many Christian projects, churches and charities by giving donations by a gift or a regular tithe.

CBC has suggested to Ofcom that any satellite broadcasters subscribing to the UK Broadcasting Code should be able to say that they are conforming to the Ofcom Broadcasting Codes, and possibly the CBC Code of Ethics, as a 'stamp of approval'. This would help viewers differentiate the responsible Christian and religious broadcasters, some of whom have UK offices yet up-link outside the UK, from those TV channels that are up-linking from other countries where such regulation is not practised.

Let us pray that the day will come when Christian broadcasting will really flourish financially in this country so that the Christian radio stations and TV channels will be able to produce even more positive and uplifting programmes that can bless those that see and hear them.