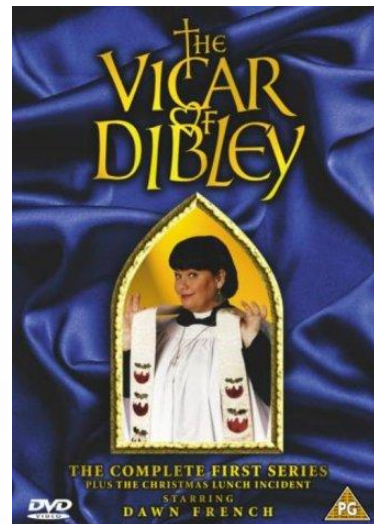




Religion and TV



The Media

A medium is a way of communication, media is the plural. Mass media includes any way of communicating with large numbers of people. Mass media includes newspapers, radio, television, film and the internet. The media is very influential - we need always to ask what sort of information is being shared, can we trust it, and what angle does its originator take.

A target audience is the specified audience or a demographic group for which a particular subject is aimed at. You need a target audience because when you're making a difficult point it would be no use talking to a child you would obviously be trying to make your point to older people who will understand you, so you need to know who you are trying to get through to whether its children or older people and when you've figured that out then you can decide what type of language you're going to use and what you're going to say. You also need to talk about things that your target audience is familiar with because it would be no good talking to a pop star in conservative jargon so this. So having a target audience helps you to aim your points at the right kinds of people.

Religious Broadcasting

Broadcasting began in the 1920's, with the formation of the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927. The first programmes were broadcast on radio (known as "wireless") and were broadcast live. A Scot - Lord Reith - was controller. He was a serious Christian and banned programmes during "Church hours". This was so people would not stay at home to listen to the radio rather than attending church!

In the UK TV broadcasting was mostly Christian in character until the 1980s when it was more recognised that Christianity was no longer as active as it had been since broadcasting began in the UK.

Now TV tries to aim at anyone who is interested in religion, even if they do not practice. Religious programmes are normally in the 'God slot' - a particular time on a Sunday (Usually in the morning and early evening) when there are religious programmes. The 'God Slot' is the colloquial term used to describe religious broadcasting. British broadcasting is prohibited from proseletysing (evangelism

or trying to "convert" people). However, there are many channels, particularly in the USA, which are run by Christian churches to "spread the word."

As the service developed, the use of the "God slot" - the time when people would be in church - had to be decided. Initially, a Morning Service was broadcast, and *Songs of Praise* was first broadcast in the evening in October 1961. (*Songs of Praise* still has an audience of over 4 million).

Today the BBC broadcasts a wide range of religious programmes. Magazine programmes and debates on ethical issues have also been introduced, as have cartoon programmes for children.

On radio the Asian Network and the World Service broadcast programmes concerning all world faiths, and UK radio. TV programmes include *The Big Questions* on Sunday mornings - Nicky Campbell and Sonia Deol host this series of moral, ethical and religious debates on topical issues - and 'Songs of Praise' late afternoon on Sundays.

The Sunday evening 'God slot' is still alive on the BBC who maintain *Songs of Praise*...but the God Slot disappeared on ITV in favour of Sunday evening dramas like *Heartbeat* (which replaced *HIGHWAY*, a Christian travelog programme). This disappearance on of religious broadcasts at such a traditionally exclusive time has drawn many to make conclusions about society, religious behaviour or about the demands of advertisers (who fund channels like ITV).

The BBC because of the way it is funded at present (by TV License) has to serve the public so the BBC is a good gauge of how popular such programmes are. If there was no demand, no programmes would be made and so there must be a need/desire for such programmes in what many would call a secular (i.e. non-religious) society. The cost of broadcasting prohibits people making religious programmes that will not be seen...

What's your experience of Religion on TV?

Who do you think is interested in such programmes?

Why do you think ITV dropped the 'God Slot'?

SONGS OF PRAISE

Although you may not watch this programme, it maintains its popularity especially amongst people who are not able to get to a religious service (conclusions may be drawn here about the age range of the audience for *Songs of Praise* being on the older scale..!) and has about 4 - 7 million regular viewers. SONGS OF PRAISE itself tends to follow the travelog model - a location in the UK is visited and a local church houses hymns, prayers and readings. Interviews with local Christians feature as well as interviews with or songs from a locally-grown celebrity. The programme changes from this standard format at times, for example at Easter and Christmas and other national days of importance.



To what target audience is SONGS OF PRAISE directed? What's your evidence?

Songs of Praise is a BBC television programme based around traditional Christian hymns. With an average of 4 million viewers weekly it is believed to be the most-watched and one of the longest running religious television programmes in the world. It is also one of the two peak-time free-to-air religious programmes in Europe (with its Dutch equivalent, *Nederland Zingt*, broadcast by the EO)[1] (Its ITV peak-time equivalent, 'Highway', was dropped in the early 1990s).

It is usually broadcast on Sunday early evenings, and it usually includes congregations from various churches and cathedrals singing famous hymns whilst the presenter explores that week's theme.

While focusing on hymns, in recent years the shows have become more diverse in its content, typically with a different theme for each show. It has also had special programmes celebrating the lives of famous British Christians, including the late Dame Thora Hird and Sir Harry Secombe.

Outside the United Kingdom, *Songs of Praise* is regularly shown in the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Canada and South Africa.

The first show was broadcast in October 1961 from the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Cardiff, and is now one of the longest-running TV shows in the world. The programme was the idea of the then Assistant Controller of Programmes at the BBC, Donald Baverstock. During its history, *Songs of Praise* has visited over 1,800 churches, cathedrals and chapels, singing over 12,500 hymns.

It has had many different guest presenters over the years including Sir Cliff Richard, Alan Titchmarsh and Toyah Willcox. However the current main presenters are Pam Rhodes, Sally Magnusson, Diane-Louise Jordan, Aled Jones, Eamonn Holmes and Gavin Peacock.

A number of famous people have been interviewed on the show, including Pope John Paul II, Tony Blair, Frances Shand Kydd, Alan Ayckbourn and members of the British Royal Family.

The show also appeared as a feature within an episode of the BBC comedy television series *The Vicar of Dibley*.

The programme staged its largest event on the first Sunday of the New Millennium at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. A live audience of over 60,000 people came to sing hymns, with a 6,000 piece choir, an orchestra of 100 harps, the band of the Welsh Guards and an anthem special written by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Today, *Songs of Praise* still continues, and has developed to reflect a much broader impression of Christianity, as do Church services for special occasions - e.g. Christmas, Harvest.

Reasons for the continuing popularity of *Songs of Praise* are:

- It has moved with the times to include different approaches to Christian music
- interviews with people for whom faith is important
- groups like the deaf and children,
- support for various initiatives such as school choirs and the opening of the Millennium Stadium
- Broadening its locations beyond the UK
- It is broadcast at a peak 'family time'
- It offers an opportunity for those who are housebound to join in Christian worship at home
- It provides a 'comfort blanket' for those who do not go to Church but still consider themselves Christian

Documentaries

Religious documentaries are also popular religious programmes because they deal with issues of interest to many people. *Everyman* a documentary on the BBC dealt with moral and religious issues. *Witness* is a Channel 4 documentary that looks at people who are searching for 'truth' across the religious spectrum. The main channels often program religious documentary series around festivals like Easter (e.g. Rageh Omar's *MIRACLES OF JESUS* series.)

Since early T.V. viewers in Britain were mainly Christian, how does broadcasting reflect this?

Broadcasting reflects this by screening mostly Christian programmes. You never see programmes in other languages and on Sunday church services are shown and religious programmes related to Christianity are shown, but there are no programmes shown that concern Sikhism or Hinduism or any other religion. Britain is a multi cultural place and there are many different religions and teachings practiced here but none of these are supported by TV programmes this is because when TV viewing began there were mainly Christians in Britain and there weren't any other religions around so **most** TV programmes are in English and are to do with Christians.

Nowadays society is a multi-ethnic mix. How has the media responded to this challenge?

The media has responded to this by allowing people from different religions to participate in TV programmes. They have also started to show programmes associated with other religions and they have started to show programs related to festivals and beliefs of other religions. All satellite services have channels dedicated entirely to Asians. Some programs that before only contained Christians have allowed people from other religions to participate in them for example *Emmerdale* are introducing a new Asian family. There are also programmes like *Goodness Gracious me* and *The Kumars at number 42* that contain people from other religions. By doing all of these things they have shown that people from other religions have got more relevance in today's society.

Do not assume that if religious broadcasting is not mainstream that it is not there. On BBC Radio 4 there is a Christian service daily and the internet has seen the increase in accessibility to radio and TV broadcasts that serve all the main faiths in the UK.

Satellite and Cable channels also serve religious communities and can be accessed 24 hours a day by people who sign up for them.

There are a few programmes on mainstream TV aimed at committed religious people but many are just magazine type programmes or documentaries (for example *The Big Questions*). Religious broadcasters have to make programmes that appeal to a lot of people as they have audience targets they have to meet.

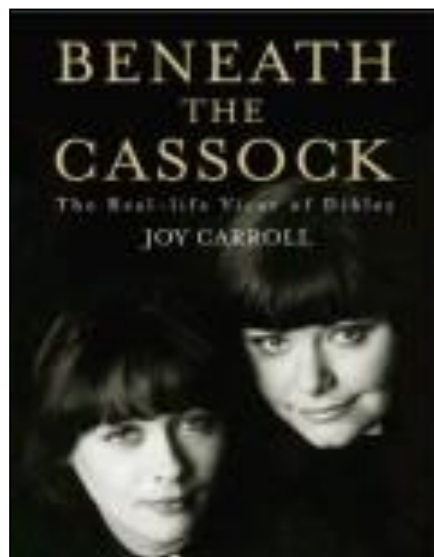
What do you think the future holds for religious broadcasts?

Why are many people interested in specifically religious broadcasts? *[NB don't dismiss such people...there are millions of them!]*

A specifically religious theme or themes of importance to Christians as explored in religion specific programming in non-religion-specific broadcasts. Students will be required to understand why the theme is important, how it was dealt with, whether the treatment was fair to religious people, and how the treatment of the theme could have been improved.]

THE VICAR OF DIBLEY (TV Drama)

This TV comedy drama is unusual in that it started by reflecting a religious problem and has had a huge influence on its' development in the public mind.



Richard Curtis, the writer of *The Vicar of Dibley* (as well as hits such as *Blackadder*, *4 Weddings and a Funeral*, *Love Actually* etc) based his research on Joy Carroll, who was among the first women to be ordained as Vicars in the Church of England.

The issue of women priests is still controversial. Many Christians from all denominations (including many women) say that women should not become ministers as the Bible specifically says that women should not be allowed to teach in Church. However many others say that times have changed and that women should be allowed to play a part in the life of the Christian church. Many women who became ordained after 1994 found themselves in the face of

opposition, criticism, sexism and ridicule, and it is this that forms the basis of the VICAR OF DIBLEY's early episodes.

The series became such a success that women vicars, rather than being the focus of controversy have had their cause championed by a popular actress and author - so the issue has become less controversial - reflected in the fact that later episodes have more to do with *Geraldine Grainger's* relationships and adventures rather than her status as a female priest.

Richard Curtis has also been able to use the series as a vehicle for his beloved campaign, *Make Poverty History*.

The series has from the beginning used comedy to confront issues like the status of women and poverty - why does it work?

What might some people find offensive about the series? Can comedy and religion mix?

The writer is obviously promoting women priests as a 'good thing'...is it right that programmes should be **biased** in this way?

The character *Geraldine* is very irreverent in her attitude towards God/religion/her position as vicar -can you see any problems there?

What happened next? Sunday 1 February 2004

Name: Angela Berners-Wilson

Date: 12 March 1994

Place: Bristol

Facts: After 16 years campaigning for the Church of England to allow women to become priests, Angela Berners-Wilson was technically the first woman to be ordained.

There were lots of things that came together to turn the tide. A lot of women felt the calling to become a priest, there were women ordained in other countries and the opposition began to gradually fall away. It still existed, though, and varied from the traditionalist point of view that a woman couldn't represent Christ at the altar, as Jesus was a man, to the fundamentalists who thought a woman shouldn't stand in authority over men. To the first I would say that there has only ever been one Christ, no priest is actually trying to be Christ; to the second I would say we are all - whether male or female - under God's authority. Look at how Jesus himself treated women. He was revolutionary for his time. Women were among some of his closest friends.

In Jewish law, to touch a woman who is menstruating is a complete taboo; but Jesus allowed a woman who issued blood for 12 years to touch him, and healed her.

The 1992 General Synod passed legislation by the necessary two thirds that allowed women to be ordained as priests. Some Anglican priests left - 'went to Rome' - while other Roman Catholics came over to us. The ordination ceremony itself will always stick in my mind as a real turning point in the history of the Church of England.

Vicar of Dibley effect: more women than men ordained

The Guardian, Wednesday 14 November 2007

More women than men were ordained as clergy in the Church of England last year for the first time since the introduction of women priests in 1994. Church statistics showed that 244 of the 478 clergy ordained in 2006 were women and 234 men.

A Church of England spokesman said a possible reason for the rise was the continued popularity of the BBC programme *The Vicar of Dibley*, starring Dawn French, which could have encouraged women who "already had a sense of calling". The church has 1,507 paid full-time female clergy but chaplains, such as those in universities or hospitals, are not included in this figure and neither are retired clergy.

Women and the Church, a group campaigning for equal opportunities in the church, welcomed the statistics but said that female clergy risked hitting a "stained-glass ceiling". While women can be ordained as priests, canon law bars them from the higher office of bishop and the Church of England is exempt from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

Christina Rees, who chairs the group, said: "There are still people who don't want women in the church and they're making demands so they don't have to experience women as bishops.

"There are women who feel frustrated. They feel they are unable to progress because of this law and these attitudes but they have no legal recourse. They will not speak out, either, because it is counter-cultural. But some people will be forced to go down the human rights line." She said the lack of women in "senior leadership" roles sent a negative message to congregations. "In July 2006 the General Synod said that, in principle, it was a good idea to have women bishops. If you say something is a good idea, and there is a will for it to go ahead, but you're not doing something, then I would have to question your integrity."

Separate statistics from the church showed that regular Sunday attendance fell by 2% to 988,000 last year, while weekly and monthly attendance fell by 1% or less to 1,169,000. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day attendance increased by 7%, to 2,786,200.

Religious and moral issues in soaps.

A Religious issue - related to the answers religion offers to the meaning of life and its challenges - e.g. issues such as Women Priests/beliefs and practices.

A Moral issue - an issue concerned with what is right or wrong - e.g. Issues such as Abortion/Euthanasia, Poverty, Political decisions about War etc.

How TV soap operas deal with religious and moral issues of importance to Christians, including an in-depth study of ONE religious or moral issue that has been dealt with.

A **soap opera**, sometimes called "**soap**" for short, is an ongoing, episodic work of dramatic fiction presented in serial format on television or radio. Programs described as soap operas have existed as an entertainment long enough for audiences to recognize them simply by the term **soap**. The name "soap opera" stems from the original dramatic serials broadcast on radio that had soap manufacturers such as Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive, and Lever Brothers as sponsors and producers. These early radio serials were broadcast in weekday daytime slots when mostly housewives would be available to listen; thus the shows were aimed at and consumed by a predominantly female audience.^[1]

The term soap opera has at times been generally applied to any romantic serial but it is also used to describe the more naturalistic, unglamorous UK primetime drama serials such as *Coronation Street*.^[1] What differentiates a soap from other television drama programs is the open-ended nature of the narrative with stories spanning several episodes. The defining feature that makes a program a soap opera, according to Albert Moran, is "that form of television that works with a continuous open narrative. Each episode ends with a promise that the storyline is to be continued in another episode".^[1]

Soap opera stories run concurrently, intersect and lead into further developments. An individual episode of a soap opera will generally switch between several different concurrent story threads that may at times interconnect and affect one another or may run entirely independent of each other. Each episode may feature some of the show's current storylines but not always all of them. There is some rotation of both storylines and actors so any given storyline or actor will appear in some but usually not all of a week's worth

of episodes. Soap operas rarely "wrap things up" storywise and generally avoid bringing all the current storylines to a conclusion at the same time. When one storyline ends there are always several other story threads at differing stages of development. Soap opera episodes typically end on some sort of cliffhanger.

The soap operas began in the early 1930s with 15 minute radio episodes and was inherited by television in the early 1950s and expanded to 30 mins. By the mid 1950s soap operas dominated late morning and early afternoon weekend television programming.



Most soaps in the States during the 50s were about middle-class families living in small towns - good always triumphed. By the 1970s soap operas had reached this country and the style and content had undergone a revolution. There was open discussion about abortion, drug abuse, wife abuse etc. Characters of various racial and ethnic backgrounds were introduced to a previous all-white Anglo-Saxon population.

The traditional emphasis on romantic and marital problems remained, but promiscuous behaviour, violence and criminal activity came to be treated more directly. Soap operas on British TV today are the most watched programmes on TV, attracting audiences of 17 million. They are broadcast at peak viewing times and have huge appeal to all ages, sexes and religions.



List 3 further key points about Soap Operas below:

-
-
-

Emmerdale

- The village vicar, Ashley is heavily involved in life in the community. He tells off the members of the community who are competing with each other and being unpleasant at the village jumble sale.
- When the villagers are in trouble (Diane and Jack facing separation, the Dingles facing up to the death of their son, Butch, the community fighting for justice after a lorry runs out of control and crashes into the village bus) he is always involved.

In an exam you may mention any TV soap - as long as the issue is a moral or religious one & not just the usual relationship/jealousy/conflict stuff!

As a class try brainstorming as many **religious/moral** issues in soaps as possible!

Religious and
Moral issues in
Soaps.

Euthanasia in Eastenders

A very frail Ethel Skinner returned to EASTENDERS' Albert Square in 2000, turning up unannounced at Pauline Fowler's house. Ethel had run away from her retirement village and had decided that she was going to come back to the square, to live in the place she loved with her old friends. Ethel was now restricted to a wheelchair and it was left to Dot to cater for her every need, which often left her exhausted. Ethel appeared to have lost none of her zest for life, despite her considerable age, so it was a huge shock to Dot when Ethel revealed that she was suffering from terminal cancer and was not going to live much longer.



Ethel revealed that she had come home to the square to die, but instead of waiting to die in agony, she wanted to choose her final moments so she could die with dignity. She had been storing her morphine tablets for many weeks and it was her plan to take an overdose before the pain became too unbearable, but before being able to execute her plan she had already become too weak and was now unable to administer the drugs without Dot's assistance. Dot was devastated and initially refused to help Ethel, as to help another take their own life went completely against her strict Christian principles. Dot spent many agonising weeks wrestling with her conscience, but she eventually agreed to grant her old friend's final wish. On the night of her 85th birthday (it was

actually her 86th, but she'd always lied about her age), after a celebratory party at The Vic, Ethel decided that this was to be her last night. After blowing out the candles of her birthday cake and bidding Dot an emotional farewell, Ethel took her pills, aided by Dot, and died peacefully in her sleep. Ethel's last appearance was in September 2000. The programme subsequently showed Dot dealing with the consequences of her actions.

How do you think the programme makers dealt with such a sensitive topic?

What are the dangers of dealing with this sort of subject?

Who is likely to be offended/upset? Why?

Is this a religious or moral issue? Why?

Look out for the religious/moral terminology highlighted below and make notes on the context in which they are used as you watch...

**Watch the clip from
Coronation Street**



rebirth

faith

creationism

Spiritual sustenance

tokenism

Baptism

Science and religion

indoctrination

Supernatural being

commitment

After watching the episode of *Coronation Street*, answer these questions...

1. Identify 2 **religious themes** in the episode of *Coronation Street*.
2. Explain why these are religious issues and what Christian believers would say about them?
3. Identify 2 **Moral issues** in the episode. Explain why these are moral issues
4. Why do you think the soap dealt with these issues?
5. In what other ways could the issue have been dealt with?
6. How would you have dealt with this issue and why?

List all the Soaps that you have heard of.

**Article on the Asian tsunami for the Sunday Telegraph -
printed 2 January 2005**

The photographs that stay with us, haunt us, are always those of particular faces: one mother's grief, one child's nightmare bewilderment and loneliness. Last week, we learned in Canterbury of the death in the Asian disaster of a 14-year old from the King's School, with her mother and grandmother. And because of that, people here experienced what had happened in a different way. The number of deaths horrifies us - but what most painfully reaches our feelings is the individual face of loss and terror.

In 1966, when the Aberfan disaster struck, I was a sixth former beginning to think about studying theology at university. I remember watching a television discussion about God and suffering that weekend - with disbelief and astonishment at the vacuous words pouring out about the nature of God's power or control, or about the consolations of belief in an afterlife or whatever. The only words that made any sense came from the then Archbishop of Wales, in a broadcast on Welsh television. What he said was roughly this: "I can only dare to speak about this because I once lost a child. I have nothing to say that will make sense of this horror today. All I know is that the words in my Bible about God's promise to be alongside us have never lost their meaning for me. And now we have to work in God's name for the future."

He was speaking from the experience of losing one child; but he was able to speak about a much greater tragedy simply because of that, not because of having a better explanatory theory. "Making sense" of a great disaster will always be a challenge simply because those who are closest to the cost are the ones least likely to accept some sort of intellectual explanation, however polished. Why should they?

Every single random, accidental death is something that should upset a faith bound up with comfort and ready answers. Faced with the paralysing magnitude of a disaster like this, we naturally feel more

deeply outraged - and also more deeply helpless. We can't see how this is going to be dealt with, we can't see how to make it better. We know, with a rather sick feeling, that we shall have to go on facing it and we can't make it go away or make ourselves feel good.

The question: "How can you believe in a God who permits suffering on this scale?" is therefore very much around at the moment, and it would be surprising if it weren't - indeed, it would be wrong if it weren't. The traditional answers will get us only so far. God, we are told, is not a puppet-master in regard either to human actions or to the processes of the world. If we are to exist in an environment where we can live lives of productive work and consistent understanding - human lives as we know them - the world has to have a regular order and pattern of its own. Effects follow causes in a way that we can chart, and so can make some attempt at coping with. So there is something odd about expecting that God will constantly step in if things are getting dangerous. How dangerous do they have to be? How many deaths would be acceptable?

So why do religious believers pray for God's help or healing? They ask for God's action to come in to a situation and change it, yes; but if they are honest, they don't see prayer as a plea for magical solutions that will make the world totally safe for them and others.

All this is fair enough, perhaps true as far as it goes. But it doesn't go very far in helping us, one week on, with the intolerable grief and devastation in front of us. If some religious genius did come up with an explanation of exactly why all these deaths made sense, would we feel happier or safer or more confident in God? Wouldn't we feel something of a chill at the prospect of a God who deliberately plans a programme that involves a certain level of casualties?

The extraordinary fact is that belief has survived such tests again and again - not because it comforts or explains but because believers cannot deny what has been shown or given to them. They have learned to see the world and life in the world as a freely given

gift; they have learned to be open to a calling or invitation from outside their own resources, a calling to accept God's mercy for themselves and make it real for others; they have learned that there is some reality to which they can only relate in amazement and silence. These convictions are terribly assaulted by all those other facts of human experience that seem to point to a completely arbitrary world, but people still feel bound to them, not for comfort or ease, but because they have imposed themselves on the shape of a life and the habits of a heart.

Most importantly in this connection, religious people have learned to look at other human faces with something of the amazement and silence that God himself draws out of them. They see the immeasurable value, the preciousness, of each life. And here is one of the paradoxes. The very thing that lies closest to the heart of a religious way of life in the world, the passion about the value of each and every life, the passion that makes religious people so obstinate and inconvenient when society discusses abortion and euthanasia - this is also just what makes human disaster so appalling, so much of a challenge to the feelings. Sometimes a secular moralist may say in contemporary debates: "Nature is wasteful of life; we can't hold to absolute views of the value of every human organism." That is not an option for the believer. That is why for the believer the uniqueness of every sufferer in a disaster such as the present one is so especially harrowing. There are no "spare" lives.

That is also why the reaction of faith is or should be always one of passionate engagement with the lives that are left, a response that asks not for understanding but for ways of changing the situation in whatever - perhaps very small - ways that are open to us. The odd thing is that those who are most deeply involved - both as sufferers and as helpers - are so often the ones who spend least energy in raging over the lack of explanation. They are likely to shrug off, awkwardly and not very articulately, the great philosophical or religious questions we might want to press. Somehow, they are most aware of two things: a kind of strength and vision just to go on; and

a sense of the imperative for practical service and love. Somehow in all of this, God simply emerges for them as a faithful presence. Arguments "for and against" have to be put in the context of that awkward, stubborn persistence.

What can be said with authority about these terrible matters can finally be said only by those closest to the cost. The rest of us need to listen; and then to work and - as best we can manage it - pray.

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The church and its history - The problem of suffering

The starting point for the Christian understanding of suffering is the messianic self-understanding of Jesus himself. A temptation to power and self-exaltation lay in the late Jewish promise of the coming of the Messiah-Son of man. The Gospel According to Matthew described the temptation of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness as a temptation to worldly power. Jesus himself deeply disappointed his disciples' notions aiming at power and exaltation, in that he taught them, in accordance with Isaiah, chapter 53: "The Son of man will suffer many things." In Jesus' announcements of suffering the Christian understanding of suffering is clearly expressed: suffering is not the final aim and end in itself in the realization of human destiny; it is the gateway to resurrection, to rebirth, to new creation. This idea receives its clarification from the Christian understanding of sin. Sin as the misuse of human freedom has led humans into total opposition against God. Turning to God can therefore take place only when the results of this rebellion are overcome in all levels of human being, all the way to physical corporeality.

In the early church the sign of the cross was not considered a glorification of suffering but a "sign of victory" (*tropaion*) in the sense of the ancient triumphal sign that was set up at the place where the victorious turning point of the battle took place. The cross was likewise considered the "dread of the demons," since as a victory sign it struck terror into the hitherto ruling demonic powers of the world. An ancient church hymn of the cross spoke of the "cross of the beauty of the Kingdom of God." The emperor Constantine, following his vision of a cross in the heavens, fastened to the standards of the imperial legions the cross, which was considered the victory sign for the community of Christians hitherto persecuted by the Roman Empire, and elevated it to a token of military triumph over the legions of his pagan foes that were assembled under the sign of the old gods.

In the Christian understanding, suffering also does not appear as suffering simply under the general conditions of human existence in this world; it is instead coupled with the specifically Christian idea of the imitation of Christ. Individual Christians are called to follow the example of Christ; incorporation into the body of Christ is granted to those who are ready to carry out within themselves Christ's destiny of suffering, death, and resurrection. The early church's characterization of the Christian was that of *Christophoros*—"bearer of Christ." Suffering was an unalterable principle in the great drama of freedom, which was identical with the drama of redemption.

God is not indifferent to suffering - A Christian perspective

God chose to enter human history in the person of Jesus Christ. He was born in a feeding trough. At the age of one or two his parents took him to Egypt to escape King Herod's slaughter of all the small children in the area. He spent his early years in a foreign country. He grew up in obscurity, probably following his father's trade as a carpenter. He was poor, depending on the support of others for his public ministry.

The Bible teaches that within the Godhead there are three equal Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, commonly spoken of as the Trinity. Jesus, the Son, took on human nature in the womb of Mary.

Throughout his ministry he was accused of being a glutton, a madman, a drunkard, a deceiver, a demon or possessed of the devil, a friend of prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners. He was excommunicated from the synagogue and several times threatened with stoning.

Finally he was betrayed, deserted by his friends, suffered the worst kind of flogging, and was nailed publicly to a wooden cross. He is described in the Bible as "**a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering**" (Isaiah 53:3). If Jesus is God, as the New Testament declares, and Christians have always believed, then God knows all about suffering. As **Dorothy Sayers** wrote in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*:

"The God who gave us the dignity of freedom of choice, now takes upon himself the consequences for our wrong choices" *For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are - limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death - he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile.*

Yet the physical and mental suffering I have described pales into insignificance beside another kind of suffering that Jesus endured on the cross. The Bible says, "**Christ carried the burden of our sins**" (I John 2:2).

In some remarkable way, when Jesus hung on the cross he was taking on his own shoulders the consequences of the evil of the human race. This is the amazing centrepiece of the gospel story. The God who gave us the dignity of freedom of choice, now takes upon himself the consequences for our wrong choices. **"Christ died once for our sins. An innocent person died for those who are guilty. Christ did this to bring you to God"** (1 Peter 3:18). God suffered at the point of our greatest need. And that, for him, meant the greatest possible suffering.

Where true love exists, and where there is suffering, then love must suffer. American philosopher **Nicholas Wolterstorff**, who lost a son in a climbing accident, says in his book *Lament For a Son*:

God is love. That is why he suffers. To love our suffering world is to suffer... The one who does not see God's suffering does not see his love. So, suffering is down at the centre of things, deep down where the meaning is. Suffering is the meaning of our world. For love is meaning. And love suffers. The tears of God are the meaning of history.

The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word "love". For the Christian a true understanding of love must always begin at the cross of Jesus.

James Jones, in his very helpful book, "*Why Do People Suffer?*" tells the story of a school that collapsed, killing all the teachers and most of the children. A little boy, badly maimed, was rescued from the rubble and rushed to hospital. For hours a team of doctors and nurses fought to save his life while his mother waited anxiously outside the operating theatre. After seven hours of painstaking surgery the little boy died.

Instead of leaving it to the nurse to tell the mother, the surgeon went himself. As he broke the dreadful news the mother became hysterical in her grief and attacked the surgeon, pummeling his chest with her fists. But instead of pushing her away, the doctor held her to himself tightly until the woman's sobbing subsided and she rested cradled in his arms.

And then in the heavy silence the surgeon began to weep. Tears streamed down his face and grief racked his body. For he had come to the hospital the moment he heard that his one and only son had been killed in the same school.

"The tears of God are the meaning of history" We may feel angry with God at times. I somehow think he is big enough to take that. He understands. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16).

The influential **Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple**, once put it like this:

"There cannot be a God of love," people say, "because if there was, and he looked upon the world, his heart would break." The church points to the Cross and says, "It did break"

It is this understanding of the compassion of God that is so powerfully revealed to us in through the life of Jesus, particularly through his cross, that can transform our attitude to suffering. During the waning years of his life, **Malcolm Muggeridge** penned the following words: *Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at that time seemed especially desolating and painful. I now look back upon them with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through affliction and not through happiness whether pursued or attained. In other words, I say this, if it were possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo-jumbo, the results would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the cross signifies and it is the cross, more than anything else, which has called me inexorably to Christ.*

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the public demonstration that he had defeated the forces of evil and conquered death itself, the end result of evil. In so demonstrating his victory he pointed the way to the final victory, when both sin and suffering would be banished forever from his kingdom.*

"He didn't give us a placebo or a pill or good advice. He gave us himself" What I am saying here is that the answer to the problem of suffering is not an idea - it is a person. For the problem is about someone (God - why does he...? why doesn't he...?). We don't just ask the questions in a vacuum, but within a relationship, like a little child with tears in its eyes looking up at Daddy and weeping, "Why?" Or perhaps in anger, demanding an answer. God's answer is not just to give us words, but to give us Jesus.

As philosopher **Peter Kreeft** puts it in his excellent book, *Making Sense out of Suffering*:

He didn't give us a placebo or a pill or good advice. He gave us himself. He came. He entered space and time and suffering. He came, like a lover. Love seeks above all intimacy, presence, togetherness.

Kreeft continues:

Remove Jesus and the knowledge of God is questionable. If the knowledge of God is questionable, trusting this unknown God becomes questionable...Suffering is the evidence against God, the reason not to trust him. Jesus is the evidence for God, the reason to trust him.

The British philosopher **G. K. Chesterton** presented a powerful thought. He argued that, for the Christian, joy is the central feature of life and sorrow is peripheral, because in the gospel the fundamental questions of life are answered and it is the peripheral ones that are relatively unanswered. For the atheist, sorrow is central and joy peripheral, because only the peripheral questions have answers and the central ones remain unanswered.

It is significant that Jesus rose from the dead with a body that still bore the marks of his sufferings in his hands, his feet and his side. Throughout all eternity he will bear those scars. It is because of them that you and I may, if we choose, share that eternity with him as "co-heirs" of his glory (Romans 8:17).

Religious Broadcasting



Answer the following questions.

1. What is meant by a religious programme (broadcast) according to OFCOM?	2. What was the target audience for religious broadcasting when television began?
3. What must religious programmes not set out to do?	4. Why did ITV abandon the "God Slot"?
5. What is worship style programming?	6. What is informative religion specific broadcasting?
7. How is religion included in mainstream broadcasting?	8. How does BBC Religious Broadcasting try to show it is "Taking Belief Seriously"?

Worship and magazine type programmes

Name the worship/ magazine programme:

1. Write a summary of what was in the programme.	2. What is the target audience?
3. Why might people in the target audience enjoy the programme?	4. Why might some other viewers not enjoy it?



Worship and magazine type programmes

Name the worship/ magazine programme:

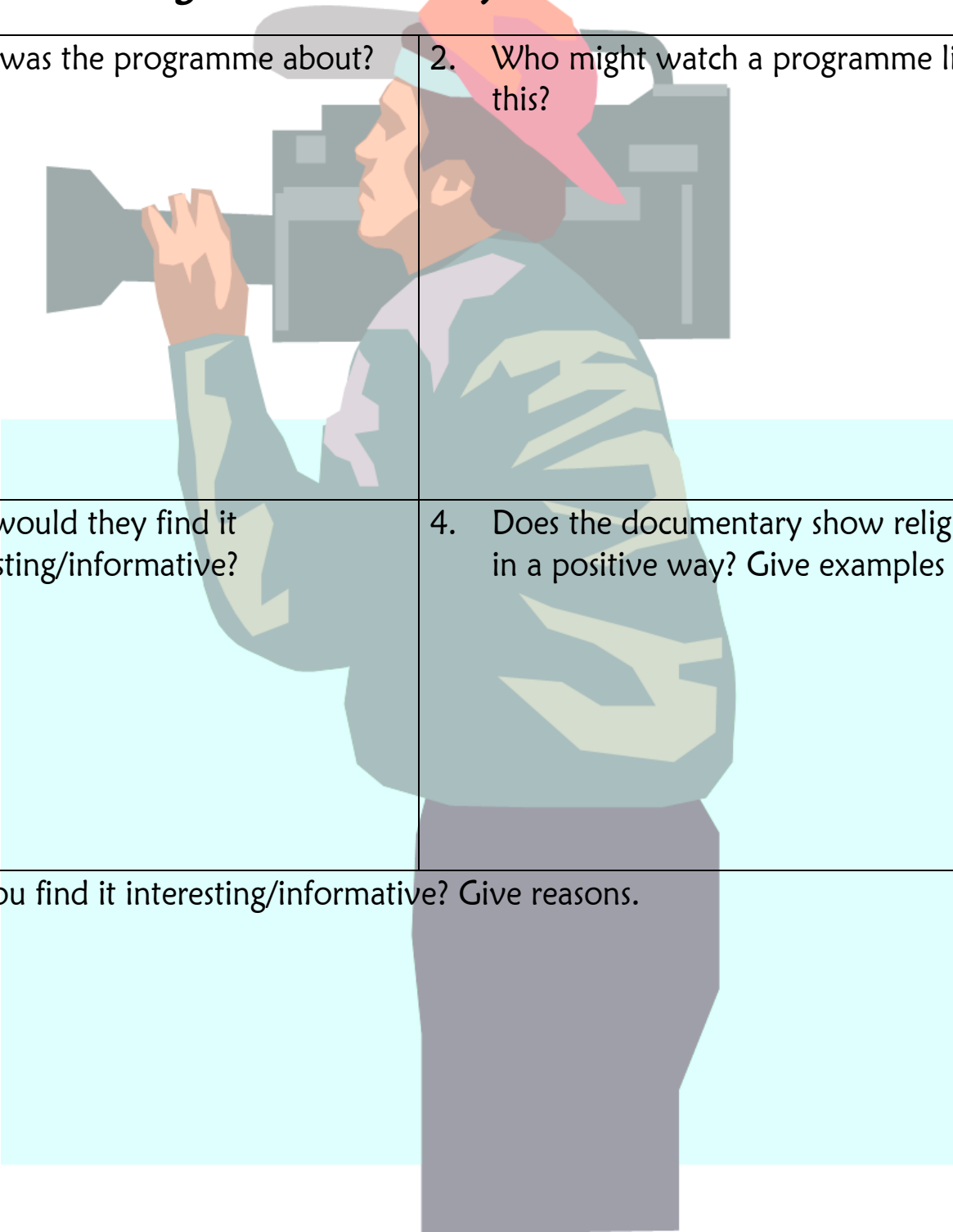
5. Write a summary of what was in the programme.	6. What is the target audience?
7. Why might people in the target audience enjoy the programme?	8. Why might some other viewers not enjoy it?



Religious Documentaries

Name the religious documentary:

1. What was the programme about?	2. Who might watch a programme like this?
3. Why would they find it interesting/informative?	4. Does the documentary show religion in a positive way? Give examples
5. Did you find it interesting/informative? Give reasons.	

A stylized illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a pink cap and a blue and green patterned jacket, holding a large professional video camera. The person is shown in profile, facing left. The background is a light blue gradient.

Religious Documentaries: Case Study

1. Documentary title	2. What were the religious theme(s)/ideas?
3. What are the interesting/good things about the programme?	4. What are the negative things about the programme?
5. Does the documentary show religion in a positive way? Give examples	

Soap Operas

Fill in this sheet using an episode of the soap opera you were asked to watch.

1. Name the soap opera and outline the religious/moral issues dealt with.

2. Explain how the religious/moral issues were dealt with.

3. Was it a good way of dealing with these issues? Give your reasons.



As you watch the series of short clips which focus on baby Daniel's death, fill in your responses to the questions below

Clip Number	Observations
Clip 1	
Clip 2	
Clip 3	
Clip 4	

As you watch the next series of short clips which focus on the aftermath of baby Daniel's death, fill in your responses to the questions below

<p>What are the differences in Laurel and Ashley's responses to the death of their son?</p>	
<p>What are the differences in Laurel and Ashley's attitudes to prayer?</p>	
<p>What ultimate questions are posed by these episodes?</p>	
<p>What does Sandy, Ashley's dad, say about faith? How does he suggest faith might help?</p>	

As you watch the next series of short clips which focus on baby Daniel's funeral, fill in your responses to the questions below

<p>What are the differences in Laurel and Ashley's responses to the death of their son?</p>	
<p>What are the differences in Laurel and Ashley's attitudes to prayer?</p>	
<p>What ultimate questions are posed by these episodes?</p>	
<p>What does Sandy, Ashley's dad, say about faith? How does he suggest faith might help??</p>	

Key
Definitions in
relation to
Christian
views on
suffering

The diagram consists of a central rectangular box containing text. This box is positioned within a larger, inverted triangular shape. Below the triangular shape is a large, empty rectangular area that occupies most of the lower half of the page.

Questions

Introduction

1. What was 'the God-slot'?
2. Which programme is still in 'the God-slot'?
3. Give two reasons why the BBC feel religious broadcasting is still relevant today .

Worship and Magazine Programmes

1. Watch Songs of Praise, This Sunday and one other worship or magazine programme e.g. Big questions. During and after viewing the programme', answer these questions:
 - a) What is-the target audience?
 - b) Why might people in that target audience enjoy it?
 - c) Why might other viewers not enjoy it?

Religious Documentaries

1. Watch at least **two** religious documentary-type programmes. During and after viewing write down answers to the following:
 - a) Who might watch a programme like this?
 - b) Why would they find it interesting?
 - c) Did you find it Interesting, and why/why not?
2. Have a class discussion on why television produces a wide range of religious programmes.



Religious and Moral Issues in Soaps

1. Watch a soap which is exploring a religious or moral issue. Write down:
 - a) what the issue is;
 - b) why it is an issue for Christians;
 - c) who is involved;
 - d) how the issue ends.



2. Then answer the following questions:
 - a) Why did the soap deal with this issue?
 - b) In what other ways could the issue have been dealt with?
 - c) How would you have dealt with the issue and why?

Exam practice

Religion and TV

(a) Describe how **one** religious or moral issue, of importance to Christians, was dealt with in a soap opera.

(b) Explain why some people may be interested in the specifically religious programmes (**not** soaps, films or dramas) broadcast on British television.

(c) "Television never treats religion fairly."

Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion, showing you have considered another point of view. In your answer, you should refer to specific television programmes.

How fairly does TV treat 'religion'?

TV supports religion:

- it keeps religion in 'the public eye'
- it marks special religious times and events
- it provides an opportunity for people to think about religious and moral issues
- it provides an opportunity to worship for those who cannot attend a place of worship

TV hinders religion:

- it is largely Christian and rarely considers other religions
- it uses religion as a 'plot convenience' to boost ratings
- particularly in the soaps it often gives an inaccurate picture of religion
- people with religious faith are often portrayed as 'odd' or eccentric or as the butt of humour.

Religion specific programming in non-religion-specific broadcasts

5. Explain the type of television programme.

6. What were the religious theme(s)/ideas?

7. Why do you think they have chosen a religious person like a female vicar as the focus for this comedy?

8. Are religious people portrayed fairly in this programme?

5. What do you think about the programme? Give your reasons.

TAKING BELIEF SERIOUSLY: SUMMARY OF THE BBC GOVERNORS' SEMINAR ON RELIGION - 13th MAY 2005

BACKGROUND

On Friday 13th May 2005 the Board of Governors held a seminar, Taking Belief Seriously. Chaired by the Rev Dr Colin Morris, former BBC Head of Religious Broadcasting and Controller of BBC Northern Ireland, the seminar explored how the BBC could better reflect the increasing impact of religion and belief on the modern world, with compelling and popular programmes.

The focus of the seminar was not on broadcasting for religious audiences, but on how mainstream programmes, from news and factual to drama and entertainment, can directly or indirectly reflect the experience of belief. Its aim was not to critique current output or decide editorial policy, but to debate issues and through that debate help generate creative ideas for future programmes.

The panel included: Karen Armstrong, author of *A History of God and The Holy War*; Professor Ian Linden of the School of Oriental and African Studies; Inayat Bunglawala of the Muslim Council; Graham James, Bishop of Norwich and Chairman of CRAC; Dr Tristram Hunt, historian, author and broadcaster; Mark Dowd, writer, TV producer and presenter; Tony Marchant, writer of *Holding On* and *Passer By*; Armando Iannucci, writer and broadcaster; and Omid Djalili, actor and comedian.

This paper captures the key points and arguments expressed at the seminar. The debate and the issues raised will inform BBC management as they develop their Creative Future programme strategy. With the exception of selected quotes, comments have not been attributed to individuals; rather the paper is a summary of the broad range of themes discussed.

The Board of Governors is grateful to the panel for their thoughtful and considered ideas about how the BBC might improve this area of its output.

The opinions expressed by individuals at the seminar and summarised in this paper are their own and should not be attributed to the BBC.

Session 1: DOES BELIEF REALLY MATTER TO OUR LISTENERS AND VIEWERS?

Panel: Professor Ian Linden, Karen Armstrong

There's no hard evidence that audiences are asking for more "programmes about religion". But if belief is re-emerging as a potent force in the world, are there strong public-service arguments for the BBC to "take belief more seriously" in its output? Does belief really matter to the lives of listeners and viewers?

1A AUDIENCE REACTION TO THE PROGRAMME LABEL OF "RELIGION"

Ofcom's 2004 survey puts "programmes on religion" at the bottom of the audience's priority list. But the position is shared by politics and business – both key drivers of public affairs, and subjects which the BBC has made huge efforts to popularise.

In contrast, audience figures show a substantial interest in programmes about belief – 2.5 million for The Monastery on BBC2 against strong competition, and large and appreciative audiences for series on faith in action, like Country and Seaside Parish. Traditional worship programmes more than hold their own in the schedules.

1B 4 IN 5 PEOPLE IN THE UK AND WORLDWIDE CLAIM A RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Only 1.1 billion of the world's 6 billion inhabitants describe themselves as non-believers. And a surprising 77% of people in the 2001 UK census identified themselves with a faith-group (23% didn't answer or said they had no religion).

So though active involvement in religion is still declining in Britain, a strong sense of religious identity persists.

And levels of participation mustn't be underestimated: in the UK's football-obsessed culture more people attend Anglican service on a Sunday than a football match on a Saturday.

"In the 60s, radical theologians predicted that from the ruins of organised religion, a maturely secular world would emerge. Chance would be a fine thing. What emerged was a society riven by every conceivable form of religiosity." - Dr Colin Morris

1C THE RELIGIOUS INSTINCT SURVIVED THE 20th CENTURY

In the middle of the 20th century, many commentators were confident that secularism was the coming ideology, and that religion would never again play a major role in world events. Now we see that didn't happen. Is homo sapiens perhaps irredeemably homo religious?

If so, in the words of Professor Linden, human beings may be "hard-wired for goodness, truth and beauty". The software packages on offer include sport, philosophy, drugs, institutional religion or spirituality. In Britain the religion package isn't doing well, but spirituality's market share is growing.

People can no longer assume that the young are less religious than their parents. This is true in Muslim communities, but also of a growing Protestant youth culture in Britain.

"All I can say is that religion is alive and well in my in-tray. No subject – politics, history or education – creates hotter debates or calls for more difficult decisions." - Mark Thompson, BBC Director General

1D SPIRITUALITY VERSUS ORGANISED RELIGION

There's a paradox: on the one hand statistics show established religion continues to decline. At the same time other forms of spirituality are increasing, largely bypassing the churches.

The new spirituality hasn't a central headquarters, formal system of beliefs or membership. But that doesn't mean it's unimportant to the BBC's audiences. Cathedral visitor numbers are rapidly increasing, with candles lit and prayers requested by people, in Bishop James's words, "who want us to have faith for them". Responding to this new phenomenon is a challenge for programme-makers.

1F THE NEW RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

In the 20th Century for first time in history people have been able to understand the very wide range of faiths in the world, and experience perspectives beyond their own communities.

This dimension of globalisation may be liberating but to many it feels very threatening. Fundamentalism and religious conservatism are important reactions to this modern sensibility.

1G BELIEF AND THE EMERGING POLITICS OF IDENTITY

A dominant secular elite largely determines the nation's affairs. Small, seriously religious elites are starting to challenge that dominance in a series of key battles over issues like abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, stem cell research.

These are crucial drivers of the new politics of identity. They help society to understand the difference between the politics of the US (where the religious elite is strong) and the UK (where it is currently weak). But that position may be changing in the UK, with arguments based on belief moving much more into the political mainstream.

1I POLITICIANS ARE NOW "TAKING BELIEF SERIOUSLY"

Across the world since 9/11 the interaction of politics and religion has become a major preoccupation of governments and international bodies like the UN. The global human rights agenda is seen to depend on a successful dialogue between religious and secular institutions.

The British government is now building partnerships with faith organisations to deliver social policy, and in foreign affairs and international development.

30 civil servants work in the "Faith and Cohesion" unit of the Home Office, many more in the FCO's "Engaging with Islam" programme. Grassroots religious organisations are central to DfID's approach to development in many countries of the South.

1J 911 CAN DISTORT UNDERSTANDING OF THE RE-EMERGANCE OF BELIEF

9/11 forced secular-minded politicians and journalists to recognise the force of belief in the 21st century. But there is a serious danger that it will also distort perceptions, by suggesting that the impact of belief is always divisive.

Worldwide this is also the great age of religious pluralism...of dialogue between beliefs. Fundamentalism is only one or many responses.

The growing social and economic role of faith institutions in developing countries, and the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the Far East have nothing to do with fundamentalism. Nor has the "new spirituality" emerging in countries like Britain.

In particular, several speakers regretted the widespread misunderstanding of the nature of Islam in Britain. There was praise for Rageh Omaar's recent BBC4 series, which helped to redress this by showing its tolerant, pluralist history.

"We assume that because something has been around for hundreds of years, people know everything about it. There's a great hunger for information about religion which co-exists with a deep mistrust of religious institutions." - Armando Iannucci

. It is important to explain the human motivation behind these stories.

2C THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF BELIEF ON UK POLITICS

Critics have suggested BBC News was slow to recognise the decisive impact of organised religion on the 2004 US presidential election campaign.

Faith-groups are also central in debate on some of the hottest subjects facing politicians from stem-cell therapy, euthanasia and other "life" issues to trade reform and global poverty.

"Just remember that the combined membership of political parties in this country is less than the number of people who take communion in the Church of England on a wet Sunday in February." - Bishop Graham James

2D THE IMPACT OF NEWS MEDIA ON THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

There is a particular responsibility on BBC News to give fair and balanced portrayal of religious minorities.

For most of the majority population, the image of Islam, Hinduism or Sikhism carried by the news is their only window into those faith communities. Their perception of those faiths might be distorted if portrayal is dominated by news-making voices from the extremes.

This ideal of "fair and balanced portrayal" is difficult to achieve, since the hard news agenda is inevitably dominated by crisis and conflict.

As a counterbalance, it's important for religious minorities to be seen in a wide variety of stories as part of the normal fabric of life in multicultural Britain.

"Growing up, I knew that sectarian killings in Northern Ireland weren't the truth about Christianity, because I was at school with Christians in a majority Christian country. When it comes to Islam, all most people know is what they see on TV News. They have no other reference points." - Inayat Bunglawala

2H NEWS COVERAGE OF BELIEF MAY HAVE INEVITABLE LIMITATIONS

News programmes on their own may not be able to provide depth in portrayal of the religious context of controversial news events. Time-constraints are tight, and the editorial agenda is inevitably driven by the pressure of breaking news stories.

So it's vital that audiences can find out more through accessing online background material and listening to radio sequence programmes and phone-ins which have the space to explore these issues in greater depth.

Above all the BBC is fortunate that its output includes many other broadcasting genres. **Programme strands like factual, drama and even comedy might help audiences put news stories in context.**

SESSION 3: CAN BELIEF JOIN HISTORY IN THE PROGRAMMING MAINSTREAM?

Panel: Dr Tristram Hunt, Mark Dowd

20 years ago, history programmes were widely seen as worthy TV for a minority audience. Inspired producers and presenters changed all that. Could the same happen with the story of evolving beliefs, values and ideas? Is the definition of the scope of BBC "religion and ethics" output too narrow?

3A DEFINING THE SCOPE OF RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING

The seminar discussed whether the current definition of religious broadcasting was perhaps too narrow to realise the full creative potential of the areas of experience discussed in the first part of the seminar.

The Ofcom analysis pushes programme-makers towards a genre approach to belief. But this is not a genre area like sport.

Programmes about belief in 2005 may have nothing to do with the great faiths of the world. Equally those religions may be their core subject-matter.

The BBC should be encouraged to open up the creative space in which great talents and authorial voices can explore these issues.

"Go back to the word religion – from ligare, to connect or bind. Religion is about reconnecting to something. It can be about God or simply about the instinct to belong to something bigger than oneself. So binge drinking, drug culture, sex in saunas – these to my mind are cries for communion with oblivion." - Mark Dowd

3B SHOWING CONFIDENCE THAT THESE ISSUES MATTER

The revitalisation of history broadcasting in the 1990s took the subject out of its ghetto and into the mainstream. Difficult or painful subjects can now attract large audiences in prime time.

Something similar could happen for programmes exploring belief. Shared commitment of creative staff, commissioners, and schedulers is crucial.

Audiences will take on the challenge of unfamiliar material if they sense from promotion and scheduling that it really matters.

3C TELLING HUMAN STORIES

One key to history's revival was that broadcasters learned to tell stories again.

From Simon Schama's *Citizens* to David Starkey's *Six Wives of Henry VIII*, programmes won broad audiences with accessible human narratives which had meaning and relevance for them.

Stories of the impact of belief on human lives – both in the past and today's world – are equally compelling programme material.

"Try to find epic individuals whose lives are caught up in great moments of belief, conflict or tension in the past or today. We're fascinated by people facing dilemmas and choices." - Mark Dowd

3E COURAGEOUS SCHEDULING AND PROMOTION

The intellectual ambition of the audience mustn't be underestimated. Programmes about belief can win substantial prime-time audiences.

During development, Simon Schama's history of Britain was often referred to by sceptics as "the Albatross". But it was vigorously promoted and given prime-time scheduling, and the result was a ratings and critical success.

3F A WIDE RANGE OF GENRES AND CREATIVE FORMATS

History TV stayed popular through constant re-invention. Techniques ranged from Schama and Starkey's "lantern-lectures" to drama-documentaries and even hybrid "reality history" series. Each can engage audiences in ways which inform, educate and entertain.

The same spirit of cross-genre experimentation can make belief accessible. "The Monastery" is a pioneering example of "reality religion".

There's also potential for programmes which explore the interweaving of history and belief. This can help audiences better understand the nature of religion today, and give a richer insight into historical events.

"Programmes like Seaside Parish and Monastery are breakthroughs because they show ordinary people undergoing transformation through the power of religion. It's a very, very new experience for people who don't see religion in their lives." - Jana Bennett, BBC Director Television

3J MAKING SENSE OF A DANGEROUS WORLD

As a public service broadcaster, the BBC has a responsibility to help audiences find the knowledge they need to make sense of a dangerous world.

Rigorous, sensitive programmes about belief should not be seen as optional extras in 2005, but essential tools for understanding the world our children will inherit.

" Rageh Omaar's Islam series had a wonderful reception in our community because it showed how different religious communities co-existed positively in the past, and proved that the default position isn't always conflict." - Inayat Bunglawala

SESSION 4: IS THERE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL FOR COVERAGE OF BELIEF IN DRAMA AND COMEDY?

Panel: Tony Marchant, Armando Iannucci, Omid Djalili

Drama and comedy have always been powerful ways of exploring changing values in the world of its audience. In 2005 belief is re-emerging as a key factor shaping world affairs and a multicultural UK. Yet it's largely forbidden territory for comedy, and rarely impacts on the storylines of TV drama. Are programme-makers missing a trick?

4A BELIEF IS ABOUT THE "FIRST ORDER QUESTIONS" : AND SO IS GREAT DRAMA

Great drama deals with the first order questions. Why am I here? What happens when I die? Why do I do things I don't intend to do? These are also the great religious questions, though they may have no direct connection with institutional religion.

BBC Drama should have the courage to go with these big questions, and into the depths. They're part of a writer's remit to explore what it is to be fully human.

There may not be many dramas which are overtly about religion. But they do deal with issues of morality and faith – because that's the heart of all serious drama.

"Drama and comedy began as art-forms in Athens as part of religious festivals. They existed to give people transcendence and compassion. They can help us today to learn to grow together as a multi-cultural world community. But you must expect clashes over what people feel is sacred – between freedom of speech and fixed religious attitudes." - Karen Armstrong

There may be wariness in British television about commissioning and scheduling dramas which are overtly religious, and contain characters who have religious

motives. This contrasts with a much more accepting attitude to strong political beliefs.

4E INSIDE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Writers of drama and comedy agree that knowledge of faith communities from the inside is essential for fair and rounded portrayal. So a Catholic or a lapsed Catholic, can write about Catholicism with authority. Conversely *Goodness Gracious Me* would have been unthinkable as the product of a white programme team.

Broadcasters need to be particularly sensitive in the way they portray a religion about which there is general public ignorance.

Islam is the crucial current example. Broadcasters must avoid sensational storylines or two-dimensional characters which convey a caricatured view of the complexities of Muslim community life.

The recent rise of fundamentalisms (Christian and non-Christian) is a very rich ground for broadcast drama. But also very difficult – writers tend to come from secular, liberal, "modern" backgrounds, so the mindset of fundamentalists may be impossible to empathise with.

"We invited a Sikh comedian to write a satirical piece about his own upbringing. The community reaction was fantastic: 'We've arrived – now we can laugh at ourselves.' What made the difference was that the Sikh faith was an important element in the writer's own life." - Christine Morgan, BBC Executive Producer Religion and Ethics

4F PORTRAYAL OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTERS IN TV DRAMA AND COMEDY

"Normal" characters in popular drama are almost exclusively secular. In comedy programmes, religious characters are rarely credited with a sense of humour: they're targets of humour, not its source. Geraldine in the Vicar of Dibley is a rare exception.

In the past there's been a tendency in British mainstream comedy and broadcast drama to treat a religious world-view as eccentric and a secular approach as normative.

Following on from the success of the BBC's *Hawking* film, it is felt that there's potential for dramas which explore issues of belief through telling the stories of key transitions or turning-points in the lives of historical figures or individuals caught up in dramatic situations of belief today.

"The best way to avoid committing offence is always to create characters which are three-dimensional. There have been dramas ... where fundamentalist characters were two-dimensional and everyone else three-dimensional. Emotionally and morally that approach wasn't even-handed. I believe you must never create straw people." - Tony Marchant

4G COMEDY AND BELIEF

The purpose of comedy is to make people laugh, not to convey a message or explain a belief. But it can also help an audience understand someone else's point of view or change a prejudice.

But the concept of "responsible comedy" is fraught with contradiction. "Responsible journalism" is all about balance, providing evidence, searching for the truth. Comedy is about twisting logic, being unfair, making up amusing lies. The essence of comedy is distortion and exaggeration.

This makes religion a very difficult subject for comedy, since it involves dealing with beliefs which may hold certain things sacred and beyond discussion. Fear of causing serious offence can turn religion into a no-go area for comedy.

"At the highest level in comedy, as in any art-form, you try to be entertaining and educating and elevating. Comedians who pause to reflect on the seriousness of a point often get a bigger laugh because they've really connected with their audience."
- Omid Djalili

4H CAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE BE A COMIC TARGET, BUT NOT THE CORE OF BELIEF?

The concept of religious comedy is neither new nor revolutionary. There's a long tradition of satire in Christianity and other faiths going back to medieval times.

But there are implicit limits. Speakers felt there was a crucial difference between making fun of religious people, practices and institutions, and ridiculing the central figures of a faith.

Writers agree the most effective comedy comes from an inside knowledge of a faith – not from the perspective of a total outsider.

4I COMEDY HELPS US UNDERSTAND EACH OTHERS' LIVES AND BELIEFS

As Hilary Salmon, BBC Senior Executive Producer for Drama, said at the seminar, "If comedy isn't about looking for meaning in chaos, I don't know what it is about."

Comedy's purpose is laughter, and laughter breaks down psychological barriers, bringing the unfamiliar or alien within our imaginative grasp. An obvious example was *Goodness Gracious Me*. **Another was Richard Curtis's determination in creating *The Vicar of Dibley* to confront the furore over women priests and show how normal a woman's ministry would be in the real world.**

More generally as Jon Plowman, Head of BBC Comedy, suggests great comedy and drama share a common concern with exploring the human condition in all its complexity and richness – and that includes the enduring impact of belief.

4J HANDLING CONTROVERSY

It may be tempting to play safe and declare religion a no-go area for drama and comedy. Coverage of belief in drama and comedy is more dangerous than in news and factual programmes. If it's to be part of the mainstream of broadcasting across genres in Britain, both programme-makers and faith leaders need to be robust.

Broadcasters should be encouraged to find better ways to share information with religious leaders and be more open about the inherent difficulties faith programming involves.

Director-General Mark Thompson said: "In the past religious programming has been associated with duty and caution rather than energy and life.

"In broadcasting, religion and faith is not just a genre. Instead issues of belief and non-belief inspire programme-makers from many genres.

Appendix

Panel Members

DR COLIN MORRIS

After National Service and Oxford, Colin Morris worked as a Methodist missionary in Africa, becoming president first of the United Church of Central Africa, then of the United Church of Zambia. Back in the UK, Colin became President of the Methodist Conference, before moving to the BBC in 1978 as Head of TV Religious Programmes, then Head of Religious Broadcasting. After a period as Special Advisor to the Director-General, in 1987 he took over as Controller BBC Northern Ireland. Since then he has presented many religious programmes for the BBC, including Radio 4's Sunday. He has lectured widely in Britain and overseas on religion and broadcasting, and has written many books on faith and media issues. He was Director of the Centre for Religious Communication in Oxford from 1991-96, and is a frequent contributor to Radio 4's Thought for the Day..

KAREN ARMSTRONG

Karen Armstrong spent seven years as a Roman Catholic nun in the 1960s, but left her teaching order in 1969. She studied English Literature at the University of Oxford, and then taught modern literature at the University of London. In 1982, she became a full time broadcaster and writer. Her books include the autobiographical *Through the Narrow Gate*, *The Gospel According to Woman*, *Holy War*, *The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World*, *A History of God* (which became an international bestseller) and *The Battle for God, A History of Fundamentalism*. Since September 11th Karen has become best known for her work on Islam and fundamentalism. She has twice addressed members of the US Congress on this subject, and was one of three scholars to speak in the United Nations in its first session devoted to religion. She is currently involved in a major project to develop a pluralistic American Islam.

PROFESSOR IAN LINDEN

Ian Linden is a writer on politics and development with a particular focus on religion and conflict in Africa – and an advisor to the UK Government on the role of religions in development (a key emphasis of the Commission for Africa). He is an associate professor at the School of Oriental & African Studies in London, and a director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, a respected think-tank linked with radical Church groups in Southern Africa, Central America and Philippines. Ian was awarded a CMG for his work for human rights in 2000. His last book *A New Map of the World* investigates the impact of globalisation on the world religions and the growth of a global civil society.

INAYAT BUNGLAWALA

Inayat Bunglawala is the Media Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain – the UK's main Muslim umbrella body. He has studied Islam under some of the most senior British Muslim scholars, including Khurram Murad, Professor Khurshid Ahmad and Dr Basil Mustafa, and has been actively involved in the affairs of the Muslim community for over 17 years, and particularly with reaching out to Muslim young people. As the Council's Media Secretary, Inayat makes regular appearances on radio and television, and writes articles for all areas of the national press, from the Sun to the Observer.

BISHOP GRAHAM JAMES

Graham James is Bishop of Norwich and chairman of the Central Religious Advisory Committee of the BBC (CRAC). His roots are in Cornwall where many members of his family worked in the tin mines. After reading history at the University of Lancaster, he trained for the ministry at Cuddesdon College in Oxford. He worked as a team vicar in Welwyn Garden City, and then moved to Church House, Westminster to oversee selection procedures for candidates for ordination. In 1987 he was appointed as chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Returning to his native Cornwall, Bishop Graham was consecrated Bishop of St Germans in 1993, and finally in 2000 enthroned as Bishop of Norwich.

DR TRISTRAM HUNT

Historian, journalist and broadcaster Dr Tristram Hunt lectures in modern British history at Queen Mary, University of London and is visiting professor at Arizona State University. Previously, he was an associate fellow at the Centre for History and Economics, King's College, Cambridge. He read history at Trinity College, Cambridge and the University of Chicago. He has worked for the Labour Party on two general election campaigns, as special adviser to the Science Minister, and as research fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research. He writes regularly for UK and US newspapers and magazines, and is a leading British history broadcaster. He is also a trustee of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

MARK DOWD

A former monk, Mark is a writer, presenter and television producer. After graduating with first class honours in political science, he trained for priesthood in the Dominican order at Blackfriars Priory in Oxford. He gained an M Phil in international relations at St Antony's College, Oxford, then joined the Times as a journalist. He later worked for LWT and the BBC as a current affairs producer, including six highly successful years as producer/director on Panorama. Recently Mark has written extensively about religion and presented a number of innovative television programmes on issues of belief, including Hallowed be thy Game and Children of Abraham.

TONY MARCHANT

Tony Marchant's outstanding contribution to television drama was recognised by the 1999 Dennis Potter Award at BAFTA. Best known for his ground-breaking 8-part television drama Holding On, Tony has a unique reputation as the great moralist of TV drama in Britain. In plays and TV drama series like Passer By, Kid in the Corner, Swallow, Take Me Home, Bad Blood and Goodbye, Cruel World, he brings to life some of the key moral dilemmas of modern life. He is currently working on Birthright, a 3-part drama for the BBC and a Channel 4 film, Iraqi Prisoners.

ARMANDO IANNUCCI

Scottish-born Armando Iannucci is a comic writer, performer, director and producer, responsible for some of the most original comedy on radio and television, including The Day Today, I'm Alan Partridge, Knowing Me, Knowing You and The Saturday Night Armistice. He started in BBC Radio launching shows like The Mary Whitehouse Experience, Girls will be Girls and On the Hour before diversifying into television. Armando has won two Sony Radio Awards and three British Comedy Awards, one a special award for his contribution to television comedy. His own topical show, Armando Iannucci's Charm Offensive, started this week on BBC Radio 4, and a satirical TV drama series, The Thick of It begins next week.

OMID DJALILI

Iranian-born Omid Djalili is one of Britain's most successful stand-up comedians, as well as a prolific TV and film actor. His stand-up career took off at the 1995 Edinburgh Festival with Short Fat Kebab Shop Owner's Son, followed in 1996 with The Arab & The Jew and Omid Djalili Is Ethnic in 1997. Omid's comedy is unafraid of controversy, prepared (in shows like the post-9/11 Behind Enemy Lines) to confront sensitive issues of belief and identity. He has won a number of comedy awards, as well as the One World Media Award for his TV documentary, Bloody Foreigners. He performs across Europe and in North America.