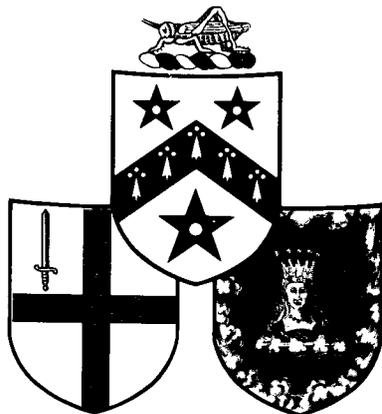


*G R E S H A M*  
*COLLEGE*



**THE MEDIA AND RELIGION**

A Lecture by

**DAVID CRAIG**

**Head of Religious Broadcasting, BBC World Service**

4 November 1996

Gresham College was established in 1597 under the Will of the Elizabethan financier Sir Thomas Gresham, who nominated the Corporation of the City of London and the Worshipful Company of Mercers to be his Trustees. They manage the Estate through the Joint Grand Gresham Committee. The College has been maintained in various forms since the foundation. The one continuing activity (excepting the period 1939-45) has been the annual appointment of seven distinguished academics "sufficiently learned to reade the lectures of divyntyte, astronomy, musicke, and geometry" (appointed by the Corporation), "meete to reade the lectures of lawe, phissicke, and rethoricke", (appointed by the Mercers' Company). From the 16th century the Gresham Professors have given free public lectures in the City. A Mercers' School Memorial Chair of Commerce has been added to the seven 'ancient' Chairs.

The College was formally reconstituted as an independent foundation in 1984. The Governing Body, with nominations from the City Corporation, the Mercers' Company, the Gresham Professors and the City University, reports to the Joint Grand Gresham Committee. Its objectives are to sponsor innovative research and to supplement and complement existing facilities in higher education. It does not award degrees and diplomas, rather it is an active collaborator with institutions of higher education, learned societies and professional bodies.

Gresham College, Barnard's Inn Hall, Holborn, London EC1N 2HH  
Tel no. 0171 831 0575 Fax no. 0171 831 5208

GRESHAM LECTURE

DIVINITY

THE MEDIA AND RELIGION

RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING - DEFENDER OF FAITHS

DAVID CRAIG

HEAD OF RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING

BBC WORLD SERVICE

CHAired BY

PROFESSOR JOHN BOWKER

GRESHAM PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY

4 NOVEMBER 1996

## **1 ARGUMENT**

Before I begin what will inevitably be interpreted as a litany of failure, I want to say that having listened to radio and watched television all over the world, I still believe that the best religious documentaries, factual series and experimental programmes are made in Britain, and many of them by the BBC.

- No other nation provides its audiences with anything to compare with **Focus on Faith**, **The Sunday Programme** or in its heydays, **Meeting Point**.
- No other nation has produced series like **The Long Search**, **Sea of Faith** or provides its audience with such regularly serious fare as **The Moral Maze**, **Everyman** or **Heart of the Matter**.
- No other nation provides opportunities for such cultural experiments as Potter's **Son of God** or more recently **The Shout**. - And no other nation has seriously experimented with television as a medium for worship as did the BBC with **This is the Day**.
- And in terms of international broadcasting networks, the BBC World Service is the only international public service broadcaster to provide any religious programmes at all.

As Television celebrates its 60th birthday, the BBC is broadcasting programmes justly celebrating its achievements. Last night's **Everyman** looked at religion and television.

It pointed out that in its early days religious broadcasting was run by the churches for the churches. And it was only in the 1950s when ITV began to broadcast religious programmes at the same time as the BBC that religious broadcasting could take on a wider brief.

**Meeting Point** the first religious as opposed to Christian broadcasting came from ITV and began to question the BBC's Reithian attitude to broadcasting.

## **2 HISTORY AND THE BBC**

Because it was first in the field, it was inevitable that early religious policies were formulated at the BBC. These policies, partly due to this historical priority and partly due to the fact that the BBC's Central Religious Advisory Committee (The Sunday Committee) established in the earliest days of broadcasting was expanded to include first the Independent Broadcasting Authority and now the ITC, have set the agenda for religious broadcasting throughout Great Britain.

Therefore whatever shortfalls there have been in religious broadcasting have to be seen in that context. And I want to argue this evening that - with notable exceptions -

1 That there has been little reconsideration of the role religious broadcasting should play since the days of Lord Reith.

2 That, because of an inherited culture, and a managerial patronage, there has been an inadequate development from traditional Christian communication into religious Broadcasting.

3 That, in accepting the intellectual perspective of current gatekeepers - those people who commission and schedule programmes - much religious broadcasting has failed to accept or to take into consideration the role faith plays in the lives of people.

Gai Eaton describes how, when he was at Oxford trying to impress the chairman of the Debating Society, he argued that only a fool took religion seriously. He was taken back to be told by the chairman that it was only fools who didn't take religion seriously.

Voices like Polly Toynbee and the articulate Baroness Blackstone with their highly publicized (albeit inaccurate assumption) that religion is only of interest to the intellectually challenged - have been allowed to go unquestioned for too long. Products of similar background and culture, the Programme commissioners have accepted the authority of their words without evaluation. So the fallacy that religion doesn't matter to their audiences has taken root in the minds of the gatekeepers. As a result makers of religious programmes have based their programme offers on the assumption that serious theological enquiry, philosophical considerations and interfaith discussion will not be appreciated.

Religion has been seen almost exclusively as spiritual exercise to the exclusion of an intellectual discipline. As a result the British audiences have been denied much serious discussion on current theological issues but have been able to attend an inordinate number of religious services - in effect hours of Committed Christian broadcasting

- in the comfort of **Songs of Praise**, a stalwart confessional programme since 1961
- in the Sunday morning worship strands, instituted in the first days of broadcasting
- in the appropriate seasons at Christmas and Easter when special services and seasonal goodies are on offer.
- in its populist manifestations, **Good Morning Sunday**
- in its presence at public and state occasions. Nothing changed the face of religious broadcasting like the Queen's Coronation

4 As a result of accepting this limited treatment of religion, religious broadcasting has failed to reflect the significance of religion in the wider world. It has accepted the definition of its role as a spiritual support system. This could either be diplomatic or selective but the result has been to disenfranchise the intellectually inquisitive, the nonbelievers, the followers of non theistic ideologies and probably most significantly, followers of non-Christian religions.

There has been no failure in understanding what a religion is in its historical, or theological sense or what humanism, agnosticism or atheism is, but there has been little attempt to understand the significance of a faith for its followers.

It is interesting that major series (both on radio and television) on Islamic politics and international relations have been produced not by religious departments but by news and current affairs. This is partly because religious broadcasting has not come up with

the proposals, and partly because - from their perceived position - religious broadcasting has been considered inadequately qualified to make them

This of course raises the question of what is religious broadcasting. Radio Vatican or Veritas or FIBA will give very simple and clearcut answers to that question. They would be quite different from those demanded of a public service broadcaster whose remit is to treat religious stories with the same journalistic objectivity used to cover political or scientific stories.

The BBC has its own religious Affairs Correspondent, responsible to the Head of News and Current Affairs, independent of religious broadcasting. So what line should a broadcasting station take on religions? Is the BBC Christian? A question which is often posed The answer is of course it is not: Last week's decision to axe a new comedy Series - Naaman the brother of Jesus was made not on grounds of Christian concern, but of broadcasting standards, offensiveness and taste.

5 But such rigorous objectivity has been softened in the area of religious broadcasting. In the early days of local radio in the appointment of religious producers for local radio stations lay in a Christian, even Anglican imperialism - necessary broadcasting economies were harnessed to part time priestly functions. The result was a generation of religious broadcasters who regarded their output as part of the evangelical work of the ministry. There is no criticism in the commitment of these loyal workers in the vineyard but inevitably their ordained status affected the programmes they made, the contributors they used and the way the station sounded. The church was quick to recognize the value of a presence in the local stations. The broadcasting stations appreciated their work and the economies.

Shortly after I joined the BBC, it appointed its first layman as head of religious broadcasting (the fact that he got ordained on retirement is irrelevant !) - he replaced a producer who had been elevated to the purple. Until the last couple of years, one of the requirements for a head of religious broadcasting was that "he could conduct memorial services".

6 Inevitably, therefore, religious broadcasting has been equated by outsiders as an evangelistic enterprise and as a result has suffered from the syndrome of "special pleading" , a subject of specialist but limited interest. This subsequent relegation of religion to ghetto broadcasting has had the most serious implications for the role not just of religious broadcasting but of religion as a whole in the United Kingdom

When I used to propose religious programmes to the then Controller of Radio 3, Ian Macintyre, the double standard of discussion about offers was amazing. Science producers would put up ideas, and we'd nod our heads, impressed by their mastery of - for example - atomic theory, musicians would put up ideas and we would sit around listening. There was an acceptance of expert knowledge. When, however a religious idea was proposed, everyone had a viewpoint. These ranged from those who considered religion had no claim on the time of a Radio 3 listener to those who felt because they went to Sunday School, they were equipped to discuss the theological acceptability of

**Hans Kung**

Where a national broadcasting agency, and arguably the most significant and prestigious broadcasting agency in the world has allowed itself to be misled about the significance of religion and the role of religious broadcasting, the implications for society are obvious.

### **3 THE REITHIAN INHERITANCE**

But back to the beginning -

When the BBC began, its ideas about religious broadcasting were simple. As the founder of the BBC, John Reith put it "The BBC must broadcast Christian programmes because the King is a Christian and therefore Christianity is the official religion of Britain". and, according to the oral tradition - essential to the BBC - on each Monday morning he would stomp into the offices of religious broadcasting and discuss the Sunday Sermon with its producer. For Reith it was not Match of the Day or the Saturday play which was the most important transmission of the week-end but the Sunday Service

Such priorities and such simple certainties, characteristic of the 1920's lingered into the 1950's and possibly the 1960s but to-day there is no such certainty left to religious broadcasting. Audiences include representatives of a deeply secular society *as well as* followers of every major religion, denomination and sect.

They include deep secularism alongside extreme religious fundamentalism, and people for whom the power of religion is identified as a dynamic force for good or for evil.

And unlike the Reithian period, we broadcast to an audience who have voted with their feet. Their critical awareness of religion is manifested in emptier churches. A theologically aware audience can see through the superficiality of a badly prepared sermon, a sloppily emotional **Good Morning Sunday**, or a patronising **Thought for the Day**. But that is only part of the brief.

The BBC is unique among broadcasters, in understanding the religious element as integral to news and current affairs, it does not leave its religious programming to Jesuits, Dominicans, Orthodox or even Methodist ministers to develop and run.

The BBC is also unique in having a specialist Religious Affairs correspondent, and in using its staff correspondents and reporters around the world to bring their specialist skills to the coverage of religious events and issues.

The BBC is unique among major broadcasters in having a specialist department for religious programmes which broadcasts news about and views from all the major religions of the World.

### **4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING**

But why does the BBC see the objective reporting of religious news stories and reflection

from the world's religions of such importance ?

At a recent scenario planning seminar, 20 heads of BBC departments divided into four groups to propose their visions of broadcasting by the year 2004: the scenario had to take into consideration potential Political, economic, sociological and technological developments but above all the scenario had to be plausible.

The first of the four groups produced a scenario where Britain had a ministry of religion and programmes were sponsored by religious groups companies and organisations, in the second group's scenario, the increasing influence of Islam was recognised and sponsorship was seen as coming from OPEC investments. Far-fetched and fictional as they were, these two examples revealed to what extent the religious influence of the world is recognized

The 1945 Constitution of UNESCO stated in its preamble:

ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war.... that the wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations of the world must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern.

One of the roles both of religions and religious broadcasting in society is the breaking down of barriers caused by cultural and therefore religious divides.

Experience in Great Britain over the last 40 years would suggest that misunderstanding of religion has been one of the causes for the strained nature of race-relations. But I would argue that the misunderstanding is not of the religions themselves but of the significance to the individual faithful of the religion.

While making *Worlds of Faith*, [a 12 part series commissioned for BBC Radio 4 after the spate of inner-city violence in 1982] Professor Bowker and I gained some insight into the passion with which Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in Great Britain regarded their religious observances.

Religious observance wasn't an extra tagged on, like going to Sunday morning Mass or Sunday school or choir practice, it was a public commitment to a personal discipline. Because it was carried out in a society based upon a Christian culture, it demanded considerable personal commitment and discipline. The calendrial imperialism which dictates public holidays according to the Christian year has major implications for Jewish or Hindu or Muslim school children

Ignorance of the importance of another's religious observance inevitably creates misunderstanding of the religion itself, its intent, its role and its relationship with other religions

Such misunderstandings have been aggravated by English attitudes to the faiths of immigrant communities. The leaders of our so-called Christian society ignorantly confused other faiths with paganism, heathenism. At best they considered them aberrations of the truth. "Lesser breeds within the law". Refuge in the misuse of language and a misunderstanding of cultural differences exacerbated religious insularity in the churches

Such misunderstandings are also aggravated by a unique English attitude to the belief and practice of religion ! Nowhere in the world is there such an artificial but potent divide between religion as culture, as a way of life and religion as commitment. Recent experience with the World Service has convinced me that England is perhaps peculiar in its attitude to religions: I was recently in Cambodia where the significance of religious belief and practice has provided a practical restructuring of a devastated country. One of the first things the Cambodian government on return from exile did was to invest in rebuilding pagoda,s Buddhist temples and schools for there at least there would be primary education for a generation who were deprived of any, there values could be taught to a society which had survived by feral cunning under Pol Pot, there the five noble truths would be taught and lived providing a nation with a structure and a goal. It was moving to visit the newly re-opened Buddhist Text Society of Cambodia. Formerly it had been the repository of one of the greatest collections of Pali texts, leaf books and Buddhist writings in the world, almost totally destroyed under Pol Pot's regime. Now gifts from all over the world were arriving and the printing press was at work publishing significant Buddhist texts for use in schools and for the new monks an edition of the Trippitica.

Meanwhile at a recent colloquium at the State University of Moscow, I was talking with the makers of Christian programming at the new Centre of St Paul for Christian Communications, itself part of the prestigious and influential Faculty of Journalism.

Partly because religious broadcasting is something new in the FSU, and partly because the centre and programme makers are on a slow learning curve, the group lacked any awareness of the audience for its programmes. There was an assumption that the Russian orthodox Christians should listen to Radio Sofya, while Russian Catholics should listen to Radio Blagovest.

There was no broadcasting policy, no sense of programmes even. We discussed whether programme types should be catechetical, developing on what was available in the increasing numbers of churches or whether they should aim at serious outreach to develop the Christian gospel, indeed whether they should provide programmes of more general interest.

There was a sharp division in the group between those who saw radio as a means of Christian evangelism, and those who saw it as a means of religious broadcasting. The interesting result was that it was agreed that each group needed to learn from the other, understand the position and find a way in which both positions could be developed creatively and of mutual benefit.

Two examples of societies where economic deprivation threatens survival but where the

power of religion is recognized taken seriously and given a prominent role.

But for many people in Britain, intellectual arguments based on scientific and historical scholarship have demythologized [the Christian] faith to a series of fables, conjuring tricks and, - through its clerical hierarchy - the exploitation of the pious ignorant. Such a comfortable relegation of the Christian religion easily develops into the rejection of religion - any religion - as irrelevant to real life.

Exacerbated by xenophobic insularity, this peculiarly British hypothesis has led to the assumption that similar attitudes to religion are current among enlightened intellectuals of other faiths. The general dissatisfaction with western coverage of Islamic and Jewish issues is a direct result of this misunderstanding.

Because it has never radically been forced to re-think its role Religious broadcasting has lagged far behind the rest of the BBC in its awareness of its responsibility. Because it has inherited a developed liturgical structure, Daily Service, Sunday Worship, Choral Evensong, Ten to Ten, Pause for Thought, Thought for the Day and so on, the BBC has still kept at least one foot in the period of Reithian certainty and, as Lord Runcie put it in the Guardian last July "provided an effective chaplaincy service to the nation" . I would argue it is not for the broadcasters to attempt to do the work the churches have, on the whole, failed to do over the last twenty years. I'm not sure it is necessarily right for the broadcasters to provide a liturgical substructure for Christians who can't get to church or like hymns singing if it is done at the expense of developing a strategy which caters to the real concerns of the audience.

## **5 RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Radio broadcasting has gone through three major stages  
pundits, punters and people

- 1 Experts speaking,
- 2 Experts interpreting ordinary experience "what he really means is this..."
- 3 ordinary experience speaking "we speak for ourselves"

Religious broadcasting has failed to keep up ! There have been few occasions when as of right, non-Christian functions, celebrations and occasions have been broadcast, when the differences within religions have been acknowledged.

There have been times when our insensitivities have caused us to fail to identify whether a Muslim contributor represents the sunni or shi'a positions, or whether a Jewish contributor comes from the Orthodox, Reform or Liberal traditions. We'd never dare make the same mistake about the affiliation of a Christian !

And in this, I would argue, religious broadcasters have, however unwittingly, added to the ignorance which has been the cause of so much intercommunity ill feeling.

Take the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel **The Satanic Verses** for example. Muslim communities were outraged at the blatant and calculated offense while other liberal, post-religious literary critics failed to understand the hurt and offense. It was ignorance not only of the religion itself but of the significance of that religion for its

faithful followers. The subsequent and violent demonstrations against the book, its publishers and translators cannot exclusively be dismissed as the work of **fundamentalist** groups, but in part be seen to reflect the passionate hurt and anger that faith can be so dismissively misinterpreted.

## 6 TOWARDS A SOLUTION

As part of the re-evaluation that makes the BBC reinvent itself every five years, each of the specialist production areas at World Service were subject to a Strategy review of its output - sport science, music religion and so forth. The group evaluating religion including one of the news room's most influential voices, a committed agnostic, a member of the Farsi Service, a member of the publicity department, A senior Russian producer and me. We convened and for two meetings I felt I was hitting my head against a brick wall - the chairman argued that the BBC had no room for religious broadcasting. In despair, at the end of the second meeting I handed him a couple of tapes and said before we meet again listen to them - they included an edition of a news magazine Focus on Faith, a programme about Death, a programme for a series on Islam and a programme discussion between John Polkinghorne and Richard Dorkins. The following week he returned and said "I never knew religion made programmes like that" and from being the most obstructionist voice became the most enthusiastic supporter of World Service religion, ensured the presentation to the Board of Governors was positive and agreed that religious issues needed wider coverage from the newsroom. As I jokingly parodied, he assumed that all religious broadcasting did was to sit up on the eighth floor singing hymns and reading the bible - but that was his conception of religious broadcasting.

As a result of this experience and of then strategy group, a distinction has to be drawn between those programmes which are educational, informative, objectively critical and which obey the standard rules of journalism and those programmes which reflect the peculiar element of religion where the divine impinges on the human.

Because it is essential that religious broadcasting should extricate itself from the ghetto into which it has been cast. There is need for broadcasters to differentiate between the words faith and religion.

**Faith** would be used to describe personally held religious beliefs which influence conduct and which at best **can** enhance and transform societies and individuals, and of course can at worst alienate, fragment and destroy communities and individuals

**Religion**, on the other hand, would be used to describe the culturally inherited belief system which has dictated the history of a society. "England is a Christian country" makes sense when it reflects the long history of British education, civilisation and social services which, regardless of birth and religious background every Briton is heir to. In a similar way Russia's heritage has been Christian ever since the conversion of the Rus by the Orthodox Patriarchate in 988

So some suggestions                      for religious broadcasting

For a positive approach it is important that the major focus of religious broadcasting

should reflect the critical issues of our time. It must be involved in the practicalities of life which shows the relevance of religion.

In most religious traditions, practice has given paramount authority to a priestly caste. Experience, however, has proved that people of faith outside such a caste can influence and act on critical issues - especially such issues as peace and environmental protection - and show that service grounded in wisdom and compassion can change the world.

It was a Sri Lankan ~~Doctor~~ practising and teaching Buddhist principles through his surgery and through local schools that rejuvenated and restored Kandy's great Royal Forests which were in danger of being destroyed as villagers chopped trees down for firewood.

Religious broadcasting has assumed that priests and their peer group from other traditions are automatically the best representatives for a religion but as Orthodox and non conformist Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus have shown this is far from the case: Articulate lawyers teachers shopkeepers and laypeople in general are usually eloquent representatives of specific religious issues. No need to wheel n the Bishop !

Sometimes this shift from the hierarchy is interpreted as a threat to authority and so religious broadcasting, has been seen to threaten the establishment, to exercise a radical influence.

In whatever direction we look there are troubling signs; grave and widespread threats to the environment, grotesque extremes of affluence and poverty; tribalism, racism, inter-religious hatred, gender discrimination, tribalism and xenophobia.

The prevalence of war, and the violence associated with oppression and injustice destroy any claim to humanity as a family.

How can there be a just and sustainable co-existence one caring for another and together for the planet that nourishes the community of all life.

Because the world has now the means to make mistakes which could threaten the existence of the ecosphere, religious responsibility and therefore religious broadcasting assumes a new imperative.

New ways of living together on earth must be explored, discovered, and their progress disseminated. To do that new alliances and relationships must be forged sometimes at the expense of old loyalties.

The role of religion in the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe should not be underestimated: while the role of the church in galvanizing a captive communities to action against oppression in Poland or Eastern Germany reflect the effectiveness of applied religion. The recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize to a Bishop in East Timor highlights the activities of committed believers and reflect the integrity of religion

But while religion has inspired or given form to the highest ideals of humankind, its influence has a darker side. Daily news coverage makes this obvious.

While every religion might teach peace, religion was claimed as one justification

for more than half the 50 wars and armed conflicts raging during the past year.

Faith inspires extraordinary allegiance, religious allegiance is one of the very few causes for which people are willing to die and kill. Religious hatred and intolerance have brought death and destruction to almost every part of the world. No wonder that religion has been condemned by many as the cause of much of the world's strife and suffering and dismissed for its negative power.

The seeds of intolerance and hatred can be found in the teachings of many faiths not merely in the homiletic rhetoric of demagogues who exploit religious fervour for their own purposes.

Claims to exclusiveness of a faith, or the superiority of the faithful, the 'saved' or the 'chosen' over infidel, heathen or simply those that are different can all be interpreted as intolerance.

Religion is a revolutionary thing and religious broadcasting can have a subversive role. No one who has worked in religious broadcasting can be unaware of this, neither can they be unaware of the battles fought to maintain its presence and profile. Maybe, but religious broadcasting must also provide a vehicle for the prophetic role of religions - failure to embrace this responsibility would jeopardize any integrity claimed by religious broadcasting.

## V THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BROADCASTERS

It is important for us as **religious** broadcasters to recognize that contrary to all preconceptions, we are not the message. A misappropriation of evangelisation is a betrayal of Public Service Broadcasting. Back to the train set - it's not exclusively ours

Sympathy with and a commitment to a personal religion can give programme makers an insight and provide enlightenment to the way other religions understand themselves and religious broadcasting. But it can, if not carefully disciplined, impose a dangerous blindfold.

*Committed narrowcasting* is one of the hallmarks of sponsored American religious programmes - it becomes an evangelistic tool for genuine religious groups, a cover for the exploiters of religious people and a goldmine for the unscrupulous.

Religious broadcasting of a type which represents religions as they are rather than as they **should be** or as **they wish they were** or as they were **intended** by their founder is important. Yet in proper religious broadcasting this creates a dilemma, in the accusation of double standards.

Those who see in religious broadcasting an extension of the mission of one particular faith are in danger of appropriating to their profession a religious authority which can not exist. There is a failure to see religious broadcasting as entertainment, information or education but rather as evangelism. They betray the special nature of religious broadcasting. They also have difficulty in recognizing the resentment their attitude

arouses in people of their faiths.

Such people, I would also argue are betraying their own religious vocation by failing to acknowledge the divine which exists in traditions other than their own and give it due respect.

To maintain its credibility, religious broadcasting needs to reflect the negative aspects of religions: to ignore religious responsibility for unrest, disquiet and strife would be a betrayal of responsibility. And it is here that I want to take issue with the received wisdom that religious practitioners make the best religious programmes. Because of our history, we have failed to do this often enough.

It was a tribute to the success of **Everyman** some years back that an organised attack was launched on it in the pages of the **Church Times** claiming it could not be described as religious broadcasting at all.

The broadcast of **Christian Worship** on a Sunday goes hand in hand with objective criticism of Christian worshippers for the rest of the week. The less attractive distortions of Islam are as real as the betrayals of Christian ideals.

The crude manifestation of Hindu fundamentalism could be compared with the behaviour of neo-Nazi groups in Europe. Alongside traditional the Buddhist search for release, for Nirvana there exist militant Buddhist elements

Religious teachings are used to justify socially destructive practices within communities, particularly in regard to gender roles.

The extreme Islamic interpretations on the part of groups like Taleban and their unIslamic persecution of women are a far cry from the liberty brought them by the revelations of the Qur'an, the teachings of Muhammad and early juridical practice.

Organized and developed religion tends to be a force for conservatism, opposing change, avoiding self-criticism and re-interpreting so-called "old ways".

Established religious communities tend to remain silent on many critical issues, fuelling criticism that they are aloof and unconcerned with the world, or that vested interest prevents straightforward involvement in moral issues.

There has been insufficient Christian outrage at the violence in Bosnia, in NI, Armenia and most recently in Central Africa.

Too few Hindu leaders have publicly renounced the communalism which led to the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodha or have been critical of Tamil violence in Sri Lanka.

**Not enough Muslim voices have been raised against religious repression in the Sudan, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia.**

**Christian communions are concerned with preserving harmony and community within the church so their decision-making structures demand consultation before any change of position, action is precluded by diplomacy - collegiality can be used to justify inertia. So while organisational structures have provided a strength to religious groups, their existence precludes any speedy reaction.**

**For similar reasons religious leaders have been slow to speak out on environmental issues and religious organisations have found it difficult to react speedily to events. Their structures cannot provide public fora for free discussion of critical issues. Authority again - it is often the lay, the religious uninformed in the bureaucracy of religions who have made the religious marker.**

**It was Buddhist monks with their Christian friends in Sri Lanka who opposed the further development of the tourist industry on the coast, standing against further ecological pollution, the siphoning of resources from the many to the few and the inevitable sexual exploitation of both men and women.**

## **7 RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING FOR THE FUTURE**

**Unquestionably religion is a major element in the way the world works. Its influence on internal politics, on wars and on ecological concerns is obvious.**

**It is therefore the responsibility of religious broadcasting to reflect this significance not only in its coverage of issues of faith and worship but in its coverage of news and current affairs. It is also important that religious broadcasting should reflect the cultural inheritance of religion which explains so much of a culture.**

**It is essential that religious broadcasting grows in its self understanding, and develops its threefold agenda, C C and C Current Affairs, Culture and Commitment. It is essential that religious broadcasting regains its confidence and is, to quote one religious tradition "faithful to its heavenly vision"**

**So as this week the audiences charter is to be released on the public here's what I hope it might say about religious broadcasting**

**It is Religious broadcasting and not Christian narrowcasting - Barriers of ignorance can only be broken down when there is understanding about and between different religious groups**

**Don't leave religious broadcasting in the hands of the churches and religious organisations, identify professionalism and exploit it**

**Recognize the need for different sorts of religious broadcasting and respond to those demands**

**Acknowledge that religion can play vital roles in people's lives even if they don't believe in anything**

**Ensure that religious Broadcasting avoids converting  
objective reports and acknowledges cultural inheritances**

**Beware of too much personal religious commitment**

**And for God's sake let people speak for themselves.**

**ENDS 4 NOVEMBER**