

**GOVERNORS' GENRE REVIEW:  
RELIGIOUS OUTPUT ON BBC ONE**

The BBC Governance Unit prepared this report for the Board of Governors for consideration at their January 2005 meeting to assess the impact of the Religion Strategy the Board approved in September 2002.

The report is a quantitative comparison of the BBC's religious output and its performance in 2001/2, the year before implementation of the strategy, with that in 2003/4, the year following implementation. The research was narrow in scope, considering only output classified as religion which counted towards the BBC's Statements of Programme Policy commitment to the genre.

Notes on the methodology:

1. The focus on output classified as religion under-represents the overall coverage of matters of religion and faith on BBC Television as this output may be classified as news, current affairs, drama or factual rather than religion, for example.
2. Comparison of hours of output in particular years does not take account of other factors. Hours of religion in 2001/2 were inflated by two Easters falling within the year and additional religious programming following the events of September 11th. If these are excluded, there were still fewer hours of core religious programming on BBC One in 2003/4 than 2001/2, however.
3. Since this report was first presented to the Board in January 2005, ITV has, with Ofcom's approval, reduced its commitment to religion from 104 hours in 2004 to 52 hours in 2005. BBC One has maintained its commitment to 80 hours of hours in 2005/6 so now commits to more hours of religion than ITV.

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January 2005**

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# 1. Introduction

## Background

Governors approved a new religion strategy covering all media in September 2002. On the BBC's two main television channels this promised:

- *“BBC One will improve its provision of popular programmes about religion including ....landmark documentaries...transmitted at the heart of the schedule about major Biblical figures and historical characters central to the main religions...”*
- *“BBC Two will strengthen its provision as the home of searching and surprising programmes about the big questions religion seeks to answer and the values we live by...”*

Two years on, the Governors' religious advisory body, the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC), highlighted concern about the marginalised scheduling of much religious output on the main television channels, including the absence of a regular slot for *Songs of Praise*.

As a result, in the Annual Report Governors promised *“Work will be undertaken over the next year to assess the effectiveness of the religion strategy we approved in 2002 which promised high-impact religious programming on BBC One alongside Songs of Praise and The Heaven and Earth Show”*.

## Objective

The review was designed to fulfil this commitment by undertaking a quantitative assessment of the Religion Strategy's impact. It forms part of a package of work which included the impartiality report on religion presented to the Board last July.

The key question it asks is: Has the Religion Strategy, approved by Governors in 2002, delivered high-quality and wide impact religious output on television, particularly BBC One?

## Approach

The review was commissioned as a purely quantitative study with a narrow focus on only that output which counts towards the services' Statement of Programme Policy commitment to religion, i.e. output classified as 'religion' by BBC Television/Finance (see list of programmes in Appendix 1 and Terms of reference in Appendix 3).

The review compared the output and its performance in the year prior to the implementation of the strategy (2001/2) with that post implementation (2003/4).

## 2. Key findings

### Summary

Comparison of output in 2001/2, pre-implementation of the Strategy, against 2003/4's output (post-implementation) indicated that the strategy has not resulted in religious output with wider impact on BBC One:

- There has been a reduction in hours of religion on BBC One, with overall reach of religious output also down on the network partially as a result of this
- The landmark strategy has not delivered greater impact on BBC One
- Audiences to *Songs of Praise* are lower as a result of the earlier and irregular scheduling of BBC One's key strand

At the same time, hours and reach of religion on BBC Two have increased.

### BBC One

- There were fewer hours of religion on BBC One in 2003/4 than 2001/2 – 87 hours compared to 101 hours. Fewer of these were scheduled in peak
- BBC One's commitment to 80 hours of religion in 2003/4 was significantly below ITV's commitment to 104 hours in 2004. In terms of religion in peak, BBC One offered marginally more than ITV: 0.1 hours on average per week versus no hours in peak at all on ITV
- Partially as a result of the reduced volume of religion on offer on BBC One, there has been a significant decline in the reach of religion on BBC over the year, from 62%<sup>1</sup> in 2001/2 to 54% in 2003/4. This was not simply a result of a lower volume of output: the average reach of the output was also down
- Despite this, audiences overwhelmingly judged BBC One best for both the range and quality of the religion it offered
- The strategy has not resulted in any overall change to the average cost per hour of religion on BBC One.

### Landmarks on BBC One

- The landmark approach aimed to offer a small volume of higher impact religious programming on BBC One that benefited from peak scheduling and higher spend in order to attract a wider audience to religion
- In 2003/4 there were fewer hours of non-strand (or one-off) religious output on BBC One than 2001/2. Although landmarks accounted for a higher proportion of this output in 2003/4 than 2001/2 they still only amounted to three programme titles and 4.5 hours of output. Three titles, however, meant that there was more choice and a

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<sup>1</sup> Proportion of all individuals 4+ viewing any consecutive 15 minutes of religion over the year (BARB)

wider range of religious output on offer in 2003/4 than 2001/2 (human interest alongside historical output)

- While the average cost per hour of non-strand output has remained relatively stable overall, a small amount of output became more expensive in 2003/4 – this is the landmark output
- There is no evidence that this higher spend on landmarks has delivered greater impact:
  - The unique reach<sup>2</sup> delivered by the landmarks in 2003/4 was lower than that delivered by *Son of God* in 2001/2
  - The average reach and audiences to the landmark output in 2003/4 was no higher than that achieved in 2001/2. The cost per hour of both *Saint Paul* and *Noah's Ark* was higher than that of *Son of God* in 2001/2, yet:
    - *Noah's Ark's* reach was only marginally higher than *Son of God*, and its average audience was lower
    - *Saint Paul's* reach and average audience was actually lower, less than half that achieved by *Son of God*
  - The memorability of landmark output was not reliably higher than that of other religion output in 2003/4.

### **Strands on BBC One**

- Strands accounted for a greater proportion of religious output on BBC One in 2003/4 than 2001/2. During the majority of weeks BBC One's two strands *The Heaven & Earth Show* and *Songs of Praise* comprised *all* the religion output on offer on the network
- Average reach of *The Heaven & Earth Show* was higher in 2003/4 than 2001/2 (1.2m vs. 1.1m<sup>3</sup>)
- The average reach and audience to *Songs of Praise* was lower in 2003/4; reach was 3.0m in 2003/4 vs. 3.5m<sup>3</sup> in 2001/2, and average audience was 3.9m in 2001/2 compared to 3.3m in 2001/2
- CRAC has expressed concern about the earlier and variable scheduling of BBC One's main religion strand. Evidence suggests that the fall in reach and audience to *Songs of Praise* was a result of a tendency to schedule it earlier when the audience available to view is smaller. It was also a result of an increasing number of instances when it was transferred from BBC One to BBC Two (eight times in 2003/4 vs. once in 2001/2). *Songs of Praise* has never had a regular slot, however, even in 2001/2
- While the average cost per hour of *The Heaven & Earth Show* was marginally higher in 2003/4 than 2001/2, the average cost of *Songs of Praise* was marginally lower

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<sup>2</sup> Unique reach measures the proportion of the population 4+ attracted by this programme title but did not watch any other religious output on the channel (BARB)

<sup>3</sup> Average number of individuals 4+ per watching at least 15 mins of the programme title

## BBC Two

- A doubling of hours of religion on BBC Two from 18 hours in 2001/2 to 37 in 2003/4 means that overall there has been a slight increase in total hours of religion across the BBC's two mainstream television channels
- There was also more religion in peak on BBC Two in 2003/4 than 2001/2 – an increase from 14 to 22 hours. However, this was insufficient to offset the decline on BBC One
- BBC Two's SoPP commitment to 20 hours in 2004/5 was well below Channel Four and Five's commitments in 2004 to 52 hours each in 2004. In terms of religion in peak, however, BBC Two's average of 0.4 hours per week compared relatively well with Channel 4's 0.5 hours and Five's 0.1 hours in peak per week
- The average cost per hour of religion was marginally lower on BBC Two in 2003/4 than 2001/2
- The performance of religion was higher on BBC Two in 2003/4 than 2001/2:
  - Reach of religion on BBC Two increased from 23% in 2001/2 to 40% in 2003/4<sup>4</sup>. This meant that across BBC One and BBC Two there was only a marginal decline in reach – from 66% in 2001/2 to 65% in 2003/4
  - On BBC Two religious output has managed to match, or even exceed, the average reach for its slot
  - Religion on BBC Two generated higher impact in 2003/4 than in 2001/2 in terms of the average consumption, which increased from 25 minutes in 2001/2 to 56 minutes in 2003/4
  - BBC Two religion has demonstrated its potential to score relatively well in terms of memorability; its output memorability scores compare well to much of BBC One's output. It has not, however, been able to achieve the high score of the most successful BBC One output such as *Noah's Ark*
  - Religion has performed strongly on BBC Two, but it does not currently have the potential to achieve the reach or attract the size of audience of the top performing output on BBC One.

## BBC portfolio

- There were fewer hours of religion across the BBC Television portfolio in 2003/4 than 2001/2 – 167 hours compared to 178 hours in 2001/2. BBC One and BBC Two still account for the majority of religious output broadcast by BBC Television – 124 hours in 2003/4.

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<sup>4</sup> Proportion of all individuals 4+ viewing any consecutive 15 minutes of religion over the year (BARB)

### **3. Key issues raised**

#### **3.1 BBC One and Two's commitments to religion are below those of other networks**

BBC One commits to 80 hours of religion in its Statement of Programme Policy. BBC Two commits to 20 hours. While both channels exceeded their commitments in 2003/4 – BBC One with 87 hours, BBC Two with 37 hours – these commitments were significantly below those of other networks. ITV committed to 104 hours in 2004, and Channel Four and Five to 52 hours each.

#### **3.2 The landmark approach has failed to deliver higher impact religion on BBC One**

On BBC One, the strategy aimed to deliver higher impact through a small volume of landmark factual output that would benefit from peak scheduling and higher spend.

During 2003/4 there were three landmarks: *Saint Paul* and *Noah's Ark* were one-hour documentaries, and *Hand of God* was a three episode series. The review indicates that this was insufficient to have any major impact over the year, with reach and average consumption of religion lower on BBC One in 2003/4 than 2001/2.

The increased investment in these landmarks in 2003/4 did not guarantee a greater reach amongst the audience or more impact in terms of post-broadcast memorability.

#### **3.3 *Songs of Praise* suffers from erratic and increasingly earlier scheduling**

*Songs of Praise* is BBC One's flagship religion strand. The Central Religious Advisory Committee has expressed concern about its variable scheduling. The average reach of the strand has fallen since the implementation of the strategy as a result of more variable scheduling, which tended to be earlier in 2003/4, and there were more occasions when the strand was transferred to BBC Two. Evidence indicates that *Songs of Praise* reaches a larger audience when broadcast on BBC One, and the later it is scheduled.

#### **3.4. *The strong performance of religious output on BBC Two raises questions as to whether more such output might be carried by the channel***

Reach of religion across BBC One and BBC Two is relatively unchanged due to an increase in reach on BBC Two which almost offset the fall on BBC One.

Religion on BBC One largely failed to deliver a significant audience with even landmarks performing below the average for their schedule slot in 2003/4. Religion,

meanwhile, performs more strongly relative to other output on BBC Two, with two programmes, *Country Parish* and *Seaside Parish*, achieving a reach in excess of the average for the slots in which they were scheduled – in peak.

This raises the question of whether BBC Two might not be a more natural home for some religious output than BBC One. That said, BBC Two does not have the potential to achieve either the reach or impact of the top performing religious programmes on BBC One.

**Appendix 1: List of religious output  
(source: BBC Television/Finance)**

**BBC One 2003/4**

A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE FOR IRAQ 2003  
BETRAYED  
CAN'T WAIT TILL CHRISTMAS  
CENOTAPH  
I AM A MOHEL  
ME AND UNCLE SAM  
NOAH  
ROSH HASHANAH  
SAINT PAUL  
SONGS OF PRAISE  
SONGS OF PRAISE AND THE STORIES OF JESUS  
SONGS OF PRAISE ARMAGH  
SONGS OF PRAISE FROM THE USA  
SONGS OF PRAISE GIFTS  
STATION OF ISLAM  
THE ARCHBISHOP OF CATERBURY'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE  
THE CRUCIFIED KING  
THE FIRST EUCHARIST OF CHRISTMAS  
THE HAND OF GOD  
THE HEAVEN AND EARTH SHOW  
THE JOYFUL EASTERTIDE  
THE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS  
THE POPE'S SILVER JUBILEE  
TONGUES OF FIRE  
TWO MINUTE SILENCE  
URBI ET ORBI  
VICTORIA AND ABDUL  
WHERE THERE'S BRASS

**BBC Two 2003/4**

A COUNTRY PARISH  
A SEASIDE PARISH  
BBC4 ON BBC2  
BIBLE MYSTERIES  
CAROLS FROM KINGS  
DOES HEALING WORK? (EVERYMAN)

DOES MEDITATION WORK? (EVERYMAN)  
DOES PRAYER WORK? (EVERYMAN)  
EVERYMAN  
HEADHUNTING THE HOMELESS  
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE  
SONGS OF PRAISE  
SPEAR OF CHRIST  
TALKING TO THE DEAD  
THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE  
THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN'S SOUL  
THE CENOTAPH: HIGHLIGHTS  
THE HEAVEN AND EARTH SHOW  
TWO MINUTE SILENCE

**BBC One 2001/2**

A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE  
A SILENCE FOR AMERICA - LIVE  
BATTERSEA TO BETHLEHEM  
BIRTHDAY OF THE PROPHET 2001  
CHRISTMAS FAMILY SERVICE  
CHRISTMAS VOICES  
DOT COM AND KOSHER  
EASTER SERVICE  
EVERYMAN  
FATHER FORGIVE  
FAVOURITE CHRISTMAS CAROLS  
FESTIVALS: MIDNIGHT MASS  
FOR LOVE AND GOD  
GETTING CLOSE TO THORA  
HAPPY NEW YEAR  
LETTERS TO THE  
MESSAGES - ROSH HASHANAH  
ON A STREET IN JERUSLAEM  
ONE GOD - TWO WORLDS  
PENTECOST, PEOPLE AND PRAISE  
QUEEN MOTHER SONGS OF PRAISE SPECIAL  
REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY:  
RISEN TODAY  
ROSH HASHANAH

SCAR STORIES  
SON OF GOD  
SONGS OF PRAISE  
SONGS OF PRAISE - CAROLS  
THE CURRY MILE  
THE HEAVEN AND EARTH  
THE HEAVEN AND EARTH SHOW  
TO HELL AND BACK  
WESTMINSTER MEMORIAL SERVICE

**BBC Two 2001/2**

A SILENCE FOR AMERICA  
BRITISH MEMORIAL SERVICE IN NEW YORK  
CAROLS FROM KINGS  
CENOTAPH- HIGHLIGHTS  
EVERYMAN  
EVERYMAN  
HAPPY NEW YEAR  
IN SEARCH OF HAPPINESS  
ISLAM UK  
LIFE ETC  
OUR FATHER THE SERIAL KILLER - EVERYMAN  
PRAYERS FOR AMERICA  
SONGS OF PRAISE  
THE EXORCIST  
WAR GRAVES

## Appendix 2: Sources

- . BBC Television/Finance: Programme output and cost data
- . BARB: Audience viewing data (average audience, reach, hours of viewing)
- . Ofcom: *The Communications market 2004*
- . Pan BBC Tracking Survey (PBTS): audience approval data
- . QUEST: Memorability of output data
- . Statements of Programme Policy:
  - o BBC 2004/5
  - o Channel 4 2004
  - o Five 2004
  - o ITV1 2004

## Appendix 3: Terms of reference

### Review of Religion on BBC Television, particularly BBC One

#### 1. Background

- Governors approved a new religion strategy covering all media in September 2002. This aimed to:
  - “bring renewed confidence and energy to reflecting the different faith experiences of the audience...through television, radio and interactive media of high quality and wide impact”
  - On BBC One and Two: “Impact will come from landmark programmes in peak-time and high-profile series and seasons”
- The Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) has highlighted concern about the marginalised scheduling of much religious output, including the absence of a regular slot, and the lack of understanding of religious faiths on the part of some programme-makers. Based on this, in the Annual Report, Governors promised:
  - *‘Work will be undertaken over the next year to assess the effectiveness of the religion strategy we approved in 2002 which promised high-impact religious programming on BBC One alongside Songs of Praise and Heaven and Earth .... We are concerned that there may not be enough landmark output in peak time to make a regular impact with viewers’*
- The impartiality review of the BBC’s religion output (which included consultation with a specialist panel of faith leaders and focus group work with members of the main religious communities in the UK) highlighted concerns about the scheduling and prominence of religious output.
- The Director of Television will be bringing a new religion strategy to the Board during the autumn. This will be an update of the strategy approved in 2002.
- An independent assessment of the effectiveness of the religion strategy on BBC One in particular, and BBC Television in general, will:
  - Fulfil the commitment to such a review made by the Governors in the Annual Report
  - Set the context for consideration of the new religion strategy the Director of Television is planning to bring to the Board during the autumn

#### 2. Scope

The planned work will focus on the output classified as religion on BBC One, given that BBC One is responsible for 80 of the 112 hours religion commitment on BBC terrestrial television. The work will necessarily make reference to the religious output offered by other BBC television networks, and competitors.

The key question it will ask is: Has the Religion Strategy, approved by Governors in 2002, delivered high-quality and wide impact religious output on television, particularly BBC One?

### **3. Approach**

It is proposed that this piece of work be carried out by the Performance & Accountability team. The work will be largely based on quantitative analysis but will draw on the qualitative research already available. Work will be based on the Reach, Quality, Impact and Value for Money metrics.

### **4. Timetable**

The work will be presented to the Board before the end of this year, ahead of the new strategy being presented by the Director of Television