

A SUBMISSION

**To the BBC Trust
from the Maranatha Community
in response to the
BBC Editorial Guidelines Consultation**

22nd December 2009

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We are a movement of thousands of Christians from all traditions who seek to follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and who regard the Bible as a reliable guide for living.

We belong to many churches and also organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We serve and work with people in a variety of national, regional and community contexts. We have knowledge and experience of many of the issues and problems facing our nation.

1. The State of our Nation

Crisis: There is now abundant evidence that our nation is in deep crisis - politically, financially, economically, environmentally and socially. Many people are experiencing very difficult and worrying times and it is likely to get much worse for us all in the months and years ahead. The nation's health and fortunes are in steep decline and the pace of this downward trajectory appears to be accelerating with every month that goes by.

Concern: It greatly concerns us that there is seemingly little agreement amongst our nation's leaders about the action that should be taken to slow down and reverse our descent towards what could be a national catastrophe. Inevitably, it is the poor, elderly, young, infirm and vulnerable who will suffer most of all.

PSB Responsibility: The BBC has a huge legal and moral responsibility in this situation, being the nation's main public service broadcaster with the ability to greatly influence its audiences through radio, television and the Internet. It is with this in mind, that we make this Submission at a time when you are considering responses from the public to your Reviews of Television Services and Editorial Guidelines. As you will see, we are addressing foundational issues which relate to the BBC as a whole and not just to the matters under current review.

2. The Reason for our National Crisis

Moral & Character Failure: We believe that widespread moral and character failure has been the major contributory reason for our various crises. This failure often takes the form of greed, dishonesty and self-centeredness. Sadly, materialism and individualism have become the primary philosophies of many in our nation today. Personality has become more important than character.

*A BBC ComRes Poll in September 2007, showed that 4 in 5 (80%) said they believed that Britain is in **moral decline**.*

Cultural Context: Our common human weaknesses have been exploited during a time when our culture's values have changed and materialism and consumerism have burgeoned. These values have flourished in the fertile ground of secular humanism. Many have rejected divine authority and chosen instead to make ethical and moral decisions based on what they personally believe to be the right or wrong course to take.

Shared Responsibility: Moral failure has of course always been part of the human condition. We all share to some extent in the responsibility for the current levels of societal breakdown and the crisis that we face today. This moral failure has adversely affected the public's trust in and support

for many of our national institutions, including the BBC and the Church. This moral failure is like a debilitating sickness which gradually affects every area of our national life. The symptoms are varied and widespread. However, the extent of this moral sickness appears to have grown very considerably in recent years. It has become an epidemic which threatens our survival as a well-functioning nation.

The foundations of our nation are undoubtedly Christian. From Christian teaching has sprung our love for freedom, democracy and tolerance. These Islands sent missionaries throughout the world and have played a unique role in human history.

3. The Root Cause of our National Crisis

Spiritual: We believe that the root cause of our moral decline as a nation is spiritual. The British people have tried to live without God in their lives to empower and guide them. Encouraged by secular humanism which has been intensively promoted in the media, they have tried to do things in their own strength and solve problems with their own faulty human wisdom. British people are now doubtless experiencing the consequences of these destructive influences which have been at work over the past 50 years. Millions are depressed, de-motivated and demoralised. Millions are seriously ill. Many in our nation are literally sick and tired.

The link between religion and morality was confirmed by the 2007 BBC ComRes Poll. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents said religion was important in guiding the nation's morals.

Cutting Roots: We have gradually wandered away from God and the formative influence of the Bible and have been cutting ourselves off from these nourishing spiritual roots. Parliament has passed numerous laws over the past forty years or so which have been directly in conflict with Biblical laws and standards.

The portrayal of vulgarity, pornography and violence as acceptable, together with the rapid growth of bad language, has brought deep concern to many viewers and listeners. Some have objected strongly to the invasion of their homes in this way.

This self-destructive severing seems very surprising in a nation where Christianity continues to be the main religion. Visitors from other countries are quick to recognize what is happening to our nation. Many, including followers of other religions, express their sadness.

Almost three quarters of the population (72% in the 2001 Census) have classified themselves as Christian. About 5% of the population belonged to a non-Christian religion of which just half were Muslim. 15% of respondents said they had no religion.

Cultural Dynamics: We believe there are probably three main reasons why our cultural roots have been neglected or attacked, despite Britain having a mainly Christian population:

First, there are many millions of nominal Christians, who may or may not take part in church life, but who do little to preserve our Christian heritage, laws and values;

Secondly, the church has largely failed to communicate and demonstrate the transforming power of the gospel to those who do not yet have a Christian faith;

Thirdly, some secular humanists, who are in positions of power and influence in and around politics, education, science and the media, are opposed to Christianity and have been working hard to reduce the role that religion plays in the public life of our nation;

Fall & Rise: The influence of secularism and materialism now seems to be declining. There has been a marked rise in the public's interest in spirituality, religion and the paranormal in recent years. Religion features in news reports and current affairs to an extent unheard of ten years ago.

This is supported by the findings from a February 2009 BBC ComRes Poll:

1. Most people (62%) want religion and the values derived from it to play an important role in British public life. The response from Christians was 73%.

2. A similar majority (62%) agreed that our laws should respect and be influenced by the UK's religious values. The response from Christians was 70%.

3. A significantly greater proportion of the Muslims and Hindus polled (albeit in relatively small numbers) supported a strong role in public life for the UK's (essentially) traditional religious values.

4. The influence of broadcasting on our culture

Main Shaper: A nation's culture is primarily shaped by the religion practised by the largest proportion of its population. State enforced atheism has itself sometimes resembled a religion. The religious beliefs of a country's population usually govern the laws, shared morality, values and customs of that country. In the case of an atheistic regime, where there is no freedom of religion, most of these matters are dictated to the people by the country's leadership. There is no doubt that the Christian faith has shaped British culture over very many centuries. It is beyond dispute that the Christian faith has changed the lives of millions of people for the better. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the preaching of the Christian gospel transformed the lives of vast numbers of men and women. Many then went on to spend the rest of their lives either campaigning against injustice and human exploitation or sacrificially loving and serving the needs of others.

Cultural Oak: For centuries Great Britain had a clear cultural identity. It was like a large oak tree, many centuries old, providing welcome and security to all who would seek shelter within its branches. However, over many decades now, we have been gradually severing this cultural oak from its spiritual roots and thereby diluting the influence of Christianity in the public square. The promotion of Britain as a multicultural society, coupled with the insidious growth of political correctness, has greatly accelerated this trend in recent years. At the same time, we have been attempting to engraft many other cultural and religious rootstocks onto what remains. It is not surprising that there is cultural confusion in Britain and a crisis over our national identity. The preaching of 'pluralism' and 'multi-culturalism' have not helped.

Heritage Treasure: However reassuring the messages of the media might seem, it appears that the once mighty British oak is slowly dying and action is required before it is too late. The urgent need for change is not only recognized by Christians but by adherents of other religions. There is a need for us to treasure our own Judeo-Christian heritage and values. These values respected the sanctity of human life, fostered marriage and the family, put the interests of children before parents, provided for the poor and vulnerable and championed the individual's historic freedoms of conscience, speech and religion.

The media, and especially the BBC with its public service responsibilities, has a crucial role to play in highlighting the importance of our nation's religious heritage. All is not well. *The 2009 BBC ComRes Poll showed that one-third of respondents (35% total and 34% Christian) disagreed with the statement that the media reports their religion fairly and accurately.*

Whatever our personal beliefs may be, we believe all British citizens should know about and respect our nation's spiritual roots and Judeo-Christian heritage. Otherwise, our values will be permanently undermined and all of us will be worse off, whatever our creed or ethnic origin. The prophet Jeremiah, recorded in chapter 6 verse 16, spoke God's timeless words to the Israelites:

5. Hope for our Nation

There are signs of a growing recognition of meaning, purpose and value in life. There are signs of

a widespread search for the spiritual dimension of human existence. This search has been inhibited by the media which has strongly favoured doubt over belief; agnosticism over conviction and the rejection of absolute truth in favour of relativism.

6. Key Issues for the BBC

Major Principle: We have sought in this Submission to address points of major principle and not to list specific comments, complaints or suggestions. We will leave that to others.

Foundation Stone: Our biggest concern is that the BBC has been gradually cutting itself off from its own spiritual roots and Judeo-Christian foundations. We would like to remind the Trustees that the BBC was originally dedicated to Almighty God by its first Governors, who had their prayer inscribed in stone in the Entrance Hall of Broadcasting House. Their prayer was that **“good seed sown (broadcast) will produce a good harvest, that everything offensive to decency and hostile to peace will be expelled, and that the nation will incline its ear to those things which are lovely, pure and of good report and thus pursue the path of wisdom and virtue.”** This prayer is based upon a scripture verse found in the Bible - The Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 4 verse 8:

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever things are of good report – if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – think on these things”.

We believe that the BBC has done a great public disservice to this nation by departing from its own spiritual and cultural foundations.

First, It appears to us that the BBC has largely abandoned the Christian worldview of its founding Governors. It seems to us that secular humanism has become the most prominent underlying worldview of those involved in making, reporting, presenting and contributing to all kinds of programmes broadcast.

Secondly, we believe that the BBC has seriously departed from its commitment to its stated values of impartiality and honesty on issues such as evolution. Frequently, the concept of God being our Creator, has been ignored or rejected. The BBC's reputation for integrity and truthfulness remain as important as ever if audiences are to be kept informed and not misled.

Thirdly, we believe that the BBC has deliberately ignored the clearly expressed wish of the British public for there to be less obscenity, vulgarity and bad language in its programmes. Repeatedly, public opinion polls have revealed over the past ten years that they want action to stop this, but this has not happened, but the BBC has ignored these.

Fourthly, the BBC has gone out of its way to broadcast material which is deeply offensive to Christians and highly critical of the Christian faith. While healthy discussion and free comment must always be encouraged and defended, there is no reason for the BBC to broadcast material which is gratuitously offensive to Christian believers. An example of this was the Jerry Springer Opera case when the BBC apparently received over 50,000 letters and emails of complaint about a programme which mocked and ridiculed Jesus Christ. The BBC chose to ignore or reject this massive expression of public concern and would not dare to treat other religions such as Islam in the same way.

We believe that the Trustees should now make it their top priority to address certain key issues. Namely, those that relate to the BBC's foundational values, its role within a nation in crisis and the programming values and output that are needed.

7. Our Call to the BBC Trustees

Our message is clear and united. The nation is in deep crisis. People are becoming increasingly worried and fearful about the future. Over the past fifty years, we have increasingly squandered our Christian heritage and turned our back on God and the wisdom found in the Bible.

We believe there is hope for the despairing and good news for those who will heed the warning signs and treasure our spiritual heritage. We believe that the BBC can be a help or a hindrance to people who are seriously concerned about the state of our nation and to our seeking purpose and value in life.

With all the above in mind, we call upon the Trustees, as a matter of urgency, to:

Revisit the Judeo-Christian foundations and values of the BBC and consider how this world-view has served to promote the wellbeing of our nation in the past and the international reputation of the BBC and the United Kingdom until recent times;

Reflect upon the words of the inscription chiseled into the Dedication Stone situated in the Entrance Hall of Broadcasting House;

Reconnect with the spiritual roots of the BBC and its Judeo-Christian principles and values;

Revise the Editorial Guidelines and programme policies and plans in the light of these spiritual roots and foundational principles and values;

Broadcast more programmes that:

Foster a deeper understanding of our Christian culture, heritage and history;

Demonstrate the transforming power of Christian values and faith in people's lives;

Show how men and women of faith have benefited our nation both now and in the past.

We recognise that one of the roles of the BBC is to question and to explore. This does not mean that it should be a means of damaging our national life and inheritance. In claiming impartiality the BBC actually favours agnosticism and secular humanism.

We appeal to the Trustees to re-evaluate the role in our society of this important national institution.

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