

# Religion and the Media

## Religious Broadcasting



This type of broadcasting began when Britain was primarily Christian and there were very few other faiths. TV programmes were therefore aimed at Christians. Now it 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.

There are a few programmes aimed at committed religious people but many are just magazine type programmes or documentaries. Religious broadcasters have to make programmes that appeal to a lot of people as they have audience targets they have to meet.

## Worship and Magazine programmes

There are a number of these programmes on TV. **Songs of praise** is the most popular and attracted between 5 and 7 million each Sunday. However even this traditional religious programme has changed from just singing traditional hymns to one that looks at the lives of believers and where the music is more up to date. **The Big Questions** is a discussion based programme on BBC Sundays 10am that is similar to daytime discussion programme with a studio audience discussing relevant issues. (like the Wright Stuff) but with religious stories and chat about ethical and moral issues.



## Documentaries

Religious documentaries are also popular religious programmes because they deal with issues of interest to many people. **Everyman** a documentary on the BBC deals with moral and religious issues. **Witness** is a Channel 4 documentary that looks at people who are searching for 'truth' from way out religions through to Christians fighting for justice in the world. There are other programmes that are one off serious like '**From Jesus to Christ**' which used modern special effects to look at the life of Jesus. Recently there was a documentary in December 2009 on Channel 4 looking at the Tsunami in 2004 and exploring where God was when this happened.



## Religious and moral issues in soaps, films and TV dramas.

### A religious issue

Connected with the meaning of life and linked to religious belief. E.g. 'Is there a God?' 'Should priests marry?' 'Should women be priests?'



## Moral issue

An argument about the rightness or wrongness of an action. E.g. 'Is abortion acceptable?' 'Should Euthanasia be legalised?' 'Is war ever justified?'

## Eastenders

Dot Cotton is a character who is often seen referring to the Bible and turning to her faith. Lucas was a preacher who was first seen as a very virtuous and caring character. However viewers eventually saw a darker side when he murdered Trina and Owen. Do these characters present a positive or a negative image of religious people?



## Coronation Street

Roy and Haley wanted to marry in church but Haley had been born a man and then had a sex change operation. The issues are whether it was moral for a person to change their sex? Should Christians be tolerant and even when someone is not following traditional Christian beliefs etc. Sophie Webster became a Christian and chose to wear a purity ring and had an adult baptism. She since came out as a lesbian and struggled to find a church that accepted her.

## Films and dramas

Films and dramas often have moral or religious issues, some examples:

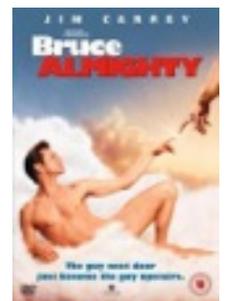
**Four Weddings and a funeral** includes issues of marriage, commitment, adultery etc.

**Bruce Almighty** – This is about a man who is given God's powers.

**Bend it like Beckham** looks at issues relating to living in a multi-faith society.

**The Chronicles of Narnia** – CS Lewis who wrote the novels was a Christian. The character of Aslan represents Jesus.

**Noah** is a biblical epic that retold the story of Noah - but upset some Christians due to not being entirely faithful to the Biblical story.



## Is the media fair?

### **Yes**

- There is a lot of serious religious programming (Documentaries etc)
- Many programmes portray religion in a positive way (Religious magazine type shows)
- There are lots of opportunities in programmes like soaps where important religious and moral issues are examined.

### **No**

- Many programmes just use religion for comedy (Father Ted, Vicar of Dibley, Family Guy)
- Religious characters in soaps are often odd or extreme characters (Dot and Lucas– Eastenders/ Edna – Emmerdale, Sophie Webster in Coronation Street)

- Religious programmes are now sidelined, they are shown only on Sundays and not at prime time

### Tasks

**Complete the following tasks in your exercise book.**

1. Who is religious broadcasting aimed towards?
2. What is the 'God slot'?
3. What are religious broadcasters trying to do?
4. Give two examples of religious documentaries
5. Give two examples of religious/ moral issues being addressed in Soap Operas.
6. Give two examples of films that have a religious issues in them.
7. How is religion used in a positive way in broadcasting?
8. How is religion used in a negative way in broadcasting?
9. Why do you think religious programmes have been sidelined more recently?

