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# CHANNEL 4 AND THE DECLINING INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZED RELIGION ON UK TELEVISION. THE CASE OF *JESUS: THE EVIDENCE*

Richard Wallis

*During the early 1980s, there was a high level of expectation attached to the provision of a fourth television service in the UK. Channel 4 was set up to be a publisher–broadcaster, commercially self-funding, but with a public service remit to cater for minority groups. For the churches, the new channel initially looked as if it might provide fresh impetus for religious broadcasting, believed by many to be moribund. The paper examines the circumstances surrounding *Jesus: The Evidence*, a highly controversial Easter documentary series commissioned by Channel 4 during its first year – not at all what the churches had hoped for. It is suggested that the public furore sparked by the series arose from an escalating sense of disenfranchisement related to a very particular earlier history. It charts the general shift away from the precedent established in the 1920s by the BBC’s first Director General, to the advent of Channel 4, by which time this earlier position had come to be viewed as less than impartial. The paper identifies the principal points of contestation at the heart of the controversy, and concludes that it was emblematic of a growing cultural dissonance between the religious and the broadcasting institutions.*

In April 1984, the newly created UK broadcaster, Channel 4, launched a major three-part Easter documentary series entitled *Jesus: The Evidence*.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the traditional slate of devotional Lenten and Easter programming that UK audiences had long been used to, the Channel 4 series was interrogative, skeptical, and self-consciously provocative. According to its pre-transmission publicity, the series would come as ‘a profound shock to many’.<sup>2</sup>

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*Jesus: The Evidence* caused a shock, but one of a different order to that imagined by the broadcaster's Press Relations department. The ire that the series attracted, and the energy of the campaign mounted against it, had greater significance than the series itself. The furore sparked by the programmes arose from an escalating sense of disquiet among many within the UK's Christian churches: an unfolding awareness of a loss of previously-held privilege in relation to broadcasting in general, and religious broadcasting in particular. By the early 1980s, what had largely been a general and unfocused frustration about this sense of lost ground, found its expression in specific indignation about *Jesus: The Evidence* coming, as it did, at the moment of a further decisive shift in the place of the churches in public service broadcasting, with the establishment of the fourth channel.

Religious broadcasting in the UK had been no stranger to controversy over the years. From the earliest days of the BBC, many churches had strongly objected to the idea of broadcasting religious services, mainly on the pragmatic grounds that they could become a substitute for attending church in person. Dorothy L. Sayers' 1941 radio dramatization of the life of Christ, *The Man Born to be King*, caused a storm of protest.<sup>3</sup> It prompted over two thousand letters of complaint prior to its broadcast.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the tone of many of these earlier protestations suggests that they were concerned more with particular ways in which the Christian religion was communicated, than from any sense of uncertainty about the rightful place of the churches in determining it. When the Lord's Day Observance Society lodged a protest with the BBC about Sayers' work, requesting it to 'refrain from staging on the wireless this revolting imitation of the voice of our Divine Saviour and Redeemer', it did so on the premise that there was a consensus about the place of The Redeemer at the heart of the nations' broadcasting service.<sup>5</sup> The furore surrounding *Jesus: The Evidence* was not a complete break with this perspective, but it did mark a dawning realization among many within the churches that they could no longer assume the same prerogative as they had previously enjoyed.

Within a broader frame, *Jesus: The Evidence* may be understood in terms of the progression of *secularization*, and not dissimilar to changes affecting many other aspects of British society of the same period. Yet to employ the notion of secularization necessitates some qualification to avoid oversimplifying the complicated inter-related processes involved in the erosion of the churches' institutional power, its decline in cultural influence, and the various alterations in social structure that this implies. The dating of the decline of Christianity in the UK, for example, is far from straightforward. In recent years, some social historians have suggested it is a consequence of the social and cultural changes of the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> But to privilege these (albeit significant) years is to downplay the broader social forces at work in the uneven decline of organized religion throughout Western Europe over many of the preceding decades, and centuries.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the case of *Jesus: The Evidence* marks the deterioration in what had been a far from inevitable, uniquely close relationship between the BBC and the Christian denominations in the early years of British broadcasting. The extent of this early closeness was only in part a consequence of it having been a more Christian country. It was in no small measure, due to the eccentricities of the BBC's first Director General, John Reith, who dominated the early evolution of every aspect of the corporation's policy, and its religious broadcasting policy in particular.

In what follows, the model for religious broadcasting that had been determined in the 1920s by Reith, is described and explained. This approach evolved over time, and these changes are also considered with particular reference to the notion of impartiality. It will be shown that, by the introduction of the fourth channel in the early 1980s, the dominant view among broadcasters had altered to the point at which there were significant points of friction with the churches. *Jesus: The Evidence* is then examined against this background: the way in which the series was developed; the substance of its content; the principal points of contestation at the heart of the ensuing controversy; and the way in which it was contested. It is argued that the furore surrounding the series is significant as emblematic of a growing cultural dissonance between organized religion and the broadcasting institutions of the UK, the reasons for which, it is hoped, this paper will shed some light on.

### The Reithian precedent

To understand the privileging of the UK Christian churches within broadcasting, it is necessary to understand the personal history of John Reith. Reith was the son of a Presbyterian clergyman. His father had been minister at College Church, Glasgow and later Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland. Young Reith was raised in a strict religious atmosphere. A powerful paternal influence remained with him throughout his life and he always maintained strong, if somewhat eclectic, Christian convictions. When, at the age of 33, Reith took up his appointment at the BBC, he saw it as more than just a job. Rather it was a 'calling': a vocation for which he had been commissioned by God. His inherited Calvinism was the source of both his sense of destiny to such a work and his driving ambition.<sup>8</sup>

Despite his strongly held religious views, Reith actually had little time for the institutional structures of the churches. The BBC's relationship with the churches was instituted on his own terms. BBC Christianity was to reflect the middle ground of religious consensus: non-confessional and fundamental. He was a strong advocate of 'every-day' Christianity and an ardent Sabbatarian, as historian Kenneth Wolfe has noted:

Reith was never a really committed 'churchman', he was committed to the protection and promulgation of 'dynamic' Christianity in national and personal life, and Sunday was the one institution which, he believed, belonged to the maintenance of a Christian presence. He would defend the working man against being exploited and expose him to the best preaching which the churches could provide.<sup>9</sup>

It was this philosophy that lay behind Reith's determination to develop Sunday broadcasting. Within four years, these programmes included a monthly children's service, weekly Bible readings, a religious 'good cause' appeal, and a regular even-song from Westminster Abbey for the benefit of the sick.

As the Sunday evening sermon became established as a staple feature of the wireless schedule, Reith set up what was initially known as The Sunday Committee, to provide the support and advice of churches that were in the 'main stream'

of historic Christianity, particularly for the purpose of choosing Sunday speakers. By their seventh meeting in July 1926, it was thought that a more appropriate name for the group was the Religious Advisory Committee, and later still, the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC).

During the first decade of broadcasting, CRAC extended its influence in three fundamental rulings that were accepted by the BBC authorities. The first was that no religious broadcast was to take place during the normal hours of church services. The second was that there should be no attacks on Christianity or broadcasts of a sectarian nature. The third was that no alternatives to religious services should be broadcast. (The latter policy was abandoned in 1940, with the prohibition on controversy lifted seven years later). CRAC's early definition of the aims of religious broadcasting reflected Reith's ambition 'to make Britain a more Christian country'.<sup>10</sup> In a report prepared for CRAC in October 1948, 'four distinguishable aspects of this aim' were stated in ascending order of importance:

- (1) To maintain standards of truth, justice, and honesty in private and public life.
- (2) To explain what the Christian faith is, to remove misunderstanding of it and to demonstrate its relevance today.
- (3) To lead 'non-churchgoers' to see that any really 'Christian' commitment involves active membership of an actual church congregation and to give 'churchgoers' a wider vision of what church membership involves.
- (4) To provide opportunities for that challenge to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord which is the heart of 'conversion'.<sup>11</sup>

Although these aims were revised several times over the decades, the model for the style and pattern of religious broadcasting, established by Reith, and then strengthened by the oversight of CRAC, persisted for many years. CRAC's early institutionalization, extending eventually to its also providing advice to the Independent Television Authority (ITA), established a set of expectations of what religious broadcasting was supposed to be, and engendered a sense of entitlement within the Christian churches. Yet, unsurprisingly, such expectations proved to be impossible to sustain into the second half of the twentieth century. Although CRAC continued to function until as recently as 2008, its influence significantly diminished over the years, as will be demonstrated below.<sup>12</sup>

## Changing times

Commitment to the principle of *impartiality* has long been enshrined in UK broadcasting editorial values.<sup>13</sup> But what this notion is thought to constitute has always been a moving target. The gradual shift away from Reith's position of implicit acceptance of Christian orthodoxy, to one in which such a position came increasingly to be viewed as less than impartial, is reflected in various official reports over the years. It can be detected as early as 1947 with the lifting of the ban on controversy. This led the Beveridge Report to make a clear distinction between the BBC's Religious Department and its Talks Department, and the 'highest duty' of the Corporation to make an 'impartial search for truth' independent of any

religious commitment.<sup>14</sup> The subsequent changes in the policy for religious broadcasting and its aims as defined by CRAC became progressively less Christian mission-orientated, until the statement of aims of 1977 led Annan to observe that:

... it departs fundamentally from the previous definition of objectives. It asks broadcasting to cater for the religious needs of people outside the churches but not to proselytise. This is an important change because it makes clear that even if their religion lays a duty upon believers to proselytise, they must not use broadcasting to fulfil that duty.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually, this was bound to expose tensions, particularly in the area of religious broadcasting where the prevailing influence of the churches had long been presumed. From the war years onwards, the relationship between the churches and the broadcasters began to weaken. Annan's report indicates two further significant changes that had occurred within the three post-war decades: first, the term 'religion' had broadened from meaning exclusively Christian; and second, that while broadcasting was to cater for the 'needs' of people outside the churches, it was *not* to proselytize (or in Reith's terms, 'make Britain a more Christian country').

These institutional and policy changes were not immediately felt in broadcasting output, although there were periodic and unsettling jolts to the status quo: most notably, those related to the continued popularity and expansion of television, leading initially to the birth of Independent Television (ITV), and eventually to the arrival of a new approach to television content in the form of the fourth channel. Occasional expressions of disquiet would surface, most often, in response to specific programming changes. A case in point was the decline of the closed period (or 'God slot') – 70 minutes on Sunday evenings of simultaneous religious programming on both BBC television and ITV – which triggered particular consternation (although the initial move of the BBC's religious documentary strand, *Everyman*, to a late evening slot, was seen by many at the time as a sign of confidence). Yet collectively, these changes served to steadily erode the churches' historically privileged role in determining the direction of religious broadcasting. At the moment that the idea for a fourth channel was being mooted, many were actively looking for alternative models for church engagement in broadcasting.

### **Hopes and expectations for Channel 4**

By the early 1980s, there was a growing sense among many within the churches, that religious broadcasting had become moribund. Yet, the media landscape was changing. The opportunities of cable and satellite offered the possibility of a more commercial, US-style model for religious broadcasting: a prospect embraced by some, and feared by others. There was also a high level of expectation being attached to the provision of a fourth television service in the UK, intended to complement the BBC's two license funded services, and the commercial broadcasting network, ITV.

The Government-commissioned *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* under the chairmanship of Lord Annan, had made a recommendation for an

‘Open Broadcasting Authority’ to take responsibility for a future fourth channel with a distinctive remit:

We do not consider that the Open Broadcasting Authority should be required to schedule a balanced evening’s viewing ... Nor should the OBA be required to take responsibility for the content of its programmes in the same way as the BBC and IBA do. The OBA should operate as a publisher and its obligations should be limited to those placed upon any other publisher. Like any publisher the Authority would need to see to it that its programmes were not libelous, did not incite to crime, disorder, or racial hatred and were not obscene. Like any other Authority, the OBA would have to see that an overall balance was achieved in its programmes over a period of time, but we should like to see this done in new and less interventionist ways.<sup>16</sup>

Although Annan’s recommendations for the creation of an OBA were never implemented (Channel 4 became a ‘wholly-owned subsidiary of the IBA’), the new channel was still conceived in the spirit of the Report’s recommendations as a *publisher–broadcaster*, commercially self-funding, but with a public service remit to cater for minority groups.<sup>17</sup>

For the churches, this new broadcasting model seemed to suggest the possibility of fresh impetus for religion on terrestrial television. Channel 4 would be required by regulation to have an hour of religious broadcasting each week, and unlike the other channels, all its religious content would be commissioned from *external* providers. It kindled a hope among some for an opportunity of more direct involvement in programme production. Consequently, in 1981, the mainstream denominations collectively initiated the British Churches Committee for Channel Four (BCCC4) with the aim of encouraging churches to take up the new opportunities:

The BCCC4 wishes to be in a position to take initiatives as a Participating Body rather than simply an advisory group. The task to be done will therefore include putting up quite specific programme proposals to the commissioning editors or to production units wishing to make religious programme offers to Channel Four.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time as this initiative, a number of independent religious groups also formed with a similar aim in view.<sup>19</sup> Manchester-based Good News Television, for example, submitted a ready-made pilot and proposal modeled precisely on the format of the US evangelistic talk show, *The PTL Club*.<sup>20</sup>

Channel 4 was launched in November 1982. But despite earlier optimism, the appointment of John Ranelagh as Commissioning Editor for Religion dampened much of the initial enthusiasm. A self-confessed ‘enthusiastic agnostic’, Ranelagh’s views on ‘broadening the spectrum of religious programming’ were focused on his interest in more ‘intellectual’ concerns.<sup>21</sup> By the end of 1983, a year since the birth of the fourth channel, he had rejected *all* of the programme ideas submitted to him by both BCCC4 and the other independent groups. His view of BCCC4 was that they were ‘a very worthy and serious body’ but had not come up with the right proposal.<sup>22</sup> Of others he was more contemptuous and particularly dismissive of the more evangelical groups. Good News Television was rejected out of

hand. Lella Productions, another ‘indie’ company set-up by a Christian entrepreneur, was similarly suspect: ‘They haven’t shown me that they’re interested in making objective programmes’.<sup>23</sup> Ranelagh was also outspoken in his dislike of CRAC and the advisory structure generally (Channel 4 had not followed ITV’s earlier example of embracing the pre-existing advisory structure).<sup>24</sup>

The disappointment that many church groups felt with the way in which Channel 4 appeared to be evolving, came at the same moment as ITV decided to shift its own religious strand, *Credo*, to an early afternoon slot. This move from what had been the closed period (albeit a consequence of the BBC’s earlier move of *Everyman* to a later slot), and the perceived impotence of CRAC to do anything about it, resulted in a mounting frustration. As early as 1973, the General Synod’s Broadcasting Commission had reported:

At present there is a widespread feeling, as evidenced in the General Synod by Professor Norman Anderson (himself a serving member of CRAC) in the November 1971 debates that ‘to a considerable extent CRAC is used as an excuse’, a situation which caused him to say that he was ‘profoundly unhappy’ about its functions.<sup>25</sup>

A decade later, that profound unhappiness had, in some quarters, turned into distinct hostility. Religious broadcasting seemed to be losing ground fast, in quality, in quantity, and in the schedules.

Within this climate, during the autumn of 1983, a rumor began that Channel 4 was planning a series of programmes advocating ideas that undermined the reliability of the Gospels, that suggested that Jesus indulged in witchcraft, and that even doubted his existence. More than anything, it was the timing of *Jesus: The Evidence* that made it the target for religious indignation, and the focus of a furore that graphically illustrates the decline in the relationship between the broadcasting institutions and organized religion as it was at this time.

### **The idea for the programme series**

It was an article in *The Sunday Times* in December 1979 that sparked an idea for a series of programmes examining historical evidence about Jesus. The article entitled *The Gospel of the Losers* was written by the paper’s religious affairs correspondent, John Whale.<sup>26</sup> It was based on a forthcoming book entitled *The Gnostic Gospels* by the American scholar Elaine Pagels.<sup>27</sup> In her book, Pagels presents Gnosticism as an early alternative Christian tradition that was eliminated mainly because it lacked theological and organizational structure. What became orthodox Christianity, on the other hand, survived because it was embodied within a structure conducive to the political context from which it emerged:

It is the winners who write history – their way. No wonder, then, that the viewpoint of the successful majority has dominated all traditional accounts of the origin of Christianity. Ecclesiastical Christians first defined the terms (naming themselves ‘orthodox’ and their opponents ‘heretics’); then they proceeded to demonstrate – at least to their own satisfaction – that their triumph was historically inevitable, or, in religious terms, ‘guided by the Holy Spirit’.<sup>28</sup>



John Birt, Director of Programmes at London Weekend Television (LWT) (a man later to assume Reith's mantle as Director General of the BBC), sent Whale's article as a possible programme idea to the editor of religious and education features, Julian Norridge. Norridge researched the subject and proposed a series of programmes for Channel 4: an investigation not simply of the Gnostic texts but of the whole subject of historical reliability as it related to the life of Jesus and the early church. Ranelagh liked the idea and commissioned LWT's Current Affairs and Features Department to provide him with a series, the working title of which was to be *Jesus: An Examination of the Evidence*. The programmes were to be produced and directed by David W. Rolfe, noted for the success of his BAFTA award-winning film *Silent Witness*, about the Shroud of Turin.<sup>29</sup>

As they began to examine trends within Biblical criticism of the last two hundred years, Rolfe and his production team became 'shocked by certain things', convinced that there was a conspiracy of silence on the part of many clergy and theologians regarding what they actually believed about Jesus and the Gospels.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to *The Times*, Rolfe explained:

... most 'professional' Christians today base their faith on much broader principles than belief in the historicity of the New Testament. Yet the public by and large still assume that belief in virgin birth, divine miracles and bodily resurrection are requirements for church membership. The purpose of our series was to bring out in the open this division between clerical and lay beliefs. If the Church prefers to defend itself on the principles it upholds rather than the creeds it has inherited, let it say so openly.<sup>31</sup>

Norridge described their task as bringing into the open a debate which 'has been simmering quietly for the last two centuries': an *exposé* designed to create waves.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the ferocity of the waves when they came, were not fully anticipated. What occurred was an orchestrated campaign prior to transmission that appeared to attack the integrity of the broadcasters themselves.

### The leaked scripts

Norridge and Rolfe began studio-based filming in the April of 1983. Meanwhile, copies of the shooting scripts were circulated within LWT. It was at this time that they were stumbled upon by a young engineer within the Planning and Insulation Department who had recently converted to evangelical Christianity. Being disturbed by what he read, he contacted several evangelical organizations including the Order of Christian Unity, Care Trust, and a youth magazine with a strongly evangelical focus called *Buzz*. It was *Buzz* which finally expressed interest in seeing the scripts. Steve Goddard, the editor, described himself as being 'surprised by the content' and unsure of what to make of them. He forwarded them for a professional opinion to the prominent evangelical, Canon Michael Green, Rector of St. Aldate's, Oxford.<sup>33</sup> Green was quick to respond: 'scandalously tendentious and in my view deliberately so'.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, he was so incensed by what he read that he took it upon himself to forward them to the Bishop of Birmingham, Hugh

Montefiore, a New Testament scholar and more Catholic in outlook than Green. Montefiore responded by contacting LWT directly:

Canon Michael Green sent me a copy of the first programme which had been leaked to him. It seemed to me on scholarly grounds to be very reprehensible, and I made a list of objections, not on grounds of theology but on grounds of scholarship where it was in error, and sent it to the Director. He replied courteously. Later a copy of the words of the second programme fell into my lap, and I objected on the grounds of bias to those also, and sent a properly documented list of objections to the Director. He replied courteously but I don't think that he made many alterations, although some were made.<sup>35</sup>

Goddard was aware that the 52-page shooting script, which he had received in September 1983 and subsequently forwarded to Green, was unlikely to be an accurate indication of the content of the final edited programmes. When LWT's Deputy Head of Press Relations complied with his request and arranged a special preview, Goddard was given the opportunity of seeing the completed first two programmes in February 1984. He recorded them on a pocket dictaphone and later had them transcribed. In comparing this text with the original scripts, he described the 'extremism' as having been 'watered down'.<sup>36</sup> The shooting scripts of the first programme had indicated that there was to be no contribution from conservative scholars, while the finished programme presented the leading conservative scholar, Howard Marshall. The German academic, George Wells, advocating the theory that Jesus never existed, was given far less time than the original script had suggested. Other material had been deleted altogether, such as the suggestion that Christian martyr, Stephen, had been stoned by fellow Christians.<sup>37</sup>

Goddard attributed these changes to the pressure already being exerted against the series by *Buzz* and the gathering support. Before going on study leave to California, Montefiore had alerted both Bill Westward, Bishop of Edmonton and Chair of the Church of England's Information Committee; and Graham Leonard, Bishop of London and the incoming Chair of CRAC. Westwood, himself a broadcaster, declined to become involved in anti-media campaigning, but Leonard offered outspoken support. At this point Basil Hume, the Archbishop of Westminster, also reacted quickly by setting up a committee to look into the matter on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. Whether or not these developments account for the script changes is difficult to determine. LWT insisted that they did not. Goddard believed otherwise. But he also remained profoundly unhappy with the intended content of the programmes and it was at this point, after further consultation with Clive Calver, Director of the Evangelical Alliance (EA), that a full campaign was launched.

### **A growing campaign**

Official relations between *Buzz* and LWT were strained but civil. Goddard requested and was granted permission to duplicate the transcripts that he had made from the first two programmes. These were then distributed by the EA to a number of 'leading theologians and church leaders' who were asked to sign a statement

'strongly regretting the imbalance' of the series.<sup>38</sup> They were also asked for their comments. These were then returned to the EA who circulated a press release of their own and prepared an eight-page magazine in conjunction with *Buzz*, British Youth For Christ, and religious publishing house, Paternoster Press, described as: 'Ideal to give away to non-Christians. Churches and individuals alike must use this magazine to proclaim the truth when questions are thrown up by these programmes'.<sup>39</sup> Paternoster Press also joined forces with Inter-Varsity Press and Lion Publishing to instigate a book promotion campaign. 'Jesus: The Evidence – Get the Facts' was a poster and book pack supplied to any religious bookshop in sympathy with the EA's objections to the programmes.

Between the time that the EA and *Buzz* launched their campaign and LWT's Press Conference for the programmes on 29 March, Goddard had received over forty signed statements.<sup>40</sup> Many of the respondents had added further criticism and comments of their own. From these, Goddard prepared a press release: 'Historians, theologians and Church leaders condemn London Weekend Television's *Jesus: The Evidence* as distorted and unreliable'.<sup>41</sup> He included extracts from the comments made about the programmes by the eminent legal scholar, Sir Norman Anderson, the theologian, F.F. Bruce, and other leading academics and churchmen. Goddard took copies of his press release to LWT's press lunch but waited until the very end before he produced it to read. Jackson recalled that 'the Fleet Street boys had been bored', but suddenly 'woke up' and began to ask Goddard for copies of his Press Release.<sup>42</sup>

Within a week *Buzz* and its campaign against LWT had moved from relative obscurity to a feature of national news with some eye-catching headlines. The theme adopted by *The Times* ("Gay Jesus" hint in film condemned) that the series 'implies that Jesus could have been a homosexual' was particularly favoured by the press and became an emotive tool in the hands of the campaigners.<sup>43</sup> By the time that the programmes came to be broadcast, the series had become one of the most publicized that Channel 4 had aired.<sup>44</sup>

### Three arguments against the series

Amid the clamor of voices, it became difficult to distinguish between three different arguments, distinct but confused, that were being expressed against the programmes. First, strong criticism was voiced particularly by the press, of the programmes' sensational treatment of the subject matter. Phrases such as 'faintly comical', 'rather febrile sensationalism' and 'vaguely vulgar' were variously used by reviewers to refer to the programmes' televisual style.<sup>45</sup> Reviewing for *The Guardian*, Nancy Banks-Smith wrote:

The attempts to make academic research visual verged on the desperate. Scholars were DISMISSED and EXCOMMUNICATED with stamps to that effect on their faces. A statue of Jesus exploded because Albert Schweitzer said his historical image had fallen to pieces. My favourite was a reference to 'the great Cambridge Professor C.H. Dodd' which was accompanied by the shadow of a donkey. (Dodd was rather pro the entry into Jerusalem).<sup>46</sup>

Second, there was a criticism from within the churches that the programmes were undermining Christian faith and tradition. This was evidenced in Channel 4's *Right to Reply* programme, in which a young woman emotionally described the detrimental effect that the series had had on her faith. The series was felt to be 'dishonouring the name of Jesus Christ'.<sup>47</sup> It was also attempting to 'deliberately undermine the faith of thousands'.<sup>48</sup> This feeling was fuelled by the timing of the programmes over Lent, Holy Week and Easter, felt to be a 'grave offence' to Christians.<sup>49</sup> It allowed the impression that orthodox Christianity was 'under attack', and in this regard, Canon Green and others complained that the beliefs of religious minority groups would not have been subject to the same treatment.<sup>50</sup>

Much of the angry rhetoric tended to polarize the defenders of truth, on the one hand, and the opponents of godliness on the other: a discourse that may have undermined the third, and more rational, critique of the programmes, which was that they were not *impartial*, and were therefore misleading.

It was this line that was intended to be the *Buzz* campaign's main thrust. Goddard admitted to being embarrassed by some of the hysterical letters that were sent to the programme-makers by other Christians:

At no point did we positively ask for the programmes to be pulled off the TV. We just wanted balance ... I know we're going to be typecast by the IBA and others as being against these issues being discussed, but this is not so.<sup>51</sup>

The statement signed by the '41 leading theologians and church leaders' succinctly expressed the campaign's main objection to the programmes:

In response to the scripts of the first two programmes of the series *Jesus: The Evidence*, produced by London Weekend Television, we strongly regret the imbalance in the range of biblical scholarship represented. It is not a fair representation of contemporary biblical scholarship and misleads the uninformed viewer.<sup>52</sup>

Submitted with this statement was the demand that the programmes should be balanced by a 'right-to-reply'.

The view that *Jesus: The Evidence* lacked balance and impartiality was shared by a number of other critics who maintained their distance from Goddard and the *Buzz* campaign. Very few TV critics or reviewers attempted to argue that the programmes had been an accurate presentation of modern theological scholarship. Of the few that did espouse this view, the most vociferous was John Whale, the author of the original article that had sparked the idea for the series. Writing for *The Sunday Times* he expressed the view that the series was 'a decent popular statement of the present state of New Testament scholarship among Protestants'.<sup>53</sup> This was not a view shared by many. Henry Chadwick, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, recalled of the programmes that they 'juxtaposed perfectly sensible scholarly opinions with opinions so outré and hard to defend on rational grounds that disservice was done to the sensible people by the company they were portrayed as keeping'.<sup>54</sup>

This view was reflected in the comments made by the large number of signatories to the EA/*Buzz* statement: 'misleading ... one-sided and irresponsible,' 'very biased,' 'totally unbalanced,' 'mischievous mistreatment of fact,' 'extremely tendentious in

their choice of scholars,' 'way-out speculations and eccentric opinions,' 'lacking in scholarly balance,' and 'so one-sided in their presentation as to be distortions of the evidence'.<sup>55</sup> With such a consensus of view, Goddard was optimistic about the strength of his case in demanding a right-to-reply. The programmes' lack of impartiality needed to be redressed, if only for the credibility of the Channel 4 regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority. Although a discussion programme was subsequently made to follow the series, there were two complicating factors in this argument for impartiality that were not fully understood by many of the campaigners.

### Television ambiguity

The first challenge incurred by the campaign related to the complex and often ambiguous nature of media texts. Words may seem to be belied by images. Images may be juxtaposed in contradiction to others. The construction of meaning from a television text is anything but straightforward. So it was with the *Jesus* series.

The April issue of *Buzz* contained a six-page critique of the forthcoming series *Jesus: The Evidence*. Based upon his viewing of the first two programmes, Goddard wrote:

Fasten your seatbelts this month for London Weekend Television's £400,000 attempt to undermine the biblical view of Christ. Watch out for two-and-a-half hours worth of speculative theology which attempts to reduce Christ to a deluded mystical maverick. Why did they only ask the views of liberal theologians?<sup>56</sup>

The article includes extracts of interviews with both Rolfe and Norridge and gives a brief commentary on some of the theological statements made within the programmes, from a more conservative theological position. The main body of the article is structured around what are alleged to be four inaccurate suggestions made by the programmes, the principle points of contention behind the objection of that the series lacked impartiality, and also are confirmed by the respondents to Goddard's statement. These may be summarized as follows. First, biblical scholarship has shown that the text of the Bible is 'unreliable as historical evidence'; the traditional image of Jesus as taught by the churches has been shattered; it is not possible to discover the historical Jesus in the text of the New Testament. Second, authentic information about the historical Jesus may be found in other sources such as the 'secret' gospels and Gnostic writings which have been unearthed in the past 50 years; this material represents the earliest and most authentic form of Christianity, which was suppressed by the later Church. Third, these 'secret' gospels reveal that Jesus was involved in hypnosis, occult practices, magic and sexual rites. Fourth, the traditional teaching that Jesus is God was the creation of the dominant Roman Church in the fourth century; the Church suppressed the true picture of Jesus, now preserved in non-biblical sources.

The fact that these arguments are described as *suggested* rather than asserted, provides the clue to the problem of this kind of critique. Since the 1940s, scholars have questioned the idea that mass media audiences are no more than passive recipients of media influences, suggesting rather that media consumers make their

own (and sometimes oppositional) ‘readings’ of textual content. Nevertheless, had these four assumptions been plainly stated, they may at least have been easier to refute. They could certainly have been shown to be unrepresentative of scholarship as it existed in most university faculties. But a television programme rarely presents simple assertions, and under scrutiny, media content is seldom without ambiguities. *Jesus: The Evidence* conveyed ideas not merely through a commentary and the contribution of diverse ‘experts’, but through dramatic reconstruction, epic-style film footage, still images, depictions of relevant geographical backcloths, as well as through visual effects, music and a soundscape. A simple illustration of ambiguities at play in the construction of meaning may be seen in the juxtaposition of commentary and expert.

The series’ primary authority seems to be its narrator (actor Jeremy Kemp), heard but never seen. This omniscient voice becomes the viewer’s guide through a wilderness of church history, theology and philosophy. The secondary spokespersons are its expert contributors. These various historians and theologians are not removed in the same way as the narrator. Their views seem to be more easily questioned – indeed they often contradict each other. Theoretically, they have two main functions: they present information on behalf of, and in addition to, the voice-over; and they present ‘expert opinion’. This theoretical distinction is important to make for the very reason that it is often difficult to make in practice. A subject like theology is, like philosophy, occupied with ideas and interpretation rather than ‘facts’. Consequently, the way in which a viewer may understand what is being presented can be influenced significantly by the way in which it is framed. For example, in the first programme the Jewish scholar, Geza Vermes states: ‘The gospels could not have been written by the apostles, Matthew and John, and by the disciples of the apostles, Mark and Luke. The gospel authors must rather have been second generation Christians’.<sup>57</sup> Such a statement was presumably intended to be profound – even provocative. However, the identity of the gospel authors is generally considered by scholars as secondary to the sources used in their writing (their age, provenance, and reliability). So the witness of a second generation Christian, drawing upon sources from persons in close touch with the original disciples, is considered as more valuable than that of a first generation Christian who was only an occasional observer.<sup>58</sup> Here then, the profundity of the statement of Vermes’ conclusion is actually rather uncertain. The commentary merely states: ‘To this day, the identity of the gospel authors remains unknown ...’

Professor George Wells’ view that Jesus may never have existed has an ambiguity of a different kind. Although the narrator clearly states: ‘Professor Wells’ views are shared by almost no other scholar ...’ there still remains an implied significance in Wells’ views simply because the programme devotes a large amount of time to developing them.

The juxtaposition of interviews with other information has a similar effect. Again, to use the first programme as an example, the New Testament scholar Howard Marshall presents his case that the words of Jesus are likely to have been remembered accurately because of the methods of Jewish elementary education. This view is juxtaposed with Professor Nineham:

There is no doubt substance in what Professor Marshall says, and it certainly ought to be taken seriously. On the other hand, it rests on a number of assumptions and if it's pressed too far it runs foul of the known facts.

Nineham then proceeds substantially to qualify the significance of Marshall's statement by expanding on 'the known facts'. This is the way in which television narratives are constructed in order to engage the viewer and build a story, and in consequence, discussion of the claims that the programmes were supposed to have made were not always as clear, and as easy to refute, as some had presumed. One of the most animated points of contention of this kind was over the accusation that the series implied that Jesus was gay. The second programme looked at the theories of the American academic, Morton Smith, of Columbia University.<sup>59</sup> As long ago as 1958, Smith had been visiting the monastery of Mar Saba near Jerusalem, and while cataloging in the monastery library, discovered a seventeenth-century copy of Ignatius' Letters into the back of which had been copied what purported to be an extract of a letter from the second-century Christian scholar, Clement of Alexandria. Within this extract addressed to somebody called Theodore, Clement quotes from a secret Gospel of Mark for 'an inner circle of initiates'. This quotation appears to be an alternative version of the Biblical story of Lazarus which concludes:

And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. He remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God.<sup>60</sup>

Clement then assures Theodore that other rumors that he had heard were not true, and 'naked man with naked man and the other things about which you wrote are not found'. Smith takes all this as the starting point for an elaborate theory that Jesus was a magician who initiated a small number of followers through secret nocturnal ceremonies. At no time does he clearly state that Jesus was homosexual, but what the 'secret nocturnal initiation rites' are supposed to have involved is left to the imagination.

This ambiguity within Smith's own work is magnified by the context of the programmes which make no clear endorsement of Smith's theory by the narrator:

Morton Smith's discovery and resulting theory is still to be fully evaluated by his fellow scholars. Many feel that the evidence is too slim for such far-reaching conclusions. The letter he discovered is sufficiently removed from the events it describes for there to be other explanations. Unless further corroborative material emerges, it remains an intriguing speculation.

Smith's theory then, is formally presented by the voice-over only as 'intriguing speculation'. Nevertheless the considerable amount of time devoted to developing it, was taken by many of the programme's critics to be itself an endorsement. For example, the Evangelical Alliance press release stated of the programmes: 'Jesus is portrayed as a mystic homosexual engaging in hypnosis and pagan rites ...'<sup>61</sup> Rolfe hotly denied that the programmes had portrayed Jesus in this way at all:

When the campaign was mounted ... and *Buzz* magazine made their request to see our films, and we showed them to them, they clearly took the decision

that one of the best ways that they could perhaps frighten the IBA enough to put pressure on us not to show them would be to make claims for it that the programme itself does not make ...<sup>62</sup>

Here, then, is an illustration of the first problem the campaign encountered when it began to make specific rather than general accusations of bias.

### **The nature of the fourth channel**

The second major complicating factor that had not been anticipated by the campaign concerned the particular editorial approach adopted by Channel 4. As a broadcaster specifically constituted to provide an alternative service (in the spirit of Annan), it deliberately set out to avoid replicating the editorial line of the existing television channels. For John Ranelagh, this meant finding a distinctive and more provocative approach to religious broadcasting:

My own concern is to pursue the intellectual examination of faith and to provide religious programmes which other broadcasters in this country generally do not. Thus I have avoided worship or *Songs of Praise*-type programmes and prefer instead theological debate and the depiction of religions not in the mainstream in Britain.<sup>63</sup>

Ranelagh's choice of religious programme material may have been seen as idiosyncratic by many of those within the churches, but the IBA were able to defend it as entirely consistent with Channel 4's rationale. Bob Towler, the IBA's Head of Research, defended *Jesus: The Evidence* on the grounds that Channel 4 was set aside for programmes that do not always reflect mainstream attitudes and traditions.<sup>64</sup> He believed that those who watched the channel understood this and read the programmes within this context. There was no need, therefore, to attempt to balance the arguments that they presented. Across the spectrum of all four channels, they were broadcast within the context of a large number of other religious programmes during the Lent and Easter period which reflected a more mainstream Christian tradition. Towler's assumption that, by 1984, most viewers had adjusted to this new understanding of the distinctive nature of Channel 4 may have been optimistic. Clifford Longley, the Religious Affairs Correspondent for *The Times* wrote at the time:

The churches have acquired certain expectations about the public broadcasting services which were entirely justified before the advent of Channel 4, and which have not yet been adjusted in the light of it. Channel 4 is not so much the last of the main public service channels to arrive, as the first swallow heralding the broadcasting pluralism of cable and satellite. Those in control of it have no inhibitions about tendentious programming as can be tested almost any night: it is a channel for all sorts of points of view.<sup>65</sup>

This was a factor the implications of which many of the campaigners had not wholly understood.



## Effects of the furor

As the controversy surrounding the programmes increased, so too did the divide between the conservative and the more liberal wings of the churches, the latter viewing the campaign with growing unease. Feeling against the programmes had been initially expressed from a wide cross section of theological persuasion, but outside of the evangelical and Catholic wings of the churches the prevailing view was that vigorous public comment in advance of the series' transmission had not been a good idea. David Bridge of the Methodist Home Mission, a religious advisor for the IBA, commented: 'The churches reacted hysterically. The reaction of the churches was more lamentable than the programmes themselves'.<sup>66</sup> The Bishop of Edmonton described the campaign as a 'brilliant PR job' for LWT.<sup>67</sup> He believed that the campaigners had been naïve, and expressed the fear that a series which otherwise might have died a natural death as poor television, could now be sold internationally and more programmes like it be made. This view was shared by others who thought that the relatively high viewing figures (1.8 m) for the first programme had been the direct result of the publicity generated by *Buzz*. There was even a rumor that LWT had deliberately leaked the script and manipulated the whole affair. Goddard did not consider that his handling of the campaign was naïve and rejected the view that the publicity that the programmes subsequently received was necessarily a bad thing. It had also been publicity for the campaign and a display of strength on the part of a large number of evangelicals, and had made the IBA 'think twice about offending Christians'.<sup>68</sup> He believed it to have been a contributing factor to Channel 4's (later) decision not to show Monty Python's *Life of Brian*.<sup>69</sup> He also believed that in encouraging *Buzz* readers to view the programmes with an informed mind he was helping Christians to think through issues related to their faith. In doing all this, Goddard had also succeeded in putting his own magazine on the map, with at least one well-known Fleet Street journalist writing to compliment him on it.

Throughout the campaign, Goddard had called for the 'balance' of the programmes to be redressed. The publicly expressed hope was for a right-of-reply. After the first programme of the series was transmitted on 8 April 1984, Ranelagh commissioned Channel 4's Immediate Production Unit, Griffin Productions, to make such a programme. *Faith and Fact* was broadcast on 29 April. The programme was presented by Ann Loades of Durham University and featured Canon John Fenton of Christ Church, Oxford; Professor Henry Chadwick of Cambridge; Professor Howard Marshall of Aberdeen; the Catholic scholar Father Thomas Deidun; and the Jewish scholar Hyam Maccoby. Many of the contentious issues surrounding the programmes were discussed and time was given for alternative views to be presented. Marshall described it as 'a genuine chance... for a discussion in which different points of view could be represented'.<sup>70</sup> Chadwick's appraisal was more cautious: 'The discussion afterwards was controlled by Ann Loades; members of the panel spoke when she asked them to do so ... I really do not know whether the imbalance of the programmes was corrected by the discussion'.<sup>71</sup> Goddard believed that it was not. Despite the fact that this right-to-reply was what he had been demanding, he described the programmes as just 'middle-aged theologians talking concepts'.<sup>72</sup> He insisted that the main thrust of the campaign against the

programmes had come from *Buzz*, a young people's magazine that was written and produced by a staff all aged under 30. In Goddard's view, it was these young and enthusiastic 'ordinary' Christians who remained unrepresented on television.

## Aftermath

As indicated in Rolfe's letter to *The Times*, the aim of *Jesus: The Evidence* had been to expose the division between 'lay and clerical belief'.<sup>73</sup> A subsequent controversy that raged about the views of the newly appointed Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, expressed on ITV's series *Credo* (also produced by LWT) convinced Rolfe that he had achieved a degree of success in this, as belief in a 'literal virgin birth' and 'literal resurrection of Christ', were subjected to similar media scrutiny:<sup>74</sup>

I believe that the acrimonious debate over the fundamentals of Christian belief that has been pursued so publicly by opposing Church factions could not have taken place without *Jesus: The Evidence*. That debate entirely vindicated the content of my letter to *The Times* which pre-dated David Jenkin's *Credo* interview.<sup>75</sup>

The 'acrimonious debate' triggered by *Credo*, certainly exposed theological differences between traditionalist and more liberal factions within the churches. But in determining to expose (and perhaps magnify) these differences, it might also be argued that the programme-makers proved to be ill equipped to illuminate them. Jenkins, a serious and forthright academic theologian, was asked in the *Credo* programme to address himself to theological matters of faith, dogma, reason, and authority. The programme's effect may be said to have generated more heat than light. But as *The Independent* newspaper reflected: '... the commonplaces of academic theology normally go unnoticed in the wider world. Dr. Jenkins's great discovery was that they had the power to shock agnostics even more than they shocked Christians'.<sup>76</sup>

It is difficult to determine the extent of the real effect that the *Jesus: The Evidence* furore had on Channel 4 and the IBA. Many people assumed that Ranelagh's commissioning of *Faith and Fact* was the result of this pressure. Rolfe, however, had publicly expressed the desire that such a programme should be made as early as August 1983.<sup>77</sup> Towler stated that when four hundred almost identical letters of complaint arrived at the IBA in the week prior to the broadcast of the offending programme, they were dismissed as being the result of an orchestrated campaign. At about the same time, another programme that had caused 'genuine upset' and generated about eighty letters of complaint from offended viewers had been taken very seriously indeed. He did not consider *Jesus: The Evidence* as being in the same category.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Ranelagh claimed not to have been swayed by the pressure. While he admitted to being embarrassed by what he referred to as 'the silliness' of *Jesus: The Evidence*'s 'needless vulgarity' he saw the aim of the series as entirely consistent with his policy of 'intellectual concerns' in religious programmes.<sup>79</sup> He dismissed the campaign as indicative of how 'facts will upset faith'.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has described and illustrated how, from the earliest days of broadcasting in the UK, Christianity was assimilated into the BBC's official view-of-the-world. Editorial content was determined by a set of values rooted in Reith's conviction that the BBC had a responsibility to promote those things that he considered to be core to the Christian religion, and justified on the basis that this was 'the stated and official religion of the country'. For some years, the BBC's notions of impartiality and objectivity were explicitly based upon these values. And with them went a presumption about the churches' rightful place as an advising and guiding voice in influencing content.

Whilst the idealized notion of impartiality remained sacrosanct, over the following five decades, ideas about what was (and was not) considered to *be* impartial changed considerably. By the 1980s, an impartial religious programme had become one that did not presume to have a religious view-of-the-world, and in the case of Channel 4, was (like Ranelagh's self-description) 'agnostic'. Advice and guidance from CRAC, or any other religious organization or expert, increasingly seemed to be unnecessary – even inappropriate. In the name of impartiality, programme-makers (even makers of religious programmes) ought to be free to exposit ideas that were directly in contradiction to religious orthodoxy, Christian scholarship, or the expressed advice of CRAC and the approbation of the churches. *Jesus: The Evidence* was a sign of the times. Particularly so as it aired on Channel 4, which, to borrow Longley's metaphor, was the first swallow heralding a coming age of broadcast pluralism.

The study highlights a significant and growing cultural dissonance between organized religion and the UK's broadcasting institutions. On the one hand, the churches seemed unable (or reluctant) to see the inevitability of the decline of their privileged access to broadcasting in general, and to religious broadcasting in particular, and ineffective in finding alternative strategies for their own cultural engagement in the face of Reith's expiring legacy. On the other hand, a new generation of broadcasters had emerged with a grasp of religion that had been circumscribed by a growing disengagement from the discourses and social practices of organized religion; and whilst lacking the necessary level of religious literacy, had also developed a more commercially focused appetite for greater simplification, polarization, and sensationalization in programme style and content. The consequence of these increasingly divergent perspectives, as *Jesus: The Evidence* so clearly illustrates, was mutual incomprehension.

## Notes

1. David W. Rolfe, *Jesus: The Evidence*, London Weekend Television for Channel 4. TX: 8 April 1984; 15 April 1984; and 22 April 1984.
2. Pre-transmission programme summary of *Jesus: The Evidence*, issued by London Weekend Television (April 1984).
3. Val Gielgud (written by Dorothy L Sayers), *The Man Born to be King*. BBC Home Service. TX monthly: 21 December 1941–18 October 1942.

4. Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation 1922–1956: The Politics of Broadcast Religion* (London: SCM, 1984).
5. Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 227.
6. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001).
7. Steve Bruce, *Secularisation: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
8. Andrew Boyle, *Only The Wind Will Listen: Reith of the BBC* (London: Hutchinson, 1972).
9. Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 5.
10. This was Reith's conviction articulated in *Broadcasting and Religion*, *BBC Handbook*, 1928, 131–133.
11. Frances House, Confidential paper prepared for CRAC in October 1948. BBC Archives.
12. CRAC was eventually substituted by the far less influential Standing Conference on Religion and Belief, set up 'to provide a point of liaison between the BBC and the UK's major faith communities'. Minutes of BBC Executive Board. 28–29 April 2009. Item 5, 4.
13. A notion first enshrined in the BBC's editorial values, rooted in its Royal Charter and Agreement. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/governance/regulatory\\_framework/charter\\_agreement.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/governance/regulatory_framework/charter_agreement.html) (accessed December 1, 2014).
14. Report of the Broadcasting Committee (The Beveridge Report) Cmd. 8116. London: HMSO.
15. Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, Cmd. 6753 H.M.S.O. (1977) para. 20.12, 319.
16. *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* (London: HMSO, 1977), 236.
17. Eric Croston (Ed.) *Television and Radio 1984*. IBA Yearbook (London: IBA, 1983), 10.
18. Rt. Rev. Stewart Cross, Bishop of Blackburn, A proposal for the 'British Churches Committee for Channel Four' (London: unpublished, 1982). This was a small circulation document setting out Cross's vision for BCCC4, copy in the author's possession.
19. These were independent religious groups in the sense that they were not intended to be representative of any of the mainstream churches, although their constituents and supporters were, on the whole, communicant members of one or other of the Christian denominations.
20. With the advent of Channel 4, this group requested help of US evangelist, Jim Bakker, to produce a UK version of popular US religious talk show, *The PTL Club*, running on its own satellite network. Bakker obliged, and the result was the production of a UK pilot show. Channel 4 rejected the pilot without comment.
21. John Ranelagh, interview with author, April 1985.
22. John Ranelagh, interview.
23. John Ranelagh, interview.
24. John Ranelagh, interview.
25. Church of England, *Broadcasting, Society and the Church: Report of the Broadcasting Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England* (London: CoE, 1973), 64.
26. John Whale, 'The Gospel of the Losers', *The Sunday Times*, December 2, 1979, 17.
27. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Weidenfeld, 1980).

28. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 142.
29. *Silent Witness* (David W. Rolfe, Screenpro Films; UK, 1978).
30. David W. Rolfe as cited in *Buzz*, April 1984, 22.
31. Letter to *The Times*, 26 April 1984.
32. Julian Norridge, 'Jesus: The Evidence', *What's New at LWT*, April 1984, 13, 4–5.
33. Steve Goddard, interview with the author, January 1985.
34. Canon Michael Green, in correspondence with the author, 22 November 1985.
35. Rt. Rev. Hugh Montefiore Bishop of Birmingham, in correspondence with the author, 18 November 1985.
36. Steve Goddard interview.
37. *Jesus: The Evidence*. Shooting script. London Weekend Television, 1983. Shot No. 344.
38. *Buzz* press notice, April 1984.
39. Gilbert Kirby of Mission to London, as cited in *The Real Jesus* (publicity material) (London: Evangelical Alliance, 1984).
40. Steve Goddard interview.
41. *Buzz* press notice, April 1984.
42. Andy Jackson, interview with the author, April 1985.
43. *The Times*, Friday, 30 March, 1984, 3.
44. Andy Jackson interview.
45. Peter Ackroyd, 'Television: Vaguely Vulgar', *The Times*, Monday, April 9, 1984, 8; and Richard Last. Review in *The Daily Telegraph*, April 9, 1984, 11.
46. Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Taken on Faith', *The Guardian*, April 9, 1984, 13.
47. Charles Knox Hyndman, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, statement issued in response to the EA/*Buzz* request for comment.
48. Rev. David Tarrant, Church of the Nazarene, statement issued in response to the EA/*Buzz* request for comment.
49. Simon Coombs MP, as cited in Canon D.W. Gundry, Plea for 6 month delay in showing of Jesus series. *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 April, 1984, 23.
50. A.F. Gibson, British Evangelical Council; D.B. Copley, Moorlands Bible College; and P.E. Brown, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. Each made particular reference to this in statements issued in response to the EA/*Buzz* request for comment.
51. Steve Goddard interview.
52. The statement sent for signatures and comment by EA/*Buzz* in early 1984.
53. John Whale, 'The God Plot', *The Sunday Times*, April 8, 1984, 54.
54. Professor Henry Chadwick, in correspondence with the author, 21 August 1985.
55. Statements issued in response to the EA/*Buzz* request for comment: Dr. Stephen Travis, (Methodist Church); John Lancaster, (Elim Pentecostal Churches); Rev. Bernard Green, (Baptist Union); Rev. Canon Dr. George Carey, (Trinity Theological College); Rev. Dr. John Stott, (Director of London Institute for Contemporary Christianity); Dr. Michael Griffiths, (Principal of London Bible College); Dr. R.T. France, (Vice-principal, London Bible College); and Professor F.F. Bruce, (University of Manchester).
56. *Buzz*, April 1984, 20–25.
57. *Jesus: The Evidence*, Ep. 1. TX: 8 April 1984.

58. I am indebted to Rev. Dr. George Beasley-Murray for bringing this point to my attention.
59. *Jesus: The Evidence*, Ep. 2. 15 April 1984.
60. *Jesus: The Evidence*, Ep. 2.
61. Evangelical Alliance, press notice: 30 March 1984.
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63. John Ranelagh, in correspondence with the author, 21 March 1984.
64. Dr. Robert Towler, interview with the author, April 1984.
65. Clifford Longley, 'Sceptics Discount Vital Evidence', *The Times*, April 9, 1984, 14.
66. David Bridge, interview with the author, November 1984.
67. Rt. Rev. Bill Westwood, Bishop of Edmonton, interview with the author, May 1984.
68. Steve Goddard interview.
69. *Life of Brian* (Terry Jones, HandMade Films; UK, 1979).
70. Professor Howard Marshall, in correspondence with the author, 7 March 1985.
71. Professor Henry Chadwick, in correspondence with the author, 21 August 1985.
72. Steve Goddard interview.
73. David Rolfe, letter to *The Times*, 26 April 1984, 13.
74. Philip Whitehead interview with Rev. Prof. David Jenkins for the religious affairs programme, *Credo*, London Weekend Television. TX: 29 April 1984.
75. David Rolfe, in correspondence with the author, 14 January 1987.
76. Profile: The one true Bishop of Durham: Dr. David Jenkins, 'Retiring Scourge of Sacred Cows', 5 February 1994. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/profile-the-one-true-bishop-of-durham-dr-david-jenkins-retiring-scourge-of-sacred-cows-1392030.html> (accessed December 1, 2014).
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78. Dr. Robert Towler, interview with the author, 27 April 1984.
79. John Ranelegh, Channel Four's Religious Programme Policy (A Preliminary Paper). Unpublished. 27 October 1981.
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