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**The production and reception of discourses  
concerning religion in fictional broadcasting**

**Vol. 2**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**University of Glasgow  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Faculty of Social Sciences**

**September 2002**

**Arbroath interview (Dorothy, Mary Monica, Mary, Davina, Louise, Gill, Bill, Betty, Connie, Beryl)**

*OK out of all the programs that you have circled on the form and anything else that you can think of as we go along, can you think of any characters who are supposed to be the religious ones?*

Monica. Dawn French in Vicar of Dibley

Beryl. There's Ashley in Emmerdale

Davina. The other chap in Father Ted

*The three of them*

The three of them

Mary. Most of them

Betty. The minister, the young minister who was in EastEnders. Young Church of England minister.

*EastEnders. Yeah that was a while back wasn't it?*

Betty. Yes. But you still have Dot in EastEnders

*Dot. Yes, Dot Cotton*

Mary. There's the man but I can't remember what, the mother has got an Irish accent and has a big family and the daughter is married or engaged to

Gill. Bread?

Mary. That's it, Bread.

*Oh alright that's going back isn't it?*

Mary. Well we watch OnDigital. They've got all the old programmes.

*Ah right. Can we just stick to?*

Mary. What's on now?

*Oh well no actually it is*

Mary. That's all we get. It is always on our telly

*That's fine. If it's not, I hadn't thought about this. Right I'm glad you raised that. If it's not on BBC 1, 2, ITV, 4 or 5, you know if you're watching it on something like E4 or UK Gold or whatever could you actually say that? That that's where you're watching it.*

Mary. It's not me who presses the button so I just watch what's on. A moving picture. I don't know what the world's doing just now

*OK. All right then because I don't have OnDigital you see so*

Mary. So I don't know which. But I'll try

*In that case if it's actually on at the moment and not something that you're remembering from 5, 10 years ago. So if it's on at the moment that's fine. It's just I did have somebody who kept coming up with programmes from 20 years ago and it wasn't a lot of help.*

Gill. Of course Star Trek is the ultimate religious programme.

*Who is the religious character though Gill in Star Trek?*

Gill. Worf.

*Worf?*

Gill. Yeah definitely.

*Now I hadn't seen Star Trek so you'll have to explain who Worf is. Well I haven't seen it since Captain Kirk's days.*

Gill. Oh dear

*I know, I know*

Gill. Goodness me what am I going to do with you Ailsa? Well Wharf is the warrior. He comes from a warrior race who, you know physical violence is very central but he's extremely; he's very religious. He practises meditation. He has his own system. His sort of cultural system of beliefs which actually in some ways are quite, are very eastern. So there is lots of incense and candles and stuff like that and he practises meditation and has a very clear code of moral conduct. It might not be what we think about being moral but it's certainly is religious in a very big way.

*Right. Brilliant. OK we'll come back to that if we may. Thank you. Any other*

Beryl. Ballykissangel. Vince I think he's called now isn't he? The latest one.

Betty. I've forgotten.

Gill. The nice Australian:

Beryl. Oh the Australian one yes.

*Any others? Let's have a look at the programmes you mentioned. Coronation Street? Right, nobody can think of anyone in Coronation Street? Neighbours?*

Connie. I guess Harold would be the one in neighbours.

Betty. Oh he's the Salvation Army isn't he?

Connie. He is the Salvation Army.

Betty. That's true.

*Right. OK anybody in The Bill? Know. Casualty? Anybody obviously religious in that?*

Monica. My son-in-law once played an Irish priest in Casualty.



*Really?*

Beryl. There you go.

Monica. He played an Irish Roman Catholic priest. They do have obviously, I didn't see it but they obviously do have priests in Casualty.

*Was he coming in as a customer of Casualty or*

Monica. No he was a priest in Casualty for 3 episodes. About four years ago. But he wasn't a regular. I mean it's not, but he was a priest.

*Was that like a hospital chaplain or something?*

Monica. No he was visiting, he came and visited. He played a Roman Catholic priest. He is Irish anyway. And he is Roman Catholic but he played a Roman Catholic priest. As his granny said she always wanted him to go into the priesthood anyway. So I mean obviously, I don't watch the programme anyway but obviously they do bring, and it was played straight, it wasn't. So they obviously do bring it in

*Right. I didn't know that*

Monica. Well I wouldn't have known if it hadn't been my son-in-law.

*Taggart anybody?*

Gill. Oh yes that guy is supposed to be a Christian. That guy that's now the, what's his name?

Beryl. Ah yes. Jardine.

Gill. Jardine yes

Monica. What I've seen of Taggart's always seems to move towards the occult rather than.

They have some weird story lines in Taggart, very much

Gill. Jardine, Inspector Jardine is meant to be a Christian. He's meant to be a very staunch Church of Scotland

Monica. I'm not a regular watcher

Gill. Yes he is actually. I'd forgotten that. Yes he is. Because there was quite a lot of discussion about his morality when he was having an extra-marital affair, well he wasn't married but he was having an affair. Because of his being so Christian. I remember that yes.

Dorothy. Not a lot happens to all of us I suppose.

Mary. We should be so lucky.

Dorothy. I don't know. I'm only saying that.

*What else have we got? Cold Feet.*

What's Cold Feet? I don't know.

*Isn't it a comedy?*

I don't think it's very religious.

Monica. I would say they are typical thirtysomethings of today.

*Right. OK Frasier?*

Monica. Never see, never heard any in Frasier. I'm pretty regular there. Never heard any religion at all mentioned.

Mary. Never heard any.

Monica. The Americans are pretty careful about this sort of thing. American T V is different to ours in that respect.

*It seems to vary*

Monica. They have, they do have their own religious programmes but they go out on so many different channels.

*Yeah. Somebody in an interview I was doing talked about one called Sister, Sister which I think is aimed at the teens and twenties. It's quite funny because she was going Oh it's wonderful you know these black girls and they have this great life but they're actually Christians and they really stick to their values. So I came back and said to my daughter who is 14 you've watched that Sister, Sister haven't you? And she said O yeah. And I said they are Christian. And she went no they're not. And I thought OK fine. I don't suppose anybody here watches it do they? A third opinion on this one.*

Gill. There was that programme that was on a couple of years ago, which was a detective thing that had a nun that played a detective. D'you remember that? That came from the States.

Lily. Ah yes

Beryl. Oh yes

Gill. That was very amusing. That was very good. Very amusing but I can't remember what it was called. A whodunit with a nun who was always doing naughty things, lifting her habit and climbing up drainpipes and things.

*I completely missed that one.*

Lily. Don't get ideas Gill

Beryl. Wasn't it called Father something?

Gill. Yes it was but, that's right

Beryl. Because she was sort of his housekeeper cum everything else wasn't she?

Gill. Yes. Right so you have to find out which one it was now.

*Yes, right, OK. E R?*

No

Monica. I watch it avidly

Mary. So do I

*I do*

Monica. But I can't honestly remember ever seeing anything to do with religion in it. Never mentioned. Never suggested. All these people are dying but there's never

Betty. Aye they did once

Connie. O they do, they do

Betty. Yes they did. There was a baby and they brought a priest in. That's right.

Connie. And they got married d'you remember?

Yes

*Oh it was a few weeks, he was dying of heart disease or something*

That's right someone got married

Connie. And one of the nurses got married. To the policemen. Do you not remember that?

Monica. That's right that's right

And they brought the minister in and she got married in the

*But there doesn't seem to be a hospital chaplain does there?*

No

*I mean don't know what the system is in the States*

O I think there is so far as we know

Connie. Oh I think there is because I think they called someone for the christening of the baby

Monica. Is that who it was?

Yes

I didn't know that

*It's certainly not consistent though is it?*

No

No

Monica. No it's not a regular feature

*Let's see what else we've got. O Holby City. Oh High Road.*

Bill. High road. The old minister and there was Mrs Mac his housekeeper.

Yes

Yes

Bill. And there was a young priest came then. That's as much as I can remember.

*Do you still watch High Road?*



Bill. Occasionally. Well you only see it once.

Betty. It's only on a Sunday night

Bill. On a Sunday

*Mrs Mac's still in it isn't she?*

Bill. Yes

Bill. Yes she's still in it.

*Is there a minister in it at the moment?*

Bill. No not any more

*OK. Let's see what else we've got here. Kavanagh QC? Anything? No?*

Dorothy. Certainly never that. I've never seen an episode that had any one in it. I might have missed the odd one but no.

*OK Bad Girls?*

Lily. I can't be bothered with that now. I thought it was great but I can't be bothered with it now

Monica. Now, I don't normally watch it but the other day my granddaughter was in and she watches it and when I went into the bedroom and said to her right come-on it's time you got ready for bed, there was a black minister holding a service. But I couldn't make out from the little bit that I saw whether it really was a service in the prison or whether it was a put up a job because one of them was trying to escape. You know I wasn't there long enough to find out

Lily. No it wasn't. It was a proper service.

Monica. It was a proper service, Oh well?

Lily. And they do have services. They, you know, occasionally you see them, there is a service.

*Right. Are any of the prison staff obviously religious or any of the prisoners?*

Davina. OH no, oh no

I don't think so

Lily. They put it on because it's a job I think

*What, the?*

The service.

*Right. OK*

Mary. There was one programme about a prisoner that I can remember and this lady did, and she was a prisoner, and quite a nice prisoner, middle-aged

Lily. Ah yes that was one

Mary. And she used to run the Church service d'you remember?

Lily. Oh now one of the girls, Crystal, was very religious

Mary. Reminds me they all wore blue outfits

Lily. No, this is in Bad Girls. One of the girls, the coloured girl, was very

I haven't watched that

Aye she was

She used to strum the guitar and sing hymns

Betty. Yes. She's out now it isn't she?

Yes

*Oh Teachers? I can't immediately think of anybody.*

Monica. There's nobody. There's no religion in teachers. No. Not as yet anyway

*We will just move on from that one. Simpsons?*

Monica. Joe would not enjoy it.

Mary. Simpson's? I haven't seen any religion in the Simpson's I don't think.

Gill. I think the Simpson's is a religion isn't it?

*Well, I don't usually prompt but come on what about Ned Flanders?*

Louise. Who's Ned Flanders?

*He's their next door neighbour*

Gill. Oh yes. He's the epitome of bad religion if I remember rightly. Everything that's awful.

Yes you are dead right. I've forgotten that

*You've just blocked it out haven't you?*

Gill. Simpsons is not one of, well it's one of the programmes that my boys used to have on all the time and I used to go Oh when they came to stay. I'd go Oh as it came on but yes you are right so

*Last of the Summer Wine?*

Connie. Yes there is a minister in that isn't there?

Not very much

I do remember

But they are

Betty. They talked about the death of Compo and they went to Church but there was never any

Monica. No minister. It was the organist who wouldn't play

That's right

Gill. But they are quite religious aren't they really?



Beryl. I think so. They always talk about going to Church.

Monica. I think that's because they're that generation of people who would have been brought up to go to Church.

Gill. It depicts a certain sort of religion attached to a certain generation doesn't it?

Yes it does

Gill. The hats. You know the ladies all dressed up to go to Church and put big hats on.

Beryl. They'll all be Chapel down there won't they?

Bill. Stern faced.

Gill. No they weren't Chapel. No, Compo's funeral wasn't in a chapel. It was the local parish Church, most definitely. It made me cry. I thought it was the most amazing, those three programmes were amazing.

Beryl. Aye yes. And when the painters, the painter's overalls, gee I weeped. I just couldn't believe it.

Gill. You obviously didn't see it Ailsa?

*No I didn't.*

Gill. Oh well if it comes on all of you if you didn't see those three they were absolutely superb Louise. Was the very last one where they took the hearse through the countryside?

Gill. Yes

Louise. It was the last five minutes of that I saw

Betty. There was an episode in Neighbours when one of the girls was married remember?

Yeah

Yes

Well they often had it on all the marriages didn't they?

Betty. Well that Church is St. John's in Heidelberg because we went there. That was the Church we went to.

Bill. In Victoria

Betty. And it was when we were inside it as well the way you saw it

It was modern wasn't it?

Betty. No it wasn't. It was an old Church. A real stone old church. Not the wooden ones. But that was the only one I could think of.

Bill. Stone-built

Betty. Aye stone-built

*Actually that's quite a while back isn't it?*

Betty. No

No

Gill. They just had a wedding about four weeks ago

*But not in a, did I watch it?*

Beryl. And it was such a beautiful

Bill. Where have you been?

*I don't know. I don't, on trains all over Scotland and England . I mean I don't know. Where am I? I don't know*

Beryl. Why do you bother watching it when you get us interviewees?

*Well exactly. It's how I keep up these days. I talk to people. They didn't show the wedding did they?*

Betty. Aye they did

*No the last one I mean.*

Gill. I don't know

*Libby and Drew? We saw them all outside but I don't know*

Gill. But it was a Church wasn't it?

*It was a Church yeah.*

Bill. There was a wedding recently in Neighbours

Gill. That's right yes

*It was Libby and drew*

Betty. Well that's the one I'm talking about

Bill. Is that the one you're talking about? . . .

Betty. That's the one I'm talking about.

Bill. I thought it was one before that. . .

*No it was just, up until that one all the weddings in Neighbours suddenly seemed to have been done by Lassiter's Lake. And then really going back I think it was the same Church but it's going back years.*

Betty. This was really a stone Church because you saw it clearly and then the pipe band that was there and they had Piper's and they gave her the march and it was really nice

Gill. They probably didn't have it inside because it would have cost too much money.

Betty. They had it inside.

Bill. And Drew he sung what was it?

Betty. It was some Scottish song.

*Oh yes. Will you go lassie go. That was it. Very badly. Is there anything anybody is desperate to say, I watch this and you've not mentioned it.*

Gill. Morse. Now I think Morse is quite religious

Monica. Professing not to be a. He's a non-believer

Gill. Yes but there were lots of issues and things that came up that were, maybe you wouldn't call them religious maybe you'd call the moral

Monica. He was a moralist. yes definitely

Gill. But the other characters that were involved, there was a lot of

Monica. You don't think that's because it's University? Old Varsity is a bit like that isn't it?

Gill. I don't know

Monica. My nephew assures me that it is.

Gill. Well I lived in Oxford for a few years and I'm not sure that I would have said it was. But I mean you might be right

Monica. Well he's a professor, I mean when I say he's young he's 40 this week, but he was a don at Oxford for seven years until January so he said that Morse very much reflects, that is Oxford as he knew it. He hated it when he first went there but he said it's this sort of veneer of almost (sounds like farcial) but a lot of it is attached to the churches within the colleges and this sort of thing.

Gill. Because you get a lot of the music don't you?

Monica. Yes

Gill. I mean for there's an awful lot of scenes with music and stuff like that.

Monica. Probably because most of their rules and regulations, well a lot of them are Church founded, the colleges were Church.founded so of course the traditions go back. It has to be religious because that was their foundation.

Gill. I don't think my friends who were chaplains would have felt like that.

Monica. Maybe not

Gill. Actually to be honest. They'd have been a bit ooh at that. I had a couple of friends who were chaplains in the colleges in Oxford.

Monica. That what comes over I think as a general observation

Gill. I don't know. Well I do think it would depend. But going back to the Morse thing I've always got the feeling that there was a lot morality and the sort of questions of morality last. Now that might not be religion or spirituality in the way that you're talking about Ailsa. But



it's certainly a dimension that touches in a way that a lot of people who are non-churchgoers but would see themselves as Christians.

Mary. I don't know. I really thought Morse was a grumpy all its.

Gill. Oh I didn't think Morse himself was religious

Mary. Not only that but he was so mean. I mean that poor

Bill. Sergeant

Sergeant Lewis

Mary. Always had to buy him the drinks. Always had to

Gill. I wouldn't have said he was religious but the programme I would have said the programme.

*I suppose what I would like to do is concentrate on the characters. Yeah I think we can move out to the programme's but my feeling is that for most people the starting point is actually the character and that's what they notice.*

Beryl. Morse wasn't religious

Gill. Oh no

No, it not a tall

*If I think maybe if you have a religious sensibility yourself you might actually see you know amoral or religious or spiritual dimension to something*

Bill. He probably is a religious person but we don't know

Yeah

Gill. But certainly the character, I think what Ailsa is saying Bill, is that the character of the person is what she is looking at and was there any body in Morse the programme that you could pick out and say that person is a Christian or that person is a practising Muslim or that person is a Buddhist and feel that that's what's being presented. And that would be right, you would be absolutely right Monica to say that there wasn't anything specific. Yes I would agree *Yeah. Because I'll actually come on to this question about moral and ethical issues in a minute OK? Which sort of broadens it out. So out of all the characters that we've talked about, obviously time prevents us discussing all of them, but just thinking of some of them, how do you actually know that they're religious? What is it about them, the way they behave in the programme, you know the way they speak, the way they interact, that tells you, this is the one who's supposed to be religious? And you might want to split it. I'll make it slightly easier for you. You might want to split it into clergy and non-clergy.*

Monica. I think the vicar of Dibley character is a very religious character. I know people who won't watch the programme because they think it's sacrilegious. I don't. At the end of the day for all her over-the-top behaviour and everything else underneath is a very serious, very religious person.

Bill. Yes

Yes

Monica. I think that comes through very strongly.

*How does that come through?*

Monica. It's just the way at the end of the day the morals, that's what shines. At the end of the day she always does what is right. What she should be doing. And not what she wants to do really, sometimes she does what she wants to do, but at the end of it all she invariably does what she should be doing.

Davina. She also treats people very well.

Monica. Yes she does

Davina. You know the weak character, she backs them up or she

Monica. However obnoxious

Davina. In a very sensitive sort of way.

Bill. What about the verger?

Gill. Do you not think she is too?

Davina. I think she's a star.

She's a character

Gill. I remember at one of the first programmes and Vicar of Dibley, which was the one where she actually goes to the Church for the first time she gets up and preaches. I thought it was, she was talking about how she'd always been in love with the Spice girls and suddenly she read the sermon on the Mount and decided the only person the only person she could follow it was Jesus Christ. And yet always remember that because I just sat there thinking gracious me what to direct, evangelistic, playing, this is so I am a religious person, and my faith is more important to me than the Spice girls, you know bit. It was very powerful.

Monica. It is. It's quite punchy at times.

Yes

Yes



Monica. I think. And that's why I love it. I think it's a super programme. I don't find it sacrilegious at all. It's a gloss but underneath there is quite a serious message comes out of it sometimes.

Yes

Yes

Gill. So sometimes Ailsa may be it's actually direct what people say, what the characters say, that speaks to us and tells us that they're religious. Sometimes like Jardine in Taggart it's the fact that he talks about going to Church. The others talk about not swearing in front of him and there are issues like that that make us know he is a character that is. And his own morals about what he does and doesn't do.

*Basically what I'm looking for. I keep calling them the markers. What are the markers of religion for the character? I haven't seen Taggart for a long time. How is he, is he liked Jardine ? how it is he perceived because of his religion within the police station?*

Monica. I don't watch enough of it to comment

*Those who do?*

Dorothy. His character has changed since the death of Taggart's and he's almost taken on Taggart's cloak. You know he's starting to be serious and always growling. He's almost imitating Mark McManus who played Taggart's. But when he was, when Taggart was still alive, he was much a softer character and he was much more seriously religious. He actually spoke about it, you don't get him speaking about his church going so much now. He's kind of divorced he's, perhaps because he now has taken on the Taggart role, he's kind of divorced from the, he's not in the group, he's not in the group so much

*Right's OK. Why, is there any clue or do you, if there isn't isn't do you have any view yourself on why he seems to be less religious? I mean it is he just so busy now that he can't quite make it?*

Dorothy. I think they've written, I think they've underplayed his religion.

Monica. Have they got different scriptwriters now anyway?

Dorothy. They probably are. I mean I think it's quite obvious that he's taken on the Taggart cloak and his personality is being changed.

*Do you think there's any sense where being religious does not fit with been a hard-nosed*

Dorothy. Yes. I think it may do

Gill. I think it's interesting that one of the things that's happened recently in Taggart's is that he has got involved, Jardine has got involved with the young police woman that's actually in the

station and there has been tremendous play on this relationship and how he's had to go to the bad guy in order to get that relationship going. It was like you know he wasn't able to do that from being who he was and from this background of religious, he didn't know how to sort of go up and say do you want to come out for a date or whatever it was. And there's been an interesting play on his need of the bad guy in order to teach him how to do the things, in order to achieve the aims.

*So is this a bad guide within himself all within the station?*

Gill. No, no, no. The station that guy.

*Right is this, because you were saying before there was this whole to do about him having a relationship and being a Christian?*

Gill. Yes. And I think you're right. The scriptwriters are really taking him and changing him and making him on religious.

Monica. I think I think it is based on the character's bio, which means it's not written by the same scriptwriters as at the beginning.

Gill. Yes.

Dorothy. I also think that sadly the public's sort of, the public, religion sadly doesn't come over as a popular, you know, attribute to play. Which is a great pity. They don't, they don't portray the characters who are, like Jardine or any of the other characters, who are, apart from that Vicar of Dibley, who are interested. You see religious broadcasting has changed dramatically. We no longer have Late Call and things. I can't remember what they called it in Grampian.

Monica. Reflections

Dorothy. But there doesn't seem to be at requirements of any more.

Monica. Have they, did they, ask for

Mary. They never ask. The

Mary. The powers that be just assumed that we didn't want it any more

Monica. I used to enjoy it reflections. I used to think it was lovely.

*Everybody knows that religion is in decline and nobody wants it.*

Dorothy. I know. But there used to be a requirements before they got the franchise in Independent Broadcasting to have a certain percentage of religious broadcasting.

*It's still there but you want to see what the requirement is.*

Mary. That's quite so, that's quite. There once was a programme, I don't know if any of you remember it. But it was, I thought it was a lovely programme. It was a series and I think his name was Adam Smith. It was Andrew Keir played the Church of Scotland minister do you



remember it? It didn't last long because it was not popular. This Church of Scotland minister did all sorts of good Christian things. He had a daughter who went off the rails and that wasn't acceptable. He did all sorts. You saw him visiting his parishioners and I remember one particular episode, which caused a great deal of fury at the time, where he was visiting an old man who was dying. You actually saw him helping him on to his commode.

Monica. That would have been offensive.

Mary. I mean this is a long time ago

*I'm curious*

Connie. I remember it. It was a lovely series.

*was it Scottish or Grampian?*

Mary. It was Scottish Television.

Connie. It was a Church of Scotland minister

Mary. It was Scottish Television and it was, but it didn't last because it portrayed the minister as probably they didn't want to see him as

A human being

Mary. A good human, oh really good Christian social worker.

*I mean roughly what 20, 30 something years ago?*

It would be more

Mary. No it wasn't 30 years ago. About 20 years ago

Gill. There was another one like that actually that went on in England and that was the one with the guy out of the good life

Monica. Richard Briers.

Gill. Richard Briers did one as a minister and he was lovely and that only ran the pilot episodes. Because he was a good minister. You know he was dealing with all the sorts of things that inner-city ministers do like having his car nicked and the windows broken in his Church and he was dealing with all those sort of real issues and there was a lot of really good stuff in it. But the public didn't, they don't want that perception of religion. It doesn't fit the caricature.

Monica. Comedy seems to work

*I was going to say the vicar of Dibley seems to work. Doesn't it?*

Monica. Yes but Father Ted isn't religious. I don't think it is any way. I think it's hilariously funny. I don't know how I would feel if I was a Roman Catholic. I think Joe's parents in law were Roman Catholic and certainly my daughter's mother-in-law thought it was riotously, she

thought it was hilariously funny but I can honestly not find any religion in it. They don't have this sort of religious morality that the vicar of Dibley has underneath all the fun. As I say I think it's very funny but a really can't find any religion in its

Louise. I think Father Ted himself is a wee bit but the other one, the young guy in it certainly isn't

Dougal?

Louise. Is it Dougal? He's, because he comes out with questions you know

Monica. I still don't think it's religious.

*No butt I think the issue of whether it's religious or whether the characters are meant to be religious characters, it's that second bit, are they meant to be a religious character*

Monica. Well I don't know, this is what I'm saying you see

*Well but they're priests and I would say yes that's what they are being put up as*

Mary. Having to put up with potty old man

Drink!

Mary. And the half-mad young boy. He must be something of a saint

Louise. I think it's, I just think it's amusing out if they have a difficult situation they have to go and say Mass. It's when, the milk float one. And they had the thing going alongside saying Mass.

Mary. Can I just go back to the Andrew Keir one?

*Yes surely Mary*

Mary. Just for a second because I just wondered how that would be shown now, today and I think it would be accepted much better. I think it's a sign of the times

Monica. You should write to the BBC.

Mary. Well its Scottish Television. that sort of portrayal of a, it was a country minister actually it wasn't an inner-city minister but I just thought it was wonderful but everybody, there was tremendous complaints about it and it was just so true to life. Just like my minister. *This is an assumption but from what you're saying of the criticisms I presume the bulk of the complaints where from people who went to Church? That they didn't want to see*

Mary. Yeah it's well they didn't want to see this. The real work of the minister. They wanted it portrayed as they saw it. It was over 20 years ago

Gill. it only

Bill. Is it a problem with truth?



Gill. Yes it's a problem with truth isn't it? And I do think that, I was just thinking when you were talking about it but, my thoughts went immediately to do, I don't very often watch it EastEnders but is the lady's name Dot?

*Dot Cotton. Yes and I was going to ask about her next.*

Gill. She is the epitome of course of the worst type of churchgoer who is judgmental and critical and gossipy and always nosying into where she shouldn't be nosying. That's the sort of the impression I get of her. And yet she's the religious bit. It seems to me that often when we look characters on the T V who are supposed to be playing religious characters they are often not like this gentleman you're talking about, they're often either being tempted to do something they shouldn't be doing or they're seen as epitomising the worst scenario personality. And actually it's the goodness that people can't cope with.

Monica. It pricks their conscience

Gill. Yes and you see the Vicar of Dibley is so good at being good because she's funny. You know she makes goodness seem funny.

Monica. But it can still prick your conscience

Gill. Oh yes indeed

Monica. With the humour. Ailsa I take it it's only TV you're interested in?

*Yes because otherwise this thesis will go on for 10 years and it's not possible. I mean if I was doing radio or film it would be great but it's huge*

Mary. I realise that's, that's why I can join in very little because I listen to far more radio

Monica. Yes well I do too

Mary. Than I watch television but the reason for that is that for most of my interests I have to use my eyes for other things like gardening or painting or whatever so the radio goes with that it's but I can't watch two things.

Monica. Drama on Radio seems to embrace religion far more than drama on TV

Yes that's right

*I would say discussion on Radio embraces the religion. It just does. Again part of the decision for doing this is the viewing figures for fictional television are higher than anything else. I mean they're higher than they are for News or documentaries. Most films unless it's an absolute Blockbuster. I'm pretty certain it's higher than for Radio and certainly things like Radio 4. So it's from that basis that I'm actually looking at the fictional stuff because this is where most people will get their images from. When we were talking before about the reduction in religious broadcasting a lot of that goes back to a belief, and you hear it*



*constantly articulated, religion is declining in this country. Less and less people are religious. The churches are losing numbers. Nobody is really interested in religion.*

Louise. I watch a lot of, I don't watch a lot, but its children's TV because of having kids. Some of the children's TV programmes I wouldn't say, they're totally against religion

*You wouldn't or you would say they're totally?*

Louise. They are against religion.

Dorothy. They don't want to at that age you know sort of be accused of indoctrinating

Louise. They keep it out

Monica. They want to indoctrinate the other way

*I was going to say there doesn't seem to be a problem with doing it the other way does there?*

Louise. You get the ones about the witches. You know

*Are your kids old enough to watch Hollyoaks? Or do you choose to watch yourself?*

Louise. I don't actually, I never remember when it's on

*6.30s, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays*

Mary. I used to watch it when my daughter was home but now they are gone we don't

Louise. Monday night they're at swimming. Wednesday night's their swimming for my daughter and gymnastics for James. And Thursday nights James is swimming, Joseph is at gymnastic and then Boys' Brigade.

*Does anybody watch Hollyoaks?*

I really don't watch very much television

Monica. My granddaughter does but its

*It's just been interesting. There's been a Christian story line in its and one of the very cute, attractive always that the very difficult teenager had her eye on and eventually got it turned out he was a Christian, and a very committed Christian. And she's been trying desperately to seduce him and he will not be seduced. And he also plays in a Christian rock band and there's been talk about baptism and everything. So it's really, really interesting the way they've done it. I'm hoping to interview some teenagers at a local school. I'll be curious to see what they make of it. I know what I make of it as an adult but they might actually sort of think O he's totally pathetic that it seems to me that he's not, he's very clearly not done that way. Would you all agree, to slightly save time, but what Gill was saying, that on the whole unless religious characters are treated as comedy characters, apart from the Vicar of Dibley which I know is comedy but still seems to be done positively*

Yes that's right

*That on the whole they tend to be treated in the same sort of way. A kind of negative view of religion or the worst kind of religion.*

Davina. Do you mean like Father Ted?

*Not necessarily. I would just put him in as comedy. It's so over the top. The chances of you Gill. Dave Allen used to get up people's noses a lot*

*Well yes that's right. I don't know. Dot Cotton, Mrs Mac.*

Beryl. Mrs Mac now. She would be a person like what Gill figured as a person that would come across to you as a gossip and everything that you wouldn't think a religious person would be but Mrs Mac I would say was religious. She has a heart of gold really.

*Is that, is the heart of gold noticeable?*

Betty. No I wouldn't have thought so

Beryl. Mrs Mac? Oh aye. Maybe in a nosy sort of way. But she is. If there was anybody Connie. Her heart's in the right place sort of thing?

Beryl. Yeah. If there were any body in trouble Mrs Mac always there. Whether it's to nosy it or not that she's always doing her good.

*But does she make it very clear its Christian duty and it's all this sort of negative*

Beryl. Oh yes I think that's true

Bill. It's not because she's domineering. She does a lot of good

Dorothy. I hadn't seen high road for years

Lily. I hadn't seen it for years either

*But is its, if you saying she has a heart of gold and she does a lot of good then is that not a positive character? And yet you seem to be also saying actually she comes across as this negative kind of character.*

Well

Davina. Maybe she's rather good at hiding the heart of gold

Gill. But actually that actually fits Ailsa. Because I think what she comes over across as is a do-gooder

A do-gooder that's right

Gill. And that's how people like to see people who go to Church

Beryl. No I think that's wrong

Gill. Well no I think that's how the media like to portray people, people who go to Church are do-gooders because that way we can look down our noses at them and say O typical do-gooders. And I think there's an awful lot of that that comes through in these characters like Dot



and Mrs Mac. Actually they do do a lot of good but they've got this really strong negative side of their character which allows people to accept them and actually focus quite a lot of negative feelings on them.

*Does anybody else want to comment on these sorts of*

Davina. How about Scotland and their idea every year of finishing up the year with somebody like the Reverend I M Jolly?

*somebody was telling me in an interview I did last week about one of his characters that I'd never come across, the Reverend W E Free?*

Gill. Wee free?

*Yes. I have never seen him. Do you think, I'd never come across I M Jolly before I came to Scotland, now that was a long time ago, and I thought it was terribly funny because, so me it was a bit like Father Ted. It was so totally, totally over the top but people I knew said oh there's lots of ministers like that. They maybe don't get as drunk or what have you but lots of Church of Scotland ministers are that miserable. And I thought well I don't know. I don't know the Church of Scotland's you know*

Gill. There aren't many miserable ones in Arbroath are there?

No

No

Not the ones I can think of . we're very fortunate.

*No it's a historical question because I've since got to know people in the Church of Scotland and it's not my experience of them. But it was people who had maybe grown up in the Forties, Fifties, Sixties something like that and they said oh no, that's what the Church was like. He was only a tiny bit exaggerated. It wasn't you know*

Monica. Well I think they have worked very hard at their image .

Dorothy. Yes, yes. He it to up and coming ministers in the Church of Scotland now. But we've had them in Arbroath you know. Lovely, lovely, sincere ministers but they have this, they had the voice. Remember?

Monica. Excruciatingly dull.

Dorothy. I heard one minister in Arbroath praying for the vicarious, vicious vandals. That was it.

Mary. You've got the Vs right's

Dorothy. It was something vicious vandals. And you know that tone of the voice. The tone that used to be censorious.

Bill. He was sincere was he?

Yeah

Beryl. That was always the ministers when I was little. It was.

Yes

Yes

Beryl. None of you will remember the Reverend Hitchcock of Inverbrodick Church. I was brought up Presbyterian but he was all hell and wild fire and all the rest of it.

Dorothy. Well it was Gemmell Campbell.

Beryl. Oh aye Gemmell Campbell was one

Dorothy. And he's a lovely man. Kindness itself.

Beryl. But so was Rikki Fulton. You are saying that. He was a brilliant comedian. He could come on as this stage at the Webster and everybody would just laugh spontaneously. just like that.

Gill. Our church is like that on Sundays Ailsa get us back to what you wanted us to talk about because I told these folks 9 o'clockish

*Well what I was going to say in some ways it sounds like some of these older clergy that you are talking about with this more sort of staid view are actually very similar to some of the less attractive religious characters they see on TV. Almost as if they're out of a time warp? Is that fair enough? Or is that putting words into your mouth?*

Yes

Yes it its

Monica. It's probably because the writers of television now have never been to Church and only know what they have read about the past.

*Right OK. I will move you on rapidly. All of these characters that we've talked about what religion would you say they all were?*

Gill. Well they're supposed to be Christian aren't they?

*Can you think of any other religions? Any characters*

Gill. Apart from that wonderful programme which the Pakistani group of comedians do

Oh yes

*Goodness gracious me*

Gill. Goodness gracious me and they can take the Mickey out of anything with great brilliance.

Beryl. I like goodness gracious me



Louise. I saw once where he was interviewed and he said that as you said they will take the Mickey out because they will go out and they'll speak to an English person and they'll speak the English language and they will turn the corner and they will meet someone of their own country and they will speak in this own language to them and you know

Gill. Just like the Welsh

Yes

Gill. That was so rude of me. I'm sorry. I'm sorry

*I could delete that from the transcript if you like?*

Mary. No

No. Make an issue of it

Dorothy. Make an issue of the it. Racism.

*Yes. You and Anne Robinson.*

Beryl. What religion would you say she was?

Lily. She's detestable

*Please can we not to go on to Ann Robinson? Can you think of any other programmes that have any religious characters who are not Christian? Who come from other faiths.*

Monica. Jewish.

Gill. There's Lionel Blue when he's on but he's not in a character

*No he's not so he doesn't count sorry*

Davina. There was a good Jewish one one time wasn't there? Something about cutting your cloth.

Oh yes

Beryl. Never mind the quality feel the width for

Davina. Feel the width that's right

*Yet that was a long time ago. But in the past couple of years can you think*

Gill. Well I think since that issue about the Princess nobody has dared, and Salman Rushdie, nobody has dared say anything have they?

*Not really. Well think about programmes with different ethnicities in them. Like for instance in Coronation Street apparently Dev and his brother have the corner shop. Now they're Indian or Pakistani, something like that. Does anybody watch Coronation Street?*

Yes

Yes

Yes



*Right. Is it clear whether they have any religion?*

Gill. No

Lily. I wouldn't say

No. Never mentioned

*So they're in there because of their colour?*

Yes

Gill. Yes. They're there for their ethnic background.

*Right. Can you think of Buddhists? Your Star trek, Worf. Clearly something sort of eastern and mystical presumably*

but never laughed at. It's quite interesting that that is always portrayed as being something, I mean he went off to do this sort of what we would term a sort of retreat. He went off and he saw to have sat in this mountainous area for a week and meditated. So it's all very, very serious. Very charged with high spirituality. Which is something that you don't often get in the characters that are Christian. You very rarely see, for me you rarely see the spiritual. You get a little bit in The Vicar of Dibley but you don't very often get the spiritual coming out in the same way as you would in Star Trek with Warf and a few other characters that are definitely religious.

Louise. I was going to say what programme are you talking about its?

Star Trek

Monica. Do you think with the soaps when you say the young Asians that have the corner shop or whatever don't talk about their it religion, d'you think in the same way as with the Christian religion young people don't talk about it. Young British people don't say we're Christians or not. Would young Asians say we're Muslims, we're Buddhists, we're Hindus whatever?

*Apparently if they're actually practising they would*

Monica. But do you think they are all practising?

No

Monica. Or do you think a large proportion like our young people, all right that's our faith because our parents have that faith but we're really not interested.

Gill. But if you look at the religious programmes and you look at the Muslim faith. They did a series on being a Muslim in London and they took you, I think it was one of the Everyman series, and they took you, it was full of young people. It was full of young men practising

Monica. So is ST. Andrew's Church

Yes but

Gill. Practising their religion and taking all the vows and talking about why they can't have their hair cut

*It would be very clear*

Gill. Yes very clear

*Yeah it would be. There would be physical clues and there would be things they would do. It would be very, very clear.*

Dorothy. and the young people who, you know the young people who are Christian maybe a charismatic Church like the Christian Fellowship that are springing up are very, you know they shout it from the rooftops.

Monica. Yes but they're not portrayed

*They're not portrayed. What you find it is occasionally you'll get to evangelical Christians on but it's nearly always seen as a cult. Or something suspicious.*

Monica. In the same way that our young people are not portrayed on television whether they're religious or not well the young Asian wouldn't be portrayed on television as being a particular religious sect. They wouldn't. They wouldn't bring that in.

*Well it doesn't seem to and that's what I'm trying to find out. Can you think of any other religions apart from Christianity, and no matter how badly Christianity is done*

Monica. Jewish is the only thing and I can't think of the name of a programme specifically that I do know I have seen Jewish people in drama. Probably more than any other religion next to Christianity.

Gill. Oh yes now that programme, what's it called? That girl with the black hair. Jewish girl. She's done a few comedies in which she's played. I don't know whether they're one off comedies.

Miriam? She's a

Monica. I know who you mean

*There's Miriam Margolis but I think you mean somebody else.*

Monica. No it's the younger one

*And Jack Rosenthal used to write plays and they were often Jewish.*

Monica. Its drama rather than soap I think.

*Drama yes. What about Hindu? Buddhists? Sikhs? No?*

Gill. They're too frightened of offending people.

Yes



Yes

*D'you think that's the reason?*

Beryl. I don't know. There was that film which was hilariously funny East is East. And very Hindu.

Gill. I still think that there's a lot, after Salman Rushdie and that other thing that happened with that TV programme about 20 years ago

*Oh Death of a Princess about the Saudi*

Gill. Death of the Princess, the Saudi Arabian thing. People have got incredibly sensitive

*That's just Islam isn't it? I mean why d'you think there is the sensitivity about Hindus or Sikhs?*

Gill. Because they're likely to put out a fatwah

*Well not Hindus and Buddhists and Sikhs. Are they?*

Monica. They'd take offence very easily when their religion is

Gill. I think that they're far more, sorry Dorothy I interrupted you

Dorothy. No not at all. I was just going to say that perhaps because they're in a minority perhaps they feel that they have to defend themselves rather and not exactly take offence but indicate their displeasure if they're not portrayed in a very idealised way.

*Right. And you think that's why they're just not shown. For fear of offending.*

Gill. I think so

Monica. Largely

Dorothy. Yes I think the larger and more secure a group feels then the more they can tolerate either being mocked or teased or shown in a bad light. But conversely I think in a minority people really feel they have to protect themselves and not be subjected to criticism.

Mary. And I think they would be really sensitive to, you know I think giving factual programmes about Hindus and Muslims and these religions is one thing but as you were saying making a fun of what would appear to be a humour programme or even you know putting a character in a soap opera that perhaps, with their, all human frailties would be

Gill. I think partly though it's also, thinking about it, it's also to do with power.

Yes

Gill. Because the religious leaders in those sort of minority or ethnic minority groups are extraordinary powerful in the community and it wouldn't be just that you were teasing or knocking somebody that is like that. It would be actually knocking the group itself because the religion is often so integral with the culture itself whereas that's not true in terms, because there are so few people who actually go to Church now. It isn't so true of that.



*Right. It's just interesting because when I interviewed the Muslim women they said I wish they would include Muslims in soaps and show them as a normal family.*

Gill. Oh right

Monica. That's interesting

*Yeah they were fed up of the absences, of just not being seen as part of the community and only, Islam only ever coming up in terms of arranged marriages, you know fatwahs and all the rest of it. They would have welcomed characters who showed the positive side of Islam.*

Dorothy. I wondered if they would have welcomed the warts and all approach? Because that must be very difficult for the people who are considering making one or two films or a series.

Yes

Monica. There'll certainly taboos that they wouldn't be able

No, at no

Monica. They wouldn't let, they wouldn't let a male scriptwriter up over the door anyway to go and talk to them

Well

It wouldn't be so bad nowadays

Monica. No it's very, my daughters at a school, this is getting away from your subject, my daughter's a school nurse in Tooting which has a tremendous Asian population and she has great difficulty even as a female, getting to, she is often not allowed to examine children, even for nits and this sort of thing. They do not like other people interfering with their womenfolk. And they don't like them mixing and it's very, very difficult to get past the fathers and the brothers and husbands. Very, very difficult.

Dorothy. And this will mean that very few of their own women can train to be nurses to do the job

Monica. That's right, that's right. So I don't see them opening doors for writers of soaps to get the picture right, to portray on TV.

*It was interesting because all the women I spoke to were working. Had careers. Had been to university.*

Monica. an awful lot don't

*No. I'm aware but that's what they're saying.*

Monica. A huge proportion still don't speak English and are not about to learn.

*I was just surprised. They said no, it would be really nice because what our girls need are to see women out in the community doing things. They need to know that you can dress in your*

*traditional dress, you can still have jobs, you know wearing the traditional dress does not mean that you are stuck in the House. So, they're looking to the broadcast media in whatever shape or form to show them as part of the wider community not just part of the Muslim community and so, as I say, particularly for the girls - role models.*

Dorothy. I think the answer would be to have it made by people of their own beliefs

Monica. Yes, yes possibly

Dorothy. You wouldn't think that Christians or whatever were doing it in a judgmental way or worse still in a mocking way. Any if they do it themselves they can portray themselves honestly, these intelligent, these very intelligent sounding people, that would probably be a great help.

Gill. And that's why goodness gracious me is so acceptable isn't it? Because it's them taking a smile at themselves

Yes

Gill. And like we have to take the smile at ourselves

Connie. Well what's the matter with Bradford? Because the only time I really went to Bradford what impressed me was that they're seemed to be no Britons in it.

Monica. It sounds like Tooting

Gill. Well they're all Britons. That's the thing. They're all second generation. but I think that's another subject

Connie. They may be a third generation for all I know but it was spectacular. You go to the centre of Bradford and to see a white face is extraordinary.

Dorothy. And was it any better or worse for this?

Bill. It's out of place Connie

Dorothy. Or was it just that the colour was different or did it make it a better or worse place?

Connie. Well I mean for me it was a bit like going back to the West Indies.

*Can I ask you want last very quick question? The way that the religious characters that we've managed to think of how does the way they're represented fit in with your own experience of people. I mean it's Christian is mostly what we've come up with. How do the characters on TV who are supposed to be Christian fit with your own experience of Christianity?*

Dorothy. Well Gill has the same hairstyle as the Vicar of Dibley

Oh yes

Dorothy. That's too facetious but it's true

Sorry Betty?



Betty. I'm thinking that you're all talking about fiction, not talking about fact at all. So I really can't say

Gill. Stereotypes

Gill. But I think in a way that's what grabs people. People don't watch Everyman. They watch EastEnders. The vast majority of people watch the sort of soaps we've been talking about. And actually, I remember one occasion Betty- this is absolutely true. I took a party of Mother's Union ladies to Granada in Manchester to see Coronation Street and three of them wept. They said they'd never be able to believe this again. Because they believed it.

Betty. They believed it so much?

Dorothy. It was like a pilgrimage?

Gill. It was. And it was horrendous. When they went in to the pub and found it was just a bar and one table that people keep changing and putting. It was just horrendous. And the Street of course is just the street and there is nothing behind it. There is no housing behind it.

Cardboard houses.

Gill. It was so real but what I'm saying is that that's what they judge us on

Dorothy. But isn't that symbolic? It's just a cardboard image with nothing behind it.

Bill. That's right so

Monica. Hollywood's exactly the same.

*But in terms of the way, of the way religious characters are shown, you know to pick up your point Betty. If people don't go to Church, if they've not been brought up to go to Church or maybe they were sort of dragged along to Sunday school and then they just thought that's it I'm not going back again and their memory is of the ministers that you talked about in your youth, that kind of thing. Then their perception of Christianity is that it's sort of miserable and moralistic and everybody's telling you off all the time. You know it's not a pleasant thing to be involved in.*

Betty. No I never came across somebody like that

*No what I'm saying is if people have withdrawn from it and I know, colleagues say to me well I'm not surprised Christians are shown like that because that's what Christians alike aren't they? Like that's what it was like when I was forced to go to Church.*

Dorothy. They think it's a succession of thou shalt not

Yes

Dorothy. And that's it

Louise. Dot Cotton would be what I think most people see as Christians



Mary. Oh I don't think so.

Louise. No people who don't go to Church

Gill. People outside the Church

*People outside the Church*

Betty. No I gave you the wrong impression there. I was never forced to go to Sunday school or Church.

*No and I'm not saying you were and you didn't it was just that for people who were*

Betty. We were just talking about the way the minister years ago, they used to be a different way. Like they got up in the pulp its. To me, what I think of it now, they went up to play a part.

Yes, yes

*All I'm saying is that I know people who have been in churches with that kind of preaching and as soon as they could leave the Church they did. They never ever went back again and their view of Christianity, of the Church, is like you said, it's like that. Nothing's changed. It's still like that. It's full of hellfire, damnation. You mustn't do this. You mustn't do that. So when they see people like Dot Cotton and Mrs Mac what they're seeing*

Gill. That reinforces it doesn't it?

*That reinforces. They know that the Church is just like that. So what I'm interested in is if you know Christianity if you know Christians how alike is your own experience with the way it's shown on television?*

Davina. There's far too many Sunday Christians

Bill. No comparison

Betty. No There's not

*Sorry what were you saying Davina?*

Davina. I was saying there are far too many Sunday Christians.

*In real life?*

Davina. Yes. They'll speak to you on Sunday when they're dressed up, you're dressed up. And see on Monday if they see you in the charity shop and they will turn the other way.

*So in some ways that sounds like some of the characters?*

Oh yes

Louise. There was a lad who was at college with me and he worked in the Outer Hebrides and he worked in a hotel. So naturally he had to work on a Sunday and he said the locals there

would speak to him Monday to Saturday come Sunday if they saw him coming along the road they would cross the road.

Gill. Because he wasn't supposed to be working?

Louise. Because he wasn't supposed to be working. Because they knew he worked on a Sunday.

And that's the Free Church

Louise. Not all Sundays, some Sundays. He said they would actually cross the road to avoid him.

Betty. That was the Free Church

Bill. That must be Free Church

Gill. No it could be Church of England actually. I can tell you when I was ordained a priest Betty men that sat round my table drinking my wine crossed over the road so they didn't have to speak to me . so please don't think it's in the past.

Betty. Well they were the ones that didn't want women priests oh

Gill. But don't think it's in the past. That's what people do sometimes

*So in that case, in that case, are the way Christian shown on television, I mean you're saying they're stereotypes but in actual fact we're now getting examples to say maybe they're not so stereotyped after all..*

Monica. Well do you not think the stereotype is a pooling together of all the things about that particular body and you get like an average and there is no such thing as an average is there really? D'you see what I'm saying? So what you get on television is the scriptwriters perceived idea of all the different things about Christian.

*Well how varied d'you think the image are?*

I can't speak for the soaps because I don't watch them.

*Right. Well my impression from what we've said, from what everybody said this evening, is there isn't that much variance. There's either comedy or there's the Strait laced, narrow-minded, interfering, maybe got a heart of gold but on the whole perhaps somebody you not want to spend a lot of time with.*

Mary. What they all have in common is that they're all pretty vocal. They have to be because they are on television. They have to speak. And I think there are quite a few quiet, reflective people in real life who say nothing or very little and therefore they're discounted.

Yeah



Mary. Because they're not on television they have their own thoughts and they can communicate with a few friends or one friend or just keep their own counsel.

Gill. But I do think Dorothy, I'm sure you're right, I wouldn't discount anything you said, but I do think, when I worked on the big estate as a minister and people used to say things to me like, you're not like, you're a bit like the Vicar of Dibley Gill but you're not like the other clergy on the telly. Because actually meeting clergy in the flesh, particularly at times of bereavement or baptism, those sort of times which was the times I often met them, would be, they would see you as a real person and it would actually conflict totally with all their preconceived ideas. Which for most of them, let's face it, they've kicked up through the media in some form or another and, or it's what they grandma told them because they've never been to Church in their life. And I think that's it's a great shame that in these, some of them which deal with amazing things like AIDS and sexuality questions and all these sorts of things that they can't put in a character who is genuinely Christian and would be sympathetic and listening and understanding. And that's the way I think many clergy are. I think there are a few that are you know. There are lots of them have got a wonderful sense of fun. I know a few Father Ted's I'm sure but I think there's that, it's a pity that the media don't, aren't able to weave in the occasional story where the people are just genuinely good, professional and good at what they do.

Mary. That's right and for people to meet you at a wedding or a funeral or a christening I think the language there of those three events is so much easier to understand than quite a lot which comes from a pulpit. Which is floating over their head and quite often people are sitting there thinking I don't understand.

Gill. Yes because they don't know the language do they?

Dorothy. I mean someone up there could be speaking in Hindustani or whatever you know.

But weddings, christenings and funerals the language is understandable isn't it?

Beryl. Have we mentioned Ballykissangel? Because I think that is one series, it's not particularly a soap, that does, it's comedy but it does treat the Church with respect and show what a minister, well a priest because he's a Roman Catholic, his sympathy with his flock and what he has to do and how he lives with them. They are shown as real people and so often they are not in the soaps.

Monica. I think it's partly because it's set in Ireland and Ireland is so much more like that than the mainland Britain.

Beryl. Yes. It's more real isn't it?



Monica. The Church, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland's especially in rural areas still has a very, very strong hold on its community and that can't be said of anything on the mainland to the same extent but the Roman Catholic, and I would go as far as to say that the, what's the name of the older minister

Oh yes the Bishop

No the father

No it's not the Bishop

I know who you mean now

Monica. He's the superior father of the two. I think he's far, he probably is far more like the average Roman Catholic minister than the young ones that they are getting in. This young Australian guy does not, really doesn't fit any that I've met so far, Roman Catholic ministers I've met through my son-in-law and he's certainly not remotely like any of them but the other one is very much like them. And they do, they do keep their flock very much under their thumb and they dictate, they still dictate their lives and this sort of thing.

Mary. But they do say that the Irish priests, you know my brother-in-law is a Roman Catholic and he said he was educated in a Jesuit school and he said it was the Irish priests that were the strictest and most severe with them

Yes, yes

Monica. Cruel

Mary. Yes cruel

*Just stick with Ballykissangel rather than the Catholic Church. You're feeling Beryl is it's a positive*

Beryl. Yes because, well one of the things they brought in with the new priest is the fact that he's an alcoholic.

Monica. A lot of them are

Mary. Yes

*But are they treating it sensationally or sensitively?*

Beryl. No sensitively, sensitively

Betty. No quietly, sensitively

Gill. but again you see you've got to have the flaw. I was thinking when we were talking about the series that was on, The Lakes, that was on last year or the year before. Again you've got a Roman Catholic priest but he's got to do something wrong. Like there's no drama, there's no story unless there is a flaw, unless he does something wrong

Yes

Monica. Yes in Ballykissangel they've all had one

Gill. And in Ballykissangel they've all had a major flaw haven't they?

Yes

*But I mean there's a dilemma there though isn't there?*

Gill. Yes absolutely because the drama comes from it

*Because you also have this thing do you want the clergy to be up on a pedestal, to be absolutely perfect, like that programme that Mary was talking about which wasn't popular because you saw them as a human being or do you show them as a human being with flaws and yet they manage to maintain their faith? I mean there's that tension isn't there? never mind the, if absolutely nothing happens then there is no drama. We can't just see him dispensing communion and what-have-you.*

Gill. But maybe that's why the characters the sort of straight priests and clergy and I'm not saying that people don't have flaws, but I guess the majority of clergy I know aren't alcoholics, don't run off with other people's wives, aren't paedophiles or whatever. They have to be secondary in whatever the series is. They can't take a major role because the only way they can really take the major role is to show, is to create the drama, is to have that, the flaw. We all have flaws. They don't, you never, I mean they'd take the Mickey out of the Vicar of Dibley for her greed but nobody really takes it seriously do they? But the alcohol, well the greed and the alcohol problem are only the same.

*Yeah it's just one's chocolates and that's OK isn't it? All food.*

Gill. It's really interesting

*OK can I say thank you and we'll wind it up there?*

*End of interview.*

Interview notes. There were 12 people in this focus group. I was expecting it to be a group of people who were part of a non-religious group. Gill, my contact person, was worried that not enough people would turn up and therefore invited some members of her congregation to take part - hence the large size of the group and the fact that Episcopalians dominated in what should have been a non religious group. The large size of the group also made transcribing extremely difficult in terms of identifying who all the speakers were. As a result some speakers have been left unidentified. Only when it is clear who is speaking have they been identified.



## Interview With The Dunblane Drama Club

(Ann, Alison, Sarah, Isla, Lynn, Jean)

*I'll Just Explain Very Briefly. I'm Not Going To Be Asking You Questions and you've got to give me the answers which are right and wrong ones. There are some questions but I hope the structure of the thing will be like conversation. Talking amongst yourselves. The only rule I would ask is please don't talk amongst yourselves because when it comes to transcribing the tape it's an absolute nightmare and I can't do it. What I'm interested in is your opinions so there's nothing right, there's nothing wrong. I'm not looking for anything incredibly deep, or intellectual. It's about the way you would normally watch these programmes and the way you would normally respond to them. So out of all the programmes that you have listed and anything that pops into your mind as we go along can you think of any characters that are meant to be religious?*

Jean. Dot Cotton

Isla. Father Ted

Ann. And the Vicar of Dibley

Alison. And what's the, Ashley out of Emmerdale

Sarah. There is no one in coronation St at all is there?

Isla. Emily Bishop possibly.

Ann. Yes there used to be one wasn't there. She was killed off, her character. She had three little

Lynn. O Ena Sharples?

Isla. Oh was she?

Yes. She was a good Methodist. Wasn't she Church warden?

(General agreement)

Lynn. Showing my age.

Well that's two of us. Because I could give you the answer.

Alison. Well Neighbours. I do watch it regularly - that Harold Bishop. Wasn't he Salvation Army?

(General agreements)

Jean. Is he still in it?

Yes he is. Frasier? I'll just go through programmes that people have mentioned. Anybody in that?



Isla. No there isn't.

Sarah. There used to be a guy in EastEnders. I can't remember his name

Jean. He was a minister?

Sarah. Yes he was. He used to be

Allison. So he was.

Sarah. The son of

*He was the brother of Mel, yes. I never saw it at that point.*

Ann. Oh yes I'd forgotten about him.

*He's not; he's gone now hasn't he?*

Jean. Then there was the young girl who went to his Church. Sarah. Remember she was only 15 or 16 wasn't she? She was actually quite into stealing and things and then she sort of

Ann. Converted

Jean. Yes.

*We'll come back and discuss them in a minute. I'm just trying to get a list. Casualty?*

(General agreement that none of the main characters are religious.)

*The Bill?*

Ann. Yes I do occasionally watch that

Isla. Yes I watch that. But there's nobody that springs to mind.

*The Simpsons?*

Isla. Oh yes the man next door. Good gracious how could one forget? I have that because I can't remember his name.

*Ned Flanders.*

Isla. Ned Flanders. My goodness yes he's your perfect, archetypal

*Taggart?*

Lynn. Yes because, what's the one who's taken over from Taggart? He's a Christian, doesn't drink. What's his name?

Isla. Jardine.

Lane. You know teetotal.

*Isn't James Macpherson his name, or the actor's name?*

Lynn. I mean that's what I said I like to watch but I can't remember the names.

Alison. I used to watch it when it was the old Taggart but I haven't really seen it much. I remember him when he was still with, when Taggart was still the boss but not since he died.

Lynn. Yes it's Jardine but he's always having a crisis isn't he or something like that. Isn't he?

*I haven't seen it since, like you. Men Behaving Badly? Hollyoaks?*

Ann. Yes there is a young girl in it at the moment. A little bit like the young girl in EastEnders. A young girl who was up to no good and all of a sudden has converted and become very religious

Sarah. There was another girl as well she was a swot. And her dad was Anna

(Can't hear this but comments about Anna's dad)

*She doesn't seem to be very much, well*

Sarah. I think that when she found out that her father had had an affair that introduced some questioning

*For those of you that don't know her father was a vicar. Brookside?*

Lynn. Well that reminded me because there was a cult Church wasn't there on Brookside?

Alison. Oh years and years ago that's right.

Lynn. That was when you said about she'd become very religious because they had, it didn't, well I suppose it came over quite well in that it was a cult, but it wasn't a very positive message.

*I'll go on to how it was actually done in a minute if that's OK. Anything currently?*

Ann. I don't think so. No. I saw it last night but there is nothing I can think of at the moment.

*OK. Anybody else watched Brookside? OK. Friends?*

Isla. I don't really watch that programme. It's more one of Amy's programmes.

Alison. Phoebe has some odd beliefs doesn't she? Kind of religious beliefs.

*They're sort of spiritual beliefs*

Alison. Yes she is.

Ann. When it suits her.

Isla. She's a bit like the rest of us.

*Cold Feet?*

Ann. No, No there's nothing I can think of

*E R?*

Ann. I watched that last night.

Sarah. I watched that last night too. It was very sad wasn't it?

Ann. I like Dr Green.

Sarah. So do I.

Isla. Is he religious though?

Ann. No., I suppose it does come up in some story lines doesn't it?

*But none of the characters are?*

(General agreement)

*Clocking Off?*

Ann. No there is nobody in that yet it's

Jean. No not yet that it might come into its

Isla. Square eyes over there!

Ann. That's what I was thinking. It sounds awful.

*It's having teenage children isn't it?*

Ann. It is. It's Kirsty. She puts these things on and I think O what's that and the next thing is you're watching it.

Isla. You're drawn into it so

*OK so some of these characters, think about the ones you mentioned and whichever ones you actually want to talk about, how do you know that there's supposed to be the religious character?*

Ann. Dot Cotton spouts passages out of the Bible all the time doesn't she?

*What sort of person is she a, apart from spouting from the Bible?*

Ann. I think she's an interfering person but she's a very kind person. She cares about people

Lynn. She's very naive some ways isn't she?

Ann. Yes

Isla. One of the old school isn't she? Kind of, from another generation. Which she is I suppose.

Jean. I think she tries to be a do-gooder or all the time as well. Doesn't always come across like that but I think she has the heart of being good to people but it isn't always portrayed.

Isla. Heart's in the right place

Jean. I think she means well

*What about any other characters?*

Isla. Well Harold Bishop in Neighbours is always doing good deeds.

Ann. He never sees the bad side in any body

Isla. No

And. He always says there is a good side in everybody

*How clear it is it though that that's to do with him having a faith? As opposed to just being a nice person. I suppose that's the kind of distinction the time looking for.*



Isla. I think because they're portrayed in equal quantities. You see as much of him being a member of the Salvation Army as you do of him doing good deeds so they run sort of parallel. Whereas somebody who's just a good person, that's what comes across more than the religious side of things. Whereas in Harold Bishop the two run alike side-by-side.

*So it is so clearly flagged up isn't it that he's part of the Salvation Army?*

Isla. Oh yes

*He makes reference is my impression*

Jean. I mean he runs functions for them as well. They had a fashion show to fundraiser for the Salvation Army.

Isla. He does. He talks about it a lot. And he's always practising the tuba, or the euphonium, or whatever it is he plays.

Lynn. It's like any character, I mean. If you've got to an alcoholic or a recovering alcoholic this constant reference to it in the script and they've got to do that really to either it remind you what this person's character is like or for new people to the series. Whereas perhaps we wouldn't it constantly refer to us doing good deeds, or going to Church, in our own conversation. I mean that's what would come up in a script.

Sarah. With Dot Cotton they actually had that dilemma with Ethel because that's immediately brought her into what did she do when she went to her religion.

*How did you feel that was handled those of you that saw it?*

Sarah. I only saw part of it unfortunately.

Alison. I thought it was handled quite sensitively.

Ann. Yes, quite sensitively. Yes, I was thinking about it myself. Yes I felt they had done it quite well.

Sarah. Yes you did feel sorry for her

Ann. You could sense the struggle that she was going through.

. She was, she was very upset about it.

Alison. Because it was against her religious beliefs. And yet she wanted to do what her friend had asked her to do.

Jean. I think she was torn between the two wasn't she her belief and her friend

Ann. Yes

*Yes because I suppose that there was that whole thing about wanting to get convicted for something wasn't there. She wanted to be punished?*

*(General agreement)*

*I think you said something before Isla about she's very old fashioned or something like that. Old school.*

Isla. She always strikes me as being like your mother would have been. Like from that generation where they were always a good and clean living, Well not always, the you know. They were good and clean living and always looked out for their neighbours and they came from a generation where that was the accepted thing to do. She always strikes me as being a wee bit like that. She likes to know everybody else's business. A type of the village kind of mentality where everybody knows everybody else's business.

*Does she ever come across as being judgmental?*

Isla. Well again I think she would. When she thinks they're not going by the rules laid down in the Bible, yes she could be a. There are having said that as far as her own son is concerned Lynn. I'm trying to remember sometimes she might be critical of someone or say something because she feels it's against her believes but she doesn't seem to write people off.

Ann. That's true.

Alison. Yes I would agree

Isla. Criticises but still maintains an interest in the well-being

Ann. Well she would still be a true and loyal friend I think wouldn't she?

Isla. That's interesting isn't it?

Ann. I sometimes wonder that so, she's quite an nosy person isn't she a, it does like to know everybody's business. And I don't know whether that's part of it was well. There might be something else I don't know about.

*So you're suspicious that is not sought a Christian motivated?*

And. Well when it suits her

Lynn. You wonder whether you would want her as a neighbour

Isla. Well having said that so we had an neighbour like that in Glasgow I remember. John will tell you and she was wonderful. I wouldn't have been without her. Very nosy, wanted to know everything that everybody was doing. If she heard something on the stair she was out. And she could be really, really irritating at times but having said that I always felt secure. Nobody would ever, ever get near my door but she would know about it and she would stop them and demand to know why they were there. Yes she was old school.

*Did she have a religious element?*

Isla. No, no

*It was just that community*



Isla. Just the same type of community concern. Tenement living. You know where everybody knew everybody else's business and the doors were always open. Well they used to be  
*What about any of the other characters?*

Sarah. Well apart from the obvious ones who wear dog collars well obviously that shows where their religion is.

*What about some of the dog collar characters? How do you think they are portrayed? You can start with Father Ted if you like.*

Sarah. Well is he not being a bit sarcastic?

Lynn. Sometimes they are a bit one dimensional, well two dimensional I should say.

Jean. I think Father Ted made a bit of a mockery of the southern Irish. You know the country rather than the actual religions side. They're so laid back. I think they made fun of it more than anything I don't think it was the religions side they made fun of. Just Ireland in general

Sarah. I think it probably was making fun of religion, especially the celibacy. They were always going about in like the lingerie department.

*I mean father Jack or was saying feck, drink, it girls.*

Isla. Well it's a standing joke in this house that everybody, all my children's friends, think that John looks like Father Jack. (Much laughter) but he does, but he does. So the next time, so the next time fancy dress party we go to, he's to go, because Amy was determined he was going as Father Jack, you were going to have party but you didn't, and she was going to make him a white collar and he was to sit in a chair and say you know that were at.

Lynn. It was a garden party. John has always come as Rab C. Nesbitt no matter what the theme was.

Isla. Rab C with attitude. I actually found it quite unfunny. I've had to watch it a few times with Amy because she absolutely adores it and I found it really quite unfunny

Lynn. Yes

*Can you explain why?*

Ann. I found it really funny.

Alison. I loved it

Jean. I thought it was hilarious

Ann. And I didn't think of the religious side of the it's I just enjoyed it as a comedy.

*I'm curious it's because it's not often you hear people saying they didn't find it funny.*

Lynn. I do not find it funny either. I think because as I say they are very two-dimensional.

They'd these huge broad strokes at the character. You know what the line is going to be and

you know the daft one is going to say it the daft things. The drunk 1 is always going to say what he normally says. And the woman's going to come in with the trolley. And after you've seen it twice you think, I've seen it before.

Isla. Too predictable

Lynn. It just seems very repetitive

Isla. I just didn't find the characters credible. I just thought they were too

Sarah. They were exaggerated

Isla. Yes but just too much so. I tell you I couldn't stand at either, and trying to make comparisons. You know that guy he used to do 'Oh Betty', what was his name. (Frank Spencer) for the same reason. It was too over the top. Too over the tops silly for me. I just wanted to say don't be stupid. You know, like you would with the children in the nursery if they get over the top and a bit silly.

Sarah. I found Frank Spencer annoying but I didn't find Father Ted annoying

Allison. I didn't either

Ann. No I didn't either. I just enjoyed it for the comedy

Tyler. Chewing the facts more my kind of humour.

*Let's move on. The Vicar of Dibley?*

Lynn. Again that's the same. Half of it goes over my head. Emily said oh it's wonderful, O watch it Lynn so I made a point of watching it and again everybody was so type cast and stereotyped with in this sort of thing, it you know everybody's going to react the same way and it becomes unfunny because it's not subtle. For me anyway. It's nothing to do with the fact that its vicars and priests it's the depth of character.

Alison. I think the characters, I find the characters very funny at times.

*How did you actually feel about the vicar herself? The way she's treated and the way she's a vicar?*

Ann. I'd quite enjoyed it actually a thought she brought a little bit of light and warmth and humour to how you would think that a vicar would be.

Isla. She's a bit more human. I think it comes across as being a bit more human and a bit more liable to make mistakes like the rest of us and, you know, I don't know, more human than being up on a pedestal and being different from everyone else. Which a lot of people think vicars are.

Lynn. If I can digress though we were just talking a couple of weeks ago to our vicar who's a Lady. And we have several people come to our church with special needs and one of them,



he's given a pound coin and he knows he needs to put something like 50 to 70p in the collection and the other 20 to 30 pence goes for coffee afterwards, so when he came in, he came in early, or the person who looked after him wasn't there, and he didn't get his change from the collecting plate, which is just at the back. So he was really worried and he kept going up to the altar and saying to Janice, I need my change. And she hadn't even got the plates for the collection at that moment so and she was saying wait until I've got the collection Frank and then he went up for communion. I need my change so I mean, these things do happen. So maybe other people who don't socialise with vicars and priests and that so I suppose it may be gives them the idea that they can be quite a human.

Isla. Well yes, yes I think that's right.

Sarah. But does she preach much? I haven't watched it that often that I can't remember her preaching about the word of God. I don't know if she is that much a religious figure. It's just that she is unusual.

*I think she does actually. It's not all the time but I think she did a pretty cracking Christmas sermon once and there was something to do with animals.*

Viola. I remember that. I was just going to say. I remember the one at Harvest Thanksgiving where they all brought the animals along. And they were all sitting in the pews with sheep and cats and dogs and budgies and whatever and that was actually very touching.

*Yes. And she's got a photograph of Jesus.*

Ann. Yes it's got a picture of another of her idols next to it. Isn't it a picture of the movie star?

*No, but she does actually talk to Jesus. She sometimes has a word*

Ann. Yes when she is in a dilemma. That's right she does

*And there was one where she conned a pile of money out of somebody for a new stained-glass window and then she actually gave the money to somebody else and she just got a big sheet of glass. And there was a little explanation about allowing God's creation to flow into the Church. There was a moral dilemma there about should she get the stained glass or should she use it for something which she actually felt was more worthwhile. So I think it comes in bits Sarah but it's not regular. Who else have we talked about? Ashley in Emmerdale what's he like?*

Sarah. He's quite a sweetie isn't he?

Isla. I don't watch Emmerdale

Sarah. I haven't watched it for ages but that must be about eight months since I have watched it. But he was quite a pleasant character. He's quite human as well. Quite, a bit daft but, very human.

Lynn. I suppose they have got to have a vicar in something like Emmerdale because it's small village setting isn't it so I suppose that's got to be one of the central characters for a village type. Is there a vicar in take the high road.

Isla. Yes there was a young guy. I haven't watched it for a wee while because it went a bit silly as well but there was that young guy for a while.

Lynn. It's just that in an inner-city setting like EastEnders or Coronation Street it wouldn't be such a noticeable person

Tyler. They wouldn't be such a figure in the community possibly as they would be in a country area.

*Well I've heard mixed stories about whether there is a minister in High Road or not. I've had one lot of focus groups telling me no there isn't one at the moment that everybody goes to Church and then I have had other people saying Oh yes is definitely one so I don't know.*

Ann. There is definitely a character who's quite religious it's Mrs what's-her-name, is that Mrs Mac? (General agreements) just when you were saying

Isla. But again she's a Dot Cotton

Ann. Dot Cotton scenario, yes

*This sort of what, Bible quoting, interfering?*

Ann. Yes

*Does anybody watch Peak practice?*

*Lynn. Yes I do because it's set where my sister lives and I recognise all of it. In fact they used where my sister works quite often. So I'd do.*

*It was just your comments about its in rural communities you would expect there to be a vicar and there isn't any body obvious in peak practice is there?*

Lynn. The last one that I watched, well the last one that really had an impact on me, was because it was set, my sister works at an outdoor Education Unit and it's an old hall and they used it quite recently to be a convent. So she said you must watch it. My sisters called Francis and the actual heroine, the main part, was called Sister Frances so every time they were calling Sister Frances my sister Frances wasn't quite sure if it was her that had to stand up, especially when they were just saying Francis because she wondered if there was somebody calling to get her for the children or if it was the actual film. But it was an absolutely dreadful story.



Mind you it was Jenny Seagrove so. It was steeped in saccharin. You know it was a real Jenny Seagrove part. She had cancer and you know, she was battling with it and she wasn't going to have any chemotherapy

*She was agoraphobic as well wasn't she?*

Lynn. Yes. It was going to be her faith. And because it was an enclosed order she didn't want to go outside for treatment or anything and it was that awful blond doctor who my sister says has make-up an inch inches thick. But no I don't think there is a vicar in it is there?

*I don't watch it very often; I sort of catch it periodically. I gather that one has appeared once in a while to do a marriage or a baptism or something.*

Lynn. The Church does actually, the Church is often in the scenery. Whether they're going to the cemetery or whatever because I know the Church as well. My sister will ring me up and tell me O you must watch such-and-such a date because it's set, and it's an area I know very well.

*Just out of interest then, partly because I'd been speaking to one of the people in Peak Practice and I'm very curious about this, what's the Church presence in the area?*

Lynn. Well my sister lives in the largest small town in the area. Which is not the Church that they used. They were actually, tell you a bit of the background. When they first started peak practice it was in a place called Crich. First it was very, very well received by people of Crich but then be found it very intrusive and so they now go down to a place called Holloway so they using that Church now instead of the Crich church. But I mean it's, I'd go to the Church where my sister lives. If you mean is it well attended, very, very well attended. Very, very well attended. Very, very nice vicar.

*It's just that the impression I have been given is that it's a handful of old biddies and that's it and that's why you don't need to have a church in Peak Practice because having the Church presence in peak practice would not be representative of what goes on in those sorts of communities.*

Lynn. Well it's funny. Derbyshire is very, very funny because you've got a very, very left-wing presence there. The constituency next to peak practice is Wedgwood Benn's practice and the other side is Dennis Skinner. So it's very left wing but in fact where they are in peak practice is slightly more right wing and you know, it's always a marginal seat. But there are bits of, it's quite a rural area in some ways. There's the quarrying and there's the rural area, that I would have thought that it would have been as appropriate there as it is in the Yorkshire Dales or somewhere like that.

*Interesting. Anyway I'd better not stay on this but that was really, really useful. The thank-you. Is there anybody else we forgotten in terms of characters, just how they dealt with? Oh, Hollyoaks. I know you're the only one who watches it Ann, well I do. Zara got involved with Brian.*

*Ann. That was her boyfriend wasn't it?*

*What did you make of him? I mean in terms of the whole programme and how he looked and how he came across.*

*Ann. I didn't actually see much of that bit leading up to that. Not really. I wasn't really all that sure of him as a person.*

*I was just surprised to see it rear its his head because when he first appeared you thought he was some kind quasi punk, Goth band and a bit of a trouble maker and he was clearly enormously desirable as far as 15 year-old girls were concerned. Then suddenly they sort of sprung it that the band was a Christian band and he was a Christian and Zara's got baptised. Very fast I have to say.*

*And. Yes that's right. That often happens in soaps though doesn't it? One minute but that's and then the next minute it's, it's all to do with her story lines*

*Isla. I suppose they have to do*

*All the characters that we've talked about so far can you identify what the religion they belong to?*

*Isla. Yes*

*Sarah. Father Ted is Catholic.*

*Jean. He's not exactly religious.*

*Can I make the distinction between religion and denomination? You know, so are they Christian or are they Catholic, Baptist, Salvation Army or whatever. Or are they Jewish are they, OK*

*Sarah. Your question was, was it religion, rather than denomination?*

*Just both just to make the sort of distinction.*

*Alison. Well Dot Cotton would be a Church of England, Christian.*

*Tyler. Harold Bishop would be Christian*

*And. Is it Methodist?*

*Isla. No he's Salvation Army.*

*Ann. Ashley in Emmerdale*

*Lynn. Church of England*

Ann. Church of England wouldn't take?

*So that's another Christian.*

*Lynn. Just like the Vicar of Dibley would be Church of England.*

Isla. we haven't once mentioned that there might be a Muslim.

Ann. No that's what I was thinking.

*That's what I was going to ask you. Can you think of any other faiths?*

Lane. Was the doctor at one time in EastEnders Jewish?

(All agree it was Dr Legge)

Isla. But there are no Muslims or Buddhists or, or

Sarah. Was there not in EastEnders years and years ago a woman? I can't remember her name.

And Indian woman that I don't know what religion she was there was some way she was trying to get out of it.

*I think, I didn't watch it then but it's come up in other interviews, I think it was a Muslim woman. I think there was something to do with an arranged marriage was something like that.*

Isla. That's come up in Coronation Street recently as well

Jean. Yes it has

Isla. With Dev at the corner shop. And the girl who was trying to escape

*But as I understand it Dev at the corner shop is not a Muslim is he? It's not clear. It's just he's Asian.*

Isla. So it's assumed that that's what he's going to be, that he may not be. But obviously that girl who he was harbouring would have been. She would have been wouldn't she?

Arranged marriage would have been Muslim.

Isla. So I suppose you would assume that he would be that is not made clear. He really could be anything.

*So do you think there is the connection expected to be made that because he's Asian he must be Muslim?*

Isla. I suppose but then there's no reference made to its

*So none at all? He's just an Asian shopkeeper and that's it?*

Lynn. But they never talked about Diwali or any other, it you know, when we talk about Christmas or Easter preparations in these programmes you never hear about any of the fastings of the Muslims, Ramadan, or any of the other. There doesn't seem to be any family that have the sort of. You know maybe it's one-off things that have been written about like bar mitzvah Boy where you get the Jewish religion.



*Apparently there's a Jewish policeman in The Bill.*

Isla. Is there?

*Who watches the bill?*

Isla. I do

Lynn. Have you been going into the toilets and following him?

*Hey, the things you have to do for research.*

Isla. Is that the Sergeant Guy then?

*A Jewish contact told me. It's a young guy - short, black hair. I hardly ever watch the Bill now I think because my daughter's stop watching it but there was an episode the few months ago where there was some sort of undercover stuff with the BNP and he got very excited about it because he was making connections with the Holocaust and I think he'd only just started thinking about his roots. As so was saying, my Jewish contact mailed e-mailed me the other week and said you've got me hooked on the bill again. He was home visiting his mother and it was the typical Jewish stereotypical mother, are you eating enough my boy? But I was curious because if I hadn't seen that BNP episode I'm not sure I would have noticed he was Jewish.*

Isla. I don't remember that a tall. I can't think who you must mean either

*He must be late twenties, early Thirties.*

Isla. There's a few of them like that phone at the moment

*Dark-haired, slim, quietly attractive. I can't remember anything else about him but as I say he apparently, but that's not noticeable to anybody?*

Isla. No

Ann. No. But these story lines are not written for these things to be noticeable most of the time, are they?

*They don't seem to be, no. I suppose that's what I'm interested in. When there is somebody, because clearly they've decided he's Jewish well how noticeable is it to anybody who's not Jewish that he is Jewish?*

Isla. Obviously not

*Obviously not so. You know so why include him like that is it a token gesture or is it in fact is it that he just happens to be Jewish but we're not going to make a big deal out of it. And you can argue either way it's a good thing or a bad thing. I suppose that's one of the things I'm trying to find out it, how do you identify who the religious characters are.*

Alison. I suppose if they have a diverse range of characters it's always an opening for a story line at some point isn't it?

Isla. That's right because you may want to include one of everybody because you know at some point in time, throughout the life of the programme, that you are going to have the issues like the Holocaust and whatever, so we'd better have a Jew then. Or we might have racist issues so well we better have a Muslim or whatever, you know. Yeah you're probably right Alison. If you include one of everybody then you've got half a chance if you work your way through them then you've got loads of story lines.

Alison. That's right.

*Yet what you actually seem to be saying is that they haven't. They haven't got a range of characters at all because everybody you've come up with is Christian. (General agreement) as you say apart from when you said going back to Jack Rosenthal plays*

Isla. In dramas and plays you get more representation of other minority groups but not so much in soaps.

*Can anybody actually think of dramas, we've got examples of the Jews appearing, but can you think of dramas where Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs*

Isla. I can with Muslims. There was a drama on a few years back about a couple who were married in this country and had two children. And he kidnapped the children and took them back. I can't remember what it was called. We used to live in a Muslim country and I kind of watched that because it reminds me, to see if I knew where it was. And I've got a kind of interest in that. And that was really well done. And the fight that she had to try and get the children back. There have been documentaries like Death of the Princess

*Yes that just sticking with the fiction*

Isla. Just sticking with the fictional side. Or that one of definitely.

Alison. Yes I remember it now. It was a few years ago now was intense

Sarah. And the comedy side there's goodness gracious me. And when I watch it and I think it's hilarious but there are some jokes that go right over my head because I'm ignorant really.

*Can you identify, can you distinguish between religious jokes and ethnic jokes or sketches in goodness gracious me?*

Sarah. I'm trying to think. It's been a while since it's been on.

Isla. Do you think they are really ethnic more?

Sera. They're more ethnic. They're more about being Asian in Britain. I think it's because obviously the people the right it are in that situation so I suppose that's what they can, they know about it. There was a sketch about one of the Sons he was gay and he was trying to tell them and they just weren't getting it and that was more to do with their religion I think.

Lynn. As you say some of the jokes go over your head because perhaps you don't understand it because they are to do with their religion, so naturally if they keep to the ethnic jokes then the majority of people watching it, or the majority of British people watching it, will understand it whereas the majority of British people will not understand a religious joke. If it's about a Muslim or Hindu.

Sarah. Yes when the mother's are arguing about their son's fertility is that religion or is that ethnic? It's hard to distinguish sometimes.

Isla. I can't think of any dramas with Hindus or Sikhs

Lynn. What was it something of suburbia?

*O Buddha of suburbia. That was Hanif Kureshi wasn't it?*

Isla. And there was My Beautiful Launderette but that was a film. (Discussion at film)

*So in terms of things that aren't included is it fair to say that there seem to be some gaps so far as other religions are concerned?*

Isla. Yes

Lynn. Yes

*Christianity would seem to dominate. There's some stuff on Judaism and some stuff on Islam but nobody can actually think of anything to do with Buddhists. I think the Buddha of suburbia was a sort of a reference to Buddhism wasn't it?*

Lynn. Well I think so but then I think it was more. It was really about a rite of passage of a teenager but the problems they had because of their, you know being in a, I think it might have been a Hindu family rather than a Muslim family.

*I can't remember. ....*

Lynn. But even so it was more about

*There was some tension with the father wasn't there*

Lynn. Yes. And it was still from what I can remember a boy wanting a girl and that sort of thing, boy meets girl situation. It didn't seem to be that the central part of the drama was the religion.

Isla. It must be very hard though to portray other religions in dramas and soaps. More difficult for directors and people like that because you're bound to cause offence to somebody because I think their religion is so sensitive to being misrepresented or whatever that it would be very, I think people would tend to shy away from, not having a story about you know a Buddhist or whatever for fear of

Sarah. Well they could research it



Isla. But even so the amount of red tape and the research they would have to do might be off-putting. You think about Salman Rushdie or anything like that you just have to say anything slightly controversial.

Lynn. It's true

Isla. I think if I were, if I were a producer or director I'd shy away from things like that for fear of offence or causing offence or being sued. Which would then assume that you can do anything you like with the Christian religion. Nobody's going to bat an eyelid.

Lynn. Well I was just thinking how many people apart from Mary Whitehouse would object to half these things whereas I think that even people who were not Buddhist, not Hindu would object to maybe too much, the joke being made out of religion becomes then they're being politically correct by saying it shouldn't have been put on because this would offend people. Just like Anne Robinson saying she didn't like the Welsh. I mean it wasn't just the Welsh who were objecting, but there were lots of people getting on their high horse and saying that it was very racist.

*So right are you saying then that Christianity is fair game (nods of agreement) because on the whole that's been the established religion of this country and that's why it gets more coverage. Other religions, people are more sensitive about and that's either to do with a fear of offending or just ignorance about the religion (agreement). D'you think that has any sorts of consequences for the way other religions are seen?*

Isla. Say it again.

*If the main religion you see in fictional television is Christianity, yes I know its fictional, not documentary, yet never the less images filter into our consciousness. If you never see other religions portrayed do you think it contributes to an impression that these other religions don't really exist or that they're not really important or that they are so sacred and exotic that they just can't be touched?*

Isla. I don't think it makes them appear less important necessarily. Again I would think, the way I would look at it is they're not represented because of the reasons that I have explained already. I would think it would be because, and lots of those religions probably because of their very strong beliefs in certain things would not want to be associated with a programme for example dealing with child pregnancy or murder or whatever. They would not want to be associated, because of their religious beliefs, with that. But I would think it's because of that's not because there are not important, or insignificance or anything else.

Sarah. I've just remembered this situation in Coronation Street years ago. It was with Deirdre and that guy and apparently they had to get rid of him because they didn't want a Moroccan person in it, sort of mixed race. Because the audience didn't like a Moroccan person being well, really the goodie in some ways. It was that sort of like image so I think there was something atrocious.

*What was the story?*

Isla. That was Deirdre getting married to Rasheej. She went away on holiday

Sarah. People couldn't take that because it was so bizarre. They didn't like

*Was it a mixed marriage thing?*

Sarah. They couldn't respond to it so they had to get rid of him because of the audience

Lane. It Was A Mixed Marriage was it?

Sarah. Which Suggests That Actually they don't represent them because The Audience Don't Want Them

Ann. Don't really want that

Sarah. And it's my experience, I live in Govanhill where there's a lot of Asian people, just the other day I was in a supermarket and the racism that was coming out of this one woman's mouth would suggest that, you know, they don't want to see it. I think it's a bit more sinister actually. And I'm sure some of it so what you say as well because it would make you think

Ann. Because in coronation Street, if you think about where it's set, there should be a lot more Asians living in their (General agreements) but I think it's because the general public watching Coronation Street watching three or four times a week are not interested in seeing that side, they're just interested in the characters that they have as a soap. They're not really wanting to see it as a religious programme. Well they're not wanting to see the religious side coming in to it.

Isla. But they are not wanting to see it, but that's not them wanting to see it in real terms as to how it really is. If it were real and set along more realistic lines there would be half of them would be black. But that's not what people want.

*Is that more a question of race rather than religion?*

Jean. Possibly

Isla. I think it's probably your race more likely to be.

*But presumably if you had a more representative distribution of colour then in fact there would be a higher incidence of religion (agreement). Without it being some sort of northern songs of praise or what-have-you but there would be people of faith going about their daily*



*lives. Do you think it's impossible to have characters in soaps? I mean sitcoms seems to be easier doesn't it. There's Father Ted you can have it over the top. There's Vicar of Dibley you can make fun of it or whatever. D'you think it's impossible to have characters who have a faith without them being evangelical about it, they just happen to have a faith. If they're Muslims well they don't go into the pub but they go into the cafe. If they're Jewish you know there might be certain things or certain foods they have got to get. If they're Buddhist I don't know you might see them meditating sometimes but that's a terrible stereotype. Do you think that's impossible to do that? Do you think people would just assume, a religious character they have got to be over-the-top?*

Sarah. I'm sure it's not impossible but what I think what would happen would be stereotypical, that's what would always happen. And people would see what they want to see any way. I mean even if it's not just religion that's what they'll see.

Isla. It would definitely give it another, I'm trying to visualise, and trying to think what it would be like, and I think I would, you would. Well let's say for example the Jews going out to the supermarket and having to buy special things that anybody else in the supermarket from a soap who's going in to buy things, they're not in the slightest bit bothered about what they're buying because what you're listening to is the conversation of what's happening and how it affects this story line and when there are not she's buying cheese or soap or whatever. If somebody was going in to buy something specific you'd be saying, that's a strange thing to buy or whatever. You'd be more concentrating on the religious accessories, does that sound silly, religious accessories rather than listening to the dialogue and what was happening with the storyline. I'd be too busy thinking what's he doing that for, and why are they, so I would probably miss the important lines.

*If so would actually affect the flow you think?*

Isla. It would. It's like watching somebody on television but you know. You're so busy watching

*Yes you stop hearing what they're saying*

Isla. I did that with Fiona and it was odd that so, she's got quite a nice jacket and whatever and half-an-hour later I think what did she say then. D'you know what I mean? I think it would be distracting. I think it probably wouldn't be eventually because you get so used to it I suppose but it would be so unusual, it would be so different from what you do yourself that I'd be too busy watching what they were doing, that it would detract from the dialogue.



Lynn. What would they be making a big song and dance about going out to get something special?

Isla. No probably not

*Kosher food?*

*Lynn. Well yes but I mean they would probably would go into a, well you wouldn't get kosher food at Tesco's in Dunblane, but you would have to go to a kosher grocers or something like this. I mean if you had a character in a soap that was an orthodox Jew then the set-up of the kitchen would be different and things like that and that would actually show you how much they kept two separate elements of their food, completely separate, sinks and everything. But you haven't got that so, unless you have a really orthodox Jewish family in a soap you're not going to see all the elements, as you say, of the religion. Just as, unless you've got, say a Jehovah's witness or something like that in the Christian religion we wouldn't pick up the subtleness of another Christian.*

Isla. I don't think it would be impossible that if it was somebody from another religion that you really didn't know anything about and they weren't a very sympathetic character. You know, it would, it might be detrimental to their religion if you got somebody who was an absolute so and so, that happened to be of another at religion. And I know that happens

*Well just picking up on that, the examples of the Islam, the handful of examples that we've managed to come up with, have any of those been positive images of Islam?*

Isla. Not from a Christian point of view, no. I suppose

*Well anybody outside Islam looking at it*

Isla. No they haven't, no.

*I get the impression that when Islam is shown it's arranged marriages, patriarchal men and that's it really. Or they're terrorists and there's absolutely nothing else goes on in Islam.*

Sarah. Well Dev's supposed to be a Muslim. He's quite a, I think he's quite a positive character is he not?

*What I'm not clear on Sarah is whether he is meant to be Muslim or whether he's meant to be Asian and I don't watch Coronation Street but I've not actually had any body, in any of the interviews I've done yet, say O yes he's definitely Muslim. People have agreed that he's Asian*  
Sarah. I've never actually thought about that when I have watched it. I have just thought he is rather nice

Ann. Because you're not thinking about that at all. Until you said that tonight I would never have given that a thoughts.

*So there's nothing obvious is there that makes it clear. (General agreement) he doesn't disappear in the back to do his prayers (General agreement)*

Isla. And he drinks

Ann. Yes

*Oh he drinks? Well he can't be Muslim.*

Isla. So he can't be Muslim.

(General agreement that he can't be Muslim)

Ann. His cousin has got a taxi rank

Isla. I wouldn't go by that because half at the Muslims I next never (can't hear the end of this)

Sarah. He could be Muslim and not practising Muslim.

Isla. You can't. There is no such thing. You could be Asian and not Muslim but you can't be an non-practising Muslim.

Sarah. Like you get some people saying they are Catholics but then non-practising

*Islam doesn't work like that. If you're Muslim you're a Muslim 24 hours a day and that's it.*

*You can't dip in-and-out like Christians can.*

Sarah. What happens if you try and get out?

*I don't know. And not sure. And think you just don't go you don't do the things you're supposed to do. There are certain rules they're supposed to abide by in their daily lives and so if you stop being a Muslim you stop abiding by the rules and I suppose that would effectively stop you being one. I mean you certainly wouldn't do your prayers. Is it five times or seven times a day you're supposed to pray and various other things? I don't think you can be a lapsed Muslim as such.*

Lynn. Isla was saying about the producers and directors perhaps being sensitive, you know worried about touching on a sensitive script but I wonder as well why they don't get a lot more exposed in soaps and dramas to other religions because the script writers on not to actually au fait with these other religions. I mean it's like, especially if it's like something that's funny. I mean it's like a clown, the clown can only be a clown if they have learnt all the skills first. And so if a scriptwriter hasn't got that background of knowledge of another religion it's difficult to write it into a script without it being very wooden.

Sarah. You don't tend to think about it. I mean I do sometimes which is completely ignorant and I get reminded every now and again. But I just do that I mean I just do. I don't think in that way. I wasn't brought up to think like that. So you forget



*I think that's an interesting point. I would wonder whether that also applies to Christianity, the way it's covered. Because the examples that we've come up with if even Christian figures, on not terribly varied.*

Alison. I wonder if the scriptwriters feel that religious story lines are not terribly exciting? Not terribly interesting

Ann. It's not what the general public want to watch

Alison. It's not going to bring in the viewers

Ann. No exactly it's all about that

*From your point of view if there were characters in any of the programmes that you like to watch, that happened to be religious and it could be done so that they were part of the plot line. It was slipping in the God slot in some shape or form, would that put you off and watching programmes? (Everyone agrees that it would not put them off) could you see a way in which it could actually be interesting?*

Lynn. The problem is with, I mean like I said with Brookside, I remember this it was when my children were at home so I remember seeing it, they had this religious sect thing but it's like any topic that's brought up, well I think, there are very few issues that are tackled by the soaps that are a continuing issue. They sort of comes off

Isla. They come in and now it's

Jean. It's fashionable for three or four weeks and that's it finished with

*Well I'm glad you raised Brookside. Who watches Brookside?*

Alison. Occasionally

Lynn. Very occasionally

Ann. Occasionally I don't watch it regularly at all

*The family who last moved into the close, she had a miscarriage*

Lynn. Oh that's right they're Catholic

Ann. They're Catholic

Alison. The Nolan's or something

Lynn. And the little boy is funny because, I have seen that because he prays that absolutely everything doesn't he? And he works out with money how many babies you could keep in Africa.

*But you know the whole thing with the miscarriage. His fear about having caused it because he prayed to God and the whole thing with the IVF and Granny not being sure that that was in keeping with the Church's teachings and everything. It just seemed to me that it was actually a*



*really good example of how you could have a family who had some religion without making them freaky. You know that they weren't a cult. They weren't like Sarah in EastEnders, evangelising it everybody on the doorsteps or whatever. They go to the pub. They gossip but at times of crisis, I mean for wee Anthony and his granny faith is a constant, but it's there and it doesn't seem to make them less interesting characters in terms of the Brookside dynamics.*

Lynn. So wife is having IVF treatment yes?

*I think she is I haven't seen it for a couple of weeks.*

Lynn. So, I mean, would you believe, I don't know, I think it's like an average of three years for an IVF programme, I mean it would they continue that for three-year so?

*I don't know. It'll be interesting to see that once it?*

Lynn. I mean the reason why bring this up is because I do remember I do remember the Rasheej one because, did he donate a kidney?

Sarah. He did. To Deirdre's daughter

Lynn. Well I was interested because my brother, his kidneys failed and he was on dialysis and needed actually to have three transplants. But they never show you any one on dialysis. They don't show you they don't show on these programmes the day in, day out drudgery of the it they want a short sharp shock sort of thing. A quick solution. They don't want, and this is even I suppose dealing with religion, where does this storyline become intrusive? Well no not the story line, the bits-and-pieces intrude on the storyline?

*Actually funnily enough some body said to me about adoption how they treated it. And they said it's like one day they wanted a baby and the next they had it and he said you know it doesn't work like that. I think it was his sister and she actually wrote and complained that it was just so implausible. So maybe there are just some things that they can't do. I mean it will be interesting to see in that Brookside story line. I would be amazed if they spin it out for three years but who knows?*

Sarah. Let's face it they want the audience that's what the main thing is

Jean. Yes exactly

Ann. Yes

*Well then you see if she has near misses and does things, I suppose she could spin it out for three years*

Jean. And then drop it for a while and pick it up again

*Yes. It would be a good ongoing story line wouldn't it? Complete sort of shifting away. When people have to make decisions, I suppose most of the programme's we've talked about, not just*

*the soaps, what would you say was the moral framework that was used? Do you ever see people referring to religious principles? Do they refer to some vague moral or ethical principles? Is it what the neighbours think? What with the family think? Or what's best for me?*

Alison. I think Dot Cotton the likes of Dot Cotton does refer to again, quoting the Bible about things that are right and

Ann. But a lot of it is also you know what will the family think

*Well what would you say about the rest of the characters in EastEnders in terms of their decision making?*

Alison. I think the older ones are perhaps more aware of how they look in the eyes of other people, how the family looks in the eyes of other people. Perhaps the younger ones less so

Lynn. It all seems to be, I don't watch the soaps very much but I read something in the papers and it was obviously the synopsis and they always sort of seem to say that in EastEnders it's always the family, the family. Even if what they are choosing to do for the family isn't really, it's a criminal act that there intending to go through with the, it's for the family, the family. I don't know whether that's. If down in, the East End of London. I think the East End of London now is mainly Pakistani isn't it? More than whites

Ann. That's the supposed to be the in place to live now isn't there? That's where all the up and coming trendies are living. Very much the place.

Lynn. Well that's in the Docklands area but I mean the Albert Square

Isla. Well no because my

Lynn. My nephew lives in Manor Park and it's a place, Manor park believe it or not and I think he's the only white face on the street

Isla. Because Katy lives around the corner from where they film EastEnders, John's daughter.

And they have bought their flat there because it's the up and coming place to be. House prices are rocketing because it's quite a trendy place to be anyway that's getting away from it. I think a lot of the time that unfortunately it's what's right for me. What's right for me. It's a cross between that and moral and ethical, Oh shouldn't do that because it's not right or you've got to think about my future, seems to be a quote that I can think about. Or think about your future or whatever. So it's a cross between, but it's not very often, I don't think purely religious decisions. I can't do that because it says in the Commandments. No, no that really doesn't  
*Unless you've got the Dot Cotton's or Mrs Maes.*



Isla. Yes but generally speaking. It's more unfortunately what's best for me. What will the neighbours think?

Lynn. Well most of the, it seems as if a terrific number of the story lines is about the way people are deceiving each other all the time. I mean that's

Isla. But that would I think make for good drama. It's that kind of the intrigue. O imagine him doing that. He doesn't know about that. That makes for good drama, which is probably why, it's a bit negative

Lynn. Yes whereas we won't do it because we'll get found out

Isla. Exactly. But they're acting out the things that sometimes we would probably like to do that haven't got the guts to do or we wouldn't be bad enough

*One last question. All of the ways that we've talked about religious characters being shown, how do they actually compare with your own experiences in real life false? I mean, have you met any of these people?*

Isla. No I think probably most of the people I have met who are; it depends what you were talking about. If you are talking like, like religious people as in ministers and vicars and whatever else, I can think of a few examples. And the people that I have met are probably worse than the people that are portrayed on television.

*Really?*

Isla. They pontificate more and

*OK. Anybody else? Yes let's make that division because I think that's a good idea. Clergy first of all.*

Lynn. Well I haven't actually met anyone like that one, the father in the chair

Isla. You have! He's through there on the chair!

Lynn. No I haven't. I've met ones who haven't been of the cloth.

Jean. I think that's a bit far-fetched to be honest

Lynn. You've met ones like that have you?

Jean. No definitely not

Isla. I suppose Janice is like the Vicar of Dibley, -ish. No?

Lynn. Well and mean yes she does. She does admittedly because she was talking about one of the services where she was washing the feet and she said this is purely obligatory! So yes

Jean. She's very approachable

Lane. She is, she is

Jean. And can sort of adapt to whichever group she's with.



Ann. I'm thinking about the ones that we've had vague dealings with through our work

Isla. You know, I'm just thinking that lady

Ann. She was really so remote and they're just not

Jean. I think the younger of your vicars are getting better and I think they're having to because they are losing so many members from their churches

Ann. They're not in with reality

Isla. But even that lady that comes into school though. She's young. Hasn't the notion really.

Just so remote from the realities and the practicalities

Ann. And we have another one that comes in and it's just way over the children's heads and it's just not

Lynn. I think it has to be people that you don't know very well that seem to be like the characters that are, for me anyway, in the soaps. When you really get, if anyone that you really know well you see the whole rounded

*Yes. And what about the Laity? The non-clergy.*

Lynn. Well yes Mrs Edie was definitely. She was definitely the one from a soap

Jean. She was the exception wasn't she?

Lynn. This is not somebody in the soap.

Isla. An actual Dot Cotton.

Lynn. D'you remember Mrs Edie from St Mary's?

Jean. She was like a dictator wasn't she? Everybody was afraid of her. You did what you were told. And any clergy that was there, she kept them on their toes too.

Lynn. I was doing Sunday-school one day she came in and she said, you've been using glue again. What's the matter with catechism? And one of the congregation said because it doesn't stick as well.

*I have to say I was thinking why did she think catechism would work instead of glue and then of course I realised that you should have been doing the catechism shouldn't you?*

Lane. Yes, that was it. Why wasn't I just keeping to that?

Isla. I'm thinking of the likes of your (name that I can't hear) as well.

Jean. Well he's very sociable as well. He can be very funny.

Isla. Yes but he can also be very

Jean. Yes. But he has two sides. He can wear two hats can't take

Lynn. Young or old? The younger one?

Isla. The younger one. The same age as me, it definitely the Young one.

Jean. You know I have met him and I can safely say it's only that I know he's a pastor, by talking to him I wouldn't, he's never sort of brought religion into anything. Unless he had to for some reason.

Isla. I always remember him saying he would go round to, when we were having that trouble with St. Mary's, he would go round to Graham Young's house and throw a brick through his window. But I'd do it with love. You know he had a good sense of humour.

*Muscular Christianity?*

Jean. Or in the name of God or something.

Sarah. I wonder if we know people that are religious but we don't know they are. And so it's very difficult, so apart from when you think that the religious people we know who are awful, it's only because we know they are religious.

Isla. Because for an awful lot of people it's a very private thing isn't it? Which is maybe why they wouldn't want it displayed all over the television.

*I just wanted to clarify this because you have actually come up with a number of fairly negative examples of Christians who would seem to match the negative examples on TV. How representative is that? These negative people.*

Alison. Thinking way back to being a child in Edinburgh and attending Church regularly there were a lot of Dot Cotton's, probably. Not so much now. I can't think of anybody now but I think, you know, the ladies in hats and fur coats who kind of ruled the roost as far as Church and the Women's Guild was concerned were the Dot Cotton's really. It was all about, you know, behaving in a way that would be approved of

Lynn. What will the neighbours say?

Alison. Yes. By the other people in the Church and it was all quite formal.

Jean. I think all churches had people like that then

Alison. I think it's not so much like that now. You know people called each other Mrs So-and-so even though they'd known each other for years. My mother's generation. So I can think of a lot of Dot Cotton's then but I can't so much now. *Is that a sort of fair enough point to end on then? On the whole you can think of them in the past but it's not truly reflective of the state of play now?*

(General agreements. End of interview)



[Given about 10 minutes before the service starts though was expecting much longer!]

*What I want to ask you about is television programmes that you watch ordinarily. Do most of you watch ordinary TV? Yeah. Ok. And what I'm interested in is the way religion is dealt with in things like soaps, dramas and sitcoms. It's not just Islam that I'm looking at; it's all religions. So off the top of your heads can you think of any of the programmes which I've mentioned that have somebody religious in them. A character who's meant to be religious?*

1] It's not really Asians. Absolutely Fabulous, no, Goodness Gracious Me.

*That has a number of sketches doesn't it that are meant to be about*

1] Yeah

2] I was thinking about Coronation Street. That has an Indian, I don't think that's actually a Pakistani but she's in India at the moment. She's a different religion, I think she's Hindu but she's definitely religious. She's from a different religion basically. I think, is it Coronation Street? From the corner shop.

*Are they actually religious the people in the corner shop or are they just Pakistani?*

2] They're not actually religious, no

1] I've not watched it.

2] They're not religious at all but I think the culture is portrayed, the restrictions on your life style are to an extent portrayed as being religious.

*Girls, do you watch Coronation Street?*

3/4/5] No

*Can you think of any other characters in Coronation Street who are meant to be religious?*

2] To tell you the truth I don't watch much television. Since we got SkyDigital I've not watched much television for 5 years.

1] The two with the cafeteria. Roy and Haley for a while there was a time when they were discussing religion and church so religion came into that issue there. I wouldn't say they were religious though. You saw how it affected their life.

*What about any other programmes that you lot watch [directed to the younger girls]? EastEnders, Hollyoaks, Brookside?*

3/4/5] No.

2] I don't know. Since the story line of Brookside has been like, you know, they've actually been introducing like, gay relationships, I'm really totally like, it's against Islam so I've stopped watching that. I've stopped the youngsters from watching that as well. SO I feel that would give the children ideas. It's like there was one scene where both of the ladies were quite close and my daughter was like oh mummy like, and she was really, really sort of interested and I thought no, I just switched the channel because I don't want her to, it's just

*Are there any other kinds of programmes where you've taken that kind of decision because you felt that they conflicted with your faith.*

2] I think all these soaps to an extent are like that. It depends on what's going to happen at the time but I think they all conflicting very much with our religion. Hollyoaks all these, aimed at the younger generation, most of it's against Islam.

*Can you think of any which?*

1] Thinking of Hollyoaks again the changing relationships that's right against Islam.

2] Well girls in Islam they're not supposed to go on dates

1] Well girls or boys

2] Girls or boys but it's just the dating. The dating and relationships.

1] I think if you think about any religion not even religion just culture there's a lot [can't hear] that's not really acceptable.

*You're not the first people to say that. Girls what programmes do you watch?*

3/4/5] Neighbours.

*Sometimes Neighbours ok. So can you think of anybody who is religious in Neighbours at all?*

3] Harold. *Harold Bishop, the vicar.*

4] Harold. *Harold Bishop.*

5] *Harold Bishop, ok. Harold Bishop, the vicar.*

5] Harold Bishop.

*How do you know that Harold's religious?*

2] Harold Bishop in Neighbours, I always remember him. I think because he always speaks about good Christian values and he always actually says that, you should have good Christian values and try to be a good Christian person. And I think some of things he says are really good because it's like very good, modern day methods but like some traditional and very respectable. I like.



*Are those the sorts of things you've picked up on? [Addressed to girls who nod in agreement] What other things do you watch?*

1] I thought you'd be glued to the television.

*Are you just not prepared to admit it?*

2] I don't watch that much. I watch ZeeTv

1] ZeeTv covering Asianet. It's Asian channels that are coming in and a lot of families are watching that now. Not that sometimes they're any better I would say but because it is a reminder of their own culture and it's just something that's done.

2] That is basically why I said to the girls, try to watch more dramas, try to encourage them to watch more of the Asian programmes because basically I want to encourage them to know more about their cultures and also because of the language as well. Just to improve their language as well.

1] I feel that some of them aren't particularly either

*I was going to say are there different values*

1] I think that's the reason parents would prefer them watching it because they're picking up the language. To an extent they're picking up the culture but they'll pick up bad points but they'll pick up good ones as well.

[Have to stop at this point because the service starts. Resume nearly 2 hours later but only have about 20 minutes]

*Discovered that for some bizarre reason the final 20 minutes was not on the tape following transfer from the mini-CD. Main points to come out of that is that the women would like to see more Muslims on television but in a positive way. They'd particularly like to see professional women who wear the hijab as an encouragement to the young women in their community. Get fed up with the stereotypes of Islam as repressive and all arranged marriages.*

## **Findings from Focus Group Interview Monday 18th December 2000**

*Who are the religious people in the programmes they watch?*

Dot Cotton in EastEnders - preaches all the time. Minister in Emmerdale. Vicar of Dibley. Father Ted. Mrs Mack in High Road. Harold Bishop in Neighbours (but only after prompting). Ned Flanders in The Simpsons.

[should have done more prompting at this point]

*What are they like and how do they know they are religious?*

Dot Cotton: knows the bible inside out. Quotes from it constantly but doesn't seem to go to church. Has a guilty conscience about Ethel and her view of religion requires her to be punished for it. No good quoting the bible if you don't practice what you preach. Contradictory statement about her believing there's good in people but then if she gets her knife into someone they need to watch out!

Vicar of Dibley: programme initially described as sending religion up. Seen as a desirable minister. Practices what she preaches. Eventually seen as irreverent rather than malicious programme. Sends up people's failings rather than religion.

Vicar in Emmerdale and Edna: Edna talks more about religion than the vicar. Explicit talk from vicar only when talking about changing jobs. However on reflection decides he does pastoral care well. He reflects changing style of clergy. Edna a throwback like Dot - objects to gay marriages, adultery, fornication etc.

Harold Bishop: not very noticeable. Salvation Army membership seen as being related to wanting to join the band rather than as religious. Mrs Mangle ex member of cast referred to as a dragon but supposed to be religious.

Mrs Mack: interfering busybody with heart of gold. Her nosiness puts people off rather than her religion. Current storyline where village is rallying round to help a local hotel - she says it's her Christian duty to do this.

Ned Flanders: very bright and breezy and knows the bible.

*Can they identify the religion and denomination (if relevant)?*

Total confusion here over differences amongst religion, denomination, faith and ethnicity. Mrs Mack is Church of Scotland because that's what she'd be in a small Scottish village. Dot Cotton identified initially as an English presbyterian and as coming from Liverpool. Eventually decide she'd have to be Church of England. Emmerdale folk identified as Church of Scotland until one group member says they'd have to be Church of England. Vicar of Dibley identified as

presbyterian. One member said there were no Baptists - "I'm speaking as a minority denomination. They're either presbyterian, Church of Scotland or Roman Catholic." Asked where the RC's were - only Father Ted identified as such. Asked about other religions and an Asian comedy was mentioned but no one could identify it but assumption was made that Asian equalled Muslim. Then discussed Father Ted so had to say that wasn't another religion but still Christian. Following question asked: "What about Jewish, does that pass as Christian?" I have to list other faiths. Ned Flanders referred to and have to point out it's still Christianity. Decide there aren't any other faiths even when they think about plays and serials they watch.

*Are they aware of any absences?*

Religion as a whole seems to be absent from nearly all programming - a recurrent theme. (Also bit above about absence of other religions BUT can't honestly say that they had noticed this; came as a result of prompting, and confusion over religion only served to complicate the issue). Another contradiction was when they discussed real life Christians who quote the bible and are quite narrow in their outlook, saying that you didn't see this on screen, yet this is exactly what they said Mrs Mack and Dot Cotton were like. Practical Christianity is never shown - churches running soup kitchens, care for the homeless etc. Rarely see church services - only hatching, matching and dispatching! Don't see the variety of worship that you get in churches nowadays. Rarely see any children with church involvement. Particularly at this time of year rarely see people going to church or Salvation Army bands in the street. Age group of churchgoers well over 30 on TV. Seem to have a stereotype of Christianity which goes across all programmes which puts people off anybody with religious feelings. Certainly doesn't promote religion. Said that people do take soaps seriously [though they seemed to exclude themselves from this] so negative images do have an impact. On that basis could try including (subtly) some positive images which might lead to people wanting to go to church. Tried to discuss the absence of non Christian religions and whether or not it was problematic for other faiths in the same way that they saw the treatment of Christianity as problematic. This didn't seem to make sense because they repeatedly talked about a hypothetical situation which doesn't exist as if it does - "if they stuck to Christianity and didn't portray other religions then they'd leave themselves open to criticism". "Same way as police don't have enough coloured; they'd have the same thing; they'd say they'd have to widen their horizons; have to take in other religions or they'd be open to criticism." Despite pointing out that this is what they've already agreed is actually happening can't seem to get away from an equal opportunities concept: "Perhaps at first they might get away with it but after a while the ethnic minority leaders would complain and then maybe somebody could bring some Muslims in and that's the way it would evolve and then maybe they could have Muslim soap or something."



*What are the moral and ethical issues which are dealt with in the programmes?*

There aren't any. Nobody has any morals - all sex, drugs and bad language. Aimed at young people. This section was elaborated on when asked about guiding principles. Most of the issues raised are social issues and religious view is rarely brought into the programmes. Also comment on the absence of politics.

*What seems to be the guiding principle when characters are faced with choices?*

What is best for yourself seems to be main principle, even for religious characters. You never see anyone debating whether or not they should have sex with someone (though this is slightly contradicted when they discuss the Emmerdale Vicar trying to persuade a young girl that she is too young to have sex - clearly she's having some doubts about it if she's been discussing it with him). A young man on Coronation Street was being offered sex by his girlfriend as his 18th birthday present and he was reluctant to accept but consensus seemed to be that it was down to shyness and performance anxiety rather than any moral perspective. Long discussion about Vicar in Emmerdale. He's been living with his fiancée and they said he wasn't practising what he preached though there was no evidence to suggest that he preached against sex before marriage. There was a blurring here between what they thought real life vicars would or ought to say and what the TV vicar said and did. His discussion with the young girl was raised as an example of hypocrisy initially but after discussion it was agreed that he wasn't saying no to sex but only to caution her because of her age and for her not to feel pressurised if she wasn't ready. Talk about Mrs Mack in High Road and hotel situation. Initially suggest that community action is Christian but after debate agree that it's not explicit in the programme. You'd only see it that way if you were a Christian. However, Mrs Mack's decision to help is clearly based on Christian principles.

*How would they explain the way religion is treated?*

This came up right at the beginning. They wondered if new writers were wanting to drop religion completely because they felt that the ratings would drop if it was included. Writers might think it wouldn't interest the younger element - which they saw most programming as being aimed at. When I reintroduced this topic there were some different answers. The question as to why ratings would be affected was initially answered with a description of what religious characters would look like - oddballs, no make up, funny hats, hair plastered down and humourless. Explanations for the treatment of religion were that programme makers weren't interested in religion and when they did include it, it was as they *thought* Christians were rather than as they

*actually* were. But they doubted that programme makers thought about it at all. Assumed that most of them lived quite happily without religion. Christians don't have any legal protection from mickey-taking - "Do you get police or hospital programmes sent up like that - they pick on religion." Police have the law on their side; police programmes have advisors; some funny programmes (NYPD Blue!!!) but they don't make police look foolish.

*How do the representations (in terms of quality and quantity) fit in with their own experiences?*

Some contradictions here. Answers here probably included in section on absences - don't see enough young people involved with the church, rarely see inside a church, Scottish community would definitely have a minister, people go to church at Christmas but don't see this, church committee meetings in Vicar of Dibley not very accurate due to risque language, no sense of the variety of worship that exists in churches nowadays, complete absence of practical Christianity. None of the representations fit in with their own experiences of Christians currently. Vicar in Emmerdale nearest to what a real vicar would be like. People don't go around preaching and quoting but then we got a couple of stories about people they knew who had done this. One dissenting voice about the way people are always goody - goody in church but would take the last ha'penny off you. This led to a discussion about the nature of Christianity. Rena's view (she's not a regular churchgoer) was very similar to the TV image previously identified. However the others then talked about various problems in their respective churches. What seems to be going on here is that regular attenders are more tolerant of their churches failings and see the positive side whereas Rena had had bad experiences in the past and nothing current and positive to replace them with, so the bitterness dominates.

"Mrs Mack's definitely religious because she wears no make up and she wears very old fashioned hats."

"if you blinked you would miss it."

**Interview with the Edinburgh Film Guild (Darren, Scott, Mark, Nicola, Tom, Alix)**

*I'm just going to ask you about the TV programmes that you watch. What I'm interested in is the way religion is shown in fictional television. I won't be asking about religious broadcasting or news or documentaries or anything like that. It's purely fictional television OK. Out of all the programmes that you've identified and anything that crops into your mind in the course of this discussion who would you say where the characters that are supposed to be the religious ones? If you could say the character and the programme. And just one other thing if you could please not talk over each other as it's a nightmare to transcribe it.*

Alex. DeeDee in Brookside

*DeeDee in Brookside. Who's DeeDee?*

Alix. Ron's previous wife, his first wife.

*Right OK. She was religious?*

Alex. Yes

Nicola. In that case you've really got to have Sheila Grant as well

Alex. Was she?

Nicola. O yes very strongly Catholic

Alex. O yes she was

*Was she the one that went off to a convent something?*

Scott. No that was DeeDee

Nicola. No that was DeeDee

Alex. That was DeeDee

Mark. The family that's doing the IVF now. I don't know what the mother's called.

*Anthony's mother is about the best I can do. I can never remember her name.*

Mark. No the grandmother the older. She was in a turmoil about if she could lend her money for IVF.

*It's mostly granny and the little boy isn't it?*

Mark. Yeah

*What about any of the other programmes?*

Nicola. Is it recent or going back a bit?

*Preferably recent. Let's try and stick within the last five years alright.*

Darren. Dot Cotton in EastEnders. She's supposed to be religious.

Scott. Well to get the ball rolling I've picked father Ted.



(Everyone agrees)

Alex. I don't think of him as religious actually

*Well it's supposed to be religious isn't it?*

Alex. I think it's supposed to be irreligious

*He's kind of identified as a religious person isn't he? By his calling at least.*

Tom. There certainly are some clergy; they're usually Irish, who are almost like that. I mean there are some who were definitely like the straight one. The one who died, there are definitely clergy like him. The others, well with a bit of pushing there are some, like the kind of Ardal O'Hanlan one; there are some who are just almost as innocent as that. I've never seen the extreme old ones but I believe they could surprise you.

*Well I think there are more than a few with a fondness for the whisky bottle*

Nicola. O yes

Tom. I haven't seen many housekeepers but I believe she's very credible. I think in Ireland's she's very credible. There are hardly any in this country now because they got rid of them. It's simpler to get carry-outs. It's a society now where the idea of a resident housekeeper is really very strange in average Britain. So there aren't any

*OK let's, other programmes? Frasier, anybody in there? I mean that you would fairly clearly identify as religious.*

Nicola. Not really

Mark. It's hard to say isn't it?

Darren. No they have morals but that's slightly different

*Yeah and we'll maybe come back to that later . . . . .*

Tom. And they have sort of psychology-based morals

*Yes but not religious . . . . .*

Tom. There was a wedding, the wedding that got interrupted

Darren. That Miles ran away from

Tom. That's right and you never saw it as to what form or ceremony that wedding took place you don't know because you viewed it from the car in which Miles sat

*So they very clearly kept religion out of it*

Tom. So the religious element of the wedding which is an opportunity for maybe quasi religion was not taken

*Right OK. Emmerdale?*

Tom. Of course there's a vicar in Emmerdale.

Mark. I have never watched it

Nicola. No I haven't either

Alex. There's the little boy in Brookside who's having a crisis of conscience

*Yes Mark mentioned, that's the family that Mark was mentioning*

Alex. They're the same family? But he's very involved with guilt at the moment.

*This is the stealing is it?*

Alex. Yeah

*We'll come back to how we know they are. I just want to whiz through. The Simpsons?*

Darren. Ned Flanders

Nicola. And there's the father; oh what's his name. Yes, the priest in it. The Vicar.

*Oh I haven't seen him*

Darren. O there is

Nicola. Oh yeah he's in it. I can't remember his second name

*I don't watch it as often as I'd like.*

Nicola. Reverend

Scots. Reverend Lovejoy

Nicola. That's it

Tom. There's a little boy who goes to confession every so often in Brookside

*No we're on to the Simpsons now Tom OK*

Nicola. Because all the family in The Simpson's go to Church and it's Reverend Lovejoy and his rather mean spirited wife.

*Is that the one where there was the daughter who was the daughter from hell?*

Nicola. Yes

Darren. That's right

Nicola. There was one recently as well. I think it was an old one but it was shown the other night about a cult as well and the Simpsons and how they all joined

Darren. Like there is quite a lot of religious episodes. Like Homer breaks the Commandments and there was one where he stays away from Church and Ned Flanders the religious person rescues him. So it's kind of if you don't go to Church this can happen. So it is quite religious but absolutely funny.

*Right. We'll just whiz through there programmes first of all. Casualty? Any religious characters in that?*

Tom. Oh don't know

Nicola. It's been too long since I watched it

*Taggart?*

Alix. It's a long time since I have watched it

Darren. Apparently the guy who plays, the young guy who was always deputy to Taggart, apparently he's a born-again Christian in its real-life full stop I don't ask me how I know this.

That is pretty religious I suppose.

*E R?*

Nicola. Not really. It doesn't really come into it.

*Ah, you've not been watching it recently*

Nicola. Aaaah. Is it Peter Benton by any chance?

*No it's not amazingly.*

Nicola. I thought he would have

Darren. It's the Croatian guy. Yeah I kind of watched it just a little bit the last few weeks.

Nicola. He's lovely

*Yes, yes. Well he did confession last night with the bishop who croaked it. No funnily enough there was another character in it last night.*

Darren. I didn't see anything

*One of the black women made some comments to Carter and she was, she was either Catholic or, I can't remember whether she was Baptist or something. He said oh I'm Protestant and she said O does that really count?*

Darren. Ah yes I saw that

*and I can't remember who it was*

Darren. Oh yes. It was a new character introduced to Carter and I only saw about 10 minutes.

*Yet it was paediatrics or something*

Nicola. Also did Carol not have a religious belief as well? Was she not Catholic?

Darren. I thought her mother was religious

*Her mother was wasn't she but I don't think she was. Well I never got the impression she wants*

Darren. Was it not Eastern European? It wasn't was it Catholicism or was it one of those others?

Nicola. I thought it was catholicism.

Darren. I thought they were Jews.



*Well actually I was going to say I wasn't sure whether it was Jewish. I think it was clearly that vague wasn't it?*

Darren. I think in America it would probably have to be some times. Quite vague in case you *I don't know. They seem to be much more comfortable with in-your-face religion there. They do. It's because it's a private activity so it's all right to do it. It's like it's not being pushed down your throat as state propaganda. It's the market place of religion. It's free enterprise.*

*Sex In The City?*

Nicola. No

*I haven't seen a lot in that*

Nicola. No definitely not!

*It's alright. We will move swiftly on. Hollyoaks?*

Darren. Yeah I watch Hollyoaks.

*So do I*

Darren. It's like an AA meeting then. Yeah there's a girl called Anna who's father is a vicar. He had an affair with someone and had a child out of wedlock. And that was a big thing for her. It's kind of tailed off now I think because she's been on the cover of magazines or something. They've forgotten about the religious part.

*Were you going to say something Nicola?*

Nicola. No

*Did you notice, does anybody else watched Hollyoaks so are we just the two sad*

Nicola. A bit *... I don't think I've seen it since I was a child.*

*Zara?* *... I don't think I've seen it since I was a child.*

Nicola. Oh yes her baptism *... I don't think I've seen it since I was a child.*

Darren. Her boyfriend is very religious *... I don't think I've seen it since I was a child.*

Nicola. Of course. I was watching that and thinking about this and then I completely forgot.

But yes. It was a very nice, was it a vicar? It wasn't a Catholic was it? It was a Protestant.

*It was a Protestant yes. Church of England*

Nicola. He was very, seemed quite a nice Vicar.

*OK. That's everybody's programmes. Alright the characters that we've talked about how do you actually know that they're supposed to be religious? Make it easier if we start with.*

*Actually somebody had Vicar of Dibley down. Yes. But she's obviously a vicar isn't she? What are the characters like? How do you know they're supposed to be the religious one? And maybe if we'd divide it up into sort of, talk about the soap characters, the sitcom characters*

*and any of the other drama type characters. So the soap characters we've mentioned the Brookside people.*

Mark. Oh yeah the grandmother and Anthony are always going on about religion and her turmoil with her belief. Catholicism and then also her desire to help her daughter to have a baby and how it's not in God's way to artificially have a baby. They're always on about the son Anthony and his religion and how he loves going to Mass and how he loves doing whatever else connected with the Church and how he's kind of the most religious boy they know. So they make a big thing of that. A lot. But there's a lot of other, Anthea, Ron Dixon's wife she's quite religious. I think she is. She's not so. Yeah I think I'd say she had a kind of Catholic belief but she is not so in-your-face about it.

*What would make you think that about Anthea?*

Mark. Just the way she acts. She seems to live with quite strict rules really. That I would kind of perceive as being based on religion.

*You watch Brookside as well don't you?*

Alex. Yes. I wouldn't have thought Anthea was particularly. I would think she has a lot of principles but I don't notice her being religious.

*What about the family because you mentioned Anthony?*

Alex. Yes. Anthony is quite interesting because of his guilt. I'm waiting to see what happens. I'm interested.

*So how's that coming out?*

Alex. Well they talk a lot about him singing in the choir and being very interested. They talk about him being interested in religion, being very committed. Which seems very unusual in a little boy so I'm waiting to see what develops.

*How do you think those characters fit into the scheme of Brookside? Are they integrated or are they seen as the religious oddities? Because the mother, not granny,*

Mark. She's religious isn't she but her husband isn't so

*Sort of which is not quite, yeah. I get the impression her husband was raised Catholic and has now very much gone the other way.*

Mark. Yes he had a confrontation with the grandmother. She refused to give the money for the IVF. It was about your bloody religion and your kind of

*Yeah. Whereas the mum doesn't seem to go terribly regularly but it's still there isn't it?*

Mark. Yeah

*But how would you say they fit in to the scheme of Brookside. Are they oddities?* Alix. They are part of life's rich pattern

*But the way the other characters treat them?*

Mark. They don't seem to react with the other characters as much as the other people who live there. I don't think, she works in a hairdresser's and she reacts to a lot of people but you don't see a lot of scenes where the husband is with the other characters particularly. More so now but you don't see much.

*Do you think there is any sense in which because they have a faith somehow they're seen as different or it's just, I don't know, his job as a caretaker at the school and her job as a hairdresser means they're not around as much or what?*

Mark. I don't know maybe you can generalise because of the area where it's supposed to be set. In Liverpool you see the cathedral in the opening titles or both cathedrals, you see both the cathedrals in the opening titles and because of the area you know has the kind of reputation of being quite strongly religious you can imagine that perhaps a lot of the families who live there are lapsed Catholics perhaps.

*OK EastEnders, Dot Cotton.*

Darren. Dot, she's quotes the scriptures. She's old which is easily a give-away. I don't mean that in a bad sense in a sitcom or soap, she's single, she's female, she's got a classically evil son who's yin and yang. It's the devil and God. I don't know if it's as deep as that actually. I maybe need to get out more. Yeah she quotes scriptures. I don't think she tries to live her life in a pure way. Maybe she does but she doesn't. she smokes and she drinks

Nicola. Oh, I don't think that's

Darren. She steals

*You're maligning her now.*

Darren. Yeah well I'm saying she's not a pure religious character.

*Does anybody else watch EastEnders?* Wells you do I know you do. Somebody else watches it. I've got the proof.

Nicola. Well going back to Dot Cotton I think she's religious in a way that's probably unquestioning from the time she was brought up. She was just brought up with a generalised belief in God really. I don't think she's Catholic, is she Catholic?

*No she's Church of England*

Nicola. I mean it's like my grandmother was brought up, who was Protestant, I don't know what kind of Protestant but she was just Protestant. But she believes in God but it's the sort of



non-specific thing though she did go to Church when the vicar lived near by. There was a vicar wasn't there who ran a sort of home, a halfway house?

*I didn't watch it then but the feedback I'm getting over these focus group, I'm really getting filled in on what used to happen. It was Mel's brother*

Nicola. Mel's brother

Mark. Yes she was kind of big friends with the vicar I guess but there haven't recently been many scenes of her talking about going to Church or, there must be the Church nearby, but you don't see any scenes where the Church is involved directly. Apart from weddings

Nicola. Weddings which never end up going to plan

Mark. And funerals. But maybe you get the impression that she's just one of these people he likes to quote religion at people all the time and thou shalt not steal and all this and the Bible says this and the Bible says that but

Nicola. She's great. Just like my grandmother.

*Do you think she's actually, how do you think the other characters react to that kind of sermonising which she does?*

Darren. She's been in it so long it's just Dot Cotton. It's just

Nicola. It's just the way

Darren. It's dialogue and it doesn't affect anyone

*It's just one of these sorts of oddities?*

Darren. Yeah. It's an eccentric character just to make it less bleak perhaps.

*Oh well I was actually thinking more in terms of the other characters rather than maybe rather than script writers are trying to do*

Darren. That's what I mean. The other characters wouldn't like react because she's been in it so long. It's not as if this person is going to come up with a great story line. I suppose there's been euthanasia

*Well yeah I was gonna say there was the Ethel one wasn't there?*

Alex. O yes

Darren. But week after week Dot Cotton could probably be in it once an episode and nothing really too bad is going to happen I suppose in interaction with other people. She just lives there you know. Just goes off, like Emily Bishop in Coronation Street. The same kind of character

*Would you actually, I don't think anybody did mention Emily. Who watches Coronation Street?*

Nicola. It's been a while

Tom. No

*No Scott? I was just curious because you mentioned her and some people have said O Emily is definitely religious and other people have said no she's not, she's just a nice person.*

Nicola. From what I remember she was religious.

*Can you remember why you thought she was religious?*

Nicola. Did she not have a fling with a vicar at one point or am I?

*That doesn't make you a religious Nicola.*

Nicola. No but there was a vicar. to come in contact with vicars you usually generally have to be religious

*This was maybe a wanton vicar who went to the Rovers for wild time..*

Nicola. I can't see Emily letting herself be picked up in the Rovers

*But if it was a vicar it'd be alright. I don't know. What were the other?*

Tom. What about High Road?

*Welt nobody's mentioned it. Do You watch High Road?*

Tom. Not recently, I used to watch it

*Right I mean it's come up in other focus groups definitely. Is there somebody there you would identify?*

Tom. No I was just thinking as far as I can see in High Road there doesn't seem to be anybody you could identify. You might think given that Scotland is slightly, slightly more religious than England you might think that there just might be someone.

*Everybody that I've spoken to who's watched High Road has identified Mrs Mac.*

Mark. Wasn't she the cleaner?

Tom. O yes. A disagreeable

*Actually Darren's description of old, single woman – Mrs Mac and she seems to fit it. Scott, what about something that you watch? We don't seem to have*

Scott. Father Ted

*Father Ted, is that it? Is that the only thing you watch?*

Scott. I did know the Dot Cotton was religious. She does seem to be the kind of religious character and I do think that she brings bleakness to it not relief

Nicola. Oh I think she's great.

*Why do you think she brings bleakness?*

Scott. Well she's always, she's always quite dour. I don't think it's dry humour or that it's intended to be that funny. I've only ever occasionally seen it but I've seen enough of it to know that she was definitely religious. No doubt about it. And maybe that just makes me switch-off you know her piousness or whatever. The flip side of that is I don't think there ever would be religious people in Coronation Street because Coronation Street's so lightweight really isn't it? Again I don't watch it that much but I've seen enough of it to know that you never really kind of plummet any depths or generally don't go too faraway from bland.

Darren. There was the Italian family in EastEnders as well and they were, its Catholicism in the family but that was mainly more just because it was an Italian stereotype

Nicola. Yes that's a family thing

Darren. Yes it was

*You're right. It was clear that they were Catholic wasn't it? But I think that was only partly because there were crucifixes around or something. It was like symbols.*

Tom. On the wall?

*Yeah You know I think the mother had this crucifix that she wore. But in terms of practising there wasn't, I didn't see anything that would suggest*

Nicola. Everybody in the Italian families has big crucifixes because gold was really cheap in Italy at one point. We've got loads of religious medallions in our family.

*But they didn't even really seem to talk about it did they? They didn't seem to go to Mass or confession. All the terrible things that the people in that family did nobody ever seemed to have the need to go and confess.*

Darren. No

Tom. Largely because the script didn't tell them to.

*Well clearly. Television Catholicism you know. Other soaps? Emmerdale has a vicar.*

Tom. And the complexity of his marriage and his, the visit from the Bishop saying what's all this?

*Are there any other characters apart from the vicar?*

Tom. There's a kind off frightfully good pious woman who's not very nice.

*What's she like? Is she elderly, single?*

Tom. Yes and she's critical of everyone else. She seems a bit hypocritical because she's, well I mean she has to be in the bar like everyone else because that's where the conversations take place but you can't really say she's yet another alcoholic because it's necessary for her to be there so they can have a dialogue.



*But does she drink alcohol when she's in the bar?*

Tom. Oh I think so. I haven't greatly studied what she's been ordering but I probably will do now. But no I think she takes alcohol because if she was not taking alcohol it would be made very pointed presumably. Mineral water for me please. But I don't think she does that

*And what's the vicar like?*

Tom. He's quite pleasant. He's not, he's occasionally presented as carrying out some vicar's role. He had the, the difficulty of anticipating his marriage, which incurred a visit from the Bishop. That seems to be settled OK.

*Although as I understand it there was some friction with one of the characters, I think with the woman you're describing.*

Tom. Well the woman was denouncing him yes she was playing the Pharisee. O yes certainly

*And how is he seen by the other characters?*

Tom. I think he's seen as sort of OK by the other characters. That's my impression.

*And the woman, how is she seen?*

Tom. While he is now married to

*No sorry I didn't mean the woman he was sleeping with. the pious woman how is she seen by the other characters?*

Tom. They don't seem to have in general terms a very different attitude towards her than they have towards anyone else but when she makes her sharper comments there is a bit of a negative reaction by the others I think.

*Right's. So it's maybe not, because the impression seems to be that like with Dot Cotton people just ignore it don't they?*

Nicola. Yes

Scott. I think the scriptwriters would be probably ill advised to make too much of a drama out of the fact that she is religious. They'd either have to poke fun at it or take it too seriously. I think they've got to just tread the middle ground when they're handling religion because it's one of these things that you can't really play with. You're going to upset some body.

Tom. Yes it's not real life. It's dictated by the script and the script says OK she gets to say a little piece but don't all start shouting at her or something

*But you're saying that the character in Emmerdale, people do react a bit when she starts*

Tom. I think people react to the woman character in Emmerdale who is critical ;when she is at her sharpest they react but then she's sitting supping whatever she's supping along with the

others at the bar and nobody's saying oh No not you again. She's accepted in general terms. So I think.

*Do we count Hollyoaks as a soap? OK. What about the religious characters in that?*

Darren. Well there's Anna. That has tailed off but she's still religious.

*I was going to say d'you think Anna still is religious?*

Darren. Now I don't think she is now. But she was.

*My impression is that she's lost it since her father.*

Darren. Because of her father yes. He was a vicar.

*And once she discovered sex you know that was it*

Nicola. Yeah. Although I didn't really watch it when, I may be only started watching it a couple of months ago, so I didn't realise about the vicar thing until it came up in bits-and-pieces and I thought O right, because I'd vaguely heard about it, put two and two together and came up with that but I wouldn't have guessed that she was that religious. A bit square but not religious.

*So what about Zara and Brian?*

Darren. Well is Brian not religious because he's a Goth or whatever he's supposed to be? So it's kind of

*No, No he's a Christian Goth*

Darren. Yeah I know but it's like he's like this but he's also like that. Do you know what I mean? It's the, O he dresses really wildly and likes really wild music but he's a Christian kind of, d'you know what I mean? As in to give him a bit of depth to the character.

*Well I'm curious to see what other people. I'm not going to say anything. I want to know what you made of him: That whole introduction of Brian. You know where he fitted into the ... hierarchy if you like of teenagers in Hollyoaks.*

Tom. D'you not think the character in Emmerdale who is presented as having the greatest integrity and the authentic moral stance is the young woman, I think the actress's name is MacGregor, who played the wife of the guy who was killed in the bush crash?

*I don't know the characters Tom*

Tom. She was married to one of the Dingles. I can't remember her name.

*Can we may be come back to its because and just asking about Hollyoaks at the moment. It's alright. Yeah Brian and Zara.*

Nicola. I think Brian, to be honest with you, is viewed as a bit of a joke. Zara is just awful. She's just such a spoilt brat. But she, I mean she's probably the most authentic teenager. But she's just, oh she's just awful. I can't bear to watch scenes with her in it.

*You didn't think Brian was very*

Darren. He was brought in, as a danger wasn't he? This is analysing it far too deeply. He was brought in as in, he could make Zara do wild things and the kind of flip was no, no it's Zara that's wild and out of control and she wanted to sleep with him and he said no. And I think that's how they found out, they found out that he was a Christian. And now he's kind of, I don't think he is a joke now, I just think he's the kind of boy that if you were a parent you'd like your daughter to bring him home because he seems to have quite strong moral values. He just dresses strangely. That's the only thing you would think to look so yeah.

*When I realised the twist I kept thinking O they are going to turn him into an idiot or something and they don't seem to have done it and that's what really, really intrigues me you know. And all these girls were desperate to go out with him so clearly he was an attractive young man. You know he wasn't the nerd in the corner and you know, there still seems to be some tussling about him. He's a bit on the back burner at the moment*

Darren. It's because he's not pious. It is not weak. He's not this meek man of God or he's not the other way. It seems to kind of say Christianity is not really an option it's part of the story line but it's not going to affect him.

*Sorry when you say it's not going to affect him how do you mean?*

Darren. As in it's there in the background that he's not going to be a stereotypical soap character as in, sits in the bar and bitches or goes the other way and it's just like he is this meek man of God he doesn't do anything. There are no story lines going to be there anyway. It's a bit kind of bleak. Why is this person in it?

Nicola. I think Hollyoaks, with Brookside before it and Hollyoaks and Grange Hill I think they all came from Phil Redmond who has always, he's never treated teenagers as just one-dimensional characters. They have always been sort of rounded so they've had lots of dimensions to their characters and I think he encourages it so that it's not just a one story line character. So you can get somebody who's a Christian, somebody who's a, I don't know Goth or something.

*I think that's probably a really valid point. OK sitcoms. Shall we start with Father Ted? I suppose it's obvious how they're religious. If we could actually talk about Father Ted and the Vicar of Dibley, we could just flit between the two because it's clearly clergy representations.*



*How do you think that they are treated in terms of the jobs that they do? Is it complete fantasy? Is it satire? Is it total piss-take? Irreverence or is it just plain funny?*

Nicola. Father Ted I think probably does have a basis in reality. Scarily enough.

*Which is what Tom was saying earlier isn't it yeah?*

Nicola. But I think it's taken to extremes for comedy value. It's very funny. It's a very good programme but I think you know, I don't think they're actually shown in Ireland are they?

*No apparently it's enormously popular. And they are using it to recruit young priests.*

Mark. It's massive. I was over in Ireland and it was really big. About three years ago when it was quite new and it was really massive. I was working with Catholic and Protestant film students and they all loved it, across the board. The Catholics and Protestants loved it. And they were really surprised that RTE were showing it at a peak time and that maybe it was a bit risky doing that because potentially, the potential reaction people could have had to it. But everyone absolutely, right across the board, everyone thought it was incredibly funny.

Darren. Is it not because the guy who actually did play Father Ted used to do another character? A kind of, he used to go around the clubs and pretend to be a priest. And he used to be really cutting edge and everyone said oh this is, oh this is, you just can't say things like this. And then suddenly that kind of metamorphosised into Father Ted. That's what I was led to believe. And Father Ted could be about three plumbers and it could be almost as funny.

Because it's visually and it is a very funny script.

Mark. Certainly Dermot Morgan had a great deal of respect from the people over there as an individual. Not necessarily because of being Father Ted. Certainly the actor had a lot of respect.

Alex. Is it a good recruiting vehicle because they're all very sweet or  
*I actually haven't a clue. I think it's just*

Alex. Look what fun you can have.

*Yes, yes. And don't have to take your vows too seriously.*

Tom. It seems to be based on the sort of secondary mannerisms and forms of behaviour none of which are actual professional. There's no preaching. There is no liturgy. There's no public prayer. They're not engaged in carrying out their normal function. In that it's a social exchange and all the foibles and peculiar characteristics. Especially of the Irish nationality are wonderfully exaggerated and remarkably credible. Remarkably believable.

*I certainly know people with connections with the Irish clergy at a professional level and they say it works because it's a smidge of reality and it's just extended that bit further.*

Tom. It's to a credible limit. They don't do it too far.

*What about the Vicar of Dibley then?*

Nicola. I mean it's obviously different because she's a woman. A lot of the comedy comes from that especially when she first arrived. They weren't expecting her. But it's quite a cuddly portrait of an English vicar. It's not as satirical as Father Ted is. I mean it's a nice peak time BBC comedy really isn't it? And it's in a small village.

*Do you think either The Vicar of Dibley or Father Ted actually makes fun of religion?*

Nicola. No

Tom. It doesn't really deal with religion or scarcely ever. Except sometimes the young one has got a remarkably naive or completely wrong-headed view of certain religious principles. And this emerges in these conversations between Ted and him in which he says something really nutty. He's got a kind of cock-eyed grasp

*But there's an argument for saying that those sorts of conversations are actually deeply disrespectful to religion. Because it's showing a priest who is so stupid that he doesn't actually understand the fundamentals of his faith.*

Tom. But the way he plays this naive sort of young guy is somehow OK. Do you not

*No it's alright. I have to play devil's advocate here and not give you my personal opinion. That view has been expressed.*

Tom. Oh well I can believe it might be expressed

*What about any of the others?*

Tom. I think someone's being a bit too precise.

Nicola. I think it is, if I was being pedantic I would say that there are certain parts of Father Ted that are blasphemous. Definitely. I remember one scene in particular where Father Ted, when Dougal comes in and says, he's talking about Christ and he's saying and somebody told me he rose from the dead. How does anybody expect us to believe that? And I thought yeah well OK. But you know I suppose it's like he's just got a faith of the child really rather than actually questioning anything so I can see how the Catholic Church can handle that. Yeah there are certainly parts of it that are blasphemous.

Scott. I was thinking of there, the Catholics probably get more out of it than I do because I'm sure it does mock that whole kind of thing. The guilt thing and stuff. I was just thinking about the time that Father Ted was kind of wishing somebody dead and he was kind of looking up there and it happened and then he started to belief it was true kind of thing. But I think a lot of that, another thing that comes across is this kind of hierarchy that you see in the religious

structures. Especially when the top man was coming over or whatever. There is that kind of fear factor that Catholics can relate to. I can't quite relate to that because I wasn't brought up a Catholic. But I know some people who were brought up Catholics and they resented its you know that way they're kind of told from a very young age, that you were responsible. And I can see that that release for Catholics would be a strong one but I think the comedy goes beyond that anyway. I've never seen it as poking fun at it because I don't take it that seriously. I can imagine some people would maybe take offence at it. I think it's more a comedy vehicle. *What about Vicar of Dibley? Would you say that in any way pokes fun at religion? How does she come across as a vicar?*

Nicola. I think she's a very different portrayal of a vicar than you've seen before. I think she's got pictures of, I cannot remember if it's Tom Cruise or somebody, along with Jesus you know, but it's quite a nice portrayal. It's quite a human portrayal of somebody who has a role to perform and I think she does believe in what she teaches. But it's not her whole life. I think it's probably one of the more realistic portrayals of a vicar who has the same sort of wants as everybody else.

*Yes so it's quite a positive portrayall. Who else watches the vicar of Dibley? Are you the only one?*

Nicola. Only because there really thick girl in its is very, very like my sister-in-law. Which my mum offended her deeply by telling her. She speaks exactly the same. Same mannerisms. *Actually let's just touch on the Simpson's. We'll include that in sitcoms even though it's not. Anybody like to say something about the Flanders or the Reverend Lovejoy?*

Darren. Yeah. It's stereotypical isn't it? A kind of American evangelist in Ned Flanders with his rod and Todd. What does that rhyme with? But it does it in quite a funny way. They don't play card games they play card games, which have got the apostles on them

Nicola. Sort of trumps with the apostles

Darren. So it's quite funny. But they are seen as dangerous. I think they try and baptise the Simpson's children in one episode and they get rescued. So it is kind of, yeah they're harmless neighbours but it's kind of a bit strange someone so committed to something like that.

Nicola. Whereas the Rev from Lovejoy isn't a particularly nice character at all. And his wife isn't either. His wife's a real busybody. But the REverend Lovejoy isn't that nice a character definitely.

*And certainly his daughter wasn't was she? She was dreadful.*

Alix. Ned Flanders is very irritating. He's a very sympathetic character. Very, very irritating.



*What is it he keeps saying?*

Alix. Hi diddly doo or something and you go aargh

Nicola. Very nice but very irritating.

*OK. What about the series and dramas that we've mentioned? Taggart's, E R, Casualty.*

Nicola. I've forgotten an obvious one, which Buffy. Because that's got a very strong religious content.

*Well OK who are the religious characters?*

Nicola. Well they are not in a way religious but it's a whole sort of hierarchy, well the mythology in it really is almost, you've got the chosen one who is the Vampire slayer; you've got the force of good and the force of evil; the fact that Sunningdale is over a hell mouth and that's why all the terrible things happen there. So you've got a fundamental belief in good and evil. And the crucifixes that ward off the vampires and holy water.

*It's interesting isn't it? Because I know there are sections of the more fundamentalist Christian Church who see it as unacceptable.*

Nicola. I can believe that

*You know. It doesn't matter that it's a battle between good and evil. It's not Jesus who's fighting the battle. I mean she's not doing it in the power of Jesus. She's doing it in the power of Buffy and that's like major sin.*

Darren. These people believe that there's going to be a Second Coming so why can't it be an 18 year-old kid?

*Don't be silly Darren. It's going to be a man with a beard and long hair and white robes.*

Darren. These people say that and it just pricks their own pomposity you know.

Nicola. You've also got really a kind of saved figure in Angel, who is a vampire who was given his soul back. So you've got the fundamental belief in the fact that you have a soul.

When you go over to the bad side you lose the soul.

*It's really quite interesting isn't it because it's not overtly religious and yet to understand it you would need to have some understanding of religion. You know you'd have to have this understanding of good and evil and souls. If you manage to grow up totally atheistic somehow*

Scott. Is that possible in the States? It always strikes me

*Wel not in the States no*

Nicola. Here You just go to a Catholic school and you turn out to be an atheist.

*Have we mentioned a programme because somebody said something to me the other day - the X files.*

Nicola. Oh yeah

*Do many of you watch the X files?*

Alex. Scully wears a crucifix doesn't show ?

*Scully wears a crucifix. Would you describe Scully as religious?*

Nicola. No

Alex no

Nicola. Oh yes because there was an episode where they sort of, I'm sure there's one episode where Mulder says Well you believe that man rose from the dead and how can you discount everything I say as being rubbish, sort of idea. When you believe in Christianity and I think she said something like, that's different, that's faith. I'm not sure.

*It's just my feeling was that the odd time something has cropped up and it's been so odd that it's been in a very specific contexts like, you know, we need it to off set something else or use it as back-up but the rest of the time you wouldn't know.*

Nicola. Yes but she has come up with something. I'm pretty sure she's Catholic Scully and especially during her illness. I can't remember what exactly it was she had but it was related to spaceships. Yes, she'd been abducted and she became very ill

Alex. She had an implant in the back of her neck. I don't know if she's still got it has she?

*I don't know. But it was Fox he was abducted the other night.*

Nicola. Have you been watching this on Sky

*No. did you not know? It was the last episode. he was abducted. He thought Scully was going to be taken and he refused to let her go - and she's pregnant.*

Alex. Again?

*Again? I didn't know she been pregnant before. No, No, Scully is pregnant not the actress.*

*This is a terrible digression.*

Alex. I don't watch it regularly

*No I don't but I was really grateful to catch that episode*

Nicola. I keep on missing it be you've got to sort of think about the rising up into the spaceship as almost like a, Like a rise into heaven, what's the word, an assumption?

*Then there will be the resurrection and rebirth. OK. OK. I'll move on very quickly because we've not got much longer and I don't want to keep you too much longer. All the things that we've talked about, all the religious characters and the way that religion is shown. I'll give you some clues if you get stuck but I just want to ask a very general question. Are you aware of any absences? Any things that have not been included?*

Alex. In the characters or in the plots?

*Just generally. When you talked about religious characters or the way religion is shown.*

Nicola. They're virtually all Christian

Mark. Yes it's all Christian or Catholic. There's no, especially EastEnders. East end of London you would expect some Muslim or Hindu or something

Nicola. Or Jewish

Mark. But they are not shown at all. In any of the programmes. Even in Brookside, which Liverpool has got quite a large Asian population as well and Chinese population but none of these characters are in. There's Mick who's black that everyone else is. And Neesha who is Indian or something but everyone else is white and Catholic.

*Yeah they are mostly in there because of the colour of their skin*

Mark. Yeah

*Not to represent religious diversity. Can you think of any programmes you have seen that have shown other faiths? Not religious broadcasting.*

Nicola. There was one but it was quite a while ago. There was a drama that was on probably in the Eighties called Salaam, Shaloom and it was about the romance between the two, the son and the daughter of a Jewish and a Hindu family. It was all sort of, I can't remember where it was set now that it was ages ago. And the families were obviously very against their marriage.

*Right. Can anybody think of anything else? Any other programmes, plays?*

Tom. No there is remarkably little. In view of the variety of religions there are in this country we don't catch a glimpse.

Mark. Yeah I can understand it not being a problem in Emmerdale or something like that.

These rural communities are probably predominantly middle-class whites but in the East end of London it's impossible, if you walk through the East end not to, without noticing you're going to see a dozen different religions within 20 yards but that's not portrayed on EastEnders at all.

Tom. Yes. But it would be very dangerous territory for the television

*Why do you think it would be dangerous territory? Why are these things excluded?*

Darren. Because any satire on non-whites is racist. That sounds racist the way I said it but that's the way it's gonna be perceived so if you have a Hindi or a Sikh family in EastEnders for example if they're not dealt with on a personal basis and it becomes a religious thing then people will say O that's racist. So you get into dangerous territory.



*Do you think it's including the religion that would make it a problem or just having an Asian family?*

Tom. Probably just having an Asian family. Imagine the trouble, if you look at the Oldham situation, supposing we were running a regular soap on an Asian family - it would be watched very sharply

*But if there was an Asian family or more Asian families in different soaps who were of different faiths because all Asians aren't the same faith*

Tom. No they're not

Darren. It would be seen as tokenism wouldn't it? Why they are in the soap is tokenism.

*So in that case you think it's just safer to exclude them. To pretend they don't exist*

Darren. Yes

*And not reflect reality?*

Tom. For the time being yes

Nicola. I think the scriptwriters

Mark. I think it's a way, you know EastEnders is a kind of faux East end with the cheeky cockneys who are a little bit dodgy, steal a few things and eating jellied eels and having a sing-song round the piano that we like to think this what the East end is like but in reality it's nothing like that.

Scots. The real religion in Albert Square is the family isn't it? It seems to be what it's all about.

Tom. When you go into the actual East end and all you know about it, or at least all I know about it, is what you sort or think you see on television the place seems to bear no relation.

EastEnders London seems to me to bear no relation to anything I've seen on television.

*In what way does it differ?*

Tom. It just, for example it looks different. The general set-up of the streets looks different.

They are more diverse and lively than the kind of relatively slow motion experience that you've got in EastEnders. I don't know anything about Liverpool. That's the other one isn't it?

*Well Brookside and Coronation Street.*

Mark. And Hollyoaks that's Manchester or Chester.

*I think it's probably reasonably accurate for Chester*

mark. Yeah not much happens in Chester

*We were there about four or five years ago. It's predominantly white faces as I remember because there's nobody with a black, oh there's the O*

Nicola. Ooooh

Alex. Strong reaction. What was that about?

Nicola. He's the most irritating character. He's so self-righteous. He never used to be like that, I'm sure he didn't.

*I just remember him being a pain since he moved into that shop.*

Nicola. Are we talking about the same character? I'm thinking about the editor of the newspaper

Darren. That's Taylor

Nicola. Taylor sorry

Darren. Just to do an impression of the way he speaks.

Mark. There was East is East recently

*Ah but it's a film and I'm not doing films. I'm keeping well away from films*

Nicola. Well it's technically a TV movie

*No. Nicola I'm not going to be tempted*

Scot. There must have been a plot line of an arranged marriage in one of the soaps in the last few years.

Darren. (Can't hear this)

Nicola. I got the end of the TV movie the other night, which was about a Catholic girl who committed a murder. I don't know what it was called.

*Ah but that fits because Catholics can just go to confession. We know how immoral you all are.*

Nicola. Well she did. She did go to confession but then she went to the FBI as well.

Darren. There was the Buddha of Suburbia. That was a strange one. I don't know if that falls into the five-year bracket. It probably does

*I can't actually remember too much about it . . . . .*

Darren. That was an Asian person wasn't it? David Bowie so it was totally against the stereotype.

*Was it written by Hanif Kureshi?*

Alex. Yes

Nicola. Yes

*He seems to delight in upsetting stereotypes doesn't he?*

Nicola. He was in a film here recently

Mark. The only thing that was really Asian in a similar vein to Father Ted or whatever was Goodness Gracious Me, which really pokes fun at a lot of traditional Hindus and Muslims. But

maybe they get away with that because it was Asian writers and Asian stars whereas EastEnders, I don't know about the writers but I'm presuming they are predominantly white and the community might see it if it was an Asian family that their scripts being written by white people That's, you know, a conflict there. It wouldn't work

*Well when we were talking about other religions we mostly talked about Muslims and Hindus but we've not really said much about Jews and we've certainly not mentioned Buddhists who are not necessarily, have dark skins*

Darren. I was about to say some someone might be a Jew in this room and you wouldn't be able to tell so it's

*Yeah and certainly Buddhists in this country I mean what on earth does a Buddhist look like?*

*You know so you don't actually have the, but you don't then have the racism problem that you would necessarily get, that people might be afraid of with portraying Islam or Hindus or Sikhs or whatever. And yet they don't come up do they?*

Darren. There's never been a nationality problem though has there? If you're Jewish and British you're British and Jewish. But there's always, wrongly, there's always if you're a Muslim then you might be a Muslim first. If you go to see the cricket who do you support? That Tebbit nonsense. So perhaps it's that kind of

*So you think perhaps there's a fear of offending operating?*

Nicola. Yeah

Tom. I think so

*Very quickly*

Tom. There seems to be an element of thinking among the diversity of religious groups, there must be someone thinking hey why don't we get represented in the national sort of ... entertainment?

*It's certainly something that's come up in interviews I have done with other faiths.*

Tom. I'd have thought they could reasonably expect it

Mark. I don't know how Muslims would react potentially to their lives and religion being portrayed in that manner. In a, you know, especially the more fundamental, in the medium of entertainment. I mean religion being part of an entertainment programme.

*I've had two sets of reactions. One is, I'd much prefer it to be documentaries that were reasonable and balanced and didn't just show us as arranged marriages and terrorists. I've also had the reaction, it would be nice just to see a nice Muslim family in Albert Square or Coronation Street, or in a play or something because it provides role models for our girls. A*



*play where there is a Muslim woman who has a career. She's not been forced into an arranged marriage or whatever. She's not at home producing millions of babies.*

Mark. That wouldn't happen in EastEnders would it? You can't have, you wouldn't suddenly have a veiled Muslim behind the bar of the Queen Vic, that would be an extreme example.

*Well no, no, you wouldn't at all but they could maybe do the shop*

Nicola. Or the fish-and-chip shop

*I don't think this is quite the achievement this woman was looking for.*

Nicola. The doctor

Yes

Mark. You're going straight to stereotypes there really aren't you?

*She would like them to be the doctor or something like that. So there was a tension. One felt no, there was a danger of just mocking it. Having said that this person had made a comment about the Asian TV awards or music whatever it was. I can't remember and had been upset by one of the comments that one of the recipients had made, which he thought was a tasteless joke. Now that was an Asian making an Asian joke and I thought this a generation thing going on here. There are things my parents would not like that they would think was a bit off and I think that was more what it was but certainly the younger women I was speaking to they just wanted to see themselves represented.*

Nicola. Yeah

Darren. There was Millie in That's Life. Not That's Life

Mark. This Life

Nicola. That's true but she hadn't

*What was Millie? But she didn't have a faith?*

Nicola. She had no faith

Darren. That's what I'm saying. She was a woman who was a lawyer

*Yes but she wasn't a religious woman*

Darren. That's what I'm saying

*Yeah so you can put them in for the colour*

Darren. Yeah but they could look up to her and say yes she is not an arranged marriage

*No because she wasn't*

Darren. Why is it because it's a token?

*Because she was having sex before marriage. She was living in sin.*

Mark. And she's not a Muslim . She's an ex-religious person with a career.

*So I think what they were looking for was somebody who could actually say yes I am a Muslim but I also happen to be a lawyer, a doctor*

Darren. Well perhaps the word Muslim being in the script as in ex-Muslim is better than not having Muslims in the script. You know, look at it that way.

*I don't think so, No. Seriously I don't think that's seen as at all positive. I think that would be seen as seriously problematic.*

Nicola. There was the doctor in, oh I've only seen Holby City a couple of times, but there was a doctor in Holby City who's, she was gay as well

Mark. The doctor in EastEnders as well, Fred. He's Asian.

Nicola. And her father came over to visit and it was a case that she sort of drifted away from her faith I think but he was sort of trying to marry her off. I only saw a couple of episodes.

*How interesting. You know you're the first person to say that. Whenever Holby City has come up before it's just no there's nobody in it. Which is odd for a hospital.*

Darren. That's more because she's gay though. She's a gay character and she's not really a religious character. I would think.

Nicola. I mean you have, down in England if you set the hospital drama down in London and no black characters or Asian characters in it I mean there's just no way because it's run by

Darren. But you have a priest every week, every series

*In which one?*

Darren. Just in every hospital one there's always a priest in it

*Well do you?*

Nicola. No ...

*Because in all the times that I watch Casualty I never saw a hospital chaplain.*

Nicola. There's always a chapel

Darren. No I mean as in a priest who comes in who's ill or his wife's ill and he questions his faith and it's who is the real God - God or the doctors

*Ah yes that's right. They'll bring them in*

Darren. They get wheeled in every episode, at every series

*But there isn't a hospital chaplain. That I can see in any of these hospital series.*

Nicola. Though you often see the hospital chapel. Maybe it's cutbacks.

*He's off round the wards doing his thing isn't he? Finally how do, do any of these representations in terms of the quality and quantity fit with your own experience of religion?*

Mark. Only Father Ted.

*In what way Mark?*

Mark. O I know a few Catholic priests in Dublin. They always like a good drink and a good laugh. I used to work in a club, a parish club at home. It's the bar beneath the Church and it's closed now and the priest always used to be there in the evenings having a good laugh drinking and smoking and the assistant priest or the visiting priest from Ireland who would be over would always be drinking and telling jokes and having a laugh. They weren't as over the top as Father Ted but you can see some reality in Father Ted for sure.

Nicola. There was one series going back quite a bit again called Sacred Hearts. That was on when I was younger. About a convent. It was a teaching convent it actually had a Jewish character in it. it was set during the war and she'd escaped Poland and because her parents had said she was Catholic she was sent to this girl's school. Very, very strict. Well it was exactly the same sort of school that my mother went to and the things that went on there were exactly the same sorts of things that went on at my mother's school. It was shocking. It really was.

*What about any of the other characters that you mentioned, the more up-to-date ones. How does that fit?*

Nicola. Father Ted for the way the nuns act around the priests. You always saw it when the priest came into school and how the nuns would react to them. They all suddenly became very girlish and O father.

*What about the Dot Cotton's and Emily Bishop's and who else have we said? The Catholic family in Brookside who's name nobody can remember.*

Darren. Never see them. I go food shopping to Tesco's on Sunday. I go quite early and it's always, the bus is always packed with spinsters going down to the Murrayfield Church. So that's the only time I ever come in contact and obviously nothing said. So things like Dot Cotton doesn't exist for me.

Nicola. She was my grandmother

Alix?

Alix. Nothing to compare it with.

*Right. Well just generally then your perception of different religion, well it's been mostly Christianity that we've talked about. I mean your perception of Christianity how do the television representations fit?*

Alix. I just don't know

*but d'you have any sort of perceptions of what Christians are like or what the Christian Church is like or how Christians ought to behave?*





among the Pharisees. But the real essence that religious people look for, I think everyone to some extent looks for, after all we're all made, we're all beings with the seal of the maker on us and we're all yearning for the good. We all regret what we do that we see as negative. We all push towards the positive but we all do it. The religious people perhaps do it more consciously but I think we all do it.

*So I mean to sort of summarise*

Tom. And how do you depict that? It's not very easy.

*Right so it's maybe just easier to show the negative and sensational?*

Tom. But you can perceive it for yourself. You perceive it among living people.

*Yeah but just not on TV?*

Tom. Not I think on TV because all that is so contrived. They're reading the script.

*Anybody want to say anything, any last comments? Cut anybody short? Is there something really pithy I can put in my thesis? That's great. Thanks ever so much.*

(End of interview)

Interview notes - one of the problems in this interview was the fact that Tom was quite deaf. Also I was not expecting him at the interview. He was a friend of Alex and nobody else had met him before. He was also a retired priest and this clearly affected the way he gave his answers - a kind of assumption that everybody had a spiritual basis. I think this slightly inhibited the rest of the group.

**Interview with Muslim women, Edinburgh. (Ameena, Alia, Sasha)**

*What I'd like to do first of all, before talking specifically about Islam is just talk about religion in fictional television generally. Now you don't watch much terrestrial television do you? You watch Star Trek and X files. Yes. I think you're the biggest consumer. The other two are mostly satellite aren't they?*

Sasha. Yeah, yeah no, I love science fiction. It's great yeah, yeah.

*Are there any religious figures in either of those two programmes, Star Trek and X files?*

Sasha. I would say particularly Star Trek is very much a spiritual type programme yeah.

*Are there any characters that you, sorry, do either of you two watch these?*

Alia. Yes Star Trek

*You watch Star Trek as well Alia OK. Are there any of the characters that you would particularly identify as being religious?*

Sasha. Any particular character? O there's the who is it, there's a group isn't there in Star Trek? Which of the Star Treks is it? Voyager I think. There's a, oh what is it, they have a thing about the prophets. They talk about the prophets

*Is that one of the films? Or is that in the*

Sasha. No that's one of the actual, you know Star Trek is divided into 3 or 4 even. There's the Last Generation, Voyager and Deep Space Nine

*Oh I thought they were all films*

Sasha. No, no they're all. They have been films but it's been, I suppose they were pilots really and they'd been continued as series. So I can't, one particular character I don't know. ...

Alia. No just like yeah

Sasha. Like a race. You know who I'm talking about? Do you know that planet and they've got?

Alia. The little lines on their noses yeah

Sasha. Yeah and they're very much in to the calling of their prophets and calling on their prophets, yeah

*Somebody in one interview I did said there was a character who was like a kind of counsellor on board Enterprise.*

Sasha. O right. Who's the counsellor?

*I can't for the life of me remember. Who was sort of?*

Sasha. Tuvoc maybe



*I'm not sure all he said was he was almost like the Star Trek equivalent of a priest or something. No?*

Sasha. Ah right. Not that I can, it doesn't strike me

Alia. I don't like watch it all the time. I used to watch it quite a lot but I can't really remember

Sasha. There is definitely a subliminal if you like, I mean it's not obviously in-your-face but there's definitely something there. There's definitely a, yeah, a spiritual thing about Star Trek.

*Do you think that's in the themes that they deal with, the kind of encounters?*

Sasha. Even, yeah, yeah. I'd say so. I can't think of one particular character but generally yeah.

*What about the X files? Is it just Sasha who watches the X files?*

Ameena. I don't watch it

Alia. No. I watched one of the films but that was it

Sasha. X files not really. X-Files I don't really, I mean yes there are creatures from outer space but there was never anything. It's more scientific rather than this idea of a creator behind everything. It's more they've come from outer space, yeah.

*And any of the characters you wouldn't identify as being religious?*

Sasha. Not really. Not really. Mulder is the one who has always been very interested in all of this. But he's more on the dark side. It's, he's had more interest in the occult and those sorts of things so it yeah. I don't really associate that with religion.

*OK. Sister, Sister. I mean I'm supposed to be focusing on terrestrial television. But because I've been dealing with this tape today where she was discussing Sister, Sister and Sabrina we could talk about that briefly. We'll get on to Buffy as well maybe. What about Sister, Sister?*

Alia. You know there was quite a few of them were there in the Church and singing songs so there is quite a few of them. Especially there was the one where there was something about their mum and how she was dead and they were in the Church and it was like her ghost was there or something because they were singing one of the songs that she used to like. They are quite a bit working in Church but I think that's all.

*Right. What about you?*

Ameena. There's not, it doesn't really stick out. It's just the surroundings and they sing every now and then at that's it really. They don't push any points really.

*Do you know what religion they are meant to be?*

Alia. I think yes

Ameena. Just, I don't know, just Christians. I don't know what

*No it's alright I'm not asking for denominations. No, no good grief. I've interviewed Christians who couldn't tell you denominations. It's clear that they are Christian though?*

Alia. Yeah

Ameena. Yet it is

*Is that just because they go to Church?*

Ameena. Yeah I'd just put that

Alia. Yeah I think so

Ameena. It's more like, I'm not being racist or anything, it's like everyone who's there is more like black type of thing and the singing it's all

*Is it the sort of gospel singing?*

Ameena. That's what it is. That's what it is. I think they do it a lot as well because they have got really good voices and I think that's why they bring it in a lot. So I don't know if they're pointing exactly toward Christianity. It's just a manner of bringing it in I think

*OK. It's just, it's kind of strange because I'm transcribing this other interview today and in that they said, oh it's wonderful. They're so Christian. It's so clear. It's a fantastic witness to Christianity.*

Ameena. Oh?

Sasha. Which you don't know?

Ameena. No I don't. To me when you watch it it's just like a comedy

Alia. It's just yeah

*Oh no, they have said it's a comedy and it's very funny but within the comedy it's a really positive image of Christianity.*

Ameena. No, I don't

Alia. They don't bring too much about their religion in. It's just the songs every now and then

Ameena. Yeah in the Church and that's. I mean it's not, no

*It doesn't seem to affect their behaviour that the rest of the programme, how it they deal with things?*

Alia. No

Ameena. No I wouldn't say so

*Right interesting. OK*

Sasha. Different perspectives yeah

*Yeah I know. I mean it's what happens all the time. I don't think there are going to be any conclusions to this research. Sabrina?*

Alia. I don't think so

Ameena. I don't think so do. I mean do you watch Sabrina. Have you ever seen it? (Question directed to Sasha)

*Sabrina the Teenage Witch*

Sasha. Yeah, I mean I've seen the adverts but I've no idea. No I think I may have seen. There was a film wasn't there? I think I might have seen about half-an-hour or something but no.

Alia. No I don't remember seeing anything like religion

Alia. No, I don't remember seeing anything religion wise in it

Ameena. No, no. I mean they just turn to their magic. She uses her magic to get off problems and it ends up not working. But I wouldn't say there was any religious aspect to it at all

Alia. No

*OK well Smart Guy? No?*

Alia. No

Ameena. No definitely not.

And Charmed presumably isn't if it's all about witches?

Ameena. Again it's probably just like you were saying about the X files. Just that spiritual aspect. Not so much pointing out a religious or a religion

*Is it a struggle between good and evil?*

Ameena. Yes. That's what it is exactly. And yes the good's always being put down and that. That's all it is really.

*Which wins?*

Alia. The good is always winning

Ameena. The good is always winning

*The good always wins?*

Ameena. Yes always

Sasha. Just going back to Sabrina though do they not have things, is it not about morals as well?

Alia. Yeah

Sasha. And you know in the end she has perhaps been made a fool of but then whoever made her look a fool it sort of gets slapped in that person's face. I just seem to remember something happening in the film. There was a swimming costume party or something

Alia. Yeah, yeah



Sasha. Yeah? You remember that? And she actually comes out of it quite well although they tried to make her look bad.

Alia. Yeah Sabrina it's mainly like, about it's like she tried to use magic to get off things and that but then it will all go wrong and then she's got to like do things right

Ameena. You've got to do it the hard way to get there

Alia. Yeah

*The work ethic. I think a lot of those programmes are quite moralistic in that way aren't they. There doesn't seem to be, religion is not the basis of morals. The morals come from somewhere else. It's not always specified where they come from.*

Sasha. Yeah, yeah

*Or you have a sort of vague good and evil*

Alia. Yes

*I suppose that kind of neatly leads into Buffy. Who watches Buffy? O everybody. Alright Oh good. Because I mean Buffy is good and evil isn't she?*

Alia. Yeah

Ameena. Yeah

Sasha. Yeah. There was one thing that struck me about Buffy. There was one thing that came up and I thought that was weird. You know Willow? Willow the witch. And she was explaining to her mother what it is she does and she said it's all absolutely fine, and we do this and that, and we worship Beelzebub. But actually Beelzebub is Satan. It's another word for the devil. So I found that very odd. That was, that struck me as, what's all this about.

(Digression to discuss the nature of Beelzebub and the devil)

*Because that would be really weird wouldn't it?*

Sasha. Because that did strike me as, I wonder what message is filtering across here. I carried on watching it but I did wonder.

*But then there have been an awful lot of concerns about Buffy leading kids into studying the occult and getting involved in witchcraft.*

Sasha. Yeah

*It's maybe in some ways American moral panics but I don't know. Sorry Ameena?*

Ameena. Because we were talking about this the other day wasn't it, with one of my friends. And she was talking about the Simpsons. I mean I don't; I don't really watch it. But apparently there's little, it's not obvious, but psychologically it clicks in your head and she was talking about and she got this whole tape and that and it was mainly, it was more to do with

freemasonry and stuff like that. Little things if you listen to Madonna songs (*discussion about satanic messages in various songs. Sasha and I urge caution with this point of view.*

*Discussion not directly relevant to the interview - power of the devil versus the power of God)*

I mean I definitely, I watch these programmes. I watch Buffy and all that and obviously at the end of the day I switch off the TV and that's that. It's finished for me. I've passed a few hours and you know you get back to your daily, you've chilled out for a bit. You've relaxed and you get back to your thing. But you know there's some people you talk to and it's like oh my God, you watch that, oh my God. And it's so. I mean there are some people when they are coming to the house you get, I mean I know this one lady when she's coming to the house I get nervous actually. Like what's she going to say to me, kind of thing.

*Are there things you are not expected to watch as good Muslim girls and women?*

Sasha. Yes there are. Yeah there probably are aren't there? I'm not too sure what

Ameena. I mean obviously you don't watch any, I watch what I would watch with my dad, sort of thing. I'd get, there was actually an interview on the other day about this actor and that and I wanted to watch it that some of the questions were just so out of order I thought that it could have been such a lovely interview but she had

Alia. Ruby Wax

Ameena. Ruby Wax yeah. But some of the questions she was asking about you know were just, I thought they would just out of order. There are certain lines where you draw the line. You don't talk about certain things, you know, this and that. I mean fine you have a laugh with your friends and that but in front of my dad it's utmost respect all the time you know and obviously you mess around, but there are certain things you just don't even mention you know like in front of him. So yeah I mean I really wanted to watch the interview but some of the things she was saying I thought you know, my dad goes, Do you really want to watch this rubbish and I'm like yeah, but not in front of you, you know? And in that sense that it is. I don't like. Sometimes you can be watching a programme and they have to put something she came. You know it's like it could have been so fine but why did you have to spoil it.

Sasha. I think but that's it isn't it. It's more to do with rather than what we are expected and what were not expected, it's very much that it comes from us

Alia. Yes

Sasha. It's very much that it's well as you say I find that cheap and I find that. For instance Friends for example. I don't enjoy Friends very much. It's quite funny you know I've seen it a

few times. It's quite funny but I find it a bit trashy. I find that whole thing with open relationships and yeah that's just going a bit, just stepping over the line.

*Actually on that line, I mean you've obviously got different reasons for not watching too much on the mainstream television. But I was talking to a couple of Muslim women in Dundee and they were saying that they actually stopped their children watching many of the soaps because they just found the things they dealt with were completely incompatible with Islam. I mean is that anything to do with any of the reasons why you don't or would it affect whether you watch particular programmes. You know I take what you are saying about Friends and the kind of trashy values.*

Sasha. Yeah I mean for me personally yeah. I know that if I had children I wouldn't really want them to watch a lot of the soaps because with a lot of the soaps it's 10 times larger than life deliberately so that there's always a story. In the soaps and yeah I feel that as you say it's about living the real life rather than being involved in someone else's.

Ameena. But then again I'm not, even if like any non-Muslim children came to this house I still wouldn't for the simple fact that you're built-in with morals and respect and even leaving Islam aside there are certain things. I mean I was saying to my dad there are certain things you wouldn't think of doing. You know it's like someone said to me once well if you had the freedom to do it. I'm like, I have the freedom to do what I want. I've been taught right and wrong and I'm like, given what, you get what you want, you can do anything but at the end of the day you know what's stepping out of line and what's not so it doesn't even cross my mind you know. Yeah I think the TV, yeah it does. There are a lot of things where it's like. I mean I know in your head you know that's fiction, life's not like that, life will never be like that. But at the back of your head it's always like well, we were, one of my friends we were actually talking today and we were talking about perfect guy. You watch it on TV, 6 pack, big muscles this and that

*Sorry it is that a programme?*

Ameena. No, no.

*Oh sorry. The perfect guy. Sorry I was thinking I hadn't seen that one before.*

Ameena. You must get satellite you know.

*Smart guy. Perfect guy. Right the mythical perfect guy.*

Ameena. Yeah, exactly. Like tall and we were just like realistically how many people are like that in the world? I mean everyone's got to be thin. TV's like causing everyone to become a certain way and you know everyone's got to follow that way so. I don't know. I don't know I



mean yeah definitely when my little cousins come over I mean it's definitely the cartoons, the TV off, cartoons out

Alia. Because like even with the adverts during the day I find like I kind of turn the TV off when the adverts come on because even during the day I feel some adverts I like, I get really uncomfortable and I just like Ö, turn the TV off

*Is it what they're advertising although way in which they're advertising it?*

Alia. The way they do it. It can be an advert for something you know really normal like say a drink but they do it really rudely.

Ameena. There's one, God, I don't know what it advertises but basically there's these two people on a sofa

Alia. Öh God

*Ice cream. Haagen Daz*

Ameena. Is that what it was?

*It looks like they're having sex. There's ice-cream dribbling everywhere*

Sasha. Alright. I missed that one

Ameena. And I thought you know. I said to my mum I said at the end of the day look at the time of the day first of all and there are kids watching this TV yet they insist on doing this and I'd much rather have someone sitting there going mmmm with ice-cream, sitting there tasting it and going that's rather nice. To me that's fine, I'd go out and buy it. But the way they've portrayed it it's like, no, to me it would put me off. I'm not saying I don't like Haagen Daz ice cream but still. Sometimes I sit there and think, if I controlled the TV. But I think there's so many other ways to do things but again I find with TV now they feel the only way to sell anything or get anything is cheap. You've got to expose or you've got to

Sasha. Exploit it

Ameena. Exactly. So I don't know, I just

*So sticking with TV programmes, fictional stuff, are there programmes that you would maybe watch by yourself, if your father wasn't around, that are different from the programmes you would watch it if he was around. For both of you is there a difference between the kind of programmes you would watch on your own and if he was there?*

Alia. Yeah

Ameena. Definitely. Definitely. Because I know my Dad's not, he's just, like Sister, Sister. I mean there's nothing. Sister, Sister you obviously get the occasional, here and there but I think, you can watch it but I wouldn't watch it with my dad because I know that his humour or

Alia. He just doesn't

*That's sense of humour but I'm just thinking from a religious perspective. you know from your own personal beliefs.*

Ameena. It's more to do with the fact that you get a bit shy in front of your dad. If there's a peck on the cheek and that's like, it's the morals again. And you get a bit shy. I mean obviously, sometimes, on the TV there's always going to be some contact between a guy and a girl and I just feel, I don't know, it's not that, we shouldn't watch it anyway right? It should be that, like my dad says whatever you do should be educational this and that, but obviously I mean he understands he's been a kid as well but he's got a total, when he watches a programme and we watch it it's like, I know that he wouldn't enjoy Sister, Sister. He wouldn't get the jokes; he wouldn't get any of that. It's totally different.

*But it's not a question of morality with Sister, Sister?*

Ameena. I think

Alia. No

Ameena. Again it's a boy friend or girl friend theme going on throughout the whole of the thing

*Actually can I just ask, in Islam what is the contact allowed between boys and girls, men and women?*

Sasha. Not very much. Actually, really, not very much. From a certain age yeah from I suppose the age of puberty then there's more separation. It doesn't mean that you can't talk but that's really as far as it goes.

*Right so no physical contact unless it's a family member?*

Alia. No. Yes a family member

Sasha. Yeah, yeah

*So that must make watching television really difficult then?*

Alia. No, no

*Well maybe with your father then?*

Sasha. Well for me it's different

Ameena. I get, I mean I get frustrated when something comes on TV and I feel my dad shouldn't have to watch this right. And also you do feel a bit shy. I mean I know that if it came down to it you know. Because (personal story I promise not to repeat). Everything has got its own place right. I mean my dad, we have a good laugh and everything but when it comes to, like when my brother's friends come to the door and I answer it, it's just like you greet them



and straight away go call my brother, and there's no. And they straightaway, they lower their gaze. But that's the way it is

Alia. Yes it is. It's like you get lots of respect from the boys. Because all the guys, they don't look at you they well yes, they don't actually look at you and it's like they're really polite and that.

Ameena. It is. There's a great deal of respect given to women in Islam and I mean. You feel it straight away when you walk into the room. We went to the Mela the other day and there was all my brother's friends. My brother was standing with his group of friends and that and we were going to leave and his friends straightaway said, you know they hugged and said goodbye and that, and straight away all of them and their heads were to the ground when we walked past sort of thing. It's out of respect they wouldn't look. I think it's lovely.

Sasha. It is nice actually yeah. It is nice

Ameena. You never feel uncomfortable at all. You know it's like when you're getting in the car you greet them and then that's it. You don't have this uncomfortable feeling of oh God, awkward silence. It doesn't exist

Sasha. Yeah, yeah. That's it

*OK well bringing it back to television programmes let's talk specifically about Islam. We were talking in the kitchen briefly about these three very monotonous ways that Islam tends to be shown which is sort of arranged marriages which are usually forced marriages aren't they? The hijab and terrorists. And yet you all talk very positively about being Muslims, about being Muslim women. Do you see, and remember it's fictional television were talking about, d'you ever see that reflected on television?*

Alia. No

Sasha. In Star Trek

*In Star Trek?*

Sasha. Here we go

*They have Islam in Star Trek?*

Sasha. No. O I see what you mean

*No I mean specifically about Islam. Do you see that positive portrayal of Islamic women on television? I'm primarily interested in fictional*

Sasha. It's hard for me to say because you know personally I haven't watched enough of the programmes that have been on but there's far too much concentration on this (she points to her veil) and. you know it always, there were two workshops even in Edinburgh sorry now that's



going away from TV, but I thought for heaven's sake here we go again. Again, it's like this is what it's about. Something that came up in the newspapers actually but this is still relevant isn't it? Because I think Nadia had an experience didn't she? Where she was misquoted in one of the papers.

Ameena. That's right yeah

Sasha. And a friend of ours, Bahir, you know Bahir? Yeah. She became a Muslim. You may have even read the article. It was quite a big spread. I can't remember which paper it was in now, about year and a half ago. But anyway she was interviewed about how she came to Islam five years ago. Now she was doing a course when she became a Muslim and she finished that course and, but the way it was presented in the paper was she gave up the course to become a Muslim. So you see it's just a little thing. It's one sentence but it's enough. It's enough to say O these poor women you know giving up their lives. Fine, fair enough, in a way a woman's main role in Islam is as a mother you know and a woman who is at home. But it doesn't have to be a negative thing you know? It doesn't have to be a negative thing. And it's not. You know the way that it's being portrayed. The way that I see it any way you may have different

*OK what about, Alia, Ameena?*

Ameena. I watched a programme the other day and I don't know what it was called but it was about these two sisters and God, I can't remember it the name of it. One of them her husband's in jail or whatever but there's this accountant and he's Muslim and he came in and there was this Jewish lady in it as well and they cracked jokes about the Jewish religion as well, about how they can't eat meat and she goes well you know you always want something that you can't eat. And she eats the meat in the programme. Then she sees this Muslim guy and starts talking to him, about this and that and then he walks out of the room and then they cracked the joke about oh yeah, he's got four wives. So again it's back to the four wives thing so that's the only thing they, they were talking about Islam and he didn't even have a Muslim name. It was more of a Hindu, or that kind of the name. It was totally

*You can't remember what it was?*

Ameena. They wear white blouses and black skirts and they walk really slowly to music. There's two sisters and one's got blond hair and one's got really short

*And it's on TV?*

Ameena. Yeah. It's obviously an old programme but it still comes on. It comes on at about 1 o'clock time

Sasha. They crack?

Ameena. Yeah they crack that joke and inside

*Is it a British programme?*

Ameena. Yeah it is British. I can get the name for you. Yet they said that and I thought because again they don't go into it, they just crack that joke and anybody watching it they're just going to be 0 yea yeah the four wives again. Because like there were reasons behind that's back in the (can't hear) Age. You know like people would go to war. The husbands would die and there were all these women and kids left behind so obviously someone had to take them in. In this day and age you need valid reasons to take a second or third or 4th wife even. So I mean I don't know any one at all. You need the reasons. You can't just do go out there and so *So you felt that was just falling back on the stereotypes?*

Ameena. Again definitely.

*Can you think of anything Alia?*

Alia. I've seen on TV? No not really, no.

*Nothing. Can you think of many programmes where Islam has featured, even if it's featured negatively?*

Sasha. No I haven't seen enough, I haven't read. But I think that even in the, the programmes which are, which I think are supposed to be trying to portray a positive message there's again just too much focus on a few more sort of outward

Ameena. It's stops there

Sasha. More the outward things. And it stops there. It doesn't go

Ameena. I mean straightaway they just go 0 poor thing she's got to cover up. You know this and that look what their husbands are doing. They don't realise that we cover up for, so you can see the brains and not the beauty. That's the reasoning behind it. And I don't know it's just definitely I think they just stop at the outward appearance. They just see. It's like they say don't judge a book by its cover and I've done that way too often and vowed never to do it again but that's where it definitely stops. I mean my friends, one of them came up to me, well how do you manage when you go clubbing? I don't club. I don't drink. And when they heard we don't drink it was like 0 my God you guys must be rich. And I was like, and they said why don't you drink, you really must want to? I said listen if you've never tasted something you don't have a thirst for it so quite honestly

Sasha. And even if you have

Ameena. Yeah.

Sasha. You know even if you have tasted it



Ameena. I mean I've never but then to me why would I, it's like a lot of my friends come in and say oh God I've had a great time the other night. What happened? I really can't remember but it was great or they've got their headaches and this and that and I said that that's all fine because they were saying to me I don't understand how you couldn't and I'm saying I don't understand how you could. Because my friends just saw the hijab and they'd heard things but when they actually sat down and got to talk to me they said I never knew that

Alia. When they speak to you they get really interested and they think it's really nice but then the people that don't know anything and they do not like, they can't even be bothered to find out anything, they just listen to, its oh yeah you know and it's silly. It's like people in school like the people that are nicer to all they sit there and say O you got a tablecloth on your head and stuff and you're thinking if only you knew. You are sitting there saying that but. But then the people that do, like my friends they're really, really nice and they always ask questions and they seem really interested and they're really nice. Like when I first started wearing my hijab to school I was really nervous. I thought nobody would talk to me or anything but they were just the same and they were like actually really happy that I've started wearing it because they felt that you know. obviously like it is scary when you go to school that day because I was really nervous. But they're really nice about it

*Yes. Looking different.*

Sasha. They think it's good you know you are doing something you believe in. There was one programme that was on – The Veil. Did you see? Did you see The Veil? Again it was about a year ago. Supposedly actually produced by a Muslim woman - an absolute load of tripe. Again it was the whole yeah I mean it was just about the story of a, well, the presenter if you like was taking on the role of a girl who's all covered up. I think she's completely covered and her story of how she walks down the street and the feelings she has but again the way she came across was God, you poor thing. Even I'm sitting there thinking you poor thing. So it you know it was yeah, again something that was maybe having a go at being positive and I think what she tried to do was she tried to take different people's points of view and different perspectives so that there was an all-round picture but really at the end of the day it didn't come out too well at all. That was one that a lot of people talked about, a lot of people talked about that one.

*I must have missed it. But it was obviously a documentary wasn't it?*

Sasha. Again it was a documentary so again there you are.

Alia. You know how you're asking about the TV programmes. I have not actually seen any but you know how like a couple of weeks ago there was that Islam week think. My friend was



like, she's a Christian, and she was talking to me about it and she was saying that she really enjoyed the programmes but I didn't actually see it myself but she said she saw this one programme. I don't know if it was actually a documentary or a just a TV thing but she said it was about this girl, I don't know if she became a Muslim or if she was a Muslim, she was going out with her non-Muslim friends and she wanted to go to a club or something, I don't know, and she was just sitting there and they were going to have alcohol or something and they were like saying what do you want. And she said O I'll just have coke. And they're like no take alcohol. And she was like no I'm not allowed it. And they like just put it in her Coke because they thought it would be funny. And she was saying I thought that was really nasty and like I was just thinking like may be that way on TV, they might have done it but I didn't actually see it.

*So your friend thought it was nasty of them to do it?*

Alia. Yeah because it was like they were making a big joke out of it in the programme but I didn't see it myself

*No I didn't I was saying to Aameena before I didn't see all of them. I just caught a couple of them. I have to be really strict about this because I'm aware of time passing. Sticking with the fictional stuff. We are really toiling to come up with anything that has Islam in it, is that correct? Fictional wise. And then the idea that there is anything that shows Islam positively?*

Sasha. Yeah

Alia. Yeah

Aameena. I've not. I seriously hadn't seen anything. I just saw that one programme

Sasha. I mean there's nothing. No there is nothing really. This isn't is there? Anything really specific. No

Aameena. No

*Have any of you ever watched any of the soaps?*

Sasha. Yes well yes

Aameena. Yeah I mean I don't watch it all the time but I have seen the occasional one or two yeah.

*I mean are you familiar enough with them at all the to say whether you noticed if there are any religious characters in those?*

Sasha. No. I used to watch EastEnders a lot. As a Muslim actually because it's got a good story it but I am not prepared to spend four nights of the week keeping up with the story. But no not really. Lots of very definitely good characters and lots of very definitely bad characters

*But not religious?*

Sasha. But not, no I mean there's never that sort of underlying thing. You know it's always sort of morals but as you say they come from somewhere else.

Ameena. I've seen a lot of programmes portraying Christianity in a sense. Buffy for example they use the cross to get rid of the evil but I think Islam's seriously lacking. They don't portray it at all. You couldn't even say they do it in a bad way because they don't

Alia. Yeah

Sasha yeah

*What about any of the other faiths? Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists.*

Sasha. Are they portrayed you mean?

*Yeah can you think of anything that they're in?*

Sasha. No. Sometimes in some of these films. There was a film about. Actually that was a few years ago. I can't remember what it was called, but I mean films as well you know

*No I'm not doing films. Just television otherwise I'd be doing this forever. Just TV programmes*

Sasha. Because there is a chap who's done some stuff who used to well, he calls himself a Muslim anyway.

*Is that Hanif Kureshi?*

Sasha. Yeah. He's done stuff.

Ameena. No, I think, I've not hit upon anything it's all. I mean what programme was it? I think it's a Hindu guy or something he's in one of those ones. I don't know if it's EastEnders. There's an Asian guy and he likes

*O Coronation Street*

Ameena. That's the one *the one where he was in the corner shop*

Ameena. That's the one *the one where he was in the corner shop*

*Dev. And I don't watch it. He has come up in every interview.*

Ameena. I watched, I think I watched one of two of those but I didn't

*Were you clear whether he was religious?*

Ameena. I didn't pick up on that at all. No I didn't. No I didn't think he was

*Have you seen it Alia? No. Sasha?*

Sasha. No, no I think I know the character you mean but I didn't

Ameena. No I didn't pick up on anything

*Because apparently he's Hindu.*

Ameena. Yeah because looking at him sort of thing I thought that but I didn't pick up on. Like the one I saw he was in the bar at the time or whatever but I didn't pick up on any religious inclination at all so

*Because it's interesting actually. I would say the majority of my Christian or agnostic/atheist interviewees haven't had a clue. It's like he's Asian so he must be Muslim. He's Asian so he must be Hindu. He's Asian well he might be Sikh but that's really rare. That's really rare. It's just 0 he's Asian so he's probably Muslim is actually*

Sasha. It's what they tend to say yeah

*Actually funnily enough one of the interviews I was transcribing the other day I was doing that bit and she said oh Dev he's a Muslim isn't he? And Da-de-da Da-de-da something about he drinks. And actually two of the other women in the group said well he's not Muslim then. They at least knew about Islam. Ok in that case it's got to be something else. I'm not sure what but he's definitely not Muslim. But the kind of lack of knowledge of the differences is quite staggering*

Sasha. Yes. And the assuming, and the assumptions

*Yes that's right and it does seem to be if you see a brown face, oh pick a religion. That's it. And the idea that in actual fact he could be anything.*

Ameena. Yeah absolutely

Sasha. Yeah definitely

*But equally there seems to be very little knowledge of how you would identify different faiths and it goes back to what you were saying about people not knowing why are you wearing the hijab, why you don't drink alcohol or whatever. Well it must be because it's repressive mustn't it? That sort of thing. I'll make this the last question. Do you think it would make a difference, affect the way things are, if you saw Islam more often in things like fictional broadcasting?*

Alia. Yeah

Sasha. Yes it probably would

Ameena. Yes I definitely think so

Alia. I think it would

Sasha. Yes to be honest it's not something I've really thought about but actually

Ameena. But now it's brought to you, yeah definitely. Because I think people, those who do know they've only got the negative view. That's not their fault, I don't fault them at all. That's because of what they here and what they see and obviously some people are shy and won't want to come up and ask you. They think it's a hassle. But if it was portrayed and portrayed



the right way, I'm not saying go into detail, but just reasons behind little things just say it, then it would open a lot of eyes and they won't feel like you were saying, they won't feel sorry for you, you know it's like they'd see you as a human being.

*But bearing in mind that I'm talking about fictional broadcasting and the opportunities for explaining the little things might sometimes be constrained or it might take a long time before it is explained given the nature of drama or soaps or sitcoms or whatever, D you still think it would be worth doing?*

Alia. Yeah because still that little bit is still explaining

Sasha. I think so yeah

Ameena. I think that would be great though because like the reason behind it, well they'll say oh, I've got to find out next week then. I'll definitely have to find out so even dragging it out a bit for the reasons it might be a good idea

*It's interesting because I will now tell you. I asked Yaseem this question and he wasn't happy with it at all. And I think it was because he felt that, I think we were talking about soaps at the time, and the sort of moral values that were there, you would be asking, I suppose not necessarily this Muslim actors you could have people pretending but I think there was a kind of assumption that it might be Muslim actors, they would have to mix with people who were perhaps acting immorally, even though it was acting.*

Sasha. Well OK yeah I mean

*As I say it was the kind of thing, well that might just be a generational point of view.*

Sasha. I mean I, actually I would agree but it doesn't, it wouldn't have to be a soap. There are some beautiful Islamic stories actually. Some beautiful stories that come from places like the Middle East. Very, very old stories

*So you could do it as drama?*

Sasha. Yeah it could be done as drama. There are so many ways that it could be done. If it's something that's not...

The tape stopped working at this point. Having initially agreed that it would be a good idea to see Islam portrayed in fictional broadcasting when Alia and Ameena heard that their father thought it was not a good idea they started to change their mind. They thought that perhaps he had more insight into the issue than they did. It was also getting very late and I was conscious of having presumed on their hospitality for too long. I felt quite awkward. I had asked them the question and then revealed their father's thinking and there was insufficient

time to find out whether they regretted their first statements, whether coming round to their father's point of view was a short-term position or whether with more discussion they might have stuck with their original position. Even Sasha who was older than them seemed to be having second thoughts when she heard what Yaseem had thought.

**Interview With the Roman Catholic Women in Edinburgh (Iris, Doreen, Molly, Heather)**

*(Interview starts with a long explanation by Doreen about at a two-part programme called, I think, the Messiah. It's about a murderer who kills people who have the same names as the apostles. The others then discuss the details of the plot. )*

*Did they actually deal with religion or was it you just had this guy who thought he was the Messiah I mean was there anybody religious in it?*

Iris. The pastor, the clergyman he was the main religious figure wasn't he?

Molly. I was a little suspicious of him actually

Heather. Yeah I was too

Iris. They always make clergymen rather strange don't they?

*Why was he strange?*

Moray. Well he just acted strange

Doreen. Well I think what made me laugh was the fact that there was one scene when he gets a phone call in the middle of the night and he's got this whisky glass just at the side of the bed

Iris. It's the image we have

Doreen. I have this image of this clergyman getting himself to sleep

Iris. With his wee nippy bottle

*Does that not mean he was definitely a Catholic priest?*

Iris. I think it does

Doreen. He must be a Catholic

*OK of all the other programs that you've circled and any that pop into your mind while we're talking, can you think who are the religious characters? At the same time how do you know that they're supposed to be religious characters; what is it about them that makes you recognise them as such?*

Heather. Sometimes it's quite straightforward, I watch Ballykissangel and there's a priest in there so there he's got an outward sign that he is a religious person that he's a religious person, they're also O, there's another old character she's really just as well. You can tell she is. She's always going to Church and she doing things. But it's sort of the outward signs, being involved in a religious activity

*What's she like as a person?*

Heather. I think she's a bit type cast really

Iris. Aye stereotype this and



Heather. Yes she's stereotyped as well. She's a kind of busybody. Always kind of slightly judgmental of everyone else

Iris. But kind at heart

Heather. But kind at heart as well

Molly. Good intentions

Doreen. Is that the one with the shop?

Iris. Yes. Aye she's very friendly with the old priest isn't she? Pre Vatican Two. Goes to confession every time she commits a sin and all that.

Heather. That's right

*And is that good heart seen by the other characters?*

Iris. Yes I think so. But the two priests are very different aren't they? One's quite young and the others dyed in the wool pre Vatican. The new priest is Australian. He's very modern. He seems to go out with the ladies as well doesn't he? One scene you see him at the races with one woman and then you see him some where else with another woman. He's very modern you know. It always makes me laugh that. There be a lot of gossip I'd imagine

*And do they not gossip about the fact that he's seen*

Heather. They don't seem to

Iris. No

Doreen. They don't seem to

Iris. And it's a village and a small place

Doreen. And especially in a place like Ireland

Iris. And they all congregate in the pub. Never go to Church. I suppose the pub is a centre

Molly. I really can't say. I don't watch it

Doreen. It is absolute rubbish

Iris. It's daft. It's not blasphemous. It's just frivolity.

Molly. Is this the one with the Australian priest?

Iris. Yes

Molly. Oh I just thought he was kind of way out you know

Iris. Yes I think probably. But do you not think in a way it's a sort of revolutionary attitude from, by the Irish? Because they were never allowed to criticise the Church. Do you not think that?

Doreen. Could be. I think they've gone through a phase

Iris. Where they're always criticising

Doreen. Father Ted is an absolute example of that

Iris. Of criticism of the Church

Doreen. They make fun of the Church and the clergy. They send them up something (can't hear this bit) they must hate the programme

*Do they? I mean I've spoken to a couple who think it's awfully funny*

Doreen. Do they?

*Yes really*

Iris. Some priests don't like it at all and others

Heather. Father James says he has fun with the stories (can't hear last bit)

Iris. He's really strange that Father Ted one

*What do you make of it yourselves?*

Iris. I think it's quite funny. It's obviously a send-up. It's so crazy. It's so extreme their behaviour. But at the same time they're actually giving you a message that they feel that they're not really grown-up, that they're not mature. The funniest scene is the bedroom scene where one is sitting in the wee bed and the other is sitting in the wee bed and they're just like two boys sitting talking to each other

Heather. (Can't hear first bit) their Catholic faith at all

Iris. Nothing

Heather. Someone said religions about doing something oh, not for me

*D'you think it's in any way blasphemous?*

Iris. I don't think so

Doreen. Well no I don't

Heather. It would have to be a very serious attempt I think to you know, people would have to be really making an attempt to be blasphemous. These people are making jokes and I'm thinking you have to be able to laugh at yourself.

Iris. It's laughing at yourself that's true

*So do you think there are bits, comedy works because it distorts the truth doesn't it? Do you think there are little bits in Father Ted that are recognisable you know, I mean it takes it completely over the top?*

Iris. Yes

Doreen. It does especially when you think back, you know with these pictures they have on the wall. The Sacred heart.

Iris. They are dreadful the arts terrible



Doreen. But they have the mark and it is actually making a joke of it

Molly. What do you think about people, you know others say, people who don't really understand it who are watching it?

Doreen. I don't know. If you weren't a Catholic it must be kind of difficult

Iris. What did you think of it? Did you watch it?

*Aye, I watch it and think it's really funny. I have a lot of Catholic friends and have been very; well I'm part of the Episcopal Church, you know so actually I recognise it all. It's been interesting talking to people. On the whole most people have said they find it funny. They found it inoffensive. The interesting thing for me is that some people said, yes you can recognise little bits. Yes some priests do have a drink problem. Some priests have been known to have (can't hear this). Some priests have run off with the Church funds or whatever. That happens in the Episcopal Church. It's not just in the Catholic Church. You know so I think if you're a churchgoer you can see these failings but they blow them up so much*

Iris. I'd agree with that

*Well I know but interestingly some people have said oh no it's completely untrue, that's why it's so funny. It's not even remotely true*

Iris. There's always a tiny bit

Molly. And that's where you get the comedy isn't it

Doreen. That's right. It wouldn't be funny otherwise

Iris. Its satire actually

*That's actually the word I would use to describe it. It's a satire. Other programmes. ... EastEnders, Brookside?*

Heather. Well I watch EastEnders. I haven't watched it for a wee while but the last time I was watching it they had a young girl who was being converted to Christianity. She seemed to go into this almost kind of cult like group. This was quite a while ago

*It has to be about three years ago*

Heather. It's probably the last time I regularly watched it

Doreen. O yes I remember

Sarah

Heather. But then she just, then it seemed like there was and eventually I think they did bring in a kind of sane kind of priest figure, I suppose he was Anglican, who led her in the right direction but I found it interesting that their first choice was to put her in this very evangelical kind of group, that became kind of twisted and it didn't twisted at first and thought well this is



quite interesting. They're having a fairly reasonable religious sort of story line here but then it just twisted it and in the end it turned out bad.

Iris. So religions are strange?

Heather. Yeah you get the impression as well that the way the other characters treated her was they found her a bit daft and couldn't understand why she would choose this. To me that's the way it is in the world. When you think, most people probably

*Yeah it is a problem actually because when I was doing the research for my masters about four years ago and that story line came up. It was actually teenagers and I was interviewing them. They didn't like it. They thought it was very spooky but they were just waiting for it to go wrong because that's what happens when you get involved in religion.*

Heather. Eventually they did take her down the line of going to the Church and sort of helping the poor and that kind of thing. I don't know how they sort of resolved the conclusion to it. It seemed to be getting better like her own

Doreen. I think, did she not eventually leave?

*I vaguely remember the story line where she'd actually accused somebody of rape. In fact it wasn't rape she'd actually just had sex with him and felt guilty about it. That seemed to*

Iris. That added to the strangeness, that's right so

Heather. She just seems slightly mentally unhinged

*What about currently in EastEnders? What about any other characters in EastEnders?*

Doreen. Well Dot Cotton she's the sort of religious, fundamentalist isn't she? She quotes all the scriptures

Iris. The Old Testament

Doreen. And of course they'd made her rather a strange character as well haven't they?

Molly. And of course she's older so she sticks to her guns all the time. It doesn't matter so her wonderful son is wonderful. Although she is beginning to change but you can see that she still will do what he wants

Iris. She's got no sense of reality about him

Molly. Nope. She won't abandon him

*It's like a real sense of duty isn't set? You know where common sense goes out of the window. That's my Christian duty.*

Iris. Yes. He's an evil person

*Yes totally the idea that you could actually say no. It doesn't matter if he's your son.*

Iris. But it's sort of interesting though that she was so fundamental in her religion or scripture quoting it was obviously her whole life because why is this contrast that she has this awful son? Is it because she was so fanatical about her religion? Because he says one night to somebody or other in the pub, Oh I've had that all my life her quoting whatever it was in the scripture. And you sort of got the feeling that O she's done this to him.

Heather. You also seem to get stereotypes of older people with a traditional fundamentalist, whereas younger people are seen as happy clappy types you know. You don't get young people who are more interested in say ritual or a more traditional style of worship. You don't get that. They seem to definitely stick to the stereotypes.

*Can you, that's actually that's a really useful way to move forward. You take the older people, as you say, and that's my impression that they tend to be very traditional, either quoting the Bible. Can you think of characters that fit that mould? That would be Dot Cotton.*

Heather. Ballykissangel as well. With the one who runs the shop.

Doreen. I'm just thinking. Only the child in Brookside; the wee boy. He's a fanatic, him. Going to confession. They don't come much more devout.

Molly. He's very old

Iris. He's always saying his prayers

Doreen. And saying his prayers. He's about the only one

Molly. It's not very fashionable now to be religious is it?

Iris. It's not

Doreen. No it's not

Iris. It's very anti-clerical. Especially in Britain I think. It's not quite as bad in America. They still seem to have quite a proportion of people who go to the Church.

Doreen. You actually get more religion in American soaps, you know the E R. You know, the Croatian doctor

Iris the Croatian

Doreen. That was quite nice because he had lost his faith because his wife and his children had been killed. It was the Bishop that brought him back and I thought that was very well done.

*It was wasn't it?*

Doreen. You know sometimes you feel O gosh but it was well done I thought it was quite

Iris. It wasn't sentimental

Doreen. No. The bishop was dying and wanted to

Iris. He said I want to take your pain with any. And it was rather nice



*It was lovely wasn't it?*

Doreen. I thought the language there was very good. The dialogue was good

*Well I think that's interesting because religion until recently, until the story of Lukas and the Bishop, it's not really featured in ER has it?*

Iris. No

Doreen. No it hasn't

Iris. No I don't think so

Doreen. I think a lot of them are Catholic because you know, the different nationalities. But none of them actually practise

*You wouldn't know it would you?*

Iris. No

Doreen. No

Molly. I think a lot of the soaps steer clear of religion

Doreen. They do. It's as though they don't want

Iris. They do

Molly. Not that I watch that many that I thought there's not really a lot.

*Well let's just run through the soaps. Coronation Street anybody watch that? Ok nobody watches that OK Brookside there's wee Anthony and there's his Granny.*

Doreen. And his granny and actually the couple are Catholic but they don't practise

*Yeah. Well I got the impression that the dad is quite anti-*

Doreen. Yes ... ..

Iris. Yes ... ..

*Whereas the mum is maybe just a bit lapsed?* ... ..

Doreen. She is a bit lapsed I think ... ..

Iris. Of course their daughter's pregnant isn't she? The young girl. She's pregnant

*If she? I missed that. I knew she had to be a*

Iris. So I suppose the next thing is will she have an abortion or will the mother keep the child?

I think abortion probably

*You think so? Well the actual topic?*

Iris. The topic, yes the Catholic family

*Well you have the bitter irony of the mother trying to get pregnant. Heather raised this about older people being more traditional and younger people being more happy clappy but then in*



*Brookside would you say they fit that. I mean Anthony obviously isn't since he isn't older.*

*What about Granny?*

*Doreen. Oh she's very traditionalist*

*Iris. Very traditionalist*

*Doreen. Sort of pre Vatican Two in many of her attitudes.*

*Iris. Because her daughter is trying to go for IV fertilisation, to have a child and she didn't approve of it because of the Church and she went to confession about it. So of course she's very traditionalist*

*Molly. I can't really think. Oh one. I've forgotten his name. The one who just lost his wife? Harold and he's the Salvation Army isn't he? That he goes to. And he's a very good person. But it was interesting to see him when he lost his wife he sort of lost his faith the. You know when everything's going fine for you, you can think oh well that's fine but when it's, you've got to watch. So it's taken, I think just now he's coming round.*

*I got the impression he came round just before he went on the French trip*

*Molly. Well yes that's right. I think yes he's still away. But I can't think of anybody else Would you say that Harold fits into that sort of old, more traditional way of presenting religion?*

*Molly. Probably yes. Probably he's always really had that in his background hasn't he? I don't think he'd be just as definite for the Salvation Army because he does lots of things doesn't he? You know he's not just going like me just going to Church or something on a Sunday and doing my own private thing. I mean he does so much more for the down-and-out people. Plays in the band and things like that*

*The Bill?*

*Doreen. I find The Bill actually quite interesting in that if any of them you know the policemen, are alcoholics or whatever, it's always an therapist they recommend or a Counsellor. It's never a clergymen. None of them seem to be religious at all*

*Molly. I can't think of anybody. I'd do watch The Bill. I like The Bill.*

*Doreen. It's interesting to me that kind of the epitomises our society. You know the fact that they're all rushing away to analysts and encouraged to do so*

*Molly. That's just a sign of the times too isn't it? It's always analysts*

*Yeah you wouldn't see a priest as being relevant would you? If like say somebody has alcohol problems it's a therapist not a priest*

Doreen. Well I mean it's the priests themselves that seemed to that seemed to recommend this isn't it? We've had two; well we've had one that's an alcoholic.

Molly. But do you think the priest would? Do something, would help?

Doreen. Well, I would think so

Iris. It's part of their ministry

Doreen. Is it not part of their ministry?

*Are there police chaplains?*

Iris. I would have thought so

Doreen. I would have thought so

*I've no idea. I have heard it said that one of the policeman is Jewish and that one of them might be a Sikh.*

Molly. Yes

Doreen. Yes that's right. There's one of them is a Sikh

*How do you know he's a Sikh?*

Doreen. I think somebody asked him

Iris. He said, where's your turban?

Molly. There's reference made

Doreen. But I don't think he's practising religiously either, you get that feeling

Iris. He shrugs it off. He said like he threw it away or something

*Oh really?*

Iris. As if he threw the religion away

Molly. Yes

Iris. So that's what he meant. And he's divorced. Well he said to somebody he's divorced

Molly. I didn't hear that bit

*Have you noticed the Jewish one?*

Molly. Which one?

Iris. Which was the Jewish one?

Molly. I didn't know there was a Jewish one

*Young, slim, dark, it dark-haired if it's the one I'm thinking of*

Doreen. Oh the one whose parents were immigrants

*I don't watch it often enough. I saw it one night when it seemed to be an episode, was it the B N P or something like that, and it was like he suddenly started to realise he was Jewish and he*



*was making connections with the Holocaust and was getting very, very angry about it. Or maybe it was racism. That was it*

Doreen. It was asylum-seekers or something. They were being attacked in their housing  
*But if I hadn't have told you that would you have known?*

Doreen. I think I remember it but it's actually remembering it isn't it?

Iris. It's quite a long time ago

*Well I suppose the thing is if it was just raised a long time ago then clearly his Jewishness is not flagged up is it?*

Iris. Is he still in it? The character?

Doreen. I think he's still in it but you only get

Molly. You don't see them all (all talking across each other so can't hear)

Doreen. But I don't know if there was any practice of the Jewish faith. I don't think that came up at all

*OK Vicar of Dibley?*

Molly. That's another send-up isn't it? Vicar of Dibley

Iris. It can be quite funny. She's very modern as well but she seems to want a husband doesn't she or an affair or something? I don't think the Church of England would take that from, a real traditionalist would like that very much. Or just take it like Father Ted as a piece of fun and silliness.

*How do you think it actually treats religion, the programme? Do you think that's disrespectful in any way? Potentially blasphemous or offensive?*

Heather. It seems like whenever, I've only watched it a few times, but it seems like it's just by the by that she happens to be a vicar most of the time. It's not you know central to the whole thing. I must have missed the plots. You know I've not seen enough of it to know but every time I have watched it's just they are having their little meetings and there's the one that helps and is not all there and her whole rule of life seems to be more important than, it's more about what's going on than anything religious

*D'you watch it regularly?*

Doreen. I've watched it a few times but again they are rather inclined to do that with the Church of England vicars aren't they? They rather, they don't know which way to jump if you know what I mean. She's a very modern vicar but in a way if I was Church of England' I maybe would take a wee bit of umbrage to that because it comes up quite often, you know that the weak vicar's very, as though they're not quite with us.



Iris. I think that's quite true

Doreen. It's a stereotype isn't it? Mind you I suppose you could argue that with priests. They're quite stereotyped as well

Molly. I think that's the reason really why to me they don't really appeal, to me very much. If there was something on the other Channel and I was watching television I would just probably turnover you know

*It's just that it's drawing on stereotypes and it's not particularly interesting?*

Molly. Yes

Doreen. And it's always the same because she's always eating chocolates and all this sort of but maybe they're just trying to make out that they're the same as everybody else

Heather. They don't really focus on appealing to people who don't have a current and active membership of religious organisations or churches or anything like that because they're kind of appealing to things that people might remember from when they were younger or you know what they expect people would be like, rather than what the reality is. I think they're appealing to some kind of vague version of what a vicar's life is like, you know, rather than any direct experience.

*I mean, I see a lot of similarities you know again, it's like Father Ted it's a distortion of the truth but the whole response to a woman vicar coming into the village for a starter. I recognise that instantly. The tension between people who are very pro and the others who are absolutely against. And there is a sort of, there's a style which she has is very familiar to me. Even though it's comedy. It's very much of the people, I'm just an ordinary sort of person but at the end of the day her faith is very important to her and you do actually get sermons in the Vicar of Dibley*

Iris. You do yes

*You get bits. It's very grounded in people's experiences you know it's not terribly abstract, airy fairy stuff. It's solid, practical Christianity. I've known a few Anglican priests like that. Yeah men and women. So for me it's quite funny from an insider's point of view. So it's interesting to see how she comes across*

Iris. Like the one with the animals?

*There was that one yes. I was talking to somebody quite senior in the Church of England and he was saying that her Christmas service was quite fantastic. The Christmas sermon that she did. Can anybody think of anybody in Frasier?*

Doreen. No but again it's sort of the psychiatrist taking over their problems because he has his radio programme and people just phone-in with their problems. And he answers from the top of his head sort of thing but it's quite interesting. I think it's very clever

*But it's not religious?*

Doreen. No

*There isn't even any body in it?*

Doreen. No it's never mentioned

*Friends? Somebody watches Friends*

Heather. I have watched some but I don't see it regularly. Again I don't think there's any religion in it. It's probably like the Vicar of Dibley; I've only seen snippets of it.

*Casualty?*

Iris. I think occasionally you see a nun or something walking up and down the ward or corridor. Well I haven't seen anybody

*Actually just thinking of Casualty and all the hospital ones - Casualty, Holby city, A & E, E R.*

*Has anybody ever seen hospital chaplains?*

Iris. I can't think of any

*Apart from Lukas' recent story of coming back to faith and his confession can you think of any characters who are religious? My impression is that a lot of nurses particularly tend to have a faith. I don't know how true that is but somebody once said that to me. Physios, they said a lot of physios have a faith.*

Heather. (Difficult to make out every word but it's story about a course she is on for conversion to Catholicism and the presence of two nurses on that course, who know a lot of people of faith in the course of their work which she says would seem to corroborate my story)  
*Right because my impression is it doesn't really crop up any of these sorts of programmes to talk*

Doreen. I was just thinking about that because I think the doctors and the nurses in these things are, they do a lot of counselling and whatnot themselves don't they? I mean they're the main characters for helping. They are not just doing the medical bit they're actually helping  
*But none of them seem to have any faith.*

Iris. No they don't

*You know, the counselling they do is coming from (people talking over each other - can't hear)*

Heather. It's interesting because if you go into hospital in real life you find that the doctors and nurses are not always like that because they're so busy. But the impression on television



Doreen. I know, they haven't time for all

Iris. That in-depth conversation

Heather. So maybe in real life, in real hospitals you have hospital chaplains who do take that role on but in TV they have so much time they don't need the chaplain

Doreen. They take the role themselves

Heather. They don't need to have a chaplain on the ward

*It's an interesting point that it isn't it?*

Molly. Our hospital's, we have, you know the real hospitals, they do have chaplains and more than one in some hospitals

Heather. The priests at Sacred Heart (can't hear but something about chaplaincy)

Molly. And the Church of Scotland, I think there are two based at the Western

*And there's certainly a pisky at the Infirmary.*

Molly. So it is quite,

Doreen. That's quite

Molly. A good point. It is

Iris. Aye it is

Doreen. I think actually they do take-over the role

Iris. Why do they do that? Is it just this current policy of politics that nobody needs God so therefore it's up to your own human resources. It seems that way doesn't it?

Doreen. It does

Iris. You don't, their inner struggle, their, it's nothing, are they looking for, I mean a lot of these people in these hospital things are terrible in their struggles, physically and mentally but there are not very many incidents where the clergy or anyone else or even a lay person talks about religion. It's always the doctor or the nurse. Why is it? It seems to be a that is the sort of at cult isn't it? It's sort of anti. It's not to be mentioned in case, it's like a crutch, they look on religion as a sort of crutch, as a weakness.

Heather. It seems like a, maybe it's not the character development. You can talk about problems and things and lots of people can relate to that but as soon as you start to talk about religion, they might have to voice some kind of opinion about something and they want to stay firmly away from opinions that will offend people in case it harms the ratings. And so they stick with sort of the basic topics that people are interested in on talk shows and things like that



Iris. Well of course all these game shows are fairly, in a sense, it's interesting these game shows because that's control again, isn't it, it's competition, it's greed mainly because it's money

*But you said talk shows didn't you?*

Heather. Yes talk shows

*What, kind of the Oprahs and Ricki Lake's and that kind of thing?*

Heather. That's right

*Why do you think religion just generally in all the programmes we talked about, why do you think it is treated the way that it is?*

Iris. Because they think religion is too difficult as well isn't it? You're not going to get a clear-cut answer. And I think people want that nowadays. We're living in a very technological age too. We want

*But if you are going to watch a drama or a soap, less so in a sitcom but it's still do-able, then you don't necessarily expect clear-cut answers. You might in real life but in soaps, they thrive on unclear answers don't they?*

Iris. Yes

*And yet religion rarely features, no, I'm in danger of putting words into your mouth.*

Heather. Well I think the thing is they don't want to espouse any kind of opinion. And there are unclear situations where there are lots of things that can happen but if there's no sort of higher level of morality or opinion that's expressed whereas when you get to religions, you know, there are issues like abortion or things like, where people have opinions about what is right and wrong and they don't want to be in a position where they're going to say right versus wrong. It's all very vague. It's all about how you feel. it's all about emotions.

*Do you think that's true of all fictional television? Because otherwise, you know a lot of the story lines are dependent on conflict and in order for there to be conflict you've got to have some body saying this is right, no it's not, this is right. And you know there is a*

Heather. Maybe it's right and wrong about things that people aren't interested in. They like to have abortion as an issue but keep it clearly away from religion. You know things where, you get groups out there, lobby groups, which are well established. But when you do that with religion you're putting denomination against denomination more. You know you're starting to offend people whereas if you, as long as like an issue that's easier to sort of say well these people think this and these people think that, there's really an abortion in the middle. It's easier

to separate those parties. I don't know. It seems like there's more variables in religion than a whole lot of other issues.

*You see I find the Catholic family in Brookside interesting, you know the way they have done them. Obviously Wee Anthony is a fair bit exaggerated but then he's no angel either. He's been getting into bother. You know, he still has his faith. I have to say I haven't met many small Catholic boys that devout but nevertheless I'm prepared to accept there might be some out there*

Doreen. I would have thought maybe of another generation; you know that type of wee boy but in this day and age

*I'm not totally convinced*

Doreen. No I'm not very convinced

*Nevertheless they have raised the issues haven't they where a religious dimension has been brought into it and it still seems to work as a soap.*

Doreen. Maybe it's because all the rest of the families are so dysfunctional aren't they? In that close, each house if you look at it, I mean it's quite diabolical isn't it what goes on in that street?

*Aren't you glad you don't live there?*

Doreen. I am

*The point Heather was making about it maybe they're afraid of offending people?*

Molly. I think that's probably a very valid point

*I'm not disagreeing but as I was saying I'm really intrigued by this Brookside family because clearly they are not afraid of offending anybody because they have talked about, as a Catholic I object to IVF.*

Heather. But that's only one denomination. If you had some other, say a Protestant across the road, if it was a Northern Ireland drama you know would it be the same thing because it's one thing for people to say I'm a Catholic and this is what I believe in, you know and take that in isolation but when you compare it against what another person, what's another denomination believes that's when they start to go head to head you know and it's more complicated, when you start to do that.

*Do you think then it's just impossible to include religion in a more representative light and making it interesting on television - fictional television?*

Heather. I think it would be very interesting to have more story lines where you did get things like the Northern Ireland situation

Iris. Yes

Molly. Yes

Heather. Because in some ways it would be good to see the reality of what it is. I don't want it as entertainment it might be too depressing

Molly. Some of these soaps are a bit depressing. They often really just deal with special issues don't they? Specific issues and that's when I suppose if you start on the religious side as you said earlier, if they start getting Catholics and Protestants. And the Eastern cult's we haven't mentioned either

*I was just going to. Can you mention any? Because you haven't mentioned any. I don't mean personally but think about it. Everybody you've mentioned, what religion have they been?*

Iris. Well they had a comedy. I didn't watch it very much but I think religion came up. What was that?

*Goodness gracious me?*

Iris. Yes which was unusual because they're usually characterised as rather sombre people.

Again it was a send-up. I cannot remember if they were religious

Heather. I guess we just watch things that we can relate to that are sort of not too challenging.

*But can you think of any other faiths?*

Heather. When you get like EastEnders the family was it Gita, I can't remember. I don't know whether they're Muslim

*You are going a long, long way back now Heather*

Heather. I haven't watched it for a while you know

Molly. It is a long way back

*It is a long way*

Molly. Yes, I knew exactly who you mean yes

Heather. They were Asian

Molly. There is none, there's really none. Just the coloured boy who is the friend

*The doctor?*

Molly. Yes there is the doctor at course but

*Oh yes*

Molly. The young lad who's always in trouble. You only see him. You never see his parents or anything else at all

*And his behaviour is not religious*

Molly. No, no



*In fact when you think about it, and I hadn't thought about it before, he couldn't possibly be working in that chip shop if he was either a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh because of the food*

Iris. Oh aye that's right

Molly. No he's not

*So he's not religious. He's there as an Asian face or something like that.*

Doreen. I think it's because they want to appeal to a mass audience and if they start to do individual religions maybe it will only appeal to that particular religion. I think they have to be a bit careful about that. I mean even that Father Ted. It was made in Ireland wasn't it for an Irish audience? I could see, you know it was very popular there, but they said it actually took off in England' as well and they were quite surprised because of the religious background. Still, I think they're rather inclined to steer away from it because of that. To appeal to a mass audience. A lot of people actually don't want to sit and think when they're watching television as well.

*Yes, yes. I mean I'm quite interested in that because usually there's an assumption made that if religion is to be included in fictional television is always got to be serious. You know the idea that it, almost be there as a background material. Or you have (can't hear this)*

Heather. It seems to fall into one of these categories of things that you just don't do on television like you never hear people talking about doing their taxes or going for some routine thing and maybe it's just put in that category, well we might Betty is Catholic but she has this whole other life and she just does that on Sunday

Doreen. Yes. Individual

Heather. It's kind of like a routine or something that you don't necessarily bring into your everyday situation.

*Why do you think that is? You know, that religion is not seen as something that is part of people's lives? And certainly for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs it's very much a part of their daily lives. Well Jews as well actually. It affects everything. For Christians Is' kind it easier if you like to make a split if you want*

Doreen. I think it's actually because the way we were brought up as well. This sort of individual thing. Sometimes religion can be in a compartment and you take it out, you know on a Sunday or whenever you go to the Church or whatever. That some people, in some cultures, it's not something that's in compartments. It's part of their whole existence. This has been a fault probably in the Christians religion.

Iris. People seem to seek spirituality. They may not admit to a personal God but they seem to be seeking, many people, spirituality. You know if it's Zen, or Buddhism or whatever and Christianity in many ways, in Britain it's been set-aside. And spirituality never seems to come up soaps in any form does it? Like they're seeking something deeper.

Heather. Christianity is (can't hear this) maybe people just take it for granted that it's just so much part of the culture. This is where I've come from, and looking for something new. It must be something different; they are aiming for something else. They don't get, Christianity seems to me to be portrayed so much as about rules, what you can and can't do. And what's right and what's wrong rather than about spirituality.

Doreen. Yes, about spirituality

*On that just coming back to the actual television programmes can you think of any representations that you've seen, across any of the television programmes, where people are shown enjoying their faith? Rather than this, it's wrong so you mustn't. Or it's about people breaking rules because the rules are so difficult they can't keep them. I mean just somebody who is quietly, not sort of happy about it in I'm a complete nutter sort of way and everybody wants to avoid you. Just it's a good thing to be and I still have friends and a social life.*

Heather. There was a thing on in the last series of Ballykissangel actually where they found this stone in a field and it turned out that it was an altar. I don't know the history of the altar but it seemed like there was the reason why they couldn't worship in a Church and they had this altar in the middle of the field and so it had been marked as such and this guy wanted to move it but they convinced him that he couldn't move and it and they had this kind of - this is another controversial story line - but the priest married a friend who had been divorced at some point and he said well, he couldn't do it in the Church but he could do it here. But it was before this wedding took place; people were out there actually just admiring the stone. They talked a lot about how important it was to them that it stayed where it was. What it meant to their culture and the history as well and so you got quite a good feeling that they were respectful.

Doreen. I think that brought out the rules and regulations that and you know the fact that the priest, the old priest made such a fuss about marrying them in the Church. And this was a pre-Christian Stone wasn't it? Can't remember what the Irish call it but it had been there since before Christianity and I think that was why he had used this stone to marry them. I think it was making the point that these two people loved each other and that was more important than what you're talking about, rules and regulations.



Heather. So maybe that wasn't enjoying religion

*I don't know may be that priest who married them is an example of somebody who's just interested in the core not just the rules. Anybody think of any other examples?*

Molly. No there is nothing

*Actually when you were saying before about the old versus young kind of stereotypes I meant to ask you at the time but I forgot can you think of any youngsters who have faith on television? I mean we have got Anthony.*

Heather. I suppose that lassie in EastEnders that's the only one I can think of.

Molly. And that's a while ago. That's a few years. I'm just really thinking religion just isn't

Iris. Not a popular subject

Molly. Well EastEnders I can only. Is it just that people living in these little communities don't have any need for religion? Is it just all greed or is it just living

Heather. Except when they want to get married they all go to Church

Molly. Well yes

*But it makes nice photographs. Doesn't it?*

Iris. The Royal Family, they got the daughter's child baptised and he had his wee plastic suit on. The Vicar wasn't

Doreen. The christening suit was a wee plastic suit. it was a shame

Iris. A wee plastic suit. he was just a tiny wee thing

Doreen. They never mentioned you know the actual christening. They it all just came home and had a party. And got drunk you know.

*Last question. The way religion shown on television, you know the bits that are shown and all the things that aren't shown, different religions as well. How do they fit in terms of quality and quantity with your own experiences?*

Molly. Do you mean all religious programmes or just these ones?

*Just the fictional things but the way religion is shown in these programmes. What seems to, we seem to have said that it's a fairly limited view of religion, how does that compare to your own experiences?*

Doreen. I actually think that you know, even plays, that play Messiah we were discussing, to me there's always this sort of connotation that religion is something odd. You know and I don't understand this. I don't know how these characters, I sometimes think if they were real how they would actually survive you know going through their life like that because religion actually is not actually about been dotty and so on. It's a big part of your life and I don't think



they get that over you know because they're always, even Ballykissangel it's a bit, they've always got to be sending up priests to make them funny. They don't actually seem to make a programme where the people are quite normal and this is part of our existence you know.

Molly. That's actually the reason I very rarely watch the modern stuff because I always feel that I don't get anything from it except you know if you think something is particularly funny. Some I don't even think are funny but then that's just my sense of humour.

Doreen. They had that Perfect Strangers you know that Poliakoff thing, and they actually you know this very upper-class family, it was really about their past life you know, sort of grief of time passing really, as I read it in some crit but quite honestly at the end of it I couldn't quite understand what it was about but there was never any mention of religion there

*They were supposed to be a Jewish family*

Doreen. Yes that's right but religion didn't seem to enter into it

Iris. The religion didn't

Doreen. But you somehow got the impression with them that there was this seeking for something you know, beyond themselves because they had all come to sort of a stop

Iris. A full stop yeah. They felt this terrible guilt about the young man that they had ignored because he had mental problems. They were supposed to be so close but in actual fact they disregarded him when he needed them most. But they were seeking, they were looking for something. They didn't seem to know how to. The inner struggle was there but they weren't listening if you like and I think if you have, if you are religious you have to be aware some times that you've got to listen.

*But in terms of you know what your everyday experience is, of being Christians and where you see other Christians, people of other faiths and the way people treat you, how does that compare to the way it's shown on TV*

Heather. I don't think it compares at all. Because they give you the impression that the people who are writing the scripts have no direct experience of what they're doing. They have never experienced what it feels like, all the things that are important as you say in your life and how it completely changes your life. When you really are Christian and not just sort of going there to get married or, and you just feel that these people don't really understand. They're trying to make a stab at it but they're not quite

Doreen. That's right

Heather. And I think that there's a sort of you know in the media and it's in books as well, you get Christian literature is always separated out so you get Christian fiction but it doesn't stand

alongside regular fiction in the bookshop. And so people don't have a really evolved reading experience. And the same for the television I think. Programmes don't get labelled as fiction or non-fiction. Well this is Christian fiction or this is secular fiction you know I think it's not, it's sort of separated off.

*Thank you very much. I've kept you long enough.*

End of interview

**Interview With Edinburgh Schoolgirls. (Emma, Eilidh, Rosie, Jennifer.)**

*There's been a story line recently in Hollyoaks with Zara and Brian. Go right back to when Zara first met Brian what did you make of him when he first appeared?*

Rosie. Quite

Eilidh. I didn't think he was religious. He didn't appear to be

Rosie. Rocky. Rebellious.

*Was he an attractive figure? (All agreed that he wasn't) not into Goths? How do you think he was supposed to seen in Hollyoaks? Because I got the impression that a number of girls were fighting over him.*

Rosie. I think we were meant to find him attractive but

*He's not your cup of tea, no? So what did you make of it when it turned out, I mean it did you realise you know from some of the things*

Eilidh. No

Rosie. It was quite bizarre but the way he deals with it is quite unique, the way he sought to treats his religion. But I didn't think he, I had no idea

Eilidh . I had no idea he was going to be a big Christian

*When did the penny drop that he was a Christian ?*

Eilidh . When they went to, when Zara went to one of his concerts. And he was like I want to dedicate the song to Jesus

Rosie. Oops!

*So I mean all they, because there had been that kind of build up because Zara was wanting to take things a bit further physically wasn't she? What did you think? He was maybe a bit shy?*

Eilidh . Yes . I didn't think it was so to do with ; I don't know what I thought it was to do wither .

Rosie . I thought he just might be

Eilidh . Scared ?

Rosie . Sensible . I don't know . Because I don't know how old are they meant to be ?

Eilidh . They are supposed to be like 16 aren't they?

Emma. I thought they were younger than that

*I'm never quite sure. I thought she was younger than that.*

Jennifer. About 15

Eilidh. 15 -ish



Rosie. Maybe he just respects the law because if that is the case and they're younger maybe he just respects age restrictions and stuff like that.

Emma. I don't know I thought he was just scared at first but I didn't think he was like a religious person and that but

*So what did you think when you realised that was the reason?*

Rosie. I thought it was interesting. I thought that was like, I thought maybe he shouldn't have to be embarrassed about that. I don't think he should have had to hide it. Because there are lots of religious people who just sort of really embrace it and that's part of them and that's like a big part of their lives

Eilidh. Yes

Rosie. And like I think he was quite embarrassed maybe. I don't think he should have been

Eilidh. He shouldn't have been, no

Jennifer. Just really what everyone else has said, I didn't think he was going to turn out to be really religious.

*Right. What did you make of Zara's response to him?*

Eilidh. Er, I don't know I didn't expect her to react the way she did. She can have liked suddenly wanted to be a big Christian and I expected her to be a bit kind of like

Rosie. She was quite scared of it at first though. She was like I'm not sure but I don't know if she was maybe one of these people who are just really easily influenced.

Eilidh. Yes I think she is so

Rosie. Sort of wants to fit in. I think maybe she did it to make him feel comfortable but

Jennifer. I think she wants him to like her more

Eilidh. She thought that if she was to become a Christian, the same beliefs as he did he kind of not, if she was worried about him breaking up with her, he'd kind of have that extra thing not to.

*D'you think she maybe thought it would help her get him into bed with her?*

Eilidh. Probably

Emma. Yes

Rosie. Yes I think, I think she probably thought that would make him think it would serve affect him in a long-term way. I think she probably thought that made him think she was more reliable, but I don't know if that's actually what happened or if

*Where is the story line at the moment because I haven't, I saw a bit of it last night and a bit of it last week?*

Eilidh. What, with Zara and Brian?

*Yes. Are they still together?*

Eilidh. No, it's not the story line is not really following them just now. After the christening, yes, when they had the big fall-out because he didn't want to come to the christening because he didn't think she was doing it for the right reasons but then he turned up and then made up and that's about it so far.

*You said that he shouldn't have to hide it. How do you think for anybody of your own age who was in Brian's position, what would the response at school be?*

Jennifer. I think they'd make fun of him

Emma. Yes

Eilidh. Yes

Rosie. They probably would. It depends what religion is to its because people do have different opinions of different religions because there are lots of like Sikhs and Hindus in our school and everyone treats them pretty much the same. Unless, you know, well exactly the same like. If someone sort of made a comment then we treat them one way and if they make a comment, we'll treat them the same. It's exactly the same but for some reason I know there are a lot of Christians but nobody really

Eilidh. That yes

Rosie. Sort of puts it out there

Eilidh. No one makes it such a

Emma. Big deal

Eilidh. Yes

Rosie. I think, I don't know if they may think that's what's expected because Christian people are quite prominent in

Eilidh. I just think like the people of our age, even the ones who have been brought up Christian, aren't really very sure of their religion in any way, or what they believe.

Rosie. I think it's because it's more common for people to just believe in what they think's right instead of one particular like, you know, path or whatever, religion.

*Do you think it's harder for people to be Christians than perhaps maybe to be Sikhs or Hindus? Or Muslims?*

Eilidh. Well Sikhs and Hindus have always been, like we've always had them in this school so we just accept it. But I don't know about Christians. We probably had Christians in our class but would never known they're Christians. It's not been a big.

*I mean that there isn't a visible sign is there. You can tell if somebody is Sikh.*

Rosie. Because there's, you know there's this girl called Jenny and I didn't realise that she was a Christian.

Eilidh. Jenny in our R.E. class?

Rosie. Yes. I never knew she was like religious, and that because she's really, really smart and she's like got an opinion about everything and she's really intelligent. She's really into moral issues and sort of stuff and I never knew she was a Christian

Eilidh. Then she told us

Rosie. I don't know if I expected that to affect her opinions or anything but it didn't and I think that's really good. I think she probably would be open about it but no one asks.

Eilidh. Because like even though she believes she still quite open-minded about different religions and stuff.

*Do you have an expectation then that people who are Christians would be narrow-minded?*

Eilidh. Well, like my family is really strict Christian; my auntie and uncles are and they are very narrow-minded. They don't see any religions any other religions they just think it's all wrong. But they're like really strict Christians.

*And does that cross over into behaviour as well, not just an attitude to other religions?*

Eilidh. Yes. Like on Sundays and things they are not allowed to, their children are not allowed to go to the park or do anything, they just stay in with the family. They're not allowed to watch TV or listen to the radio or anything.

*Gosh, that's very strict isn't it? What about the others? Would that eat your expectations as well that Christians would be a bit more narrow-minded maybe, less open?*

Rosie. Maybe a bit more strict about what they could maybe talk about. I don't know. I don't know how to put it.

Eilidh. I suppose it depends on how strict

Rosie. Because they believe what their parents believe because they think that's sort of religiously what

Eilidh. The right way

Rosie. They believe because of their religion so I think they'd just sort of have to, not have to, but sort of agree with their parents' views and things.

*But what's your perception of what Christians would be like?*

Emma. I don't have one really.

Rosie. I think they're pretty much the same



Emma. They're just pretty much the same

*I mean it was just because of a couple of things you said that it seemed like maybe you thought they were a bit less open. Let's move away from Hollyoaks and religion specifically to some of the other programmes that you watch. In some of the ones that are you have circled and anything that pops into your mind can you think of characters who are supposed to be religious characters?*

Rosie. Neighbours I think. Harold and like his Salvation Army stuff. In The Simpsons there's Ned Flanders.

Eilidh. In Bad Girls. Does anyone else watch that? (General agreement) Crystal is like the one religious

Rosie. Was she the one who was in for mercy killing? There was one really strong Christian but she was, I don't know, she did mercy killing and that was why she was in jail.

Eilidh. She was a, Crystal she was like a Christian.

Rosie. Is that the black girl?

Eilidh, Emma, Jennifer. Yes

*So she's still inside?*

Eilidh. Yes it, well she came back out

*It's just that she came up in some interviews I did about two years ago*

Eilidh. She came back out because she stole something but then two people who had escaped from prison stayed the night at her house so she got arrested for like

Jennifer. They planted drugs in her house

*EastEnders?*...

Rosie. Dot ...

Eilidh. Dot's religious

Rosie. They used to be that girl like ages ago

Emma. O Sarah and she became religious

Rosie. Yes she was going out with the Paul Nicholls or something and she was really

Emma. Her dad's still in it

Eilidh. And there was the priest. Melanie's brother

Rosie that he's not in any more

Eilidh. No

*But Dot's still in it? I just want to try and get a list of characters first. Anybody in Friends?*

Jennifer. I don't think so.

Rosie. Maybe Phoebe

Emma. Yes Phoebe is

Rosie. But I don't think it's Christianity I think it's just whatever she sort of feels like being into. (Can't hear this bit) O there's Joey because his family's Catholic because they're Italian. Quite strong Catholic.

Eilidh. But that doesn't really affect how he behaves.

*Not at all. Holby city?*

Jennifer. I watch it sometimes

Emma. I do

*Anybody in that?*

Emma. I can't think of anybody

Jennifer. There's people that like appear but then they're only in for a few episodes

Emma. Yes

*What, sort of like patients?*

Emma, Jennifer. Yes

*OK*

Rosie. In ER there was this guy a few weeks ago and he was this priest and he was dying but it was like it was carrying on for a few weeks and there was this one doctor

Eilidh. His family had been killed and was against all

Rosie. He'd sort of gone against, he didn't believe in anything anymore and this priest came along and he, and then this priest came along and I couldn't really work out what was going on because I was sort of doing other stuff at the same time

Eilidh. He kind of changed the way he felt

Rosie. Yes because he was so strong and he was dying and he just kept going on preaching until, did he die?

Eilidh. Yes he did.

*Yes he heard Lukas's confession and then he died. He got Lukas to talk about it before he died. OK. We'll come back to Father Ted because that's really obvious. Frasier?*

Rosie. I think they're probably Christian but I think his dad, I think his dad's probably into that. I don't know

*What would make you think that?*

Eilidh. I don't think his dad is

Rosie. I think I've heard him sort of mention a few things but I think he's, it's only really, I don't know if that's what he believes in or if he's just sort of using the expressions, like I think he says things like an eye for an eye and that sort of stuff, but I think it's just because everybody does that

*Yes, rather than that there's a religious feeling there*

Rosie. I don't think anybody else

*Dawson's Creek?*

Eilidh. There was somebody

Jennifer. I think Joey is quite

Rosie. I think they're all pretty much quite, because they are quite

Jennifer. Well-behaved?

Rosie. Yes. I think they are all brought up as Christians and, but there was someone

Eilidh. I think it was Andy

*I was going to say when I did interviews at couple of years ago there was a character who had just come into it*

Eilidh. It'd be Andy

*Ty*

Emma. Oh yeah, it was. He was going out with Jen. He was, 0 was he

*He took her to a Bible club or something*

Emma. She thought she was going to a party

Rosie. Oh yeah I remember that

Emma. It was like these people gathered around reading the Bible

Rosie. Oh yeah because her grandmother she's really religious

Emma. Yes. They had a really narrow-minded view about gay people

Rosie. But I think Jen really sort of change things

Emma. And her best friend was gay

Rosie. I think she was like sort of, because the grandma used to live alone and her husband died while, just after Jen moved in, because Jen had been in trouble because she lived in New York and she got in like loads of trouble with drugs and sex and stuff, and then she moved in and she was really strict with her at first and sort of she really rebelled against, but then she opened her mind when, I can't remember when it happened but she just started

Eilidh. I think when she found friends and stuff

*So what happened to the Ty character?*



Emma. He's left. He had such a narrow view on stuff (can't hear all of this)

*OK. Cold feet? Anybody in that?*

Eilidh. I watched that but there's no one in it.

*Ally McBeal?*

Rosie. No, I think they've had quite a lot of almost religious experiences like

Eilidh. She sees things

Rosie. Like the Unicorn. I think that's more, I don't know a personal thing but it's quite special for her because she saw a Unicorn and she used see that when she was little and she thought she was growing up

Eilidh. I don't know if it's religious

*I suppose it's spiritual in a way isn't it? Something like that's a bit magical. But none of the, nobody in the practice so far as I'm aware*

Emma. It's usually just like if there are people like coming in needing lawyers and stuff

Rosie. There was a gospel singer and they all went to Church when, when they won the case or something and they all went and they all sort of sang for a while, they do that a lot, but I can't remember if any of them are like actually like EastEnders.

Eilidh. I don't think any of them are

*OK. Go back over those characters and this time we can include Father Ted. What are they actually like as people? Most of the people that you mentioned. D'you want to start with Dot Cotton?*

Rosie. I think she tries to sort of be strict

Jennifer. She means to do well

Rosie. She tries to sort of be strict with religion. She tries to sort off respect it

Eilidh. But she such a busybody

Rosie. But sometimes she just, I think she lets it slip a little bit. Not in a bad way. She's just being at the normal person. But she tries to act as if she's really spiritual sometimes and she quotes all the stuff from the Bible and she says no I never drink but she always does.

Jennifer. But the thing with, what's her name again, Ethel. Where she

Emma. Killed her

Jennifer. Euthanasia,, that's it.

*What did you think about that Jennifer? Did you watch it then?*

Jennifer. Yes I watched it sometimes. I don't know. I wouldn't have expected her to do it because she's like really religious and stuff

Eilidh. I thought it was the right thing to do

Emma, Rosie. Yes

Jennifer. I thought so too

Eilidh. Because I'm for euthanasia.

*But in terms of Dot doing it? The character. I mean d'you think it fitted?*

Jennifer. I don't think it really

Eilidh. In a way because she's quite a good caring person, like she did love Ethel. She was her best friend but it does go against the religion. I don't know if Ethel was religious because like if, to do that they believe that you won't go to heaven because it gets in the way of God's hand.

Rosie. Yes

*I mean, I didn't get the impression that Ethel was particularly religious.*

Eilidh. No but then for Dot to do that, it was going against her religion and she did feel guilty. She stole something did she not so she could go to prison?

Rosie. Oh yes because she felt like she needed to be punished

Eilidh. For something yes

Rosie. And they said, that she was all right and she went no, you need to punish me. I think she was

Emma. She felt guilty

Rosie. Yes and she knew that it was against her religion but I think she would have, even if she could have done it again because that was her friend, she was helping her out.

*Yes, OK. Harold Bishop?*

Rosie. I think

Eilidh. He's annoying

Rosie. Yes. I think he just, I don't know

Eilidh. I wish they would just take him out of the programme

*Why is he annoying?*

Eilidh. It's his nose and he's got a big chin

Emma. He wants everybody to be

Rosie. He has a really horrible mouth. It's really embarrassing. I don't know if I want to say this but when Madge died I was crying

*So was I*

Emma. So was I

Jennifer. So was I

Eilidh. So was I. I was like come on, it's Neighbours I shouldn't be crying but I really was *I know, I felt really embarrassed.*

Rosie. But then, the thing I couldn't stop laughing because his face was really horrible. His mouth. He kept saying we'll go to France and then we'll eat croissants, and then we'll wake up in the morning and drink some coffee and all this stuff but his mouth when he was talking, it was like O. But I was still crying. It was horrible.

*Is he irritating because of*

Eilidh. Yes

*Let me finish the sentence! Is he irritating because he's religious or is he just an irritating character?*

Eilidh. I don't think it's because he's a religious character I think he's just irritating. I don't like his face. It says.

Rosie. When he goes like that (shakes her head)

*So he's actually just physically unattractive is that the problem?*

Eilidh. Yes but I don't think it has anything to do with his belief.

Jennifer. It's the way he speaks as well that annoys me

Rosie. Yeah it, it'

Jennifer. And he just thinks like, like everyone should be like him

Rosie. Yeah and when he was doing all that vegetarian stuff and it was just like he wouldn't, and he was against technology, because they wanted to put the Internet into the cafe and he was like no. I can't remember why. It just sounds like there was no point.

Eilidh. I don't think it was because of his beliefs it was just the way he is.

*I mean are you, how aware are you that a lot of what Harold does comes from his faith?*

Eilidh. Well the way he deals with things like, if Paul steps out of line and does something bad he always deals with it

Rosie. Like with Tad and the club and that

Eilidh. Would be with his religion. But I don't think it's a big thing. He's not really portrayed as really religious.

Rosie. I think it's sort of goes unsaid that it's probably affecting his judgement but I don't think the, I don't know if the writers intended that to be the way it's seen, like the way he deals with situations. I don't know but I think like if you think about something he says to someone then you think Oh right, O, because you think the reason he's against a lot of these things might be because of his religion. I don't know



*So it's not a thing that really strikes you?*

Eilidh. No. Because maybe I think parents that aren't religious would deal with it the same way.

*OK. The Simpsons? Ned Flanders?*

Rosie. I think he's just

Eilidh. And when they take the Mickey out of its

Rosie. I think he's just not so much meant to be just that he's Christian; just that he's meant to be a really good person.

Eilidh. Like he's to be the opposite of Homer. The complete opposite.

Rosie. I think he's just meant to

Eilidh. Make Homer look

Rosie. Make Homer look bad

Jennifer. Because it's like the way he is, is perfect

Rosie. Yeah. Even just kind of like the Reverend, is that the Reverend Lovejoy? Even he's not really very, I don't know

Eilidh. They're just supposed to be kinda funny

Rosie. I don't think even he

Emma. The writers are just taking the Mickey out of it they're not

Rosie.

Rosie. I think it takes the Mickey out of everything sort of stereotypes everything, I and think that's basically what they're doing with Ned, sort of, he's just this annoying person who does everything perfect and you just sort of get really irritated with him but then you realise that no, they're actually a really nice person.

Jennifer. But I don't like him.

Rosie. Yes. Because I wish I could be like that

*So they're just too perfect?*

Rosie. Yes

*I actually think that's quite interesting when you said about the stereotyping. All the characters are, aren't they. Homer's the hideous, slobbish neighbour they are you really would not one next door to you*

Rosie. Yeah and then there's the supermarket guy. He's just a stereotype (mimics characters from the Simpsons)

*Friends. You mentioned Phoebe. She's kind of spiritual isn't she a and New Age?*

Eilidh. Yet but I don't think she's religious though

Rosie. I think she likes different things, which expand the mind. Like she's into yoga and stuff which is a sort of Hindu thing but I don't necessarily think that means she is a Hindu. I think she respects lots of different

Jennifer's. Yeah, she's quite open-minded

Rosie. Yes

Jennifer. I think Ross is as well. Because like open-minded but not really religious because when he was teaching his son at Thanksgiving or Christmas or something and he was teaching him about all different religions and stuff like that.

*I have heard it said that Ross is Jewish.*

Jennifer. Yeah

Rosie. Yeah I think he him and Monica are Jewish

*I have to say that I never seen any*

Eilidh. I've never

*Seen any evidence for its.*

Rosie. I think there was once when Phoebe was singing this Christmas song for them and it was like something to do with happy Hanukkah for Monica and Chandler. I don't know.

Eilidh. It's been mentioned but I don't think it's supposed to be a big issue but.

*So it's not something affects the way, a bit like Joe raised Catholicism. It has absolutely no impact.*

Rosie. Yes I think it's just something they've been brought up with that they've just sort of it's been left behind

Eilidh. It's kind of because Joey's family is Catholic they kind of make it like he has so many sisters and they make a joke out of that.

Rosie. But I think, I don't think they want you to take it seriously. Kind of there's no way you really could with the sort of characters that's in it but I think, I think they just sort of want to have a mix of different kinds of backgrounds and show how they can all sort of mix, get on.

*OK. Father Ted?*

Eilidh. I just totally love that

Rosie. I love that. I love Father Ted so much

Eilidh. But it's not based; it's hardly based on truth at all. Like priests would never behave in that way

Rosie. Yeah but I just think it's so funny because it's just so ironic. It's just so good

Jennifer. They just kind of disrespect their religion. Like all the people who are above them, like bishops

Rosie. Yeah and like the big bishop and he's unfunny. And he's giving Father Ted a hard time about Lent and then it sort of focuses on him and he's surrounded by all these girls and he's in this bubble bath and stuff and he's got a cigar in one hand. It's just funny. I don't think anybody is meant to take offence but a lot of people have. People say that you know how the main character Dermot Morgan died, people say that was because he was disrespecting Eilidh. Yeah because my auntie and uncle won't let my cousins watch it

*Really? I have to say I've never heard that.*

Rosie. I've heard a few, I have heard that a few times

Eilidh. They think it just makes a mockery out of their religion so they won't let anyone, well they don't let my cousins watch it

*But actually saying he died because this was God's punishment?*

Eilidh. It's God's punishment. I've never heard that one

Rose. Yeah

*Is that people, or have you come across it in magazines and things?*

Rosie. I've heard a few people say it. I don't think, I think they've said it not as what they believe but in what they've heard other people say. I don't know where, I don't know who said that. But it's like I can see why they would think that but I don't think, I think maybe they are taking things too seriously because it's just light hearted it's not really meant to. Because they're not really saying anything offensive to the actual God or anything. In fact they sort of respect that quite a lot because like whenever Dougal says something really dumb like he opens the calendar and says Oh look its three men and a baby and a star, O I never thought of that.

Jennifer's. Dougal doesn't really seem to understand anything about religion

*You do wonder how he became a priest*

Rosie. He converts this priest one time. He's just talking about any is like you wonder though if it's actually

Jennifer. The bitter struggle with or something

Rosie. He's like you know when God created the thing and created the garden and then he had a son and he created man and the world and everything and he's like, the other priests is like yes, and he's like well that's the bit I don't understand. It's just, I think we're meant to, I don't



think they're trying to say the actual priests are like that. They're just trying to say that's him. It's just by accident that he's a priest.

*Do you think any of it, because often, comedy works because there are bits that people recognise and then it's often distorted? Like you were saying with the Simpsons you kind of recognise this stereotype and then it's just ridiculous. The idea of coming across Ned Flanders is fairly remote. The idea of there being a Homer Simpson is fairly remote but you can recognise Homer's stupidity or slobbishness or you know. D'you think there is anything about Father Ted that has a core of reality?*

Rosie. I think they're just trying to make, to let people know they are really normal and they slip up a lot of the time. I think basically they are just really

Eilidh. The main character I think he like tries to do by what he, what God thinks, by what God thinks is right but then because of his stupid friend he always gets into trouble.

Jennifer. And Father Jack as well. He's a complete alcoholic

Rosie. He's so funny. You can't imagine him ever doing it any sort of sermons or anything. It's just so funny. There's this alcoholic who swears

Eilidh. The complete opposite of what a priest should be

Rosie. Yeah he's just so funny

*OK. Let's move on. Dawson's Creek you said Jen's Gran, she's quite narrow-minded.*

Eilidh. I don't think she's narrow-minded

Emma. It was Ty

*Right sorry. She's quite strict?*

Eilidh. She's strict but I think it's in a good way. She always just wants to do what's best for Jen. But then I don't think it ever really stops Jen doing what she wants to do, she always, but then at the end it's like the big moral of the story and Jen's seeing the way her Gran

Rosie. O sort of like sorry Gran, or I'm really sorry Gran I've just realised now that I should have done what you wanted

Eilidh. The you're right

Rosie. And then they all apologise

Eilidh. She is religious but I don't think

Emma. She's still got different views and stuff

Eilidh. I don't think she's that narrow-minded I think she just cares for Jen.

Rosie. I think she was maybe quite, not now mind you, I think, but I think she needed to consider people's feelings

Eilidh. But Christians are supposed to be against gays and she was never like

Emma. She sort of like Jack and there

Eilidh. She was never, because yeah Jack now lives with them or did live with them so she was never against Jack because he was gay. And that's like a lot of Christians are, they think it's wrong

Jennifer. A lot of people do

Eilidh. Even non-Christians

*So she's actually a bit of a mix then? Is that?*

Emma. Yes

*Because the impression, Jessica watches it sometimes and I dip in and out but don't really, I don't understand it because I don't watch it often enough to work out, but the bits I've seen she seems to be quite down on drugs and sex, that sort of thing but then the sort of things that you have no control over like your sexuality, she seems to be broader on that.*

Rosie. Because they were all talking about how they had regrets and stuff and she told them about how before she got married to her granddad, like Jen's granddad, she had this 2 day affair with this guy that she met and she was in love with him and then he went to war and died or something and she said she'd wait for him. And then she met Jen's granddad and she married him and it showed, I think she was trying to show them that she was quite normal. And that she was young once too and she knows what they were going through. Because they all had their regrets like Jen

Eilidh. Regretted all this stuff she'd done likes sleeping around and mixing up with the wrong people

Rosie. And Jack wanted this guy that he was going out with and he didn't kiss him and that's why they broke up because he was too embarrassed to sort of

Eilidh. Admit that he was gay and

Rosie. Yeah so she sort of encouraged him to sort of just to do it

Eilidh. Yeah because like she dragged him along it in the car and made him go and make-up with all the people he wanted to be with.

*Right so she does sound a lot more rounded doesn't she? OK. The girl in Bad Girls, what's she like?*

Eilidh. She's really Christian. She's really into God and things but then I suppose she would be

Rosie. Because she doesn't believe in pre-marital sex or anything. I've only seen it the few times but the few times I have seen it is always, she's always sort of, because this guy asked

her out, it was before, ages ago, this guy sort of started asking her out and she just ignored him because she didn't, I don't know

Eilidh. And now they're together. Before they were married, she wouldn't sleep with him before they got married

*And how did she behaved towards the other prisoners? What's she like?*

Eilidh. At first she wasn't accepted. At all she was like the big Christian and she used to sit with a guitar and sing gospel songs but now she's accepted but she still believes in

*Is that what you said Jennifer? I didn't quite catch it.*

Jennifer. Yeah. She never really accepted anyone else either

Eilidh. She thought they would all, she kept on telling them they'd sinned and they were all wrong to be in here. But then she was a bit of a hypocrite because so was she

*So what happened? Did she stop criticising people so much?*

Eilidh. I think she just accepted that she was imprisoned. I don't think that she could believe she was there. And when she stopped being so kind of looking down that everyone else she just accepted that she was a Christian

*So how does the Christianity workout now then? I mean is that just in relation to sex. She wouldn't have pre-marital sex?*

Rosie. I think she has just sort of toned it down maybe. I think she still has those beliefs but she doesn't like,

Jennifer. She doesn't like inflict it on anyone else

*Does it affect any of the decision she makes in the prison, you know, like, I don't know, somebody wanted to have a riot - would she not do it?*

Eilidh. Yes she would take. I don't know. I think it would depend on the kind of thing it was for. If she believes in, that when people have done wrong then she will but if she thinks it's all wrong against God's work she once. But there was one thing a couple of weeks ago where they all went on a riot and she was taking part wasn't she a? Storming about the prison and throwing chairs and stuff.

*Was there any dealing with how, that wouldn't seem to be terribly compatible with the loving your neighbour or whatever.*

Eilidh. No I don't think, it wasn't mentioned that she'd kind of done the wrong think

Rosie. I don't think it was really about her the actual budget so they didn't really talk about how she might have felt. I think they'd just, who was it, it was about someone else so this sort of focused on how she felt about it.



*So do you only tend to get her beliefs when the storyline is focused on her?*

Eilidh. Yes

Rosie. Yes

*Right so if it's somebody else and she's maybe talking about them you wouldn't get*

Eilidh. There will be a few like mentions of things, like the religious views but it's like never like a big thing because it's just Crystal so you just accept it.

*Nobody watches Brookside or Coronation Street?*

Eilidh. I do sometimes

Rosie. I've seen it a few times

Jennifer. I do

Eilidh. I watched Brookside. Sometimes but I just watch it when it's on I don't like make a point of. I watched last night

*What about religious characters in Brookside?*

Rosie. There is one isn't there? I've only seen it a few times but

Emma. Can't think of anybody probably is though.

Rosie. I don't know anybody I don't really watch it

*Coronation Street? Is there anybody religious in there?*

Emma. When Spider was in was he religious? No. Was it just like a peace campaign?

Jennifer. I don't watch it so

*My impression is that of all the people who are meant to be religious, that we've mentioned, apart from Phoebe being spiritual and correct me if I'm wrong and maybe Ross being Jewish, is that everyone is Christian. Is that?*

Rosie. Yes

Eilidh. Yes.

Rosie I think that's just, I don't know if because Christianity is probably one of the most popular religions, I think because of that a lot of people just assume that people are

Eilidh. Well Britain is a Christian country. I don't know about America is it the same?

*America is much more Christian, having said that it has a much higher percentage of all faiths in any case.*

Rosie. But we're more laid back about what we believe here, I mean apart from in like Ireland. We believe things and we let that sort of, we don't, that's just sort of

Eilidh. But in America it's big extremes

Rose. They all sort of go and they sort of have big preacher guys and all the sort of Jewish stuff and everyone so really, really impressed

Eilidh. I think that the reason Christians are more accepted is because everyone knows. It's not like, a lot of people don't know about Jews or the Jewish religion

*Do you think it matters if other faiths are not shown?*

Eilidh. In a way

Rosie. I think, yeah. I think probably it would be, it's a bit unPC to have mostly Christian. I mean, well, if that's their character that's fine

Eilidh. Most of the Christians that are portrayed are not, the way, it kind of makes the religion look bad. It doesn't necessarily make it look the way it normally is.

Rosie. On this, there's this girl on Big Brother right now and she's, is she a Hindu? And she was made fun of so much. Because there was this guy she once asked out and

Eilidh. Said no to her religion

Rosie. Said no because she was Hindu. And this other guy said I would go out with you, I mean you'd be really pretty if you were white. And she, and after that she said she was upset but then she just realised, you know, this is who I am and she really got into religious stuff and really embraces her religion.

Eilidh. And the other one who's a Christian is Penny the teacher. But then she's religious but I don't know if she really follows all the beliefs. Like she goes to Church on Sunday but I don't know if that means

Rosie. Yes she says she listens to this radio programme about

Eilidh. God. But then I don't really think it shows in many of her actions.

Jennifer. I think Narinder was really worried at first because she was talking to Brian or something that she was going to get voted out of the house first because she was Asian.

Rosie. I think that sort of, I think what happened to her like with those boys I think that just affected her, she just assumes they everyone else is going to treat her that way but I don't, I think nowadays people are really quite open-minded. There's only a small percentage of people who are racist.

*That's interesting because I was interviewing some people from the Sikh community just at the weekend and they were saying that they get racist comments every day of the week.*

Rosie. Really?

Eilidh. I'd hate that

*I mean, it was just like terrible*

Eilidh. It's just, it's so like, it's so typical of people of our age though because I don't think they really know that it affects people. They're just like, half the guys in our year they just say it, Oh Paki this and Paki that but I don't know if they actually know that it's hurtful to people. *Because one of the things I wonder as part of this research is, and, I mean I think you said Eilidh that it's not a very good impression of Christianity that you get, it's not very positive; I'm not convinced it would have many people rushing to sign up for it, you know, the people that you have representing it. But at least it's there. It might take the Mickey out of it but it's a presence. You can still see that Christianity exists. But Sikhs don't exist. Hindus are rarely* Rosie. Yes

Eilidh. I've never

*Muslims. I mean, can you actually think of anything you've seen, and you can even include children's programmes because they are probably not that far since you stop watching, we can include a couple of years back*

Rosie. I think they include coloured people but they don't

Eilidh. But there has never what the religion is

Rosie. Never talk about what sort of the religion they are. I think that's really neglected, sort of, talking about other people's views, like religious people don't feature a lot in programmes and soaps and anything really.

*Do many of you do religious studies?*

Eilidh, Rosie. We do

*So Jennifer and Emma you don't? How much do you know of any faiths that are certainly non-Christian?*

Emma. I don't know about any really

Jennifer. The basics like everyone, like from primary.

*Because you've got a lot of Sikhs at the school haven't you; did you say Hindus as well?*

Eilidh. Yeah but Hindus and Sikhs have a lot of the same, like there's variation but it's roughly the same kind of beliefs

*And does having another faith, a fairly large chunk in school, does that make you any more aware of the differences if you like or*

Eilidh. I mean before I took R.E. I wasn't really, I mean they were there but I never really was aware of what they believed but now I'd say because of R.E. I'm definitely a lot more aware

Rosie. I think it's really interesting lots of things sort of, their traditions, sort of all the things they do. Because I know those things I can understand. Not understand because it's not like



I'm saying they are alien or anything like that but I'm saying that I sort of have empathy maybe more.

*No, I think it's perfectly fair to say you can understand because in one sense it is alien. It's not as in another planet alien but it's outwith your knowledge*

Eilidh. It's definitely helped me to understand

Jennifer. I think a lot of people kind of think it's like us and them. They don't realise it's not really

Eilidh, Rosie. Yeah

Jennifer. If they think about it

Rosie. Because I said before that I don't feel that they are any different but I look at the way other people treat them and it is pretty different like, it's quite rare that you see Hindus or Sikhs uptown with just other people

Eilidh. But then everyone makes it out like we don't include them, or we don't talk to them but then they all tend to stay together themselves.

Rosie. Yes, yes

Jennifer. Yes

Emma. Because there's a lot of Sikh boys

*Yeah it's both sides isn't it? As I said one of the things I wondered was would it make a difference if there was a greater presence, not only brown or black faces, but actually identified as not all brown and black faces are the same but in fact you might be Muslim, you might be Sikh, you might be nothing, you could be Christian or Buddhist. You know that to just say a brown face, well that substitutes for every other religion that isn't Christian.*

Eilidh. Yes when there's many people that are Christians

Rosie. I think it would be really interesting what some people's reaction would be if they could learn more about their beliefs because I think if these people who sort of walk about going O Pakis, O Pakis if they knew more about them they probably wouldn't even comment on it, they probably wouldn't even, I think it makes you feel that you more similar because a lot of things they believe you probably believe without knowing that it's a religious thing. I think that if they knew a lot of stuff they probably

Eilidh. Wouldn't be prejudiced, they'd be more open

Rosie. Wouldn't treat them so different

*One of the reasons peoples had said in focus groups before this, well religion isn't included and other religions particularly aren't included because it's not interesting and that producers*

*are interested in viewing figures, ratings and if they started including somebody who was religious, then everybody would turn off.*

Eilidh. If it became a big thing and there was like in every single soap then I don't think, it depends how it was, how it came across to the viewers

*Well did you find the Brian and Zara storyline a turn-off?*

Rosie. I found it

Eilidh. No I didn't but other things I do, other soaps I do. I think they make it like that because they know that if they made it the way it normally is then the viewers aren't going to find it interesting enough to watch and they have to make it to extremes

Rosie. I think it takes a certain kind of person to find religions interesting. I don't know. But I think it's because religion as such it's an ancient sort of, maybe even art almost. Like a lot of the things they have and they have lots of different types of things that are just, the kind of things you probably see in museums and the people probably associate with old and they associate old with boring. But I think lots of, if you learnt all the different traditions they have I think it's, it's just, it's really I think it's quite

Eilidh. I do find it's interesting but I don't know if I'd want to tune in and see it on every channel

*Well, I thought Hollyoaks was really interestingly done you know. They sort of set him up as the bad boy and lo and behold he wasn't. Anything but the bad boy. And yet they managed to keep all the other story lines going. It wasn't the only one. It wasn't trying to convert people. It was just a really interesting, unexpected twist.*

Eilidh. It was good because he was like the popular boy and Zara was the popular girl and so it made it OK to be Christian. Whereas other things they're like the only one against everybody else

Rosie. I think it's because maybe they're young

Eilidh. Like we could - kind of

Rosie. Relate to that

Eilidh. Yes

*Well I think we should just bring this to a close.*

*End of interview*

## **Interview With Sikh Focus Group, Edinburgh**

**(Gurvinder, Bubbles, Veera, Mike, John, Pappinder)**

There are some gaps in this transcript because occasionally group members spoke in Punjabi. There was also an echo in the room and comments were not always recorded clearly.

*I'm not just going to be talking about, asking you questions about Sikhs, OK. It's about all religion in the kinds of programmes that I'm interested in which are soaps, sitcoms, and dramas. So out of the programmes that you have ticked as watching and anything else which pops into your head in the course of it, can you think of characters who are supposed to be the religious ones in the programmes?*

John. Well in EastEnders you've got the Asian family there. The Hindu family at the beginning when EastEnders started off. That's going back some time. It portrayed obviously an Asian family. Now being from the sub Continent whatever they portrayed them as being a religious type so the general public will assume that because they're Asian they will be more religious than a Western cultured people.

*Can you think of anybody who's currently in EastEnders whose religious?*

Mike. Well there's Dot Cotton.

John. She's awfully, rather religious.

Veera. What about the vicar?

*In EastEnders?*

Veera. Wasn't there?

*He was in it wasn't he?*

Bubbles. He came in it for weddings and things.

*But there's not a vicar now in it is there?*

John. No.

*Any other programmes. I can remind you which once you've ticked if you like?*

Mike. I just watch comedies rather than soaps.

*Well what about any of the sitcoms you watch, are there any of the sitcoms you watched the have*

Mike. Father Ted There's quite good.

*Does anybody else watched Father Ted?*

Pappinder. Now and again when I can make the opportunity. It's quite hilarious.



*How do you, I'll come back to that in a minute, any other programmes? That have, are supposed to have somebody who is the religious character in them?*

Emmerdale has a vicar there hasn't he? I don't actually watch it.

Bubbles. His name is Ashley.

*Are there any other characters in Emmerdale who are supposed to be religious?*

(Girls talk amongst themselves and don't seem to know anybody else)

John. Emmerdale's not their favourite. Its EastEnders isn't it. The Vicar of Dibley that's what you're looking for.

Mike. Coronation Street there's nothing. There are no religious characters

Veera. There's the shop

John. Well they've got the

Mike. Well, there are no religious characters

Pappinder. No he took over the shop didn't he

Gurvinder. But there is an Asian family the its religious there's got the shop.

Mike. But they are a bit westernised aren't they? They're a bit westernised.

*The only one I know I thought he was called Dev the one who owns*

John. Yes they just taken

Pappinder. There's also what her name Emily, Emily Bishop.

*So you would see Emily as the religious character?*

Pappinder. Yes

*Any others? I notice somebody's got Neighbours down.*

Veera I don't think there's anybody Asian

*That's religious not necessarily Asian.*

Pappinder. What's his name big chap, specs

Bobbles. Harold Bishop

Pappinder. Harold Bishop that's it.

Bubbles. Well he is because he quotes the Bible.

*Yes he's involved with the Salvation Army. Isn't he? Hollyoaks?*

John. I don't watch it.

*Well somebody watches it.*

Gurvinder, Bubbles, Veera. Well we watch it.

Gurvinder. But I don't think there's anything

*What about Zara and her boyfriend?*

Bubbles. They are religious but they've not been in it

Veera. But her boyfriend is religious

Gurvinder is like vegetarian and (can't hear the rest of this)

*Can you think of any of the programmes that are you have mentioned soaps, sitcoms, dramas that have Sikh characters in them? Not actors. Not people who are Sikhs who are acting that who are actually playing a Sikh character?*

John. In EastEnders there was a Doctor Singh? Wasn't there

Mike. What comes to mind to me is Only Fools and Horses. There was one episode where there was one Sikh in it. Doctor Singh wasn't it. It was Only Fools and Horses. That's the only one I can think of

John. So it wasn't EastEnders?

Mike. It was only Fools and horses that's the only thing I can think of where the Sikh has actually been portrayed.

Veera. I think there's a Sikh in The Bill.

Mike. Yes there is a policeman saying. He started last week.

*Funnily enough I was reading the Radio Times last week and I saw this name Singh and I thought Oh. Interesting but I couldn't work out from the bit in the Times whether it was a policeman*

John. Yes he's a detective

Mike. Detective Sergeant isn't he? There was this story about him last week wasn't there an episode about to start.

Pappinder. He doesn't really

Mike. He's very new; he just started last week.

Pappinder. He doesn't wear a turban. He's had his hair cut.

Mike. (Can't make this out but the discussion is about wearing a headscarf or turban, which he doesn't seem to do)

*So where does that place him as being a Sikh? Could he do that?*

Mike. Oh yes.

Pappinder. Yes you could.

John. Personally I think that if you were trying to inject an Asian into the, to be the kind of whole moral or to take up the characters place in today's society, to betray today's society and mixing cultures, then if they're going to make him up as a Sikh from a personal point of view, they should have really got to him to wear a turban so he could be easily recognisable as

a Sikh and his religious background. Rather than have him as being with the haircuts and you could probably mistake, and until you found out what his name was, you would mistake him for a Hindu or a Muslim. If they were going to do that, deliberately put in a Sikh then they should have allowed him to have the turban.

*So do you think maybe it's more a sense that they're just putting an Asian in who happens to be called Singh, rather than*

John. Just for the sake of it

Pappinder. They're not really doing their homework.

John. They are not really looking out for a Muslim or Hindu or a Sikh it's just the token Asian.

Mike. I think in today's culture people don't recognise (can't hear this) is they'd got a turban they must be a Sikh.

Wege. The Sikhs who have haircuts will follow the Sikh religion to a certain extent, as much as somebody who has got a turban. But only the visual outlook will be different. They still believe in all the Sikh scriptures and followed all the traditions

Mike. It's just the physical appearance this different.

Wege. I mean obviously appearance is more important to the ones that keep to it more

Mike. I mean that is one of the main, part of our religion is to keep your hair

Wege. That's the main image that people who will perceive you as a Sikh. It depends on interpretation I suppose doesn't it.

Veera. Some people don't know if they see someone with a turban, they don't know they're a Sikh

Wege. Yeah well that that is true. There are some totally ignorant people. They just think my God there's a Pakistani or an Indian.

Veera. Or they just always think it's a Pakistani

Wege. They won't say oh like, there's a Sikh. But more and more people actually are becoming familiar with the Sikh

Mike. There is better education now than there was

*It's partly why I wonder you know is it just a question of well, you know well we'll put an Asian face in at the doesn't really matter. And Asians and Asian and what's the difference between Sikhs Muslims and Hindus. It's all some sort of foreign religion isn't it? Whereas if you actually have a Sikh who is visibly a Sikh maybe it raises the profile.*

Mike. That's right. I think it would make a difference.



*I mean clearly with it being a new character if he was actually going to be a Sikh rather than Asian well he hasn't got the obvious visible signs has he? Would there be things that would come in the course of the character's job that people would say Oh, that's different. You know, a Sikh or a Sikh can't*

Mike. Yes. Smoking would be one of the main ones.

Veera. Being a vegetarian and not being allowed to eat beef.

Mike. And eating certain things or not eating beef. Well that's Hindu as well. But cigarette smoking and meat eating that's totally taboo for Sikhs.

*So if we see him puffing on a cigarette*

Mike. Yes

*He's definitely not a Sikh*

Pappinder. That's what it's like

Wege. Well he maybe, it's the person themselves, how he's interpreted what he should be doing but we obviously don't want that image projected to the wider community. Whatever someone does outside in their personal life is their own business, whether it's in his home or in his business

John. But if he's on television portraying the Sikh as a religious character then that image is going out to quite a majority of the population and it's giving the wrong image regarding this.

*Going back to some of the other people, the other characters that we talked about, how do you think they come across as representing religion? Do they show a positive side to religion or a negative side?*

Veera. Negative

*Negative? In what way?*

Veera. Like the ones on Coronations Street. When you see Asian people on TV you expect them to be religious then when they are not you think, what's that all about it. There might just as well be not Asian. 'Cos they're not exactly sending the message out.

*Are you saying that of all Asians would be religious?*

Veera. No but if you see them on TV you expect them to be. Well I would.

*OK. I just wanted to clarify that. What about any the other characters you know Emily bishop, Dot Cotton, Harold' Bishop. Harold Bishop as well. I never realised that they've got the same surname.*

Pappinder. To me they come across as being rather busy bodies although they maybe a Christian, born-again Christian or whatever, you know that they are religious what their faiths are. But as characters they take too much interest in other people's lives and tend to push their own religion on to others in the way they should live or they shouldn't live.

*Anybody else? How does that fit with the way you see some of these characters? Do you watch EastEnders girls? What about Dot Cotton, what do you think her?*

Veera. I think she is like, I think she does interfere and that I think that people who aren't religious alike that anyway

*In EastEnders?*

Veera. I don't think you have to be religious to be nosy or want to interfere

Mike. It's about gossiping isn't so it's that's what soaps are all about. It's all gossip is to

*What I'm interested in is the way the characters are actually portrayed when they're supposed to be the religious one. You know what is it that makes them appear that they are religious?*

Veera. You'd expect them to have a mum and telling them what to do or something like that or having a big family.

*If they were in it or the way they are shown?*

Veera. No, if they were in it and if like, if you saw them and they had a big family and stuff and they all lived together then you would think that they were religious. If they were just living by themselves you wouldn't think they were so religious.

Bubbles. They do not have to be in big houses they could be alone in small houses it's what you feel in here.

*Are you thinking, forgive me if I'm wrong, are you thinking if they were Asian families or just any body, any of the characters who are religious?*

Veera. Anybody, like any of them.

*Can you give me an example of any of the characters who are supposed to be religious who fit it to that big family situation?*

Veera. When Sanjay and Gita were in EastEnders they had their sister in law  
*Because that's actually quite a long time ago and now it isn't it?*

Veera. Yes but I think her sister and law and mother lived there as well.  
*But recently say characters who've been in it in the last few years.*

Mike. Dots quite religious she does go regularly to Church.

*But she's not part of a large family is she?*

No she's single she's just been for herself. Obviously she's just been praying for her son who's quite bad.

Pappinder. There's not been many Asians in EastEnders for a while has there?

Mike. No there hasn't

Gurvinder. There's a doctor (number of them speaking and can't make it out)

*The current doctor is black. You're right, there aren't any Asians.*

Pappinder. There haven't been any for a while. For a couple of years I think.

Mike. And obviously the whole of the East End of London there will be Asians there.

*Well you would have thought it would you?*

Bubbles. there's a boy in it as well and he's an Indian.

Veera. Who's that?

Bubbles. The boy who works in the chip shop.

Veera. They don't show his family.

Mike. In Coronation Street I mean that's got a lot of Asians in that area, it's supposed to be in Manchester isn't it? There is no Asians there. A lot of blacks there as well but there is nothing in Coronation Street.

Pappinder. Is there? There's nothing in Coronation Street.

John. Well in the area the area is quite

*You would expect a different colour balance in the programme*

Pappinder. The population of Asians is quite big in northern England

Mike. And blacks as well, there's a lot

Wege. Is the Asian family still in charge of the shop which they bought or have they missed the shop.

Pappinder. No-no they still got the shop

Veera. What about the owners?

John. They're a lot more Westernised, than an Asian family, they're a lot more Westernised

Mike. They're Hindu aren't they?

John. They have mixed marriages and that so they're a lot more westernised

Wege. So they're not really religious

Mike. I mean Sikhs keep to a tradition much more than other cultures, much more so than other religions.



*I just very briefly want to revisit the way the different characters that we've talked about, all right there's an absence of Sikh characters, you've said Dot Cotton Emily Bishop Harold Bishop*

Vera. Rosa and that, they were a big family. They were like all religious and all that they were Catholics as something.

Mike. They were Italians.

Veera. They were quite religious

Bubbles. In EastEnders.

*Oh Rosa. I'm curious about that.*

Go into or. They always used to talk about going to church at Easter and all the rest of its. They used to talk about it like Church and religion and stuff but you never saw its.

*Did you actually think that the way they lived their lives fitting it with the talking about going to Church that often?*

Veera. The mother and that, but not the others

Gurvinder. Young one she talked about it

*Does anyone watched Brookside?*

Pappinder. Yes

Veera. I watched it when there was that murder in it.

*That's a long time ago.*

(Group talking across each other about different characters and story lines. Impossible to transcribe but none of it's directly relevant to the subject)

*Hollyoaks just briefly Brian and Zara. What did you make of Brian as a character?*

Gurvinder. He didn't look it. Like going to Church because he was like a Goth and. Like you wouldn't expect somebody looking like that to go to Church. But then he was talking to Zara about getting christened so like then you realise that he's a Christian or whatever, religious.

*What would you have expected him to look like to look like a Christian teenage boy?*

Gurvinder. It's not really the way he looked. It's just that the first time I saw him I didn't think he was religious

Bubbles. He didn't talk much about it

Gurvinder. Because he just talked about going to concerts and he used to being a rock band. You wouldn't expect him to be like religious or anything.

*So do you think that within those kinds of programmes there's an expectation of the way religious characters would behave? You know that somehow they're supposed to be more straight laced.*

Mike. Yes. A lot more.

*Compared to your own experiences of being people of a faith and maybe knowing people of other faiths, how does that image of people on the whole being fairly straight laced fit your own experiences of, you know, being Sikhs and as I say maybe knowing people of other faiths? Are you expected to be terribly strait-laced?*

Mike. No of course not. I don't think so I suppose it's better if they have problems rather than being Strait laced.

*My impression is that a lot of the time religious characters are quite straight laced. Would that be yours?*

Mike. Dot Cotton is that, it's the way she is. That boy they are talking about is different. I mean, that's really unusual I have to say.

Veera. Dot Cotton's a bit of a joke though. She's like, no one would really, well I don't think anyone would take the fact that she's religious seriously. It's just like she's a bit mad isn't it? Going to church and always praying when she's doing it when she killed Ethel and that and she wanted to pray. I just thought it was weird when she goes to the grave and she says I'm not going to get into heaven and stuff. It didn't seem like religion it just seemed like she was just losing it. She thought God was going to help her or something.

Mike. I don't think because you're religious you should be straight-laced. It's the way it's portrayed, the way it portrays difference really.

Bubbles. You can't just look at someone and know they're religious. You've got to get to know them.

Veera. Like just because they come from a Sikh family or whatever they shouldn't really be expected to be religious because they could have their own beliefs in it.

Wege. Well people may expect it but what is reality is another thing, expecting is one thing. How children or adults do on people. Their fathers may be very religious their children might also be totally not religious. The way their own character is. Some people change, other people come close to the faith, some drift away. It's quite acceptable. It's not encouraged but you just have to accept that.

Pappinder. People are a lot more liberal now when it comes to religion. You not forcing it on any body or your own children, if they do what you need to do and then by all means in

the end, I meant, they do come round to see what matters makes sense. They understand their religion more; their faith better and they take it from there. Rather than being forced into it. However from what is portrayed on television as being rather strait-laced and the characters that come across as, and from what society is, I think we are a lot more liberal than what is portrayed on television.

*D'you think that is a problem being portrayed the way it is?*

Pappinder. I think so, yes. They should really, if they put in, if they are doing, portraying people as different religions then they should be a lot more closer to reality than obviously being fictitious, being in a soaps. If they want to get as close as possible to reality than they should do it better. Rather than just having trait laced, complete strait-laced, and giving the impression, then they should open it up a bit more. They should open and out of it you know the character itself rather than, you know, the Emily Bishop's. I mean somebody of the younger age group who is perchance maybe a rock and roll freak or whatever, who is religious at the same time.

*Yes. That's what I found interesting about that Brian character in Hollyoaks says. He wasn't what you'd expect of a teenager who was a Christian. Certainly not on television. I know teenagers who are Christians who are like that but there's not a lot of them about.*

Pappinder. But you know these people fit into certain slots in society you've got your own impressions of them, a young teenage Christian is going to be like this. As a Muslim he's going to be like this. This is what I, like Cliff Richard he's a born again Christian. He's the most high-profile born-again Christian that there is. You meet up with another Christian and think hang on a minute, you're not like Cliff Richard.

Wege. It's a stereotypical image of people that is portrayed on television or in the media is totally different from reality.

*One of the things I left you with when I was here the other day was this question, if you don't see much of Sikhs on television, would it be beneficial if you know, Sikhs could be seen more (because its fictional television that I'm interested in) if you could have more Sikhs being shown in sitcoms and dramas and soaps, would that be a good thing?*

John. It would be.

*Or would it be a problem because you may be put yourselves in the position of just being stereotyped?*

John. No. It would be a good thing. I mean not Sikhs but Asians as a whole but portrayed as genuine people rather than being stereotyped. It's only going to be beneficial to



the younger generation, to all the youngsters who watched the soaps and although they may be fictitious they still take on board what's happening there regarding certain characters and their morals. Take it into their own daily lives. So if you are going to have Sikhs there have them in a position where they are Sikhs, they will have a turban, or even if they're Muslims they will follow their own faith but don't have them stereotyped as a market trader or a shopkeeper. I mean we all do have, the majority are professions. Are engineers, doctors, lawyers. Do it that way and it will benefit the younger generation on a whole as well. Those that do watch the programmes.

Mike. It depends on story lines as well. It's like Muslim marriages that's usually is stereotyped isn't it? Or racism or whatever. It doesn't happen at all time so why portray that? It depends on what the trade how the story line is

*Do you think there are ways that they could portray it?*

Mike. There are ways but it would be quite boring to watch.

*I don't know would it?*

Mike. It is just be a normal family wouldn't it what could they say? So it would be pretty boring for the studios to take on.

Wege. What does a typical Asian family do?

Mike. They want to shock factor rather than this nice Asian family sitting there together, enjoying themselves, having a good time, everyone's happy. What's the use of that?

*Well I suppose they've got to have a certain amount of tension in any dramatic form in order to make it interesting and if the whole soap wasn't just about this one terribly harmonious of Asian family, but you know they were part of the soap community, or whatever it was, then couldn't you see situations where they do interact with the neighbours but the problems are not just about racism and arranged marriages, there must be other things. I mean if you look at every single story line in every single soap why can't some of these things*

Mike. Well that's right. I mean for instance there's a councillor, and I think it's in Coronation Street isn't it? There's a councillor. It could be in Asian guy, it could be anybody. It doesn't have to be white it's how they do it

*But I suppose that's what I'm asking, do you think that is possible?*

Mike. Yes, I don't see why not.

*What would you say are the moral and ethical issues that tend to be dealt with in soaps?*

Pappinder. Teenage pregnancy. Drugs. all the usual.

*How d'you think the decisions within the soap community are actually made? What values do people refer to? I'm a teenager. I'm pregnant. Should I have an abortion or have the baby? What are the values that they bring to bear in making those decisions?*

Mike. I think they're better now than they were previously. I think they're more, obviously after each programme they have helplines.

*But say it's a teenage girl in the programme how does she decide if she's going to keep the baby or abort it or have it adopted?*

John. She has her friends to talk to; she has a family to discuss the situation she's in. As normally you would.

*D'you think any kind of religious framework is ever brought into it?*

Mike. No

Pappinder. There is, I mean, for instance in EastEnders I suppose you'd get, who was that lassie who had the child just recently, Sonia. Right although she wanted to keep it is secret you got the soap pipeline, you got all the busy bodies like religious person like Dot Cotton who will seem to be interfering but at the same time she's been wanting to give her the best advice possible regarding her experiences and then you know allow her to decide from that.

*Can I asked just one last question. Are there any issues that, if they put a Sikh family into EastEnders, Brookside or Coronation Street, that these sorts of decisions would clearly be informed by a religious point of view? Or if they just said we'll get the family together or anybody in the street we'll discuss it down the pub and will come to a decision that is dramatically interesting but in actual fact would be at odds with what you would do as Sikhs. Would there be things like that?*

John. Yes there would. Depending on for instance, if you had a Sikh family there were younger lads or the father, they wore turbans, just say that for this scenario, the youngster would decide to come home one day and have a haircut. You've got one there. Or you got the young girl and you got the boy, who has decided to take up a white girlfriend. He decides to marry. You've got inter-racial there and that would come up. Religiously, it would be concerned as part of the religion and having to sort it out ethically, what is the right thing to do? What is not the right thing to do? If it was done correctly it would give out the right message for the wrong situation.

*I'd better let you go thank you very much.*

*End of interview*



## **Interview With Fraserburgh Pentecostal Church**

(John, Ella, Ann, Marie, Tony, Andrew)

*First question. Out of all the programs that you've listed and any programmes that might come to mind whilst you're thinking about it which are the characters in the programmes that you watch who are religious. And I use it in a non-pejorative sense OK? The ones you do identify*

Ella. I don't understand this. Sorry I don't

*OK. Who they are, what they're actually like as characters and how you know that they're supposed to be the religious character. So Ella you said Dot in EastEnders.*

Ella. In EastEnders yes. She's always helping the old mannie. She's an old lady and she's religious.

*How do you know she's religious?*

Ella. She runs back and forth to the pastor. Helping in the Church. She won't do a thing that she thinks is against her religion. What else does she do?

Andrew. She is a miserable character isn't she?

Ella. Well, Aye, Aye. She is, Aye

Andrew. My wife wrote to the programme producer and said she was, my wife herself was a Christian, and thought that the portrayal of a Christian being so miserable was out of character.

*So what did they say?*

Andrew. I don't think she got a reply Aye

*Really? That's interesting.*

Andrew. That was quite a few years ago

Ella. But she won't do anything if she thinks it's against her religion

*Does she stick to that all the time do you think?*

Tony. No

Ann. No

Ella. No she smokes

*Sorry Marie?*

Marie. She's aye in what's it called its, at the Woolpack, that's Emmerdale

Tony Aye. The Queen Vic in

Marie. The Queen Vic. That's the pub in EastEnders

*Anything else? Does Ella's description fit with what everyone else would say?*



Tony. I would say so generally. I think she's a bit sour definitely

Ella. She's a nice person she is meant to she is a nice person because she helps everybody. You see she helps everybody. And she wouldn't go in with that old man when she was ill because people would talk.

*But overall though even though she wants to help people she still comes across as a miserable sort of character?*

Tony. Aye I think she keeps, she portrays, she keeps telling everybody she is religious as such. You know she'll tell somebody I'll pray for you or this that and the other but I mean generally, you know, she makes it well known to everybody else where she stands but with a lifestyle it's totally different.

Ella. But she helps everybody

Tony Aye. I that I mean so do a lot of other people. But I think by her lifestyle it's totally against what she actually says verbally.

*Is that things like going to the pub do you mean? Or just the attitude towards other people?*

Tony. Generally I think her whole attitude in general. That's what I think, personally.

Ella. She's a person who would help everybody

Tony. O Yes, definitely but she's a miserable you know. You know anybody else I mean somebody went up to her and she turn round and said I'm a Christian, I've got a bad back and a sore this and a sore that and a sore the other it's like stay away from me, it's not what I'm wanting. If that's how I've got to be. But I think it's again it's just the way it's portrayed in that particular instance and within that television programme.

*Well what about other programmes that people watch?*

Andrew. I watch Dad's Army. The minister there just seems to go on the stereotype, this poor soul wringing his hands and trivial things seem to show importance

Marie. Father Ted they're a

Tony. O it's just ridiculous, ribald. but then again you've also got things like that Vicar of Dibley, as well. And that's just takes the mick out of

Andrew. And I think that she leaves a pretty immoral life

Tony. Definitely

Andrew. Almost blasphemous I would say

John. Never seen it

Tony. It can be funny

Ann. Same with Ashley in Emmerdale though. When you think about it.

Tony. Oh aye. I mean he was living in sin before he was married and all sorts of things wasn't he?

Ann. That's right

Tony. And he was preaching one thing to his flock and yet he was doing exactly the opposite as a person

*Can I just check this out because I don't watch Emmerdale regularly? I watch it for the bits*

John. I've never seen it myself

*I have to watch a lot of things I might not always choose to watch in this research. I mean some of it I will choose to. I only started watching briefly when there was the big row about you know, Edna had complained to the Bishop and everything but did he actually preach against sex before marriage?*

Ann. I dinnae think he actually did, I dinnae think he actually did.

Marie. No he never did he?

Ann. he just did it.

*So he did it but he wasn't actually preaching against it and then doing something different himself?*

*(Agreement that this is the case) so in that sense he wasn't being hypocritical? Maybe wasn't doing what you might expect a minister to do?*

Andrew. I haven't watched this but if he was doing that then I would think that would be, he would still be a hypocrite in my eyes.

*OK I take the point. What's he actually like as a character?*

Tony. I think he's a bit of a wimp

Marie. Aye he is.

Ann. Aye but he has lashed out.

Tony. O aye like he's been violent as well, he's been violent.

Ann. He has been violent

*Physically violent?*

Tony. Yes physically violent

Ann. He actually hit somebody in the pub

Tony. Then regretted it about 10 minutes after he did it but definitely a very violent man. I think as a character he wants to be friends with everybody, in general. He wants to do right in everybody's eyes. He doesn't care, he doesn't want to offend anybody at all so he's very much, you know, he'll say one, kind of goes for everybody's side.

John. That sounds two-faced to me

Tony. Well I wouldn't say he's two-faced two-faced. But he's certainly the sort of character

Ann. He just wants to please everybody

Tony. He just wants an easy life basically I think. Definitely.

*Does he actually talk much about his faith?*

Tony. You see him preaching sometimes from the pulpit like in Easter services or whatever

Ann. Its nae often that you see it

Tony. No you don't

Ann. You just see the dog collar on him all the time

Tony. Or if you watched it last night in rugby shorts and shirt and he went out jogging and that was a sight. But that's getting away from it but no I think generally he's just

Ella. I've not seen him with a dog collar for a long time

Marie. I've not seen it for a long time so

Tony. I watch it every day. I tape it on Monday when I'm here.

*What about any of the others?*

John. Well I watched M.A.S.H.

*It's not been on for a while though has it?*

John. No I haven't watched it for years. Though you're saying about Dad's Army's repeats. I didn't see it so. Only when it came out.

Andrew. I could watch them all over and over again

John. They're all dead

Andrew. I know. I still enjoy it.

John. Oh aye. I mean if it was on I wouldn't switch it off

Andrew. The verger is it

Tony. O the verger

John. He's something else as well isn't he?

*Oh, what Dad's Army now you're on to, yes.*

Tony. He's just out for his own ends

*I mean, he's not a very sort of attractive character at all as I remember it, is he. The verger.*

Andrew. No

Tony. He's like a little weasel

John. I think what strikes me about M.A.S.H. is, and as I say I haven't seen it since I have been saved because that was only a couple of years ago, but even before I was saved at least



Mulcahey was trying to do something. You know he was a practical man. Someone would shout give us some (can't hear this word) over here and regardless of denomination, faith or anything else. Now it's a wonderful thing when you think about it especially when you see some of the, you know. I mean it detaches him from the situation. (Seems to be relating to a particular example but can't make it out clearly enough) I would say that seems to be quite a positive thing. I don't think there would be any arguments. You might not agree.

*I would agree with you. I think it was well done. You had this sort of mayhem and raucousness and everything and yet they weren't afraid to show the priest doing his bit.*

John. I mean it was understandable in the medical context because if you react to the pressure, even just the messing about, the pressure that you have, young people in an anxious state, well you take it upon you, it builds up and you've got to get a release of that some way or another. I mean we,

Tony. Come on then

John. I was just saying that when we walked into second year in medical school when we were doing (can't hear this) that was the option, that was what made the difference when we were cutting up cadavers, you know. It's a different story. You're never the same again once you've, you know, rabbit's one thing but cutting

*Human bodies are another.*

John. I think I have gone a long way away

*No, well, I mean that's actually then something you remember as being a very positive image of a religious character?*

John. Yes before I was in any way religious myself.

*Yes, o.k. What about some of the other programmes that you've mentioned?*

Andrew. I've just remembered one that I watched. Ballykissangel. Which I stopped watching after a while because it had to get silly. But, the priest I thought he came over as quite

Ella. He was a bent one wasn't he

Ann. That's right there was a new priest

Ella. His Australian

Andrew. The original one, up like he packed in the priesthood because he'd fallen in love with this girl. But I thought he came across as quite a strong character and I thought it, it was a Roman Catholic of course, but it presented it in a more positive image of it.

*Does anybody else watch Ballykissangel?*

Ella. Aye, I think I have watched it

Ann. I think I've only watched it about once

*So Ella you*

Ella. Yes I watched it last time. There's a new priest, a young one. The old one's still there.

He's an old man. Now he's bought the pub.

*What, the young priest has bought the pub?*

Ella. Yes.

Ann. Aye but that was to, for the couple that was in the actual pub ken they were feared they'd lost their house. It was, it was all over, it was so they wouldnae loss their house. That's the bit I seen.

*Right so he was actually helping them out?*

Ann. He was helping them out

Andrew. But the priest's superior in Ballykissangel he came over as being a shrewd manipulator, I thought. Hypocritical in a sense

*I've heard people say he was quite bullying*

Andrew. Yes. Tried to put pressure and get his own way whatever.

Ella. And he was angry at him buying the pub you see

Andrew. Well I never saw this

Ella. Did you nae see that

Andrew. This was the previous

*This was the prevlous one when Stephen Tompkinson was the priest. Right. OK so those who did watch it he seemed like quite a reasonable character again?*

Andrew. Down to earth man

Ella. Well he seemed to be all right. He was the man who was never going to do anything wrong like. (Difficult to hear something to do with marriage)

*OK. Any others? Do you want me to go through the list? Coronation Street?*

Tony. I think the only time religion enters into Coronation Street is if there is a wedding or a funeral and that's it

Ann. That's the only time

Tony. That's it I don't think, I have never seen anything else in it except for that.

*Emily Bishop has been mentioned in other groups*

Ella. Well she's a lady, she's

Marie. O aye she is

Ella. Aye she's religious and she wouldnae



Tony. But again I don't think it's made known. She's very much, it's made known in her character that she does a lot of charity work. I mean she's all out for this charity work that she does in the charity shop or whatever. But I don't actually think it's foretold her that she's actually religious or Christian or whatever

Ella. Actually goes to Church

Marie. Aye that's right

Tony. You know, I think her character's very good and very you know good living if you like. She never does anything wrong she's everything else but I don't think she's portrayed as a religious character.

John. I'm amazed just now listening to you guys talking about that fictional series as if it was something that happened in real life, with real people. That's scary.

*No, it's fine for the purposes of my research. That's what's required. I want people to actually talk about the characters because in order to actually make some sense of this research people need to talk about it like that's.*

Tony. I think when you watch these programmes, I think partially you do become involved in what's going, in the plot of these things, you know.

*I think particularly with the long running ones as well, with the long running characters, they develop the character so you can*

Tony. That's right

Ann. You can be talking about what's happening next

Tony. I mean a programme I never miss is The Bill. I never miss The Bill, I think it's a brilliant programme. OK I'm not so much into the more violent ones these days but beforehand; so I know every thing about every character that that happened, since the beginning. It's something that I like

John. I've seen it

Tony. I mean I'm ex-military police any way so I suppose you know it that's where my background comes into it so I suppose that's probably why I do watch it that no, I think it's a fantastic programme. I think it's brilliant. I think the way they deal with people is really quite true to life these days.

*What about any religion in The Bill?*

Tony. I don't think there is

Ann. No I don't think there is.



Tony. I've never seen any religion at all in The Bill. I mean so far as I can see it's nothing I've ever seen in any way. It's just about the police basically. And their station and what they go through. I think sometimes they have moral issues to deal with more than religious issues. I think something will happen where their own personality, what they think about something, comes through their characters. Like Polly's very, very soft and some of them are a bit harder on the stance they have with various things that I mean morally wise yes they do deal with issues but religious Wise no I don't think they do.

*OK. Anything else? High Road? Somebody watches High Road.*

Ella. Aye I watch the High Road. I cannae think, I'm trying to think just now  
*Mrs Mac?*

Ella. Oh Mrs Mac. No I dinnae think she's religious

Ann. She likes to think she is

Ella. Yes, I. She portrays herself as a religious but I dinnae think she is so. She's another like Dot in Coronation Street

*Dot in EastEnders?*

Ella. In EastEnders, sorry.

*In terms of the High Road is she actually meant so v? You know whether or not you actually think she's a good example, within the community*

Ann. I think she is. She cleans the minister's house or whatever it is, well she used to

Ella. Does she clean in the Church?

Ann. I dinnae ken

Ella. I haven't seen the High Road for a while.

*So not particularly convinced that Mrs Mac is?*

Ann. No

Ella. No

Marie. I've no idea. I dinnae watch it

*I'm just sort of going through these and looking at the programmes people have mentioned.*

*Casualty? Any evidence of religion in there?*

Ella. No I haven't seen

Marie. That Dean (Some teasing of Marie by the others but can't make it all out)

*Well you would expect there to be a Chaplain wouldn't you?*

Marie. I ken

Tony. Well I think if there was a chaplain portrayed in Casualty I think he'd be the most busiest person on the ward because every second person who comes in snuffs it. You know so they've got the families coming in and that's it then it's so basically I think they'd need a programme just for the chaplain of Casualty or something like that.

*Well I mean Holby City is a spin-off isn't there? People who survive appear in that. Is there a chaplain in that? Or any anything?*

Ella. I dinnae watch Holby city

Ann. I don't set and watch it

Marie. Holby city?

Ann. I dinnae think there is.

Tony. I've never seen it

Ann. I div watch Holby city

Marie. I have seen it but I dinnae watch it

*Because again it's quite interesting particularly within the medical profession, in nursing, you do get a lot of people of faith. I don't know whether they go into it because of their faith or being in it rejuvenates their faith or something. It strikes me as odd that two hospital series there would be absolutely nobody with any kind of religious*

Ella. I've never seen anybody

*The Simpsons?*

Ann. Aye the next door neighbours. Ned is it?

Marie. Ned Flanders

Tony. Yes oh yes. He's very much religious.

Ann. Aye

*What do you think, what you make of Ned the way he shown?*

Tony. A wimp

Ann. Aye

*A Wimp?*

Tony. A wimp

*Can you expand on that?*

Tony. His religion to him is the be-all and end-all of everything, of life. And basically I think the way he's portrayed is just as I said, as a wimp. I think he's too soft as a character. He doesn't challenge nothing or anything. You know, he's got his life and it's his life.

Ann. It's his

Tony. And round about him I think anything could break loose and he's not really bothered  
Ann. That's right

Tony. As long as it's not affecting his own doorstep then really that's the way I think he's  
portrayed for all I've seen of him anyway. I don't watch The Simpsons a a lot

Ann. No ne'r do I watch it a lot

Tony. Ask my wife. She'll tell you. She watches it all the time

John. That's a cartoon?

Tony. Yes it's a cartoon

John. What are they talking about?

*Ned Flanders, the guy next door to the Simpsons.*

Tony. Like I've seen one when he was on this picnic with his wife and his family and everyone  
else was having a carry on and he was just driving the car, big smile on his face. Not going  
over the speed limit or anything. O yes dear. That's a good idea, it dear. And the kids in the  
back are not even yapping to each other. So the portrayal is a total falsehood, I think.

Ann. Aye it's nae true-to-life for the kids

Tony. Oh no

Ann. No way

Tony. Little angels. We could do with some of them on a Friday night.

*Friends?*

Marie. I dinnae think there's any religion in Friends

And. No there is nobody

Tony. No

Ella. I don't watch it;

Mary. I watch it all the time and I don't think I have ever seen

Ann. Unless there is a marriage. Well mind you

Marie. Nae even then because they never even get there. They dinnae. (Everyone laughing and  
talking about weddings in Friends. Can't separate the phrases.) They only get as far as the Las  
Vegas chapel.

*OK what else? Frasier?*

Tony. Nothing

Ann. Nothing

Tony. Again it deals with moral issues in its own way

John. Its substitution isn't it? It's just the psychiatrist is a substitute



Tony. Yes

John. For what would be done by a minister of religion and basically it's actually very anti-Christian because, I wonder why I watch it. Because they put self first all the time. It absolutely promotes self to the end. It comes to the point where you got to go and talk to somebody and have him agree that everything is OK with your life so that you can continue in this pursuit of self-. The number of folk in America who are in analysis, I'm talking seriously, is incredible. And it's just to justify a godless existence. It's as simple as that. I don't mean that in a (can't hear this bit)

*No, I actually want to come back to that. If I can put that bit on hold for a minute John because I want to come back to self and those sorts of things. Can anybody, I'm not going to keep on going through everything but Sister, Sister, Sabrina?*

Ella. No Never see that

*Fresh Prince?*

Marie. Sister, Sister is like a Christian type programme

Ann. Aye but they're nae actually Christians in characters in the programmes.

Marie. They are because

Ann. They are really.

*Sorry Sister*

Marie. But when you think of it's they do because they have the Church times as well. They mak Church as an important part of the programme. Like there was a time for telling the children that Church was the most important part of their life ken. . .

*Sorry, is that Sister, Sister?*

Ann. Aye

Marie. Aye. They're real Christians in real life but they like dinnae really portray themselves as Christians and yet they say in one of the programmes that Christianity was the most important part of their life and that if this boy was to gang with her then he had to start ganging to the Church to bide ganging

*And that's actually in the programme?*

Marie. That's actually in the programme

Ann. Aye

*Well is that not clearly*

Marie. So it is

Tony. It's a very positive thing

Marie. It is and I mean you see them having a great laugh and hanging out all the time with their chums and everything you saw

Ann. These are non-Christians

Mary. Aye it is a good

John. Is it American?

Marie. Aye it is. It's American. It's on Nickelodeon.

*I was going to say. Is it on the mainstream, terrestrial?*

Ann. It sometimes is on Channel 4

*It vaguely rings a bell. I think my daughter*

Marie. They're black girls. There are two black twins. Have you ever seen Smart Guy? It's their brother he does that. Smart guy.

*I don't think. It might have been on but a lot of the time* (group starts laughing at Marie and teasing her)

Tony. Now you're 21 you've got to watch adult programmes.

Ann. Excuse me, I'm 34 and I still watch it.

Tony. Well there's no hope for you then is there?

Andrew. He likes EastEnders, and the Bill isn't he?

Tony. Ah well no I don't watch EastEnders. I watch the Bill.

Marie. But like Sister, Sister is a good programme to portray as Christians because it shows them having a great laugh and they're nae the, ken like, portrayed like

Tony. Dot

Mary. And they're nae portrayed as a, ken, fake either. And like there's been heaps of times that they have also had they have also had really famous Christian music artists in their show. Ken like Kirk Franklin and all them. Ken they invite them along to their shows

*That's quite interesting isn't it?*

Ella. I've never seen the programme

Marie. It's a good one like. It's really good

*So that's on, I'll just mark this on one of these sheets so that's on Nickelodeon then?*

Marie. Nickelodeon

John. I thought Nickelodeon was a kids' programme?

Tony. It is

Ann. It is

Marie. It is. But Sister, Sister is ages with me so I can watch it.



Tony. And those of young at heart

*What about Sabrina?*

Marie. Sabrina?

Ann. No

Marie. There is no religion

And. She's a witch

Marie she's a witch

Tony. She's a witch and her two aunts are as well and I think everybody else in the programme is a witch

John. Is that the guy who

Ann. Buffy is a witch

*Nope, no. This is Sabrina*

Andrew. Somebody Montgomery isn't it

John. Did that not become (can't make this out clearly but realise that John is talking about Bewitched - short discussion of who the characters were in Bewitched and the fact that John is out of touch)

Tony. No, Sabrina the teenage Witch is a modern-day version of Bewitched. No I think Sabrina is totally out of it like. It's good for a laugh

Ann. It is, it's a good programme

Tony. And I think that's basically as far as it goes. If you treat it as a laugh

Ann. That's right

Tony. Then yes that's OK but I mean I suppose some people it could portray other things. You know, I mean it's a good comedy programme. It's good for a laugh and that's but it depends how seriously you take that, or how much it you read into it. If you watch it as a comedy it's fine. It's laughable but I suppose some people would probably take that as being a bit further than that. A thing to do, or a thing to look in to and I think that's when you are going to obviously lead to problems.

*Can I just go back because we skimmed over it fairly quickly? Vicar of Dibley. Do many people watch it?*

Andrew. I watch it occasionally

Tony. I do, I do

John. I think you watch too much television

Ella. I dinnae watch him



Ann. It's a her

Ella. O, it's a her

*It's Dawn French*

Ella. Oh it's Dawn French

Andrew. O a big woman

Tony. I think again, the same as Sabrina way it's funny as a comedy but I suppose really if I look into what I believe I shouldn't watch it. The way it portrays it.

Marie. But it's like father Ted. I really like that but yet if I was to look in to the beliefs that I believe in I shouldnae be watching Father Ted. But I like it. It's a laugh

Tony. I don't think we could watch a half of what we watch any way

Marie. Ken I like watching it as a good laugh

Andrew. I just, The Vicar of Dibley, I think it's funny as well

Tony. It takes the Mickey out

Andrew. But I think it puts the wrong image of Christianity

Ella. Aye

*Can you explain that, what it is wrong about the image it puts across?*

Andrew. Well if she fancies a feller she'll sleep with him. She over imbibes.

Tony. But then again you've got

Ann. she swears

Marie. It's a bit like Father Ted

Andrew. Aye there's swearing and things

Ann. It shouldnae be

Tony. Aye yes at a Church council meeting. I mean there was one thing where she was going to put a new stained-glass window into the Church and she conned money out of this business man by offering kisses and all the rest of it but when they actually opened it, it was plain glass and you saw like the sun set. And that's when it became very much of what they mentioned God's creation and all the rest. I mean if you took that next 10 minutes that was really, really good and very sound. I mean overall. So there is little bits. I think sometimes they do put little bits like that into its obviously and then there was the time she had all the animals in for the harvest

Ann. That's right

Tony. And things like that so they do try to mix the both, the actual with the fictional

John. To my mind that's more corrupting. I can't speak because I haven't seen it but the way you describe it, it is. Because if it is just done for a laugh that's fine but if there's as sub message that's ridiculous

Marie. Father Ted is just non-stop drinking, swearing and just folk are walking about. it's funny if you dinnae take it too serious ken. Ken if you watch away. It doesn't give a good image like but at the same time ken its funny

*Yes it's just so ridiculous that it wouldn't do any harm?*

Tony. Aye you couldn't believe it's

*And, you didn't actually say much about it Vicar of Dibley but you do watch it don't you?*

Ann. I have watched it I dinnae it watch it much nowadays. Just, I mean I'm gey often oot then

*But do you have the same feeling about it?*

Ann. Aye

*OK that's fine thank you very much. When you think of all these kinds of programmes can you think of any things that are missing? Particularly talking about religion, all right, the things that you don't see in relation to religion?*

Tony. Modern-day problems. I think socially people are willing to accept almost anything on television programmes but I think in reality, you know, there's a lot of problems, things like drugs or whatever, and I don't think the true Christian perspective of these is put across in any way. Tell people it's helping in any way from anywhere. I think that, well that's what I feel. That there's no real answer to anybody who's got a problem like this and they are looking maybe into ways of getting round this problem, yet they don't know any other way. You know, I mean people watch television and they watch all these morning programmes and they have deep discussions on whatever that does nothing that actually puts a Christian point of view across

Marie. (Can't hear) in neighbours because they were doing stuff on drugs and that. And he's a Sally Army

Harold?

Marie. Harold

Ella. With the tuba, of Aye

Ann. Him and the doc used to go about at night and actual do it with the drugs So there has been something. But nae that you see much of it



Marie. I think in programmes today as well they always trying to find their own way of help. It's always like, I can help myself, I dinnae need any help. That's what they're putting across on the TV. Well to me anyway that's what I see.

*Can we just stick with fictional programming? So you know that this idea of needing help and things like drugs within the fictional programming that we're talking about, could you see how that could be introduced? How could they actually, maybe include a Christian response? I mean, do you think it's possible or not possible at all?*

Tony. If it's possible how many people would continue watching whatever they watch? I don't know. I don't think it is possible. I think you probably need a totally separate programme altogether.

*And then people wouldn't watch it because it wouldn't be a soap?*

Tony. Then people wouldn't watch it, yeah.

*Why do you think?*

Tony. I think soap writers are not taking on board that one point of view if you like. I think maybe they want to make this thing very watchable, and think they're going for ratings, so the more whatever they can put into it, it becomes totally watchable or whatever. And yes the higher ratings they are going to get

*So what you think it is about introducing a Christian perspective, like, you said there was the bit with Harold and Carl, clearly that didn't affect the ratings for Neighbours in any shape or form*

Ann. No because that ran for a couple of weeks

*You know, what; does anybody watch Hollyoaks?*

Marie. Aye, I do

John. It's made for an Australian audience and not for an English audience and therefore these things are set

Ann. It's made in Australia

John. Do they not just have it on at lunchtime?

Ann. It's on in the evenings

Marie. It's on in the evening

John. So it would just be on any way and its ratings are its ratings. Different TV companies would buy it. I presume it's a BBC programme? Because I've often asked my wife, you know, why is Jamie watching this and she says oh because it's got values. And I looked at it and I thought aye, what values? It doesn't have values that I would connect to.



Ann. There is actually a Christian in the programme but he's nae portrayed as a Christian  
Marie. Who's that?

Ann. Lance.

John. Does he want congratulations for that?

Marie. Aye though, he is a Christian in real life

*Right, but the character isn't is he?*

Marie. No

*I mean Harold is the only Christian. I was going to ask you about the Hollyoak's thing Zara's  
Boy friend.*

Marie. I havenae seen Hollyoaks for a while

*Right. You know Zara the hideous teenager? The daughter from the cafe.*

Marie. Oh aye

*Well she started going out with this guy who plays in a band and he puts on lots of strange  
make-up and clothes and everything and the mother is like O, this is terrible. In fact it turns out  
he's a Christian and it's a Christian band he plays in. I mean I don't know what category of  
music it is but it needs black lipstick and black eyeliner and everything. I hadn't seen it for 2  
or 3 episodes but the last one I saw he took her out to a gig and it was all Christian bands.*

Marie. I have nae seen it since that happened with Luke.

*Right, oh, right that's a while ago*

Marie. I haven't seen it since then

*I'm a bit curious to see how it develops because clearly they managed to*

Marie. I'm gonnae start watching it then

*As I say I'll be curious to see how it all turns out but they do seem to have found a way. He's  
not identified as a Christian at first in fact that's the twist because he's a good-looking guy; he  
plays in a band*

Marie. You mean he's cool?

*Yeah dead cool, the girl's fancy him. Zara's got him. Oh! He's a Christian and she's having to  
take a fair bit of ribbing from her family for going out with a Christian. I think that's what I'm  
wondering. They managed to do that*

Marie. It'll be interesting to see how it turns out like

*I would be amazed if it affected the viewing figures because I think he's good looking enough  
for anybody who's watching it for the fanciable factor not to be put off*

Tony. Well that puts me and you, John, out of the picture then. We'll just have to write the scripts mate.

*But there still seems to be a feeling I think I'm picking up on, that for some reason, putting religion into a soap or a sitcom, unless it's to make a joke of it, it would affect the ratings.*

Tony. I don't think it would

Ann. I dinnae think it would

Marie. I don't think it would either providing how far, like as long as they didn't portray it as really dull and boring. Ken like if you were to have a Christian family into Coronation Street as long as they werenae this dull, boring family that just sort of went to Church on a Sunday

Ann. I think that would affect the ratings

Mary. Yeah. They would haetae mak 'em

Ella. Like us

Marie. Like us

Tony. Like us. Let's make a soap

Ella. Happy Clappies

Tony. Yeah let's make a soap on Elim

Ella. Aye

Tony. That'd be really good

Ella. Well they would wonder sometimes when they see us, that's it

*Can I come back to they question of anything that you've ever noticde that's missing then?*

*You've said the Christian way of dealing with problems within these programmes. But, children who have any kind are faith, that sort of thing. Different faiths. Different ways of showing people of faith? I mean think about your own experience of coming here. And your own experience of living in Fraserburgh. When you think of some of the programmes that we've talked about how does it compare in terms of, Well you've obviously got a lot of kids coming here. Do you see anything like that? You've clearly got a wide age range of people. How does that compare to the age range of religious characters? Do you have any non-Christian faiths in Fraserburgh?*

Tony. Well

Ella. that's to be debated

Andrew. That's debatable

Tony. That's to be debatable

Ella. That's to be debatable I would say



Tony. Aye. I suppose what some people would call Christian and what other people would call Christian is two different things in this town. From what you're saying about age ranges obviously you've got people like Dot in EastEnders, who I'm not being funny is basically a pensioner

Ann. But was there nae Sarah in EastEnders?

Tony. To this person in Hollyoaks

Ann. She was this, she gaed back and forth to the Church

Marie. Sarah in EastEnders, she was a Christian

Ann. She gaed back and forth to the Church

Marie. D'you mind Sarah? Joe's (dialect of word I don't know and don't know how to spell.

Think it means either daughter, friend or sister. Next question from and to Marie uses the same word.)

Tony. I don't know. I don't watch EastEnders

Marie. Aye she helped Joe out all the time even when he was going through that schizophrenia

Ann. Aye that's right so

Marie. Oh aye and there was the pastor. Melanie's brother, Alex, he was the pastor.

*But he's not been in it for a while*

Marie. And then there was Sarah

Tony. Are these people just in it for the story line?

Marie. Sarah. Sarah came awa from it. Sarah ended up by being awa,

And. That's right she came awa from its

Marie. She came awa

*What did you actually think of Sarah?*

Marie. I thought she was, she seemed strong. Mind you Joe was trying to pressurise her into haein sex and that's and she says no. It goes against my beliefs and I winner. Ken. So like I think that was a good image to put to the young folk that watched EastEnders ken like. Oh that was good ken. I think that was quite a good image like but I dinnae ken fits happened to her.

John. She takes a moral standard and gets written out of the series? Is that how it goes? Does that not tell you a thing or two?

*I don't know*

Ann. No ought I don't know

Marie. She cam awa, she cam awa from her faith that didn't she

Ann. Her maw, she had a word with her maw



Marie. No she went awa to her dads didn't she? Her dad went aff tae Africa or something and she went away after him. She ended up going or something

Ann. Something like that

Ella. That must be a fine while ago

Ann. Aye it was a while ago. Because she was ganging oot the series ony road.

*So can you actually think of any other things sorry? Tony you were saying something about age just then?*

Tony. Yeah well from what you were saying about age wise you know how Christians are portrayed. Well you've got Dot and you got the guy in Hollyoaks. So you got two different ages completely.

Ann. Aye but there's nae a lot of young folk that are portrayed as Christians really. It just seems to be the adult age.

Marie. Apart from that thing you're saying about Hollyoaks

*Yeah that seems to me unusual. But I'm just wondering have you noticed any gaps that all?*

*Can you think of any programmes, not just soaps or sitcoms, think of dramas, one-off plays or things that run for four or five weeks, where there are any other faiths included?*

Tony. No

Ann. What about Silent Witness?

*It's a forensic scientist isn't it? No I missed it. In the end I opted for the documentary.*

Ann. I didn't get it all but there was something about the Catholic Church. It was about the nuns.

*Right but that's still Christian. Can you think of anything that's not Christian?*

Marie. Like Buddhism?

Yeah.

Marie. And stuff like that

*And Hindus, Sikh*

Tony. What about East is East? Oh was that a film

*That was a film.*

Ann. Aye is that with the colour

Tony. Aye that's with the Asian family

*Yeah in Salford. But I'm not doing film.*

Tony. I can't see that there is

Ann. I cannae think

John. Can you suggest?

*No. It's not a trick question. I mean one of the things I'm trying to do is look at what is not included and occasionally you get Jewish characters in plays in maybe four or 5 week series*

Ann. Remember there was a Jewish character in EastEnders?

Tony. The doctor. Wasn't he Jewish? Dr Legge.

Marie. Aye he was

Ann. O no, I dinnae ken

Ella. Aye he was

Tony. He was Jewish.

*How did you know he was Jewish?*

Tony. I do believe, there was, it was mentioned

Ann. What about him with the butterflies and that, was he a Jewish. I'm sure it was EastEnders

John. The orthodontist?

Ann. Was he nae a hairdresser?

Tony. No John

*No you're going too far back John.*

Tony. O butterflies as in Wendy Craig?

John. He was a dentist wasn't he? He was an orthodontist.

Andrew. I cannae mind that.

Tony. Well she ran off with anybody and everybody in the end didn't she?

*But going back to Dr Legge you can't remember*

Tony. Dr Legge, there's something. I've got this image in my head. I know, I can actually, funnily enough I can actually see this guy standing there

Ann. Did his loon no bide in Israel or no and he came ower?

Tony. That, that's it,

*Sorry, his?*

Tony. His son

Ann. his son

Tony. There was something mentioned about

John. Loon is son.

*Well I thought she actually said loan. If she'd said loon I would have known. Clearly it's pronounce loan here.*

Tony. I think just his portrayal of the character who eat once though. There was something Jewish about him. Not as in tight-fisted.

*I mean the only one I can think of recently was Fat Friends. It was about the women's slimming club. And one of the, the girls trying to be the model, she was Jewish and the whole think*

Ann. O

Marie. Is that her that used to be in Coronation Street?

Ann. Aye

Marie. Aye Judy Malik.

Ella. Aye it's her

Ann. I never realised she was Jewish.

*The one episode that was given over to her was about the tension in her family and the fact that she had moved away from the faith and she finally got rid of a hideous boy friend*

Ann. That's right. Aye that's right. She took him back to hame to hae a dinner. Something to do with the Jewish feast

John. But you see Edwina Currie has done that in real life

*Sorry?*

John. Edwina Currie has done that in real life. You know what I mean?

*Yeah. But I'm trying to find out if there are actual examples of any other faiths*

Marie. I'm sure there is but I just cannae think of them

John. There must be Muslim culture and things

Tony. I was going to say does it not depend on your geographical area with your local televisions?

Andrew. Aye they would have their own programmes wouldn't they?

Tony. I mean somewhere like say Birmingham, Manchester whatever would probably have more ethnic programmes then what we would have up here because we don't have an ethnic minority.

*Well possibly but that doesn't matter because my research is in Scotland. We've got Coronation Street. We've got EastEnders.*

Tony. Well OK but take Glasgow.

*NO, you get, its no difference. I get the same*

Andrew. There used to be Muslim programmes on Saturday mornings, it was on BBC2 or something?



John. Aye that's right. Used to show something

Andrew. Aye that's right

John. It was all so, it had no violence, which was terrific I mean it was really good from that point of view

Tony. There was also that programme that showed you about gay men coming out in India and (can't understand this)

*But was that a documentary?*

Tony. Know it was, ò yes it was probably a documentary

Andrew. The programmes on Saturday morning I think was just like, it was just everyday life.

I don't think it was anything religious. It was mostly Muslim but I don't think there was any

John. Or Hindi

Andrew. What AV

*But do you think that was specifically for*

Andrew. It wasn't targeted to us particularly

*But it wasn't for everybody?*

John. Like we used to get a quarter-of-an-hour of Gaelic programmes a-week until they discovered there was Common market money in it.

*Marie what we you going to say?*

Marie. No I was awa to get into documentaries

*No, let's just keep it to fiction. OK come back to something that John mentioned earlier. Two things together. What would you say are the moral and ethical issues that they try it to deal with in this fictional programming? And then if you can identify any what would you say is the guiding principle when people have to make choices?*

John. Just off the top of my head something like Frasier. I mean the real problem is that the folk have of admitting to the fact that they have a problem. And the problem is a problem of.. lifestyle. By putting them self first and second and third. And everything that is in that programme is designed to facilitate this. That's nothing deep. It's just my impression I get from it. And maybe that's what I find hilarious (can't hear that) there is no God being brought into this programme at all. You know it's a simple as that. And they intellectualise this that and the other thing and it makes no difference and then they reduce it to themselves and you know wander off and then next week is more or less the same thing. Mind you I continue to watch it because I like the characters.

(General laughter)

*Well that's fine because they're fictional you don't really have to worry about it too much*

Tony. Talk on a moral issue. Recently in EastEnders. Teenage pregnancy.

Marie. No, that was Coronation Street

Tony. No, I know there is one

*Sarah, no Sonia*

Tony. Sonia

Ann. Oh that's right

Marie. O aye

Tony. That went on for a couple of weeks because you had the fight

Marie. She seemed to have the bairn awful quick

Tony. Between her and

*She didn't know she was pregnant.*

Ann. She was scared

*Until she was giving birth*

Marie. Right OK

Ann. It does happen

Tony. But I mean you had that and there was then the fight. The granny wanted to keep the baby and bring it up as part of the family but the father didn't want anything really to do with it but was going along with the mum because he wanted to keep mum happy

Ann. He was basically scared o' his mither

Tony. So on moral issues like that it can be dealt with you know but in their own way. They don't give you any specific guide lines but there was that wasn't there?

*What would you say, were the, I think that's very interesting example. What were the actual guiding principles say as far as Pauline was concerned over the child?*

Tony. Pauline wanted to do what was right, in her own eyes

Ella. Her son was the father

*Who for? Who did she want to do what was right for?*

And. She wanted it for herself

Ella. That's right

Tony. She wanted it for herself definitely.

Ann. For herself

Tony. And she also wanted to put one over on the girl. Because the girl's family harmed them in the past. You



*So in actual fact was that really about wanting to do what was right?*

Tony. Very selfish. No it was very selfish. You know she's been trying to get one over if you like or one back.

*OK. What about Sonia's decision? And her dealings with the baby. Sorry are you lost? She's the one going out with Jamle.*

Marie. Aye fa's got the bairn now then?

Tony. It's been adopted

Ann. She got it adopted. She adopted it out

Marie. So Pauline or naebodies got it?

Tony. Well there was meant to be a court battle in the end but Pauline dropped out

Ann. Because she actually listened to the son

Ella. He wasn't interested

Tony. But I think Sonia had a very, very good point in point of view of the fact is where she realised she couldn't care for it. And she didn't want to bring it up in an environment where she was brought up in.

Ann. That's right, I

Tony. I think she looked a lot at what her relationship with her parents were and she saw that she couldn't provide for the baby that she wanted to, the way, so she did the next best thing and gave it to somebody who could provide for it

*So in fact hers wasn't such a selfish decision?*

Ann. No

Tony. No

Ella. Hers was just for the bairn

*moving out quickly to practically every other incident that takes place in any of the other soaps that we've talked about, bearing that example in mind, how would you say those decisions and made the end?*

John. What do you mean decisions by whom?

*By, whenever the characters are faced with a choice. Not like will I have chips or peas but*

Ann. Basically themselves mak that choice

Tony. Aye I think it's very much individuals. I don't think, there's some where the families are concerned and the family may make a joint decision but overall I think it's very much on an individual basis. It's how the individual sees things



Andrew. There was something on a soap recently about somebody adopting children. My sister's, my niece adopted a child and it took years of work before she was able to do it whereas I think it was portrayed in some of the soaps that it seemed to be a matter of weeks or something. And my sister was quite annoyed. She wrote a letter because she thought it wasn't a realistic portrayal.

*And did she get a reply?*

Andrew. I don't know

Tony. Well I think on that sort of thing then it would be almost impossible to do it in time relation wouldn't it?

Andrew. It's a long drawn-out process

Ella. She was a long time before she got to a

*Yeah it took my sister about two-and-a-half years.*

Andrew. I don't know maybe that's throwing people off the track

*That's fine. Did we come up with many moral or ethical issues? I'm asking you how they make decisions and it seems to be mostly self but can you think of any moral or ethical issues that are dealt with?*

Andrew. There was, I don't watch Brookside either but there were folks staying with us who watched it and it was about incest in Brookside or something I thought that was pretty awful stuff like.

*Was that recently?*

Andrew. It was, it would be three years ago was it.

Tony. You don't have people staying with you very often?

Ann. Dot with Ethel

Andrew. I was watching it with them but I found it quite

*Sorry Ann. Ah yes, thank you Ann*

Ann. Ethel, Dot with Ethel. When she killed her.

Tony. The cancer one wasn't it?

Ann. Euthanasia

*What did you think of it? Because she certainly talked a lot about her faith.*

Marie. I dinnae ken, I think showing a Christian killing somebody it's nae good

Tony. Aye because she was torn between her friendship for this person and what she believed in

Ann. Aye that's it

Ella. She loved her as much as this and she was in so much pain. Ken I cannae say that I could do it.

Ann. Well I mean you wouldnae be able to do it for yourself at that point

Tony. Well you wouldn't would you? Until your faced with it. But those two had been together for years and years and I think in the end she kept going on to her so much, in the end she gaed in

Ann. Aye she gaed in. And did it. And she got away with it.

John. Well would she have got away with it?

Ann. In real life

John. Would her conscience not trouble her?

Ella. She just left the pills and she just took them

*Her conscience troubled her seriously*

Ann. It did because she tried to get arrested

Marie. Aye she did she shoplifted and everything

*Well there was no evidence because by then the body had been cremated*

John. But this goes back to the values of this world that if you can get away with it that's fine.

It was brought over 30 years ago from America. The thing was right or wrong, the morals didn't come into it. Whether you were right you were ok if you got away with it. If you don't get away with it well see if you get caught.

*I think to be fair to the programme that's not actually the way it was presented was it?*

Ann. No

*It really wasn't*

And. Because she did go into the Church about it ken and a' thing like. I mean her faith was there

*And she really suffered because she made that decision*

Ann. That's right

*She wasn't, O good they've not caught me*

Ann. It was made just a click and that was her decision made. Because it ran ower a good few weeks like

Marie. It was still run over quite a few weeks

Ann. Afterwards

Andrew. I think a lot of these programmes show things which make ordinary folk watching think that this is normal. And I don't know if it is



Ella. But you kenned that wasnae normal

Andrew. I think that the programme makers would say that they are just reflecting society but I think they portray things that a lot of society would never have even have heard of, if there were not watching the programme.

*Right. D'you want to glve me some concrete examples?*

Andrew. well just all these incest and lesbians and gay relationships and so on. I mean when I was younger I never heard of these things are hardly.

Tony. But what was socially acceptable, and not being funny personally against you in any way, but what was socially acceptable when you were young is totally different to what was socially acceptable when I was young. And is totally different to what is socially acceptable today.

John. Is TV not making things more socially acceptable?

Tony. I think you've got a very valid point. I think you got a great point. I think so

Ella. Never heard of anything like that when we were young. You see we never heard nothing.

Andrew. You heard of them. You could name them all in this town.

Marie. Aye, like Tony and Simon in EastEnders kissing on TV in front of millions of viewers was disgusting. You actually seen him kissing. Two young folk, loons especially, growing up, with their hormones running wild would maybe's be thinking is that right?

Ann. It's saying it's alright to do that

Marie. It says. It was saying it was all right to hae two loons kissing. ken and the same wi', fit was it, Brookside were there were the lesbians?

Tony. You've also got homosexuality in Emmerdale as well if you look for it

Ann. That's right aye

Marie. Oh aye they got married

Ann. Zoe

Marie. The two gay men, no they never got married, they got blessed

Tony. Yes they got blessed. So I mean it's there for you to see

John. It seems that they are dealing incrementally with society's taboos. And it's funny if you look at the word taboo because it's a tribal type word. They bring it into different. I mean it's just an absolute, I mean the taboo was initially against homosexuals now they're moving on to things like paedophilia and incest. And it just seems that if you watch Channel 4 or something like that after 10 o'clock at night then what ever hits you in the eye you've just got yourself to blame. There should just be a blanket coverage that says anything goes on this channel. And



the funny thing it's, it's not funny in a hilarious way, it's funny peculiar if you go back to the Word, and I've only been a member as someone who's been involved in the last year, If you go to the Word, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. God doesn't create on a curve. There's no absence of sin and it's as simple as that. If that's, you know, there's no, it's the same through the folk in this room, there's nobody who hates the sinner but we hate the sin. And maybe the reason why we're not seen any Christian input in these programmes is because light and darkness don't stand in the same; now, I'm not pretending I'm better myself that I'm saying only that I'm saved and I see things in a different reality now. These programmes don't have anything for me. Now they didn't have anything for me before I was saved either so that's a lack of my development.

Ann. See all these gays and lesbians and that these programmes are nae portraying anything that has nae gone on for years. Ken what I mean

Marie. Aye

Ella. Aye I suppose it's been going on

John. But

Andrew. But they make it more acceptable

Ella. More acceptable

Marie. Same with Luke Morgan's rape, when he got raped by the boy. I felt sick watching that

Ann. Aye that's right so

Marie. It was my ane fault because of Hollyoaks tell you. You didn't need to watch it and it wasn't it on until 11 o'clock at night but because you watch it

Ann. You do watch it

Marie. You watched it and I felt, I wanted to go down to the toilet and spew because I felt so sick after seeing it. But it was my ain fault because ken to fix it was going to be happening, it tells you it was gonna be

Ann. Aye

*Actually I watched that quite compulsively because during my undergraduate years I did a project on male rape and it was hardly discussed at the time. Hardly anybody knew it happened*

John. Is this homosexual rape?

*No. Male rape. Men raping other men.*

Ann. Just men raping other men

*It's not homosexual*

Marie. It's a homosexual

John. It's not homosexual?

Ann. It's nae homosexual it's just for the sake of doing it

*Its power. In the same way that heterosexual rape is not about desire, it's about power, then male rape is the same*

John. The sort of things that happens in prisons and that sort of thing?

*Yes and that's what the story line*

Marie. The boy wasnae gay that raped him either

*No, it was power. I actually thought it was brilliant*

Marie. It really was, it really was good.

*Balanced story line because guys who were watching it who were going, you'd have to be a bloody pansy to let anybody do that to you, and it suddenly showed that well, no. It doesn't mean you've got to be going to the local gay bar for it to be happening*

Marie. I think it would have been good for maybe men that had been raped and didnae, hasnae discussed, like would be too ashamed to do anything because Luke was like that. He didnae say anything to anybody except it was his brother wasn't it? He said to his brother. But then he finally did come out with it did he?

*Finally yeah and all the guys got sent down but yeah it was just. It's interesting isn't it. It breaches a taboo that's not talked about, it's never been seen and yet it's something that goes on and by actually doing it maybe it's enabled*

Tony. People to come forward

*To come forward and say*

Ann. It's the same with wimmin getting raped. That took a long time before wimmin come forward and say about that.

John. But we have that in culture in the sense that rape is happening with women, the Romans (can't hear this) and it's written into the thing of rape and pillaging goes with war and such like. It's something that were absolutely against and it doesn't edify me in the slightest. I've got a fertile enough imagination to visualise that sort of thing, I wouldn't have to see it on the screen. And I'm nae saying that as a Christian as opposed to, I just think there's enough filth and depravity. I wouldn't (can't hear) at all, sit and talk about it but I don't think it's necessary for it to be portrayed.

*I'll move on because I'm aware time's moving. Do you need to leave Andrew?*

Andrew. Aye and will actually. I'll give you another 5 minutes



*Thanks very much. All the representations, it's slightly going over something I've asked you before, all the representations and the types of characters that we've talked about, at the frequency with which they appear, how does that fit in with your own experience? The kinds of Christians that you've talked about, that are in the programmes the numbers that there are. The way that they behave. How does that compare?*

Marie. I hope not at all

Tony. I think sometimes, so far as Dot is concerned, not that I'm old or anything but I think part of her character is probably true to me personally because I think for a long time I was just accepting being a Christian as the social thing to do.

Ella. Aye

Tony. So I think Dot does have in many ways. I'm certainly different now but certainly in my early-years yes. Because I think a lot of people go to Church because it's socially acceptable to go to. It doesn't mean they actually believe him why they are going or what they are going for.

Ella. No-no will I went all my life to Church when I was young

Ann. So did die because I had to. Because he had to because you mum and dad

Ella. Well we went to Church every Sunday, Sunday school

*But how do those sorts of characters compare with what you know of the Church now?*

Andrew. There is nothing

Marie. I would like to think that Sister, Sister, ken, I would like to think that I would be a bit, well and you thought I would be a bit like them ken Because they mak Church the most, they emphasise it in the programme

Ann. The happiness things

Marie. They do really emphasise the Church and Jesus and I think that's another think. They're always mention Jesus. And I think that's another thing. Even like Dot and that you never hear them mention Jesus do you? Sister, Sister always mentions that Jesus is the most important thing in their life. But yet they don't, you see all these Christian festivals happening and them at it and you see them the time of their lives without drink, drugs, under-age sex or anything being portrayed his Sister, Sister. Ken you see them as young teenagers having a great time and they are Christians

Ann. But they have gone into a club that they werenae supposed to

Marie. Aye Under 21. But they made the thing that they were biding clear awa from the drinks.

Ken they would just going to see a band. But yet they still broke the rules of its



*OK but any of the others know? It's just nothing*

Tony. No definitely not

Andrew. I think ministers have to be strong characters because they have to put up with a lot

Ella. Oh aye I would think so

*And do they show*

Andrew. And yet they won't be characters as they are portrayed of. My son-in-law's and Minister. I know what kind of stuff he's got to deal with. I'm in touch with other ministers as well. They have to be pretty strong characters

*And you just don't see any strong clergy?*

Andrew. Well they're just shown on TV as just something ridiculous. Silly people

*Andrew, do you want to, I want to ask the sort of supplementary question but I don't think it's on your sheets. Some people watch The God Channel?*

Tony. Yes

Andrew. Sometimes

Ann. Yes

Marie. Yes

*Why?*

Marie. It's good

Tony. It's fantastic

Marie. It is really good

Tony. You get lots of different things happening. You get preaching. You get bands. You get stuff relative to her old folk. You get stuff relative to young folk I meant it covers every age range there is. There's times I've watched it and I've been completely gobsmacked because it's so into reality. It's brilliant. It's absolutely super

*How often do you watch it?*

Tony. I would say I've got it on every day of the week at some point

Marie. It's a 23-hour channel so you can watch it when you want

Tony. I certainly watch it when the wife is lying in bed. I can't sleep I'll stick it on. It is absolutely superb. It speaks to you in a real way. I think it's great

Andrew. Aye seldom watch it

John. I watch it early in the morning from have past five to six and later at night so

Marie. It's really good then isn't it John?

John. Yes it is

Marie. It is really good

John. I mean there's usually, the first half a dozen programmes there is usually some form of teaching. For instance they're doing something on Romans just now that's fascinating but it's also a very safe medium in the sense that you're not going to get any nasty surprises in what you're watching. I don't scare easy. Not at all. I mean I've seen a few horrendous things in my life and maybe that's why I choose not to watch that. That portrayal is like a cardboard simulation. When you've seen the real thing you do want to see anything else. It has values. *They do, as I understand it, it's a whole range of programming isn't? You said it was the music and the teaching.*

Tony. O yes there is everything on it. It depends on what you're looking for as an individual. It depends on what the individuals looking for they can find it. It doesn't matter what at some point they are going to get feeding from it. Or what they are going to look for their going to get from it. Whether it's people's search for an answer because there are some fantastic preachers on there as well. Because if somebody is really serious about life and can't find an answer to what they're doing, if they watch some of these preachers then they're going to get it. O some of the guys are so unbelievable, it's amazing. And you get some good Christian bands and I'm not talking about hymns are either. I'm talking very contemporary music. Rock, rap, whatever you want.

Marie. Pop

Tony. You're into hip hop or whatever you want it doesn't matter what you've got its being fed there. So it's there for everybody at all and I think Well basically it's a godsend. I think in today's society

*So how do you feel then when you've been watching the God Channel and then you start watching the other stuff? Does that caused any kind of tension or do you just bracket it off? How do you feel then went you been watching the God Channel and then you start watching the other stuff? Does that cause any kind of tension? Or do you bracket it off?*

Ann. Not really

Marie. Nae with me

John. I think you do compartmentalise things don't you?

Tony. I don't know if you do John quite honestly.

John. I don't think Frazier is reality. I usually tape it in fact because I tend to miss it on a Friday night. It used to be Cheers and now it's Frasier. They just follow after one another you know



*But if you're watching some of the fictional stuff on the God Channel. I mean that's not reality either is it?*

Tony. It depends on how 0

John. What fiction?

*Well you said there were fictional programmes*

Marie. There's Highway to Heaven. That's fiction

Ann. that's fictional

Tony. Yeah but it's still got a message in it

Ann. Aye it's still got a message in it but it's still fictional

Tony. It's like Angel on My Shoulder type off thing whatever you know.

*No but I'm just curious you know, if it's so good, if it gives such a range of programming I suppose why haven't you been tempted just to watch that? Could you see yourself, the more you watch it*

John. I have the Channel which (can't hear clearly . Something to do with Astra and Sky - the satellite channels ) so I get the God Channel .

Tony. Inspiration?

John. No. I get the God channel and I get the Revival Channel. I get travel programmes and the 4th channel which is Euro News and it's terrible news. Now on the radio side of that it also has the 24 hour Bible, seven days a week, 24 hours a day and they read from Genesis through to Revelation. The all-time without any breaks at all, they just read it over and over again. There are several radio channels on that as well. The Revival Channel tends to be on you know revival things and are also Maranatha type of music which is the musical wallpaper type of thing. And I tend to have that on but I am quite selective about what I watch even with God digital. I mean I do differentiate quite easily in fact, readily. The filters go up. As far as I'm concerned

*No I just wondered, you know, if you've got something that is that good. Clearly there aren't any problems in terms of content, there's not going to be anything offensive*

Marie. You see I like all of those programmes as well

Ann. You still like the others ken

Tony. I think what you watch becomes part of you. I'm not being funny in a way it becomes routine to watch it. 7 o'clock at night you put Emmerdale on, half past seven you put EastEnders on or whatever and I mean some people's lives probably go round about their television. But I think, I mean two I like are Emmerdale and The Bill and I've always watched



them and I'd probably always will. But I don't foresee that as having problems within my own mind or within what I believe in myself, personally speaking. I mean I'm not, I mean I stay away from certain things. I cannot cope with horror films personally. I can't, that's speaking personally. Yet my wife can watch that sort of thing but if it goes on I'll go on to the computer and do something else because that does worry me. But that's my own being and that's me as a person saying look I can't cope with that, I don't like it or whatever reason, then I go away from it. I don't watch it and let me introduce anything in to me but I think generally no, I can't see it being a problem. I'll watch what I watch at any time. I'm not saying what I watch is leading to a conflict of my beliefs but I think it's got to be on an individual basis, very much so. I'm not saying, I'm not condemning anybody here for watching whatever they watch because that's again an individual thing. We cannot do that as a person. And I think that goes with anything and whatever happens but I think that generally the most things that I accept I think are good for a laugh. But that's the way I watch TV

Ann. I think some horror films are funny

Ella. And there are some horror films

Ann. And there is some horror films. I mean before I could've sit in and watched every horror film there was but now I cannae. I cannae watch them all the noo

Ella. No I cannae

Ann. Because it does affect me. I'd ken as soon as I put it on if it's going to affect me or no and I just switch it off.

Tony. But it's good when you've got control you can do that

Ann. Aye

*Can I just ask one last question. I suppose because, through watching God Digital then or since you started watching it because it's not been on air that long has it? Has it made you any more aware that mainstream broadcasting is less than desirable or is it really a sort of, that's what I expect from God Digital, that's what I'd expect from mainstream. And if I choose mainstream I know what I'm getting.*

John. You practically answered your own question there

Ann. I ken

*Well I'm just wondering because I don't know*

John. Because I think that, you know that the digital, the God Digital is going to have values. It's going to have standards and they will be applied. I mean they wanted to put in a classical music/ ballet Channel and for whatever reason it didn't come to pass. Now I don't know if it's

that ethical, moral or whatever reason or just practicality in cash because it's hard to, it didn't come through. And they just apply for every show no murder, rape, violence or anything blasphemous for every show. And also it's safe for children to watch. Is that

*Yes. Yes, it's just that, so if you know they are you going to be watching mainstream broadcasting then you just accept that? It doesn't make watching mainstream even less desirable?*

Tony. I think what they've gone and done nowadays so far is mainstream is concerned. I mean a couple of years ago they used to be very tight on this watershed thing. Before a certain time then programmes would not contain say violence, sex or whatever OK. So that kind of covered families and what would be shown. But I think in these days the watershed's gone out of the window personally speaking. I think they put anything on at any time

Ann. They do

Tony. You know I think it's ridiculous. The fact is they are putting on very violent programmes on like at 8, half past eight, 9 o'clock at night when before they used to leave them until after 10.30. I'm not saying kids are all in their beds at 10.30, dinnae get me wrong. But at least parents then were quite safe in saying that their kids cannot get in at this. But these days I think it's gone out of the window personally speaking

Ann. That's right

Ella. Yes, yes

John. I was watching, the first DVD I ever bought was the Unforgiven, Clint Eastwood. And I thought that was absolutely brilliant before I was saved. And I watched it again and the last time I watched it I thought, wait a minute, there was a rape scene followed by murder, blasphemy, you know. Oh dear. It's like do you have to use that particular word? D'you really have to you know. It doesn't edify me. Hasn't done anything for the programme. Doesn't explain any further. I think why should I, like after a bit I just switched it off

Marie. Aye like I do watch watch some programmes thinking there's nae need for them to be saying all that ken like. There's nae need for that

John. Why can't they do something decent. It's terrible. I think why, and I think no I haven't actually. There's a level of decency

Ann. It's the same wi' Fame though. I sat and watched Fame from I was younger right? And it was on maybe a month ago or something. Get this, the swearing in it was unreal. I thought did I sit watching that? I thought well, what a lot of swearing that was in it.

John. We've all been saved now



Tony. Yes. Again yes I think it depends on the individual. I think a lot of us are waking up as towards what is real moral wise in this Church. And as what we accept as individuals is totally what I have not accepted before. I've only been coming to this Church, not even a year yet  
Ann. I thought that was bad. I was shocked

Tony. But the way I have matured personally, as a person, and also my faith. If you had known me a year ago and see me today you'd see two different people altogether. And this is far better because it's come real. It's 24 hours a day seven days a week. It's not just for Sunday and I think you know, that's what's taught in this Church. And I'm not saying we've got the answer here but for me personally we have

John. I tell you I don't even know if it's taught because what's happened to me, if it had happened over a month it would have just killed me. That would have been the end of me. 51 years, living like hell never even, and thinking I was doing OK. You know I'm a good person.  
Aye, I am a good person

Ella. Of course you're a good person

John. I don't ever cheat or steal or lie or stuff like that you know. I was just completely unsaved and so it was interesting you know and yet we're all singing from the same hymn sheet here. We've all come at it from different directions. There's no, I mean Mick the guy who's the pastor doesn't come in and say I will throw a spell over you and you're all going to do this sort of thing. There's no coercion. It grows and it's fabulous and it works. (everyone agrees)

Tony. And I was saying to you today we have so much freedom in here. It doesn't matter, if you want to jump up and dance about you stand up front. If you don't you stand at the back  
*It's the same everywhere*

Tony. but the thing is we'll come in here in a morning and somebody will come up here and they'll put their arm round you and say how you doing? Now you could say to that person I'm not doing very well do you want to pray about it and that's it. Instead of, Oh is that right and they'll walk away from you. I mean it's like sitting in the doctor's surgery. How many people, I've done it personally myself you see somebody in the doctor's surgery, how you doing? Ok I'm doing fine. And you? I'm doing fine. Well what are you doing here. Why are you there?  
You know. But it's totally different here

John. You see somebody you've known for 20 years in the doctor's surgery and you go hello, 0 and that's the end of the conversation



*I think on that point we had better bring it to a close. It's gone on much longer than I had intended. Thank you very much*

## Interview With the Oban Book Club

*Out of all the programmes that you circled on here and anything that might spring to mind in the course of conversation, which of the characters in those programmes would you identify as the religious characters? And on the back of that how do you actually know they are a religious character and what are they like as a character? Does that make sense? Shall I mention some of the programmes that you have ticked? Brookside, High Road, Father Ted, Frasier, ER, Coronation Street, The Simpsons, Friends, Emmerdale, The Bill, The Vicar of Dibley, Casualty Taggart.*

1. I think in Taggart one of the chief, the chief policeman who took Taggart's place, by somebody called McPherson, and when the original Taggart was in it he was the moral fibre. He was the religious guy that a lot of the other cops took a bit of the Mickey out of because he was quite up standing and quite churchy. But I don't know whether his character has changed. I haven't seen Taggart for quite a while. I don't know whether he's maybe one of the boys, now that he's had to take responsibility.

*Does anybody else watch Taggart?*

2. I do but I can't think, no, you're right that's right. But I'm not sure whether he still

1. He didn't drink as part of his religious beliefs. So when they went for a drink for example they would make fun of him; they would make fun of him for having an orange juice. Although obviously, not drinking isn't anything to do with religion. It was part of his persona; his religious and moral fibre was not to drink anything.

3. I didn't realise he was religious I just thought he was that kind of a character. I mean I don't watch it very often but I haven't heard him mention anything about going to Church.

1. Well, you see, that's what I'm wondering whether it's gone by the by. Now that the original Taggart's no longer with us and he's now in Taggart's shoes. I don't think that's so much of an issue now because he's actually taken over the role of Taggart whereas before he was the kind of Patsy that the other guys bounced off of.

*So Alison when you've watched it have you watched it recently?*

3. Not very much. I know the character you mean.

1. I think his real name's James Macpherson or he might be Superintendent Macpherson and I can't remember.

*Is it not Gordon Strachan?*

4. No it's James Macpherson is his name. In real life he took one of those embolisms on a plane he's been written out of Taggart in the meantime. (Discussion of Macpherson's health and career)

*So in the current series it's not very clear whether*

4. In the series that has just finished he was having a relationship with a policewoman, which they were keeping a deadly secret, he was getting his leg pulled about that. By the suave dark-haired one.

3. Did you think he had religious beliefs? As I say I just thought he was that kind of buttoned-up character.

4. I don't think so.

2. I think Norma's right. He definitely did in the first series.

5. In the early days when I watched had it in the very early days and he did have this kind of born again aura about him which was quite kind of disapproving in a way as well wasn't?

2. That's quite a negative image to give them isn't it that somebody religious? You know that somebody buttoned up is quite a negative image.

5. I think religion is portrayed generally very negatively. It's either portrayed, I think religious characters are either kind of creepy or they're kind of stereotyped and slightly sort of ridiculous.

1. I think you're right about the stereotype but then I think the other way of looking at it though, he stuck to his guns he wasn't going to be cajoled to have a pint with the guys, and he just ignored their ribbing. When it came to it, when they would say what are you doing this Sunday Sir, he would say I am going to Church. And he was quite happy about it. I mean I do remember, I wasn't a great fan of Taggart's, but that was the way he was portrayed in the first series, when the original Taggart was in it.

*What about Pauline's comment that they are often quite creepy or stereotyped?*

2. Well, I thought of Mrs Mac from take the high road. It was the first one I could think of. She's sort of odd. She wears odd hats and cleans the Church hall and is just an odd, not odd, but just sort of caricature of a lady who goes to Church. She's becoming more positive now because she's not so much with the Church; she is doing something with the hotel so she's moved away from being seen as a church person. So it's seen again as negatively, you become more whole the less churchy you are. And that seems to be the portrayal.



5. I mean that play I watched last year, *The Loved Divided*, the one that was based on a true story in Ireland about the mixed marriage. The woman refusing to allow the girls to go to the Catholic Church and she actually ran away with them and the priest in it is portrayed as a sort of bullying bigot. And the bishop and the papal legate are portrayed as these kind of typical sort of Cardinal types. Slightly, not creepy, but very political and they were the baddies in that play. Quite definitely and I think this is often how do the Church's, well you get something like that *Vicar of Dibley* where it's, you know just a caricature, just silly.

*Anybody else?*

6. Well that says something as well though. The wacky, off-the-wall, English country Vicar, who happens to be a woman, which is unusual. Well not unusual now but it was at first. It's almost like there's that woolly mindedness isn't there, you know surrounded by larger than life characters.

4. The only thing about the *Vicar of Dibley*, and I know it's funny and it was and it was like that too, but you always saw her in spite of all the things that she did, she had Christian charity which I thought stood out in her relationship with her parishioners.

5. But I mean all the parishioners, all the characters in that's series are just stereotypes, aren't they? I mean there's that daft girl, the squire and the country yokels.

6. But that kind of caricature has been around since Shakespeare hasn't it? It never goes away.

5. That's true.

6. And the only one I watch, the only soap I watch is *Coronation Street* and first of all I was thinking there wasn't a religious person but the only one is maybe Emily Bishop.

4. Yes she is.

6. And she goes to Church and she does fit in with what was saying. She's quite dowdy and a bit serious and doesn't like people having a lot of fun.

4. But she climbs up trees and stays there to maintain the environment so.

2. She's principled.

4. Yes, yes.

7. Wasn't there Ivy Brennan in *Coronation Street*? Was she not?

4. She was Ivy by name and poisonous by nature.

2. But she was a Catholic who was a very difficult character wasn't she?

4. She was.

*Did she not go off to a convent?*

4. Yes she went off to a convent.

*I don't watch it but I'm sure somebody told me that.*

2. That's sort of Shakespearean, get thee to a convent.

4. I don't know if it's connected but you know, when we were talking about James Macpherson in Taggart, there's a man who looks very like him and he's the sports writer for Scotland on Sunday and he also writes an article every week in a magazine. He's on Sports Report and he, which he stands out because of it; he is a committed Christian and writes about it at the same time as writing about football. I think he gets quite a lot of respect for it. He completely overturns this Mad Hatter image.

5. Who is it?

4. Gordon is his name.

2. He just stopped writing for Scotland on Sunday. His column actually changed. I just noticed that in the last couple of weeks. Like you it caught my eye because he seemed to be having a good time and talked about going to Paris with his girlfriend, various things, a normal kind of life but he referred to things which were quite spiritual as well and he seemed quite normal. It was a very good image. Is he on the television now?

4. He's on the television now. I don't listen to these but sometimes they're inflicted upon me. I came in and saw him on the television on Question of Sport I think it was. I thought it was James Macpherson but it wasn't, it was him. I recognised him as the man who wrote the articles. So he gives that, I don't know, it's very like James Macpherson in more ways than one from the descriptions.

*Can I bring you back to the TV programmes? Any other characters that you can think of?*

2. There was that lady in Brookside, who had the terrible situation, her son was killed, she was raped. Sue Johnson that was her real name but she played some character in Brookside and she was a very devout Catholic. She had a lot to deal with didn't she? She became pregnant later on and various things.

1. Her son was murdered.

2. Yes. That seems to be the positive image her strength, her faith would see her through that when her husband couldn't cope with it she could cope. That was a positive image. That was some years ago.

1. That's a long time ago.

*Does anybody currently watch it?*



2. Brookside I do. There's nothing positive. There is something now, there's some female trying to conceive, artificially and her mother doesn't approve because that's against God's law and that's quite a feature just now. That's pretty realistically portrayed.

*There's the son, well be grandson depending on which one you are thinking of. The whole thing with the miscarriage.*

2. Yes he thinks that because he didn't want this other baby to come and replace him as the youngest and he prayed for it to die and she miscarried it's all his fault, sort of thing. So that was quite well dealt with I think. But it's mostly around women. I can't think of a strong man whose life is motivated, well apart from the chap Macpherson's character, a strong man who is motivated by his its.

*In anybody else think of any male characters?*

1. I think Frasier might be the kind of character who goes to Church simply because he likes to do the right thing in society.

*But is there anything in the programme?*

1. No. No I think maybe they'd talk about going to weddings and christenings but no, nothing specific. Just the moral fibre, doing the right thing, nothing specific.

*Not overtly religious at all.*

5. Wasn't there a, I used to watch EastEnders from time to time, wasn't there a vicar in EastEnders a couple of years ago?

2. Oh yes, there was.

5. Being tempted.

3. By the flesh.

5. By the flesh. I can't say any more than that.

7. I remember because I do watch EastEnders. I noticed whenever I was reading the bit, when I watched it the next day one of the boarding houses, the bed and breakfast, that actually it showed, well I assumed it was, from memory, was a Catholic, you know holy water thing on one of the walls. And I thought my God I haven't seen that before. And I suppose it's just made me remember. It was just a wee dip.

4. We never said Ballykissangel did we?

3.No, it that's right.

4. There's the hunky priest.

2. There's a recipe for disaster.

4. Yes, after the last one too.



*Well maybe it would be easier to split it up and say representations of clergy and then representations of laity. So clergy, what have we got? We've got there was the vicar in EastEnders at some point. Ballykissangel. Father Ted. Vicar of Dibley.*

5. There was also a Joanna Trollope adaptation a few years ago, of the Rector's wife.

*Oh yes.*

5. And he had a breakdown so she was the strong person in the marriage. Is there not a vicar being tempted in the Archers at the moment?

*I'm not doing radio. Please don't talk about radio. It's too big. But she's risen above it.*

2. Father Ted that's kind of, that's funny. But it's nicely funny I think. I don't think it's cruel. Maybe it is but I don't think it is.

4. I wonder what they think in Ireland?

7. It's actually been the successful because to be honest it's quite true to life. It's never, it's never, it has been traditionally in Ireland's as shown in Pauline's programme you know where religion was, it was the mainstay. What the priest said, what the bishops said, was done. That was it; there wasn't any flexibility. But now that the society has moved on I think Father Ted was able to poke fun at it and it was very well received. It wasn't regarded as anything because Ireland has moved on. It's not the backwards State so much under the thumb of Catholicism. It's still widely practised but I think that people now make their own decisions - the pill and abortions and all that sort of stuff. There's a lot more questioning about religion and Father Ted was very far.

5. Who was your favourite?

7. The wee one, the curate.

*Father Dougal.*

4. I like the housekeeper too

7. Go on, go on, go on.

1. I think it was the funniest comedy ever to have been on British television. I just thought it was

7. They had a dancing, they had an Irish jig priest. And he just came on and he was just dancing. And they had Graham Norton before he hit it big.

*That mad one in the caravan.*

7. He was the gay priest.

*Can you think of any other clergy? In either dramas or soap's.*

5. There was a clergyman in the Adam Dalgliesh one, what was it, A Taste For Blood. Where the guy got the stigmata – not the priest. He was quite a weak character. Who kind of cashed in on the kudos that this happening in his church gave him. It was on years ago.

*OK, laity. Who've we've come up with in Laity?*

3. Emily Bishop.

2. Mrs Mac.

1. James Macpherson.

2. The lady in Brookside, Sheila, Sheila Grant was her character.

*Oh right. Yes and granny and grandson in Brookside.*

1. And Ivy who went the convent.

*She's not there are any more is she?*

No.

6. Neither is Sheila grants. She's gone.

2. There is a kind of religious element, you know replaced by these up-to-date characters. And that seems a kind of natural tension that you would have been that kind of situation. And that seems OK.

*Is Cath that the only one who watches Brookside?*

Yes.

4. I'm not sure if Inspector Morse was religious or not?

1. No he was an atheist.

4. Was he?

2. He was quite spiritual.

4. Yes he liked music and sort of religious art and buildings.

2. And smells and bells.

3. I can't think of any character at the moment in Coronation Street for instance who talks about or practices of religion but whenever there is a christening or a wedding they seem to go to Church.

*Isn't Emily Bishop?*

3. Yes but

4. It's only a token, a suggestion. It's more of good works

3. She talks more about her hospital visits

6. That's right.

4. Friends of Weatherfield. She raises money for them.

*So how would you know that she is religious?*

4. She collects all the clothes and the veins for jumble sales.

3. Good works.

*But she could do the good works without being religious. And just wondering what the indicators are from the character.*

3. There was a minister, d'you remember when Hayley wanted to get married. She's a transsexual. Did they not get a minister who agreed to do a ceremony for them and had to get permission to do that?

4. That was quite difficult for them to get.

3. She wasn't in it very long this character so I don't know if that's

4. Hayley?

3. No the minister that they got to do the ceremony for them. Because that was what it was they went to see someone, they had trouble finding someone

*Can I just press you on Emily though? Because she was raised initially as being somebody who is religious but what I hear you saying is she just does good works so I'm curious as to what it is*

3. I brought it up. You're saying about the hospital. I think I was kind of thinking her hospital visits were pursed part of Church work but maybe it's not. I kind of associated that with her Church work, you know good works for the Church.

4. I got that impression too but I don't know why.

3. I don't know where I got that from.

4. It's the Friends of Weatherfield, that what it's called isn't it.

3. But she does jumble sales for the Church and things did she not?

2. I think perhaps we've fallen into the trap of thinking that because she does things like that she must be religious.

3. No, I think there is more. I think there is. I'm sure she does go off to Church.

*I mean, other groups have said to me that she is definitely religious but I don't want to give you that information. I want to know why you think she is religious.*

3. Oh well she does take a moral stand. She will actually fall out with people if she doesn't agree with what they're doing. She will say that she thinks things are wrong.

4. Yes. She will

3. She will do that. And I presume it's for a religious reason.

4. And I'm sure she says things like Christian charity



3. And uses phrases

4. Yes I think she does. She doesn't, she's very reluctant to speak ill of people but she's not afraid to speak her mind and say that some things wrong.

*EastEnders? Any EastEnders viewers here? Any characters in that?*

7. Just the vicar.

2. He is no longer there.

1. I don't watch it but is Dot Cotton not religious?

7. Oh yes she is religious.

2. Of course she is. But she's not the best advert for religion you could possibly have.

7. It's the hair I think puts me off. I think my God I might have to do my hair.

*What makes Dot religious? How do you know that Dot's religious?*

2. The good Lord. She uses phrases like the good Lord I think. And sure I've heard her say things like that.

7. She went, when the vicar was there, she went a lot to see the vicar.

2. Yes that's true.

3. Was he hunky?

2. Yes he was actually.

*Apparently it was Mel's brother I didn't know that.*

7. Yes it was.

*I found that out in a focus group.*

7. It's all coming flooding back to me. I don't think there's anybody else in EastEnders who is religious. I suppose when I saw the holy water stand I thought that must mean something. Then I started looking around for more symbols but didn't actually

*That's the doctor's mother isn't it?*

7. Yes who's having the affair with the trollop.

*Yes. She's not happy about it is she?*

7. She's not good enough. I can't remember anybody else.

*Anybody from any of the other programmes that anyone can think of?*

3. On ER they have a chapel in the hospital. I'm just trying to think if anybody uses it but it's mostly just patients who go for a few moments of quiet reflection.

*They don't even seem to have a chaplain in eat our duvet?*

3. In the ER? Yes they do.

*They do? I've never actually seen one.*

3. They'd do.

*Does anybody watch casualty? Has anybody noticed a hospital chaplain in that? Or any religious members of staff?*

6. I think I can remember an episode when, I think it was Dr Green, who must be from a Jewish background, or partly. I think one of his parents was. Never practised but some Jewish character was a patient and it all the family gathered round for possibly the Friday night celebration and he was standing on the perimeter of it all looking in and attracted but not knowing whether he could. But he did it in fact; he was invited to join them but nothing ever developed. It was a one-off

5. It's unusual but that's the only mention of any other religion other than Christianity through all the things we are talking about.

4. Yes.

5. There's very few, what I don't know of any other religions.

*Can anybody else think of any other religions.*

5. There was just one. D'you remember the series Zoë Wannamaker and Adam Faith? One of her friends was a rabbi. There was the woman rabbi.

3. She was quite young and attractive.

5. Yes but that's the only one I can think of.

*Can anyone else think of*

1. I feel as though, going back a number of years, there was a really good series. And it was East meets West, may be set in the Seventies and it was the problems of Pakistani people integrating into city life. And that was put to David Bowie's music.

*But was that about being religious or was it just ethnic?*

1. That's what I'm trying to remember. I think that often the two become embroiled when they are trying to break away from, when they are trying to merge with a different culture. But I'm sure that was portrayed in that. But I can't remember the name of it. It was really popular at the time. It was very risqué as well.

3. It'll maybe come back to you.

6. You don't hear about it characters, ethnic characters on Coronation Street, EastEnders. They don't talk about, you'd expect them to talk about their religion because those communities tend to be religious but they don't.

*Are there many ethnic characters on Coronation Street and EastEnders?*

6. Well at the moment there's Dev and his nephew.

3. That's very recent isn't it?

4. There was an aunt.

6. There was the aunt.

4. And there was the father and a sister. They were all religious.

6. They've sort of been written out now but they didn't talk about it, you don't know whether they were Hindu or Sikh or Muslim. They didn't talk about Diwali

*Nothing at all?*

6. Nothing that I can remember.

4. And it would have been quite interesting if they had and there was a lot of scope for it.

*And I mean EastEnders, well the doctor who's going out with the trollop, he's black and his mum's black and perhaps his mum's Catholic but that's it. There's another black guy in the pub he drinks in the pub is going to get his head shaved for Dot's horrible son but he isn't featured is he?*

7. No they usually just walking characters I think. Usually the main players they have are predominantly white.

*Yes.*

5. Wasn't there any Indian or Pakistani guy, and didn't he beat up his wife? All was that a few years ago?

2. Yes, it yes. Mena she went off with somebody else. That's right.

5. But again there was no kind of sanction for that. You didn't see them as being part of, you saw them as maybe the token coloured person in the programme rather than being there as an interesting character in themselves.

*I suppose to digress slightly the Archers is interesting in Usha, the Asian solicitor is clearly Hindu. At Diwali she either has it at her house and auntie descends and all the family descend or she has to go to auntie's house and it's there. It's not talked about but whenever Diwali is you know that Usha is going to be celebrating it.*

5. You think, I mean you know, quite often these programmes address moral issues, what was the thing you were saying in Brookside?

2. The test tube babies.

5. They quite often feature sort of moral issues and I suppose it's a way of exploring the issues for the people who are watching the programme but you think it would also be a way of getting the majority of the population to understand how an ethnic group or a religious



community or if that could be written in. They never seem to write in the religious aspect of their lives.

*Well, when it comes to moral and ethical issues what sorts of things would you say that they tend to deal with the and when people have to make the decision about a moral or ethical issue what sort of guiding principles do they use, or do they employed, the characters*

3. I don't think that happens that often really. Ann and I were talking about this just recently. We were saying how in soap's it's so concentrated on people's selfishness and concern for their own little problem and very little concern about how their behaviour affects other people. I don't think you see people struggling with the moral issues very often at all. Now, I think maybe you did in the past that I don't know whether you do.

*So if there was some kind of moral issue that came up then in fact any decision that was taken would be based on self?*

3. Well I think yes.

4. They seem to naturalise things that are immoral more than anything. If you look at Coronation Street just now it's making it natural for, you almost feel that the characters aren't behaving properly if they don't sleep with somebody on their first date. Like the problem of teenage pregnancies, they don't show it as a problem. The girlfriend of the girl that got pregnant you know she's into older guys and two-timing guys and from the oldest characters right down; like Rita's sleeping with Anthony whose daughter's annoyed about this because her mother's got Alzheimer's, it's all through the levels of split families and you know, behaviour like that, it's making it seem as if there isn't an alternative that's worthwhile.

3. It's quite sleazy isn't it?

*So would it be fair then to say that people, it seems that people just do what they want?..*

3. That's what's important, it your personal happiness is what's important.

6. Self-gratification.

3. Gratification rather than happiness.

1. I think that occasionally in soap operas can come out with some absolute chance. I don't watch any soap operas but my daughter loves Holly Oaks. And occasionally if I'm having my tea I say what's happening now and there was a really awful dilemma that one of the main characters was raped by another guy.

*Yes, I do watch it.*

1. That opened up a whole can of worms that, or his brother found out and his brother was advocating that the rapist should be brought to justice but his brother at just wanted to

bury his head in the sand and couldn't face up to the fact that this ghastly thing had happened to him and just when he was then ready to face up to this dilemma and bring the perpetrator to court, the rapist turned the whole thing on its head and really it made out that this guy was just bluffing and that he had asked for it; and so it opened up this whole can of worms that if you were put in that situation would you really stand up on principle and say, yes I was raped or would you just back down and just keep it quiet for the sake of your own dignity and your own stance. Because there was a very fair chance, a very good chance that people were going to believe the rapist and not him and unfortunately I don't know what happens.

*I can tell you they all went down.*

1. Oh they did.

*Yes they did.*

1. Oh they did. So there you have it. But for a few weeks, from what I could gauge, it was this cliffhanger. It's on at six at night so it does actually address very sensitively issues like rape because it's way before the watershed.

*Though actually the introduction of the rape story line was one of their late night specials so if you hadn't seen the late night special you kind of missed out on exactly what happens. You just knew that Luke was traumatised by something horrible. It finally came out he'd been raped.*

1. But that was like the whole moral dilemma. Do you assert yourself and say yes this did happen and I want the person brought justice or is it going to be easier for this male character to forget about the whole thing and that was a real moral dilemma for him and for his family.

*Does anybody else watched Hollyoaks or have it on in the house?*

2. I've seen it occasionally, yes.

*It just suddenly struck me when we were talking about that. It seems to me that it probably is one of the few programmes where there are references to other people, it you know the responsibility of actions and how they affect other people. There's this sort of, you did what, you didn't think of, but what about, it will hurt such-and-such, how can you possibly hurts and it's not like in EastEnders. It seems to me any referral to anybody else it's the family, it's not whether it's right to think about what the family is, it's almost Mafiaesque you stick with the family at all costs. Or you refer to yourself. But Hollyoaks does have an awful lot and about the impact and of the consequences of other people's behaviours. And it's got a Christian in it at the moment. Zara, the hideous teenager, is going out with rebellious boy, or*

*so she thought, and it turns out he's part of some Christian, I don't know what's Goth, punky rock band. It's quite interesting.*

6. Do you think that might be to do with the age group it appeals to because a lot of these soaps that are aimed at teenagers or were originally like Neighbours, tend to move through moral issues so quickly, it's breathtaking. But they tend to start off with maybe someone adopts a difficult teenager but they stick with it and you can see that slowly their behaviour starts to reverse and they become a much more amenable person who has got social responsibility and it looks like they keep doing that in teenage soaps as if to say well OK you might steal, you might be promiscuous, but if you are taken into a welcoming family who are going to support you, you will be able to turn around that kind of behaviour. Whereas in adult soap it's so much more pick-and-mix morality where you think well, OK other people think that's wrong but I think this is going to be fine for me. Adults expect to have more choices I suppose.

1. I would say definitely for Neighbours Anne and soaps of that ilk. But Hollyoaks is that one step removed because things don't actually always end up like you see changes in people. I actually hardly watch this so I've maybe just got tuned into the right bits of it but I think at the moment there's this one girl who's really gone off the rails and she's gone back to prostitution and it's not all like you come in, and you're welcome to with friends and family, but then things get better. Things go terribly, terribly wrong for people as well. I think she's very well written and I think it's the way that, because it is generally for younger adults. Young adults I do believe bounce off each other quite a bit so you're seeing, them more open about saying look that's really not right, you were out of order. Whereas I think in adulthood and in different sorts of pockets of community, like in soaps, it's not an easy to turn round and say look Mrs Magee you were out of order or what have they ever whereas there are all part of a peer-group. Is it a college there at?

*Well they're not all at the same college no. Some of them aren't. No, not necessarily. I must say it's not something that has ever occurred to me until talking about it just now. Would other people agree that most of the other adults soaps people are motivated by self-?*

(General agreement)

5. They're very dysfunctional aren't they?

*And decisions are either it governed by, do I stand by the family, whatever's best for the family is best for me or it's just whatever's best for me and then, if there happens to be family well they'll cover up and pick up the pieces.*



6. Well the Rita Anthony dilemma in Coronation Street is a perfect example of that. On the face of it it looks dreadful that Anthony would divorce his wife who couldn't even understand what is going on. And Rita turned initially turned against her and Emily gave her a hard time about it and she gave Anthony a hard time about it. But Anthony is sticking to his guns because he says the marriage wasn't fulfilling before she had Alzheimer's and that he should have made the break years before. So he's not willing to back down on this moral issue. You can see Rita warming to this, coming round to the idea of OK we've got to have some kind of life to gather. Whereas I believe at one time that would have been a complete no-no. People would have been very judgmental about the divorce and it just wouldn't happen but now people seem to make their own choice about that and everything will work out in the end. That's the impression I get.

*Do people think that's a change in soap writing styles or reflection in actual social change?*

5. I think it's reflecting the social change. I think a lot of things that are happening in soaps with the idea of self-being the most important thing, rather than self within a community whatever that entails, I think that's just a reflection of how society.

3. The soaps are influencing that too.

5. Well yes there is a two-way influence there.

4. I don't understand why he's so adamant that he has got to get divorced. The woman's not going to know the difference. It's as if he has to have this kind of, he wants to get divorced and to get married to Rita. So if anything goes what's the point?

*So you think there's some sort of moral problem there?*

4. What is the point? He's saying he's not going to abandon his wife, he still going to pay his share towards her upkeep. He still going to visit her but he wants this kind of accolade.

3. Do you mean about making an honest woman of Rita rather than live with her?

4. Well this is it. I mean if people can live together that's fine, I think, so why do they have to go through this kind of trauma if they don't still at the back of their minds have this thing that they must get divorced if you know, you can't do it yourself.

*Can I just pick up something Pauline and Alison said there about the effects being a two-way process. In what way would you see television as having an effect when we're talking about things like soaps?*

3. I couldn't be specific about it is just a feeling I have. But I do think television is really tacky and sleazy these days. I think it's getting much worse and it's bound to influence young

people when they are seeing, just as we're saying, about selfishness, the way ahead, and the way to go for. I think it has a very bad effect.

*But that's just on young people then? I mean would you see it as having an effect on yourself?*

3. I think, I hope it wouldn't but I don't know

5. It's almost as though people think, it's reinforcing the idea that it's OK for people, real people, to be selfish if this is the way they are behaving. You know it's reinforcing the belief in the self, that the self that is all-important. If that's what they're seeing portrayed on the television all the time.

1. Is nobody altruistic in soaps?

3. I really don't think so very much at all, it really I don't.

2. There is no sense of obligation or duty you know an obligation that you just can't break and you're stuck with that obligation.

3. I mean that I don't think that entirely reflects society and there because I think they're still a are a lot of people who are, take their obligations seriously but you worry that would continue if this is the diet, we're going back to young people but I suppose they're the ones that are influence more, I don't know. An age when they would be influenced by it.

7. But do you not think that would be a cycle in the same way the acquisition of money was all-important and then people started to see it wasn't and you have the downgrading of lifestyle. People who are working in the City said that no, money wasn't that important, pressure wasn't that important. So is its

3. You see I feel that's very short term. I think that will change again. Things change in decades rather than in centuries. I can imagine in another 10 years it'll be back to loads of money and money is really important isn't it.

*Can I just press you on this effects question? If you have the feeling that it really affects young people how much are you aware of the effects it has upon yourselves? Or do you think there is something unique about young people and when you were young people watching television how did it affect you in ways that it no longer affects you?*

3. I didn't actually see any television and till I was 18 so I can't really answer that. Would you not have been the same? How old were you when you first saw television?

5. I was about 15 when we got the television.

4. God I was quite old when we got a television. But I think what were talking about is like when I was younger, when they started having the likes of Bill Haley and the Comets.



And it was seen, like when we had what we called jam sessions and that meant playing records and things, there was a fear that it was going to cause an outbreak of bad behaviour and everything which it didn't do but the thing has kept on going. I really think, this isn't actually much to do with the television, but the promotion of people like Liam Gallagher her and all these really badly behaved people, I don't think it does anything for young people. I think watching television, older people subconsciously are affected too. In my case a lot of the time I get quite angry when I see a lot of the things they're saying because I don't think it's right. The kind of ideas they are promoting as natural. If you see something which shows the resilience of the human spirit it means an awful lot more. That's how books and plays and things last whereas if you see sleaze you just feel as if you're walking through it yourself. And a lot of the things you see are really sleazy.

1. I suppose, just in view of the fact that Coronation Street is on, is it four times or is it 3?

3. Four.

1. Four times a week and EastEnders is the same, that must be what Joe public wants.

4. Well it's what they get.

1. But then EastEnders and Coronation Street Anne have got the highest viewing figures out of all the television programmes in Britain. I mean Friends or something gets, is it like 2 million and EastEnders gets

*13 or 14 million depending on the episode.*

1. So I mean a lot of them tune into it.

5. But I mean they're hyped up. You see the "everyone's talking about it" runners for it. I mean it's hyped up that something terrible is going to happen or controversial.

4. That's another thing even, like I watch Coronation Street but it becomes a habit and you hope it will get better but instead of that

1. Well maybe it's because it's like a habit you need more fixes you know you just need more

3. I'm sure that's true

1. You need more "who's getting split up now. There has to be yet another story line.

5. It's almost like, it's like when you see disasters unfolding, real disasters unfolding on television, you get, not a fascination with it but you get kind of punch drunk. The impact, you know the magnitude of the disaster is not there any more because you've seen it before, so maybe in the soaps in the same way it's like a sort of drug thing. You need more of the drug to



have the same effect. So things have to go on getting worse and worse and worse for people to get their fix almost.

6. I don't see it as a drug because I find it very easy to break the habit of soap operas. I used to watch a lot more than I do now. I only really watch Coronation Street now that my mother's been in hospital for the last six weeks and I've rarely seen it and I just don't miss it at all. I really don't. If I am home on the night that it's on I don't even feel that I've missed the story line. It just seems that you can pick up straight away even if you haven't seen it for three weeks. It doesn't seem to make any difference.

3. No.

4. Nope. I think that's truthful.

6. And it really wouldn't bother me if I never saw it I don't feel addicted to it though I do admit to watching it. But I don't feel that it would cause me any problems if they said tomorrow Coronation Street will not be screened ever again. No bother at all.

1. But that was kind of like, I know we're not to talk about films but that was kind of the ethos of the Truman show. I don't know if you seen that film. He was a living soap opera and at the end of it the two guys said what's on telly next after he'd gone through the, so maybe people just watch any way regardless of what's on.

3. There isn't anybody who is the kind of celebrity from being on television, you know who become celebrities who in their part sets a, you know who people respect, who have moral fibre, is there? Is a celebrity that is well respected by people. I can't think of anybody.

*What just sort of famous for being famous rather than actually as actors?*

3. Really, really famous just because they have got a part in a soap or whatever. And they are because anything that happens to them, it's sometimes on the news even. There was that chap from Coronation Street got mugged and it was all over the news. So these people are really famous but I don't think

4. And they're just the same when they speak. They're hardly actors to my mind. But the likes of John Thaw, Inspector Morse, and the quality of the programmes he has done speaks for themselves I think. Well I think he's a really good actor. The things he acts in I think you remember them.

2. He's a kind of heavyweight now; he's become a heavyweight.

4. Yes. I would say he is the star.

2. But is not a religious person. Not somebody you would say portrays himself as a moral, and mean I could see there would be a very good line for the TV series of soaps. Somebody who had high moral grounds and had to deal with every single day.

3. Was respected and was fun. You know somebody positive.

2. How would you actually cope with the X, Y and Z? That would be a really good Easter programme. Somebody you knew had certain expectations, who battled with themselves and sometimes failed and sometimes succeeded, and that would be a really good way of dealing with a whole load of issues that nobody's ever tackled it that way.

*Why do you think they don't? Why do you think it's not possible to have that sort of religious character in soap? You know battles, their faith is a source of strength as you say, sometimes they fail, sometimes they succeed.*

3. I suspect they're too scared to try it because they think people will think that's really boring. That they think the public wants people who are outrageous and breaking rules, moral rules all legal rules or whatever.

*And yet they do have some religious characters but really the characters we came up with earlier all seem to be fairly limited.*

7. But is that not the same way as for example magazines whenever they put a normal woman on the front of the magazine it doesn't sell but if they have a skinny model it does sell. Now it's the same people who are buying it. I think at times people don't want normality they want something else, they need to take themselves out of their lives and to a certain extent this gape and look at that. And I think that we do like Pauline said, we do need to have a continually heightened, it has to be more off the wall, it has to be more immoral, it has to be to captivate us. Because I think at times people have to be taken out of their own lives for half an hour or an hour.

5. But I think if I wanted escapism I wouldn't want to watch EastEnders where they all seem to have such dreadfully depressing lives. My escapism would take a quite different form.

2. Maybe it makes you feel your life isn't as bad as them so it must be OK will start

5. Well I suppose so.

7. It's the same way with when we buy magazines that don't have ordinary women on them.

3. There are things on television now that are soft porn aren't they really? And would not have been allowed to 10 years ago. I really do think you could switch channels and become fronted with the most horrendous perversions

1. But do you not think that

3. And not that late at night it's, you know. Channel Four's particularly bad about 10 o'clock at night. I'm sure a lot of young people must say oh my, it's boring and change over. I'm sure they're not shocked by it but you think it must affect how their, you know, their relationships if they see these explicit sex scenes on television. Which they can see so easily.

6. I read that the Coronation Street writers got together and one of them came into the room and said, who is the happiest married couple on the street, and at the time it was Kevin and Sally, and the leader writer or the producer said right, OK, let's split them up. And I've seen that written-down and I've heard it quoted. So they are, to them, you're a boring character. The character developments going nowhere if you're a happily married couple.

4. That's right.

*So it d'you think that same sort of thing applies to religion? To show somebody for whom religion is a source of strength who actually deals with issues from a religious perspective that actually that's just too boring.*

3. I think so.

2. I think the weighing up would be alien to most people. The actual notion that what you want to do is not your guiding light would be alien to most people who would watch that. They wouldn't understand the concept. This is what I want to do but is it actually the right thing to do against the set of principles that people don't have. So I think it would miss a lot of people. They wouldn't be able to identify with any dilemma. There be no dilemma if that's what you want to do, do-it- would be the common perception.

1. I disagree.

*Would you see how it could be done dramatically?*

1. Well don't you think it's, I don't see why you would have to portray a religious person to have these moral dilemmas and principles because the vast majority of people have the same sets of principles and moral dilemmas; whether they follow a set religion or not. It depends on the moral fibre of the person.

2. Yes but I haven't seen much in the way of moral fibre in the sense of, call it like moral fibre or Christian, or any set of principles, like that's what I want to do but it's not the right thing so I'm not going to do it so I can't do it. I haven't seen that process in anything that I have seen lately. I really want, I really want to marry so and so, and Anthony really wants to be with Rita but it's going to be so upsetting for my wife and my family I mustn't do that. I haven't seen that kind of I want, but I can't have because.



4. Even in Emmerdale, that Vicar, I think it's Ashley isn't it? What kind of character is he? I mean

*What you think of him and? How would you see him?*

4. I mean I would see him as a wimp.

*Why? What is it about him that wimpish?*

4. Well there didn't seem anything special about his relationship with Bernice. They were sleeping together and not wanting the village to know about it. That's not my might idea of a vicar you know.

3. It wasn't. Not honest that.

4. I don't object of people sleeping together but it's not my idea of the vicar. And the fact that they were doing it and they didn't want people to know about it. I think if you're in a position like that you should be above reproach. And I don't mean it's reproach but if they think it's wrong they shouldn't be doing it. It's not what I think is wrong.

*I mean you should either be upfront about it or not do-it- instead of skulking around?*

4. That's right. It doesn't add a religious dimension to it as far as I can see. I don't watch it all the time, not very often and I switch-off because I don't watch EastEnders any more because it was so depressing. I'm watching Coronation Street in amazement wondering how much worse it can get and it's not because, talking about the way you can behave, if you had I Claudius on there were much worse scenes in it, than what you would see on television but it was a great programme. It's the quality. It's like always giving you the Daily Record and never a quality newspaper. That's what the television is doing

6. So you really need a quality soap?

4. Just quality programmes I think. I really do think that the programmes, they stand out the programmes that are good.

1. I think actually some of the children's soap operas are very good. Grange Hill is very good and Byker Grove is very good.

*Yes.*

4. I would agree with that. When the children were younger I saw better programmes than I've seen recently.

1. And why its stuff you're talking about like moral fibre and making choices and having to stand out from the rest they cover issues like bullying, being deceitful, being a class thief. Like at the moment one of the teachers has prostate cancer and one of the pupils is

pretending he's very sympathetic and he's actually laughing behind his back, so there's a lot going on in these kids' programmes.

5. Who watches Grange Hill?

1. My youngest watches Grange Hill but she also watches Byker Grove. I don't think Byker grove is on just now.

*No it's not on just now.*

5. When my daughters were that age I used to watch Grange Hill every day with them because I thought it was good

1. It is a soap opera.

5. There was a big drugs issue one time and you wanted to go and watch the next episode to see what was happening.

2. That's the morality of the young people that's more coming back to saying, that the young people seem to be responding to that, making choices, you know what to do, how it's going to affect other people. But it doesn't seem to venture its way through into adults.

4. I mean I think they do bother about the proper issues and things.

*So I mean are we saying as adults we don't? Any as adults that's why we watch it in millions and millions and millions? You turn 18 and moral fibre disappears out of the window.*

2. It's a gradual thing. Just on the question of, an example of Rita and Anthony I have a client situation which is exactly the same. (Discussion of Cath's client) so I sent it off to this lady with the power of attorney and she said, that's just like Rita and Anthony. That was her very words. It seems like a fantastic story line but it's happening in Scotland. (Further discussion of the case). But when she got the letter she got on the phone to me and said this is just like Rita and Anthony. And it was like art imitating life. It seemed like a fantastic story line and yet she said, this is somebody, she hates this man, who has let her sister down so badly. There she is immobile and unable to speak and he's saying unless you do what I want and going to

6. So what are we delivering morality through soap operas to our young people? Is that how they're getting their moral values now? Instead of possibly more organised religion at some point in time. Is there now an ethos that runs through programming that a check must be kept on what is screened to youngsters, that over 18 anything goes?

1. But then it would be called censorship.



*Yes, well it operates. Very quickly, one last question, the characters that we've talked about, the programmes we've talked about, in terms of quality and quantity of representation how does it fit with your own experiences?*

1. Could you repeat that please?

*Yes sorry, it's really long winded. You know, the numbers of religious characters that you see and the types that you see how does that actually fits with your own personal experience of people who are religions?*

1. Well, I know this group very well. We meet every month and really, apart from Anne who I work with, I didn't actually know anyone's religion. So religion doesn't really feature much in my life as far as knowing that person who he or she is.

5. I think religion doesn't feature in how I feel about people but their, I was going to say moral fibre that didn't quite mean that, but their humanity and their concern for others and that feeling that they're a part of the community would be important to me. You know, somebody that I thought was just purely for themselves and never did anything that wasn't of benefit to them, that would affect me more than what a person's religion is.

7. I come from a society which is very influential in its religion and there are things that, I think this is a good way (can't hear the rest of this sentence) its

*Sorry. Maybe let me just clarify. The kinds of religious people that we've talked about, that we see in the soaps, that have tended which have tended to be fairly narrow-minded, stereotypical, limited characters, is that right? (Agreements all rounds) it's your own personal experience of people who are religious does that fit its? Or if you don't have does it fit with your perception of, that's really what religious people are like? Or it's what I remember them being like from when I was a child. Is that a clear question?*

1. I think the point I was trying to make is, not really knowing any of this group's religion but I do know all these ladies lead very interesting lives so perhaps we really don't need to know a soap character's religion because in reality do we really all know each other's religion, unless we sit beside them in Church?

*Well, that's fine that's what I'm trying to*

2. I think that's, that's not my experience. I think people, my experience of people who are religious now is because they want to be, are very interesting because how people who are now of faith, I know who are really strong adherents of faith, they interest me because I wonder how can you be this person, how can you actually stick it didn't all that's going on? They're interesting rather than dull is my impression.



5. I think that people who are religious or feel they have religious beliefs now, I think less people go to Church or whatever because they think it's their duty or it's socially expected, I think the people that do go up the people that like Cath says have firm religious beliefs. So I don't think, I would say it was maybe true in the past, type of characters we've been talking I think that was maybe true in the past, that I think people who have the genuine religious faith now I don't think that's a fair representation any more. Although I can remember people in my past who would have fitted well into that.

3. Yes I was going to say you do remember people like that with an annoyance if they have tried to take the high moral ground or suggest they were better than other people, you do remember that with some distaste that I don't know what that's a much now.

6. I don't identify with any of the religious characters in the soaps at all. The people that I know who are religious are very diverse in their characters and choose to live their life how they want to.

*Anne?*

4. I don't think so either. I hardly touched on religion and I'm not religious but I would be very interested if they did show a dimension of how Hindus or Muslims, or people like that, and I think it would be very good for society if it was a more natural part of understanding about other people. And, I mean, I think for children too. I think the more that you can learn and understand about others the better it will be and I find that the kind of characters that are portrayed are caricatures or they don't follow it through.

1. There is actually a very good comedy programme on and it's run by Asians. It was on the other night. It may be brings up the Hindu and Muslim divide.

*Oh Goodness gracious me?*

1. Yes. I saw that for the first time the other night and it's really good, very witty.

3. I'd heard it was. But I've never watched it. It's been on quite a while my.

1. Yes and that's the first, the only thing I've ever seen with Hindus and Muslims looking at themselves and having a laugh and bringing up the divide and how crazy any divide is.

*I think it's quite interesting because so often you get this blurring of brown face means an ethnic label and it's Asian. Well you might be an India or you might be a Pakistani, and then somehow you're a Muslim. You know the idea that actually depending on which parts of India you come from you'll be Hindu, you're Muslim, you might even be Christian. Which part of Pakistan. I like it from that point of view because it makes it clear that just because you've*

*got a brown face does not mean you're this one thing. Anybody want to make one last comment about what we discussed? Did I cut you short on anything?*

1. I just wondered, could I ask because it's just come to mind? It was a Take the High Road special on at Christmas, did anybody see it? Well it was so bizarre. I can't believe it wasn't a parody of take the high road but this was the Christmas special. There's a character in take the high road called Sneddon and he's had quite the chequered past and the whole episode was about him meeting the devil and having to address his sins and redeem himself.

*A variation on Scrooge or something?*

1. Yes and there was a wee fairy guy who was a New Age traveller he seemed to come in and work magic. It was quite bizarre. It just came to mind and I wondered if anybody else had seen it.

(No all round) so

*Had he had too much to drink and this is what happened?*

1. He had dozed off and this was it. He had gone through this and it was how he was going to then help people. I think he had fathered child in many episodes before and he'd done some of this wrong and he'd done things. All Sneddon's past. He had to; he was going to be a better Sneddon from that day on.

*Is he?*

1. I only saw the Christmas special. I was completely fixated with it. He must have been on the magic mushrooms or something.

*OK thank you very much everybody*

*End of the interview*



*First of all, in the programmes that you ticked and said you are interested in, can you think of any people who are religious or who are supposed to be a religious person? If so what are they like and how do you know they are supposed to be the religious person in the programme?*

Well, Dot in EastEnders.

That's what I was going to say.

She's always quoting chapter and verse. Spouting forth from the Bible.

The Vicar of Dibley, of course. And Father Ted, they're the only two I watch.

*Any of the other programmes?*

Well there's a wee boy in Brookside, Anthony in Brookside.

Oh yes.

And in Star Trek there's a councillor who is the equivalent of a religious spokesperson.

*Really?*

Oh yes.

*It's a long time since I have watched that.*

It's a sort of futuristic religion. It's the nearest equivalent they've got to it.

*Some of the programmes that people have said are Holby City, Casualty...*

There's Ballykissangel just back on again.

There's the High Road. Mrs Mac in the High Road.

Oh yes.

*Let's see what else we've got. The Bill, Casualty, Taggart.*

Taggart, seems to be all the bit parts in those. Taggart, you don't see very many unless they've been murdered.

No, wait a minute Jardine. Chief Inspector Jardine he's a Christian.

*Is he?*

Yes, in Taggart.

*Oh right.*

That's right he goes to Church.

*Does he? I'd got confused I thought he was in real life.*

No he is in the programme as well.

He is in real life as well.



*Right OK. Buffy?*

Somebody it watches.

I do there's lots of waving of crosses about. But it's not religious.

*OK. Coronation Street?*

Emily Bishop.

Oh Emily yes. She does a lot of work for the Church.

*Emmerdale?*

Well there's the vicar.

The vicar, Ashley.

*The Bill?*

No.

*Cold feet? Neighbours?*

Don't watch it.

Neighbours. No, I don't think there's anybody in particular. There's a wedding coming off and it's coming off in the Church but I don't think there's anybody.

What about Harold?

Oh yes, there's Harold's. Harold and the Salvation Army, yes. You're right.

*Morse, Frost, West Wing? This is all yours Anne.*

Yes, I don't think they have time in West Wing. They're always dashing around in west wing.

Morse is too self-obsessed.

And he's dead now.

He probably did need the Church.

No he wasn't churchy from what I remember

*Did I say the Bill?*

Yes

*So nothing. So if we take some of those characters that you have mentioned, what are they like and how do you know what they're actually supposed to be religious? You've said Dot Cotton quotes the Bible.*

And she goes to Church; she's always going to Church.

Even if it's not a Sunday.

She's always trying to help people. And Mrs Mac in High road course, she's over the top.

She cleans the Church and decorates it.

I don't think she's just as bad as she used to be.

No.

Or as good as she used to be.

*What are they like, Dot and Mrs Mac, as personalities?*

In the soap?

Yes.

Very strong.

Oh they are.

*In what way?*

Opinionated.

Yes.

*How do you think they are seen by other characters in the soaps?*

Cranks.

Yes they are.

They put people off.

*Do you think their clear religiousness puts them off? Is that part of it?*

Yes it is.

Their holier than thou attitude probably puts people off.

*Emmerdale, the vicar.*

He's all right.

Yes he's quite normal isn't he?

He's a bit, if necessary, a bit wishy-washy.

Inoffensive

He could do with being a little bit more

More religious

Well I don't know so much about religious but more decisive. Although he does have strong opinions too, because when they were getting married he really wanted to take that job in Leeds. He felt that was what he wanted to do.

*Was that from a calling perspective? Really felt God was calling him perspective?*

Yes. Yes.

He's more like a modern minister isn't he? He's more like the younger ministers he's got that sort of attitude. Not like the older ministers when I was young.

He doesn't tend to put people off.

No.

I don't know that they go especially but he doesn't put people off.

*I was going to say how exactly does he compare to what you would expect of a minister? Or your own experience of ministers?*

I find he's very like the younger minister that you get. He's more pastoral and he's easy to talk to whereas some of the older ministers were a bit, you have to keep your distance.

Most of the ministers I see on television are like either Father Ted or the vicar of Dibley or

They're something to laugh at

I M Jolly type.

Fire and brimstone or they're wishy-washy.

Ashley, I think he's quite normal, I think he's quite reasonable.

Ashley, yes he's reasonable.

They're always extremes shown, they're always shown as extremes, definitely.

*What about the people then who aren't ministers, the ones who have the faith? How would you say that, right we've said Dot and Mrs Mac are a bit off-putting, Emily Bishop?*

No, she's not off-putting

She's a normal kind of Christian I would say.

She's got very definite ideas and very definitely marked right and wrong. No...

Grey areas

Slightly edge, no rippley edge, you know, that might, she's very definitely yes or No.

But she doesn't push it down people's throats like Dot does

No, but she does make her point. For instance recently when Rita and Anthony, she didn't

agree with that and she did make the point, even if it did upset Rita she still made the point.

*Is it clear that she is making that point from a Christian perspective?*

Yes

Yes

Well I didn't think it was very Christian of her to do that.

Well, that was her policy.

That's her policy but I still didn't think it was very Christian of her.

No, I agree with you but

There's no forgiveness in it, if that's the case. Is there any forgiveness in it? That's what the Christian religion's about.

Yes.



But what's right is right in her eyes and she thought that.

But that's not religious and that's morals. That's her morals.

*It's interesting though it isn't it because it seems to me that people like Mrs Mac, although I don't watch High Road, but from what everything everybody says and Dot Cotton, and there's a woman in Emmerdale, is it Edna?*

Yes

Oh she's brilliant

*But it is this totally unforgiving Christianity isn't it? Well that's my impression of it.*

Yes.

There is no forgiveness in its.

*It's about rule. It's almost Old Testament rather than Christian isn't it?*

Yes

You know an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth and as you say forgiveness doesn't feature largely in it.

It's all very well preaching from the pulpit and things but to do it to somebody you have known for years is not very forgiving.

Well maybe that's why they're more of a joke in the programme's because they are over the top, you know because they do the sort of things, because if you were a normal Christian, doing the proper things that you should people wouldn't be laughing at you. I mean they don't really carry out everything they profess.

Having said that Edna did wrong recently. She took the dog over to France without a passport.

So you know the rights and wrongs obviously didn't quite stick.

*Interesting. How did she justify that?*

She didn't. Just that she couldn't be separated from him and she had to go and see her son or something. She had to; she couldn't leave the dog behind.

*But she didn't deal with it in terms of her faith?*

No.

*It was conveniently forgotten was it?*

Yes.

She did a bet too. She took a bet on the horses

That's right.

She knew she was doing wrong when she did that.

She knew about the dog too but she just hoped no one would find out about her.

She was also blackmailed from the other two that got married

That's right.

*I was watching it roundabout Christmas when there was the big ding-dong with her and the vicar over his proposed marriage and this whole living in sin. And it actually seemed to me that her problem was with sex or sexual sin; it didn't actually seem to go over to anything else. Actually she was complaining about the pub and that the fiancée owned the pub and it was a den of carnality and all the rest of it at and you sort of think, yeah it just seems to be physical sin. And certainly if she can turn a blind eye to pet passports and gambling. Who watches Brookside? Oh, 3 of you.*

Only by default. I can't get out of the room quick enough.

Oh why do people not to admit to watching it?

I don't watch it.

He makes a deal on a Saturday night.

I'll do anything I wash the dishes make the tea, anything rather than watch an hour of Brookside.

*What about Anthony?*

I think he's brilliant.

Yes, the Pope in training.

Who is Anthony?

He's the wee boy. He's a Roman Catholic. But you find that with the Roman Catholic religion.

People are inclined to be a bit more open about their faith than we are.

He's feeling guilty at the moment because he's feeling responsible for her losing the baby because he prayed for her to lose the baby.

*Well what do you actually think about the way he's been dealt with in terms of a portrayal of somebody whose religious. I mean everybody we've talked about so far seems to be a bit extreme, apart from Ashley, he seems to be a reasonable representation of a more modern Vicar.*

I think that the vicar of Dibley is a more modern representation.

*We'll come on to her in a minute. But the three, four women we've been talking about all seem to be harking back to a slightly more old fashioned and more judgmental type of religion with more than a touch of hypocrisy thrown in. What about the way Anthony is dealt with? The whole family I suppose.*

He seems to have a very old head on young shoulders. It's a bit too much. You don't see too many young people to compare him with.

I think it's a good idea. It's good to see children portrayed in a religious way because if it went true to fashion there should be more people would join in religion. I was going to say the Church but whatever branch of religion. And I think it's quite a good idea to see a child, a youngster, portrayed in that way. OK it's fun the way it's put over but I think that it's a good idea.

When you said if it was more true to fashion did you mean if television was more true?

*I'd just meant if there was more youngsters were interested in religion*

It's not normal. It's not normal. You don't get young kids of 7 or 8 talking about it. I mean I work with them every day and none of them speak about Jesus or God, you know. They don't

No it doesn't seem bad either.

No, but it is kind funny for a young child at that age to be so into religion.

*D'you think it makes a difference with him being Catholic and presumably he is at a Catholic primary school?*

O yes absolutely because they go through all the rituals that we don't. Maybe they are more in to it than we are.

I think his grandmother is influential.

She's a Catholic as well.

She's strong in the religion she's perhaps, that is perhaps where he's taking it from. I don't think anybody really pushes him. I think he's like that

No, he's like that

He's quite happy to do so.

But the family think he's a bit kind of iffy because he's so.

Because they're older and into more nonsense.

*I have to say I thought that whole thing about the miscarriage and his uncertainty about whether he caused it by praying and the discussions he'd had with his granny and then the priest came round to do the little service*

That was quite sensitively done

*That was my feeling. It seemed like an unusually realistic portrayal of the Catholic faith.*

My daughter-in-law is of the Catholic faith and we found that. That she had a, more intensity than we did about doing things and she just has different ideas altogether.



Vicar of Dibley.

Yes.

*What would you like to say about the vicar of Dibley?*

Well, the Vicar of Dibley, she's an icon for the modern minister, in fact. Because she does things, unorthodox things which you do see ministers, real ministers, try to do. I mean they had one thing with the children, she had a pet's day where the Church was full of animals and we tried that too. Those things happen. Most of the things that you see that are outrageously funny like the Nativity that they had when she had the real people and the baby, and mean these things they don't happen but it's a great idea which she did. Where do they get the ideas from? Some ministers would pay money to get ideas like that. The problem with that is I think they forget, will forget, they remember that it's a sitcom and they don't copy because everyone will know that they've done that. But apart from the fact that she's female in a male-dominated world.

Laughter

But it is that, but it is that

Well certainly in the Church of England.

In the, vicar in England she is a minority. Although it's not as bad as it used to be that even in Scotland where do you see. There's only one female minister in this town.

There's 2 in the presbytery (discuss local clergy close brackets

The vicar of Dibley I think she puts it over in an attractive way. In a way that people might want to go to Church.

*D'you think there is any way in which it can be said to be making fun of religion.*

Actually no.

No.

No, actually no. I've thought about that. All of the bad taste humour has got nothing to do with the Church. And there's no attempt to make out; she's not a hypocrite. There's no attempt to hide anything. She was having an affair with the laird's brother. It's all pretty open and above, I don't think it does any harm for religion, going to Church anyway.

She brings in this business of talking to the photo of Jesus when she's doing things.

I honestly think that this is what's wrong with a lot of religious things, there's a lack of humour. This sense of humour is one of the most important things any religious person should have. Then they wouldn't make a fool of themselves so often. By being so dogmatic.

I think this is one of the thing that's wrong with our Church today, people think it's too staid  
and too

Well they do.

There's not enough fun and you go there and you going to be miserable and this is what  
detracts the young folk.

And they're not good enough to go to it.

I don't know so much about not being good enough to go.

And then they think we shouldn't be going because we're not good enough to go up either.

Yes.

*I suppose it's all these sorts of things that I'm trying to look at in this research. I'm curious, is  
there any connection with that the way religious people are shown on television and  
with the way the unchurched see religious people in society.*

I don't think it helps.

No it doesn't. No they definitely don't.

I would say maybe, it's the way they are not shown on television. If they were shown as vicar  
of Dibley and Ashley and things like that a lot more people would go to Church. A  
friend of mine is a dentist and he says that when they started advertising toothpaste,  
before they started advertising toothpaste on television they had every month a couple of  
what they called bad mouths with people were they took all their teeth out and now he  
says they've got one a year, since this started advertising. And so the power of  
advertising is wonderful and it would, if they did it in the right context, promote  
religion.

But do you notice that all these people, the majority of people, older? To have a part like that  
well of our generation d'you know what I mean?

Geriatrics.

Seriously because my daughter is a great churchgoer but when she would go out on a Saturday  
night before she was married they would say to her Janet, what are you doing in here if  
she went in for a drink. D'you not go to the Church. You know this was a laugh. You are  
not supposed to go to pubs if you go to the Church.

Isn't that a popular misconception that all the people who go to Church are good people but  
that's the complete wrong side of it? We all go because we're sinners.

That's it.

So that's the bit that really has to be put over the fact that it's not the good people who go to Church but it's the bad people who go to Church it's like people going for a confession though we don't. But we're still sinners.

I think they do expect older people to go but they don't expect younger people because when David Watson was here he always used to have Janet singing at the midnight service, and he used to say, it's good because we get a good young crowd in and they see you. And I think that's what happens.

David is the one who stood in the pulpit and said about the prodigal son. He's the man who went off and spent all his money on wine of women and song and wasted the rest.

That's right.

That's the difference, humour.

You see David was a young man. He was great he tried very hard to bring the young people in.

He did quite a lot. It's very difficult with an old congregation. Margaret and I are probably quite young in the congregation.

Well I must be the baby.

What isn't that true?

Yes it is I'm afraid to say.

90 per cent of them are retired and that won't to encourage young people into the Church.

*What I want to talk about now is absences from the programmes and it can cover any period you like. We've said there is a shortage of children being shown as having a faith. Now we accept there is a shortage of children in the churches as well. It sounds like what you're saying is there's a shortage of portrayals of people who are real Christians. Who live ordinary lives but who also happen to have a faith? Who aren't...?*

Bible thumpers.

*Bible Thumpers or constantly saying you mustn't do this, so that somebody will go to the pub but they will also go to Church and everybody won't go O you hypocrites or they won't be going into the pub and saying oh you'll rot in hell if you take another sip of whisky*

Like the Salvation Army do

*Are there any other sorts of gaps in terms of the way religion is shown?*

Invariably it shows single women whether they have been unmarried or widowed. But you don't actually see families going to Church.

No.



Or a husband and wife or a mother and daughter or son. It's invariably portrayed as one single woman like Edna, Emily, Dot, Mrs Mac. They are all people, they're all single women one way or another.

The only programme way you see them all going to Church is High Road. They do go to Church. You quite often see them going to Church.

Yes.

Not only for funerals and things as they do in a lot of the other ones or christenings or what.

But you do see them go to Church and they do in that programme go. You see them go as a family. And the people in high road are very supportive of one another. You see them going to Church and you see them helping one another so I would say in that programme you do see the real ordinary person who goes to Church.

*Can I just check something out because this the what one of the ones I don't watch. When I did one of the focus groups before Christmas it seemed to be off-air for a while. But the women in the group I was interviewing they did watch it and they said that in High Road the last time it had been on there hadn't been a minister, and they felt that the Church really wasn't featuring very much at all. With the new series has that changed?*

No you see them going in to the Church but you don't see a minister.

You don't see a minister. You see them going into Church you always see the Church, at the churchyard, going in to church, you see them having conversations when they come out.

There's quite a lot of church going.

*But there is no minister?*

There's never a minister : : : : :

And you're not inside the Church either.

You don't go inside the Church. : : : : :

It's from the outside of the Church.

*And the only person who outwith that going to Church that you would identify as a churchgoer is Mrs Mac?*

No, no, they all go

No, no

No they all talk about going to Church

Davie Sneddon doesn't

No he doesn't but lots of the families do.

They were talking about the christening of Sheila Ramsay's child in the last episode.

No they do have in that programme quite a lot, the Church is quiet a part of it. And they definitely are very helpful. The people you see going to Church you can see helping neighbours and things.

*That's interesting.*

I would say that's the only one that you see that really. Without making a fuss about it, it's just happening and it clicks. I've never really thought about it until tonight, until you started talking about it and it's the only one that they have the kind of normal life that we do.

The Vicar of Dibley, they do as well.

There's quite a bit in the Church too. And you do see people coming in and out.

I suppose it would have to be because it's the vicar of Dibley but with the others

But that particular thing with the Nativity was actually quite, it was quite cleverly done because it did portray the Nativity quite well. They did every stage of it and it was shown, it was like the Nativity but only on television.

It was a funny Nativity. There were all laughing all the time. It wasn't

Yes that but it was a comedy but it did show up all the stages of it.

Aye, it did but it was just so funny and I mean, the girl was having the baby and it was born and I mean it was well done but I wouldn't say, it was just a laugh.

It was a comedy.

It was a laugh.

But it was there.

I wouldn't say it was. Did you see that?

*Which one?*

The vicar of Dibley.

*I never saw that.*

It was outside.

That second time it was on.

*I actually missed it both times.*

(Explanation of the episode)

*Oh I did, yes.*

It was funny but I wouldn't say it was really religious.

*It's interesting because I was interviewing somebody from the Church of England and they mentioned it and they said they thought it was wonderful theologically. They thought it was brilliant.*

It was tremendous.

*And apparently one of the English bishops had used it in a talk for the day or something as an example so it's very interesting, different attitudes.*

You know it's humour but it's just, if you forget the humour of it and forget the fact that she had the baby, which was over-the-top in a way, but everything was there. They did all the stages of the Nativity. Sheep and Angels, stables and so on.

You know I was doing in Nativity once when I worked with a family group and I was doing the Nativity with the kids at Christmas and one of the mothers came up to me and she said, what is this Nativity, she said, what pantomime's that? Honestly. She didn't know. It's unbelievable that people who don't know and you just take it for granted you grow up with it.

When our daughter was getting married they were going to the Minister and this wee girl at the same time was going. And this girl said to her, and he asked me are you a regular Church attender, are you a regular Church attended she said to Janet, and Janet takes the Sunday school and she's there. And my daughter said yes, I'm a regular Church attender. And she said Oh so am I go every Christmas Eve service.

One other programme, which is showing the difference, is Ballykissangel because they've brought in a young priest, an Australian priest this time. He's completely different from the old priest. Do you watch Ballykissangel?

*No I don't.*

I have seen it before the previous series.

There is an old priest and he's very staid, as you would expect. They have always also had the young priest who, I was saying the other night he almost bullies the young priest. But this time it's an Australian priest and he's not going to bully him.

He's getting axed.

*I was going to say did you see they're pulling the plug on it.*

They're what?

This is the last series.

Oh is it? Oh right.

Aye, there's too many things going to happen in this one. The Catholic religion don't really like them. That's just an aside.

*I read it was because their viewing figures weren't as good as they had been. They'd just decided enough was enough.*



That's another story.

And of course there is a woman in that again, a single woman.

Oh that's the shopkeeper.

Yes.

*A very narrow one?*

Yes, yes she goes telling tales. She goes to the old priest and tells tales about the young priest.

*Just going back to the absences thing, can you think of any non-Christian religions that are shown?*

Hindus. There are these programmes that are specially for Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims. You quite often see them on.

*You mean drama?*

Within the soaps, sitcoms, or dramas.

They are a kind of soap, I can't remember what they are called because I don't watch them particularly but I know there are at certain times they have these particularly aimed at the Asian population. Quite a number of them.

*Do they have religious services?*

They have religious parts, well they are, their life is based on their religion and it's all through it.

*Would this come under religious broadcasting?*

No. Dramas, comedies. I can't remember. I've just happened to flick on and seen it and it's all Pakistanis and Indians in saris.

You're not thinking of goodness gracious me?

That was one of, that was an Asian comedy.

That was an Asian comedy but there were other ones as well.

There were people in Coronation Street at one time as well.

There's also Ali G.

The people who own the corner shop.

Yes.

There was EastEnders there were

There was a couple of Indians in it. But I don't remember much

*But do you know whether they had any particular religion or was that just a sort of ethnic thing?*

I think it was just an ethnic thing.

I do think that it. No they didn't talk about religion.

The comedy ones I know that they talked about.

*I wish you could remember what it was Billy. I can't think of anything.*

I haven't seen them for a while but there are programmes because of the huge number of the Asian population in England. I think it's made it on English television rather than Scottish, I really can't remember. It was occasionally at night that you would see them on.

*Not in soaps though?*

Sort of. They're Asian soaps I think that's what they are.

*On terrestrial television not on satellite?*

Probably BBC 2 late at night.

Probably but we wouldn't see them they were aimed at a certain population. It's not goodness gracious me I know that's the one you quite often hear. It's more a comedy than a sitcom and it's got Indian music and sitars that start off.

*I have no idea what that is.*

I mean everything they do has got a religious connection, even their work ethics. So far as they're concerned the money's there for the religion, by the way stop

*Any other programmes that you watch, can you think of any other examples of different faiths?*

No?

No.

Don't think so.

*So basically what we've got, tell me if I've got this wrong, it's predominantly Christian or it's solely Christian. It tends to be if you've got a character, there's a tendency for them to be a single female of a slightly older age group, with a rather all fashioned attitude to religion and fairly hypocritical as well. Is that a reasonable summary?*

(Agreements all round)

*On the other hand the two clergy that we've come up with, the vicar of Dibley and Ashley in Emmerdale, are fairly reasonable representations of clergy.*

We haven't spoken about Father Ted.

Father Ted, yes. Would you like to say something about Father Ted?

I think Father Ted's, well it's really, really over the top. It's only the Irish who'd put on something like that.

Yes, I tended to think, Father Ted it was the younger one? Is that right?

No Ardal O'Hanlan was the younger one.

*He was the middle-aged one. Father Jack was a drunk and Ardal O'Hanlan was Father Dougal.*

Right. Well I always felt, it wasn't a programme I always watched and I didn't particularly like it,

No I didn't.

But what I did think was they portrayed the old man badly.

I must admit the one that I thought was really bad was every time they flashed over to, to phone the Bishop, the bishop was either sitting in the bath with soaps suds up to his chest with two women washing him.

Good for him.

Ballykissangel has got nothing on Father Ted.

It's just a fun thing isn't it?

It's just a send-up.

It's not religious.

No, it's not.

It's so over-the-top it's not offensive to the religion. It's nothing to do with religion.

Although some people see parallels, I'm afraid.

*My suspicion is from talking to other people, is that it's funny because actually there are kernels of truth in there. The terrible scandals they've had with bishops recently.*

(Discussion of Catholic Bishop of Galloway, who had recently caused a major scandal, whom they all knew and were very admiring of)

*There's the whole ongoing thing of Catholic priests and their love of whisky, which is what the Father Jack character feeds into*

Yes that's it.

I think Father Dougal is the bog stupid Irish myth.

Oh well, what about Alice? Nobody's as stupid as she is. In the Vicar of Dibley.

Exactly.

Nobody's that thick.

What about the housekeeper in Father Ted. Oh go on, go on, go on. It just depends on your sense of humour. Some people just couldn't watch that. Margaret doesn't like that stupid kind of sitcom. I do like them.



*Can I move you on now? Within the different kinds of programmes that we've talked about it, and it's probably safe at this point to stick with soaps and dramas, what would you say are the moral and ethical issues that tend to be dealt with in these programmes?*

Abortion probably.

Under-age sex. Babies under age.

Yes I suppose living together rather than marrying.

Yes

That's just run of the mill now, that's not a problem.

*So sexual issues? Would be one.*

Is there anything else?

*That's why I'm asking.*

Drink, drugs.

And rock'n'roll.

I'm just trying to think of EastEnders. Business dealings?

Well Ian Beale's not a Christian anyway.

*Well just generally what do you think are the sorts of issues that are dealt with?*

In the soaps?

*Yes and the dramas.*

Well, violence

Violence yes

In EastEnders for instance there is actually quite a lot of violence in it.

It's OK Phil's been shot.

So that's helped.

But that's only one of them. He still going to have an influence on the other one, Jamie.

And they bring in a lot of lesbians and homosexuals now on Brookside, which you never ever heard of before.

Yes that's true. It all adds to the entertainment value.

*So what would you say are the guiding principles when characters in those programmes are faced with choice? Take a potential new sexual relationship. What would you say the guiding principles are for a character on whether they pursue that relationship or not.*

Whether they got found out or whether they got caught.

*That would be if it was adulterous?*

Yes

*What if they were single? They haven't got a boyfriend or a girlfriend or whatever.*

Well it doesn't seem to be, it passes without comment in most of them.

Well it's not just now EastEnders because this girl's going with the doctor isn't she? And she's supposed to be a tart but obviously she is not good enough for him.

*Well take Cat for instance. Cat's decision to get involved with the doctor. Is there any kind of restraint there? Is it just, this is what I want to get?*

That's right

Yes that's it.

*So any other kinds of decisions like whoever it was clearly decided to shoot Phil, any of the goings-on, Ian Beale, what have you, when people have got choices would you say it's either they think of themselves or what other people say or do they have some sort of religious constraint?*

No, most of them think of themselves, the majority.

*What about Pat?*

The earrings, please!

What about it? Well she didn't think of anybody

They just think of themselves, every one of them.

Even consequences they don't think of.

There wouldn't be a drama if they did. They wouldn't get into half the situations they do.

*What about family? Wondering what the family will think.*

In EastEnders they do it.

I suppose the Slater's are quite family oriented.

Yes the Beales are. Coronation Street?

Deirdre she just goes from one to another.

They just jump in, they do don't they?

There's an awful lot of that just changing around.

*So the characters that we've already talked about, who are religious, or who are identified as being attached to a faith, d'you think they still work on self - or do they actually use their religion to come to the decision.*

I think Dot Cotton would use her religion. Because she tries to do good.

So does Mrs Mac really.

I think this is part of their character, is that they live religion first and foremost but not necessarily in a good way. They use it more as a stick for other people and because of

that these people never really have much of a decision to make because they don't let themselves into situations because they're so straight and narrow. They don't get into situations where they have to decide what will my family think about this. They don't have that because they simply shun everyone and everything that is anything but the straight and narrow.

When you think about Dot Cotton's son and the trouble she's had with him she's kept remarkably true, because he's not, and her husband before.

They may have family who have problems, and a lot of people do have. A lot of religious people do. Anybody who has a family has problems quite often. But you don't, you have to be a little bit flexible and these people are not flexible and so they will never get into situations you and I might get in to.

*How would you explain the way religion is treated on television, in these kinds of programmes?*

Just as a laugh.

It's exaggerated.

*So why, why do you think it's done in these limited ways?*

Because some people think that's how we carry on I suppose. They don't know.

To make them look different from other folk. Because that's how people look at churchgoers, they're different.

*But that supposes that the people who are writing it are not religious themselves.*

That's right.

*But how do you know that.*

But that means everybody writing's not religious then because there's hardly any religion in anything.

But that's what I mean.

So that's right.

There's very few programmes on television

That's why people say they are not religious but there must be some of them writing these, so, do they think it sells, do they think people will not watch if they put too much religion in, which is probably what they do think.

But people wouldn't watch.

No they wouldn't.

The songs of praise on a Sunday that's all they watch, that's enough.



*But if you had more characters within the different soaps and dramas, I suspect there is a limit to how many religious sitcoms you could do, that staying with soaps and dramas, do you think it's possible to have more religious characters. You know who are not there evangelising but who just happened to be religious?*

Yes because there are a lot of ordinary people who will, the sitcoms are meant to portray ordinary people that I would say there is definitely a lack of ordinary people in them.

Because I don't think there's room for ordinary people in sitcoms they don't sell.

No I think people are interested in sex and violence and something different aren't they?

Well that's what gets the ratings.

But it is.

And that's really all, it's what the people who put on the programmes on want. They want the ratings. The only way they are going to get the ratings

Is by doing that

That's the only reason Phil got shot.

That's right. That's right. It's the only reason for any of these things, this business of Mike Baldwin's son turning up. It's the only reason that they have this.

Somebody new and the advertising company

Even in it they're not considering the child though they say they are, they just want to fight it out to get the boy.

The whole point of it is the fight they're having about it, not the boy.

And there has been no mention of religion in. No minister, no priest

Nobody coming to advise because they don't have a connection.

I think Ken has got religious photos in his hall or something like that.

Oh yes.

I think the suggestion is there. That he's religious.

That was Uncle Albert's. He left it to him!

*D'you think in that case if the only reason, the main drive that programmes are put together is the ratings, religion is clearly not at any kind of a hook, unless it's over the top or something*

Dot's just there for the laughter she's not taken seriously

Yes that's it

*D'you think then that the idea of equal representation is a non-starter in these kinds of programmes? That is just not taken into account.*

No it's not.

What do you mean by equal representation?

*It's a fair question. Would you say, say the soaps that we've talked about, given the locations of many of them is there a reasonable representation of religion in them?*

No. Coronation Street is based in Manchester and about 50 per cent of the population in Manchester is probably Muslim or Hindu, but you don't see any of that in it.

They probably should be a lot more of those characters in EastEnders as well

There is none of those. They do not have anything to do with that.

There is no disabled characters in them either

No.

There was in Crossroads, remember there was a boy.

Well that's right but that's 20 years ago maybe

I wonder if it's because its soaps we're talking about. Dramas have a different way of putting over religion. There was a drama on a year or two ago I can't remember what it was called, but it went on for about three nights and they had the fellow who used to be in Brookside at that time, the baddie. One of his brothers was a priest and do you remember there was someone shot and there was a lot of, there were three brothers and one of them were shot in whatever they were doing, and the other brother was a priest, and they kept all through this drama the priest was in it, and there was a lot done in the Church. And it was done well and it was normal people if you can call them normal if they mixed up that sort of thing. They weren't portrayed like Ashley being wishy-washy or the others that we were talking about being laughed at. I wish I could think what it was called that it was a drama. It was set in Liverpool.

*So maybe there's more scope to do it more representatively in a one-off dramas over two or three nights?*

Yes

The trouble is those characters evolve in those soaps, they evolve what's good one week can be bad the next but not literally that, but after a while there wouldn't really be a good way of portraying a religious

Well they don't really have any depth do they?

No, they don't

In soaps they don't have a depth therefore there's no depth for the religion

Depending on which way the wind blows they could be bad, good, just depending. How the writers, if the writers change, they could just write them out

*Just to summarise how do the representations that we've talked about in terms of quality and quantity fit in with your own experiences of people who are religious?*

Well over the top

Well there is the odd one

Even Father Ted

But I mean in real life, there are people.

I know.

*You know Father Ted?*

Well there are people who are over the top like that. And these are the people who put people off religion. You find them everywhere.

*So if you do actually have people who are like that, in real life, is it unreasonable then to say that when you get them in soaps and sitcoms that it's showing an unbalanced view, or that it's unfair to show them because in fact they do exist and maybe these are the people that writers have met? You know this is their memory of Sunday school.*

That's all right if you've got one of the other extremes to balance it out. When You just see the over the top side of things you're not really getting a fair representation.

When you think that take the high road, where they just go as a normal part of the programme, they go to the Church, it's part of the programme. They don't say look how religious I am like Mrs Mac does but most of the rest of them don't. But they're seen going to ... Church. That portrays people more.

I would say that's the only one that does.

Whereas the rest of them don't have that, they may have religion in it but there's some point to it, there's some point they're making because that's somebody who is religious.

*One of the things that you have collectively said is, they don't do the things high road does because it would affect the ratings. Now I don't actually know what the viewing figures are for High Road.*

It's quite good.

It must be quite good because it's still going.

They tried to kill it off but they couldn't

Well it used to be national now it's only Scotland.



*Right but it's clearly enough that they continue to allow it to go out. So what I hear you saying is that they can do that in High Road, they can show religion as just being part of people's lives without it damaging the ratings, without it having to be a central story line. It clearly is to Mrs Mac but for the others it's just part and parcel and all the other interesting soapy stuff goes on around, so it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to destroy a soap, you can still have sex, violence or what ever it is.*

Sure

And still have your religion

Is the only one I can see that does it

They even get dressed up to go to Church.

But is it, is it not more Scottish orientated

Yes it is

And this is why it's not shown south of the border and therefore the ratings will want to come up. It's only because we

We recognise it

They don't understand what the truth it's down in England; they just don't understand it. They don't understand any of the humour or the significance of it to Scottish people. The fact that it's Scottish actors though there are a few English people though very unbelievable English people.

The one who's supposed to be English is actually Scots.

But they're very unbelievable for English people. They're nice quiet English people.

*We're all terribly quiet!*

No, no, nice quiet English people don't leave England!

*Some of us do. Is there anything anybody's burning to say or feel that I have cut them off?*

I just think it's a pity that so often religion is put down in programmes.

*Let me just ask you quickly one question. D'you think it does have an effect, the drip, drip, the negative portrayals?*

Oh yes

Yes

Probably

It's the same with the toothpaste. It's same thing. It's negative advertising. It's just the same thing. It's the effect it has

Hear it often enough you believe it I suppose.

I can't see that it has much effect really. I don't think people pay much attention to it.

I don't expect that it's, unless the Spice girls and say what's his name the footballer and lest they undergo conversion in a big way

Aye that would might

That would get people to think about it

*But the actual way it's shown at the moment, because what we seem to be saying is on the whole it's fairly negative, d'you think that actually has an effect on the unchurched, if you like, the way they see*

There's not enough of it. It's just now and again it slips in this wee bit. It's not as if it's an ongoing thing. Everybody knows Dot's religious it's just now and again she quotes the Bible.

She used to be terrible at all the time but nowadays it's just once in a while

Or Emily or any of them they just kind of mix in with all the rest and I wouldn't say it would influence you one way or another

*So that would be your position as well Anne?*

Yes

*David?*

I don't think, not that much.

I always think the power of advertising is a wonderful thing and a curse in others. All these people who want the rights to publish.

*But d'you think it's*

I do think it's, they're seeing nothing positive. And so it's going to be negative what they do and many use them as role models, many look at EastEnders, not EastEnders what's that other one Neighbours, all these young things that have got wonderful jobs, clothes and figures. None of them go to Church. This is the sort of role model. Friends is the great one, which I don't watch. They don't and they're all the local heroes. If some of them were leading normal lives I'm quite sure, in the case of Friends out of the group that live in the house at least one of them would go to Church or had some religious connection. If it suited the soap they would have. So far it hasn't suited but maybe it will and that might come in any one of them. Maybe somebody needs to get hold of some of the writers and give them a religious conversion.





**Religious Broadcasting.** Buddhists are not very well represented locally in the UK. They have very good contacts with the BBC World Service.

In UK there are 130,000 Buddhists (University of Derby statistics) – half the size of Jewish population. Jews are grossly over-represented, possibly due to story telling tradition. Main reason for under representation is that multi-faith dimension of religious broadcasting is driven by race relations. Buddhists are westerners so often race doesn't apply. Asian Buddhists not articulate, not visible and fragmented. Do get dropped off the list.

Feelings about this: Buddhism has something to contribute to national religious discourse (ethics, spiritual life). 'Sunday' programme occasionally features it but usually driven by news agenda.

How to change? Very problematic due to history of Buddhism. Many kinds in east and west. Buddhists don't know each other. No collective sense of what Buddhism is. More established branches need to talk but don't have resources to be proactive. Buddhists need to prove credentials but shouldn't feel indignant about exclusion. Needs a middle ground.

**Non Religious Broadcasting.** Issues have come up in relation to ads and movies. Network of Buddhist Organisations – secretary complained about various ads to ASA (NatWest; Gold Card; Tchaie tea). Lots of ads with Buddhist images. Controversy about the complaints – should they laugh it off or complain. Ads were in 1996.

Buddhism subtly marginalised by being seen as eastern exoticism. Makes them not real people – displaces them. Undermines the image of Buddhism. Sometimes fantasy about Buddhism. (Young monk and vacuum cleaner. Tibetan monks widespread – trades on mystique of Tibetan Buddhism) Feeling that these ads are disrespectful in some quarters – not necessarily Vishvapani's view. BA ads used recumbent Buddha to advertise their seats. Irreverent treatment of Buddhist iconography. Some Buddhists see them as sacred objects; others say you can't protect sanctity of an object in modern era.

If you disagree with Dalai Lama on a particular cause it's very difficult – like criticising Father Christmas. Critics of him are given a very hard time. Popular images also impact on Buddhists themselves.

Soaps, sitcoms, dramas: Kung Fu; Monkey. There was an episode of Absolutely Fabulous where producers approached FWBO. Joanna Lumley character was going on a retreat. Based on Lynn Franks and type of Buddhism known as sokogatai (designer Buddhism). No knowledge of Buddhism by makers or viewers – very different from Father Ted which is very knowing. Producers asked what a shrine room would look like and they said keep it simple. Producers said no, we've got to have a Buddha image. Ended up with something that was not remotely accurate. Characters don't relate to a caricature rather to a fantasy of what Buddhism is about hence experience with Ab Fab lot.

America is very different due to greater awareness through films. Kung Fu was American and was based on fairly realistic portrayal of Chinese Buddhism. What is the UK equivalent? Song – Everybody's gonna do Kung Fu fighting; episode from Steptoe and Son where they got beaten up and went to a kung fu class and ended up doing big kicks. The portrayal is jokier in the UK.

Adequate Representation. Buddhists are 0.2% of UK population. Not very much would be representative. However Buddhist ideas have pervaded beyond Buddhist community. Idea of peaceful and serene Buddha has widespread appeal. It's also a spiritual alternative to western ways but it's just not seen. Draws on caricature of cults e.g. Hare Krishna.

## **Interview with Mrs Pat Holgate – Press Officer, Church of Scotland**

Is the research about how religion is treated in non-religious programmes?

*Yes , yes, I am trying to talk to representatives of Christian churches so I have spoken to Catholics, and the piskies, and now yourself. I have also spoken to Buddhists, Sikhs w research doesn't exist and then, looking at other religions, forget that, that's even MORE non-existent.*

Oh, I can imagine.

*Anyway, first of all, do you actually have a mechanism within the Church of Scotland for say, liaising with fictional broadcasters commenting on what they do, you know, in-put and that kind of thing?*

No, we don't have in any way a specific mechanism but were there to be something that we didn't like, we obviously would comment. But equally, if we wanted to use a programme to get a message over , then would we not, I would have thought, be better getting in touch –whether or not they would do it , I don't know.

*Right, I was going to say. is there actually an example of that?*

There's an example in a previous life but never in religion. My previous existence was in Social Security and we used EastEnders and Coronation Street frequently and it's not a clever thing to do, because you have no control of the script. What you have is your message and, if I can perhaps give you an example where the message was anti-flawed and, you might not remember this, but Arthur Fowler in EastEnders...

*Oh, I do remember I watch it a lot...*

He was caught claiming benefit while working so the message came over that you get caught but all that happened was that he got a slap on the wrist and told to go away, so the whole method at the time was not the way the Government at the time would have wanted it. So, my worry is always, fine, talk to them, see if they can link something in, but be very , very wary of them, Funnily enough I saw one recently that I thought was again the point – in Coronation Street, where obviously the census people were desperate to get their message over about census forms, but they picked up , silly man, I can't remember his name, but he's an idiot, but I could instantly see all the census enumerators saying "oh, well, ..that's what we have to do'. ..so the venture is dangerous! No, .sorry, I've gone on a bit, but we do not have a mechanism -that s not to say we can't do it if we needed to.

*Right. Have you ever actually had cause to express concern about anything..?*



Not broadcast media. Certainly there's been stuff we've seen in the newspapers we didn't like and that's easy to deal with but not the broadcasting media. We do at times have points to make about religious broadcasting but that's not what you are talking about? You are talking about the news, or fictional...no, no. There's a couple, or three things I can think of quite quickly that are on the go just now and one I suspect somebody might want to complain about and that's that GOD, THE DEVIL AND BOB. I've heard people saying "oh...that's not right" so it will be interesting to see if there is a representation. I frankly don't have a problem with it but I'm not the one to decide but I think it will get people to think more about religion than they do! But I'm not the arbiter of change. I think it's brilliant. *I know. It's funny, I was talking to my sister last night and she's actually what I would describe as a fundamental Christian, and I thought, oh, oh, but she said "no, it's brilliant" and I said "you know it was taken off in the States", and she said "no, why? But it's so good and so on. It's not Christian but it's religious.*

It's religion, it gets the message over and it's fun, and it's funny. I've always hinted that God has a sense of humour so I don't have a problem with that at all.. Having said that, I dug out your letter and I thought, hmm, I thought this particular programme would come up and it would be interesting to see if anybody complained sufficiently, I am going to have to do something but there's been muttering and nobody has really said "oh, I think you should complain", but if we had to, we would. We do have strong links with the ITC and that sort of thing, and our Moderator goes to their dinner, what most people type basis.. No, we have no mechanism and, no, I haven't, and I have been here two years and I have never complained. *I actually think I cut you short, because you said there were three things. You said the first was GOD, THE DEVIL AND BOB.*

What I would complain about is that dreadful Vicar in Emmerdale. He is not Church of Scotland and he is nothing to do with me but I think, oh, is that how you portray them! There were three things recently, mindful of my meeting with you that I would think, hm, yes, I don't like that very much. It will come back to me, I am sure it will. Anyway, no, we have never made a complaint. The groundswell...somebody like the Principal Clerk, Sandy MacDonald and I would talk about it and sort of think, yeah, we will have to do something about this, or, the only other bit of the church that might get involved would be the Board of Social Responsibility acting as Press Officer, although he and I liase daily and he does very much narrower jobs than I do and he is their Press Officer and they're the people who tend to be outraged about things and the media stereotype them into being outraged. Generally it is

about books but things like the Edinburgh Festival, they are expected to be outraged about films and things like that, but at the end of the day, here I have a rule that if we ARE going to be outraged by it, we are not going to comment because they currently describe some ...but that Edge film about Jesus being gay. I think last year's one was JESUS IS GAY, and he was something else, and something else, and he was a drug addict and if you are not outraged, well, we haven't seen it so cannot comment., so I suppose then Hugh brings up another possibility and you might be interested in linking up with Hugh. He's at Clarence House in Edinburgh and I'll give you a phone number.

*That's brilliant-thank you..*

He, as I say, might be more likely to complain, but yes, it would be me, I would probably end up writing the letter, but I would liaise with the people's clerk here.

*Do the Producers ever approach you for guidance, information?*

Guidance is a bit strong. Along the lines of historical accuracy, could something have happened at such and such a time, or maybe what people would have worn if they were a Minister. Quite often we are approached on that and we dig out ancient old photos that Mission World would have of missionaries and that kind of stuff. What would a church be like back then and "can we borrow a church to do filming". There's that sort of link but not in the sense that you mean Ailsa, about theology, how to depict....no, you don't? but again, from my previous life, they didn't either. They would do endless fiction about Social Security in order to push forward posters to make it look realistic without actually approaching...I know religion is very different but that is the benchmark almost I have too so ...

*That's so interesting, isn't it?*

I think there's a kind of arrogance about approaching anybody about anything

*Yes, they have a vision and just need you for the props.*

That's right.

*It's funny, actually, I was talking to the Buddhist Press Officer, and he was saying they have been approached by ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS and, one of the characters goes on a retreat and they said, what would a little prayer-room look like and he said "very plain", and they said oh, no, no, it's got to be this, that and the other, and he said no., well, what else would this be and he said "oh, you do this". Oh, no, no, no.....*

This is it, they've got this pre-conceived idea, haven't they.

*Yes, it seems to be.*

Yes, no doubt about it. That's to say, apart from, that's what I remember most clearly they were doing something about a missionary and they wanted to know what a missionary would have looked like and whenever it was and had we got any photos. Certainly nothing about the script, or about the actual accuracy of the theology or how to play something up, no, no.

*Do you ever watch HIGH ROAD? I am really going to have to try and watch it this weekend because I am interviewing the Producer.*

Oh, really!

*Yes, Mrs. Mac, and clearly that's the Church of Scotland setting....*

Yes, it's Presbyterian.

*Yes. I just wondered, whether you have ever heard any comments from people within the church of how that is portrayed? .*

No, I can't say that I have, except that I know people in the church who love FATHER TED . My own view is the Catholics come out better than us. Somehow or other they are portrayed as more human, accessible. The Church of Scotland, cold, Presbyterian, Calvinistic, sort of I think it's how it comes over if people want to depict us., but no, I can't honestly say I have heard we were that terrible, no, I haven't. But my own view now I work here and from watching it I obviously like FATHER TED; it's a warm, cuddly programme. You know, I suppose it does in a way take the mickey out of priests, like, but it doesn't, in my view, lose them respect, whereas I think a very Calvinistic, cold approach could lose, maybe not respect, just dislike the Church of Scotland because of it and what you don't see is the portraying ministers are women – you don't, do you? And we've got quite a few of them.

*Hm, yes. Well, the only one I can think of is VICAR OF DIBLEY*

Ah ha, that's the only one but in terms of what comes on in Scotland, yes she does, but it's not a Scottish programme. No, there's nothing; and the VICAR OF DIBLEY, yes, you're right, it was a great step forward, wasn't it?

*Yes, it was brilliant.*

Yes, and other than her, it is always a middle-aged, very austere-looking man , wasn't it? If they wanted a Church of Scotland Minister. You know, something like TAGGART, they always seem to be burying somebody. No, they never come on to us about things like that. No.

*I was actually doing some transcribing this morning , you know, the focus group I did a couple of months ago, and they were talking about TAGGART and how Jardine is supposed to be a Christian – I gather he is in real life - and he is played as a Christian and I said to them,*



*I've no idea what sort of Christian he is meant to be and whether that sort of comes across. I actually stopped watching it when TAGGART died ...*

Well, I'm a bit the same, I was not conscious that he was supposed to be particularly Christian, I was not conscious of that. I haven't watched it. Like yourself, I thought it all very funny when he died, I thought he kept going. I don't really watch it, but I didn't know that.

*The impression I get is that he's quite moral. No, I'm not going to the pub, I'm not doing that...maybe I should start watching it again when it comes on, but it still seems to be this sort of 'don't'*

Yes, rather than 'do'.

*Yes, none of the pleasures or joys of Christianity, it's the negatives.*

I guess maybe the media in this instance does reflect what the populace think. That's how people, without the media being involved, perceive the church, isn't it? Stop you from enjoying yourself type of organization and I guess that's what a lot of churches are for. I know there's a lot being done to try and let people know it's ok to laugh when you are a Christian, it's ok to enjoy yourself, it's ok to be happy but I think maybe the media do reflect, but they don't always reflect, what the population actually think, and I think maybe they do. What worries me is they see religion as some thing that it's not all that important to get right because really it doesn't matter. That's quite sad.

*Yes that's kind of part of what I'm looking at. Is it OK to show religion as very stereotypical or just to be laughed at because no-one cares actually.*

And that's very sadly think the way we think, and the way an awful lot of people think. It is quite sad. I mean that's part of my job to try and change that. But it's very difficult, and it's easier well it's easier with the religious channels well religious broadcasting because you can suggest things and all the rest of it but fiction is hard and it would be quite hard for us to complain if they did stereotype us because then it becomes even more stereotyped, there they go again it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. So it's quite a difficult area isn't it?

*It is. It's part of what I'm trying to unpack. If you do complain, as you say, then it's those narrow-minded Christians again, which is why I suspect they probably come to you at the Festival.*

Oh that's right what they want is us to be outraged Ailsa. There is no doubt about it and they get quite miffed if you are not. I can't remember what last week's little gem was. It was a newspaper and it was something they thought was outrageous. Course I know what it was it

was Claudia Schiffer and somebody or other were going to be involved in some drama they were doing about Adam and Eve and wasn't this outrageous. And well no why?

*Why?*

Well why why would it be? Ah well, well you know they didn't know why they actually didn't know why they wanted to be outraged they just did there really wasn't a story. OK so Claudia Schiffer and whoever the guy was were going to play Adam and Eve so what? There is an expectation as you so rightly say for us to be outraged. Added to which it's quite hard to influence the programme before it's made so you don't know what you don't know. And you don't know that somebody somewhere is out there dreaming up a religious programme or a religious fiction and even if they are who are they? You know it's harder to keep in touch with fiction makers then it is with news journalists

*I've probably sort of asked you this do you actually have any contact at all with any of the fictional programmes?*

No

*So there isn't any sort of 'in' where you can just drip, drip*

No there's not an 'in'. The props department is probably the nearest I have. Having said that you could find an in and yes you could be saying to them remember if you are doing such and such we're here to help. I honestly don't know if it would be worthwhile, I'm not saying it wouldn't be because I haven't I can't say that, but I do think that because we are well in with religious broadcasting that one expects them also to have a role within the BBC for example in terms of, if you are making a programme that was fictional but had religion in it one would hope that you might talk to religious broadcasting to get a feeler for who else you might talk to, but that's presupposing you talk anybody. And that's my worry I don't think they do.

*I was going to say, that's my impression of religious broadcasting, that it's quite marginalised*

It could be. In Scotland it's not so bad

*I think it's not so bad, no. I was at a talk at New College the other week and Michael Wakelin, the producer of Son of God was doing the talk and he was, and this was from within a religious broadcasting department, and they got somebody senior on the programme who was saying have we got to do all this religious stuff about Jesus? You know.*

It's sad isn't it.

*Yes. Couldn't we talk about the clothes he wore and what he played as a little boy and that was from within religious broadcasting.*

It's sad

*It's totally depressing*

OH y'know. It is difficult. It's a very difficult area. Having said all that if you read as I have to do 12-14 papers a day and all the letters pages very little appears from the public complaining about religious fiction. In fact nothing I've seen. Maybe the odd thing it must have but you know

*Well rarely I would have thought so, is my impression. You obviously read more of them than I do because that's your job.*

Well I do because I have to. So that tells you, that tells you lots of things. It can tell you that people don't have a problem with it or that they couldn't care less. But you would expect if it was going horribly wrong and religion was either not being noticed at all, there would be a school of people who were saying isn't it awful they don't notice us at all, or if it was really being stereotyped in the media or made a fool of they would be complaining. They don't. Maybe that means there are very few people out there who care. I don't know. You will be looking at that.

*I mean, that is what I am looking at. I mean there's*

It's hard to judge isn't it

*It's really hard to judge. I think there is an argument for saying it's just not been thought about*

No it could be, could be right so. And you know it

*And you know that's it. If you take women's issues and you go back to second-wave feminism, where were the letters prior to the emergence of the women's movement complaining about the way women were, they weren't so, they didn't exist so you could very comfortably as a man sit back and say well nobody's complaining, it's perfectly all right.*

That's right I agree with that. I would have to say society moved on a lot since the women's movement in the sense that society's got more expectations and it's a more complaining customer oriented society so maybe you might expect more now.

*Having said that and I would agree with you but disability is only just taking off as an issue in terms of the representation and this is what 30 - 35 years post women's movements, which I would see as the first issue of representation. You know race is still a problem.*

Yes because it's interesting because each of these things you mention you're perfectly right you can't opt in and out of them. You have to be a woman because you are you have to be black because you are you have to be disabled because I'm sorry you are but you don't have to go to Church. I often wonder, about lots of things if it's about being able to opt in and out people don't get as upset as if it's something you are born with. Between social security and



coming here I did work for the Abbeyfield Society and their thing was that old people were always stereotyped. They were all Victor Meldrew and bad-tempered old whiners. O they were all Mrs Mac, not that she's particularly old. So I guess that a lot of different groups, if I can call religion a group, feel that the media get it wrong, that fiction is wrong. When you think about it all the people who do you think about bopped Victor Meldrew, all the Waiting for God lot. These people whose name I can't remember, you know who I mean. So maybe it's that kind of worry and maybe, maybe if its comedy they have got to really it always caricature or, and I'm trying to think of religious things that aren't comedies. Well I suppose there's soaps  
*It's in the soaps and you do get it cropping up in drama its*

But not to any great extent

*Not to any huge extent*

It's like it's not there it will all stop it's quite worrying isn't it?

*Yes yes. It does come back to this issue of, is it as you say people don't get that bothered because you can choose to have no faith or not whereas you can't choose to be disabled or whatever. Or is it that we've dealt with the really big issues, or we're dealing with the big issues but there are just other agents. It's like a snowball. We're looking at women, we're looking at race, we're looking at disability, we're looking at sexual orientation. Maybe religion, and my experience of being involved in the hierarchy of churches is that it grinds exceedingly slow,*

Aye that's putting it very kindly and you're being very restrained

*You know so maybe I wonderr, is it just that they haven't got their act together at all*

Probably

*We're so fragmented. There we have all the denominations never mind the different faiths how does religion speak with one voice at least in terms of saying come-on, it is still part of society?*

Aye, absolutely. Have you spoken to ACTS - action by churches together in Scotland Group?  
*I couldn't get anybody to speaks to me the miserable so and so's, so I just thought stuff it, I'll speak to the individual denominations*

That's quite surprising isn't it!

*No they were actually high on my list and no, they were actually quite snotty. So I just sought out all the individual denominations then*

Yes but you would have thought they would have had a kind of umbrella approach. Oh, don't get me started

*I'm a piskie so I feel I'm an insider so I can criticise*

But they would drive you mad wouldn't they?

*Yes. They just don't. My own church doesn't have a policy on the media.*

We have lots of policies but we don't on what you're talking about.

*Just generally think about it in terms of, we've just appointed a new communications officer, so it's in terms of how do we get across or how do we deal with it when they come to us but the media, what the Church ought to be saying about how it functions, there's nothing*

There's nothing

*No it hasn't even occurred to them it ought to be an issue in its own right.*

Well it ought to. We also, you will know we have boards and committees, and the Church and nation Committee one, their remit is the media. And it's to do with the media and is it fair it's that kind of thing, it's not necessarily to do with the Church. They might be another avenue for you to have the talks to about this particular thing you're interested in And I will give you a phone number. Because to talk to them, they would report to the General Assembly on the media. So they would be worth talking to but I don't for a minute, maybe I'm doing them a disservice but I am not aware let's say, but they have never given much thought to what you're talking about. As I know it's a huge, huge big committee - Church and nation 80 or 90 members. But they have the media sub-group. So they presumably get quite involved in talking and thinking about the media. As I say they might not be helpful but it's worth thinking about. That just struck me now when you were talking about the police case.

*Did you remember what that the third thing was?*

It's just something that's been on. There was Emmerdale. There was God the devil and Bob and there was something else with somebody religious on its. I thought what it was it was Father Ted. Recently I've been taking particular note to remembering how I was meeting you and just thinking how it's portrayed in these three different things. You've got three very traditional priests who are funny, but very funny. And you got this kind of boring Vicar in Emmerdale they you think own note. And then it you have this off the wall cartoon so there there is these great big differences. None of which I would find offensive. None of which I think do a lot of damage. Possibly the vicar in Emmerdale does the most damage in his own little way. I quite like the cartoon. We've said all that. There is nothing back any of the and that would get you interested it probably wouldn't have a new off but it wouldn't get you interested. It's how you get that message through in fiction. It's a dangerous game. You've got

to have a really good relationship and a lot of editorial control you ain't going to get it because they're so jealous that the moulds of their right to have whatever they want it.

*I suppose, I'm not sure that I said to you when we spoke, the reason I'm focusing on fiction rather than on religious broadcasting is, well it gets the highest viewing figures*

Yes absolutely

*If you go down the line that we are in a more secular society, but even if you look at the viewing figures for religious broadcasting. Again compared to the fictional stuff less people watch it. On the whole it's people who have some kind of faith, I know it's not a totally, I know religious broadcasting does get people who have no faith*

Your right. It is very unlikely that people with no faith at all do tune in.

*I have heard one or two people who will listen to religious broadcasting on Radio 4 but it's because it's actually interesting programming. You know they won't listen to the services but something like Something Understood, that sort of thing, that's OK. So what I'm interested in is if that's where the bulk of the viewing figures are, if all you get are very limited views of religion well that's all the people see.*

I know I know what you say. I know exactly what you mean if people just don't have any other contact with churches or whatever, just that, it's worrying, it's quite worrying. But it's how, even if you were to put in place a mechanism which would feed a carefully controlled diet of propaganda, and aren't calling it that, to departments which had commissioned works, it's a long shot whether it'd influence anybody isn't it?

*Well yes I get the impression it's incredibly difficult*

And think it is very difficult because I think as you say they are not the same people who do news programmes. That anybody can decide to produce a work of fiction. And then you get film-maker's (discussion of the thorn birds and films) So maybe we ought to get somebody writing a wonderful trilogy? A Blockbuster. I don't think so.

*Actually all that I can think of really in literary stuff is Lewis Grassie Gibbon's, A Scots Quair, which is hardly an endearing picture at the Church of Scotland*

I always say when I write the book it'll be worth a chapter. But it's true I mean there tends to be stuff about the Catholic Church things like the Pope dying and electing a new Pope and all this but there's actually very little about the Church of Scotland in a fictional sense

*No not really*



There may be the odd minister as you say appearing in something. There you are, there is a market. That would be a goodie wouldn't it. Well if you can have Dr Finlay's Casebook you can have the Rev from Bloggs something or other

*Of course he'd be up to all sorts wouldn't he?*

Well absolutely. Well it's quite tempting I'd probably get the sack and it's all your fault.

*You could do when you leave*

Well absolutely yes I could. I could get Jilly Cooper to come in like she did with Polo and all those sorts of things. I don't think I have been very helpful at all

*Yes you have, honestly.*

I have been giving it a bit of thought. As I say the bottom line as I see it is you would want to influence, not influence but you know you want to get the message into things and how to do that. I cannot think how you would do that I can't I can think of how you might try to do it I don't know.

*I suppose what I try to do is I go to conferences and I give papers on my work-in-progress desperately tried to buy gyp people to talk to*

I can understand why you are trying to do it. It's very, very interesting. I'd be very interested to see the answers if you do come up with any conclusions.

*I don't know as I say I'm meeting the producer a High Road next week and supposed to be speaking to one of the script writers on Coronation Street sometime this week. I have spoken to someone from Peak Practice. I've got to phone somebody from drama in Granada who is currently working on A&E. But they're actually terribly difficult to get hold of just to speak to. It's really, really hard work.*

The other problem I suppose you've got is that a lot of the very big drama things they watch are based on books. I'm thinking of pride and prejudice where as well as Colin Firth, swimming underwater which I will never forget, was Mr Bennett and the parson and he was actually a print character but he was a real pain

*He was dreadful*

He was terrible. He was brilliantly acted but then again that was based on something he years and years ago

*I think it was probably very and its*

Yes but so much of the drama that we get is based on a book and is adapted. That's the difficulty as well because it's already in print. Well, well we might say, perhaps change the words to an extent then we can make a guy looked or we can make it a woman or whatever but

I don't know. I think that's another difficult day. Actually knew his stuff written his way you want to get in there but we define the people doing that it's a hurdle

*I suppose the ideal starting place would be in soaps*

Yes it would be if you think of the viewing figures

*Do you ever watch Brookside*

It's the one I have never ever watched

*It's just that they've got a Catholic family who seemed remarkably sensible. Granny and the little boy who's about eight or nine a very devout, mum is sort of in-between. Dad is seriously relapsed and anti-and the other kids are in various stages. But their faith comes into play in big moral issues. So like she had a miscarriage and it was all why God why us? The little boy was really annoyed that she was pregnant and he'd been praying to God to get rid of it. So there was the whole thing of has God answered my prayers.*

It worked

*Yes. But he was also really upses because then it was like I've killed this baby. Is God really going to do that. That was all dealt with. It was amazing. At the same time they go to the wine bar they do things that they shouldn't be doing. The same as everyone else and yet over certain issues their faith is brought to bear. And it doesn't seem to happen in any other soap. The only other thing I can think of and I'm actually talking to some teenagers on Thursday morning about this, is Hollyoaks. They have got this irritating teenager she brought this new boyfriend home. Mum had heart failure he was a Goth and into bands. It turns out he's a Christian. This was the big shock. She ended up getting baptised. Now it was a totally unconvincing process towards baptism*

At least they tried it

*But they tried. He was an attractive young man who wasn't the nerd.*

How interesting but again that's not one I see.

*Teenage daughter. I got hooked on it.*

Ours are long gone. The only thing I was thinking again as I was speaking in Corrie now, where Alma is dying. What I don't know is are we going to get the big, is she going to become a Christian all of a sudden, is there going to be any priest or vicar appearing on the scene. You would have expected there to be but maybe not so maybe that again reflects life. That people don't necessarily run to Church when they are dying. We've had all the medics talking about palliative care. She's had a lawyer in to do her will. But there has not been any religion. And it

to be quite interesting they must have written it by now because she supposed to be dead by the summer. It to be quite interesting to see if there's talk of how she wants to  
*Oh it is. I'll tell you how I know. my mother was up at the Lakes and actually bumped into them in a pub or something and they'd been filming the scene where they scatter her ashes on the lake*

Oh well. So presumably there's some religious bit in there but you would have perhaps expected by now that if you were told you were dying well you'd rail against it, you'd be angry, but I think an awful lot of people would go back to the Church almost as an insurance policy. That's terrible but they would wouldn't they. There's been none of that. There's an example of where you might expect to see some kind of religion.

*It would be interesting to see. if it's not going to come in then if they will have the integrity to dispose of her in a non-religious ceremony.*

That's right's. Or to say why. You know, I mean, you could imagine if somebody near you was dying like this saying well, do you want to talk to a minister or a priest or whatever and then saying No I do not and this is why they do not. To do with it that way. To say I'm angry with God. Know what I do want to talk with anybody. I mean it's just not there. It's been ignored.

*I think it is a gap in the way anybody with cancer would deal with it. Somebody would say d'you want a talk to somebody.*

Even if you just wanted to rail against religion and say you really let me down and say what happened. Then you would do something wouldn't you? You would quietly go in to Church on a day that wasn't a Sunday and do whatever you did.

*But even at the level of somebody in the street saying I know you've not gone to Church but would it help? And then she can still turn round and say no.*

But at least it would be dealt with.

*My experience of cancer is that yes*

I would think so too. I would think a lot of people who aren't religious and frightened would think maybe I should do something about God now that I'm dying. And even for that, which I think is an artificial reason, but even for that reason there should be something in it. well you seen the script writer or so that more interesting. (general discussion about characters in coronation Street)

*Very briefly I'll bring this to a close. I was speaking to the guy from Peak Practice. When you were saying before about not seeing letters of complaint one of the things he said was well you know nobody on the website ever mentions religion and I actually had a look at it and I*



*thought I'm not surprised. All they're doing is bitching about people who complain about a character. In some ways that's disingenuous because it's like, well why would you complain about something that's not on it because that's all you've got.*

yes I know what you mean

*It's like somebody who's never had caviar doesn't know it exists*

Doesn't complain they have not had it so yes I know what you mean.

*Sort of Hall's saying about how do you ask for something that's not there. They say but nobody's asking for it and that's why it's not there. And within that, when it is in what I have noticed and is coming out of the focus groups is that it's Christianity and nothing else. We had one or two references to Jews in plays and I think there was a Jewish doctor in EastEnders*  
You wouldn't really know he was a Jewish doctor if you know what I mean nothing much was really said.

*The only thing that comes up in terms of say Islam, Sikhs or Hindus is goodness gracious me*  
And coronation Street's had this recent story line about the marriage trying to get the Indian girl to do the arranged marriage, which is not straight religion at all, but it's part of it. It only lasted for about two or three weeks of course

*The impression I got was that she had come into it briefly*

End of the interview - tape ran out

## **Interview With Hugh Brown Church of Scotland Board of Social Responsibility.**

I don't think the problem with the religion today is confined solely to fictitious situations.

*No I don't either.*

And I think today I can give you as a good example where a situation arose with the press and they wanted the Church of Scotland's view, and they knew what they would get. They knew that we were going to say that we were against this grant been given to Stonewall to allegedly look at discrimination against gay people. They knew what they would get. And I think what has struck me in the past few years, which is different from when I started in this job a decade ago, is that the press now want, they're now happy if they get a sound bite from a religious spokesperson. It doesn't matter what that person says in some ways, perhaps because of deadlines, as long as they get this sentence from a Church of Scotland's spokesperson or from a Roman Catholic spokesperson, they don't really care what that person says, or they don't do their homework or the background and look it and why we might say that or what that actually means, or how many people we might actually be talking on behalf of. I often think that's the point you were making earlier about it, it's because, we're not seen as a Christian country any more in that respect but there are still a lot of Christian people around, a significant minority go to Church if you want to put it that way, are members of denominations. So we should be listened to. That's where I think the media is getting it wrong. It's actually, stereotyping Christians and Christianity and other religions as well. I'm using Christianity I think, if you see the vicar on Emmerdale, I mean you know, yes he's had quite a good story line I don't watch it all the time, but he's had a good story line and all the rest of it but he's still very wet, I'm sure there aren't very many vicars like him and I do not think there are very many like the ones who appear on other soap operas. I think they are, producers seem to use terrible stereotypes of religious people and they're either goody-goodies or Holy Willie's. They're not ever portrayed as normal characters in a soap. They have got to have an extreme and I think that's unrealistic and unfair. Because I would regard myself as being a fairly normal person who happens to be a Christian and not the opposite way round. Does that make sense?

*Yes, it does, yes fine. As you say I don't think it is just fictional broadcasting but the reason I'm focusing on that is if you look at viewing figures for instance - and in a PhD there is a limit to how much you can do so you've got to focus, so I'm not doing press. I'm not doing religious broadcasting because the numbers in terms of viewing are not that big and on the whole the*

*bulk of people who choose to watch it have some sort of belief system. Not everybody I accept that.*

I know you don't want to go down that road too much but I think part of that has to do with the way broadcasters treat religion in terms of the time slots. In terms of the, morning worship that's fine, that's morning - worship, you got the heaven and earth show on BBC 1, and you've got Eikon on STV. Both of which are put at times when people who would want to watch them are at Church. Which is crazy. The only exception to that and even then I think that it's been dumbed-down a lot is Songs of Praise, which has gone away from the way it used to be, and I'm not saying these programmes should not evolve but again religion gets time slotted and type-cast into a slot that actually means, that if you put religion on at 8 o'clock on a Monday night opposite EastEnders yes, you're not going to get a good audience on STV or whatever, but at least you say religion is important, I think the trouble is too many broadcasting organisations have seen, have thought that religion does not have a significant place in Britain today and I don't think that's right, I really don't think that's right. We're not all raving evangelicals, we're not all goody-goodies, we're not all wet. Most Christians I know are fairly ordinary people. But that doesn't make for good viewing.

*Well no. It doesn't and it comes back to looking at fictional broadcasting which is more interesting in a way because that is what the bulk of people watch. So what are the images they are getting? Out of fictional broadcasting, not just soaps but sitcoms and dramas. What images of religion are on offer for them? Do they ever see that there are any other religions apart from Christianity? Actually when you look at fictional broadcasting it is very, very rare that you ever get another faith for instance. But as you said a lot of it is terribly stereotyped. One of the things I was asking Pat about was whether the church had a mechanism for communicating with the broadcasters about the kind of images that are portrayed within the media and then I think she felt that you maybe, in this office, were more likely to make comments than she would on certain issues. I wondered whether you had?*

Not very often is the answer. Not because I don't want to but our brief is social, moral and ethical issues. Which covers a wide range, like today's Stonewall thing and last week on the care homes story, which was more an operational one for us. Yes we also get charged with social, moral and ethical issues. I think I'd love to be more proactive on particularly media things. Whenever I'm doing talks I always say to guilds or sessions you know if you see something on television that you don't like, either because it is offensive or because it doesn't give the right impression about your faith then do phone, do write, because producers do take



notice that. And, if you know, we're the most apathetic bunch Christians sometimes because we don't do that. We think Oh wasn't that awful but what do we do about it? The answer is nine times out of 10 nothing. Yet, or worse still, you phone the completely wrong channel. You know it happens so, people do it. I try to encourage people to make their views more heard. I know that the likes of the National Viewers and listeners Association of old and Mary Whitehouse got a really bad name but my goodness she was listened to for a long time and people knew what she stood for. And she stood for good morals, and she stood for Christian things. We've lost that in a way, there's not the same complaining mechanism. And I would love our department to be more proactive on that front but quite honestly we don't have that time or the staff to do that.

*Can you think have there been any situations when you have actually said that was no, unacceptable or I suppose instead of just being negative have you ever said gosh that's really good?*

More likely to be the negative.

*I just thought I'd give you the chance.*

There certainly have been times when I have contacted a broadcasting organisation and said I was unhappy with that on our behalf. And I have written personally, I have not written on behalf of the Church I can't remember, but I have done it a few times. Because I do believe that's how they get their feedback.

*Would you mind giving me a for instance?*

What was the last one? I phoned, let me just think, I phoned a Radio station because I was concerned about the number of times the presenter was saying things like oh God. Because I think he was doing it as a throwaway line the way people these days say Jesus Christ and they don't see it as being blasphemous. But I thought it was. It was not necessary it didn't add anything to the programme, I just felt I needed to say, "this is not on". So I did that and I spoke to the programme controller who said all right I'll speak to the presenter, and that was that. But I wish I had more time to do that, to be proactive but I don't. The answer to your question is there's not a set mechanism from the Church of Scotland to actually do that and I think the reason is we simply don't have the resources to do that.

*You said something about when you talk to the guilds and things like that d'you have any media awareness package, system for members of congregations?*

Before I worked for the board I was on one of our study groups which looked at young people and the media and that was in the early Nineties and we looked at the occult, pornography,

New Age, violence etc etc and we put together a pack called young people and the media study pack. It was on cards and it had questions and discussion topics and actually that was at the point where I started working for the board. We haven't done anything since then but again it's been down to lack of time rather than anything else. It's something I would like to pick up again because things have moved so far and we've got, we have Channel 5, with Keith Chegwin and all. We have so much more. When you look at late night television particularly, I'm not a prude, but on late night television on Channel 4 and Channel 5 there are the things on now which simply would not, I don't think the ITC would have let go out a few short years ago, and now are going out, and I think our standards are going down the tubes. I think we're to blame in some respects because we don't make our feelings known. And the only other example recently, I missed it, I meant to video it, I got a phone call from a journalist saying what do you make of this thing that STV are doing called Party Animals, which is on about eight. It was on last night. It's basically about getting young folk to do party games and they've had a few good few drinks beforehand in the hospitality - it's really outrageous. My answer was the same as it usually is which is that I don't comment on things that I haven't seen or read because I don't think it's fair. There are always two sides to a story and the journalist will want one particular, he will want us to be against it, to say that's outrageous, that's dreadful. The reality is when you actually watch or see something it can quite often be not as bad as it was first painted. But I didn't video it last night so you have to try and watch it next Monday night on STV because it's on - it's been in all the press over the past few weeks.

*It's passed me by.*

There you are you're too busy doing your Ph.D. *on the subject of*

(Discussion of Big brother and a 1960s play called Year of the Sex Olympics) but I think we have gone down a rocky road now in terms of what we allow to go out now. People say it's past the watershed, it's past 9 o'clock. I don't think that matters. I think children and not so young children watch things. Most of them have got video-recorders and they will watch - I'm sure a lot of them didn't see this thing on last night but I bet your bottom dollar they videoed it and will watch it when they come home from school, because the hype has been so, that's how they get viewers, to hype it up. No, I think we've gone a long way down the wrong road in terms of what we've allowed to go and it - and part of that is our own fault because we don't complain. And as we now know, we are so obsessed with ratings that anything goes almost. Almost nothing is taboo anymore. I never thought I'd see the day when I would see a naked Keith Chegwin running around - and you think, there you are. That would simply not have

been allowed and I'm very surprised the ITC let that go out. And yet I think I remember reading they had something like 84 complaints which sounds like a lot of complaints but it's not really.

*When you think of how many, I imagine most people switched off as soon as they saw it. They didn't bother to sit and watch it and complain.*

I'm sure they probably did. I think the difficulty with having any kind of mechanism, if we were to set that up, we ourselves would end up becoming the prudes. Oh it's only the Church of Scotland, they must be against this, they must be against that. And I did try even today, writing a release about the Stonewall thing right at the beginning, we would applaud anything that tried to eliminate discrimination against any group of people, so you've got to start off with a positive I think and then work in your negatives. Because otherwise they only think Oh it's the Church being negative. I know when I did that pack there was then, in England, a Mother's Union media awareness project and they had a super leaflet and it seems they were doing a very good job.

*I'm not sure how successful that was. Because when I wanted to do a pilot study for this I knew about that and I thought right, I'll contact the piskies, get a Mother's Union Group, forget it. It was really difficult. Mother's Union, they should call it the grandmothers or the great grandmothers Union, you know and I say that as a piskie, knowing the people.*

They did a very good leaflet, which I actually put into our media pack

*They have some super stuff*

It was good I thought it was worthwhile putting into our pack.

*I have read the Mother's Union newsletter, magazine actually, it's really impressive but I've yet to find a Mother's Union anywhere that is as dynamic as the core organisation which is producing it. Whether I have just been unlucky but in this area it certainly doesn't seem to figure in any shape all form. One of the impressions I am getting, not just of the Christian Church, I've spoken to yourselves, I've spoken to the piskies, I've spoken to the Catholics. I have also spoken to Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims and Jews. And it's like, the only focus, the churches only sense of communicating with the media is in terms of press releases or saying this is what we're doing, or we're responding to things that you ask us about. Actually coming together either as, all the Christian churches coming together just as a starting point, never mind religion coming together because if religion came together you would actually say, well actually there's an awful lot more people in this country who are religious than Christianity as a significant minority. But it's as if somehow it has not been grasped that you can actually*



*deal with 'the media'. Not just about press releases or responding to journalist's inquiries but the actual structural functioning of it.*

No, I think you are right. I think there's a fear of the media most of us are frightened of it.

*Yes I get that.*

When I do say these things to the guilds or whatever they almost seem quite shocked that oh gosh little old me could write a letter to the producer of whatever, and you think yes you can, of course you can and he or she will actually pay more attention to that one Letter from you, than they will to most other things that are said in their own setting because you are a real viewer and you watch the programme.

*Well that's really interesting because this morning I was interviewing the producer of High Road and he said they get an awful lot of letters from viewers. In some ways in the scheme of things I think High Road is a bit of an anomaly because it's not quite, it's not Brookside and EastEnders realism, it's this mythical, slightly in the past Scottish village and all the rest of it but never the less obviously its fans loved it dearly.*

Well, even they've become a bit raunchier in recent years

*But he said that if characters deviate or, you know, terrible things happen to characters that they wouldn't expect or they don't behave, he said they'd get letters and what he said was, we do have to respond because if we don't keep an integrity within that character, that viewers recognise, then they'll stop watching.*

I think the difficulty is, where do people's impression of reality and fiction, where's the line between them? And too many people cross that line and they think that Eileen McCallum really is Isabel Blair and therefore, if you know. She was here a few months ago planting roses in the garden for us, and she was a lovely woman. And they really do believe that. And yet when people, what he's saying is right, when characters are taken out of character - rather stupidly and foolishly I said to my wife one night last year I'll take you out for the night, and I said I'm not telling you where I'm taking you. So we went through to Glasgow and I took her to the pavilion to see the high road 0, expecting it just to be a mini high road. NO. This was effectively a pantomime, which was just completely, I wanted to cringe. It was utterly awful, the acting was dreadful, the production was dreadful. And yet the folk that went and loved it and thought it was brilliant. And I'd just sat there and thought this is the worst two hours I've ever had to sit through partly because the characters were all out of character. They were singing and dancing, it just wasn't them. It was the same set. They were wearing the same clothes. It wasn't them. And I thought these people really treat this seriously. I thought, dear,

I'm glad I'm not that addicted to soaps. And my wife said thanks for a really good night out, NOT! And I said I'm really sorry, and I thought it was going to be High Road, the play. And it turned out to be high road the pantomime and yet it was sold out for weeks too. That proves that if you take characters out of their normal setting the people will not. Maybe I'm almost going against myself, maybe they didn't believe them but they still laughed and still found it, but I didn't find it funny, I just cringed. No, I think the whole thing about our reaction to the media and the churches, I wish we had more time. I would love to spend more time in actually being interactive with the media and saying no, and doing a lot more of the contacting and writing and phoning business. I think that's, producers probably do sit up and take notice of that. And if it came directly from the Church of Scotland or the Catholic Church they would probably also sit up and take notice. I worry dreadfully about the media. I have worked in the media for 20 odd years, professionally and therefore I know what I'm on about. And I've seen it fall into almost terminal decline in certain areas. Certainly in standards, certainly in morals, certainly in what we allow to go out to which we would never have allowed a few years ago. And all for the sake of ratings. And all for the sake of the shock factor. And if you can't in inverted commas get your kit off then you can't have a drama. You can't have a drama without people getting their kit off. So I find that quite, so that we've had to go down that road in order to grab ratings. There are not very many nice, family type dramas left. I'm trying to think if there are any.

*Well I suppose it depends whether you kind of split between soaps and dramas.*

Yes. There is not that many of them. There are not too many nice family dramas or dramas for the family.

*I was just trying to remember whether people did get their kit off in it I do remember that there was a short one in the autumn the called The Sins.*

Oh yes they did. Very much so.

*Because I actually thought that was quite interesting because the Uncle Leonard figure was the very sort of strong moral figure. It was unusual.*

I was thinking back to my childhood, thinking back to how the media have portrayed clergy and ministers and that sort of thing, and thinking back to things like all Gas and gaiters - sigh. *They were slightly buffoonish.*

Very much so, very much so. I remember watching, there was another good one. They did a re-run of Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em and there was one about the Nativity. And the Minister

in it was very uncaring. I thought poor old Frank Spencer but there haven't been very many good examples of clergy being nice characters.

*It seems to come down to, people being nice is not very dramatically interesting.*

No it's not. It would be really boring. You imagine if a really ordinary family moved into Brookside close it wouldn't be interesting.

*Well, this one keeps coming up in interviews. I find that interesting because there's a Catholic family in Brookside who are incredibly ordinary.*

The Murrays.

Yes.

And they are. And yet they managed to make them interesting through the IVF thing, the miscarriage, wee Anthony's bullying.

*Yet they mix in. The neighbours don't ostracise them. They're not all devout. Dad couldn't care less about it and yet they seem to do it.*

Yes I think they've been one of the few successes and in some ways I'm surprised that Channel 4 have stuck with the Murrays. We're about to get Adele with her pregnancy.

*Well presumably that's going to be about an abortion or not to have an abortion.*

I would have thought so. I think that's going to be the big story but think back to Brookside, I was thinking of the last vicar who was in it. Remember it, was it Derek? The kiss. It was the cleaner who ran off with the vicar.

*Nobody's mentioned that.*

That can't be more than four years ago.

*I didn't watch it then. I started watching it for the purposes of this research but nobody has mentioned it. They remember the cults and a house that blew up and some woman who went to a convent.*

That's right, it was Derek and Margaret I think was the name of the girl. Trying to remember what happened at the end. Either he ran off and decided he couldn't do it. It's the last time you saw a religious person in Brookside or a vicar anyway. You don't often see priests either. Well Anthony went to confession couple of times.

*Didn't the priest come round for the wee service?*

Yes that's right he did.

*You're right, you don't. It's interesting because it seems to me from my own viewing and all the interviews I have done with the audiences, if you are going to get somebody who's religious in a soap they will be Christian. The only place that Jews seem to crop up apart from*



*apparently Dr Legge in EastEnders but I think if you blinked you'd have missed it, the only other time that Jews crop up is in dramas. One-off plays and things like that. Muslims you will tend to get in documentaries about Islamic fundamentalism or maybe film. Buddhists will appear in advertising, seriously distorted. Sikhs, Hindus forget it. They don't exist. Talking to my white focus groups if there is a brown face well, take your pick, depending on the focus group they're Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs. There's an assumption made that colour of skin means whichever faith they happen to think of whether there are any clues that this person is religious in any shape or form, it's lumped together.*

*We've not had a family like that in EastEnders for a long time. I'm trying to think back to I think it was the couple who owned the shop wasn't it?*

*Yes it was Ali and Mira. Since, they disappeared again and we've not had a coloured or any kind. Well we've had coloured but we've not had Muslim or anything like that for a while. Maybe the producers think it's a turn-off? Who knows? A fine upstanding Christian family would probably make for fairly dull television and poor ratings.*

*It's true but then as you yourself said you can be a serious Christian but you still interact with the world. Forgive me if I malign you but I doubt you do everything absolutely right every minute of the day.*

*Oh no, not at all, not at all. No I think that's right. Maybe that's why it's nice in some ways I suppose being a Protestants for want of a better word, or the Church of Scotland person because I wouldn't like to. I like the fact that I can talk directly to God without any body in between and if I've done something wrong I can ask forgiveness, rather than having to go down to confession. I just couldn't hack that. Then another human being comes into this. Even though they obviously have to keep quiet about it I still wouldn't like necessarily telling other people. One of the things talking about the media which is different for us than for instance the Roman Catholic Church is that when Cardinal Winning says something then that is the view at the Catholic Church full stop. And his flock are expected to just accept that and go along with it. I'm absolutely sure that not all the Catholics in Scotland believe everything Cardinal Winning says but not many of them, but not many of them will come above the parapet and make that known. There's been one priest, Father John Fitzsimmons who has done that, and he's been put in his place. One of the good things about the Kirk is that we can have differences of opinion and we do have on the issues like cloning and Clause 28 last year, we can have differences of opinion. We didn't agree and that's good too because hopefully it says*

to the wider world that we don't all have to sing from the same song sheet, though we can actually have differences of opinion. We're not dictated to.

*But I'm wondering as well whether that's a problem with the media in any case, of journalists who don't understand how different churches work*

They've no idea, no idea.

*So there is an assumption that the Catholic Church is dictatorial that's it. The idea that if they actually trawled round a few congregations they'd get the exact opposite of what Cardinal Winning said, but they don't, no.*

I think that's where journalists have become sloppy and are not doing their homework and are not doing their background. One of the ones I usually tell when I'm doing talks is talking about Clause 28 last year. And boy was I sick of the words Clause 28 because it was just every day. And because we did have a difference of opinion in the Kirk and the Board of Education was saying one thing and we were saying another the media loved it, because it was almost the Kirk's split, and what they wanted when we went to the General Assembly last year was blood on the carpet. They wanted us to be seen to be splitting but in actual fact we didn't. We ended up coming up with a joint report where we weren't exactly, as my convenor put it, joined at the hip but we weren't coming apart at the seams are either, and I thought that was quite good. I think that showed that we didn't have to necessarily be completely lead from on high, we could make up our own minds about issues. The number of e-mails, letters, phone calls from ordinary Church members, some supporting us, some supporting the other side. And I thought that was good because you wouldn't get that sort of discussion in the Catholic Church because what Cardinal Winning's says is what goes. At least on the surface. And the story I'd tell about this one was when many, many phone calls, was one from the Guardian and the journalist said to me, it was the day after the Moderator had said that he was in favour of scrapping Clause 28, although he stressed quite clearly that this was a personal view. Media didn't pick it up this way surprise, surprise - Moderator wants to scrap Clause 28. We went through all that.

Anyway the point was the Guardian phoned me up and said now, I know, I know that there are different opinions go within the Kirk but of course the moderator who is the head of the Church of Scotland wants to scrap the clause. And I said hang on let me stop you there for a little minute. The Moderator it is not the head of the Church of Scotland. O she said to me. O she said who is? And I said Jesus Christ is the head of the Church of Scotland, and there was a pause, and I honestly thought she was going to say to me, and do you have a contact number. She didn't. But that showed me how little the media knew about the workings of the Kirk, now

true, it was the Guardian in London so I could just about excuse them, but it's true of the Scotsman and the Herald as well. They don't do their homework; as long as they get the sound bite and this paragraph they're happy, they're absolutely happy. And I don't think that's the kind of journalism I like. I just wish one journalist would come on and say I was doing a bit of research and homework about you and this etc., etc. They don't. They go to the press office. They don't know, I'm not saying this is their fault, it might well be ours. They don't know who to contact they think it's the Moderator on everything. But it's not the Moderator on everything. If it's social, moral or ethical issues it's us. If it's other things it's other departments. If it's cloning, if it's animal cloning it's society, religion and Technology project. If it's human cloning it's us. Now I don't say this is easy for the media. They need to find the right person and they want an easy line. Whereas they go to the Catholic Church and they get Ronnie Convery or Cardinal Winning and they go bump that's the story. And sometimes we don't make it easy for them but I think we do the right thing because I think we hopefully have people who can talk from a knowledgeable background about subjects that they want to know about. And one of the interesting things is that you know this story today, at the Stonewall thing, or Clause 28, what Anne Allan was saying last on our behalf was in many ways a personal view. The point at which we first started discussing it, it hadn't even gone through our board because it was a fairly new issue. So what she was said was a personal view but they didn't say that. They just said Anne Allan of the Church of Scotland said. And there probably, there were people on our board, not many, who disagreed with what she was saying. All who felt that she was coming out too strongly. That in itself is the strength but it's also a weakness. It's certainly a weakness for the media because they capitalise on that and they see that, and they see the perceived split between two different sections of the church. And I don't know how we get round that.

*I wonder if that's just a general problem of society at the moment. The idea that you can have a group of people, who actually live together with conflicts, you know they're not constantly agreeing. Pretty much like a family, you don't all think exactly the same but you manage to find a way of working together. All the churches are like that. Politics is like that.*

I think that's true of the individual churches as well.

*Yes, absolutely.*

If I look at my own Church in Corstorphine, we've just had a vacancy; our Minister retired after 30 years. I couldn't on tape tell you some of the things that happened in the last three months.



*I could imagine it. I've been there.*

It has been shocking, to the point that last week our associate Minister will hopefully become our minister, got what amounted to a threatening letter, an anonymous letter. And I thought how low are we going? This was from a Church member. It said at the end yours sincerely a Church member brackets for the moment. And you thought where are we when people? And I went to our Kirk Session and I said to them I am horrified with what's happened over the past few months. I've worked in the media and for the media for the past 20 years if I were to phone the News of the world tomorrow and tell them what has happened they would love that. And our Church would be a complete and utter joke. I said you all need to know that as Kirk session members and I hope that gets out to the wider Church because quite frankly the only people we are making look absolute fools here is ourselves by doing this. And I thought politics; Tony Blair doesn't have a look-in on Church politics, not a look in. Hurtful. It's been hurtful for those of us involved. It's been particularly hurtful for our associate Minister and who's had to re-evaluate her whole career and think do I really want to stay in a Church where some people, a minority are so hostile. If she stays she's got to work with them. And then can you really trust. So I think we have problems within the Church and with the media.

*We do but when you don't have hideous situations like that and I've been in a Church like that and Church people can be nasty*

That can be bitchy, so bitchy

*Well yes*

The worst of the worst. And the next day they will be sweetness and light and they expect you to forget all about it. Now I'm not saying that I'm perfect or any of the people I'm talking that if we are really genuine about our Christian faith we should try to be decent people. Nothing to do with religion, we should be trying to be decent people who treat people with respect.

*Yes absolutely.*

I bit the head off a journalist this morning because I'm so sick of this story and I regretted it. He actually called back and I apologised to him - that wasn't the way to treat the guy, no matter how I felt, he was only trying to do his job and he didn't deserve to get an ear-bashing from me. So I thought I'd better apologise. And also I think if you treat people well, then people will treat you well back the way. You do get what you give.

End of interview.

## **Interview with the Reverend David Sinclair , Church and Nation Cttee, Church of Scotland.**

Reporters indulge in stereotyped response they expect Christians to be outraged and socially conservative especially about sex and drugs. If they are not they do not know how to cope.

They either twist it or find a more outrageous speaker. For example when the Moderator was at Faslane they thought it was only to get attention away from Cardinal winning. The Church said no, it's about its nuclear weapons but Winning still appeared in the article.

The Scotsman and the Herald no longer have informed staff. They do not have dedicated religious correspondents.

The Church and nation Committee has been in existence since 1919 and have concerned themselves with the issues of the day. They have contact with other organisations in society.

The media sub-group has just been dissolved. They were concerned with the big issues such as Gaelic broadcasting; the communications white paper; the merger of S T V and Grampian; freedom of information. Broadcasting is now part of the Westminster Group. This includes Holyrood, and Westminster, Europe, international issues, social issues.

Sometimes they get letters in from people. The Herald had a piece at the weekend about a film. There were different views about the film. Some people thought it was offensive but he did not and was not prepared to complain about it. The Church and Nation Committee never takes up individual cases.

There is a fear that speaking out will further stereotype the Church. There are some who will quite happily fit into this but there are others who don't want to be sucked into it.

So far as representations of the Church on television are concerned the Church of Scotland minister in Lewis CRASSIC GIBBON'S television adaptation. It showed a fully rounded human being with all his weaknesses and strengths. There are good reasons for not rushing to the barricades. There seems to be a problem with television writing when it comes to the Christian Church. There is a sense that greater care is taken with other faiths. The interesting question is how do perceptions find their way into the way people approach the Church.

*Introduction about my research... Actually I saw you being quoted in the Metro about the Stirling thing and the new Gods. I thought that was really good. I bet they don't often get that much publicity.*

*yeah.*

*Anyway what I want to know is does the Catholic church pay any attention to the way religion is shown in fictional broadcasting. Rather than the issues the church would ordinarily deal with but the way people are represented and do you actually ever have any input into dramatic productions. What I mean is things like dramas and sitcoms and soaps.*

There are really two questions there. And the answer to the first one would be that yes we are interested in how a particular church is portrayed in fiction. Especially if it's things like soaps because soaps have an immense influence on people and it's always interesting to see how religion is portrayed because quite often they're a little bit of a caricature of the real thing. And it's also interesting how many of the characters in soaps who are considered to be religious tend to be the slightly dotty types. This is always interesting that that is done. That said we really do not have, certainly here in Scotland, we do not have much if any control over that. Most of the soaps as you know either come from Australia or south of the border. Anything that is done up here, I don't think we've had any input. I'm not aware of anyone having any input from this office. But we're very open to giving input. We certainly have been involved, well most recently I was involved in helping a Bollywood film. As you likely know Bollywood seems to have adopted Scotland and they were looking for a Catholic church where they could film a bit of film and apparently this Indian girl's in Glasgow doing a degree or something and falls out of love or falls in love and for some reason she wants to go to a Catholic church to resolve this. I'm not quite sure how that fitted in the plot. So they approached us to see if we could help them in any way. so I went along to see what was going on and it was ablaze with candles so it was obviously recognisably catholic but with that Bollywood spin on it. Does that answer those questions?

*Yes it does. In terms of the first question about taking an interest in the way it's represented, is there a mechanism within the Catholic church for dealing with that? For actually responding.*

Well yes, there is this office. We are the media office for the catholic church in Scotland and if for example we felt we were being unfair, well it would have to be really quite extreme before we took any action, if you're talking about fiction. So yes we, like anyone else, could voice a concern with whoever it happens to be, the ITC

*Have you, have you recently? Say within the last 4 or 5 years.*

We're talking here about fiction?

*I should say here the reason I'm concentrating on fiction is because it seems to me that if people are not churched they certainly won't be tuning into religious broadcasting so their*



*images of religion will come from the most popular kinds of broadcasting, outwith the press, and that's the soaps, the sitcoms and the dramas.*

Certainly. No I'm not aware of us having taken any action. Likely for two reasons. One because the chances are it would be post-factum post transmission action which in a sense, you know

*It's just not worth it?*

Well you know unless it was exceptionally serious and the other thing of course is that generally even though the portrayal of religion and religious people, like the Vicar of Dibley and so on and while I would regard it as something a wee bit stereotypical and laughable, not in a comic sense but in that sense, generally it's quite benign. It tends not to be offensive. I remember some years ago when Father Ted was launched over here I took part in a radio programme with the writer of father Ted, it was Radio Scotland I think, and he was in one studio and I was in another, and they thought they would get a barney going and of course there wasn't. I said it was amusing, kind of far fetched and it was humorous because quite often humour is taking reality and just exaggerating it that touch. As I say I don't think, it would have to be something quite extreme for us to take any formal measures if you're dealing about fiction. There were concerns raised for example when the filming of Priest was being done, about how involved the Church should get in that. It really all took place down in England we were just told about it to be warned if you like. And at that time the church took a stance not to cooperate with the film makers. It was felt it was an unfair portrayal perhaps. I think that was the wrong decision. Or at least perhaps, in a sense perhaps that's the only sanction we have if we're dealing with a programme at the making stage. You either cooperate or you don't cooperate. If you cooperate then you have a limited input; if you don't cooperate then you have no input or control.

*Are you familiar with Brookside?*

Yes indeed. I visited the set and spent time with the inventor of it. Many years ago. We used to have a meeting of Catholic Press officers from the whole of the UK and we try to meet in different cities and we met in Liverpool and one of our outings was to the Brookside set. Oh what's his name?

*Phil Redmond.*

Phil Redmond, yes.

*You know there's a catholic family in it at the moment?*

Mmm. He maintains that he deals with all real issues. I suppose they are real issues, burying people in the garden But er,

*I just wondered if you'd seen it recently and had any feedback?*

No I haven't seen it recently and I haven't heard many people speak about it.

*Right. It's interesting. I'm an Episcopalian so but looking at it as a non catholic it seems to me it's one of the few really positive images you get of, I think the little boy is probably slightly over the top. He's terribly devout but they seem to have really made an effort to deal*

*with issues sensitively. You know, the mum had a miscarriage and there was all the tension of that and why god, why did it happen to us, it turned out the little boy was very jealous and he'd prayed and then he thought maybe God had answered, and the granny worked it all out with him. I was thinking this is incredible to actually get that sort of sensitivity, and theological insight and praxis of faith, with its doubt and uncertainties about big issues.*

I think Brookside has a track record of dealing with all the major issues generally in a quite level kind of way, with the odd exception of course.

*It's just that I have only fairly recently started watching it because of the research but some earlier research I'd done, the only feedback back I got on religion in Brookside was that it was all over the top and they had this cult which seemed to have stuck in everybody's memory and I think one of the houses got blown up or something in the course of this cult. It surprised me to see it being done like that. But generally the impression I'm getting, talking to audiences, is that it's caricatured. When religion goes in, and it's predominantly Christian. People are toiling to think of anything that's non Christian. It's either comedy, Father Ted or Vicar of Dibley or it's soap characters who tend to be older women who are the gossips*

That's right

*Interfering, fairly negative*

Who like to regard themselves as good people

*Yes that's right. They like to keep the vicar on track, or the priest, tell them where they're going wrong. They're the ones with the hot line to God. It's those kinds of things that interest me 'cos you said soaps were very powerful and what I'm curious about is does that kind of portrayal of religion, what sort of impact does that have on people generally, particularly when you have a press, which on the whole says we live in a secular society.*

Yes it's interesting. I think there are all sorts of contradictions going on there. You're right, the press say we live in a secular society yet open any newspaper, any day and chances are you will find 3 or 4 articles that are dealing with faith matters or morality matters in a general sense. And religion is never that far from the news and here with the Cardinal in Glasgow we know that well enough. But when it comes to kind of religion dealt with as religion as opposed to this thing that impacts on real life which in some ways they're quite reluctant to regard as religion or religious in any ways, then yes, I think it does fall back on the outspoken comments or the caricature. And that's a concern because in religious broadcasting I think the most effective type of broadcasting is the more oblique religious broadcasting. In other words not so much the Songs of Praise because in a sense that's catering for a particular broadcasting but the religious broadcasting coming at it from a different angle where it's less obviously religion, I think that it can be much more effective and that people can take it in without even realising that it is religion and the problem then is that's what happens in things like soaps, is that in a sense that the portrayal of religion is coming at you from an oblique angle and from a very skewed perspective and it must have an impact because if that is the portrayal that is continuously coming across on



programmes that have the highest ratings of all then either Marshall McLuhan got it wrong or yes it's having some sort of effect.

*You see it's one of the reasons I'm curious about why different denominations, different religions, seem to slightly take a back seat in terms of fictional broadcasting. there seems to be much more concern expressed about factual coverage or religious broadcasting but that skewing and that subtle effect, it seems to have passed them by that is possibly a source of disinformation about faith. I've spoken to the Primus of the pisky church and it hadn't really occurred to Bruce very much. I mean, I'm on the Communication and Information Board of the episcopal church and it doesn't occur to them that it's actually an issue. This was setting up portfolios for the bishops to deal with particular topics. And the media - They hadn't even thought about including it. I was like, Hang on , you've got to have it as a separate issue. It's not enough to just talk about peace and justice and all the rest of it, you've actually got to deal with this and it was oh haven't thought about that.*

I think it's true even in our church now. In our church we have an office like this. We have a bishop whose job it is to oversee the media in a sense and every year there is a communication Sunday which is coming up this month. And it would have to be said that likely the communication Sunday is one of the least enthused about. Priests in parishes and people in pews I think they find it hard to figure out why the church should be involved in the media and if they are what exactly is it they are really doing and I think there is an immense difficulty there among not just church people at the higher levels, to put it that way, but all the way down. And yet if you were to spend a couple of days in here you would see that the media in the widest sense of the word is terribly interested in what the church is up to or opines on or whatever the subject happens to be. And one of the things we try to do when we respond to press enquiries is really to try to clarify what quite often is a total misconception. And even in factual and quality papers it's an interesting thing journalists quite often have their preconceived ideas and they're either phoning just to get them confirmed or if you don't confirm them for you then they're liable to disregard them because it didn't just quite fit what they wanted. I had an example of that quite recently. One of the quality Sundays, two weeks ago I think it was, were doing a piece about the Church of Scotland were going to discuss cloning at the General Synod. One of the issues they were going to talk about was if a human being is actually cloned then they're going to talk about the fact that this human being will be a proper human being with a soul. So the journalist phoned me and said, that's kind of difficult for the Catholics 'cos you believe that the soul goes into the body at conception. I said not quite. That's a bit of a simplistic way of putting it. Let me explain it to you and spent some time explaining it to him and when the paper appeared it said This of course is difficult for Catholics who believe the soul goes into the body at the, there you can't win. But that in a sense illustrates the difficulty of the preconceived difficult issues and opinion of what a particular denomination says or stands for. And if you're talking about soaps or comedies or whatever you are dealing with, well the people who watch them have no, well the vast



majority of them presumably have no great background in the particular teaching of a particular church so they are hostages to whatever is coming across. So it becomes very difficult to distinguish between what Father Ted says the catholic church says and what the catholic church actually says. That must be a problem.

*Which I suppose brings me back to why don't the churches become a bit more proactive about the way some of these characters are represented, or even a sort of endless drip drip about trying to have slightly more positive characters?*

well if you're dealing with fiction likely one of the major problems would be that the reality would not be as entertaining as the caricature because as I said earlier on in many ways the certainly humour is taking the reality and exaggerating it just that way or in one particular way and that's where the humour lies. You know a real priest doing a real job, while it has its moments, likely isn't what a lot of people would sit at teatime and be engrossed.

*No, well fair enough. But To come back to the catholic family in Brookside. They're done very interestingly. They're involved in their neighbours' goings on so you've got story lines there but at key moments it's perfectly clear, well certainly granny and the little boy, have got a faith, it's brought into the discussions about the big issues. But the whole thing isn't watching the family go to church, watching them come back from church because no, dramatically that would be extremely boring.*

I'm sorry I haven't seen Brookside of late but if it is as you say it is and there's no reason why it shouldn't be

*But there's perception you see that's why I prefaced it with I'm not a catholic.*

But you see to have a character trying to analyse events in the light of something, in this case in the light of faith, is probably just a good story line. I mean there are so many young people who search for meaning. I mean, I think some times we're very hard on young people. It's as though sometimes we read the papers and young people are thoughtless animals. It's not true. That in a sense likely reflects reality and also the generation jump where you can't talk to your parents but maybe you can talk to that older figure. So I suppose that's a very real thing.

*It seems to me and I'm curious as to well, if they can make it work in something like Brookside why do the others stick with caricatures. Set comedy aside, clearly for comedy to work it's got to be a distortion.*

But then in other dramas, if religion comes into it it tends to be the big issues of religion. Teenager gets pregnant. Abort or not. It tends to be those issues, which are real issues but even that is a distortion because religion isn't all about those big issues. Religion is about the day to day living what it is to have a faith and that is not easy to show and not easy to portray. In dramas if a priest is involved chances are he's going to fall in love with someone or have a gay affair. It's not going to be doing funerals and consoling people. But even in serious dramas, drama being drama there needs to be a drama. You ask why? should we be doing more? I don't know. I don't know is the answer.

*Do you think it is possible to do?*

I would find it very difficult. Clearly when someone writes a drama they write the drama then it's produced and in a sense it's all done and dusted. It's quite rare. Now and again we'll get people writing novels coming in to this office and they want background information but the kind of information they get is so superficial. Like what colour robes does a cardinal wear. Red, oh yes, thanks very much. Not quite as simple as that but their own knowledge and understanding of what our particular faith says or does is so limited that all they're really doing is trying to make it vaguely convincing for somebody who's not totally involved in it. Dramas, many of them if they're well made try to be real and convincing but I'm quite sure if you're a 3 star general and there's something on about the army you'll notice all the flaws and the inaccuracies. Cos it is fiction and really at that point you're dealing with entertainment but that's the big thing it has to entertain, not necessarily be humorous but certainly be entertaining.

*It seems to me that that's where part of the problem lies. That yes there's a sort of striving, it depends on the quality and it depends on the nature, but there's a sort of striving for an illusion of reality, yes it's got to be entertainment, but within that illusion of reality is it just perpetuating stereotypes that feed in to what everybody knows or is it in some small way expanding knowledge, breaking down some of the myths even a little bit, or can it only work as entertainment by relying on stereotypes. So we all know that catholic priests constantly have trouble sticking to celibacy. it's either got to be a homosexual or heterosexual affair. The idea that one would stick with celibacy. Well that's a myth because they don't do they? And equally we know that if they're Irish and elderly they're knocking back bottles of whisky every night. I just, is there something about the nature of the medium that it can only*

No I don't think so because I think a lot depends on production values and also on how much people are willing are to spend. Many things in the media boil down to that. If you're willing to spend lots of money then you get a product that looks as though vast sums of money have been spent on it whereas if you're doing it in a studio with two cameras, sort of, so to go back to priests, because recently there was a documentary that spoke a lot about that so that's kind of in my mind and kind of with hindsight now, at the time I went to see it and I didn't really enjoy it, I thought then it was quite stereotypical too, priests struggling with sexuality, meets boyfriends

*Oh is that the one that was on on Saturday night*

Yes there was a documentary but the writer of that film was interviewed but with kind of hindsight now looking back on it now it did address many other issues but again as side issues. The main story in a sense was the stereotypical one but the side issues I felt were much more important; were the ones that people would take in without really realising they were taking in. Just the whole subject of the humanity of a priest which many people find difficult to accept curiously enough but true nevertheless. The whole business about the dynamic between someone who has been in the priesthood for a long time and has perhaps become slightly jaded with this



guy who is struggling, searching for something but at the same time has a very good heart. Almost sub plot going on there. In many ways those for me are the most interesting things rather than the more obvious things and in some ways I think they do a better service to religion and indeed to the whole art of drama than the more stereotypical almost predictable storylines that so often appear.

*It's interesting that. I was interviewing the president of the mosque, the central mosque in Edinburgh on Monday and he said because I mean Islam doesn't feature in fictional broadcasting, I think the only thing anybody has been able to think of is Goodness Gracious Me, and there's a sort of blurring of race with religion, there's an assumption if it's an Asian then it's a Muslim we're dealing with and that's nonsense, but he felt he would far rather see documentaries that showed different aspects of Islam than actually see Islam in fiction. He just felt that there was too much scope for getting it wrong and too much scope for stereotyping.*

Well I think that even when you're dealing with documentaries there's a fair bit of scope for getting it wrong there too, depending on the documentary maker, quite often they are hammering away at their own drum and tarring it up in the course of the documentary apparently.

*Well I would agree and I think he was hoping that if you could have positive documentaries that didn't just focus on Islamic fundamentalism or arranged marriages that he saw that as a more productive way of raising the positive side of Islam.*

But then even in documentaries as well as fiction it, the extremes is what is portrayed, in documentaries it tends to be the anti abortionists protesting outside the clinics. Or someone with an extremely right wing Christian viewpoint in some soap or other who's condemnatory to everyone else or whatever, it's easier to do. It's much easier to make that interesting because it's extreme rather than the majority. I watched a documentary couple of weeks back about 2 protestant fundamentalist preachers who claimed miracles

*Late Night. Benny Hind and Reinhard Bonke.*

Bonke, yes what a great name.

*I have come across them before.*

And I thought it was a tremendously well made programme but again you were in a sense dealing with a fringe thing. Yet towards the end of it there was a wee bit of the catholic side of miracles and Lourdes was brought in to it and I thought oh oh and yet it turned out to be a very sympathetic comment on, in 150 years Lourdes has had the number of miracles claimed that they have in one night. so in a sense it can be done. Maybe you've got to take the extremes to then focus the attention but it's a very difficult thing to do and i think if it's difficult to do that in what are factual programmes then I think it's all the more difficult to do in drama and fiction.

*Do you, I'm not sure if this seriously a research question or a personal question. Sometimes I wonder in the course of doing this research whether in fact it's a waste of time because there doesn't, people get very concerned about, gender was a big issue, representation of race is of concern, representation on age is coming to the fore and disability there are voices*



*for all of these things. It's not just about covering these things in documentaries but it's about the way they're dealt with in fictional programming. I was at a conference last month and there was somebody from one of the disability charities talking about trying to get more disabled actors in and not as a big thing but just they're there. They're part of life. They were looking at one of the BT adverts and another one for Playstation. And they have this guy in a wheelchair and he's spinning around in the Underground doing wheelies and everything and it's just one of many many shots of many different kinds of people. So all these things have voices and have complained and successfully to varying levels to the extent that people have actually become aware of how these things are portrayed, to represent reality and I sometimes get to the stage of thinking it's just me, nobody else cares how religion is portrayed in fictional broadcasting.*

No, I would suspect that it's just that religion is coming up the rear because as you'll know in recent weeks there has been talk about maybe it's time that there was some sort of legislation in Scotland about sectarian provocation. Because that whole, the subject of religion and talking about religion is really quite a difficult subject. Certainly in Scotland. And it's a bit like you just don't talk about it at polite dinner parties because it might cause offence. In the same way that you didn't talk about other things in the past and now these things are spoken about. So it may just be, if it's any consolation to you, that having dealt with the more obvious ones like gender and race and disability then the next one is creed perhaps and maybe it's only having dealt with those ones that people now will suddenly might as seems to be the case, it is slowly dawning on people that you can insult people by saying not nice things about their faith whereas apparently in this country you can't call someone a black b but you can call someone a fenian b and it doesn't, you can't get done for that whereas you can get done for the first. Whereas there seems to be a growing awareness now, wait a minute, it's not acceptable to say that either. As you know all the great equality claims tend to talk about equality of gender, sexual orientation, colour, creed. People should not be discriminated on on any of those issues but creed is always the last and maybe it's because, and yet it's such an important thing to so many people.

*When you said that I thought, I've never actually thought about the difficult of talking about religion in Scotland and I'm just wondering if that's part of the problem. I've lived here for 27 years but I suppose not growing up here I didn't know that was a problem.*

It's an issue that's just not spoken about.

*Yeah, well it was only about ten years ago that, I was talking to a good friend, long catholic family, that I discovered there was discrimination against Catholics in Scotland. I mean, I had no idea that happened. She was telling me a number of stories, family In Edinburgh and certain jobs were closed uncles having to pretend they were protestants and that was just a complete eye-opener to me. But again I suppose it wasn't discussed. I didn't grow up here so I didn't absorb it and then it's not discussed so maybe maybe that is part of the difficult.*

I think it must be and we haven't spoken about it for so long that it's kind of hard to start talking about it. It's as though somebody has just said something and my goodness. I don't

know whether that would have any influence on why people would maybe be reluctant to voice concerns about portrayal of particular religious perspectives in drama. but i think it may well be because in some ways for many years you would never have seen a black face in drama. They weren't there even though they were on the streets. I mean I remember thinking how strange when catholic characters were portrayed they weren't kind. To use a comedy, The Boswells in Liverpool, they blessed themselves. Maybe they were Anglicans I don't know about it!

*No, no. Good Liverpool Catholics.*

But that was a caricature as well, likely, yet in a strange way it was strange to see it. Scotland has that, the Cardinal refers to it as a dirty secret. There is quite a level of discrimination whereas it's more hidden now, although I think people, that's why I say to you, I think people are dealing with it and given time, issues like how religions are dealt with in the media both factually and fictionally may come up the agenda a little same way as, but unless there is, the other point is unless there's some sort of sanction. Race relations Board, Equal Opportunities all those things there is no, how dare you, this is the How Dare You treat a Catholic that way on Television Committee, there is no such thing.

*I know there are guidelines. There are ITC and BBC has producers guidelines but they're so open ended if you like.*

If I got in touch with the ITC to complain about the portrayal of even the people in Brookside that would be seen as a personal, that's your own personal sensitivity to that. There isn't any kind of sanction, there really is no effective way of dealing with it even if people were more aware that it is going on.

*I wonder then if that's because the churches and the other religions haven't got themselves together to have a voice. I interviewed Melvyn Bragg earlier in the year and he said that well women got together and formed groups and became extremely vocal and legislation was passed. The same with other races. And things like that he said that the churches don't do that, the religions don't do that, they don't have this one voice.*

Well, well, they do on certain issues but not on other ones and this is one that we don't and it is likely because it is not seen as that important. I think that is the bottom line. As I say our church kind of makes, well it does what it has to do about communications and the media but sometimes deep down, and I sometimes feel not that deep down, those who are in positions of authority in the church don't understand how it all works and the real influence that it does have. That's most seen when you're dealing with negative news but it's I think it's true across the whole board. At the back of it all, the people who at the moment have influence do not see the media really as high up the agenda,. It's hard to believe that.

*No sadly*

*But it's true. I believe it's true.*

*Maybe when I get all this done.*



Opening discussion about The Archers on Radio 4 and suggestion that Linda Snell was intended to be Jewish. No official confirmation of this. No explanation of why it didn't happen. Tell him about interview with Simon Cherry and fear of racism in Archers as explanation for lack of ethnic diversity. Discuss Roy Tucker and Usha.

E: comes through occasionally in one or two of the well loved characters...there have certainly been occasions when there has been talk about incomers and outsiders and elements of racism creeping in to that. I suppose it is part of society that they need to reflect if it is going to be an ordinary country family.

*Me: well exactly*

E: but on the other hand I'm not sure what the ethnic mix of Chipping Norton is

*Me: well I doubt it's that mixed*

E: no probably not. I was up in Invergordon a couple of weeks ago talking to kids in a local school and aside from the fact that all the 7 years old I saw were white locals. They actually had no conception of being a minority. I said how many of you belong to a minority and they all sat on their hands. And I said well you know I'm not particularly interested in who is who but just think about this, there are amongst you, having checked with the teacher that there wasn't a local catholic school, this was an integrated education authority, there will be amongst you Protestants and Catholics and amongst the Protestants there are probably a majority of the church of Scotland but you might not even be a majority of the class, you're just the majority of the protestants and then there's also the Episcopalians and undoubtedly up there some wee Frees and so forth as well. In fact two flavours of wee Frees and so forth. So just think about that. And that's before I even pick on you for having red hair. At which point one or two of them collapsed! I was saying that to the Minister (Scottish Office) this morning that really I think one of the, this is starting to sound like propaganda rather than education, but that what they ought to be trying to do is to get everyone to see that they are members of some minority because then the big gulf between the group with the power and the under group disappears, and we're all just members of overlapping minorities. For whatever purpose it might be. It might be religion it might be gender it might be sexual orientation, it might be ethnicity, whatever it might be. And even all the confusion, and what's brought this to a head is the forthcoming census, even there, there is confusion at the level of the heading of the question about ethnicity and culture and colour and a whole lot of other things. The question is a mess.

*I was actually at a meeting last week, SRA, one of the guys from the census dept was there (discuss who it was). It was interesting actually seeing it.*



He, I think, is head of the pure stats end of things. He gets very uncomfortable when people take him on about the philosophical aspects of it. John Randall, who is the Registrar General, I was surprised to discover is actually a career civil servant rather than a statistician. SO this is just his current posting so to speak. But there are lots and lots of issues to do with how they're handling the ethnicity question, the religion question, the overlap between them. The ethnicity question, the heading is ethnicity then the question says 'identify your cultural background'. And then the five headings are in the following order, White, Asian Black and Other. Does that remind you of anything? I get very irritated. How do you spell apartheid? SO we're, when I say we, the minority communities are up in arms about this.

*When I was working on the sampling method for this to do my focus group interviews, you know it's only one strand, it's not big, it's qualitative, I'm not desperate for it to be statistically valid but there had to be some rationale. Because I wanted to not just deal with Christianity, I wanted to look at other religions as well, I thought I'll find out which religions in Scotland have the most adherents. That's probably the fairest way of doing it. Well it will be no surprise to you to discover that this information is not kept.*

It will be.

*Well, yeah it will be but you know it's a voluntary question. And I rang everywhere to try and get this information and then I eventually rang Steve Bruce in Aberdeen... and he often has figures. Honestly nobody has the figures. And that's because the last time it was asked on the census was 1800 and whenever. But Steve Bruce sent me some figures*

And then it said tick the following box

*Well but it was ethnicity. It's this interchangeability of ethnicity and religion. So I sent an e-mail back and said no, I don't want ethnicity because what ethnic origins are you if you're Buddhist for example?*

Quite

*It's the same thing presumably with Judaism.*

Well I was giving an example to the Minister this morning. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minister I've told this story to in the last fortnight. The recently published report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Police in Scotland had a number of recommendations. I mean obviously it's very much dominated by the Lawrence or post-Lawrence culture and so forth. But one of the recommendations, recommendation 18, is that they've got to be ethnically sensitive and they should have halal meat meals in their freezers in police stations. And I said excuse me, what's this got to do with ethnicity. That's a religious requirement. And it's only in there because you identify Asians with Muslims when in fact the majority of Asians in the UK, not in Scotland but the UK, may well be Hindu. I don't know. Nobody knows, but it's a

possibility. To say nothing of home bred, in inverted commas, converts to Islam. And of course Kosher meals aren't mentioned. Not because the Jewish community is smaller but we're in the religion box and you've put Muslims in the ethnicity box. Now just think about that. So there is this constant crossover and after an amount of pushing and shoving I got the Scottish Executive to ask the Met for their Cultural Awareness Handbook. I forget what it's called or minority awareness. And it's very interesting because it's loose-leaf, which itself is an interesting signal. And it's divided into two sections. One section is on religious minorities and one section is on ethnic minorities. So you've got. And in fact I don't think they use the word minorities I think they use Communities because it's got Christianity in it as well. So it's got Christianity and Islam and Buddhism and Judaism and so on in one section and in the other section they've got the West Indians and, sorry I can't remember which cultural, sorry ethnic minorities they've got but they've made the conscious decision to separate the two out and that is in fact the right thing to do. There will be things which will be clearly cultural, geographical cultural as it were as opposed to religious and they may in the majority of cases coincide

*But not necessarily*

Yeah, and how you handle them may have to be different as well. You can say to somebody that's merely cultural, I'm sorry but you can't say to somebody that's merely religious. I'm sorry you know this ham sandwich is all we've got in the fridge is not gonna work. And neither is I'm sorry we're gonna have to put you in a mixed cell but there might well be other things where you could say, I mean I can't actually think of a sensible example, where you could say I realise culturally this a problem for you but it's very difficult for us and to be fair we've done our best for you on things that really matter but this is only cultural. I mean it's as if, this obviously wouldn't be true, but if somebody said to me look we've got Kosher meals but unfortunately they're Sephardic meals do you mind. You don't mind eating African kosher food do you? Well maybe it's not what I was brought up with, OK, but I'm not gonna complain that much about it. So I think it's important that people should realise just exactly what kinds of issues it is that they're dealing with at any given time and where the boundaries are, which ones are a matter of etiquette and which ones are somehow deeper than that. Which is not to say ignore the former but be aware you can ask for a certain amount of come and go.

*Can I just come on to the media question?*

[loo break and doesn't flow sensibly for a bit]

*The media thing. How much involvement do you have, do you have any input to the media. Are you proactive? Are you reactive? Do you just tend to keep your heads down? Would it just be hard news situations?*

We tend to be pretty reactive. [Phone call incoming] Probably I suppose in two different ways. Everyone now and then one or other, mainly radio stations but occasionally TV will get in touch and say we need somebody to do a thought for the day slot. Or some specific religious programme, like Eikon or whatever, will ask for somebody to take part in a round table discussion. So we're reactive in the sense that we're responding to an invitation. And the other kind of reactivity is if there's something somebody hears on a news bulletin or a documentary or a magazine programme that they'll then get in touch with the producers and say this isn't on. Speak to Charles Woolfson about the BNP and Term Television. I don't think we ever got to the bottom of that one. He was invited up to Aberdeen to take part in a programme and discovered that the BNP were on it and, e-mail networking is absolutely wonderful because within 24 hours half the population of Scotland had complained about it. Nobody knew anything about it. I forget how it came about. I'd come back home very late from something, flopped in to bed and switched on the television, was channel hopping and thought 'talking heads' I'm not going to watch this and then I thought, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, I just wonder and I watched ten seconds more than I would have done and I realised I was actually watching the offending programme. And Charles had had a promise that they were going to edit the BNP out and I was actually able to e-mail him the next day and say 'they lied'. Just because I'd had a late night. Anyhow that doesn't help you. So as I say, it's really those two kinds of things.

*Would you ever get consulted if there was any kind, if there was any Jewish story line or anything like that?*

Maybe yes, maybe no. I really don't know. It presumably depends an awful lot on who is doing what. I mean I remember for example they filmed an episode of Taggart in the department. There was one story line to do with someone being a philosophy student. They got hold of some poor guy in the department and got him to write a couple of bits of dialogue for them for a tutorial. So in a similar kind of way they might very well come along and say well we want this Jewish bit in a story could you tell us just how it would work. On the other hand of course they might think they know all the answers. Sometimes, films will set my teeth on edge because they could so easily have checked the facts or checked the ritual or whatever and they literally just make it up. But then they do that with everything. This isn't anti-Semitism. It's Hollywood knowing best.

*Yes, It's just laziness sometimes.*

Yes. Translate Et Pluribus Unum.

*Sorry? Many. It's, pluribus is many. Unum is one.*

It's the motto of the United States. And I've always thought that it meant, in fact I know damn well that it means Unity and Diversity. Out of many one. There was a stupid film on



TV the other night. It actually bore no relationship to the storyline at all but just twice the slogan was mentioned because it's on all American currency and it was translated for the benefit of those without Latin as effectively first amongst equals.

*Now that's primus inter pares. I know that!*

Yes. But you can see if you're working with the English one out of many it can sort of have both senses. But it's that kind of thing. How long would it have taken to open a book and look? So you know you've got that kind of thing a lot where things are just marginally misrepresented because somebody vaguely remembers something. But then again you get other films which are very good. There was a film on last week which was very good – Price Above Rubies or something.

*Oh yes I saw it.*

Did you watch all of it? I fell asleep half way through it.

*I videoed it.*

So if I want to see the rest of it I can borrow the video from you?

*I think I've still got it. I thought that was very good but then I thought, I'm not Jewish, I know bits about the Jewish faith, I'm not sure how good it is.*

Until I fell asleep I thought it was very good. I mean, quite how many Orthodox girls would end up screwing their brother in law in the living room, I'm not a 100% certain of, and not for long, but the Jewish aspect, the ritual bits were well done and reasonably, well in fact fairly accurate not just reasonably accurate, and it was pretty easy to identify which particular sect they were dealing with, at a pretty early stage of the story. So that was a good example. But then there are others where you begin to wonder just which comic they got this caricature out of.

*If I can bring it to television rather than film can you think of instances of Judaism on television?*

Well, there are a few set pieces. Like the Chief Rabbi gets given two party political broadcasts. One before Passover and one before the New Year.

*I was actually thinking more in fiction rather than factual stuff*

Other than that. There's an odd paradox actually. There may very often be fiction or Jewish story lines as one offs rather than soap operas but they will very often put them on on a Friday evening for the benefit of the Jewish public who will precisely then not watch them [laughter].

*I suppose it's maybe like putting something for the Wee Frees on a Sunday.*

Well exactly. Well actually that happens. Less so than it used to [break to pay bill]. I remember when I went to Israel as a kid. The radio stations broadcast on Sabbath but only religious music.

[Discuss holidays in Eilat and Sabbath and Kosher regulations]

*Let's go back to television.*

Look I'm not a soap watcher and I'm simply not aware of anybody saying did you see a caricature here and I do think people tend to be a bit oversensitive at times which in a way is a bit inevitable because any member of a minority community is going to be seen as totemistic and therefore anything you do is going to be seen as a stereotype and that's inevitable. But I'm certainly not aware of anybody having raised in this kind of neck of the woods, certainly that I can remember.

*Do you think it's something that there should be more awareness of.*

The problems going to be, I mean I was discussing this again this morning, sorry to keep coming back to this, with Maggie Curran, there's always the danger that what you're actually doing is setting yourself up. Holocaust Memorial Day a couple of weeks ago was very well done as an event both here and in London. But what it did potentially was to provide a focus for right wing discontent. You're giving them something to come out from under a stone to protest about. Now, maybe that's actually a good thing because it reminds you they're still there and so forth but that's a more subtle kind of argument. And it may very well be that if you put a member of an ethnic or religious or whatever minority into a soap plot. You have to give them something to do. So either the Jews are all middle class or whatever positive or negative stereotype and you're playing to people's prejudice. Even in education the question is whether you're giving people an understanding or whether you're simply giving them facts so they know which name to call you to be even more hurtful. Cynic. I suspect that if one were to take a straw poll of the community they would be happy not to appear in soaps.

*You think so*

I'm almost certain

*Head below the parapet?*

Yeah

*Interesting. I was talking to the Primus of the piskie church yesterday.*

Richard Holloway or Idris Jones?

*No, no Richard's gone now. Idris isn't Primus.*

Oh they don't have one?

*Idris isn't Primus. It's Bruce Cameron at the moment.*

Temporarily?

*I don't know whether it's temporarily*

I read about a short list of five the other day

*No, no that's for Bishop of Edinburgh. This is our primus inter pares which is how I know it's primus inter pares.*

Oh right, sorry I had naively assumed. You're quite right. I was wrong if you see what I mean. When I saw that article I didn't distinguish between Richard Holloway's two jobs. *No, he was Bishop of Edinburgh and he was Primus.*

I heard him speak at the royal phil last Thursday night. He was very good. He spoke without pausing for breath for an hour. Exactly. He was very good and as the chairman said at the end of the meeting, we've heard a lot of good speakers but we've never heard an audience not cough, or move or sneeze for an hour.

*He's wonderful.*

As it happens his content I thought was Beta double pluses but his presentation was Alpha. He started off with a silly metaphor which even he gave up in the middle of. He's a nice guy.

*I was talking to Bruce yesterday. I got a very similar impression. The daft thing is I'm actually on the Information and Communication Board of the Episcopal Church. I only joined in September so I'm still not sure what I'm meant to be doing or what the job is.*

Are you in touch with Martin Oxey [?]. He was the vicar of somewhere around here and is now in the Outer Isles. He got in touch with me last year... and it was an invitation to come and talk to his training course out in Perth for fledgling piskie priests. It was hysterical. Actually my opening remarks were this is a poisoned chalice and they all just fell about laughing. I mean I was talking to them on a Sunday morning. They'd just come back from Mass. It was great fun. Martin has been sent off somewhere or other.

*No I haven't come across him at all.*

I doubt whether he still has that responsibility.

*TISEC?*

Yes.

*The point I was going to make, I got the distinct impression from Bruce and the reason I mentioned my own position is because I thought, God I'm on this Board, I could be talking to myself. I don't know the answers to what we're doing as a church and responding. But it seemed to be a similar kind of thing. There was a, we don't want to, it's always been reactive. We've seen what happened to Richard. It was all very nice to have Richard being our spokesperson, raising the profile, taking the flak, but*

But you've left soaps again. You're now back in to hard news.

*Yes [toilet break] What struck me there was a sense of, running scared's a bit cruel, a bit judgmental, but of not quite sure how to deal with it so we'll see if we can slip them the odd*



*press release and things like that but actually then moving into the areas of commenting like soaps, sitcoms and dramas, that was a step far too far.*

You see I think there's a difference because for most purposes if you watch an episode of a soap, any soap you're going to be very hard pressed to identify from anything whatsoever which members of the cast are Wee Frees and which are Piskies and so forth. Whereas the whole point of having a Jewish character or Jewish family more like would be to have them doing Jewish things and therefore it's not gonna be just a matter of every now and again on a Sunday morning one lot go to that building and one lot go to that building. It's a matter of precisely bringing out that these people are doing different things every time. Every soap has, as it were, it's corner shop I understand so you have to have a big discussion about what food's kosher and this sort of thing. So I think it's different because the only way you're going to have a recognisably piskie character is as a priest. And even then it's probably not going to be all that significant which denomination.

*No, I think as far as Christians are concerned Catholics are identifiable and after that well it's not, not Catholics. It seems to be as far as people manage to go in identifying. They know it's Christian but they couldn't tell you anything more specific. But Catholics seem to be very clearly identifiable. I suppose what interests me is, I sometimes wonder, is it just not an interesting question. Does it at the end of the day matter if there isn't a reasonable representation of the different religions in this country within popular broadcasting because if that's the bulk of programming that people watch, I'm not saying that's exclusively what people watch but lots of people watch at least 2 or 3 soaps and then there'll be the sitcoms and the one off dramas and the serials and if across the broad spectrum of programming religion barely gets a look in and when it does it's a caricature or it just doesn't. And then you off set that against different kinds of media coverage that we're not a religious society any more, nobody takes religion seriously, you know, and if you don't go to church, mosque, synagogue whatever, and not many of your friends do, and you think, well I know it's only television it's not real but it's pretty close. And you know particularly the ones like EastEnders and Brookside, which try to deal with serious social issues, it just seems to me that there is a slight problem. That if you haven't got a balance, and you know it's not necessarily about showing, hey look at these weird Jews, the way they do things or look at those funny fundamentalist Christians or whatever. It's just about; this is part of my life.*

[Arrival of student known to Ephraim] Johnny do you watch soaps? Have you ever found an episode [introductions – President of Jewish Students Society]. Are you conscious of any Jewish episode in any soap? I'm the wrong person to ask.

[Can't hear]

*One thing I can think of in past 6 months is Fat Friends [tell story]. My knowledge of television viewing is that Judaism will crop up in plays but it doesn't crop up in other things.*

It does in Friends. That's strange because the character Ross is Jewish but his sister in the programme is not Jewish.

She is.

No. Monica never comes across as Jewish. Just hysterical. [They leave]

*It confirms what I suspect.*

But maybe inevitably, it's maybe to do with something else. Aside from the "secularisation of society' in general. You've also got the, I ought to be able to make up a big fancy Greek word that sociologists would love for this, the de-praxisisation of religion. Religion for most people is, and this is a very Christian view, religion is to do with praxis as opposed to God love, theology and therefore short of having people sitting round the table at a dinner party discussing something it's not gonna come up. It's not to do with what you do; it's to do with what you believe. Now that's probably not true for Jews, Muslims and other minorities as well but it's certainly true for Christians and it's therefore, it sets the conceptual framework within which the viewer and producer and society at large are going to conceptualise these questions. Do you know Ninian Smart's On the Nature of Religious Experience? All you have to do is read the first chapter... it's the conceptual framework within which he's operating. It took me a long time before I realised that this might be called comparative religion but what he was actually doing was very much a Christian looking at comparative religion. So the framework, though he wouldn't admit it because he comes from a very secular family [details] but Smart talks about 6 dimensions of religion. But first thing you have to do is convince people that this isn't a definition of religion it's a framework for talking about religion. If someone says to you, you want to go out and buy a car these are the things you should think about. That's not a definition of a car it's simply saying that you should think about safety and braking and acceleration and so on... that's not a definition it's just a list of aspects. So when he talks about the ritual dimension, ethical dimension and the mythological dimension and so on that's not a definition of religion. Even separating them out in those ways is a very Christian kind of thing because for Judaism and I think for Islam there isn't a distinction between the ritual dimension and the ethical dimension. As I said to the pisky training course, the reason I don't go around murdering old ladies is actually the same reason that I get up at 7 o'clock every morning and go to the morning service. The same reason, not one of them is religious and one of them is ethical. So you have that kind of problem. So the minute you're in a Greek derived Christian culture there is a sharp divide between religion identified as ritual and ethics on



the other side of the divide. Then the ritual thing just doesn't come into the discussion at all and therefore having a character in a soap of a different religious background would apparently be as irrelevant as whether someone was a piskie, a church of Scotland or a roman catholic, although that, as you say, may be slightly different. The point at which you have to bring out the distinction as ritual and ritual is not going to be all that easy to handle or interesting if you're restricted to 45 second episodes, in the way in which soaps are constructed. So you know, if you look at most films or plays or whatever, unless they're about religion in some sense or identity or whatever, the way they tell you the character is Jewish is by having a Menorah on the shelf in the background and usually with the wrong number of branches. And that's it. So if you can 't make it interesting why should it be there? Why make somebody odd if you actually want people to identify with other aspects of their character?

*Do you think it's not at all possible to have a Jewish family move into Albert Square, in EastEnders for instance, have a stall or run one of the shops?*

That was last year's Jewish Chronicle's Purim eve spoof. Half the back page was taken up with a picture of a Hassidic family. This was supposedly the scoop. They were the new family moving into Albert Square.

*Clearly a Hassidic family is maybe stretching it a bit. Is it not possible? Would it not be possible, would it not be workable for something like that without making it like?*

I don't know you'd need to ask television people that.

*Yeah, but would you see that as possible?*

I think I'd cringe.

*Would you?*

Well, the problem is always going to be that they're going to have find some kind of half way house between these people being totally weird and therefore being not a negative stereotype but nonetheless a negative portrayal because 5 million people are going to scream, this isn't for real. And they'll [?] they're being Jewish to point at which it's least inaccurate and again just trivial. I don't know if it can be done. This may be an interesting topic for a round table discussion with a couple of scriptwriters and producers. How would you handle it?

*I don't quite understand why it can't be done. Because if it can't be done then what you're actually saying is in everyday life Jews can not mix with non Jews because they are constantly seen as oddities. I mean you and I would not be meeting here, talking, sharing that lunch and yet we've managed to do that. So why can't somebody meet somebody in a café in a soap have lunch and whatever the plot line is?*

But then how do you bring out that they're Jewish?



*Well, you know it's Friday evening and I say I'm going out on the town getting pissed and you say you're going off to the synagogue or whatever.*

Well big deal, how interesting is that going to be after the first time.

*But I think what I actually wonder is, is by the very absence of the ordinariness, the routineness of religion in people's lives, is that not part of the problem. It's shown as something big and weird, often, and what I wonder is, for most of the people I know, those who tend to be at the more fundamentalist end of their faith, they actually manage to function in everyday life. There are maybe things, there are things related to worship, they would go here to do this, they would go here to do that, there are decisions that they would make that would be affected by their faith and there are some things they just would not do and sometimes you make compromises because you're a human being. And all that sort of thing. But it's that very ordinariness. It's like it can only be shown if it's sensational, you know to emphasise the oddity of people who are religious.*

Yeah

*And that's why nobody takes religion very seriously any more isn't it because they know they're all a bunch of nutters.*

No I hear what you're saying and I don't know what the answer is. I think may be the answers may be different for different religions. It's unlikely for Christians short of occasional attendances at a religious service and the kinds of arguments that would be brought to bear at decision points it's just not going to come out at all. For Jews and Muslims let's suppose that we're not talking about people who are in some sort of ethnic or racial way identifiable, people who are maybe children of converts, and I'm deliberately saying children of converts and not converts, so that they are members, ethnically they are members of the background population be it Scotland or Manchester, so you've got people who don't look any different, how are you going to bring out that they are different and keep reminding people. And it may very well be that the problem, and it's part of the problem I suppose that one has with religious education as well, that what you're always telling people is the negative things and not the positive things. It'll come across that somebody will say 'no I can't do that; I can't join you for dinner; I can't give you a lift to the hospital on a Friday night' and then of course what will happen will be that the producers will, for reasons of political correctness in a good sense rather than a bad sense, will say well hang on, we don't want to do that because by the nature of the thing it's a negative stereotype. What else are we going to do? Well, how often can you show them putting money into a charity box?

*I know.*

It may just actually be insuperable. Anything interesting is weird and if it's not interesting why bother? And where do you pitch it? If you could somebody entirely secular there's no point in as it were announcing they are Jewish. You might as well give them a yellow star to wear.

*Yeah, yeah*

And if you get somebody in a black hat and ringlets then we wouldn't be meeting in here for lunch and for that matter they probably wouldn't be living in Albert Square either. So you pitch it somewhere in the middle and then it becomes radically compartmentalised as those of us who live in the middle are. I mean I'm meeting you here for lunch. My wife wouldn't. So, whereabouts in the middle do you pitch that?

*I don't know. I was speaking to a producer on Peak Practice the other week and he said something at one point and I thought that he felt I was actually complaining, but why aren't you doing it, why aren't you doing it, you should be doing it and I thought*

You do occasionally sound as though you are saying that

*I know, I know. I have to really think about this because the difficulty is getting them to listen to the question and saying come on why aren't you doing this? I'm not accusing you. This is not a one-woman pressure group. I'm curious as to understand what the constraints are that are going on whether within you personally or within the organisational structures, social structures that you feel that are constraining you.*

They're maybe scared. They may be scared that anything they do is going to be wrong and they may be criticised on the grounds of stereotyping. I mean it may be that the way to ask people from the broadcasting side to widen it is how do you handle diversity? And what kinds of diversity can they handle. Every soap nowadays has to have a homosexual, I gather, even The Archers... they seem to have got over that particular hurdle. I suppose it's constructive

[Tape seems to have run out at this point but it was practically at the end]

**Interview With Yaseem Mohammed at the Potter Row Mosque 7th July 2001.**

The media are not friendly. One-and-a-half years ago Channel 4 did a documentary about how repressive Islam is. The BBC countered this. There is the difference between tradition and Islam. The media only want to show the repression. There is an important distinction between people and the religion. There is the peace of Islam versus the warfare of individuals. The media have an agenda and want to sell a story - there is also the question of racism in interviews. Fatwahs should not be done based on feelings, they should be done after consultation - what does Allah say does the Prophet agree with it.

You're also dealing with the narrow mindedness of the viewers. It would not be a good idea for in Muslim family to be in soap. There is one television channel which is OK on Islam the others are not so. Documentaries about Islam are better - soaps are problematic. This is because they all to do with making fun - I wouldn't want my own family in a soap because some of the values and morals would not be desirable. They are not likely to show women in appropriate dress or people behaving appropriately. They are more likely to make fun of it and that's not helpful.

*I wonder if this is an issue of age. Yaseem referred to the Asian TV awards and a joke that was made by one of the winners about eating his chaudies - he thought this was immodest and inappropriate. I saw most of the awards and that the younger age group were all laughing. It might be useful to speak to younger Asians.*



## Interview with Sikh men, Edinburgh.

There were a number of problems with this interview. It was recorded in a large hall, which echoed badly. Despite being asked not to the men repeatedly talked over each other and to each other. They also, frequently, spoke in Punjabi, which meant I could not understand anything that was being said. We were also 20 minutes late in getting started due to the late arrival of some of the men. This meant the interview was shorter than expected because most of them had to leave at a set time.

*So, what I'm really trying to do is talk to different religions around Scotland. You can see from the leaflets I have been interviewing focus groups and some of those people (constant interruptions as people keep arriving). As I say I've been talking to representatives of different religions and I have also been doing focus groups with people from different religions and people who are not religious. But interestingly enough many of them have turned out to be. This is part of my PhD research and I'm looking at the way different religions are shown in fictional television. I suspect there will be an additional bit that addresses religious broadcasting because it keeps coming up but my main focus is things like dramas and sitcoms and soaps. My research is funded by the government as part of social inclusion and exclusion and what I'm questioning is, if religion is not shown very often in fictional broadcasting, which is the kind of television most people watch, you know it's the stuff that gets the highest viewing figures, does that actually affect the way society in general perceives religion? And then you come down to individual religions. Does it affect the way those individual religions are seen? So as far as I can see from my own television viewing I can't think of any fictional programmes that have ever included Sikhs. Which makes me wonder does that make Sikhs invisible, to vast chunks of the population who wouldn't watch religious broadcasting or listen to religious broadcasting on the radio, which is quite good and covers a lot of different religions. Yet at the same time you have a lot of people in the press, well within the media generally, saying we live in a secular society and no one is interested in religion any more. It's all of these issues that I'm trying to look at. Is that really true? How do different religions feel about the way religion generally is shown, their religion in particular and could you see ways in which it could be done differently? And do you actually think yourselves it does have an impact on the way people view religion and the Sikh community?*

It would have I feel because a lot of people they see us as Sikhs and they are very curious about our future in a turban and all that. And they feel that we've been in this country for a long time but what we would preach and how we would believe and how we

go about our religion if they see that on television, and as I said before we have four or five festivals a year and then they know that we have a temple, that we pray in and what kind of temple we have, what we do inside it and what kind of festival we have, what we believe. You know what to be Sikh means really you know. As I said before if we could maybe let the television people come, interview and ask a lot of questions about us and then it would go all over the UK and people would see how the Sikhs are. What they believe and how they are from the Sikhs and what Sikhism means. You know all these things.

What their culture is actually

This thing is already, what do you call it, in the South. On TV. It covers Sikhism. It shows you about Sikhism.

*Does it? Is that religious broadcasting?*

In the south. It is.

Birmingham, Manchester but not in Scotland. It's not that much.

I think Ailsa is trying to find out about general programmes. Not in the religious sense you know. I know in the religious sense like you occasionally have programmes. What Ailsa is trying to find out is like soap, maybe EastEnders or Brookside or you know these kind of programmes. That you know, is there a Sikh there? Because Sikhs live in the community everywhere. (Punjabi) those kind of, they don't show that there are any Asians or Afro-Caribbeans. Well they show Afro-Caribbeans, Asians are less well represented so especially Sikhs because we look obvious. To start with the turban and the beard and I think this is what Ailsa means.

You mean to say that Sikhs are more, should be more in this kind of film?

In the films and the drama.

That's the main objective yes. We should be. ....

So they can recognise, people can recognise Sikhs.

*I have no control, no input into increasing targets for Asian actors or anything like that. It's more, can you think of any fictional programmes that have actually had Sikhs in them?*

I can certainly remember one. Only Fools and Horses had the doctor Kapoor thing. He used to go about on his motorbike and his white turban. In one of them he was sold a helmet from Mr Trotter.

There's a Singh in

We had a programme in the Sixties and Seventies, Just Sir or something

Oh that was the one about the school

That's a long time ago

There's quite a few Sikhs without a turban that are in the films. The one in the police.

The Bill?

Yeah The Bill.

Asians maybe. not Sikhs.

(Name of Sikh actor I can't make out) he was in it as well.

Oh he was in Taggart.

Yes he was in Taggart.

Yes that's right so he was - in Taggart. There was a chap in Glasgow.

You do seem them now and then.

But I think he's very realistic. Very real.

*When this person you're talking about, was he in as an Asian or was he in as a Sikh?*

He was in as an Asian

As an Asian

*Yeah because it seems to me there's often this blurring that if we put in an Asian then we've done religion.*

Covered all the minorities?

Yes

Because Asian people could be anybody. Pakistanis, Bengalis, Sikhs, Hindus. There's several kinds of Asians and they don't recognise it as specifically one. But as you say with there being a turban it would really send a picture as a Sikh.

So what we're trying to say right, is that we're talking about general everyday people like ourselves. We're not talking about people who are already in that field. Like maybe actors a tradition of actors might be in their family. There's a lot of Sikhs in film but I think what we are trying to target is the general community. In a given area there is like you know Scots, English, Irish, Welsh, Sikhs, Pakistani, Bengalis, Hindus you know all these types of people living in that particular environments and they go to the pub, they may go to the local snooker hall, they may go to their local areas of recreation for pastime but they're not being represented as you say. This is the target I think isn't it? Am I right?

*Yes that's the area that I'm looking at. Stick with the soaps for a minute that are supposed to be a representative of a particular community. I mean do any of you watch any of the soaps?*

I do. I watch a soap

*Right so of the soaps that you watch how representative d'you feel they are of the communities that they are set in?*

It depends on the soap and obviously on the programme. If it's like Coronation Street and EastEnders and all that and this always leads the director to bus the people in to make a story out of it. I mean if a Sikh is going to be a pub owner or a cafe owner or something



he's going to come in as the new owner or something and he's going to get in to a story about that or whatever. He's got a daughter or son or something like that. It goes on and on. These soaps are all like that.

*Do you ever actually see Sikhs? In Coronation Street or EastEnders?*

I've seen one.

Odd one

Very, very few

The white turban

That was in Only Fools and Horses I remember

No, no that was in EastEnders

Well we've had a couple of actors but not as a Sikh. We've had Indian actors in Coronation Street and other soaps, and various actors. They came in now and then because they're professionals and they take in all kinds of programmes you see.

Are you referring to Coronation St maybe? The Asian family that took over the shop.

I've seen them as many, as various pictures of programmes I've seen. professional actors in a lot of programmes but they are professionals. You know they're all professionals and we've seen them before. We've seen them in pictures and that and they would come in dramas but as you say I haven't seen much turban peoples, Mr Singh you know. Indian man or presenting his religion like, his home as Mr Singh and recognise him as a Sikh person in a programme. That makes it more interesting. We would like to see more often like that.

Well that's it, the following question do you want to see more people?

More. Yes we would like to see more

Like there's Hollywood we've got Bollywood in India. You get more sort of you know there's a lot of actors, acting going on in India and this and that. Documentaries is very nice too you know.

*Some of the other religious representatives I've spoken to have, well there's only one or two actually, that have said this, but they have felt that they are quite happy not to be included in soaps and sitcoms because they feel they would be made fun of and it would just be a stereotype. They would rather see themselves being represented either in religious broadcasting or documentary. Could you see that there might be a problem if Sikhs were included in the soaps and sitcoms? D'you think they would just be stereotypes that you would be represented as?*

Not really

It could cause trouble yes. It could cause trouble.

It all depends. (Punjabi)

I feel that we are among a multicultural society you know and we do mix and mingle with every kind of people, In general so we are included in the soap and all that wouldn't harm our image or any way like because we are what we are.

I think like you say you'll find Sikhs that go to the bars or the snooker hall or maybe to the local park.

Discos, clubs or whatever.

That's right. There's no denying the fact that the Sikh Youth and girls, even the elders do go and this is where we feel we're not

We're only human

(Punjabi)

That's the question, what are we going to do as Sikhs? (Punjabi)

Within reason. Within reason. We can't totally amalgamate totally. We can't mix.

Obviously we will go so far and that's it. There is a line that we won't go over. You know we go to a bar, we're not going to start going to try and chat up some of the young girls in the bar are we? (Punjabi - seems to be some disagreement here) by a large the majority of the Sikh group, 4 or 5 go to a bar, they go just to have their own company. They'll drink. And whatever they do, socialise and then they'll go out. But you'll find it's a majority of mainstream community they will go to the bar for another reason also and the chance of like meeting someone. It's like a meeting place you know. The possibility of meeting someone and progressing their sort of like social activities. So we don't do that do we? (Punjabi)

*So in actual fact then if you had a character in a soap or something there wouldn't be problems within the dramatic story, like a Sikh family moves into Albert Square. Then they would be perfectly able to go to the Queen Vic*

That's right. That's what I mean. They mix with the rest of the crowd and all that and then they get to know them and they say this is this family and the children or whatever and all that and as I said we live in the society. We've been here for 40, 50 years now. We have friends and neighbours and all that we go out together, everybody, all sorts of things.

We mix in well.

They introduce us to their friends.

Yeah but the socialising only goes so far. It doesn't go as far as like integrating with like relationships. You know in that sense. You wouldn't intermarry.

Yes.

There's some that have done.

How can you say there's not marrying and not socialising with other community. Now you see all these mixed marriages nowadays. I mean Asians can marry a Scots lassie.

There's no crime against that. Even though it's forbidden and it's against our religion but it doesn't stop them from doing that.

I know, but we're not promoting that.

We're not promoting that. (Everyone talking)

If the father would guide his son and say look like you've got to do your tradition and you've got to go by your tradition but if the son is in a more European way of society then he would probably decide on his own. This is happening.

Yes it is happening. I don't think we're denying that fact, it does happen. It will happen in future also, probably more but we're not promoting a

That's right

We're not encouraging them to go that way. We're encouraging them to stay in our own traditions. (Punjabi) we're socialising different to a certain extent. It only goes so far.

On the other hand we can not stop them either. We can not put a stop to it like forbidding. Break the rules and the law of religion.

You can control so far.

It's European ways and they've been born and brought up in this country and well we tried the best to keep them

But it's like as you say if there was a programme and all that. Did you see that film East is East? You see this Asian film is very, comedy obviously

It's very funny

*I thought it was brilliant.*

Actually Fifties and Sixties times and all. I've been here since that time. I can see that time. I knew what was happening. I have seen that. It was hilarious you see.

I think they overdone it really. (Everyone talking and some Punjabi)

I suppose it's like Goodness Gracious Me. It's really over emphasising this stereotypical Asian family. That's what they do like. But you can either take it with a pinch of salt (everyone talking)

*Can I just ask for a point of clarification with Goodness Gracious Me what are the main religions they, my impression is they poke fun at Islam and Hinduism but I don't know enough about Sikhism to say that they have done that as well. But I'm also aware they're also poking fun at Asian culture in the UK. Do they poke fun at Sikhs?*

Oh yes aye

Yes they do

They have a go at everybody

First thing they say, oh have you got a headache? That's an old one.

Just like you get in the school.



Aye they're still good though. They come up with this kind of thing because they make fun of it.

In the programme itself it points more or less the way we follow our family position. You know how strict we are. Marrying again coming back to marrying. There's no inter marrying. So, Everyone's got their own way of doing things.

Aye, but that's what I feel one family can be strict and their children will behave and do what their parents want. Another family will work the other way round and the children will not do what they're supposed to do or told. Boys or girls. They're going out mixing with the rest of the crowd so what can you do about it?

It's like the Kupars that want to be the Coopers. (Punjabi) they also had a go at the Christian faith also. I thought that was, I got offended to that like. How they went into the Church and they were given, going through the whole ceremony and that's right. I thought that was maybe over the top but then you say well, OK they are having a go at everyone. It's this quite harmless fun really.

*The reason I'm actually asking you about that one I think it ties in with this whole non awareness of Sikhs in particular but certainly any Asian who's not a Christian. When I have talked to the whites that I've interviewed and they've said O Goodness Gracious Me that's got other religions in it so you say right, what religion? Ah well they're Asian so they must be Muslim. And then somebody will go Oh well maybe it is Hindus. I'm not very sure no, No I'm sure it's Muslim. That's it. Sikhs are never mentioned.*

They don't recognise them

*No never. I didn't recognise them but at least I knew there was more than just being an Asian. There were at least religions in there. And I was trying to say but what religion?*

That's right. It's like

Individually every religion should have its own sort of face

*Yes and it hasn't. It just seems to be that there's this Asian face and that's sort of it*

Yes

*Full stop. Oh what's an Asian religion I can think of? Ok Islam. That'll be it. That's what you must all be.*

You see one India has so many religions in it. There's one whole India with so many religions. There's 16 different languages in India.

*Yeah. But if you are looking at programming that's designed for this country there's not that amount of diversity. Well I don't think there is. But certainly if you look at the programming that's aimed at the mainstream population then you are not going to need to deal with different languages because whatever you are producing will be produced in English but you could at least reflect religious and cultural diversity. Which doesn't seem*

*to happen. D'you think that's any kind of problem or from your own position in Edinburgh d'you feel you've been around long enough that people do understand so it doesn't matter if you're not on?*

It's a thing that has never really got to us.

*In what way?*

Like you know we've never wanted to go forward to the image. You know maybe the kids, I don't know

We could do with that

We could but you know.

You could, it's a thing that could be done

We'd been more recognised

*Is it because you've just never really thought about it or is there a fear of, if you do sort of approach the TV companies and say come-on let's have a bit more representation that actually all you would end up with is negative.*

Never thought about it. Never thought about it.

*You not really alone in that I have to say.*

It's something that's not really sort of bothered us really as much as like. I think everyone's more concerned with our own developments and not to be projected on sort of TV soaps as you say because of the ridicule side of it but basically I think there have been small snippets through the ages say that have represented Asians or Sikhs in a very small minority. But in Edinburgh we do get discrimination. There is discrimination in Edinburgh. There's no denying that fact and maybe if we get everything

It's not as bad as the English.

Well this is the thing but I think we probably could be more represented on the television programmes than we are but I suppose that's everyone's own sort of aspirations. If they want to sort of really be projected to that kind of level they've got to get out of their own sort of rut. Their own sort of situations. Their own stereotypical life style and move out and then slowly they'll get involved in media and other aspects of the community rather than just like you know the view of everyone - shopkeepers, market traders, salesmen you know or the occasional doctor, you know and that's it. You know and after that the youngsters can aspire to, they can look up to as a role model. So it's everyone's individual choice isn't it? We can't stop people marrying.

Doing whatever they want

Obviously we are going to guide them how to keep within

You always try to guide them

Yes that's right. We've got to keep hold of our own traditions, our own language, our own religion. We have to hold on to that as much as possible. It's a personal thing and if we recognise ourselves then people will recognise us. It's the age-old story like if you are going to recognise yourself, what you're supposed to be then no one else will also acknowledge your existence.

*But then if people are not terribly aware of your existence then you run the danger of being something exotic and odd*

That's right

*And possibly something to be feared. Whereas if, you become part of the everyday*

You'll be more recognised

*I'm still working this through. I haven't got the answers. This is what the research is about*

More recognised in this society. The other side. More Sikhs and part of life. And you're Indian and you eat and you drink and you do this sort of thing and all that. You're not a foreigner sort of thing any more and yeah man's a man. Part of the society, yes. I stay here. I'm going to live here the rest of my life.

I don't know if that would be sort of like properly represented on the television. You see in the soaps like its more sort of, the emphasis is more sort of on ridicule and stereotypical images of people rather than you know projecting the wider percentage of people. It's just a very small minority that are like that so they are put into that slot as a token Asian or you know Afro Caribbean that they will be representative of that community.

*That's actually coming back to what I was asking you earlier. Is it better to have hardly any representation rather than risk maybe making a fuss; getting a bit more representation but all you do is get more shopkeepers*

Yes

*You know who force their children into arranged marriages or whatever, or is there a case for saying well maybe we could just be a bit optimistic and hope that we would appear more often and as we just become ordinary characters then awareness is raised?*

I suppose it's time isn't it? That will eventually happen as like you know more and more of the next generation are moving out of that stereotypical image of shopkeepers, market traders and whatever and they are getting other jobs. So this is integrating with the community you know as much as being as part of like a soap. So if people see us in different environments then they will accept as more. They are quite capable of moving into a different environment from the one they'd been in for many years and they can move



into it and still be a part of it. In a practical one, a beneficial sense for the whole community. That will come through time.

An ordinary way of lifestyles

And education. Education. The emphasis before, like most Asians didn't go to school. I mean East Is East is obviously quite a true reflection. They would stay off because there was a family party. Oh we must stay off, two days off. Oh there's a wedding, a week off. Oh there's a cousin having a party in wherever, let's go. Three days off. That's not acceptable in today's sort of like environments you know. They've got to be more involved in the education so that when they leave school then they can move out. But if they don't get an education because of like family commitments

We must modernise these things (really hard to hear) but these days things have got better. You wouldn't like to see the Sixties again (everyone talking) broken English or something like that

*So I mean really we're talking about three or four generations on. I mean there isn't really any excuse for continuing to portray members of the Sikh community as, either not portraying them*

Exactly

*Or in this semi-literate kind of fashion. Is there? You mentioned this character in Taggart. Was he, he did he just appear for an episode or was he a character?*

Just for an episode

I think he was an immigrant. He was portraying an immigrant family who had come into Glasgow.

And he doesn't wear a turban.

Yeah

He just passes as an Asian. Not as Sikh.

He becomes a Muslim; he becomes a Hindu.

He becomes Sikh

He becomes everything.

*He's just an Asian?*

He's just an Asian

Yes he's just an Asian.

*That sounds terrible but you know what I mean.*

He's a Sikh actually but he's he covers everything

*Right but actually in Taggart he's just seen as*

An Asian

An Asian that's right

*And so there's no distinction made in terms of religion.*

No

That's right.

He came in a few films as well

*Right but I'm not doing films it's too big.*

But he came in a few films as well as an Asian. And he came in an Indian film as well as a Muslim. He was in an Indian film as a Muslim. And he's a Sikh himself.

(Punjab they)

*Right because Taggart's sort of interesting isn't it because there's a Sikh community in Glasgow?*

Yes that's right. There's quite a bit.

*Yeah and given, I haven't seen Taggart for quite a while but certainly when I used to watch it regularly, they go all over the place and all sorts of, I mean obviously most of it's to do with murder and crime or what have you, but peripherally you would expect to see more Sikhs and you don't do you?*

That's true. In Glasgow there are so many Asians but there's very, very, they're not represented at all basically in Taggart. And Taggart's, you know, set in Glasgow, the Gorbals and all this

They don't come forward

And there's thousands of Asians there and they haven't

They don't wear a turban. They are shown as Asians.

But they're still not on television in Taggart because that's set in Glasgow and it's like you know four or five times the size of the community that's in Edinburgh but they're still not represented in Taggart. Let's face it Asians commit crime as well. We're not all law-abiding citizens. They do commit crime so why are they not being represented.

It's not religion

I wouldn't like to see that. That's bad for my image pal. I'm a good Asian.

I suppose that's what it is. It's the stigma attached to it's like. Well, that chap he represented a criminal. Maybe he must be a criminal. (Someone has a coughing fit and can't hear clearly but it's something to do with representing a Muslim) but he's only acting. He is only playing a part you know. It's like the criminals in the village of the Indian film. They're only acting. They're not real.

Of course it's only acting.

*Yes. One of the things that I had somebody say to me is that maybe one of the reasons, I mean they were particularly referring to Islam but I think you could extrapolate it out to other faiths, was that the reason they don't cover Islam and other Asian faiths is because*

*they're afraid of being accused of racial prejudice. So instead you get ignored. That seems bizarre to me because it seems just as prejudiced you know to ignore somebody. I mean it's a kind of passive prejudice as opposed to putting you in and only ever having Islamic fundamentalists and jokes about Sikhs and turbans*

That's right, that's right

*But as I say it's been suggested that there's this tension that one of the reasons it's not covered is because it will cause offence so it's better just not to do it.*

Yes. Leave it alone unless it's broken eh?

But of course if it was offensive Sikhs wouldn't like that.

*No I take your point but then nobody would like it.*

Nobody would like it.

Nobody wants to be criticised

Treated as bad

*Yes but then at the same time if the alternative is well we just don't deal with you, how do you feel about that?*

That's a moral dilemma isn't it? You've hit us with the million-dollar question now.

I think you should take us in a film and give us a good part.

We'll really have to have another talk with you Ailsa.

We need to get the youngsters involved as well I think.

*Yes I'd love to.*

I suggested that Ailsa get in touch with the young Sikhs (discussion about future arrangements to meet youngsters and women)

End of the interview



Most of the interview centred around a discussion about how and why the Murrays were included in Brookside.

The series producer, Paul Marquess, decided that a new family was needed in the Close. He was of the view that there isn't any representation of ordinary religious people so he wanted the Murrays to be an ordinary, working class, Catholic family. People that audiences could identify with and accept. New families/characters are often launched with a big splash but it was decided to introduce the Murrays with no story lines initially. The audience could get to know them and gradually story lines would evolve. To include a family like the Murrays, where some of the members were religious, would not only provide a family with a wide age range but would also provide differing points of view within that family – notably the debates around IVF and abortion. Equally their faith meant that encounters with other people in the Close would ensure that they had a point of view – something different from the rest. Nowadays Brookside doesn't seek to be sensational which is why they didn't want the Murrays to be sensational. So much of what drives programming these days is linked to ratings (and sensational story lines do get the ratings) but Brookside wants to deal with stories, which can be developed and are part of the characters' lives.

The decision to include a Catholic family came out of a recognition that religion can make good drama. The characters can be interesting and people will either recognise themselves or someone they know. There was an awareness that there is a history of tending to make religion as either something comic or sinister. If other people don't do it it's perhaps because they haven't seriously thought about it or don't have the knowledge.

The knowledge of Catholicism was partly based on Paul's own knowledge of being a catholic but it is also extremely well researched. Some of the writers are also catholic. The best stories are drawn from shared/personal knowledge.

Method of introduction – probably – Paul would go to the writer's conference with an idea. If everyone agreed (which they obviously did with the Murrays) they would then discuss who the characters would be and invent a history for them. If they know characters are working well and are going to be in the series for a long time they can plan for up to 3 years in advance.

Absence of other faiths: stories and characters have to be strong. It's better to be knowledgeable about what you're writing. In terms of Brookside it's more likely to be a catholic family rather than any other faith. Again, these are the kinds of family that people 'know'.

'Real Time': they do try to keep things to real time but they can't do it all the time. This is why we don't see Anthony and Bridget going to mass.

Dev is a Hindu. (His girlfriend Geena is a Christian) Vic and Sinita who had the forced marriage were also Hindu. They deliberately made them Hindu. They try to treat religion with sensitivity. Asians came in to see production team. They had complained that there was no specific religion. IT wasn't clear to whites. They wanted to deal with it sensitively. Dev sees himself as western first and Hindu second.

Emily Bishop is definitely religious and definitely Christian. Has voiced her religious concerns regarding Hayley. Emily, who has connections with Ena Sharples, is one of the older characters from the days when the programme was more moral and religious. Don't deliberately decide to exclude religious characters – omission rather than commission.

Roy and Hayley have religious views. They approached local vicarage for CoE position on this. Some confusion here as I thought he was referring to scriptwriters. Realised belatedly it was TV vicar and not real vicar.

Don't see it as essential to story telling to have someone say they are off to the temple or whatever. Alma was definitely agnostic therefore her funeral was humanist.

Changed story at this point: they wanted some Asian input – they took decision to include an Asian character and then contacted Asian groups.

Emily is written by writers, many of whom are CoE themselves. There is a female vicar who is a semi-regular character in Weatherfield. Was created especially for Roy and Hayley's wedding. Probably does only appear for weddings and funerals.

Storyline is unpolitical. More a question of how organic the storyline is. Developments always come from the storyline – where would a character go from here. Try to maintain some kind of consistency with characters.



Everything pertaining to religion e.g. vows at weddings, we always research and talk to relevant church. Deal with CoE press office. Stories do not organically come out of Dot's faith. Euthanasia story – not sure where initial idea came from. Felt Dot, as established religious characters, seen as most relevant character. Secular view of own choice versus 'only God can end a life'. Assumes that was part and parcel of it. Difficult when you have a religious character; difficult when they are on a secular canvas for those characters not to appear humorous and that the humour is not derived from her faith. People maybe confusing tragicomedy of Dot with her own faith. Her faith is one of most coherent aspects. She is a victim of life rather than faith.

Problem of any drama – has to be element of caricature e.g. Barry Evans, not likely to know anyone as bad as him totally. Have shifting pool of writers who take core elements of characters e.g. way Dot referred to her religion probably fair amount of variety. Writers who are trying to get a particular point across may use a bible quote – Dot uses it inappropriately and it furthers the storyline.

Secular show and do not want to offend anyone so are very careful about religion. Wish to be careful around issues of Islam. Only things around Islam would be inter-racial tensions. Multi-racial issue rather than religion. Exploring faith in drama very difficult to do without seeming to be judgmental. Any story that would be put forward about religion would be examined in close detail. What kind of story are they telling?

Various ways they judge what should be the ethnic ratio in shows. Take East End – has large Afro-Caribbean community and large Turkish community. That part of London is ethnically divers. Albert Square represents Greater London and is a community that lots of people in Britain can relate to. Thinking about introducing a Sikh family. Would be well researched and would not be there as Asians. What would actors be able to bring to a role because they would hope to have actors who were Sikhs and so they would draw on their experiences? With a new family, they would want a microcosmic view of divisions within Sikh community. Could make this based on generations. There are a variety of ways of doing this – older generation more traditional, younger more liberal OR older generation more westernised and younger generation more fundamental. The questions they would want to ask and the issues they would want to clarify would be: what would feel the most natural about those characters and what would be the tenets of their faith which would be most important to them. But would not be

playing on-going stories about the essence of the religion. Love story between a Sikh boy and a non-Sikh girl for instance; would it be more traditional view or a more western view?

However, at the end of the day, the issue would be the love story and the way religion impinged upon it rather than an in-depth exploration of the religion. Stories based around societal mores and interaction of people with each other. Would look at how their worldview interacts with and other East End worldview. Not just stress religious thing.

Also talked about whether or not a shorthand was being applied to Dot given that most of my interviewees saw the markers of her religion but did not actually see a religious worldview, which affected her behaviour. Felt that viewers had got euthanasia story-line wrong because it was a tension between friendship and legality from the production point of view NOT a tension between friendship and God. Finally conceded that it was not a question of them getting it wrong if that is the way it was seen.

[Didn't say this but I think it is why the Dot/Ethel story line was so well received. All of my interviewees saw it as a religious issue versus friendship. The legality of it was unimportant. It was one of those rare moments when you realised that Dot's faith was more than spouting the bible and being judgmental. It gave Dot real depth and many of my interviewees felt that a character with a religious view of a particular moral or ethical situation, who clearly struggled because of their faith, was actually really interesting. They wanted to see more storylines like that.]

## Interview With Mark Grindle, Executive Producer High Road.

Opening discussion about a film with religious theme, which is going to be shown at the Edinburgh film Festival.

It lay in background to my research.

*What I would like to talk to you about it is that what has been coming up in the focus groups, various programmes pop up over and over again. The kind of opening question I start with is, which programmes you watch that have a character who is supposed to be religious, how do you recognise that they're religious and that kind of thing? So Mrs Mack in High Road crops up really regularly.*

Yes she's become quite an icon really

*It's quite interesting really. I haven't sat down and analysed the tapes yet, at the moment I'm just recording everything*

Oh you've got tapes have you?

*No, sorry from the focus groups. I have just decided I cannot possibly fit in an analysis of the programmes. I just had a meeting with my supervisor. The grand scheme initially was archival work which is under way, well it's nearly done, talking to audiences talking to producers and then there was going to be a sort of analysis of programmes, never mind the theoretical, secularisation, media stuff it's just not possible. It's not possible I need a research team and this is just me with three years funding. The analysis has had to be set aside for the time being. My sense so far from the interviews is that it's split. And it's very much an age split. Older members of the audience say, well she's a bit of a busy body but she's got a heart of gold. The younger you get they all describe her as this hideous old cow they can't stand and she has absolutely no redeeming features whatsoever. But still the sense I get from talking to people is that she still fits into this stereotype of older woman, unattached, church-going, sticks her nose into everybody's business, whether she has a heart of gold is debatable - actually what I really want to preface this with is I'm not being aggressive about this or hostile OK? If I'm asking you question its*

Not all, not at all, I'd rather, I'd rather you were

*It's just that somebody once said to me you sound as if you are on a bandwagon and it's like no, I'm not I'm really not its*

I think it's important with these sort of exercises, I did it myself when I did interviews with the Hollywood producers, and its, you come out and you haven't had a rigorous discussion about it, there was no point in waiting to do that then why bother, walk away with assumptions, and I'd prefer that you knew exactly what happens. In relation to what you you're looking at. I



suppose, an important part of it is clearly intentionality, is anybody editorially responsible for that particular representation, and I think what you find is because of the constraints of the production process, and the constraints of the budget, are going to affect the practice in a bit and you'll see, it's really a case of it's a machine. And Mrs Mac been there for a long time and for a start it would be a very brave producer who killed off Mrs Mac. So straight away you can see the audience like her which for a commercial organisation which is chasing advertising that's a character and we don't mess with. We did feel in the early stages, I been a producer for three years now and writing for it before that, different producers come and go along the way, we did feel at one point that she was becoming stereotypical. We wanted to do something with her. So we gave her a nervous breakdown. Obviously this is confidential. It worked for the duration of that but people wanted to see Mrs Mac back stop so there is a feedback thing happens whereby characters do become stabilised. More so because you're dealing with about normally a team of 10 writers each doing their own script and all the story lines are done by two people OK? So in the storyline you've got, what's provided to the writer is all the scenes, with the location, basic structure of what happens within each scene and the sets that will be used, that is then handed over to the writer who really comes up with the dialogue rather than what is already there. Which would make anybody assume that the control is with those two story liners but they've got six episodes to storyline in two weeks and in the meantime they are doing editing work as well, so again Mrs Mac becomes a character it's easy to reach, it's easier not to do it than it is to do it, to change the character and why make the effort when your audience likes that particular character?

*What about the religious side of Mrs Mac you know her Church involvement, you know that sort of representation that seems to be slightly old-fashioned Church of Scotland parishioner, where does the, is much attention paid to what it's like for the average church-goer in Scotland these days or is it just this is what somebody's memory is or their perception is?*

No, I don't think it's that detailed. You've got between 14 and 23 characters and 6 story lines and to go into that detail with each character is impossible because you haven't got the resources. We don't have a research department; the story liners have to do the research and then marketing will do some research, but sometimes I think ideally it could be more rigorous. No it's because you've got a lot of characters that they are the ones who inform the story. Everyone knows that Mrs Mac works up at the manse and she doesn't get on with Effie and there is always the tension there, and they always know that she's going to come into the shop and if she doesn't, if she isn't a busy body they want to know what's wrong with Mrs Mac. It's a bit of a push me pull you thing you're always trying to find new things for that particular

character to do but you always end up reaching back into their character as established. So really in terms of that religious side for me ideally you could do more, you could make it more detailed but again the emphasis on advertising its three stories maybe 5 stories going keeping them interlinked, and we'll stick to the practice of the world we know Mrs Mac inhabits but it's always in relation to say 15 or 23 other characters.

*Seen in terms of High Road how much do you actually strive generally for a kind of realism?*

I think that would depend on individual producers. The show does have a tone of its own and it's the tone that does tend to reach two, viewing figures show people between say 35 and 55, An increasing amount of young people are interested in the show, and again they like to hate Mrs Mac likewise Sneddon. They want to think he's a bad bugger and if he cries they're upset because he's not bad enough, so we do listen to what audiences are saying

*How do they get the feedback, do people actually write in?*

They write in and with the web-site and we get e-mails from that. They call-in. There is a constant dialogue with them. Which as a producer, restricts you slightly. We've tried to push it as much as we can; try to get as much detail as we can but still at the end of the day, you're making 52 of them in 17 weeks. You've got a development period of say three months, so the constraints do I think mean we have to reach a happy medium in terms of depth of the issues, certain issues. Having said that you got to keep characters consistent the audience want them to be consistent. Otherwise you know, these are the people they know and love and they go there once a week to sit down and to share half-an-hour with them; and as a producer you don't want to do anything with these characters, there would, you're always working in terms of the confines there but in terms of the story line you can give them and feed into the characters I think it does start to become, to have more and more of a moral base. Again because you're going to keep your audiences you do tend to leave it on an up note, a positive note. You might take somebody through cancer, you might have Mrs Mac shooting a dog or her dog being shot, or you might see Mrs Mac outside with placards denouncing the arrival of the fortune teller at the pub, but it will be the issue that's fed into the character but it will always end up on a positive note for a character. Again you've got a shared group of writers but in the end they've got to come to some sort of agreement about what, the way those story lines are going to go, and quite quickly. So what you tend to reach for is I think, just through having done it and observation, you reach a common moral framework which is clearly there. The story meetings, you should probably attend one of the story conferences, it's, you know two or three hours of ferry rigorous and sometimes hot-headed debate and argument and tears because you're dealing with emotions. And again because people are quite strident in what



they want to happen they throw it into the mix and as I say it does always tend to end up on a moral high note. Although it would never be my intention to say, well it might be, I just think it wouldn't work if I was to come along and say I want to make a moral point here because that would be wrong and the storytelling becomes didactic, what the characters say, they lose their own voices. One of the most difficult things about a show like this is getting writers who know those voices and the audience can spot them straight away.

*It's really interesting that because a number, I would actually say the bulk of the audience interviews I've done, their explanation for either the stereotype, or what they perceive as stereotypes of the religious characters, or their kind of, well either their absence or taking the Mickey out of them, is that everybody knows that everybody in the media is completely irreligious and you're all lead this incredibly immoral lifestyle.*

That's the perception

Yes

Yes I'm aware of that it's sometimes catches me out. I was in that position at one time. All media organisations were run by completely immoral people. They were the bad guys. And you know having been immersed in that culture I may have become a bad guy as well. I'm very much aware of that but as you say you've got to tell stories that are, part of it is humour and you only get humour if you go to develop character and out of the truth, unless you really in the story liner process you have to really interrogate that truth through your characters, be true to them not to the issue. I mean there are programmes which will just say okay here is an issue, galvanise it in, the characters get flattened in the process. EastEnders does it to achieve a particular tone. Personally I don't think that tone's relevant to High Road. There is a hyper-real to High Road and so going back to the question about realism we don't aim for realism, you know a director may, but we do aim for the truth.

*Sort of through those characters or as those characters would see it?*

Absolutely as believable as it could possibly be. But again given the budgets, given the time constraints, in terms of the visual representation it's very hard to be naturalistic.

*Can I just clarify something there?*

If you can come back to that I'll give you a bit of an inside thing. Take the writers' group. They tend to be mostly Catholic and mainly, not out of choice, I just suddenly realised. Take from that what you will. But it does you know, the make-up that again in terms of the process is important.

*That certainly gives the lie doesn't it to the perception that everybody is completely irreligious?*



Yes, yes absolutely

*Which is why I want to talk to producers because it's so easy just to go, well everybody knows don't they, that's the end of it, that's the end of its.*

There was this human process going on, of a mixture of individuals and obviously coming from an anthropological point of view, you know there's an element of there's a tribe. We meet every three weeks and have common interests and goals. But interestingly enough from a very similar background. And I think certainly if you were to pursue that and related to what's happened in the film industry here, on where the power is in the industry, you'd probably find something similar. It's interesting. It again is not as if any, because it's not as if any representations which have been specifically from what you would consider a Catholic stance. It's more from the heart and what they believe to be true and often times there will be a row - no you can't do that and so again it would be, it has to be a consensus from that group meeting otherwise they're all not happy.

*Well actually that kind of ties into the thing that I was going to say can I clarify. Because you say, you don't have research resources to check things out.*

The storyliners do the research

*Have I got that right? It's still limited by time constraints and all the rest of it.*

In my mind yes it's an ideal. I used to script it Dr Finlay and I had a researcher. Their budgets for it are bigger because it's a network programme. And it was rigorous. It was a series about a practice in a surgery, with two doctors and a chemist. And everything had to be accurate because you get somebody saying that's not tincture of mint. So that for me is an ideal. It's regional programme it only goes out regionally so there are there are less resources.

*But then because of that sort of limited research resources they are drawing on what they know. To a greater extent*

Oh absolutely

*But then as you saying interestingly at the moment you have people who have faith who can draw on that.*

Oh absolutely.

*What is the situation with the minister in High Road at the moment? I'm getting conflicting story lines.*

There is no minister.

*There isn't, there definitely isn't, right. Because that was something that came up as a criticism. You wouldn't have the parish without a minister.*

It's a very valid criticism.

*Is there a good answer to it?*

There is an answer to it and quite frankly it's again the turnaround, the time for development. I am aware, as the producer there is a gap there. And in previous times they haven't quite got it right and it's a character that needs to be got right in my mind.

*How have they not quite got it right?*

Well I think it's small things like casting - the person hasn't been quite right or they haven't had time to examine it quite closely enough. Glenn Darroch is in some way geographically slightly north of the central belt, somewhere near where Luss is but it slightly moves occasionally. And there are ministers in those areas where one minister will serve four or five different congregations and spread themselves about a bit. That to me is a contemporary situation and that's what I'd like to do with it. But what that gives you is a, it gives you a rogue character. In that, the story line of that character is not always available to the story liners because we have to contract the actors prior to the 17 weeks shoot, so they all know what their availability is, they've all got guarantees of X amount of episodes and they all tied into that to you see, so to bring in a character whose only coming in, it's outwith the process slightly, and that's my reason why it hasn't been done to date. But is not something that, it's something that is going to happen, again between you and I. Especially in that size of community.

*Well it was certainly brought up one group which had a lot of Church of Scotland members in it and they said no, it wouldn't be the minister for just that parish, he would have four or five charges but it's really odd that they don't have one.*

I think something else they have done with him, or her, is that they had a minister in who quickly they struggled for stories for and quickly had them have an affair. Do you know what I mean? If you are going to have a minister staying there you've got to have a minister staying there and living by the principles that a minister lives by and the drama therein, or thereafter, is the involvement with the other characters.

*Is that really difficult to do? That's something I've wondered. It came up in a couple of groups. Why can't you have a minister or a Christian character who is not sexually driven or alcohol driven, or whatever? But say a character's having a crisis, the religious person becomes part of it.*

You can have, you can have. Again the issue is about introducing the character. Introducing a new character who is going to be there and seen constantly means a commitment to them in the face of a budget that is only catering for your regulars and you've got those regulars' position to consider. And the moment you know, somebody says what's going on here, who's for it, something has to give along the way.

*It does all seem to be about financial constraints rather than any ideological position.*

Oh absolutely. That's what I was saying about intentionality. There's not the time or the resources for any one person to have that sort of editorial control it has to be a machine particularly with the schedule, and working at the rate but should you slow it down, try do something different with it, then the machine starts to slow down and there are economic knock-ons. But within that once we accept we have a budget we do try as much as possible to get it right. It's a commercial organisation and the money comes from advertising revenue. But my job is to make sure the people still watch the show and that the characters are true that they're still wry, still ironic and they still have a sense of humour and a sense of community, in that, I can't do without you on a day-to-day basis so although we're having a row now and we've got to get through it, how are we going to get through it. Well watch the next episode. So that's my job. Whilst trying to keep it as refreshed as possible. There have been attempts to make it younger.

*How's that?*

Well personally I'd think it is quite clumsy. You make it younger by putting young girls in and have them scantily clad. And that for me wasn't quite you know. It's better to follow the characters that are there, say Mrs Mac, get the youngsters saying no, you're not getting away that and get them involved in it that way, because it is universal in a sense that they will recognise a similar link in their own community. I think the day that we try to do that performance it's not the same show.

*A kind of more general question Mark, is it, and I've heard everything you said about finance OK and I understand that, but do you think there is any sense that within financial constraints where decisions have to be made, we will include this, we won't include that, even you know, you've got to have community and character integrity, that somehow religion, and I'm not just talking about Christianity, but different faiths, that they kind fall off the end because it's like, nobody's really that interested any more are they, so we haven't really got enough money to do it, so it doesn't matter, so we'll just exclude its.*

I don't think the decision will be made in that sort of calculated way. I think it's more of a contemporary thing. I think people do tend to come in with ideas of the world that is around them.

*I think I'm probably not really suggesting its that calculated but when you start analysing that subconscious motivation.*

Oh well I would certainly say that that is the result of it. And something that needs to be built back into the process as much as possible.



*How would you do that?*

Knock-on somebody's door and demand more money. But when the advertisers, when the advertising revenue is down that's not going to be available.

*You talked about advertisers, you mentioned advertising a few times, do you think including a few more religious characters or being slightly more upfront is going to affect viewing figures because that's certainly come out of focus groups. Not only are you all irreligious but it's all ratings driven and religion is not interesting.*

No I disagree because religion watch it as in Father Ted for instance can be very amusing, if it's treated with integrity and certain shows do approach like that it's just that at the moment we've got Mrs Mac and no minister.

*Nobody's mentioned any of the other characters as being noticeably church going or anything like that. Having said that people have sort of suggested that there is a sense of a community that still has a connection with the Church.*

Yes. Well they do. I'm trying not to reveal any story lines.

*I promise absolute discretion.*

Yes we're working towards that. It's very Church based. In terms of the material that's gone on you got your characters like Lackey, a pig farmer and Tom, the Farmer. And Effie and Isabel and on a Sunday they all go to Church. But we build the drama into that process. This is where it will be an information exchange outside the Church. But you know if something is going on in a character's life, if Lackey is concerned about something and doesn't turn up to Church, everybody's concerned. If Isabelle doesn't come to Church everybody's concerned, so that's what they do. So I think that's quite rigidly adhered to but again it's the mechanics of their daily life we assume. In an ideal world that would be really researched a lot more not just in terms of religion but say it, the shopkeeper. What is a shopkeeper in that kind of community having to deal with now? That would be more rigorously done but as I say it's time and resources.

*You see that's interesting because that's one of those things that I personally wonder about it is, I can't see how you can seriously introduce into soaps and what-have-you strong religious story lines without everybody getting bored of them turning them into cults, it's that sort of ordinariness. Well that's what they do on Sunday*

Yes the day-to-day

*It seems to be absent in so many situations where it could be. People could just say I'll see you after Church or I'll see you after I'd been to the mosque or*

Right, the assumption behind that surely is that they would want to. Why would they want to?

*Why would producers want to do that? Because it might actually be slightly more reflective of what goes on in certain sections of society and if you think about, across the broad range of soaps in particular where are the other religions. You know the non-Christian religions.*

*Yes, yes that's*

*Nobody's been able to come up with anything. There's been a suggestion that one of the doctors in EastEnders was Jewish but I think it only seemed to be if you caught a couple of episodes where the reference was made. You know there was nothing in his practice and there's a strong link that, Oh an Asian face means Muslim despite any, despite lack of evidence to show any connection. They could be Sikh, they could be Hindu they could be nothing.*

*But the thing is, is it the job of the producer to directly reflect what is out there. People would go and sit out, watch people going to Church if that were dramatic you see*

*But that's why I am saying,*

*It's again the reason for doing it is*

*Well exactly that's why I am saying, I'm not so much saying, I think you should have these really strong story lines amazing things happened at Church or at the Sikh temple, but just in up part of the devices that move story lines along in programmes, somebody has to leave for a purpose, to disappear for a couple of hours or somebody goes or has just come back. These things happen all the time. But it's rarely attributed to the fact that they've been involved in any kind of the religious events. I'm curious as to why it can't be part of that back ground stuff, just generally.*

*Obviously what you'll find are the reasons for it. Let me know.*

*In some ways High Road seems to be different because you have got this community, you got these people who go to Church and rural Scotland is quite different from urban England's isn't it so it's*

*And urban Scotland actually.*

*Well quite true*

*It's an interesting one because it does as they say retain its moral framework and I think part of that is this an element of nostalgia with a high road. It's almost like the representation of things gone by and I do think that's a very important pull of the show.*

*I would agree with that's. People who are very fond of it they certainly say that it's not really like that. Scottish life. It's a bit quaint.*

*For me that's part of the balancing act is to maintain that, while keep a contemporary edge to it as much as possible. It's interesting as you say generally I'm just trying to think of other, British drama as a whole, to think what else has managed to do that successfully.*



*I don't think there is a huge amount. There's a family in Brookside at the moment.*

*Are you looking specifically at soaps?*

*No. I'm looking across the range. The trouble is people tend to keep talking about soaps*

*Yes, yes*

*There was somebody, I was doing a group the other night and they were talking about it was it Messiah, I only caught the very end of the first episode, No I thought I'd missed too much. It was a serial killer who did everybody in on the basis of the deaths of the apostles but that wasn't strictly true but that was kind of something they thought of that dealt with religion.*

*What about something like Father Ted?*

*That comes up yes, that comes up quite a lot.*

*Ballykissangel?*

*Yes as well. And it's, they're quite funny in the responses you get. One of the groups I had a retired priest in and he said I recognise Father Ted, it's a gross exaggeration but yes there are people like that and then you get others who go, that would never happen usually it's Protestants or not Catholics who would say that's. Or they're very young. I did some interviews with teenagers for my Masters, it was quite funny. It was a group of young Catholic boys who said a 0 no nothing like that would ever happen in a church. I thought, give you a few years. The only other group who were quite appalled when a group of fundamentalist Christians and it was just blasphemous, really dreadful, and all the rest of it. Most people see it as very positive and they recognise that priests do drink too much, some priests are a bit thick, other priests have sexual indiscretions and all the rest of its and is not malicious. I think that's kind of, it's done with affection. Vicar of Dibley is the same. Most people would see it as being done with affection. And somebody who's an insider because certainly people who know the Church of England know, recognise, what's happening in the Vicar of Dibley and have said you can only write something like that if you have inside knowledge of the system. Yes, yes any writer who's worth their salt writes about what they know in a way their skill is in doing it in voices other than in your own. But any writer, I would agree they would be insincere if there wasn't an autobiographical element in there and sometimes the writers on High Road do come unstuck because they're trying to write their own story, particularly writers, which when you've got characters who are long established you can't do that, and you pull them away from that and then they'll keep coming up with anecdotes which will get fed into the characters which is contrary to what the story is doing, that's the problem. But others will just walk-in to characters but the truth will often come from a situation in their life that*



their experience, something they feel strongly about. It's very much down to the skills of the writers as well.

*I think some of the worst offenders in terms of just providing stereotype, I would say questions whether they are writing from anything they know or whether they've been so traumatised by dealings with the Church as a youngster that it's an outpouring of bitterness and revenge, I mean, are the soaps. I think it's unfair to say all the soaps but certainly I think EastEnders and Coronation Street and a couple of other dramas. Brookside is interesting because I think the Catholic family is done with a great deal of integrity, it's somebody who knows what being a contemporary Catholic is like and you are not po-faced, you go to Mass and you can still go to the pub, that kind of thing.*

I have a motto for the team which we always come back to which is God is in the detail, and of the writing is not honed enough you say go to the details. It's interesting it just came to me - God is in the detail.

*But do I think that's the point I was making in some ways about why can't people say I'll see you after Church, it's that tiny detail it's not the broad sweep*

They don't in drama because it's not interesting.

*But there are still devices used*

It's not a dramatic situation

*I'm off to the coffee shop*

But there's one thing you don't do in drama is tell, you've got to let the viewer work out its

*It's true you do in drama don't you I'm thinking of soaps.*

I think in soaps as well, that's a very expositional sort of thing. The audience is then going to see an exposition and then they work on the cut. They've seen what's going to happen in between the cut and they don't want to be told what's going over here.

*But they do, I mean, lots of them do.*

But that's bad writing in dramatic terms. D'you see what I mean?

*I actually do, yes.*

If there's a conflict and there's a resolution of conflicts I will come out of these conflicts or you will come out of this conflict having moved on and it will be, the resolution of the conflicts all the escalation of that conflict that gets you out into the taxi, or gets you back upstairs, or gets me out to lunch. D'you see what I mean?

*Yes I do. I have this dim memory of something theoretical I did.*

But if you said right, I'm going for a taxi now, it's quite interesting because the two are almost mutually exclusive. Aren't they? Because you've got, its taking the assumption that you would

want to put in more detail like that, then you got the detail on that side that you want to put on but dramatically you put it in and you're clogging up, you get in the way of the drama actually.

*So you end up kind of coming back to*

Having said that, having said perhaps you could get a great drama out of the minister for instance who was having to work all the hours God sends to serve these individual communities and the demands they're making of There is a very real dramatic situation there. Again, being specific about High Road and my role, my job would be to introduce that but using, talking hypothetically because there, but it's got to be right. Again going back to the core of the show there is an element of it being idealised, that's a world that doesn't exist any more.

*It's really interesting. I mean I can see how that would work dramatically, how it would satisfy the absences.*

But you see I could go into the conference tomorrow and, that's what I want. I walk in there. We do the normal process of Hello etc. We discuss the story lines that had just been published, the previous week, any problems and the writers who are dealing with it, and then we get into the gist of the storytelling. Normally we have an agenda of about eight or 10 different items and they will all be the relationship between two characters - where are we with this relationship, where are we with this relationship. And we'll put each one forward. And I go in and say actually guys I want a new character, I'm the producer, I want a new character. And straight away the production manager who is sometimes there will say we can't afford it but I'm the producer and I'll say we can afford it because I've got in my mind that somebody else is going to get, that somebody is going to have to be. But one of the writers is an actress who is her best friend in that meeting. So you see you've got all the policy. So gradually my desire for that to happen is, but I'm still the producer I can still make it happen. So I open out the idea and the idea is discussed, everybody is a great idea would have a minister. Then we go out of the meeting the story lines will write up their notes, I'll give them a day just to chuck it about in their heads and let it fall and then it becomes meaningful and I'll meet them on the Wednesday morning and will discuss it further. O I've had a brilliant idea we can still have a minister, what we'll do is this - and it's no. And we'll start an argument again. The other story liner in the meantime is writing down, they have already gone through the process of written notes, so editorially the ball is, at the ball is so, so I've got to let that happen because if I sit there and restrict it, it means I'm doing the story line, and there is less truth in it, it's come out of the common pool of, or what you want to call it culture soup I don't know, fed on down the

line. But for me to do that would be taking too didactic a stance. However looking at the long term I know that I'm responsible for series I can do the feasibility before, I can say that characters coming in, and present it at the meeting that I have a right at the start of the series which I call the trajectory meeting, which is to say look we've got 51 episodes where broadly do we want to take the characters, would you want to take them to at the end, what are we moving towards, and what I'd like to see in the middle of it is a new minister coming in and his effect on the community, it's only in the year so it's realistic. So that's the way it happens. But because we only do, we have to do so many series back to back their often isn't that feasibility time. More time and more money and they could do-it. And it would happen but it would have to have a dramatic character-driven reason for that.

*Because they knew advertisers would complain because nobody would watch.*

Well exactly, exactly.

End of the interview



## **E-mail responses to questions - Hollyoaks**

### **1. How and why was the decision taken to introduce Brian as a Christian?**

- We had no hidden agenda when we created the character, Brian. His religion is merely a facet of his character- a facet unexplored in any of our other characters. In every new character there is obviously an attempt to make them an individual, so to make Brian a Christian certainly would make him stand out, and would hopefully lead on to new stories that would bounce off other characters. This was in no way meant to be a comment on religion, rather a description, in part, of the character himself.

### **2. Why was it felt that including a Christian character would work, without making him a freak? How did you approach his fling with Steph?**

- There was no consideration of making Brian a 'freak', as we already had his character, and this was simply going to be one of his qualities that would make him interesting. We knew that Zara was to return from Scotland as a Goth, and that she would return with her musician boyfriend, yet this would have been a typical teenage rebellion story. We decided to highlight the preconceptions that would go with this story, by reversing the roles of who is shocked by this revelation. Brian, we would presume is there to annoy Mrs Morgan, but instead it annoys Zara that he is a Christian. By doing this, we have shown how there are accepted ways of seeing people, by all age groups, and hopefully shown that this needn't be the case.
- When Brian slept with Steph, it was intended to show that even with the strongest conviction, one could be led astray. Brian was annoyed by Zara's alleged infidelity, so he intended to show her that he could do it too. We felt that to have a character who didn't want to lose his virginity put in the predicament of having done so, would show that any teenager no matter how strong their conviction, can be susceptible to momentary lapses in judgement.
- We thought that it would not compromise Brian's former integrity, as we have already seen that he can be strong, but at the same time have seen the pressure that teenagers can put on themselves to try and fit in. This was something he was already doing with his trendy 'alternative' music tastes.

### **3. Was there much opportunity to research that alternative, youth Christian lifestyle or did someone (writers or producers) have knowledge they could draw on?**

- It was possible to gather information on the subject of Christian youth. The Observer articles on religion, Christianity and faith in UK teenagers were particularly helpful. Using such sources, the issue was researched, and, in turn, the information passed on to the writers and producers, who incorporate this into their storylines and subsequent scripts

- We collated information by speaking to various religious organisations, using the Internet, books etc. It is however impossible to know absolutely everything about every topic we cover, but all issues are backed up with extensive research notes.

**4. When it came to Zara's baptism it seemed to happen very quickly and without any preparation. Was there a reason for that?**

- Zara's baptism was indeed a quicker process than in real life, but you will probably have noticed that this is the case with most things on fictional drama. Yes, we must be well researched and informative, but above all else we must be entertaining- purely as a business, we can't afford to lose viewers who are bored with a lengthy process. It was mentioned at the meeting between Zara and the vicar that the screening process would normally have taken longer, yet the fact that he was there, after their previous meetings demonstrates that there was indeed close contact, and discussion between the two. He finally placed the responsibility of the baptism on her head, informing her that this was merely the first step to realising her faith.

**5. What happened at Hollyoaks that enabled a Christian character that avoided caricature?**

- We are constantly striving to be innovative and new, but also remaining reflective of the society which we represent, Therefore we have a willingness to create characters that do not fall into stereotypes. The point you raise, about religious characters being too boring has been acknowledged by Zara's initial reaction to finding out that Brian was a Christian. She, like most of the viewers, (I would think) thought that he was a little strange, and probably unable to have a good time. The fact that we have put him in a rock group, and shown that he is fallible (Steph) will probably dispel this belief.

**6. When Finn and Victoria were married, how did they marry in a RC church when Victoria was divorced?**

- When it came to the issue of Victoria getting remarried in a Catholic Church, although we did know what would be required, we did not feel that this was integral to the script. We knew that it was possible to remarry if an annulment had been granted, so to do so would not be inconceivable, yet we did not feel that it need be mentioned.

**7. What is the actual process of developing a character and their storylines?**

- The process of developing a character and their storylines begins with the long-term meeting. Conducted at least twice a year, these meetings will decide what will happen, to whom it will happen, and the possibility of new characters. Writers and producers alike will arrive with new character ideas, and over the duration of the meeting, which will last several hours, any ideas will be considered, developed and either taken down for development or scrapped.
- The existence of institutions such as the school in the show makes the creation of characters easier. We already know that we need more student characters each year, and can then develop families for them, with a free reign to then create

individual family members, and friends for them. Once this is done there is the obvious interaction of the new and old characters, to inspire new storylines.

**8. Having included Christians, do you see a time when you would include characters from different religions? Are there any you would be cautious about including?**

- There is no attempt to deliberately introduce a regular character specifically because they will fit a religious role. This would limit the ideas we would have for that character as, like you say, they would either be stereotypical or superficial. It is from the creation of a character that we can ascribe a quality, such as religion, and make this a part of their character, but not the reason why they are there.

**9. Are there either financial or time constraints that affect how well you research things like religion in order to achieve a degree of accuracy?**

- Yes, with every storyline meeting there will be five or six issues that will have to be researched over a two-week period. Some of these stories would be long term and therefore the research would be continuous. With something like Brian's Christianity, we would get an overall feeling of how his religion is important to him, events in the religious calendar and so forth.



## **Interview re Peak Practice. Telephone conversation.**

Set in fictional village of Cardale and based around middle class morality. Comments on programme website never mention absence of religion [having looked at this site I'm not surprised. It'd be totally irrelevant. All they seem to do is slag each other off for not liking a character enough!] They had an Asian in the shop but it was only to introduce a fresh storyline. Alice North goes to church occasionally. Black Swan is focus of the village rather than the church. Decisions about what goes in to programme based on metrocentric views of senior staff. Story about a cairn on top of a hillside to commemorate a dead child. London people wanted to know why they couldn't plant a tree because they didn't know what a cairn was. Absence of brown faces, other faiths, relates to concerns about showing racism, which they would, inevitably have to do. There is a vicar shown in Peak Practice but not in a big way.

His view that religion doesn't interest the bulk of viewers

### **(E-mail responses to questions)**

Hello Scotland ! I'll reply to your letter as you wrote it...

Re last weeks episode on the Nun :

The Nun provided a vehicle for the medical conditions agoraphobia and cancer. Contrary to what you observed, no solutions or salvation were provided by medicine.

Overcoming agoraphobia happened through her dynamic with Will Preston. Her cancer was clearly terminal and in the absence of a cure it was clear that her reconciliation with the reality of death in the short term would be achieved by returning to pass the balance of her life back in the convent amongst people who knew and loved her. As Will grew to know and trust his patient he was able to acknowledge his own inability to accept his 3 year old daughter's death. In a way we saw a gentle exchange of vulnerability between the two which as we know can only ever occur on a platform of trust. I think many of us look back at crossroads in our lives and wonder 'what if?'. Perhaps your image of religion as a crutch for this particular Nun was stimulated by her own doubts as to why or how she had come to spend her life in the convent. The only trigger, I think, in our story, was in her romantic feeling for Will, which she didn't fully understand. I felt that she was clearly portrayed as naïve on this issue which I felt was appropriate. As an 'old man' I see the poignancy of what was an almost adolescent reaction to

her own awakening sexuality and feel that certain viewers would have extrapolated a relationship developing between Nun and GP. However, we all know only too well that the excitement of these early experiences is transient and for the Nun to resume her earlier path made for better resolution in fictional Cardale.

I think salvation is too strong a word...resolution and reconciliation made for a peaceful resignation for both characters, and allowed us to restore Will to the Cardale practice having developed his character a few leagues more. This is the beauty of a 'stand-alone' episode format which marks the difference between Peak Practice and a Soap. In Peak Practice the storylines, (relating to guest artists), start and finish in each episode. There are serial and character arcs which develop stories relating to the permanent characters through an entire series, but the dictate for 'stand-alone' episodes originates in London from the Executive Producers. This brings me to the point about the inclusion/exclusion of religion in the series. The meat of what we see in Peak Practice is a reflection of the vision seen by London, in this case. To be frank I believe that this rural series is in many ways influenced or shaped by people with urban perspectives. I could illustrate this point by citing instances where London has not liked story aspects due to ignorance rather than strong preferences. Where the majority of people understand a rural way of life and attitude, London might not. I am conscious of the danger of personalizing my explanations so I will not, and it's unnecessary anyway. With regard to religion we again have to look at London influence, and that of our story editor and Producer. In the case of Series 10 and 11, (the latter is transmitting at present), the Producer is heavily involved in script. This is not always the case but because Phil Collinson climbed through the script area of TV he will always be naturally drawn to script. The story editor has worked closely with Phil for two years and so their symbiosis has been evident. The story editor must understand the 'vision' for PP, wherever it originates. Lisa in this case will propose the story lines to Phil and London. Phil will screen them first. When the story strands have been agreed, and often this can, and ideally should be, the result of a collaborative effort involving all in the script department, a writer will be commissioned. A first draft will be written, read, picked apart, and 'notes' will be given to the writer, usually via a script editor who will then work with the writer through subsequent drafts until the shooting script emerges. London will have given notes throughout the process, so their influence is constant. To determine why there is a lack of religion in our series you will have to understand how London and others evaluate our viewers needs. This is a long-surviving series and I believe that their has always been a natural desire to keep the piper sweet...the piper is the viewer and



the viewer inevitably has the Emperor's veto. Someone somewhere has determined that religion is not an area which particularly interests the bulk of our viewers and I would agree with this. My opinion is based on monitoring our website for a year, and of course in talking to viewers. It does not follow that an absence of religion means an absence of morality. Cardale is a middle class farming community which logically will exude middle class moral values. It's 'fictional' Church is loosely Anglican and there have been 'appearances' of our young vicar at all the normal functions...weddings, baptisms, etc. There has also been an episode devoted to our vicar when it was discovered that he had Lupus. However, the Church does not figure prominently in past series, and probably will not in future. The content of most primetime viewing these days seems to lack religion. When you look back at the seventies there was a strong platform on which religious bodies could stand up and pass judgement on the promiscuous 60's or, in my view, the confused 70's. I don't suppose you ever had sight of a book titled 'The Cross and the Switchblade'. The theme of this book became overworked during the 70's, usually focusing on a criminal who saw the error of his ways and turned to God...very often becoming a 'disciple' in the guise of a vicar. The cache of such characters and their acceptance by the Church hinged on forgiveness for sinners. The special quality of the sinners seemed to be in their 'worldliness' and ability to carry the message with conviction to the badlands, something that the traditional 'good' vicar had been struggling to do with great difficulty for centuries. There is always an appeal in converted bad boys (and let's not forget the bad girls) who go on to lead shining examples within the community. I believe there is a place for such a character in Cardale.

The incoming producer and story editor will have very different ideas for Peak Practice which I am sure will be moderated by the powers in the South, but the new series which will start transmitting in September 2001 will reflect changes in the image of Peak Practice.

With regard to the inclusion of 'other' religions in story lines I think that, once again, taking into account the type of individual responsible for storylining, and considering the viewers' expectations, it is understandable why these issues are omitted. I don't believe that this is due to proactive avoidance, but rather a passive omission, if that makes sense.

I think I've said enough for the present. I'll give you a chance to read this and will phone you presently. Hope this stimulates some direction.

What is the desired "effect" of PP ? The answer is simply to retain, and increase if possible, the ratings. This viewing share percentage is the lifeblood of the programme. Without a



reasonable share the advertisers will go elsewhere. You might have noticed an additional commercial break in the PP hour...the drama now has 4 acts. This is a purely commercial move...more ad space to sell.

When the series started over 7 years ago, borne from an idea of the writer Lucy Gannon, there was no intention other than to make a pilot series of eight episodes. This is often the way a series starts, and only when it is clearly popular will the powers commission further series. There is always an optimism at the outset that the series will be a success. Many projects enjoy only their first series before they are buried.

In the case of PP, when I saw Series One episodes I was struck by the 'All Creatures Great and Small "for humans"' element. The plots were character driven in all the usual ways, and audiences still talk about the 'Amanda Burton & Kevin Whately days'. As time passed the need for fresh angles and stories grew, and so there followed trends of changing theme...more plot-driven stories, then more medically-driven, back to character-driven, and so on.

Throughout the years the ratings figures will have been scrutinized each week.

PP does pay heed to portraying medical facts faithfully, simply to avoid contention and to retain credibility. It would also be irresponsible to cause distress in viewers who are often sufferers of conditions PP will cover. If the former constraints did not exist then we'd make it all up, and tailor medicine to suit the story. In reality our stories have to be tailored to the medical condition.

I looked after the medical help lines in the past two series and learnt a lot about the nationwide matrix of best known to obscure support groups. Perhaps this is why I came to feel very conscientious about verisimilitude. An extreme example of 'faux pas' would be in portraying a treatable condition as terminal. Viewers often believe what they see, even in the world of make-believe. I don't intend to patronize these viewers but am simply emphasizing the power of the screen. There are financial penalties for making this kind of mistake, as there would equally be those for trades' descriptions. Remember also that 'health' is common to all and is one of our greatest concerns. In conclusion, accuracy is paramount in all issues, I would like to think, but particularly in the area of medicine.

The absence of religion and race in PP is both curious and understandable. It would be natural to build a strong priest figure into PP. In itself it would provide an evolving opportunity for stories with a strong moral base. It could keep pace with current affairs and feature Cardale's reaction to a woman priest...and so on. There used to be a strong Methodist (and Baptist ?)

congregation in Derbyshire, but this no longer exists. There is the same congregation famine in Derbyshire as anywhere else, so religion does not seem to leave a void by its absence from our story lines. When we first spoke I felt that your questions were slightly admonishing...there being the underlying implication that religion should be a part of our storylines. In writing to you I want to persuade you that its absence is not inappropriate.

The case for 'race issues' I believe is similar. In Derbyshire, the concentration of mixed culture is urban. 'Cardale' is rural. It is populated by old and young, not one of whom is remotely akin to Hannah Hawksworth of Northern fame. For the most part the village is a modern one, with modern concerns. In rural Derbyshire today there exists a much wider range of potential issues than those we choose to cover. If you examine our stories you will see that the consistently changing backdrop is of occupation. We have covered narrow-boating to quarry work to textiles to singers to military etc etc. These environments will interest viewers and will not cause contention. In this way we might compare the inclusion of religion in a storyline as being potentially contentious. We seem to be conditioned to feel that we should belong to a 'faith', and for the growing number of us who do not, I see religion as isolated as an aspect of a story. It would not be an issue, perhaps, to which the majority of viewers could relate to with ease, and anything that is demanding in this way is actually unsuited to the PP formula. The programme is intended to entertain. To date it has been called a medical drama in a rural setting. The early success of a series ensures that the original formula will be continued. As I said, the original stories appear to have been character driven. The current trend will be to return towards creating strong allegiances between viewers and characters. It becomes less important to include 'issues for debate' but rather more important to focus on character dynamics which will involve the audience emotionally. In this way the viewer becomes loyal. It follows too that the nature of 'stand-alone' episodes with little connection in stories from one week to the next, will change. To build a consistent viewing figure, there have to be 'hooks' which return people to their seats one week later. Stand alone episodes are viable if you can keep coming up with new stories. It is logical to exploit the usefulness of permanent cast. Soap Operas do this very efficiently, and my feeling about the upcoming series is that it will focus more heavily upon the relationships of our principals.

The physical backdrop of the Derbyshire countryside is a prerequisite for many of our viewers, the majority of whom live in centres of high population. The strong image of this

type of countryside will play an important part in sales of PP abroad (Australia for instance)...ex patriot nostalgia.

I do not believe that race or religion is excluded by policy in PP, but do believe that neither are important to the viewer in the context of this programme. PP does not appear to push any particular message and has never pretended towards 'platforms', be they moral or otherwise. In 47 mins and 30 secs we have to provide an engaging story which must entertain. It really is that simple. Whether you make a film or a documentary, time is always the constraint.

The comments of the majority of viewers tell us clearly that they are more interested in the character developments within the stories. The rest is dressing. Please remember that all I have said in this note reflects only my own opinion. I have no communication with London and therefore no true idea of their own vision for PP. All I know for sure is that the new series will be racier and more 'colourful' with regard to characters and relationships.

Hope this answers some of your 'thoughts'.



## **Interview with Graham Gordon, Executive Producer, Taggart.**

Graham has only recently taken over. To get a feel for it they watch older films of Taggart episodes – between 6 and 8. They talk to the executives and then decide on a storyline. He was very surprised that Jardine was seen as a Christian. Knew he was teetotal. They're very careful about religion. There is a need to conform to a specific audience expectation. Religious profanities are worst offence they can commit. People will write or phone in to complain. [Words they are warned about: God, Damn, Hell, Goddam, Jesus, Jesus Christ] The network has the real power because they pay for the show. They are governed by the ITC. If the ITC receive more than 10 calls they have to investigate.

He believes religious groups have a lot of power regarding complaints. They would be very cautious about using a Muslim as a killer because they are part of a minority group. Also wouldn't have Jews murdering Arabs – don't go there. Religion and politics are very difficult. This is the story that works. They want to please audiences. Still amazed about Jardine. If part of a character hasn't surfaced in the previous 8 episodes then it's lost forever. Taggart is done as separate films. The audience is watching a TV thriller – characters are not what the show is about, much more plot driven. They have an ensemble of actors and try to make them interesting.

4 x 2 hour films. Shooting time is 5 weeks with 6 – 8 weeks' preparation.

They don't have religious characters, who have brown skins, in these series but it's nothing conscious. Scriptwriters have freedom. There are no quotas for sex, religion, etc.

Audience is between 35 – 65, male and female who watch with their family. Very few topical issues. He's been told it has to be a murder mystery. They seek not to offend. At the end of the day it's a morality tale.

## **Telephone Interview with Alan Bookbinder, Head of Religion and Ethics, BBC.**

Religion comes up in a lot of popular drama. Usually character driven. (Doesn't actually provide any examples) There is no quota for it however. Wouldn't like to see a quota. It's not the way good drama emerges. Shadowlands (story of CS Lewis and his wife) came out of imagination of religious broadcasting dept. Soaps cover a broad range of ethical and religious issues (again no specific examples).

Drama needs to veer towards extremes. Because religion has tended to be about putting limits on freedoms the drama that is most readily available is negative. Fundamentalism has also increased and there is a clash between liberals and fundamentalists. This reflects a loss of deference to the church.

One of the things Shadowlands did was to look at the limitations of religion – dealing with difficult issues like death.

Popular drama is better at being multi-racial. Thinks we might see more Muslim characters in inner city settings post September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Dot Cotton and Ethel was a religious story between duty and love.



*First of all, by way of background, do you mind telling me why you got into religious broadcasting.*

Well I've been interested in religion all my life, that is to say I've been thinking for the last say 40 years since I went to University. Before that I was a practising Christian. I joined the Church of England when I was six as a choir boy which meant that I was at church twice every Sunday then I was at choir practice, then there was Sunday School. So the church was a very important part of my life educationally, socially if you like, as well as if you can call it spiritual when you're a kid, for a long time. Also in the 40s, early 50s the town I was brought up in was a small town, with 5000 people, many many religious places in it - Roman Catholic, Church, Quakers, different sorts of methodist, salvation army, salvation missionary, Congregationalists, they were all over the place. And they ran the town really. Not only in terms of religion but in terms of leisure, entertainments, such as they were, trips away and so on. So the idea of being part of the church and the church being part of your life is fairly natural to me. And then, when I began as it were to think differently, I thought my way out of it, as I thought but it didn't go away, there was still this residue there and I continued to pay some sort of regard to it, certainly fairly respectful, but in terms of practice paid some regard but it was only occasionally, the usual Easter and Christmas business. And over the last few years there's become an increased interest in science and increased interest in religion grew correspondingly. That was the background and the foreground was I suddenly had an idea; I got rather annoyed with people doing this millennium business without recognising what the real purpose of it was, why everybody was getting excited about the millennium, so I thought that I'd like to do a big stab at it. 20 one hour programmes, each one taking on 100 years of Christian history and call it 2000 years. And I got interested in it as an idea and as a rather over-ambitious attempt on a very low, a very low religious broadcasting budget to do this. I did it. And it went down perfectly well. It was a 3 parter really. We did films, we did a discussion with experts and then we let the general audience come in to discuss. And there were those who preferred the films, those who preferred the discussions and those who thought the mix wasn't very satisfactory. And those who thought the mix was perfectly satisfactory. We're now repeating the films but we've made them longer. We've shot extra stuff so their going out at a greater length and they're doing very well as repeats. But I revived my interest in history which was, sorry, in Christianity, I was about to say which had become as much an historical interest as anything else and then since then I've done programmes on the 10 Commandments and before that 2000 years almost as a little dry run at religion I interviewed the religious leaders, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Roman Catholic church, the Methodists, the Jews, the Sikhs and the Muslims. So I got involved in making programmes and still am involved in making programmes about religion. So that's where it comes from.

*thank you. Over the time that you've actually been involved in broadcasting what are the changes that you've seen in the way that religion's been treated.*



Well I think the change is, the people that I've worked with we try to bring a lot more rigour to it, we try to examine the fundamental tenets if you like, we have asked people like the A of C and the Cardinal and the heads of the churches, do they believe in the resurrection, do they believe in the virgin birth as well as asking them to try to explain the nature of good and evil and so on. So I think we've been more rigorous and more fundamentalist in our approach to their fundamentalism. We try to blow away obscuring cobwebs of convenient thinking and see what was left. So that was one thing I'd say. I don't claim to have done much. But I think that was what we have tried to do. And we have also tried to show how religion does play, have a force in the contemporary world. I mean that word relevant is an appalling word because it usually leads to bad programme making but the truth is that the way in which we live our life and why we live our life the way we do to me these are still important questions and religion has given some answers. And sometimes it has given very, to many people it has given extremely satisfying [?] answers. And we try to sort of dig right out of the condition of religion, dig that out of religion and put it into broadcasting. And thirdly what I think we try to do is to reintroduce the notion of discussion and controversy in religious broadcasting. We've said these things must be aired, these things must be discussed. Whereas I think that quite a bit of religious programming is just affirmed or declared which I think is absolutely fair enough but I think there are other ways to do it.

*when I was doing some of the archival stuff, a lot of it was radio. I was quite surprised by what seemed to be quite serious debate about the nature of religion. On the other hand all I had was programme notes in the Radio Times I didn't actually hear what was said. Are you aware of what those kinds of programmes might have been like in the 30s 40s and 50s.*

No, I think [?] it was all taken for granted, nothing was disputed, very little was put in an historical context. You were just told. It was reexpressed but it was reexpressed for premises which were taken for granted for true as being true and generally shared.

*do you think, you were saying, when you interviewed the leaders of different faiths, do you think that's been a big progression in actually interviewing other faiths? Because my impression of looking at the archival stuff, and even now I think, is that Christianity is the dominant one. I think there were maybe nods to Judaism but there really wasn't much else. Do you think that's something positive that's*

Well I think that's the case. I mean in television over the past few years there have been big series on Judaism, an enormous number really and that's fine, that's more than fine, it's good. And a few on Islam, not as many but some. And I think very little on Buddhism or Sikhism. And so on. But i'm sure you're right. To the people that i grew up with it's still officially a Christian country erm a although numbers of churches are dwindling that doesn't mean it's not a Christian country and therefore proportionately [?] that's the argument. I don't have enough knowledge, detailed knowledge of that.

*Can you say anything about the changes, or what the changes have been, in the way religious broadcasting is seen in relation to general broadcasting. Like, is it seen as a negative career*



*move, for instance, to go into religious broadcasting; are there greater financial restraints.*

ON the whole, I've been doing religious broadcasting outside the religious arena, you know the history of Islam for instance, religious broadcasting have lower budgets. We stretched the budget on 2000 years because we, I've got some very good directors who could sustain periods of filming in around a few locations which we spread over 20 programmes so we advertised it and we, actually did very shrewdly and made the thing extremely good. I, as I say, good production values. It was a struggle and I think it would be difficult for people outside a big programme unit like ours to do that. Yes the budgets are much lower, the slot times, the viewing times are not those which [.....?] mid Sunday morning or very very late Sunday night or very early Monday morning.

*It was one of the irritations of the Ten Commandments in Scotland*

Yes Scotland was an absolute disaster, all over the place. Well it was an hour earlier here but it wasn't much better. It was still all over the place. So yes I think it is thought to be a bit of a burden on the system, by the system, slightly, and as regards a lot of people doing it, well, I don't think it would be regarded as a good career move. That's why I thought it was useful to bring in extremely skilful directors into 2000 years. The people who directed that had worked on South bank shows and that sort of thing. But yes, I would say that in the hierarchy of broadcasting it doesn't figure very highly.

*At the Television Conference that seemed to come across very clearly that it wasn't important and in an ideal world it would be. Which doesn't seem to fit with a n idea of Britain being populated with people for whom religion is important. You know, in whatever shape or form, not necessarily bums on pews or whatever.*

Well, there's always, it's always very difficult to argue this one from the ratings because when 2000 years started at the quarter to eleven slot it got a good audience. It stayed there for about 3 or 4 weeks and the audience built and it was a bigger audience than the South Bank show was getting and then it switched its time and then it stopped for a week and you just lose the audience, they don't know where it is. And that, there hasn't been a chance for religion to build an audience except for an early night sing song thing, which Harry Secombe did extremely well and a lot of people love those. But you know, there's only one Harry Secombe, he has a shelf life like everyone else and that's where the thing begins to run out like everything else and it was very much a one off. I mean to come back to your question, it doesn't seem to figure very importantly in the scheme of things unfortunately. People prefer programmes about gardening, cooking, even politics, even the arts

*I wonder if there is a mismatch between what people are doing in their lives in terms of religion. They might not be going to church but they might believe in God however they do it, and a perception that we are in an increasingly secularised society. I mean, I hear Ernest Rae's talk in Manchester two years ago, I think, and one of things he said was that there was a culture of secularisation within the BBC1, now he was obviously talking specifically about the BBC but it was obviously very difficult for , within broadcasting, to express a faith, it had to be*



*hidden, because it was just seen as, well not quite the thing you did if you wanted to get on.*  
Well, you've said that before. I think there's something in that. I can't say anymore. I don't think many people come into broadcasting to end up as religious broadcasts. You do but not many do. I think the problem with God is you know of the art forms in this country for instance, there are far more people belong to theatrical societies than they probably belong to film societies or other art societies and yet when you do programmes about the theatre they're the lowest rated. So there's not necessarily a correlation between peoples' participation in an activity and their willingness to watch that activity. And I think you could have two sets of figures. One which says his country was still, a great number of people, an immense number of people were still interested in you know things which were most important about religion and yet they're not going to church, not watching religious programmes. I don't think that would be a contradiction.

*I think that's a very interesting point. Definitely. I'm aware we have a time limit so I'll press on. Do you think religious broadcasting can continue to be justified for companies with a public service remit? From the secularisation argument, which I think we've touched on and also from a commercial point of view?*

Commercially I don't know what the commercial values of it are. I mean the BBC ought to continue it because of their public service remit and that's one of the things the BBC's for and so that should be that. So that should be an open and shut case. They should be very pleased to continue it. They should change it I think, I'm not sure, it's up to them. They should change it so it's not too much CoE, it's not too much Christian in the sense of [...] that's too tiresome, but they should continue to do religious broadcasting without any question and continue to do it well and to put reasonable resources in to it. The commercial companies; well we have a public service remit as well. WE have to do regional programmes, we do many more than the BBC, we have to do arts, we have to do children's programmes, we have to do religious programmes. I think that'll continue for quite a while. It's part of this country's approach to television, there is regulation. In order to get these licences you are mandated to do certain things. I think it will continue for quite a while. I think it will be difficult to chop it off. What is happening of course is that it's becoming marginalised. There you go. a lot of other things are marginalised. The arts are marginalised. People think that serious politics are marginalised. A lot of things are marginal but I think as long as they're there people can seek them out.

*I 've heard people say, and it ends up being a numbers game, to be honest, well numbers are declining, the percentage of people in this country who are religious, you know you include all religions, are a tiny fraction of the population, so why should it be on there. You should have it on satellite or something, that you pay for it. The licence being for everyone.*

You pay the licence fee there'd be [?] all sorts of programmes

*I take that view on football*

You wouldn't pay your licence fee for football

*No not at all.*

Where does that take us? It means we all belong to minorities and majorities.



*So as long as there are some people for whom it's important, if you have a public service remit Well yes, the BBC simply has to do it. It would be better if they did it with a good heart and id it well. As long as we in ITV have a public service remit we have to do it too. We should do it well, try to do it well. I think there are some good programmes.*

*What effect do you think there will be when the net becomes capable of broadcasting and a step forward is taken to designated channels?*

*I don't know. I think there's an awful lot of speculation and I think one [?] is as good as another. I simply don't know what effect that's going to have. I mean the dedicated channels, I don't know. The evidence so far is that it works in certain limited areas only. On the other hand it works in surprising areas, the History Channel in America that's worked very well. I should imagine a religious channel, well America is a religious country in a way that we're not. I don't, I think that the best bet for the religious people is to hang on to the place that the have in the big channels.*

*When i was at Barclay Knapps lecture at the TV conference and he was talking about these dedicated channels. It was a constant theme, the brave new world of internee and everything. But it struck me that one of the things nobody seemed to address was any cost of social consequence of this endless fragmentation, you only watch the kind of things that you want to watch. You have TiVo which selects out anything which you might happen to come across accidentally and, maybe it's kind of doom merchant stuff. There just seemed to be an absence of consideration of what happens. Partly because I think I'm aware of people who have retreated, maybe that's a bit pejorative, who only watch Christian satellite stuff, they will only have Christian videos in the house and they become the most insular people on earth. And you think this is scary and yet none of that seems to be addressed.*

*Who would you want to address it?*

*I'm not sure. I think I just want people to pause before they start saying, look there's all this wonderful stuff out there, look what it can do, wait a minute is there a downside to it; maybe they should consider, you maybe won't stop it but at least if you've actually thought about there could actually be limited consequences you won't suddenly wake up 20 years down the line, oh dear we never considered what might happen, everybody's fragmented in this way. I get slightly pessimistic about technology. Sticking with this multi platform stuff and everything. One of the possibilities is that you make a programme about religion, somebody downloads it into their programme which is only going out on the net, and you have no way of how what you have said is being used. For all you know you're out there on internee broadcasting having been edited, endorsing some sort of religious fundamentalism, that you're completely unaware. Have you thought about that at all and how that might be policed.*

*I haven't and policing it might be a nightmare. They thought that when they started trying to police copyright [?]. Similar battle in a similar nightmare for the very reason you've put your finger on it will have to be policed, because people's words can be used against them. I haven't thought about how it can be done. the way would be to put copyright fees on. Fees would mean*



they couldn't use it unless they pay. Another way would be they can't use them unless they get permissions.

*But then if it's available on the net and they just download it to whatever it is they're doing.*

I think the relationship between the original broadcaster and the net is the main one. I think it's going to have to be, it must be a question of copyright. It isn't any different from anything else. It's got to be a question of copyright. People have to find ways to exercise their rights in that area. [...]

*Particularly the area that I'm interested in, no sorry, the specialist area that I'm looking at, within popular broadcasting, soaps sitcoms etc, Christianity seems to be the main religion that's shown. All the focus groups that I've done, spoken to people, you say think of a religious person whatever, and nobody's ever managed to come up with anything other than Christianity, apart from a techno pagan in Buffy. Do you have any views on that, in terms of representation.*

Well I don't think people who sit down to write soaps sit down to be all that representative, but I think if most people were pushed in this country, most people would say they were Christian, they'd say they were nothing or were Christian. Other churches may or may not be effective. Other religions may or may not be more effective. I think it's just representing the mass of people in this country. It seems to be in terms of church going, rather, for most people, at arms length any way, a certain indifference to a certain extent. I still persist that that is not necessarily indicative of the way people think about their religion or their faith, that's a different matter.

*Do you think its, maybe I'm being a bit naive in thinking, that soaps particularly they aim for some sort of realism, particularly in reference to social issues that they will try to cover, but the absences in terms of coverage of other religion; I'm not talking about evangelism or proselytising, but you would expect*

I told you that I'm not an expert on this field so you're asking questions that I can't answer with any authority whatsoever

*I'm not looking for an authoritative opinion*

I don't know what's on. I don't know what religious, and how much is in certain soaps, I don't watch enough of the stuff, really. I really don't. I'm giving you guesses but it's just guesses. I don't think it's there very much really.

*It isn't*

Soaps, I would guess from my fairly light viewing ... that pubs is an apology for religion.

*The arguments that there are about representation, not just about religion, but across the whole spectrum in the media, the way women have been portrayed, the way different ethnic groups have been portrayed, and all that, those sorts of issues seem to have been taken relatively serious, in some areas, but as things that ought to be addressed. there ought to be a degree of representativeness. do you think, and i know you're not speaking with authority but this is your personal opinion I'm looking for, do you think it's unrealistic to expect religion, and politics because that never gets covered, to be representative, that it's outwith what light entertainment*



*is trying to do?*

Well I think these are enormous questions, there good questions, no doubt. the reason why women made a stand in some television is because they've become a pressure group and it was also quite clearly right, what they were about. Similarly with other pressure groups, in terms of race and so on. I don't know where you would start with religion. Would you go to the producers of Coronation Street and say there aren't enough Roman Catholics on and they'd say, God if you're in Granada Jimmy McGovern's [?] are full of Roman Catholics, Jimmy McGovern's plays are all about Roman Catholics so what are you talking about, we can't get rid of Roman Catholics. So it's difficult to know how they would be an effective pressure group and it's difficult to know whether writers would say that isn't my experience. I mean every writer could say well, a few I suppose, well most writers would say men and women that's my experience so let's try to do what we can do about that. I don't know that many writers would say my experience is Christian men and women and anyway I don't think it's how people write. And also I believe that most things start in the writing. The fact is in terms of organisationally, institutionally and bureaucratically, we're in a post Christian society. Individually and personally and spiritually Christianity is certainly one of the religions in this country which has got a future and certainly has a strong presence and certainly got a future. In terms of being something that is part of the way the country sees itself, in a structural sense, I don't think it plays a part in it.

*I think I would agree with you. I think there's a tension there. For those for whom it is really important, actively important, then it does seem to be really important that there is this equal representation in the same way that gender was important, race was important and all the rest of it*

That's right. Maybe a pressure group will come out of it and surprise us all.

*Very quickly, do you have any views on dedicated religious channels?*

I'm in favour of dedicated channels. I don't know but I think they'll take a long time to bite in. But I'm very much in favour of them. It depends how they're handled. It's the same as everything else. You can have a dedicated arts channel that's so badly done that nobody wants to watch it or so well done that everyone wants to watch it. These things have got to be well done. A dedicated religious channel in the hands of the right producers, writers and thinkers could be absolutely terrific and excellent.

*Do you think there's any way in which it could be potentially divisive?*

Oh yes. It'd just have to be exclusive and controversial in some ways that people don't like. Yes it could be divisive. You mean religions? Not difficult to see how that could happen. Divisive by being exclusive for instance.

*Have you come across God Digital or have you heard of them?*

No

*It's a satellite channel, they're operating out of Gateshead and I got some of their material... they do the Revival Channel and the Dream Factory. It's Christian broadcasting as a sort of counter to the humanism, Satan inspired, what have you that you get on terrestrial television.*



*they seem to have had a run in with the ITC because they want to be very very clearly Christian straight down the line. As I understand it, I'm not quoting accurately, there is only one true god and, well there's only one true way to Salvation and that's through Jesus and everything else is wrong. Which of course does not fit with ITC and yet their argument is that this is the truth and this is what our channel is about. It's a mix of family viewing chat shows, broadcast of revival meeting. I haven't seen it, I've looked at their brochure and I've looked at their website but it's very glossy and it looks as if in principle it ought to be quite well done. So I wonder if there isn't another tension between it can be very well done but there's something problematic with the content.*

Well by very well done, I always mean the content. You know, is it interesting enough to watch. Glossy TV can be just as boring as badly made television. Badly made television can often be very good because it's interesting. A lot of kids nowadays are deliberately doing badly made, badly looking television because they like the roughness of the surface and it's all to do with content. I mean you can have very glossy stuff which is so bland that you can't stand it for more than two seconds.

*Finally, is there anything else that you want to say or you feel that I haven't covered*

No, I think it's a, there's a sense in which I think, to go back to your pressure group idea I think religion could, religious er, I do think they bring a lot of pressure to bear on ITC, I wonder if it's the right sort of pressure? I still think they could be more questioning and more questing. I think they could deal more with spirituality than organised religion. That's where the entry point is now rather than organised religion. Deciding moral questions are the way to religion now, why people behave in the ways they do, the constraints, the motivations and so on, these are interesting questions now.

*Did you get many complaints about 2000?*

Some people didn't like the fact that the audience, which tended to be zealous Christians, I think the zealous Christians gave it its ballast. We didn't get many complaints at all. Mostly we got commendations except I don't know whether the ITC liked it all that much. I think they thought it was a bit too, I think they'd have liked a celebration, much more celebratory and I can understand that. It would have been nice to have celebrated. One wanted to be a bit more rounded than that but I can understand the objection.

*thank you very much.*



## Interview with Simon Cherry - London, 29/1/01

Simon: Well, I came to dept in 1990 and I'd done about ten years of other work before that including some journalism. I came here originally as a researcher, worked on a book series, some South Bank shows. Then over the last about 2 and a half years I've done a whole lot of work on programmes which at least are commissioned by, they come off the ITV's religious commissions budget. Whether they are entirely what people would want to see on television, some people would want to see on television as religion is something we might talk about. But I did the series 2000 years, which was the 20 part history and discussion. That broadcast in 99. And I did the Ten commandments series last year, which was essentially Melvyn's discussion studio series, ten programmes.

*I caught some of those but it went out really late didn't it? It was in Scotland.*

In Scotland they put a lot of them back until one or two in the morning. There was some other programme that was being run as a Scots programme. No, we got a lot of letters about that.

Down here they were mostly 10.45 and there were a couple that went really late. Cos you ran up against the Grand Prix - it's one of the things they build their evenings around. But those are the two main things I've done as a producer. I'm currently directing two programmes in the series called The Apostles which will be half hour documentary programmes which will go out on ITV, starting at Easter. Those will probably go out in Scotland at one o'clock in the morning as well.

It's the same late night Sunday slot. My own personal background, though I'm not sure I want the Daily Mail to know this

*this is confidential*

No, this is funny and I sometimes think about leaking it to them when I want to get off making religious programmes, is that I'm an atheist. Which I, is, why is an interesting point of view. I'm interested in the history, the ethics, but I don't get the God part of it. Whether that makes me a better producer of those programmes as I'm dispassionate, or whether it makes me filthy evil, undermining it I don't know.

*Well, I suspect there are people who would take both points of view aren't there?*

I've known some of the second lot certainly through letters. So that's what I've done.

*when you've said about the letters, do people know that you're an atheist, don't they like the content and assume that you must be*

No, it's because they don't like the content. What I found happened, when I started doing 2000 years which was I thought essentially a history programme. it was a programme about the 20 century. already anything to do with the religious spiritual side was done before the first one started almost. It was a history of how the church had grown and the ideas it had come into contact with. And we very deliberately treated the stuff in that programme, saying you know, according to the gospels there was a resurrection and things followed from that. we weren't taking an editorial line because whether you believe it or not there's a clear historical cultural



significance in the belief that arose out of that. People didn't really have a problem with that. I didn't really get much correspondence on that we did get one or two comments, including the odd, fairly friendly comment from a bishop and so on, saying your series has done a very good job of showing all the terrible things the church has done down the years. We would defend it and say we showed the good as well. What we did have problems with was we had discussions after which were essentially Melvyn plus 3 guests. The very first one we wanted to talk about the main questions - was Jesus the son of god, was there anything in this so, a good solid Anglican bishop, based in Ireland, Anglican church, an atheist, oh we had Karen Armstrong who I thought was a non aligned theist, a former nun. So I thought well we've got 2 [?] and one atheist, that's fine. Absolutely not. The reception from lots of viewers, and also I think, there was a panel of religious advisors, which I think has been disbanded since, there's also the church commissioners who take an interest in this, was that we were skewed two to one against belief in God. So my idea of what might have been balanced, given you can't have a catholic, [?], wasn't their idea at all. So we did think about this and tended, as the series went on, to put more clerics on. But even so, you would get letters saying why haven't you got any proper Christians on. Proper Christians essentially meant, I'm a catholic and I want to hear a catholic point of view or I'm a member of an evangelical church, the only view I want to hear (this seems to me), the only view I want to hear is the evangelical point of view. And I think they'd have been quite happy to have 3 people on the panel with the same point of view which of course would be death on television. Because that was the true point of view. So I think what happens is that individual viewers, or bodies of viewers, take the line where they hold this position is correct, because this is their belief. And I wouldn't knock that. I do understand people's religious belief is very big. My line would be, if you're confident in your beliefs then I would have thought you would have been someone who could see them discussed. We're not going to come on and say this is all rubbish and take an editorial line. But we might have someone on the panel who says no this is rubbish. So it seemed to me very difficult very early on, to take anything like a, an objective point of view when trying to balance discussion. Now if you see politics or hear politics discussed I think it's relatively easy. you can represent Labour party, Tory party, who themselves set agendas and most of the time discussion revolve around those agendas and then you might have someone else in the middle. You might have a Scot Nat or a Lib Dem or someone non aligned, and there you are you've got balance. Outside the frame that parliament sets you haven't got balance. You do that with religion there isn't that, there isn't consensus in the same way. There are interested lobbying groups who believe that consensus is what they think.

*it seems to me that what's actually being looked for is not discussion, it's not even a fear of their faith being challenged because you can't challenge it because it's so right, it's proselytising and that's what they see religious broadcasting as it ought to be.*

Yes, yes. I do think there's perhaps a further problem and if I look back on the series, both of the series, I would be aware that we tended to have for example a greater rep from more aggressive



clerics. Jack Spong would be an example. People who can talk not about god but about other god experience. Not about the gospels not as kind of witness but about people at the time trying to make sense of something they believe

*But that would be anathema to whole swathes of the church*

Absolutely. The problem I find is that, I won't say more interesting but that it lends itself more to discussion and argument than having someone who is of the more evangelical wing who will come and say this is right because it says so in the gospel. Much harder I think to find people who can carry a discussion in that camp and I would therefore say that maybe we haven't had for those people enough proper Christians on the series but i think it's because there's perhaps a gap between discussion between debate, between the kinds of things that have currency on television, discussion and affirmation which is what a lot of people want. Which is probably better done by televising an act of worship than putting someone in a studio and saying, if I was parodying it, can you tell me how great god is. And that's as far as you get in some cases with people like that.

*Have you seen any of the dedicated Christian channels.*

I haven't seen much here to be honest. I've seen a bit when I've been in America. I've seen some.. I've seen Gerry Falwells phone in programme, which is just scary. Forget about balance there. that was at the time of the Gore Bush recount. He was basically going on television and lying. I suppose you can do that when you've got your own channel. I've seen some of the preachers over there. We were shooting in Nashville once and I did a couple of things with people who to my mind would happily misrepresent history because it fits their agenda, and again editorially I have a problem with that. When you have, when you're into the kind of denial of Darwin areas, now I know all that stuff is just a theory but there is historical evidence, the number of people I've seen who want to hold a, it's usually a conservative religious corner, and will misuse, it's pushing it to even call it evidence, but will cite things out of context or simply not true, I find that quite difficult. But no, I haven't really seen stations over here.

*I got something through the post on God Digital, it's up in Gateshead. also known as the Dream Factory. It's satellite digital and have linked up with UCB. I was on their website and looking through their very glossy brochure. the kind of programming they seem to do is affirmative. It covers everything. It's not just worship. the Richard and Judy kind of thing. I'm desperate to watch it. Having seen clips of other things that have come from the states , I can't see why it would be any different. You know children's broadcasting, like they've got Bible Man who's dressed up like Batman and has to deal with all sorts of problems and solves them biblically. There's the Revival Channel which is part of it and covers big revival meetings and I've been on the fringes of those sorts of groups in the past, a long way in the past, and there is no room for debate, it's not an issue, and I can see*

Yeah, again, the problem I have with that kind of discourse again in terms of putting anything like that on television, it just seems to me, I've done this big history of Christianity, I know quite a lot

of the history now, it really seems to me there may or may not be a religious truth back there and almost everything that's followed has been made by human beings and it's been made to suit a kind of [?] you can't dig that out and what you see people doing now, that i'm not sure we'd get away with under ITC rules, is to say well I believe, for reasons which I'm sure they couldn't explain, that this position on that issue is right and i will find the bible and i will cite the bible and you can turn scripture inside out. I mean after Tom Lehrer said satire is dead after they gave Kissinger the Nobel Peace prize, I thought that scripture study was dead after Mrs Thatcher interpreted the parable of the Good Samaritan to mean that it was good to make wealth. That is so far from missing the point, but of course you can do that and again, you know you see it, I think it's more rabid in the states, but something as simple as, the one I've seen is particularly the line on wealth between here and there. Because America has a culture which comes from, this is my theory, comes from an immigrant background, it comes from people going there to make good, it is important to put surplus food on the table, which is why Americans are so fat, it's important to have money because you've got away from the background you've come from. Now that seems to me to be the root and now you'll get people saying if I have money it shows that God has blessed me.

*Prosperity gospel*

Absolutely, my big car. And even we had a big evangelist over from America for the 2000 years series, a guy called Luis Palau

*Did you meet him, what was he like*

Oh yeah a bit scary. His first question to me was, I've seen an article by you in the church times haven't I? NO you haven't but I think that's a gambit to find out what I think religiously. We talked to him about, you're a priest, why big car, why the expensive suits and he said if I didn't have those no one would take me seriously. It's quite different from that culture that we have, that you know abstinence. Again I think it's historically determined but I do think you can pull anything out of the bible. and if you're going to do those affirmation things, and i think there's room for them on television, but they're not the same animal at all as discussion programmes.

*Do you think there's room for them in companies that have a public service remit?*

Well i'm not sure about that the problem with that is well, if this group why not that group and how far are you going to go and I think there will be a very good argument for saying well we want what is almost a party political broadcast on these issues. I would rather see debate with all the problems of balance that presents.

*What about non Christian faiths? How do you think the representation of them, in terms of balance.*

I think not very much. I think it's difficult. I've been thinking about this because I've been thinking about doing something. It's about finding points. First of all finding points for discussion where agendas might meet interestingly. we did quite a lot on ten commandments where we had Jewish speakers as well as Christians. then you just walk into another set of, are



you, you know, Reform or, you've got another set of people who you've got to balance up. One thing I have learned is you can't say we've got A Jew and we've done it. And then you introduce Islam as well and we've tried to do it where we've thought someone was relevant to that particular discussion. Melvyn's also done a series where he interviewed leaders of faith, one to one. I can't remember what that was called. where he did go through and interview the Chief Rabbi, it was Hume, it was Carey, it was Joel Edwards from the EA. I think a Hindu and a Sikh. i can't remember who those were, and the Muslim leaders. I think more should be done. I think there should be more awareness of other faiths, because it's culturally important. On the other hand I think there are cultural reasons why more room should be given to Christianity, very difficult now because you start treading into areas of racism, but one of the things that intrigues me and bothers me generally is how much because, I suppose it's because of the legacy of empire, how much as multi culturalism comes in, we're chucking away. Certainly the English. I think Scotland's different because you've got a kind of nationalism and I think Church and religion have a part to play and that is one I would be critical of. I'm liberal I want to see multi culturalism but I think there is a problem of identity. It seems to me there is a kind of very, pragmatic line is taken where most religion on television is going to be Christian. but will have a the Sikhs, will have the Jews involved and so on and that can do (?) and that can be actually very difficult to frame a more coherent policy than that without offending some group enormously. that would cause big problems so it kind of bumbles along.

*A comment that comes out of the last two focus groups I've done, with adults who've had some sort of church connection, when we're talking about popular broadcasting, nobody could think of anything that didn't have, well a Christian that was being parodied or something like that, and both groups said, they wouldn't do it if it was Islam. there was no way they'd get away with that kind of send up, and it was Islam that was specifically mentioned. But there was this perception that it's ok to knock Christianity because, well I don't know they never quite came up with a because, but it was a feeling of, I think, a reverse racism.*

Yes, I think that operates a lot. The position with Islam is complicated of course by, well, I mean I was working in Waterstones in Manchester, as a book seller, at the time of the Satanic Verses. *that must have been an exciting place to be then.*

It was exciting there was, the night that Tim Waterstone was on Question Time he said something along the lines of, I suppose if someone firebombed the Manchester Branch we'd have to think about stopping stocking the Satanic Verses but at the moment we're doing it, and you're just sat at home and think I can't believe he just basically said, if you want to stop us selling this book then bomb the Manchester branch Brilliant! There's also, the rules are more complicated. When we did the 2000 years programme about the rise of Islam we had to do a lot of work finding out about what we could do without causing offence. Now is it right to pay that much attention to that religion. For example there are some very nice manuscript drawings from a particular Islamic sect from about 1400 of all the events the Vision of the Night Ride. Of course



we can't use them because we'll offend all the mainstream Muslims, now or maybe we can show parts of them so long as we don't show the figure of Mohammed, so you're going through it and then you get different Muslims giving you different advice about what you can and can't do. We wouldn't have dreamed of doing that with Christianity in the same way. If someone's produced, well I suppose blasphemous images we would be careful of, but no, different rules apply.

*But that's a different kind of thing isn't it. What you're talking about is not blasphemous religious but sacred images*

Well, it's blasphemous, but no for Islam it's blasphemous to first of all depict anything figurative, but particularly more than that to show the prophet. For instance a life of the prophet has been made by an Islamic film industry and it's all point of view. You never see Mohammed. That seems to be ok cos then you never see him. But that is a problem. But I do think, But to come back to your question, the sensitivity sometimes is different and whether you're dealing with, I suppose the church is big enough strong enough to look after itself, but maybe it isn't now as things have become [?]

*It seems to be a complaint that seems to being articulated more by the Anglican Church in particular, although it is around in the other denominations.*

But I also think it comes back to only Jews can tell Jewish jokes and they can tell very funny Jewish jokes about Jewish behaviour and if someone else does it we're outside pissing in as it were. And if you look at Goodness Gracious Me on television is an obvious example of parodying cultural behaviour, you can't repeat some of Spike Milligan's stuff without it being racist, some of the jokes I'm sure would be fairly similar, though maybe the way of observation is different, now obviously there is a difference. GGM got into trouble when they, they, *the Eucharist*

yes although the joke was on the Coopers.

*Funny, i didn't see it and came down last year to the Church of England synod debate and one of the speakers from the floor was complaining about it, so I have to say GGM doesn't always appeal, so I said who saw it and tell me what happened. One person who was a Christian said it was very funny but another friend who is actually an evangelical minister said it was a bit near the knuckle and not very happy about it. In the last focus group I did they were all Episcopalian women, and one of the women there had said she'd found it deeply offensive. She said she didn't mind Christianity with the church being poked fun at, she said the church is big enough it can cope with that, but she said when it's the fundamentals of our belief and the Eucharist is the fundamental that was offensive.*

I can see why people would think that. That it kind of oversteps a line and no matter how much you talk about context that's not going to excuse it. I think, I mean I don't make comedy programme, I'd be aware and try not to go too far. Well, actually, I'm pretty sure I would because we shot a catholic service recently in Chicago where what we wanted was the fact that

there was a shrine there to a particular saint and I said to the priest, of course I won't shoot the communion, and that was fine. I don't know if he wouldn't have wanted me to but I wouldn't use it as just wall paper shots, even though we wouldn't be criticising it, I think that deserves a bit more respect. But it's interesting this thing about parodying. I was trying to think about where else, cos you were talking about other appearances of religion on television. Now we've made occasional South Bank shows where religion is important to the artist - John Taverner springs to mind. We have a lot of religious action there. But some others as well where it comes up in interview.. We've made programmes which have had religious music in. there are those sort of depictions. Then there are soaps and again I'm sure you'll know a lot more than I do, but there aren't many vicars around on telly. when they are you can almost bet there's going to be a trial of celibacy [?]

*well if they're catholic there will be and it's a question of whether it's heterosexual or homosexual celibacy*

I mean EE had one a few years ago. Coronation Street had it's wacky sect.

*Oh right. I can't bear Coronation Street. I get my daughter and parents to tell me about it. But that's not come up funnily enough. No one's mentioned it.*

They have some sort of kind of cult definitely. Someone went off and joined. It was a few years back. The Archers on the radio always has a vicar but that seems to be part of the focus of rural life, the vicar, the doc, you know. They're not main characters. though she's getting a come on by the doctor at the moment.

*Ah no, no, his wife sorted that out the other day...(discuss plot of Archers). I've always thought she's been a good representation of a vicar.*

I think they've done quite well. I mean Richard Adams who was the vicar about 15 years ago was just boring. I couldn't swear to this but I think they've always had a vicar who's come in and out. And then they did the whole problem of rural parishes where, now i can't remember whether they did a shared vicar first. There was a part time one who was also the vet, who was a lay preacher. Now they've got the woman

*Who has her own problems with the linked thing*

They're quite good on that. They tend to not have many story lines though.

*they don't really. She tends to be seasonal, if you like. And I think she's been around a bit more because of this stress line, the farmers in stress. But on TV there aren't many. There's a Scottish soap, High Road, there used to be, I think there's always been a minister in that. Again, it's one of the ones I don't watch, but the women I was interviewing before Christmas, a few of them watched it, said they've not had a vicar for ages, a minister, get the terminology right, they've not had a minister for ages, and they were critical because so much of it as a small Scottish village was accurate and you just would not have a small Scottish village without a minister, even if he was doing linked parishes, and he would be there in it, so that was notable. there's one in Emmerdale, I only watch it when my daughter says the vicar's coming on.*



You get the odd one popping up occasionally in detective programmes. Vicar of Dibley, which again I don't watch. That's quite interesting. I can't believe they would, I think with her it's Dawn French and she's female is kind of more important than anything to do with proper vicaring.

*Well, it's, in Scotland it's always on at a bad time (discuss timing) but again it's been, people within the church quite enjoy it because they recognise so much of it. Yes it's a parody but it's a very truthful parody. You do get those responses to female vicars. There are pains in the bum on the parish council or whatever. You know these petty petty quibblings. One of the things that has been commented on is that when she's actually talking about her faith she doesn't mock it. she takes it seriously, so that even in a comedy it's treated with respect and that seems to be valued very much. Father Ted is another story.*

There's a very good priest in the first series of the Sopranos as well... There's a very good relationship between the Sopranos wife Carmel and the priest which runs through a few of the episodes and that's quite interesting. And there's The Thorn Birds as well.

*A classic! Oh and The Lakes as well.*

I didn't see that

*It was almost classic Jimmy McGovern. Let's get a dig at the catholic church. The pillars of catholic community you knew were going to end up shagging each other.*

I think what you said earlier was very interesting actually, the more you think about it, the more you can think of vicars, priests popping up as characters. We haven't even mentioned, you probably haven't seen Revelation. You HAVE to get Revelation. It was a soap that was made by some of the ITV companies and it didn't go network. Intended up being shown by Granada Carlton and Central or something like that and between them they funded it. And it was a late night drama and basically the plot was, it was about a bishop whose mistress got pregnant, he ended up murdering her by pushing her down the stairs. This took a whole series. It was fantastic! That one's a must. It defined trash television.

*I take it they didn't do a second series.*

they might have done a second series. I may have given you the plot of two series rather than one. it was full of shagging and there was incest hovering on. sort of things like that. I think what you were saying earlier about church goers was interesting. The way you think of them. Because they're always, well I don't know if it's always, but they tend to be eccentric don't they. Dot of EE, Ivy Tilsley, as was in Coronation Street. And you don't have ordinary people, don't go to church.

*And going to church. I'm not suggesting that in EE the whole square would say see you after morning service. but you would expect one or two, apart from Dot, or even one other. It's always struck me, nobody says, I'll see you after the service. It's always, I'm off to the pub. Or I'm off to, people do say, admittedly there are less people. but people do say it. But it never comes in just as a sort of casual thing. it seems to that when they are there they are caricatures.*



*What I'm desperately trying to do is get hold of some of the producers of these programmes... It almost seems as if the Dot Cottons of this world hark back to an earlier time and you wonder if the people creating these characters remember these sorts of people from their brief involvement in the church, and they've never had any more involvement. And that's what you've got, it's a sort of warped, out dated*

I think you're right, I think that's possible. I think what happens in those long running dramas, there's a kind of inheritance where there are only so many characters that spin around again. You know you recast someone who has the same function. You know, you take away a few of the minor characteristics and give them a few more. It kind of generates, the people who have a place in the framework. In some ways dot cotton is a kind of reworking of Ena Sharples who was bible bashing chapel, no strong drink, so I think she might have something to do with that. Someone said, oh that was a good way of spinning on [?]

*It seems to me that Ena Sharples when she existed a lot of the church was like that. What seems to have been missed is the evolution in the church. That people are not, it's not to say they're not all like that because there are some clearly still like that, but there are so few nowadays*

But what you also never get, EE in particular, how much people sit down and say should I stay with him or should I go. what are the cultural values involved? the cultural values almost always seem to be a struggle between being true to yourself and family. I mean [?] is all about family but all the moral decisions are sprung off from those two contrary pulls. I can't remember ever seeing anyone sit down saying should I do this, should I do that, because there's a morality involved

*Absolutely*

So it doesn't even impinge in that way.

*It's one of the things I've actually asked focus groups, what do you think the framework for decision making is. Like you say it seems to be individualism or family. There's no reference to anything else, apart from Dot who will say John 6. But no one else does. It's quite funny, When Sonia was giving birth on the sofa not realising that's what she was doing and Mo the matriarch was delivering her and it was, I can't be, I can't be pregnant and Mo made reference to the last time this happened, there were 3 wise men and a star in the sky and i thought, this is weird really weird. Because of everything that woman is in the programme, the idea that she would actually even make that kind of reference i find very very strange. But that was the end of it and then we had the agonising about the adoption and everything. No kind of moral, no kind of support from outside. there was nothing there at all. In things like Coronation Street and EE and Brookside which are supposed to be based in big cities, where are the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Jews, the Buddhists. I mean you'd expect at least one, I would have thought. I mean it's difficult living in Edinburgh where it's a very non multi cultural sort of city but that's tied up with racism, isn't it. It's actually perpetuating racism by not casting minority actors and characters. Coronation Street now got the Pakistani or Indian corner shop about 30*



years after everyone else. I think they've had the odd black family before but no one has really stuck. EE is a bit better and I think the fact that there's no religion probably isn't a prime consideration because there's so little minority casting going on at all. The reasons for that, well actually I once interviewed a producer of the Archers, in the late 80s, just before the days of Usha Gupta and there were no, and this was discussed, and they said to me quite straightforwardly we can't put a black character into the Archers because half the long running characters would have to be racist. What was very interesting then, was when Usha turned up they actually did a racist story line. But everyone we liked was very pro Usha and I think there were one or two sort of fringe comments, and Roy tucker who was the one who got on a motorbike and chucked a brick through her window, and Roy of course now has been completely redeemed to the extent that I'm really sorry for what I did, I was stupid, so they sort of did it and completely bottled it. The same would be true in EE actually. I live in Bow in the EE, not in one of the more obviously difficult areas, but you know they are casually racist there [?] and it runs very deep and some cases is still quite casual. And to be true you'd have to reflect that. I think that's the sort of consideration they have apart from the fact that they're all white, their audiences are all white, they see that

*Do you think it's an actual fear of having to depict racism*

I think that has to cross their minds at some point. I think it's more that they probably do focus groups and focus groups you know which characters do you like, which characters you don't like and the majority of focus groups are going to be white and the majority of characters they like are going to be white, and that kind of thing

*How can you say I like x if x never even features*

Well yes, but that's how it goes. there's an interesting character in EE at the moment. They've brought in a new black doctor and they've brought in his mother. And I think his mother's fascinating. she just sits at home she doesn't have a character she has an intonation [?], the fussy mother and she's terribly stereotyped. I think maybe the other thing that happens in soaps, maybe characters come in and are very stereotyped at the beginning and they kind of broaden out, but I can't watch her at the moment.

*Oh she's irritating in the extreme. I was just trying to think because I mean, Big Mo and her family have not been in it that long, were the stereotyped.*

I think they're terrible actors, every one of them

*I hate them. They're such horrible characters. I can't decide whether I think it's awful acting or the acting's so good that I really dislike them, the idea of having to spend 2 minutes in their company. Where they as stereotyped as the doctors mother?*

I think they were more or less introduced as being the thieving crim family, the rough.

anyway, there are others, the Battersbys with the Street. you know it's when they're bringing people in and I think that happens quite a lot in the long running soaps. I think somebody's brought in to be awful by the time you've had them for 6 months, worked the story line up,



they've become less stereotyped. But I certainly can't think of any, there's been the odd Jewish character, I can't think of any Hindus, Sikhs, featuring. There's the odd Muslim by default. And I think EE had some story lines which were generated out of Islamic family values, the Muslim couple

*right back at the beginning was it because I didn't watch it then*

Yeah but there's certainly not much, there's really not much, as we were saying earlier, in the religious programmes, ethical programmes, but I think that's a complication of [?]

*Yeah that's fair enough. it's been interesting looking at the archival stuff. The relationship with CRAC and all the delimitations, we can have this one we can have that one, no no we're not having them. I mean the overarching thesis, I suppose, is it's Christian because we're a Christian country, and that's it and people get progressively less depending on how many adherents there are. In some ways I suppose that seems understandable in terms of religious broadcasting, but it strikes me as odd that in popular broadcasting, light entertainment, which you would think would try to reflect more the social complexity of city life, village life, whatever, but maybe that's naive.*

I don't know, but I don't know whether there is n't a way in which popular culture generally diminishes, the complexity. I'm trying to think, what do we know about Islam from the popular press, for example, they're all mad aren't they?

*Yeah, they're all fundamentalists and they force their kids into marriages.*

I mean we actually made a programme, a book series I came here to do. We made it was the Gulf War time, the level of ignorance pumped out, I always thought was to disguise a nasty little war about who's got the oil, was enormous then. And we made a programme with some book writers saying well, is there a pan Islamic threat. And there isn't cos they're all arguing amongst themselves. there's very little chance they're going to mobilise, even if they wanted to. What do we know about Sikhs? They wear turbans and don't like crash helmet laws. I can't remember any other Sikh things. So, I think there's a way in which popular culture, as opposed to what people know individually, doesn't go into the thing seriously. You know religion is a way of people being different from the mainstream. Certainly, those foreign religions, being different. They're not looked at in any other way. I mean I don't read the Sun, the Mirror, the News of World all the time but when I do those are the sort of things I see, rather than anything which explains anything else there.

*I would agree with you. It's just, do you think, if you're trying to, particularly with soaps, which seem to me make a claim to some sort of representation of reality, there should be a wider ethnic mix*

I agree with you

*and within that you would then get bits of other religions that do not have to be, we'll all sit down and have a lesson on the Talmud, the Koran or the Bhagavita.*

i agree with you but I don't think, I'm not sure that anyone thinks that they're reflecting reality



and if they are, they're kidding themselves. YOU know, I spent enough time in Salford when I was living there and Coronation Street is not there anymore. It's even got to the point where they're doing a story line about preserving the cobbles because the cobbles, you know. That's all gone. Albert Square is a strange fiction spun off from some kind of East end. They're all distillations, you know this. I suspect that the people who make them are canny enough to know that as well. It's not just something that's invented [....?]

*Do you think then that there's almost a pandering to white racism, a harking back to a nice safe time, you know we get tabloid headlines that by the year whatever, we'll all be over run and white's will be in the minority, and all the rest of it. so we pretend that what we're doing is gritty realism, and the social issues that we deal with in these soaps are gritty realism but the actual make up is a slightly cosier time, or is that being horribly cynical?*

I don't, oh, I don't know if I'd go, it depends which one you look at. Coronation Street I think has been nostalgic like that for years, yes, but not necessarily racism. I think that's essentially nostalgic for an idea of community built around the street and it's about people in the street knowing each other. I think that's what that one is about. I think EE is more about as I said, family and in particular women at the head of the family and EE is actually pretty relentlessly grim. I don't think that there's a lot that's nostalgic in that so I think it would be difficult to tie the lack of ethnic casting into a sort of [?] nostalgia about things

*I just wondered. It's difficult to use the word racist without it sounding pejorative but you know, almost a time when you could have communities when you didn't see many different coloured skins, what have you, was predominantly white, and that there's something reassuring, almost at a subconscious, well not almost, at a subconscious level, there's enough going on in these things with wife beating, child abuse, incest, lesbianism, the whole lot, have we really got to deal with race. We'll deal with those issues but we'll not confuse it with ethnicity so we'll keep it at a time when everyone, at least you could recognise the colour of the skin of the people around you,*

Yes, yes

*They'd maybe white. Edinburgh's a bit quaint like that, Particularly the part where I live*

I think there's also, but I don't know what the figures, you're saying Edinburgh's like that, my mum and dad live north of Bury, they haven't got any black neighbours. They're just not there. I think there are a lot of parts of country well, I don't think it's just pockets actually. I think you know there's a metropolitan view, we've got London, we've got the midlands conurbation, we've got Yorkshire obviously there are a lot of people there, Bristol is quite strong, but we went to Cornwall for a holiday a couple of years ago, I think we saw one black person and it's something you're aware of. But I think there are large parts of the country still, maybe that's where some of the difference comes from, that what drives some, I think on the whole, what we've got is, I don't think there's an agenda going on. I think there's a kind of inertia, probably. And I think it's probably preferable to what you see in America now, which is towel heads are the new Russians

cos we can't do Cold War stories any more and you put black actors into roles which have high status but very low dramatic impact and involvement. So you know, if a meteor is hitting the earth you make Morgan Freeman the president but he has bugger all to do

*But at least he's in it*

You're not empathising with him. Or I remember a review of that new Nicolas Cage movie recently. He hated the movie and he said he hated it because it pressed every pc button going, in terms of how and the way characters were cast. and one of those is when the angel pops up guess which race he belongs to, because if you're casting an angel in Hollywood they're all going, hey we're all white, there's probably not a black face around the table when the decision is being taken, but we'll make the angel black. And that happens and in some ways I think that's more racist because it's compensating in a way, people are gleefully thinking they're being pc but actually it's reinforcing the way they are marginalised.

*It's tokenism. Actually funnily enough there's a brilliant programme on Radio 4, Dead Ringers, it was the Archers Tribute and there was a mock interview with Usha about tokenism and it was so funny but it touched the mark.*

But interesting thing of course the thing is if you did go to the places where Ambridge is based you wouldn't see many. You'd see the families that have been there for years and the rich out of towners who given the kind of society we live in are likely to be white.

*yes to be honest I don't have a problem with Usha being the only Asian in Ambridge because it does seem to me that that's quite realistic. My sister lives in a small village just north of Oxford and they don't have any black or Asian neighbours at all. I mean I'm sure there must be some, the guy in the post office is, but there's hardly any. [Question about length of time for interview]*

I'm sort of talking, I mean obviously I've been talking a lot about drama which aren't things I work on, I watch them and I know to some extent how television works, I would suggest that you, I don't think you'll find conspiracy. I think you'll find it's more to do with inertia, it's more to do with what you're saying, well we won't go in that direction because it'll be sensitive, or we won't cast that way because we've got a couple of black characters and that's kind of

*You know how you were saying you had to walk this fine line of achieving balance, you can't just say we've got a Jew because is it a reformed, is it an orthodox, is it a da di da, having said what we've said about inertia, do you think that in some ways there is a sense of that almost, well if we put people in from other, well if we actually have a Muslim or a Jew does it become too problematic because we're so aware that we're putting somebody from another faith in. It's all right to parody, it's all right to get it wrong with Christianity but we daren't get it wrong with non Christian faiths*

I don't know

*and it is just easier not to bother doing it because we don't want to tread on toes too much*

I don't know cos certainly the way I'd work would be to try and work out, if you've got an area for discussion, what are the issues that you want to include in that area and then how do you cast



it to give a range of opinions. Like when we did The Ten Commandments we had some that were quite theologically based and we had some where we didn't have anyone who was a professional representative of a faith at all. We had some where, actually by chance we had 3 people who were more or less Jewish. They had a Jewish background. They might still be practising, they might feel they'd left that behind. so out 3 out of 4 might be that. I really don't know about other programmes. It might be interesting to look at something like Question Time. They probably have quite a reasonable balance. See when I'm casting programmes for these religious programmes I'm very consciously looking for someone who will give a [?] point of view. We did one about, you shall not take the lord's name in vain, about blasphemy, which actually turned into a ding dong between the progressive bishop of Edinburgh ... [discuss Richard] we had Peter Hitchens on and I thought, somewhere along the line this is going to go off and Hitchens just went in like that and they dominated the conversation and they had a real spat. And what was interesting about that was we were having a discussion with two people where it mattered, where it really mattered, how you saw god and that I thought was great. We did also have Lord Ali, not Arleigh, we had one of the Muslim peers who has been putting a reform bill through on blasphemy to give religious coverage to others. Now he got in at the end and he was very definite there because he was bringing a different point of view from another religion which says [?] Now I was very aware that I'd got a Muslim there. Now you might want to look at programmes where, sometimes in Question Time I guess they've got someone because they've got a professional position. And I don't know how it also happens that they are Jewish or Sikh or Muslim and whether they will think of balancing it in the same way. I may not be explaining this very well. We don't do lots of questions like QT we're looking at A discussion, where are the fault lines in that discussion, how do you get people on either side to try and pull them apart and that's what you try to do.

*I hadn't thought of looking at something like QT like that.*

I think they're probably quite concerned to get some sort of balance I would have guessed more than just party political. Or at least if not balanced then some sort of representation.

*I'm toiling to think of instances actually but I don't watch it every week. How do you actually get the people you get, have you got a book, Jewish contacts Muslim contacts.*

No you employ people who either have a book or know what they're doing. so on 10 C I had two assoc producers on that. One who's background was essentially on Kilroy, cast topical, getting members of the public in, in fact the job became so much that we needed someone else, we had some audience members. But her background was 'hot' discussions and things like that and one who'd worked on quite highbrow political stuff so between them there was a lot of knowledge that they can bring in. They didn't have a religious specialist on that partly because we'd already been through a lot of that with 2000 years. You do a lot of work. I don't know if that's the case everywhere else. cos there's definitely a sort of circuit. I'm not saying we're better than anyone else. I'm saying that I was trying some of the time to find people who were



not TV regulars but they're risky cos they might just sit in the studio and freeze so you need at least one, preferably two people, who you know are bankers who will keep the section going. *Yeah, it seems to me that the Bishop of Liverpool is stepping into Richard Holloway's shoes but from the completely opposite end of the spectrum. But he seems to be the sort of television bishop if you like. He just crops up everywhere.*

There are also, I don't know about other faiths, but there are a lot of Anglican bishops who are very, very boring. there are a lot of Catholics who you get through the Catholic Media Office, who tend to put up nice party liners. It's not the best way to get discussions going. I think there's a lot of politicking in the established religious orders. And very often the people who get the job are not the most inspiring figures, They tend to be the ones who haven't ruffled very many feathers. They've got their turn. Which may be one of the things which is wrong with the Church of England, so you don't have the Edinburgh bishop

## **Interview With Brian Muir GRF Radio**

I don't approve of christian radio. We were founded in 1948 - we are the oldest in Europe. We make radio programmes – we're an independent radio producer. We are not a Christian Radio station. We have never done it because we are uncomfortable with the idea of Christian radio. From a theological perspective my discomfort is that the basis of Christian Radio is usually evangelistic in a very narrow sense. This contradicts my own view that God is with people and helps them to find God. The voluntary team reflects the full view of theology. It recognises the diversity of the audience and therefore we produce diverse programming in terms of age, content, length. Our programmes are infused with spirituality. We aim for mainstream radio - we are the biggest suppliers in the UK. All our work has a cutting edge. It always respects the listeners. We share faith from a position of fragility - infused with doubt and certainty. This is very attractive to listeners. Christian Radio is ghetto broadcasting but we will supply them. There is a loyalty to Christian radio from listeners. In the USA despite the number of Christian radio stations very few listen to them in totality. Transworld Radio is a Christian missionary radio station I am a board member GRF provided counterpoints to UCB. We also say no Christian Radio because mainstream broadcasting would withdraw if it existed in every city, and nationwide. There would be no more religious broadcasting on mainstream broadcasting if that was the case. There is also an issue of stewardship of resources. GRF costs £20,000 per annum - UCB would cost £5 million per annum. There is a total potential audience of less than 1 million for the whole of the UK even Premier Radio only gets 100,000 out of 7.2 million potential listeners. I don't see a role for Christian Radio.

We provide RSL training sessions we get a lot of people coming to us who want to set up local Christian Radio. We spent the first morning asking them questions about their own media consumption. It's very interesting they want to provide things that they themselves do not consume.

We believe that God engages in an ever changing way with the world. It's worth looking at the government website's responses to the Broadcasting paper. The idea of a multi-faith channel is woolly thinking.

What's the future? 92 per cent of the population listen to Radio. 82 per cent watch television. Broadcasters are trying to resist fragmentation. There is a community of watching. The cost of production values is a key feature. Good programmes take lots of time and therefore lots of money. We're not necessarily going in the way of fragmentation.

The Anglican vicar in EastEnders was very complex - he struggled in an open and honest way he was a very good representation; he wasn't poked fun at. Issues of faith and spirituality should be dealt with more in these programmes. Why isn't it? People are scared - can't deal with it all at once. Producers and writers lapse into caricature.



## **Explanatory Notes**

In the focus group interviews two and a half interview transcripts are missing. This is because the person who was transferring them from mini-CD to tape for me, lost them. I had brief notes from the Aberdeen Rotary and Scottish Episcopalians interviews, which were too brief to include. For the second half of the Dundee Muslims interview I managed to remember the key points that were raised.

There is one interview missing from the Faith Representatives, that of the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. This was due to a recording malfunction that was not obvious at the time. I have explained how this was resolved in the relevant chapter.

Interviews with Professor Tom Carberry, Rev. Dr. Andrew McLellan, Mr. Andrew Barr and Mr. John Gray were not transcribed because they took the form of opportunistic encounters. Key points were jotted down following these discussions but it did not seem appropriate to include these notes as part of the transcripts.