

RADIO RELIGION

RADIO RELIGION: WAR, FAITH AND THE BBC, 1939-1948

By HANNAH ELIAS, B.A._{HONS}, M.A.

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Lay Abstract

This is a study of the place of religion in British public life during the Second World War. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was tasked with creating popular, upbeat entertainment that could boost the morale of the nation while reminding listeners of the reasons to stay committed to the fight. They created a “BBC Religion” during the war, one that emphasised unity by stressing commonalities between all kinds of Christians, and offered psychological and spiritual comfort to listeners in a time of crisis. The Religious Broadcasting Department created engaging content that prized accessibility and simplicity above all, commissioning beloved programmes, including C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, Dorothy L. Sayers’ *The Man Born to be King*, and *Lift Up Your Hearts*, a precursor to Radio 4’s *Thought for the Day*. When the urgency of the conflict passed and victory became assured, this BBC Religion ceased to serve a propagandistic function. Instead, the post-war BBC celebrated diversity and respected differences in religious belief and interpretation instead of forcing conformity.

Abstract

This is a study of the British Broadcasting Corporation's religious broadcasting practices during the Second World War and its aftermath. Using documentary sources from the BBC Written Archives Centre and the National Archives, this thesis argues that the wartime context allowed the articulation and development of a particular kind of "BBC Religion," one that celebrated commonality over difference, emphasized the importance of accessibility, and focused on individual rather than communal worship. BBC Religion was an important site of national propaganda and national identity construction, and was central to the celebration of key civil religious festivals, including the National Days of Prayer. BBC Religion provided listeners with daily prayers, devotionals, talks and entertainments to offer psychological and spiritual support during a time of crisis. Religion can be an effective tool of persuasion, particularly when propaganda builds on pre-existing beliefs and loyalties. The Ministry of Information and BBC used a generic, practical Christianity as an "ecumenical weapon" to foster unity in Britain and between Allies. This thesis argues that the medium of radio and the technological and physical constraints of war shaped the particular articulation of BBC Religion. While the BBC helped foster a "spiritual consensus" during the war, this consensus quickly degraded in the aftermath of the conflict. Instead, the BBC articulated principles of tolerance and liberty in a more straightforward way, celebrating the return of regional and religious diversity in radio programming. In 1948, the BBC broke with its former "ban on controversy" to allow Bertrand Russell to openly question the existence of God on the air for the first time. This study offers a revision to "caesura" and "gradual-declinet" narratives of religious change by suggesting that religious change in the mid-twentieth century may be more episodic in nature, and that current historiography would benefit from an approach that considers the formation, development and adaptation of multiple discursive Christianities.

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I have imagined assembling these acknowledgments hundreds of times, because I knew these would be the last pages I would write before submitting this thesis for examination. I've had a long journey to this point, one full of unexpected twists, and one that would not have been possible without the support of a great many people.

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I started researching British religious culture in the Second World War during my undergraduate degree at the University of Calgary, and some strands of those initial proposals and investigations have made their way into this work. I have to thank Professor Warren Elofson for first encouraging me to pursue this direction of inquiry, and Dr Ken MacMillan for teaching me to be a better writer and first suggesting that I go to graduate school. Dr Anne White in the Department of Religious Studies introduced me to cultural and postmodern approaches to the study of religion, and I am still benefiting from insights gained from those discussions.

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Lastly, there are six people who deserve to be thanked above all the others. It is to them that this effort is dedicated. They are: my grandfather, Brian Chapman, who first taught me to love British history. My nanna, Jo Chapman, is the most formidable woman I know and could solve all of the world's problems if given a chance. My granny, Sheila Elias, took care of my body and soul when I was sickest and inspires me with the constancy of her love and faith. My father, Larry Elias, who despite ups and downs, is there in a pinch. My sister, Emily Elias, makes me laugh and keeps me honest. And most of all, my mother, Joanna Berg, to whom I owe everything. She taught me to read and write and to love to learn.

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List of Abbreviations and Symbols

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC WAC	British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre
BCC	British Council of Churches
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CRAC	Central Religious Advisory Committee
DG	Director-General (of the BBC)
DRB	Director of Religious Broadcasting
GOS	General Overseas Service
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LUYH	<i>Lift Up Your Hearts</i> (BBC Programme)
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library
LR	Listener Research
MOI	Ministry of Information
MOA	Mass Observation Archives
NA	National Archives
NBC	National Broadcasting Company (American)
NCCL	National Council for Civil Liberties
ORBD	Overseas Religious Broadcasting Department
RBD	Religious Broadcasting Department
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
WCC	World Council of Churches

Declaration of Academic Achievement

This thesis offers an important reconsideration of the place of the Second World War within larger narratives of religious change in the twentieth century. While many scholars have subsumed these crucial war years within accounts of inter-war change, or dismissed them as a period of mellow or austere religion, the Second World War provides a significant opportunity for an analysis of religious change that relies on a confluence of vectors. International geopolitics, political consensus, myths of national cohesion, physical constraints, technological developments and currents in ecclesiastical thought each played a role in shaping the religious culture of wartime, one that I describe as a “spiritual consensus” that prized unity and commonality over difference.

I achieve this by taking the BBC’s religious broadcasting output as the focus of my study, arguing that the wartime context and consequent changes to the medium of broadcasting provided the setting for the creation of a novel religious culture. Scholars such as Callum Brown and Stephen Parker have used the concept of discursive Christianity rather homogenously, but in this thesis I argue that BBC Religion should be recognised as one of many, multiple Christianities whose meanings are continually renegotiated and redefined. As such, I trace the disintegration of BBC Religion in the immediate post-war years, as cultural and political contexts shifted, allowing the development of a broadcasting schedule that stressed the importance of diversity and tolerance. In this way, I have also offered a compelling alternative to the ‘caesura’ and ‘gradual-declinist’ approaches to religious change, suggesting that the nature of these shifts may be more episodic than linear.

This thesis also opens up an important new front for the history of modern Christianity in Britain. The relationship between mass media, religion and national culture has been under-examined by scholars, as has the particular ways that media shapes mental environments. The relationship between the Churches and the Ministry of Information seems to have sat in a penumbra between disciplines, leaving the rich trove of documents at the National Archives about the activities of the Religions Division of the MOI relatively unexamined. This thesis discusses in detail the global and domestic role afforded to an ecumenical Christianity in MOI propaganda. It also adds to existing scholarship that has emphasised the significant place afforded to Christianity in identity construction during the war, and its importance in the articulation of the narratives through which the urgency and necessity of the conflict was understood.

Introduction

“Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments.”¹

I. Religion in British Society

This dissertation, a focused study of the BBC’s religious broadcasting practices during the Second World War, has larger implications for our understanding of the changing place of religion in British culture. There is a cacophonous debate surrounding religious identity in contemporary British society, one rooted in competing visions of progress, modernity, and inclusion. David Cameron reignited this conversation during his first term as Prime Minister. In 2011, at a speech in Oxford marking the quadrennial celebration of the publication of the King James Bible, Cameron asserted, “We are a Christian country, and we should not be afraid to say so... The Bible has helped give Britain a set of morals and values which make Britain what it is today.”² In April 2014, Cameron wrote a lengthy piece in the *Church Times* defending his allegiance to the Church of England and “our status as a Christian country.”³ Such bold and seemingly regressive assertions prompted former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams to counter that Britain must now be considered a “post-Christian” country, one that has been shaped and formed by Christian institutions which remain influential, but is now home to many different faiths and religious cultures. These cultures cooperate and overlap, sharing space, streets and communities. To Williams, “A Christian nation can sound like a nation of committed believers, and we are not that. Equally, we are not a nation of dedicated secularists.”⁴ Indeed, the *British Social Attitudes* survey of 2012 found the British public

¹ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, (London: Penguin, 2008), p.26

² Prime Minister’s King James Bible Speech, Oxford University, 16 December 2011. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-ministers-king-james-bible-speech> (9 June 2014).

³ David Cameron, “My faith in the Church of England,” *Church Times*, 16 April 2014.

⁴ Interview with Rowan Williams by Cole Moreton, “Rowan Williams: I didn’t really want to be Archbishop,” *The Telegraph*, 27 April 2014.

equally divided between those who do and do not regard themselves as belonging to a particular religion.⁵

The rise of far-right political movements and the popularity of vitriolic anti-immigrant sentiment certainly indicates that Britain is a nation coming to terms with its changing ethnic composition and overlapping identities. Britain is a nation with an incomplete multi-cultural project and uneven practices of inclusion.⁶ But Britain's religious communities actively engage in prosperous interfaith initiatives⁷ and collaborate on local service projects.⁸ Civil commemorations have taken an increasingly multi-faith tone, with representatives of each major religion invited to contribute to significant anniversary ceremonies.⁹ Religious communities from different faiths often share more

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10789740/Rowan-Williams-I-didnt-really-want-to-be-Archbishop.html> (9 June 2014).

⁵ NatCen Social Research, *British Social Attitudes Survey 28* (London: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 173.

⁶ According to research conducted by the Runnymede Trust, Members of the BME community are more likely to be in poverty, in the criminal justice system, or in disadvantaged schools than their white counterparts. Runnymede Trust, "Submission to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee inquiry into the 'equalities agenda of the Government,'" 11 March 2011. Runnymede Trust, "Runnymede Trust Evidence for Equalities Panel" 30 January 2009, <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/resources/currentPublications/policy-reponses.html> (accessed 30 September 2015). Flourishing multi-ethnic urban communities in London, Bradford and the Midlands find themselves the targeted sites of protest by proto-fascist groups, whose members often derive from mostly white, suburban sections of the south and east. See: "Bradford and its Communities: Hope over Hate," *The Economist*, 398: 8723 (March 5 2011), 63-64. "EDL moves planned Lee Rigby Woolwich march to Walthamstow after mother's complaint," *The Independent*, 3 April 2015; Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, "Angry White Men: Individual and Contextual Predictors of Support for the British National Party," *Political Studies*, 58:10 (February 2010), 1-25.

⁷ Some active multi-faith initiatives include: The Inter Faith Network, City Sikhs Forum, Christian Muslim Forum, St Ethelburga's Centre for Conflict and Reconciliation. For more information see Abdul-Azim Ahmed, A Short History of Interfaith in the UK, *On Religion*, 16 February 2015, <http://www.onreligion.co.uk/interfaith-in-the-uk-a-short-history/> (accessed 2 May 2016)

⁸ Claire Dwyer, "Faith in suburbia: A shared photographic journey," in *Material Religion: the journal of objects, art and belief* 10:1 (2014); "Golders Green Together Campaign goes ahead," *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 July 2015.

⁹ World faith leaders prayed together at the 10th Anniversary Memorial Service of the 7/7 bombings at St Paul's Cathedral. St Paul's Collections, "Order of Service," 15 July 2015, St Paul's Cathedral. https://www.stpauls.co.uk/SM4/Mutable/Uploads/medialibrary/15_07_07-Bombings-ORDER-OF-SERVICE.pdf (Accessed 15 September 2015). Local community centres

commonalities than differences, including a theistic worldview, communities underpinned by ritual and symbol, and a belief in transcendence. These commonalities can operate as a bridge between faiths, uniting them against voices that dismiss religion as a relic of the past incompatible with modernity or modern life.¹⁰ This vision of cohesion competes locally and nationally with those voices that seek to exclude, reverting Britain to an imagined past of religious and racial uniformity.

A major theme of this dissertation is that religion, in the Second World War as in twenty-first century Britain, can operate as a site of commonality and shared experience, allowing a communal identity to develop, one where articulations of difference can be celebrated. Certainly, there are significant differences between the dominant cultural and religious narratives that operated in the Britain of 1945 and 2016, and the expressions of religious cooperation operating in these cultures are not identical. But historians have begun the important work of examining and explaining the roots of religious diversity in Britain. Instead of solely assessing the history of religious change through a prism of decline fixed on the death of Christendom, they explore the ways that post-imperial migration has created a differentiated religious culture, one that demands liberty and respect for diversity.¹¹ As important as mid-twentieth century migration has been to the history of multi-faith Britain, it is possible to find the roots of religious diversity much earlier. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the British state gradually extended full civil rights first to different Christian denominations, and then further to non-Christian groups.¹² By 1914, the number of Protestant Dissenting denominations had grown

in London organised memorials to emphasise the contribution of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu soldiers, including the Selby Trust, Tottenham and Newham New Deal Partnership in East London.

¹⁰ St Ethelburga's Centre for Conflict and Reconciliation, "Sharing the Space: a report on promoting conversations between Christians and Muslims produced by St Ethelburga's" London, 2006.

¹¹ See Jane Garnett and Alana Harris (eds.), *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis*, (London: Ashgate, 2014); Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams (eds.), *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives*, (London: SCM Press, 2006).

¹² Stuart J Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom*, (London: Longman, 2008), 4.

rapidly, with a majority of Britons worshipping outside of the established churches.¹³ Ecumenism grew strong roots during the interwar years¹⁴ and flourished in wartime, particularly in response to a national crisis that prized unity above all. This cohesive, collaborative religious discourse, which celebrated commonality over difference, faced considerable challenges in the aftermath of the war, when calls for the expression of diversity and freedom of religious expression gained currency in the national media and politics.

Scholars have long seen Christianity as a core element in the construction of Britain's imagined national and imperial identities, but conceptions and uses of Christianity have not remained static and unchanged. Christianity, as a concept, practice and set of ideas, has been highly variable; it has undergone significant discursive shifts over time and had contested meanings in a singular moment or place. While Christian rhetoric has been used to justify and legitimate conquest, empire and jingoism,¹⁵ it has also been used to reform, foster peace, and build unity by supporting arguments for the advancement of the welfare state,¹⁶ calling for the end of slavery,¹⁷ and a pacifist response to conflict.¹⁸ The second major theme that will be developed throughout this dissertation is that religion cannot be considered a fixed and static entity. A religious culture mutates

¹³ Stuart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire*, 4. The following Dissenting denominations were active in Britain in 1914 according to Brown: "General Baptists, Particular Baptists, Congregationalists, Wesleyan Methodists, New Connexion Methodists, Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, Calvinistic Methodists, United Methodists, Unitarians, Free Church Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, Reformed Presbyterians, Free Presbyterians, Irvingites, Brethren, Salvation Army, Labour churches, or one of the hundreds of independent mission churches." Other believers might be classed as Roman Catholic, Orthodox Jews, Reformed Jews, or adherents of spiritualism, Theosophy, Celtic religion, esoteric Buddhism, or atheism.

¹⁴ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, (London: SCM Press, 1991), 302.

¹⁵ John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945*, (London: Routledge, 1994), Chapter 8.

¹⁶ Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of State Between the Wars*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.1.

¹⁷ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 16.

¹⁸ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1986), Chapter 7.

and adapts in response to the cultural climate and contexts in which it is used. It is a fundamentally human tool, one that takes shape through shared systems of meaningful communication through symbols, myth, ritual and customs to foster a belief in transcendence and help make sense of the physical world.¹⁹ Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance* can be particularly helpful to explain the fluidity of religious cultures and narratives. To Derrida, *différance* is “‘a playing movement’ across a continuum of similarities and differences which refuses to separate into fixed binary oppositions... Meanings, then, cannot be fixed but are always in process.”²⁰ Though religions are rooted in origin myths and ancient texts, their applications and uses change synchronistically as the society in which they are embedded experiences change. Jose Harris, in her excellent book *Private Lives, Public Spirit* employs a useful metaphor to make sense of this kind of social and cultural change. She suggests that society best resembles Penelope's web, as it is carefully unstitched by day and re-stitched by night.²¹ The same metaphor can be applied to religious change. For this reason, it is limiting to attempt to trace these adaptations solely along a paradigm of decline, as the binary axes of secularisation thesis do not account for the varied complexity of transculturation or *différance*; and, teleological, progressive narratives can obscure nuances of change, making the evitable seem inevitable.

The Second World War is often dismissed in larger histories of religion in the twentieth century as a mellow²² or austere²³ lull in a larger chain of events leading to secularisation in 1960s. Such an approach can obscure the precise mechanics of change and its small, unexpected outcomes. It can also provide reductive answers to a very

¹⁹ Adapted from a definition of religion advanced by David Chichester, *Patterns of Transcendence: Religions, Death and Dying*, (London: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001), p.3.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida as paraphrased by Catherine Hall in *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 16.

²¹ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 251.

²² Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Longman, 2007), 160.

²³ Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, 177.

complex question: what is it that drives religious change? Religious change does not confer singular effects; change is triggered by the confluence of multiple vectors, and its impacts can be felt in unforeseen ways. Over the course of this dissertation, it will be shown that international geopolitics, political consensus, myths of national cohesion, physical constraints, currents in ecclesiastical thought and technology each played a substantive role in the creation, promulgation and deterioration of a particular kind of wartime Christianity in Britain.

Wartime certainly created heightened circumstances that allowed for innovation. The physical constraints of the Second World War had a significant impact on technological developments, particularly on the transmission and production of radio services offered by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC has played an undeniably significant part in the cultural life of the nation throughout its 94-year history. As Charlotte Higgins has recently written: “The BBC... is the most powerful British institution of them all, for, as well as informing, enlightening and entertaining, it permeates and reflects our existences, infiltrates our imaginations and forms us in myriad ways.”²⁴ It is easy to romanticize actions of intrepid journalists and stoic broadcasters as the wartime BBC has come to occupy a significant place in the popular memory of the war.²⁵ But the BBC had a substantial place in the daily lives of Britons during the war as a constant and immediate news source, a supplier of popular entertainment, and a source of educational and religious programming. The Corporation has adapted repeatedly during its long lifetime to keep up with social, cultural, political and technological developments, though that process, at times, has been easier than others.²⁶

²⁴ Charlotte Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), Introduction.

²⁵ *BBC at War*, Episode 1. Director: Robin Barnwell. June 2015; Tom Hickman, *What did you do in the war, Auntie?* (London: BBC Books, 1995).

²⁶ Department of Culture, Media and Sport, “Press Release: Government Begins Debate on the Future of BBC,” 16 July 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-begins-debate-on-the-future-of-bbc> (30 September 2015)

The third main theme of this work is that the war indelibly shaped the medium of radio. Borrowing from Marshall McLuhan's innovative scholarship, that medium in itself is the message, this dissertation supports the view that media takes has an active role in shaping mental and social environments.²⁷ This is an important point, one that has been disregarded in most studies of British religious culture in the twentieth century. The architecture of mass media and the ways it presents, relays and omits sensory and verbal information has itself had a significant impact on how people construct, understand and internalise concepts. McLuhan argues that media creates a particular environment in which humans live, create and understand meaning.²⁸ He rightly contends that it is important not to study "not only the 'content' but the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates." A medium is not a passive entity or mere vehicle for a cultural narrative or discourse; it is active and can trigger or generate change in social affairs. This study offers a reconsideration of the place of religion in both the historiography of Britain's home front during WWII, its place in the larger history of the BBC, and hopes to prompt a reconsideration of the timings and triggers of religious change in the mid-twentieth century.

II. BBC Religion

The BBC's radio service radically transformed between 1939 and 1945. At the start of the war, it had a staff of 4,899 and 23 transmitters, broadcasting for 50 hours a day. At the war's conclusion, it had a staff of 14,417 and 138 transmitters broadcasting a total of 150 hours of content per day across its different wavelengths in Britain and around the world.²⁹ The war years also witnessed remarkable changes in content and programming, as the BBC was tasked with creating popular, upbeat entertainment that

²⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*. (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), p. 7. McLuhan writes: "In cultures like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message."

²⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 11.

²⁹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Sound and Vision*, Volume 4, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 28.

could boost the morale of the nation while reminding listeners of the reasons to stay committed to the fight. This was no small task – at the start of war, the BBC lost as much as 80% of its audience to Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandie, which were both relaying transmissions from Radio Hamburg by 1940.³⁰ The Corporation faced enormous pressure from both the Government and Ministry of Information (MOI) to respond to listener wants and tastes effectively in order to ensure a wide listenership, while simultaneously supplying effective and palatable national propaganda.

Religious broadcasting became a significant part of the BBC's wartime plan, and the Religious Broadcasting Department (RBD) took great care to create a broad-based, ecumenical and accessible brand of Christianity that could unite all believers. A so-called "BBC Religion" developed out of this wartime demand for programming that promoted national unity, embodied democratic values, and tied Christian communities together with a latitudinarian, deliberately nondenominational message. It was a kind of generic, "practical Christianity"³¹ designed to provide spiritual aid to a nation in crisis; a flexible form of religious practice that could fit into busy wartime schedules as needed, and take place in the liminal space between public and private created by the medium of radio. Constraints on resources meant there were not enough broadcasting hours for every denomination, so the BBC tried to create a template of Christianity to which all could subscribe, one actively supported by key members of the ecumenical movement who had been quietly advancing their cause during the inter-war years. It was underpinned by a definition of democracy that meant the will of the majority should be represented. If a majority of Christians could read something of their own practice into BBC Religion, the project could be considered a success.

This dissertation will argue that the wartime context and consequent changes to the medium of radio broadcasting provided the setting for the creation of a novel religious

³⁰ See Chapter 1.

³¹ This term has been borrowed from Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 231. It is helpful for describing the practical expression of Christian values and beliefs articulated in everyday behaviour, outside of formal church attendance and without theological complexity. It is also a term used within the BBC to describe their religious broadcasting practices.

culture. BBC Religion was intentionally devoid of theological complexity and controversy to try and find this universal appeal. It was designed to be deliberately broad so that Christians of all denominations, as well as the casual “occasional conformist”³² whom seldom attended church but subscribed to generic Christian ideals, could read something of their own beliefs in to it. It is important to note that this generic Christianity was a collaboration between all Christian denominations, Protestant and Catholic alike, rather than a watered-down Anglicanism dressed up as a national religion. Between 1938 and 1940, Mass Observation found the number of religious broadcasting on the BBC tripled from making up 5% of the total weekly broadcasting output before the war, to over 16% during the Blitz.³³ Clearly, this marked a profound shift in the BBC’s broadcasting output. Religious broadcasting also had a place in the BBC’s growing Overseas Service. Like the domestic Home Service, these programmes emphasised the importance of unity between all kinds of Christians, Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox. Unlike the Home Service, the Overseas Service also offered religious broadcasts specifically targeted at other faiths in order to cement Allied claims that theirs was the side of “the good” opposed to a “Nazi evil” that offered religious discrimination instead of liberty and tolerance.

The term BBC Religion began as one of derision, an attack waged on the BBC amid accusations that they were creating a homogenous Christianity that deliberately excluded minority voices and opinions, and ignored non-Christian religious traditions. This term has been borrowed from contemporary reviews and the BBC’s internal departmental memos. Critics used it derisively, as an attack on the “watered-down,” non-

³² This term has been taken from Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Chapter 4. “Occasional conformity” is used to describe those people who participate in Christian rites of passage, but generally refrain from attending church services on a weekly basis. Elements of Christian belief were often overlapped with folk religious practices and beliefs, including superstitions. Grace Davie has described extra-ecclesiastical expressions of religious faith in the period following the war in *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (London: Blackwell, 1994).

³³ Mass Observation Archive, Topic Collection 91.

ecclesiastical faith promoted by BBC.³⁴ But it will be used in this dissertation as a helpful shorthand to refer to the practical culmination of the RBD's policies enacted between 1939 and 1945. BBC Religion was deliberately and intentionally made to be a kind of People's faith, one comprised of a spiritual consensus that enabled a unified and accessible presentation of the Christian faith on the wireless. It was a unique kind of "Radio Religion," one that is impossible to separate from both the medium and context that created it. This BBC Religion had a propagandistic and diplomatic function; however, it was also intended to be a spiritual and psychological balm for a nation at war.

The term "BBC Religion" appeared at ecclesiastical conferences and in print,³⁵ and most notably as a wholesale critique of the BBC's religious broadcasting policy in a pamphlet published by the Rationalist Press Association in 1942.³⁶ An anonymous clergyman writing pseudonymously as "Clericus" denounced the BBC's broadcast policies and argued that the Corporation's use of religion was a matter of national and imperial importance. He wrote, "The potency of religion for good or evil is matched by the potency of the BBC as an instrument of religious propaganda. No saint, missionary or prophet of old ever dreamed of so swift and far-reaching a means of disseminating the word."³⁷ He continued,

No element in our daily lives is more calculated to arouse deep and bitter emotions... Throughout history religion has been one of the most powerful factors in shaping the course of social, economic and political evolution. It has operated as both a unifying and disruptive force of the highest order."³⁸

Clericus complained that the BBC operated as a voice of authority, delivering the truth to the public. But this "truth" was not complete. The BBC omitted matters that it deemed "controversial" by its own internal standards or in consultation with the Government and

³⁴ BBC WAC R34/809/2, "BBC Religion," Memo from Eric Saxon to DRB, 22 Jan 1946. Canon Orgil used the term at a Diocesan conference in Wakefield in 1945. He charged Rev. Dr. James Welch with the creation "of a 'BBC Religion,' which was a presentation of the faith at less than its fullest." He thought 'BBC Religion' obliterated denominational distinctions, compromising the importance of membership in an actual church.

³⁵ These examples will be discussed further in Chapter 1.

³⁶ Clericus, *BBC Religion*, (London: Thinker's Forum, 1942), 2.

³⁷ Clericus, *BBC Religion*, 3.

³⁸ Clericus, *BBC Religion*, 1.

MOI. Controversy could, and indeed did, include political views unpalatable to the Conservative parliamentarians.³⁹ During the war, the definition of “controversy” extended to preachers with pacifist sympathies that could be perceived as opposed to the war effort.⁴⁰ Before 1941, it also meant any discussion of post-war reconstruction that questioned or sought to redefine the social order. Above all, it meant any item that called into question the hegemony or legitimacy of the Christian faith.⁴¹ To Clericus, it was this exclusion of other world religions, unorthodox branches of Christianity, and rationalist or agnostic perspectives that was most objectionable. In 1942, the National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL) protested against the absence of free religious expression on the BBC with a public rally in defence of religious diversity.⁴² Though the NCCL and Clericus registered their displeasure with BBC Religion, the policy proved successful with the public, enjoying high listening figures and receiving positive feedback in letters and surveys.

The BBC’s Religious Broadcasting Department (RBD) bristled at the accusation that they created their own religion. Rev Eric Fenn, the Assistant Director of Religious Broadcasting during the war years, and a committed member of the worldwide ecumenical movement, resisted taking up the term, likely because it was first used as a vociferous attack on the principles of the department he served, both within and outside the Christian community. In an interview conducted for the BBC Written Archives Centre in July 1986, Fenn was asked if the RBD and its Director, the Rev’d Dr James Welch, had intended to make a BBC Religion. He replied,

I don’t think it was ever in his mind. If that... if by ‘BBC Religion’ you mean something apart from [and] independent of the Churches. As I understood him,

³⁹ See Chapter 2.

⁴⁰ The Ban on Controversy was not unique to wartime. It began in January 1927, as result of a decree issued by the Postmaster-General, who then had direct authority over the work and practices of the newly minted British Broadcasting Corporation. He forbade any statement of opinion by the Corporation on issues of public policy and speeches including “statements on topics of political, religious or industrial controversy.” Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, (London: SCM Press, 1984), 26.

⁴¹ Wolfe, *Churches and the BBC*, 26-31.

⁴² BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Freedom of Opinion on the BBC.”

what he was concerned about was to enable the Churches to make a much more vital and valuable contribution through the right use of broadcasting.

Fenn witnessed a church establishment “terrified of this new instrument” of radio. He said, “They were all brought up on the cat’s whiskers era and didn’t take broadcasting seriously and found it intruding into their own affairs and... rather got paralysed by it.” It was in this moment of paralysis, with church officials unwilling or unable to innovate with the medium, that the RBD’s innovations held considerable influence.

Despite Fenn’s distaste for the term BBC Religion, it deserves to be used heuristically as a way to refer to the very particular kind of Christianity broadcast by the BBC during the war, shaped by the physical constraints, political demands and psychological impacts of the conflict. As Fenn put it,

The agenda was made by the crisis. [...] People were being killed, people were being herded into shelters, people were having a terrible life and they were asking questions. Well now, these could not be answered very well in the ordinary church service kind of setting. Therefore, they had to be done in the studio.

BBC Religion responded with urgency to the moral and spiritual questions asked by the nation. For the first time, religious broadcasting gave priority to listener needs, wants and tastes above the preferences of denominational leadership. Indeed, the denomination and identity of clergymen was anonymised on air. Talks became more accessible in tone and content, morning prayers and lessons were increasingly rooted in daily experience and popular culture. Serial biblical dramas and passion plays taught Christian myths and stories with humour, cockney slang and regional accented English. Listeners were encouraged to participate in private and collective moments of devotion at their own convenience. The church was no longer the sole locus of spiritual instruction in a community, but anywhere one could listen in to the wireless.

BBC Religion was almost exclusively Christian; Jewish voices were largely excluded with a few notable exceptions. On the Home Service, little thought was given to Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist perspectives, and secular humanism was treated as an errant

cousin that needed to return to the fold.⁴³ Creating the appearance of freedom of religious expression had an important propagandistic function as the BBC did not want the appearance of totalitarian intolerance, but neither did they want to emphasize division. Contradictorily, it was out of an expressed desire to be “democratic” and universally appealing that some unconventional or non-Christian religious voices were excluded.⁴⁴ This trend reversed immediately after the war, when freedom of religious expression came to mean a celebration of religious diversity, with a plurality of religious voices and opinions on the airwaves.

The BBC worked hard to emphasise strong commonalities between all kinds of Christians across Britain and Empire during the war years. However, as the war drew to a close, the impetus for a universal, ecumenical presentation of the Christian faith that could act as a shared national religion receded. When the external threat to national security subsided, so did the need to emphasise commonality and unity above all. Religious uniformity no longer served an important myth-making function; Churches, individuals and marginal groups began to bristle at what was now commonly identified as forced conformity. Atheists, fringe traditions within Christianity, and even the “mainstream”⁴⁵ denominations clamoured for substantive change in religious broadcasting policy, so that each group could have its own dedicated time and space on the airwaves.

Between 1944 and 1948, pressure built both within and outside the BBC to allow true freedom of religious expression and permit the broadcast of “religious controversy.”⁴⁶ The end of the Second World War prompted a meaningful reconsideration of religious broadcasting practices as the spiritual consensus of wartime fractured. Mainstream denominations agitated for the demise of the generic Christian BBC

⁴³ See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

⁴⁴ This stemmed from a desire to be “uncontroversial,” see Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1922-1956* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 26.

⁴⁵ The CRAC defined the ‘mainstream denominations’ as Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Free Churches, Church of Scotland, and Roman Catholic.

⁴⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 331, 332, 26-31.

Religion, in order to replace it with denomination-specific broadcasts, or co-opt it as a mechanism to increase church attendance. At the same time, the BBC's leadership pushed for experiments in religious tolerance and liberty, so as to defend the Corporation's position as Britain's national broadcaster during the process of charter renewal by demonstrating its commitment to representing a diverse range of voices. After the war, diversity became the order of the day. Cries for greater regional representation were answered with the return of regional wavelengths for Scotland, Wales, the midlands and north. Denominations pushed to have their voices separated from one another. The BBC's Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) decided that programmes should cater for particular denominations again, instead of maintaining the strictly ecumenical Christianity offered during the war. New Director-General William Haley pushed the CRAC to experiment with religious liberty and inclusion, allowing the broadcast of secular humanist perspectives for the first time in 1948. That year certainly marked a significant shift in the tone and content of religious broadcasting on the BBC, if not an epochal change. The Religious Broadcasting Department faced a significant decline in listenership after the war, which they tried to combat with an evangelical zeal that did not find much resonance among listeners. However, even though the clergy and churches tired of broadcasting BBC Religion, it seems the public did not tire of listening to it. A lingering trace of BBC Religion could be found in the weekly ecumenical "People's Service," the most popular programme offered by the post-war RBD. Technological changes and an inability to come to grips with the opportunities presented by a televisual medium in many ways left religious broadcasting outside of the BBC's mainstream programming in the post war years. The reluctance of the RBD's radio producers to engage with the television format early on, meant that religious broadcasting did not adapt to this newly recovered mass medium or anticipate its ascendancy.⁴⁷

The significance of religious broadcasting to the home front experience has been grossly overlooked in recent historical scholarship. Though the work of Sian Nicholas

⁴⁷ For further discussion on these points, see Chapter 5.

chronicles the wartime history of the BBC in rich detail and effectively demonstrates the cultural significance of the BBC's wartime contribution, she significantly underestimates the importance of religious broadcasting, and the ways that it contributed to the process of national mythmaking. For example, in her book *The Echo of War*, Nicholas only makes one specific mention of a religious talk, and does so to demonstrate the inefficacy of Christian rhetoric in the service of morale and propaganda.⁴⁸ This is a trend echoed in the broadcasting histories of Andrew Crissel, John Cain, and Tim O'Sullivan among others.⁴⁹ Thomas Hajkowski largely excludes it from his studies of the BBC's role in national identity construction, and Simon J Potter makes only minimal reference to religious broadcasting in his otherwise excellent book *Broadcasting Empire*.⁵⁰ Where religious broadcasting is mentioned, it is seen as separate or segregated from the larger project of wartime programming. Similarly, studies focused on the place of the Church and the ecclesiastical legacy of religious broadcasting fail to account for the broader wartime and post-war contexts in their analyses of key figures and programmes.⁵¹ This study takes a very different view. It is vital to locate religion in history, rather than take religious

⁴⁸ Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-1945*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.131. Nicholas suggests that Christian talks were inefficient because they used "crusading rhetoric" that was not in keeping with the spirit of the times. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 1, crusading rhetoric was only rarely used in religious talks, and the Religious Broadcasting Department strongly disliked it for precisely the same reason as Nicholas, and because they saw it as contrary to the spirit of the gospels and incompatible with lessons learned after the First World War. The crusade-like rhetoric existed away from the mainstream of Christian thought, but still had some prominent supporters, including Churchill.

⁴⁹ Andrew Crissel, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, (London: Routledge, 1997); Tim O'Sullivan, "Listening Through: The Wireless and World War Two," in *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two*, eds. Pat Kirkham and David Thoms, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 173–185; John Cain, *The BBC: 70 Years of Broadcasting*, (London: BBC, 1992).

⁵⁰ Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Simon Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). In both of these otherwise excellent and worthy studies, religion and Christianity are only given cursory mention.

⁵¹ Kenneth M Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC* (1984); Justin Phillips, *C.S. Lewis at the BBC: Messages of Hope in the Darkness of War*, (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002); Stephen Parker, "Teach them to pray Auntie: Children's Hour Prayers at the BBC, 1941-1961," *History of Education*, 39:5 (September 2010), 659-676.

history to be separate from the culture that shaped its expression.⁵² Considering religious broadcasting separately from the larger wartime project of the BBC overlooks a vital rhetorical and psychological tool for constructing nationhood and building morale.

III. Nation and Religion

The connection between Christianity and iterations of Britishness has a long and substantive historiography. A number of scholars have marked the ways which strands of Protestantism have been used in the construction of national identity in the modern era, from the Act of Union to the twentieth century. Much work on British national identity formation has been shaped by the work of Benedict Anderson, who has argued that a nation is “an imagined political community... both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁵³ Nations have been created and destroyed by the mentalities and beliefs of the public; they are not infinite, divinely-ordained or primordial. Anderson suggests that the key element in the creation of an imagined community is what he has called “print-capitalism.” He contends that print languages and mass media provide the foundation for national consciousness by creating uniformity in the language of communication. They foster a sense of community by connecting readers together, building upon a sense of tradition and antiquity, and allowing for the expression of popular vernaculars in a national forum.⁵⁴ Anderson’s understanding the birth of nations and nationalism usurped the essentialist contentions of Tory historians who have claimed that national identities were

⁵² This turn of phrase is adapted from one used by Alan Wilkinson in *Dissent or Conform*. Wilkinson says it is vital for scholars to look at the church in history rather than just be preoccupied with church history. It’s also derivative of Schleiermacher: “Christian faith propositions are... conceptions of Christian religious soul states set forth in speech.” Quoted in Richard Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 141.

⁵³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6. He goes on to argue that the vital moment in the formation of identity occurs when individuals begin to recognize that they share a common history, destiny and culture with an amorphous mass of people. A national identity could not be created or sustained without the necessary prerequisites for the rise of nationalism, namely print technology and mass communications.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44-45.

grounded in the past and inherited in the present.⁵⁵ Eric Hobsbawm has found other elements of modern culture to be vital to the construction of national sentiments. To Hobsbawm, “the evolution of centralized nation states and the creation of industrial societies” was foundational for the invention of traditions in the imagined political community.⁵⁶ In the modern state, peasants and workers were transformed into the citizens of a country. Through this democratization, citizens imagined a community by seeking common memories, signs, symbols, practices and places.⁵⁷ The state reinforced this patriotism by underlining “the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ ... [because] there is no more effective way of bonding together the disparate sections of restless peoples than to unite them against outsiders.”⁵⁸ He also contends that identities can be multiple. Although individuals can only wear one pair of shoes at a time, Hobsbawm contends that each person has several overlapping identities at any given time.⁵⁹

Historians have built on these understandings of the ways nationalisms are constructed to map the cultural institutions and discourses that have led to the development of British national identity. Linda Colley has argued that Protestantism supplied “the foundation that made the invention of Britishness possible.”⁶⁰ Building on the work of Anderson and Hobsbawm, she argues that Britishness is defined

⁵⁵ This school of thought posits that nations have progressed and evolved over time without the invention of community in popular culture. J.C.D. Clark has claimed that “Britain was not invented; it developed.” see J.C.D. Clark, “Protestantism, Nationalism, and National Identity, 1660-1832,” *The Historical Journal* 43:1 (2000), 275. His work instead depicts England as an *ancien regime*, one that developed over time and was underpinned by three institutions: the Church of England, the monarchy and the aristocracy.

⁵⁶ Richard Connors and J.R.D. Falconer, “Cornering the Cheshire Cat: Reflections on The ‘New British History’ and studies in Early Modern British Identities,” *Canadian Journal of History* 36:1 (April 2001), 88.

⁵⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90.

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 91.

⁵⁹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 123.

⁶⁰ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), Introduction. Colley argues that there were four chief cements of British national identity: Protestantism, war, empire and commerce.

oppositionally; that identity is “contingent and relational by nature.”⁶¹ Protestant Britain built identity and allegiance through centuries of opposition to Catholic France.⁶² However, Colley’s approach has been rightfully criticised by Kathleen Wilson, who contends that ideas of Britishness and “the people” were heterogenous instead of monolithic, shaped by local actions, interests and concerns.⁶³

However, the questions raised by this debate continue to occupy historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Is national identity singular or contested between regions and localities? Is it typically defined through mutually agreed characteristics or in opposition to an external other? But religion has been consistently marked as a key element of national character and identity formation. James Vernon, in the conclusion to his innovative book *Politics and the People, 1815-1867*, asserts that popular Christianity had an important role constructing languages of both inclusion and exclusion.⁶⁴ Catherine Hall, in *Defining the Victorian Nation*, suggests that religion operated as “part of the articulation of national consciousness.”⁶⁵ Hall’s work is notable for her integrative approach; she looks beyond structural Marxist and post-structural interpretations to suggest that race, gender and class each operate as axes of power in society and empire.⁶⁶ Religion, then, adapts and alters accordingly to echo, support, or subvert these axes. But perhaps it is also worth considering the ways that religious discourses operated as another axis along which power dynamics and relationships are considered and defined.

⁶¹ Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” *Journal of British Studies*, 31:4 (October 1992), 309-329.

⁶² Colley, *Britons*, Introduction.

⁶³ Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Conclusion.

⁶⁵ Catherine Hall, et al. (eds.) *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Introduction.

⁶⁶ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 16. According to Hall, “in the postcolonial moment we are aware of the multiplicity of positionalities (race, class, gender) located across the binary of coloniser/colonised.” A binary lens cannot sufficiently describe the complex dynamics that create webs of meaning in society. Hall insists instead that historians must ensure that they take up “a cross-cutting way of thinking” in their studies.

Religion certainly had a foundational place in the ramparts of empire and the conceptions of civilisation and nation that legitimated imperial rule in the nineteenth century. Christianity sustained the legitimacy of “Greater Britain,” an expansive vision of the United Kingdom that included the white dominions and colonies in Asia, Africa and the Pacific.⁶⁷ Christian ideas underpinned the moral framework for empire, particularly the notion that “Britain had received the empire as a providential gift of God for the diffusion of Christianity and civilisation.”⁶⁸ This notion, popular in Victorian religious and political rhetoric, underpinned the so-called “White Man’s Burden,” the belief that white, “civilised” Christians had something of overriding value to share with the rest of humanity, and a moral imperative to do so.⁶⁹ Boyd Hilton has called this the “Age of Atonement,” one that witnessed the rise of a kind of evangelical Protestantism, one fully supportive of utilitarian, *laissez-faire*, free market capitalist ideologies.⁷⁰ Official imperial ceremonies often had a substantial Christian element. According to John Wolffe, the trappings of church and state were used to “cultivate awe for a distant monarchy presented to Africans in semi-divine terms.”⁷¹ Judeo-Christian ritual and language were not just used to legitimate empire domestically and project it abroad, but the trappings of religion were borrowed to assert and extend dominance.⁷² The architects of Empire appropriated malleable religious forms to create a pseudo-imperial religion underpinned by a patriotic Christianity and Christian militarism.⁷³

However, just as some iterations of Christianity were used to justify imperial actions and conquest, others were used to call them into question according to a Christian framework. For example, Methodist churches the north of England waged a vigorous

⁶⁷ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 215

⁶⁸ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 222.

⁶⁹ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 215.

⁷⁰ Boyd Hilton, *Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1758-1865*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1986).

⁷¹ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 219.

⁷² David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Introduction.

⁷³ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, Chapter 8.

campaign to stop slavery.⁷⁴ Missionaries placed enormous pressure on the British Raj to outlaw the practice of Suttee burning, that is, the custom of tying a living widow to her husband's funeral pyre.⁷⁵ Christianity has also acted as an agent of social reform, used to bolster arguments and campaigns in support of the creation of an equitable welfare state.⁷⁶ John Wolffe calls the use of Christianity to legitimate the state and imperial projects "double edged," as it could be deployed both in support of or opposition to colonial rule and political reform. Stewart Brown suggests that the nineteenth century was one where British people "sought to bring their conceptions of the divine to bear upon the world, and to shape their political and social institutions according to what they believed was God's will."⁷⁷

During the First World War, popular jingoism was imbued with Christian imagery and mission, an association that ultimately tarnished the spiritual authority of church leaders in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. Christian churches and clergy provided spaces, rituals and symbols for the performance of a national civil religion, one composed of "patriotism and valour, tinged with chivalry, and ... coloured with sentiment and emotion borrowed from Christianity."⁷⁸ The First World War saw the church willingly become an instrument of the state; in its aftermath, a painful cultural disillusionment emerged as a response to the shocking scale of human suffering caused by mechanised war.⁷⁹ The Great War ultimately damaged the credibility of a Christian Church that freely and enthusiastically supported a conflict which led to gruesome death on a mass scale.⁸⁰ The link deliberately forged between military and spiritual warfare prompted a

⁷⁴ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

⁷⁵ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 216.

⁷⁶ Gauvreau and Christie, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1945* (McGill-Queens University Press, 1996).

⁷⁷ Stewart Brown, *Providence and Empire*, 1.

⁷⁸ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 237.

⁷⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸⁰ Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organization and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p. 237; Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London: Pimlico, 1969), 481; Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, Chapter 6.

cynical response; the slaughter of millions could not possibly be part of a divine plan.⁸¹ As a result, a number of clergy and even whole denominations rejected the connection between church and state, embracing an internationalist agenda and pacifist message instead.⁸² Increasing emphasis was placed on the social gospel, at the dawn of a new age of incarnation.⁸³

Though the precise impact of the First World War on Britain's religious life has been debated, it seems clear that Christianity continued to be firmly linked to patterns of commemoration, tributes to the war dead, and state celebration of Empire. However, within British Christianity there was a fracturing of opinion and a general reluctance to place the Church solely in service of state.⁸⁴ Religion kept its place as a key part of national identity, but lessons were learned from conflict that were not to be repeated. During the interwar years in liberal Christian quarters there was a strong rejection of crusading rhetoric, the idea of God as British, or the suggestion that religion should be placed solely in the service of the state.⁸⁵

Histories of nation and national identity in the Second World War have largely been fixed to debates on how the war itself was interpreted and understood. Some scholars have described religion as integral to national identity, others have omitted it from their narratives entirely, or consider national identity or character to be something fundamentally fractured in practice. Sonya Rose rightfully suggests that wartime is a significant moment of national redefinition, as “public attention is focused on who ‘we’ are and what ‘we’ stand for.”⁸⁶ Indeed, times of national crisis and conflict are distinct sites of identity formation. But most histories of the Second World War tend to overlook

⁸¹ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 240.

⁸² Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, (London: SCM Press, 1991), Chapter 8.

⁸³ Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*; Introduction; Boyd Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, Conclusion.

⁸⁴ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*.

⁸⁵ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*; Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*.

⁸⁶ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

the place of Christianity in the negotiation and construction of the meanings of the war. Indeed, it seems that a generation of social and cultural historians has failed fully grasp the place of religion in the development of war propaganda and the construction of national identity. For example, Rose's book on wartime national identity, *Which People's War?* offers a substantial survey of the intellectual components of citizenship, but does not make any mention of religion whatsoever.⁸⁷ The political histories of Stephen Brooke, Paul Addison and Kevin Jeffreys are similarly silent on the relationship between Christianity and wartime politics.⁸⁸ Recent works on the psychology of the Blitz experience have admirably reconstructed the mental landscape of war,⁸⁹ but have overlooked the place of spirituality and prayer as coping strategies in times of crisis. This dissertation will show that not only was religion used and offered as a psychological tool to cope with the stress of the war experience, it was a fundamental element of British national identity and key component of the "People's war" mythos.

Angus Calder's comprehensive tome, *The People's War*, does ably describe the ways that the ecumenical movement contributed to a co-operative wartime environment, the participation of Christian leaders in the reconstruction debate, and the connection between Christianity and just war doctrine.⁹⁰ Calder provides an excellent overview of the key figures, movements and ideas that contributed to the "People's War," which he describes as a near-revolutionary, progressive pattern of social mobility, democratization and inclusion.⁹¹ But Calder's book has been rightfully criticised by many scholars, including Calder himself, for mistaking the prevalence of a discursive People's war myth

⁸⁷ Rose, *Which People's War?* 72.

⁸⁸ Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945*, (London: Pimlico, 1977), Kevin Jeffreys, *The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics, 1940-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party during the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁸⁹ Amy Bell, "Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-1945," *Journal of British Studies*, 48:1 (January 2009), 153-175.

⁹⁰ Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London: Pimlico, 1969), see especially Chapter 8, "War on the Mind: Science, Religion and the Arts."

⁹¹ Calder, *The People's War*, 17+ff.

with wholly transformative social change.⁹² Nevertheless, the “People’s War” holds weight as a discursive category, encapsulating a set of wartime mentalities, public conversations and political debates about unity. Calder describes it as the “myth of the Blitz” in his subsequent work, a set of ideas and narratives that framed a belief in “British or English moral pre-eminence, buttressed by British unity.”⁹³ Though many social, cultural and political historians have investigated the extent to which myths of unity or consensus correlated with policy and behaviour,⁹⁴ it was certainly a predominant theme that shaped MOI propaganda and much of the BBC’s programming and policy. My research into the BBC’s wartime practices have found an organisation that willingly and deliberately participated in fashioning this mythology.

David Edgerton has called for the rejection of this term entirely, as his research has not uncovered any exact references to the “People’s War” in books, articles or literature before 1945.⁹⁵ However, Edgerton may be restricted by his key word search methodology; just because he has not found the complete phrase in use, the adjectival use “People” can be found in many contexts during the war, as this dissertation will show. Mentions can be found in BBC records to the “People’s service,” “the People’s archbishop,” and “the People’s gospel.” Though they did not mention a People’s faith explicitly, this was certainly part of what BBC Religion was aiming to provide: an ecumenical, colloquial, personal kind of Christianity that could foster unity by being deliberately accessible to the public, as well as consistent with government war

⁹² Rose, *Which People’s War?*; Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹³ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 2.

⁹⁴ For example, Jose Harris, “Society and the State in Twentieth-century Britain” in *Cambridge Social History of Britain, vol. 3 Social Agencies and Institutions*, F. M. L. Thompson (ed). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 63–118; Harold Smith, (ed.) *War and Social Change: Britain in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1984); Lawrence Black et al., *Consensus or Coercion: The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Post-war Britain* (Cheltenham: New Clarion, 2001).

⁹⁵ David Edgerton, *Britain’s War Machine: Weapons, Experts and Resources in the Second World War*, (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

messaging. I use the term “People’s faith” in this dissertation partly to signify the importance of inserting religion into the dominant historical narratives about social change and national identity in the Second World War. More significantly, BBC Religion participated in the development and articulation of a “spiritual consensus” that helped to perpetuate ideas of a unified, moral Britishness.

The history of religious change and culture in Britain during the Second World War has been somewhat occluded by the emphasis on the 1960s as a primary site of secularisation.⁹⁶ But some excellent works have shed significant light on the relationship between Christianity and national identity in wartime, and the place of religion in national conversation, to which this dissertation is indebted. Wolffe’s *God and Greater Britain*, an exploration of the place of Christianity in British national life, provides an excellent chapter on the place of religion in justifications of imperial conquest, and its role in the official civic ritual life of the nation. However, Wolffe shows much greater confidence writing about the crusading rhetoric of the First World War with its overt Christian militarism, than in describing the way Christianity operated in the Second World War. He observes that “there were important differences” between the wars, that clergy in 1939 were more cautious in their endorsement of conflict, and that religious responses were more likely to be channelled in official directions in the Second World War than the First. But he provides very little detail about how any of these things were accomplished.⁹⁷ Keith Robbins has written several works on the relationship between religion and national identity, before and during the Second World War, but he sees Christian language full of connotation rather than meaningful religious belief.⁹⁸ Matthew Grimley’s work on the

⁹⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Religious Crisis and the 1960s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain, Understanding Secularization, 1800-2000*. (London: Routledge, 2001); Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Longman, 2006); Clive Field, “Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularisation? A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Interwar Britain, 1918-1939,” *Church History and Religious Culture*, 93:1 (2013), 57-93.

⁹⁷ Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 250-252.

⁹⁸ Keith Robbins, “Britain, 1940 and ‘Christian Civilisation,’” in *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick*, eds. Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 279-299.

place of providentialism and nonconformity in the English national character provides a well-formed intellectual and cultural history of the place of religion in national identity during the Second World War.⁹⁹ However, Grimley perhaps mistakes some elements of a generic, practical Christianity for nonconformity. BBC Religion deliberately included members of all denominations -- Protestants as well as Anglo-Catholics, and listeners in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England in addition to Britons abroad.

Michael Snape has assembled a substantial social history of the place of religion in Britain's armed forces during both world wars.¹⁰⁰ Though Snape's work is full of useful insights, there has been a noticeable absence of substantive studies of the place and role of religion in British national culture and home life in the Second World War. This dissertation has been in progress at the same time as the excellent State Prayers Project at the University of Durham. Philip Williamson's recent work on National Days of Prayer offers an important contribution to this field. Williamson has suggested that the National Days of Prayer have been in a blind spot for historians, a formative national civic ritual that has not been granted sufficient attention by historians of politics, religion or culture.¹⁰¹ The same can be said for the significance of the BBC's religious broadcasting to national life and the wartime experience. This dissertation adds to our understanding of the Home Front experience and the development of Britain's wartime national identity by analysing the genesis, development, and reception of this substantial part of the BBC's wartime schedule.

IV. Secularisation and the Roots of Religious Diversity

Most histories of religion in Britain's twentieth century have been written in homage or opposition to the secularisation thesis. This dissertation joins the chorus of

⁹⁹ Matthew Grimley, "The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and 'National Character,'" *Journal of British Studies*, 46:4, (October 2007), 884-906.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Philip Williamson, "National Days of Prayer: The Churches, The State and Public Worship in Britain," *English Historical Review*, 128:531, (April 2013), 323-366.

critics that have called for a reconsideration of the place and utility of the secularisation thesis in Western historiography. By relying on a constructed opposition between modernity and religion not reflected in practice, the secularisation thesis has proved to be an inadequate means of describing patterns of religious devotion despite its explanatory capabilities, and has begun to be overturned in favour of an approach that acknowledges the varying ways that religion has been understood according to different conceptual frameworks over time and space.¹⁰² According to Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, in their joint entry in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians debate the Secularization Thesis*, the crux of the secularization thesis is the idea that “modernization (itself no simple concept) brings in its wake ... ‘the diminution of the social significance of religion’” through social differentiation, societalization, and rationalisation.¹⁰³ Or, put even more simply by Bruce in *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, “The basic proposition is that modernisation creates problems for religion.”¹⁰⁴ These authors suggest that religion and modernity were fundamentally incongruent, and that as modern society advanced, the traditional practices of a religious past were jettisoned due to its increasing irrelevance. Bruce claims that secularisation can be considered a “social condition” that results from a decline in the social and political importance of religious roles and institutions, and brings about “a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Lucian Holscher, “Secularization and Urbanization in the Nineteenth Century: An Interpretive Model,” in *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities*, ed. Hugh McLeod (London: Routledge, 1995). Holscher only describes the way that different paradigms of religious experience vary over time, but there is also certainly variation across space according to geographic and cultural regions, a point raised by Samuel Cruz in “Religion: Recent Publications on Religion among Puerto Ricans and in the Caribbean,” *Centro Journal*, 18:1 (Spring 2006), 276-285.

¹⁰³ Wallis and Bruce, “Secularization: The Orthodox Model,” in Steve Bruce, ed. *Religion & Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 11.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularisation in the West*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Bruce, *God is Dead*, 3.

The secularisation paradigm was widely supported by social historians in the 1970s, eager to use this theoretical framework to showcase their social scientific statistical methods by tracking the demise of religious belief through the assessment of church attendance records. *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* by Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley epitomises this trend. Their study was an important milestone in the history of religion, as no study to that point had previously provided such a reliable and systematic analysis of church attendance.¹⁰⁶ Through a rigidly empirical examination of church attendance records, Currie et al observe a very clear pattern of decline in the popularity and prevalence of church institutions over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰⁷ They account for this trend by suggesting that church growth depended on traditional social structures, which were “remedied by the development of new social and cultural forms, forms often based on new industrial techniques.”¹⁰⁸ Industrialisation was the triumphant harbinger of modernity, ridding the West of the conditions that allowed the former ascendance of religion. However, the quantitative and statistical evidence used in this structural interpretation of religious adherence does not convey the strength or intensity of actual belief in society. An individual’s presence or absence from a church service does not necessarily correlate with a degree of personal religiosity, or reveal anything particularly dynamic about the nature personal devotion. It is presumptuous for historians to equate practice with belief, as those who failed to participate in ecclesiastical customs cannot be summarily classified as irreligious, just as all weekly churchgoers cannot be unanimously considered willing devotees of the Christian faith.¹⁰⁹ It seems that the methodologies used to support the tenets of the secularization thesis do not account for all or even most aspects of religious experience.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 9.

¹⁰⁷ Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 116

¹⁰⁸ Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 116.

¹⁰⁹ This is the thesis advanced in Grace Davie’s groundbreaking sociological study, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1994).

This criticism has been repeatedly raised by revisionist historians, who have found that a quantitative approach severely limits the conclusions of the secularisation thesis.¹¹⁰ Common to the work of the revisionists, including Hugh McLeod, Simon Green, and Jeffrey Cox, is the idea that the working classes were not less religious than the middle class who made up the bulk of attendees in Sunday church services; they were simply religious in a different way.¹¹¹ Jeffrey Cox advanced the concept of “diffusive Christianity” to explain this phenomenon, the casual manipulation of official Christendom to suit community and personal needs.¹¹² Jeremy Morris has also observed that the patterns of decline recorded by Currie et al were not uniform and straightforward; rather they exhibit a curiously cyclical pattern of ups and downs.¹¹³ Declining patterns of church attendance in the early twentieth century should not be taken to mean that British society became less religious than it was during a mythical golden age when men and women enthusiastically attended weekly services, and bowed to the dogma and proscriptive morality of their chosen denomination.¹¹⁴ McLeod charged Currie, Gilbert and Horsley with advancing a form of “sociological determinism,” through their endorsement of a mono-causal approach which made secularisation “the product of inexorable social forces which the church could do very little to direct or control.”¹¹⁵ In order to correct this approach, McLeod argued instead that the “religious crisis” he

¹¹⁰ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 6; Jeffrey Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organization and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹¹ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 7.

¹¹² Cox, *English Churches*, Chapter 1. Despite the popularity of this term, it is the position the idea of a diffusive or diffused Christianity somewhat devalues the strength of popular religious convictions through the implication that popular Christianity is somehow a less saturated version of established Christianity. Such a distinction accepts orthodox perspectives on unofficial religious expressions, instead of acknowledging the culturally conditioned nature of the term ‘Christianity.’

¹¹³ Jeremy Morris, “The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularization Debate,” *The Historical Journal* 46:4 (2003), 966.

¹¹⁴ Bruce and Wallis have objected to the charge that secularization theory is necessarily underpinned by a mythical golden age. Their counterpoint is that “The historical record is ambiguous.” See “Secularization: The Orthodox Model,” 25.

¹¹⁵ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 4.

chronicled at the end of the Victorian era must be understood as the result of a series of social, political and economic factors.¹¹⁶ In his early work, McLeod ascribed structural causes to the patterns of decline. In *Piety and Poverty*, he suggests that both class dynamics and intellectual movements, not modernisation alone, led to the alienation of working class people from churches and promoted the domestication or folklorisation of religion.¹¹⁷

Revisionist scholars provided an essential grounding for those eager to question the main suppositions of the secularisation thesis. However, Sarah Williams rightfully criticises the early revisionists, including McLeod and Cox, for allowing their arguments to be shaped by the terms of the secularisation debate. Indeed, though the initial theory has lost authority and credibility, the term ‘secularisation’ continues to be used as a short hand descriptor of religious change. Even though, as Cox has written, “the word secularisation is inherently invocatory, and the story invoked is teleological and casual, whether it is applied to the mid-Victorian age or the late 20th century.”¹¹⁸ Pinning religious history to the story of secularisation overlooks the growth of evangelical movements, the strength of religious practice in immigrant communities, and limits the explanatory capability for any history of religious cultural practice and change by anchoring it in one direction. It can also overlook the myriad ways that modernity and post-modernity have shaped the articulation of faith and religious practice.

Central to the inefficacy of the secularisation thesis is the monolithic and unchanging definition of religion that it endorses. This attitude has pervaded in western historiography beyond the history of religion. Religion has often been treated as one item on a long list of formative identities that shape social and cultural belonging and

¹¹⁶ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996), 177. The weakness of this study is that McLeod allows his account of a ‘half-secular’ society to be governed by the assumed existence of a ‘golden age’ of ecclesiastical primacy.

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey Cox, “Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation: A Progress Report,” in *Secularisation in the Christian World*, eds. Callum Brown and Michael Snape, (London: Ashgate, 2010), 20.

exclusion.¹¹⁹ Religion has not been considered essential to modern history, it has been seen as “a social or political force, on among many, and subordinate to most.”¹²⁰ It is this caricature of religion and religious experience that has been posited as antithetical to modernity. For example, Stuart Hall claims that one of the four defining characteristics of modern society is “the decline of the religious world-view typical of traditional societies and the rise of a secular and materialist culture.”¹²¹ Brad Gregory has called this a “secular confessional bias.” He suggests that by reducing religion to something social, cultural, political or economic, scholars are enshrining a dogmatic metaphysical naturalism, or at least a thorough epistemological scepticism, about all religious claims, despite what believer-practitioners claim their religions to be.¹²² Growing numbers of scholars have begun to acknowledge that modernity and religion shape one another, and that their relationship is not necessarily a hostile one. According to Mark Cladis, “religion is alive not in spite of modernity, but rather because modernity and religion are not necessarily antagonistic. It is simply no longer useful to think of religion as an anomaly in the modern age.”¹²³

The old guard of “New Athiests,” including Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennet, have vociferously defended the secularisation thesis outside of the academy in the truncated public forum of social media.¹²⁴ They have continued to pit faith against reason and tried to demonstrate to readers and followers that science and religion are antithetical. Dawkins in particular has faced widespread derision for the

¹¹⁹ Gauvreau and Christie, “Modalities of Social Authority: Suggesting an Interface for Religious and Social History,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 36:71 (2003), 13.

¹²⁰ David Gary Shaw, “Modernity between Us and Them: The Place of Religion Within History,” *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 45 (December 2006), 3.

¹²¹ Quoted in Jon Butler, “Theory and God in Gotham,” *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 45 (December 2006), 54.

¹²² Brad S. Gregory, “The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion,” *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 45 (December 2006), 136-7.

¹²³ Mark Cladis, “Modernity in Religion: A Response to Constantin Fasolt’s ‘History and Religion in the Modern Age,’” *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 45 (December 2006), 94.

¹²⁴ Crispin Sartwell, “Irrational Atheism,” *The Atlantic*, 11 October 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/10/a-leap-of-atheist-faith/381353/> (15 September 2015)

bigoted tone of his arguments.¹²⁵ His attacks on the legitimacy of religious beliefs, particularly Islamic ones, are often tinged with racialised conceptions of what it means to be progressive and civilised. By claiming secularisation as the high-water mark of modernity and progress, societies that do not follow a presumed pattern of Western European development are marked as backwards, and religious communities are painted traditionalist relics to be outgrown. Sir Peter Higgs, Nobel laureate and theoretical physicist responsible for the discovery of the ‘God’ or Higgs boson particle, has called Dawkins an anti-religious “fundamentalist.”¹²⁶ Samuel Cruz has charged such secularization theorists with inciting “prejudices against religious phenomena in general and more specifically against religions on the periphery of society” in their scholarship.¹²⁷

That Christianity and modernity are compatible is a theme addressed by a number of recent works on religious history. Scholars of American religious history have fortified the connection between religion and modernity by stressing the persistence of a “religious marketplace” in the modern age, one which brought vitality to the practice of religion.¹²⁸ In Canadian religious historiography, Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie have emphasised the vitality of modern Christianity and rejected the “intellectualist bias” that has dominated much of the Canadian historiography on secularization, focusing instead on the social Christian movement. In contrast to the arguments advanced by David

¹²⁵ Andrew Brown, “Richard Dawkins' latest anti-Muslim Twitter spat lays bare his hypocrisy,” *The Guardian*, Monday 22 April 2013.

¹²⁶ “Peter Higgs criticises Richard Dawkins over anti-religious ‘fundamentalism,’” *The Guardian*, 26 December 2012.

¹²⁷ Cruz, “Religion,” 278.

¹²⁸ Assessments of the religious marketplace are widespread, and a number of books have been issued to examine the way that this marketplace is created and operated, a theme popularized in the early 1990s by: Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Beryl Satter, “American Religion and Commercial Culture,” *Reviews in American History* 23:1 (1995), 159-160; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Cruz, “Religion,” 277; In David Chidester’s *Authentic Fakes*, marketplace jargon is deployed to describe “the production, circulation, and consumption of popular culture” to demonstrate the ways which popular culture can operate like religion. David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 2

Marshall,¹²⁹ Gauvreau and Christie find a flourishing phase of renewal within Canadian Protestantism from 1900 to 1940, as “a full orb ed Christianity,” based on social service and centred on personal conversion, became increasingly popular as a result of the efforts of progressive clergymen. Unlike Marshall, they assert that social Christianity was an intensely modernist Protestant vision of the social order.¹³⁰ Christie and Gauvreau have also disarmed arguments which suggest that religious decline took place at the onset of the modern age in their more recent works. Christianity was not simply the victim of external pressures and changes that rendered it irrelevant; it was modern Christianity that provided some of the liberal roots for cultural change in the 1960s.¹³¹

Religious Change in Britain, 1930s – 1950s

There is an active debate over the precise nature of religious and cultural change that took place in Britain between 1930 and 1960s. Hugh McLeod has advocated a “gradualist-decline” interpretation of the role of the churches in this era, suggesting that a there was a long period of slow religious decline that foreshadowed a period of steeper decline in the “long sixties.”¹³² He asserts that it was between 1958-1974 that the west

¹²⁹ Marshall proposes that Darwinism and historical criticism dismantled Protestant culture by altering clerical perceptions of religion, which in turn alienated adherents and led to a new conception of social religion that secularized Christianity. In addition to urbanization and processes of social change, Marshall provides a list of cultural and intellectual developments which coalesced to produce a new religious climate, one marked by “a march of progress” towards a secular society instead of “the Kingdom of God.” See David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 4-5.

¹³⁰ Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie, *A Full Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900 – 1940*. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), xii, 56, 72.

¹³¹ Nancy Christie, “Sacred Sex: The United Church and the Privatization of the Family in Post-War Canada,” in *Households of Faith*, ed. Nancy Christie, (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2002), 349; Mark Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” *Church History* 75:2 (2006), 267. See also Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2006), especially p. 354.

¹³² See Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); or see summaries of McLeod’s argument in Callum Brown and Michael Snape, “The Influence of Hugh McLeod,” in *Secularisation in the Christian World*, eds., Callum Brown and Michael Snape (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1-12.

experienced “a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation.”¹³³

McLeod argues that a long period of alienation from the churches, beginning with political emancipation movements contemporaneous to the French Revolution, eroded the position of Christian churches with the growth of religious toleration and the gradual growth of liberal intellectualism.¹³⁴ McLeod keeps the chronology of decline endorsed by secularisation theorists, but looks to intellectual and cultural shifts to explain their cause. Simon Green has largely agreed with the model set out by McLeod, both contending that little in the way of church growth took place in the 1940s and 1950s, supporting the model of gradual, long-term decline.¹³⁵ He claims the four decades between 1920 and 1960 brought about a gradual but unmistakable change in the place of Protestantism as a part of the national identity, character, and the lived habits of the English people.¹³⁶ Counter to this view, Callum Brown has suggested that the 1960s were a “caesura” in the history of Christianity in Western Europe.¹³⁷ Though Britain experienced a decline in churchgoing, Christian culture flourished in family and community life. He has claimed that a singular, hegemonic “discursive Christianity” flourished in this era, before a radical reassessment of moral behaviour and a rejection of sexual abstinence and traditional ideas of female respectability were overturned in the 1960s. Brown, along with Michael Snape

¹³³ McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 1.

¹³⁴ Hugh McLeod, “The Crisis of Christianity in the West,” in Hugh McLeod, ed. *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol IX: *World Christianities, 1914-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 328-9.

¹³⁵ Simon Green, *The Passing of Protestant England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹³⁶ Green, *The Passing of Protestant England*, 12, 3-5, Conclusion. Green’s clarifies that the decline of a Victorian, institutional practice of Christianity is not analogous to the passing of Christianity per se, nor is the eclipse of “historic Christianity the same thing as the death of the sacred in modern Britain.” However, a chief weakness of Green’s work is that he places Protestant England in a vacuum; he isolates it from Catholic religious practice and thought at this time, from religious currents in the rest of Britain, and omits the crucial place of other religions in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century.

¹³⁷ Callum Brown, “The ‘Unholy Mrs Knight’ and the BBC: Secular Humanism and the Threat to the ‘Christian Nation,’ 1945-60,” *English Historical Review*, (March 2012), 525. Clive Field refers to this as the “revolutionary secularisation” approach, as opposed to the gradualism endorsed by McLeod. Field, “Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularisation,” 57.

and Stephen Parker, has found in Britain a flourishing religious culture marked by a spirit of revival after the Second World War.¹³⁸

This study takes a different view of the place of the Second World War in narratives of religious change. Firstly, this dissertation focuses on religion in public life outside of the churches, though not free from their influence. Secondly, this dissertation will endeavour to show that religious change between 1930 and 1950 was far more episodic in nature than Brown and McLeod have suggested. Contrary to the view of gradual decline, this study finds a flourishing religious culture in the Second World War, one that existed outside the confines of church and chapel, pervaded public life, and provided the terms from which the war could be constructed and understood. Contrary to the “caesura” view, this study finds not evangelical revival in the post-war years, but a defensive evangelicalism responding to the growth of religious diversity and a burgeoning freedom of religious expression after the war.

Some excellent studies of interwar belief and religious thought have informed this dissertation, and provide an essential foundation for this assessment of the Second World War. Sarah Williams’ study of *Religious Belief and Popular Culture* points to an active and vibrant religious culture in Southwark between 1870 and 1939. This culture, she contends, was not “a hangover of some previous rural and pre-industrial era, but ... an integrated facet of the modern urban environment.”¹³⁹ She strongly asserts her case with vivid depictions of the folk Christian rituals and practices that formed a prominent part of popular cosmologies in London. Participation in the passage of religious rites at key transitional moments had an important place in working class, but religious adherence was largely marked by a pattern of “occasional conformity,” one in which orthodox

¹³⁸ Brown, “Unholy Mrs Knight,” 348; Michael Snape, “War, Religion and Revival: The United States, Britain and Canadian Armies during the Second World War,” in *Secularisation in the Christian World*, eds. Callum Brown and Michael Snape (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 135-57; Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham, 1939-45*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

¹³⁹ Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, v.

religious meaning was actively renegotiated within a popular cultural context.¹⁴⁰ Folk rituals and superstitions, including charms, amulets, dolls, cures and mascots, could avert misfortune, ensure good luck and cure specific diseases.¹⁴¹ In times of crisis, hymns, prayers, and blessings, outside of the official confines of the churches, were called upon to soothe anxious minds or grieving hearts.¹⁴² Williams depicts an active and fertile folk religious landscape, one tied to Christianity, but one that individual participants choose to access and interpret on their own terms. Indeed, Grace Davie's terminology for post-war era seems to apply to the pre-war years just as effectively: it seems many believed without belonging to a church, or at least regularly participating in weekly church services.¹⁴³

Interwar religious culture was not only marked by a rising interest in popular spiritualism,¹⁴⁴ a fascination with the supernatural and a strong implicit religion,¹⁴⁵ but also an established Church increasingly fixed on ecumenical cooperation and a focus on social teaching. Matthew Grimley, in *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England Between the Wars*, ably describes the flourishing of Anglican social thought before the Second World War. His study of liberal Anglican thinkers, including William Temple, Ernest Baker and W. R. Inge, provides a crucial examination of the Christian influence on dominant conceptions of state, nation and community in Britain.¹⁴⁶ Alan Wilkinson's *Dissent or Conform?* provides an animated study of ecumenism and pacifism during the interwar years. He has traced in great detail the intellectual links between church leaders, theologians and political movements, to describe the growth of a substantive ecumenism

¹⁴⁰ Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 88.

¹⁴¹ Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 54.

¹⁴² Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 150.

¹⁴³ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 93.

¹⁴⁴ Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British society between the wars*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

¹⁴⁵ Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society*, (Kampen, Netherlands: Kos Publishing, 1997), 7.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998).

that allowed the development of a fully formed movement in wartime.¹⁴⁷ Adrian Hastings, in his enduring *History of English Christianity*, has similarly traced the development of an “ecumenical bandwagon” in the 1930s, that could roll on through the 1940s.¹⁴⁸ The liberal Anglicanism described by Grimley, paired with the growing ecumenical and Student Christian movements, provided the intellectual ramparts for the development and articulation of BBC Religion in wartime. Indeed, many of the BBC staff in the Religious Broadcasting Department had active experience working in these movements during the interwar years. But this dissertation will argue that the wartime context was essential for the proliferation of these discourses, and their expression as a normative, national BBC Religion. The wartime use of ecumenism as a state-sponsored tool of persuasion was far from inevitable. But the ecumenical movement of the interwar years put in place a series of structures, alliances and relationships that would prove useful in the wartime context.

The second way that this dissertation will offer a serious and much-needed revision to the work of Brown and other proponents of the “caesura” view, is that study will move away from the idea of discursive Christianity as singular, suggesting instead that multiple discursive Christianities operated in British society in the twentieth century, of which BBC Religion was one. Brown has rightfully rejected the social scientific approach to religion as “reductive to bipolarities,”¹⁴⁹ insisting that modern cultural theory should be used to study “discursive Christianity,” a term he uses to describe “the people’s subscription to protocols of personal identity which they derive from Christian expectations, or discourses, in their own time and place.”¹⁵⁰ To Brown, these protocols have numerous expression and may come from official church teaching and practice, from public discourses including the media, from communities, ethnic groups, families or the self. This definition is useful, and rightfully encourages cultural and religious scholars

¹⁴⁷ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 252.

¹⁴⁸ Hastings, *History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, 303.

¹⁴⁹ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 12.

to examine the multiple ways that Christian ideas and teaching operates within the nexus of a dynamic and complex society. However, Brown unconvincingly argues that this discursive Christianity abruptly ceases to operate in British culture in 1963.¹⁵¹ This sharp end point in the text perhaps comes as no surprise, given Brown's expressed "need for imagining this 'endgame' of Christian decline in Britain."¹⁵² But his critics have correctly argued that the discursive use of Christianity can be observed outside of Brown's periodisation in the latter decades of the twentieth century and beyond.¹⁵³ They rightfully charge his work with advancing a monocausal account of religious decline, one that pins the causes of secularisation on sexual revolution, second-wave feminism and the disaffection of women.¹⁵⁴ The 1960s were an important site of cultural and social change.¹⁵⁵ But it is important not to overstate the importance of the 1960s in religious historiography, as many roots of change can be found decades earlier. Turning the 1960s into a hinge for long-term religious change carries with it the danger of obscuring precursors and continuities. Many religious historians have looked to this decade as the dawn of secularisation in the wake of Brown's influential book. A significant shortcoming of approach is that outlying decades which do not perfectly fit this model of change can be overlooked and brushed aside, obscuring the particular factors and contexts that shape the articulation of unique religious sub-cultures, beliefs and practices.

However, a more substantial critique takes aim at Brown's rather singular interpretation of postmodern theory. His emphasis on one hegemonic discursive Christianity can obscure the small, successive waves of change in thought and expression within a time that he has rendered as monolithic. Perhaps there is more fertile ground for

¹⁵¹ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 188.

¹⁵² Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 7. He says, "It is needed for reasons of scholarship, for reasons of understanding our contemporary society and its future, or for simply needing to know whether church buildings and schools are going to be needed for much longer." Brown's anxiety for church buildings aside, the uses can be multiple. Perhaps this is not a binary proposition.

¹⁵³ *Redefining Christian Britain*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ *Redefining Christian Britain*, 5, Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Chapter 8.

¹⁵⁵ *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianisation in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*. eds. Nancy Christie, Michael Gauvreau, Stephen Heathorn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

future scholars in a reconsideration of discursive Christianities as multiple, competing and constantly shifting; defined and redefined as diasporas, migration, political crises and responses to changing material concerns prompt different interpretations and manifestations of Christian or religious thought. The story of religious change in the twentieth century is more complex than one narrative can allow: it is a story of fracture, diversity and differentiation. It is a story of overlapping and interconnected webs of cultural meaning.¹⁵⁶ It is a story of alternative modernisms overlapping and interacting in a post-imperial Britain. Contemporary artists and cultural theorists called this awareness or experience of several overlapping iterations of modernity “Altermodernism.”¹⁵⁷ American historian Stephen Stein, in his assessment of American religious historiography, argues that the principle of inclusion that underpins the decentred approach should be praised for making the discipline “richer, fuller, and more diverse.”¹⁵⁸ In contemporary feminism, “intersectional” approaches that assess multiple, overlapping identities have gained currency for their ability to convey the inherent complexity of narrative construction. Patricia Hill Collins have defined intersectionality as “the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena.”¹⁵⁹

This is the path that has begun to be mapped out in the work of Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, Sarah Williams and William Whyte among others. In

¹⁵⁶ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (London: Penguin 1994).

¹⁵⁷ Altermodernism is a recent movement in contemporary art that seeks to define the post-postmodern era. Networks of interconnectivity and globalisation have provided the opportunity for artists to wander through time, space and mediums, with an awareness of a multitude of possibilities and many alternative reconfigurations of modernity. As Nicholas Bourriaud, curator of the Tate Britain’s triennial exhibition on Altermodern Art in 2009 has put it, “It arises out of negotiations between agents from different cultures and geographic locations. Stripped of a centre, it can only be a polyglot.” It is the artistic expression of transculturation and hybridity. See Nicholas Bourriaud, *Altermodern*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), “The Birth of Altermodern,” *Adbusters*, 18:2 (March/April 2010); Alan Kirby, “Successor States to an Empire in Free Fall,” *Times Higher Education Supplement*, no. 1,949, 27 May 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Stephen Stein, “American Religious History: Decentered with Many Centers,” *Church History* 71:2 (2002), 374.

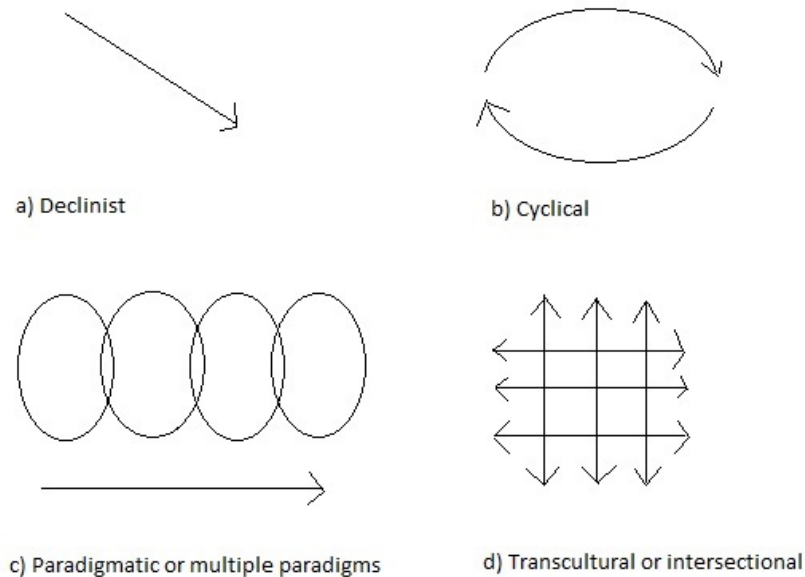
¹⁵⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41 (August 2015), p. 1-20.

Redefining Christian Britain, these writers contend that the propensity to use the organic imagery of birth and death has been fundamentally restrictive.¹⁶⁰ They propose instead that three key concepts can redefine the research agenda: authenticity, meaning the tension between authenticity and a desire to be “relevant” in the public and private performance of Christian messages; generation, referring to the changes in languages of religion as transmitted between age groups; and virtue, the connection between religion and morality.¹⁶¹ Each of these areas offer a practical way of examining how religions operate within a culture, to gain a better understanding of the historical uses of religion. Certainly these can be useful cues for research, but this list is in no way exhaustive. The common element is a creative consideration of the myriad ways that religion operates in society, and the multiple pressures that change religious cultures. This study builds on their work by assessing the complexity of the context that shaped and produced BBC Religion. Once rid of teleology, religious historians are free to study unexpected changes and their unpredictable effects. A focus on the long durée can obscure short-term changes in mentality and culture; positivistic narratives and terminology impose inevitability where none exists. The Second World War deserves to be re-examined in and of itself, to learn how political and social pressures real or imagined adapt religious discourses and practices to suit a particular need. The place of Christianity in national public life can shift and change based on variable contexts within a wider web of cultural meaning.

¹⁶⁰ Garnett et al, *Redefining Christian Britain*, 8.

¹⁶¹ Garnett et al, *Redefining Christian Britain*, 12-13.

Figure 1: Models of Religious Change in the History of Religion



It may be helpful to categorise historiographical approaches to religious change according to their narrative approaches to the subject. Gauvreau and Christie have challenged the linear narrative of religious decline in Canada, suggesting that great expansion of the concept of a Christian nation between 1880-1930 “cannot be taken as a benchmark of religious practice. Rather, it exhibits a cyclical pattern of oscillating importance between public and private imperatives.”¹⁶² They contend that post-war Canadian religious change cannot be described as dechristianised but part of a cycle that includes a concurrent resacralisation. Lucian Holsher has suggested that religious change is neither linear nor cyclical. Instead, he has identified five separate historical paradigms in German religious history, each of which contain their own unique understandings of what it meant to be religious.¹⁶³ The final phase he has identified in the twentieth century

¹⁶² Gauvreau and Christie, “Secularisation or Resacralisation,” in *Secularisation in the Christian World*, Eds. Michael Snape and Callum Brown, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 111

¹⁶³ Holsher, “Secularisation,” 268.

is described as “religious differentiation,” where the revitalisation of old religious models of understanding is accompanied by the emergence of new ones.¹⁶⁴ But it is possible to move another step beyond Holsher’s chronological description of successive paradigms of religious understanding. A more complex approach, borrowing from the fascinating currents of post-colonial and recent cultural history, including the work of Catherine Hall, Jose Harris and post-colonial scholars of transculturation,¹⁶⁵ would be to examine religious history through the overlapping of different narratives, discourses and interpretations of religion across time and space. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz has argued that religion and culture are not things in and of themselves, but systems of meaning, or “webs of significance,” that connect human thought and behaviour.¹⁶⁶ This approach could free scholars of the linear trajectory and causal imperatives imposed by the “end game” of secularisation, and open new avenues of exploration.

V. Radio Religion

Marshall McLuhan considers the Second World War a key moment in the history of radio. In *Understanding Media*, he suggests that pre-war radio followed established traditions of print media, following “the patterns of literary structures” in programming.¹⁶⁷ In McLuhan’s view it was Adolf Hitler, and his Ministry of Propaganda headed by Joseph Goebbels, that first showed radio had “the power to turn psyche and society into a single echo chamber.”¹⁶⁸ It is the perceived intimacy of radio that gives it such authority, as it transects the divide between public and private. McLuhan borrows from Jungian understandings of the collective unconscious to argue that a medium, when

¹⁶⁴ Holsher, “Secularisation,” 283.

¹⁶⁵ Transculturation refers to the process by which cultures develop from the confluence of multiple rather than dual influences. Coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1940, has been supported by scholars of Caribbean and Atlantic World history. See O. Nigel Bolland, “Reconsidering Creolisation and Creole Studies,” in *Contesting Freedom: Control and Resistance in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean*, ed. Gad Heuman and David V. Trotman (Oxford: MacMillan Caribbean, 2005), 195.

¹⁶⁶ Eric Mazur and Kate McCarthy, *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010), 5.

¹⁶⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 334.

¹⁶⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 327.

fixed on the personal and intimate, can lead a person to become infected through the unconscious with a dominant psychology.¹⁶⁹ This proposition, compelling as it is, can be difficult to quantify or locate within lived experience. But some surveys of radio listener habits and attitudes support the claim. As one female respondent to a radio poll said, “I live right inside radio when I listen. I more easily lose myself in radio than in a book.”¹⁷⁰ Recent discoveries in neuroscience have found this experience is a common one; the experience of listening to voices or narratives on the radio activates sensory, memory and emotional networks that work collectively as the semantic system of the brain, producing an immersive experience for those listening.¹⁷¹

Scholars of American religious history have been more willing than their British counterparts to engage with the place of media in religious history. Bruce David Forbes, in his book on religion and American popular culture, has rightly argued that scholars must be attentive not only to expressions of religion in popular culture, but also to the impact of popular culture on the practice of religion itself.¹⁷² Robert S. Fortner has argued that it is important to consider the ways that radio resulted in a “quickenings of life,” an accelerating experience that confused the divide between public and private spheres.¹⁷³ David Morgan has explored the visceral element of the popular religious experience, suggesting that images were a significant element of Christian nurture because didactic images operated as powerful tools, offering children a direct, visual access to the religious sphere with feeling and sensibility.¹⁷⁴ He argues that the form and content of religious

¹⁶⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 23.

¹⁷⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 325.

¹⁷¹ Alexander G Huth, et al, “Natural Speech Reveals the Semantic Maps that Tile the Human Cerebral Cortex,” *Nature*, Vol. 532, 28 April 2016, 453.

¹⁷² Bruce David Forbes, “Finding Religion in unexpected places” in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. See also: Mazur & McCarthy (eds.), *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010); Stuart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.), *Religion and the Age of Media*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁷³ Robert S Fortner, *Radio, Morality and Culture: Britain, Canada and the United States, 1919-1945*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, p. 5, 15.

¹⁷⁴ David Morgan, “Protestant Visual Practice and American Mass Culture,” in *Practicing Religion in the Age of Media: Explorations in Media Religion and Culture*, eds. Stewart Hooper and Lynn Schofield Clark (2002), 53.

imagery deserve careful consideration by scholars because “the power of popular religious imagery resides precisely in its contribution to the social construction of reality.”¹⁷⁵ Radio possessed a similar authority; it actively contributed to the rendering of social and cultural worlds and the reification of moral norms. Though scholars of the history of religion in Britain have been behind their North American counterparts when it comes to a consideration of the relationship between religion and media, this dissertation hopes to offer a significant contribution to this debate, and offer insights on the nature and development of a unique kind of radio religion during the Second World War.

The BBC deliberately created a kind of “catch-all” Christianity that would encourage unity and collaboration between traditional divides. This forced homogeneity, created out of ecumenical aspirations and propagandistic intents, suited the medium of radio, and helped to enforce the idea of a united Britain and Empire, aligned on the side of the good, in defence of religious freedom. This BBC Religion could not exist without the modern technology that transmitted it worldwide. BBC Religion was purely the product of the wartime environment, and could not survive long after 1945, when a demand of diversity in religious expression found popular and official support. Far from being a minor element of the Home Front experience, BBC Religion was a major component of the celebration of national civic festivals, and catered to public demands for a non-ecclesiastical presentation of the faith.

The first chapter of this dissertation will examine the policies and discussions that led to the creation of BBC Religion. The BBC and MOI sought to minimize religious difference and causes of discord to bolster the image of a united, patriotic home front. Christianity was used to remind Britons of their common values, fundamentally opposed to a secular and amoral continental fascism. This chapter will examine how this policy was developed among BBC policy makers in conjunction with the MOI, and how it was then applied and practiced by producers. It will also examine articulations of BBC

¹⁷⁵ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17.

Religion on the Empire and Forces Programmes, and the audience response to this brand of generic Christianity. The wireless encouraged a kind of autonomous religious practice, allowing people to “listen in” to religious sermons, services, discussions, music and plays at their own convenience. It will show precisely how the medium of radio encouraged a decentred, customizable religious practice. This chapter will also examine the why the BBC’s religious broadcasting department tried to be wholly ecumenical in their programming, their purposeful use of democracy for propagandistic ends, and the importance of the appearance of inclusion.

Chapter 2 will examine the use of prayer and silence on the BBC. The morning prayer programme *Lift Up Your Hearts!* enjoyed a wide listenership and boasted an impressive array of guest speakers, from notable clerics and politicians to servicemen. Aside from chronicling the narrative shifts in this programme throughout the war, this chapter will also attempt to explain how prayer and silence could be used as sites for the expression of a national People’s faith. There will also be a discussion of the difference in the types of prayer and invocations used as the war progressed, and the themes present in the liturgy for National Day of Prayer and the use of prayer as a national ritual.

Chapter 3 will focus on representations of the nature of God and “the problem of evil” in C.S. Lewis’ *Broadcast Talks*, later published as *Mere Christianity*. Lewis’ popular theology has inspired volumes of analysis and criticism, but these talks have not been sufficiently analyzed for the cultural and historical context that produced them. *Broadcast Talks* will be examined in the context of wider developments in the BBC Talks department, and within a larger contemporary debate about the existence of a benevolent God in a time characterized by horrific devastation and uncertainty.

Chapter 4 contains a study of Dorothy L. Sayers’ play cycle, *The Man Born to be King*. This play provides an excellent opportunity to examine dialectics of the sacred. A significant debate took place in 1941 over the appropriate language that should be used by an actor portraying Christ during the broadcast of the play. The use of colloquial and regional speech by the actor, instead of the familiar text of the King James Bible read in Oxbridge tones, initially caused a national uproar, but the play came to enjoy

unprecedented success. This chapter will examine how the rejection of this assumed essentialism was in keeping with the spirit of BBC Religion, and what it revealed about languages of class, respectability and sacredness.

Finally, Chapter 5 will examine the collapse of the spiritual consensus between 1945 and 1948. Changes in technology, politics, staff, internal BBC policies, and public pressure each acted to bring about substantial changes in religious broadcast programming. The Government began to show less interest in the use of religion as a diplomatic tool, and the urgent need for a unified national religion subsided. The BBC started to broadcast programmes that catered to theological and ritual differences between denominations and had a greater regional focus. Religious broadcasts became more overtly evangelistic, aimed at bringing people into churches instead of providing a radio religion in its own right. This chapter will show precisely how the Religious Broadcasting Department failed to adapt to the technological changes that accompanied the rise and ubiquity of television; the unique form of BBC Religion could not be retranslated in a new medium or a new cultural climate.

Chapter 1

The Development of BBC Religion: A People's Faith for Britons, Britain and her Allies

*"The potency of religion for good or evil is matched by the potency of the BBC as an instrument of religious propaganda. No saint, missionary or prophet of old ever dreamed of so swift and far-reaching a means of disseminating the Word."*¹⁷⁶

*"Religious Broadcasting is inescapably interested in the present war, because the issue is, at bottom, spiritual; it's one way of life opposed to another, right opposed to wrong."*¹⁷⁷

War can operate as a crucible for cultural and political change; it can reshape the social order, cause unprecedented shifts in art and culture, and prompt new developments in technology, political philosophy and communications. Certainly, the exigencies of the Second World War created circumstances ripe for social experimentation in Britain, a statement borne true by the successful construction of the welfare state by Labour politicians in Churchill's coalition government. Owing to the sense that the public should be repaid for their war efforts with a stake in the victory to come, and in recognition of the stoic resolve with which they faced enemy attack, the mythology of the "People's War" helped Labour put a number of social policies into place developed while the party was out of power in the 1930s.¹⁷⁸ The war years witnessed one of Britain's greatest reforming governments, one that brought about social security for all, significant education reform, the implementation of Keynesian budgetary techniques, family allowances, and the inauguration of the National Health Service.¹⁷⁹ That spirit of reform, combined with the scarcity of resources and the urgency of wartime necessity, helped

¹⁷⁶ Clericus, *BBC Religion*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ BBC WAC, R34/806/3, James Welch, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting," 19 January 1943.

¹⁷⁸ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 16; Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, revised ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 631-33; Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 14-15; Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party During the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁷⁹ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 15.

instigate profound cultural shifts. The war provided a unique set of physical constraints and psychological pressures; few aspects of British political or cultural life were left unmarked by its influence.¹⁸⁰

Religion and propaganda were intimately entwined during the war. Asa Briggs has argued, “As the war went on, it continued to prove extremely difficult to draw fine distinctions between religion as propaganda and religion as a spiritual force in its own right.”¹⁸¹ Indeed, religious broadcasts on the BBC were inextricably bound to the particular demands of each successive phase of the war. The religious broadcasting schedule was specifically developed to cater to wartime needs. Looking back on the achievements of wartime religious broadcasting in 1945, the BBC’s Director of Religious Broadcasting, Rev Dr James Welch, wrote that from the first *Daily Service* broadcast of the war on 1 September 1939,

The whole of our religious broadcasting has been conceived and planned within the experience of total war; it has been all the time conscious of the growing needs of an increasing number of listeners; it had to speak to the mood of Dunkirk, the air raids of 1940-1, Singapore, Tunisia, D-day, and more recently, hope deferred. It has had to ‘feel on its pulses’ the needs of millions of listeners of every social grouping, experience, tradition and church loyalty; and when it has not done this it has failed.¹⁸²

Though religion had been an integral part of the BBC’s mission from its inception, the war years witnessed a significant change in the character of religious programmes. Religious broadcasts were no longer simply the echoes of what listeners could hear in a local church service. Innovations in form, frequency, and a fundamental change in the practice of the BBC’s ecumenical philosophy resulted in the perpetuation of a non-denominational Christianity that could be used and accessed at the listener’s convenience.

¹⁸⁰ Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London: Longman, 2004); Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), Chapter 8; Amy Bell, “Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-45,” *Journal of British Studies*, 48, 153-157.

¹⁸¹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 3: War of Words*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 633.

¹⁸² James Welch, “Religious Broadcasting in Wartime,” in *BBC Yearbook 1945* (London: BBC, 1945), 41.

The wartime Religious Broadcasting Department created, with the support and instigation of the government, the MOI and BBC management, a unique religious culture that had considerable propagandistic value at Home and Overseas. It served as a vehicle for establishing and reinforcing core principles of democratic freedom, and supplying Manichean terms and moral justifications for the conflict. The BBC Religion that resulted had a homogenous form, a kind of generic Christianity that could find heterogeneous use by individual listeners and religious communities across Britain, throughout the Empire, and in Nazi occupied territories.

I. Pre-war Religious Broadcasting and the Roots of BBC Religion

Religious broadcasting had been a significant part of the BBC's aim, mission and output from its inception. Sir John Reith, the first general manager and Director-General of the BBC, ensured that this connection was enshrined in the BBC's first Royal Charter in 1927. Speaking before the Crawford Committee in 1925, he said, "It is suitable that [in broadcasting] there should be a definite association with the Christian religion in particular. Christianity is the official religion of the country."¹⁸³ He believed that radio could provide a great service by educating the country on the fundamentals of the Christian faith.¹⁸⁴ Reith's pedagogical aims were not limited to religion; he considered radio a tool to "inform, enlighten and entertain" the public.¹⁸⁵ He made many early decisions about the tone and nature of the service to be offered by the BBC entirely on his own; he had no reliable listener research department until 1936, no advertisers to please, and no domestic competition. His main objectives were to provide quality programmes for rich and poor alike, and to "eschew the shoddy, the sensational, and the morally dubious."¹⁸⁶ Reith, the son of a minister in the United Free Church of Scotland, practiced an "austere Presbyterianism."¹⁸⁷ He had an "almost superstitious regard" for the

¹⁸³ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 33.

¹⁸⁴ Clericus, *BBC Religion*, 15-16.

¹⁸⁵ Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 30.

¹⁸⁶ John Cain, *The BBC: 70 Years of Broadcasting*, (London: BBC, 1992), 12.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Silvey, *Who's Listening? The Story of the BBC's Audience Research*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), 13; Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 3.

importance of the Sabbath; he considered Sunday piety to be an institution that had to be zealously guarded and protected to preserve a Christian presence in national life.¹⁸⁸ As a result, the Sunday broadcasting schedule was filled with services, sermons, hymns and religious talks; no variety or entertainment programmes were permitted.

The first religious broadcast aired on 24 December 1922. It consisted of a religious address by the Rector of Whitechapel, Rev J.A. Mayo. It was followed by a New Year Message on 31 December; from that point onwards a religious message became a fixed feature of the BBC's Sunday evening schedule. Early religious broadcasts typically included an overture performed by a military band, a violin solo, and a 15 minute address by a clergyman, typically broadcast from St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square, London.¹⁸⁹ Weekday services were not introduced until 1928. It is important to note that the BBC's daily weekday religious service began not at the urging of the clergy, but in response to a suggestion from a listener in Watford. It became a fixture in the broadcasting schedule at 10.15am.¹⁹⁰ At this time, letters and correspondence received from listeners were the best and most direct way of gauging reception and audience interests. Religious talks began in 1929 as a form of bible study for adult listeners. In 1931, the BBC codified its broadcasting philosophy: all sermons or talks "must be regarded as representing the orthodox Christian faith."¹⁹¹ In 1935, a monthly service to the Empire was broadcast from St Paul's Cathedral, with the cathedral rechristened as "the Parish Church of the Empire."¹⁹² Innovations in religious drama began in 1936, most notably with a broadcast performance of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* on Sunday 5 January 1936.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 5.

¹⁸⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, "Broadcasting Policy: Religious Broadcasting History and Current Practice," February 1943, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Cain, *BBC*, 23.

¹⁹¹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, "Broadcasting Policy: Religious Broadcasting History and Current Practice," February 1943, p. 6-9.

¹⁹² BBC WAC, R34/814/2, "Broadcasting Policy: Religious Broadcasting History and Current Practice," February 1943, p. 11.

¹⁹³ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, "Broadcasting Policy: Religious Broadcasting History and Current Practice," February 1943, p. 12.

The Reithean Sunday was an impregnable feature of pre-war broadcasting life, even though the BBC faced a significant loss of listeners to Radio Normandie and Radio Luxembourg, as listeners in their millions sought a light music reprieve from the offerings of the BBC. These rival services could take up to 80% of the BBC's listening audience on a Sunday.¹⁹⁴ Before 1933, silences were broadcast during morning and evening church services so that radio would offer no competition to the Church.¹⁹⁵ However, over the course of the 1930s, this policy faced considerable opposition, given popular demand for lighter entertainment. In 1938, then Director of Religious Broadcasting, F.A. Iremonger, attempted to lighten some of the Sunday religious programmes on instruction from Reith, in response to the pressure he faced from public and government demand.¹⁹⁶ But it took the pressures of the Second World War to accelerate the dismantling of the Reithean Sunday, as the Corporation faced unprecedented pressure to keep the British public listening to patriotic programming on a Sunday, lest they lose listeners to German propaganda broadcasts.¹⁹⁷

At the outset, religious broadcasting was exclusively Christian and governed by a council of representatives from "mainstream" denominations. Reith "showed small sympathy with the unorthodox, the individualist, or the independent."¹⁹⁸ Christian Scientists, Spiritualists Christadelphians, the Free Church of England, Unitarians, Swedborgians, Seventh Day Adventists, Churches of Christ and the Oxford Group Movement were excluded from representation on the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC), the independent governing body tasked with supervising religious broadcasting output on behalf of the BBC. The CRAC was composed of representatives from the "mainstream" Christian denominations, and had Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Scotland and Anglican members.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), 52.

¹⁹⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 70.

¹⁹⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 74.

¹⁹⁷ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 40.

¹⁹⁸ Clericus, *BBC Religion*, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 28.

The committee ensured it included representatives from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the English North, South and Midlands.²⁰⁰ The BBC and CRAC banned Freethinkers, Rationalists and Humanists from broadcasting anything that would “explicitly deride or question the central beliefs of the Christian position.”²⁰¹ This so called “ban on religious controversy,” set in place in 1927 and 1928, remained the prevailing religious broadcasting policy throughout the Second World War, but was called into question in the war’s immediate aftermath, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Initially, the BBC developed what Kenneth Wolfe has called a “pan-Protestant” policy, but in 1928, the BBC made space in the schedule to allow Roman Catholics to produce 8% of religious broadcasts.²⁰² Some of the broadcasts reacted to a perceived decline in the popularity and regularity of church attendance with an evangelical zeal, treating radio as a tool to bring people back in to the church pew. Others did not see church membership as an index of Christian conviction, and simply tried to provide a religious service that could be heard at home.²⁰³ The RBD had a pre-war policy of rotating between Roman Catholic, Anglican and nonconformist services on a fixed schedule.²⁰⁴ It also aired up to seven Sunday morning services simultaneously, so that listeners could choose to listen to the denomination of their choosing.²⁰⁵ There were obstacles to broadcasting non-denominational services alone; power was vested in the hands of churchmen who wanted the autonomy and character of each denomination to be represented. However, by 1938, the Religious Broadcasting Department was staffed by men with strong ties to the growing ecumenical movement, including Welch, a close ally of William Temple’s, and Rev Eric Fenn, who started his career in the Student Christian Movement.

²⁰⁰ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy: 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice,” February 1943.

²⁰¹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 28.

²⁰² Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 40.

²⁰³ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 32.

²⁰⁴ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy: 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice,” February 1943, p. 3

²⁰⁵ “Broadcasting of Religion,” *The Times*, 1 April 1939.

Ecumenism grew in strength and scope during the interwar years, providing a necessary foundation for the broadcasting policies and philosophies that would develop after 1939. Horton Davies has described the twentieth century as the “ecumenical century.”²⁰⁶ Certainly, the twentieth century witnessed the beginnings of a great tradition of cooperation and collaboration between the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. David M. Thompson has tried to locate the rise and development of the ecumenical movement after the Second World War, at the inauguration of the World Council of Churches at Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, 1948. However, Thompson entirely overlooks the important work that took place during the interwar years.²⁰⁷ Adrian Hastings has suggested that the 1930s established the “ecumenical bandwagon” that would roll on and build momentum during the 1940s.²⁰⁸ It is important to note the fault lines within this movement which foreshadow the post-war collapse of BBC Religion. Hastings observes a polarity between the liberal-minded socially conscious “inclusivists” seeking to overcome ruptures between denominations, and “exclusivist” evangelicals seeking to convert the world to a particular gospel message.²⁰⁹ The “inclusivists” certainly held sway over the shape and tenor of BBC Religion during the war, but “exclusivists” claimed ascendance after the conflict.

By the late 1930s, early ecumenical pioneers of the Student Christian Movement, including William Temple, William Paton, and J.H. Oldham, had become senior ecclesiastical figures.²¹⁰ Instead of looking to 1948 for the beginnings of the ecumenical movement, Hastings sensibly finds it in 1937, at the Oxford Conference on Life and

²⁰⁶ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England, Vol 5: The Ecumenical Century, 1900-1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

²⁰⁷ David M. Thompson, “Ecumenism” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume 9, World Christianities c. 1914-2000*. Hugh McLeod, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁰⁸ Hastings, *English Christianity*, 306.

²⁰⁹ Hastings, *English Christianity*, 88.

²¹⁰ Hastings, *English Christianity*, 302. He observes that “no one attended more ecumenical conferences than Temple, a truly pontificating figure – pontificating in the precise etymological sense of bridge-building.”

Work, held in July. It was at this gathering, attended by representatives of all Christian denominations, that a definitive resolve was passed to establish a World Council of Churches (WCC). Hastings provides an excellent depiction of the people and movements that catalysed the interwar ecumenical movement; however, I challenge his characterisation of 1940s ecumenism as a movement that inevitably grew out of the Oxford Conference. The 1940s witnessed a unique a political and cultural climate that suited the further development and growth of the ecumenical movement. The alliances and structures for formal ecumenical cooperation established in the 1930s and the popular sympathy for ecumenism in church communities was certainly of great strategic use for a wartime government eager to foster unity against a common enemy.

The Second World War acted as a crucible for the realisation of plans made pre-war. Just like plans for the extension of the welfare state, ecumenism required the right set of contexts for expansion and further articulation. It is no coincidence that the British Council of Churches was founded in 1942, and at that time included a Catholic participation not thought possible in 1930.²¹¹ The World Council of Churches released a formal statement of their position in 1940, calling the Church “an ecumenical society in time of war.” Repeating statements from the Oxford Conference of 1937, they asserted: “in the very course of war Christians of the conflicting nations and the whole ecumenical fellowship should pray and strive for peace, not the mere cessation of hostilities, but the establishment of just relationships.”²¹² The WCC affirmed that while Christ abhorred the use of violence, citizens in nations mobilised for war could not opt out of the conflict easily; instead, they should see the war as a path to the establishment of a more just world.

The technological limits faced by the BBC in wartime forced an ecumenical presentation and celebration of the Christian faith on the airwaves, which allowed an unprecedented expansion in the practice of a non-denominational brand of Christianity. In order to use scarce resources more effectively, the BBC collapsed its service by reducing

²¹¹ Hastings, *English Christianity*, 98.

²¹² National Archives, INF 1/144, “An Ecumenical Task,” World Council of Churches, 1940.

the number of broadcasting radio wavelengths from eight to one unified Home Service.²¹³ By 1939, radio held a place of great significance in homes throughout Britain. Developments in wireless technology during the interwar years meant that most people could afford a wireless set, and that nearly the entire country could listen in to the BBC. In 1939, the BBC estimated that it had 34 million listeners out of a total population of 48 million.²¹⁴ However, when incidents of licence evasion were brought into account, estimates put that number closer to 40 million.²¹⁵ Ross McKibbin notes that the fastest period of growth between was between 1930 and 1932, at “the bottom of the depression, when the consumption of all other household goods fell sharply: an important index of how valued the radio had become, particularly as an instrument of consolation.”²¹⁶ It safe to conclude that nearly every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom could access a radio set at the outbreak of war. Commissioned by the BBC to analyse the social effects of broadcasting in everyday life, Hilda Jennings and Winifred Gill found broadcasting to be “an equalizing and unifying factor in national life.”²¹⁷ The object of their study was to ascertain whether this new public service was creating a docile, receptive listener, or decreasing parochialism.²¹⁸ Because the BBC wanted to see if broadcasting was “helping to level-up the interests and cultural opportunities of less privileged sections of the community,” the study focused on a predominately working-class, thickly populated district in east Bristol.²¹⁹ Jennings and Gill observed the home life of this district had experienced substantial change since the start of the twentieth century, with a reduction in working hours for many. As a result, there were increased leisure hours to spend in the public house, sitting with families at street doors or at chairs on the pavement watching

²¹³ Antonia White, *BBC at War*, (Wembley: BBC, 1942), 5.

²¹⁴ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 12.

²¹⁵ Mark Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society, 1918-1939* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1983), p. 7-9, 44.

²¹⁶ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 457.

²¹⁷ Hilda Jennings and Winifred Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life: A Survey of the Social Effects of the Coming of Broadcasting*, (Bristol: BBC, 1939), Conclusion.

²¹⁸ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 7.

²¹⁹ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 7.

community life, going to the cinema, shopping in town, and visiting the racing track.²²⁰ Jennings and Gill saw broadcasting as a crucial element of a wider revolution in the mental life of the working class neighbourhood.²²¹ They noted that the wireless allowed listeners to be “conscious of themselves and their lives in relation to a larger community. The fact that millions are listening to the same programme gives them the sensation of being part of a nation in a way that was experienced rarely and for short periods in the past.”²²² To borrow the vernacular of Benedict Anderson, radio improved immeasurably on the efficacy of print-capitalism, defining and reifying imagined communities with greater ease and immediacy.²²³ Broadcasting reached men and women in their private spheres of experience, ushering in the external voice of a national public service. History, biography, poetry, politics, plays and music were accessible to the literate and illiterate alike, during hours of domestic labour, and for family entertainment, and by the elderly, isolated or infirmed.²²⁴ Because of this, Jennings and Gill concluded that radio was a useful tool for fostering conscious and responsible citizenship, as listeners had greater awareness of national and global affairs, and greater access to “cultural enjoyments.”²²⁵

On the effects of broadcasting on attitudes to religion, the Bristol study found that there was little correlation between those who listened in to morning and Sunday broadcast services, and those who attended church services. Churchgoers reported that broadcast services compared poorly with their experiences at church, and that they would not listen to a radio service instead of attending their church on a Sunday. Similarly, those who listened in to church services on the wireless did not attend church. Jennings and Gill defended religious broadcasting from the criticism of ministers and clergymen who feared it would be a rival source of religious teaching that would reduce the size of church membership. They found that religious services brought “additional people into contact with religious ideas, [but] there is no need to regard them as rivals of religious

²²⁰ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 10.

²²¹ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 12.

²²² Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 12.

²²³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44-45.

²²⁴ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 13.

²²⁵ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 40.

organisations, nor to fear them as temptation to church members.”²²⁶ Listening in to the religious service seems to have been a kind of religious practice in its own right, one that reached people in their homes at their own convenience, a non-attendant religious practice separate from the local church community. “People listen to services that never went to church,” said one survey respondent, “and they’ll take care not to miss.”²²⁷ Religious services were popular with housewives and those who worked from home, as they found “a fairly general habit of ‘turning on the morning service.’”²²⁸ Seebohm Rowntree observed that in working-class households in York “it was customary to switch on Radio Luxembourg in the morning on a Sunday and leave it on all day but with a deliberate break in the evening for the religious service.”²²⁹ Many of his interviewed subjects described how much they enjoyed listening to the religious service and how they made it a part of their weekly routine. As Sarah Williams has described in her excellent work, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880-1939*, religious broadcasting in the interwar period “created further channels for the expression of religious devotion in the private context of the home.”²³⁰ To sum up, the roots of wartime BBC Religion existed pre-war in that the RBD was closely associated with a strong ecumenical movement in the late 1930s, the Reithian Sunday was starting to be very gradually dismantled, and the department encouraged listeners to access and use religious broadcasting on their own terms. Between 1937 and 1939, the RBD began to propose “experimental periods” to try out new formats and configurations.²³¹ However, these trends accelerated thanks to the acute pressures of wartime broadcasting.

²²⁶ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 33.

²²⁷ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 32.

²²⁸ Jennings and Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life*, 32.

²²⁹ B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), 407.

²³⁰ Williams, *Religious Belief*, 175.

²³¹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy: 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice,” February 1943, p. 13.

II. The BBC in the Second World War

The BBC had an unparalleled significance in British cultural life in World War II. It has been well established that the BBC had a prominent narrative-defining role during the Second World War, and operated as a key purveyor of the terms through which the conflict was understood.²³² In *The Myth of the Blitz*, Calder argues that the “People’s war” mythology, was generated and reinforced in all aspects of British culture, from politics and mass media to individual Blitz stories.²³³ But the BBC was uniquely placed for the task of disseminating and reiterating these mythologies as a body occupied with both satisfying popular tastes and airing official versions of events. As Sian Nicholas has shown, “in portrayals of national identity and national aspirations, the BBC *consolidated* not only a lasting image of the ‘people’s war’ but also a compelling vision of the ‘people’s peace’.”²³⁴ BBC programmes helped to create and sustain core elements of the “People’s war” narrative; it depicted everyday heroes fighting for the victory of a Christian nation.²³⁵ Radio served a unique public role, as it engaged the listening audience in a shared national experience from the confines of the home. Private domestic space and time became a prime site for the negotiation of the meanings of war and the reasons behind the war effort.²³⁶ The intimate nature of the individual’s relationship with radio, both as a prominent feature of household and family life or as a constant presence in the workplace, made it a meaningful site for mythology construction, as well as the contemplation of the articles of faith, national identity, life and death.

The BBC’s Home Service was an ideal medium for the construction and mediation of these narratives. It delivered information with immediacy unmatched by the newspapers and brought public entertainment and ritual directly to the home. Despite

²³² On the cultural significance of the BBC in wartime, see Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front propaganda and the wartime BBC, 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996); Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* Volume III, *The War of Words* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970); O’Sullivan, “Listening Through,” 173–185; Calder, *The People’s War*, Chapter 8.

²³³ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 14.

²³⁴ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 273 [Italics added].

²³⁵ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 2.

²³⁶ O’Sullivan, “Listening Through,” 175.

initial accusations of “blandness, timidity, and cravenness towards authority”²³⁷ in the press, the BBC provided an effective wartime service to a nearly national audience. Throughout the war years, the BBC enjoyed a wide audience with little competition. Indeed, the BBC became “the pre-eminent form of mass-communication in Britain.”²³⁸ Once the Germans had taken over Radio Luxembourg in 1939 and started to broadcast English language propaganda, the BBC was under pressure to create a service that was both thoroughly entertaining and enduringly patriotic. The BBC struggled to keep listeners during the aptly named “Bore War,” the period lasting from the declaration of war on 3 September 1939 until Hitler’s invasion of the Low Countries on 10 May 1940. There were substantive fears that the public would stop listening in to the sparse and unengaging broadcasting schedule offered by the BBC. This prompted significant changes to broadcasting philosophy.²³⁹ The pre-war mission “to inform, enlighten and entertain” remained intact, but was modified to place higher regard on listener wants and tastes to keep the public listening in to the BBC. This led to a significant change in the culture at the BBC. As Andrew Crisell put it, a definition of democracy took hold that meant the will of the majority.²⁴⁰ Majority opinions and desires were given primacy in drama, talks and religious programming. In this way the BBC was something of a follower instead of a leader, creating programmes to sate the assumed desires of the public. In January 1940, the BBC began broadcasting a new Forces Programme on a separate wavelength, to accompany the Home Service. The new service was ninety percent light in content; it was a welcome respite from long, droning evening talks, devoted to playing workday music, variety programmes and sports.²⁴¹ Popular programmes included the MOI’s *Kitchen Front* which offered tips and advice for cooking on rations, comedy series *It’s That Man Again*, regular drama serials, *Music While You Work*, and the evening news.

²³⁷ Nicholas, “Sly Demagogues and Wartime Radio: J.B. Priestley and the BBC,” *Twentieth Century British History* 6:3 (1995), 247.

²³⁸ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 12.

²³⁹ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 40.

²⁴⁰ Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 30.

²⁴¹ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 51.

The shift away from the Reithian mission led to remarkable changes in the efficacy and importance of the BBC's burgeoning Listener Research (LR) department, whose sociological surveys and interviews came to be regarded as one of the most reliable barometers of public opinion in the nation. Mary Adams, Director of the Ministry of Information's Intelligence Division believed that LR findings were more reliable than the Home Intelligence Reports generated for the Home Office.²⁴² Robert Silvey, the wartime Director of Listener Research, wrote in his professional memoir, "It may now seem extraordinary that the BBC did not set about studying its public systematically until ten years after it had become a public corporation."²⁴³ It was not until the BBC was forced to consider carefully the thoughts, desires and needs of their listeners to ensure the popularity of their wartime service that LR began to use probability sampling and extensive social surveys to poll listeners directly.²⁴⁴ The public began to have a direct bearing on BBC content, particularly as the accuracy of Listener Research became more reliable for the Corporation's producers and management.

It seems the wartime BBC had two seemingly contradictory mandates: both to shape and be shaped by public opinion. Scholars and contemporary critics alike have debated the BBC's role and efficacy as a vehicle of domestic and foreign propaganda, and the precise nature of the relationship between the Corporation and the MOI. Originally endowed as an independent trust with an autonomous Board of Governors, the BBC was brought under direct government control at the start of the war. In the spring of 1939, there were lengthy, intragovernmental debates about the BBC's potential wartime role. Some questioned whether it should even be permitted broadcast in wartime, as transmitters could be turned into targeting beacons by German aircraft.²⁴⁵ The Television

²⁴² Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 51. Mary Adams, Director of the MOI intelligence division said that LR findings were more reliable than Home Intelligence.

²⁴³ Silvey, *Who's Listening*, 28.

²⁴⁴ Silvey, *Who's Listening*, 47.

²⁴⁵ Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939-45: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 80. BBC Engineers compensated for this danger by "dividing eight of the medium-wave transmitters into two groups and synchronising all those in a group on the same wave-length so that a machine would have to get within twenty-five

Service abruptly stopped without warning on 1 September 1939 in the middle of a Mickey Mouse cartoon.²⁴⁶ The relationship between the MOI and the BBC was undeniably complex, and at times the precise nature of their working relationship and the vestment of decision-making authority is unclear. The Government reduced the BBC's financial independence with the temporary abolition of the licenses scheme, and the institution of a grant-in-aid to cover the Corporation's financial expenditures in April 1940.²⁴⁷ Official oversight responsibility for the BBC had already been transferred from the Postmaster General to the Minister of Information in September 1939.²⁴⁸ But even though the BBC fell under the purview of the MOI during the war, it maintained a large measure of autonomy. Certainly, BBC programmes and news announcements became subject to careful censorship, and department managers were encouraged to comply with MOI communiqués and policy directives.²⁴⁹ The MOI had what Ian MacLaine calls a "protective custody" of the BBC; it left the BBC well enough alone to prevent the appearance of authoritarian control, and acted as a shield for parliamentary and press criticism when some of their morale boosting efforts failed.²⁵⁰ Michael Balfour has called the relationship a characteristically "British compromise," as it lacked any constitutional precision.²⁵¹

While some parliamentarians, including Churchill himself, called for greater government control of the BBC, successive Ministers of Information and BBC Directors-General fostered a relationship whereby "the Government, through the MOI, had complete power but chose not to exercise it."²⁵² An independent BBC showcased the

miles of any transmitter before being able to use it. The advantage of this system was that it made British wireless programmes less liable to interruption during air raids than German ones proved to be." Balfour, 81.

²⁴⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 468. When the Television Service returned post-war, they resumed precisely where the Mickey Mouse cartoon had left off.

²⁴⁷ Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 82.

²⁴⁸ MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 230.

²⁴⁹ Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 82.

²⁵⁰ MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 231; Calder, *The People's War*, 503.

²⁵¹ Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 85.

²⁵² Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 85.

liberties afforded in a democratic system. Home Intelligence found the public responded positively when there was greater access to information about the war; a connection existed between high public morale and the perception of openness and honesty in the news media.²⁵³ Frank Pick, the modernist planner who helped create the London Underground, served as Director General of the MOI from 1940 to 1941. He attempted to enforce the greatest degree of control over the BBC by creating the position of a “Political Director” that would directly monitor BBC content and keep it in line with the Government’s wishes. But total government control was never achieved. Sir Kenneth Clark, long-time director of the National Gallery and Controller of Home Publicity for the MOI from 1940-41, even complained to a meeting of the Home Defence Executive that directives issued to the BBC could be ignored.²⁵⁴

That being said, BBC Governors knew that autonomy could only be preserved if they complied with the general policy directives issued by the MOI, and by avoiding “controversy.” A.P. Ryan, a former journalist and the MOI’s chief liaison with the BBC, helped to create and facilitate a process whereby Ministry officials could have feel as if they exerted some executive control, while fundamentally preserving the BBC’s autonomy.²⁵⁵ The MOI would present ideas and advice for broadcast programmes and news coverage at the daily meetings of the MOI executive board.²⁵⁶ The BBC was left to produce programmes on their own, but the MOI censored the scripts of broadcasts before they went to air. Censorship varied by department, depending on the nature of the broadcast content. Talks scripts were vetted in London before transmission; speakers were forbidden to stray from the text or they would be pulled from the air.²⁵⁷ Any sentiments that could be considered, or even misconstrued, as “anti-war” or detrimental to the war effort were barred from the airwaves.²⁵⁸ The BBC adhered to MOI policy advice,

²⁵³ MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 230.

²⁵⁴ MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 231.

²⁵⁵ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 43; Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 84.

²⁵⁶ Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 84. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume III: The War of Words* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), 545.

²⁵⁷ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 18; Calder, *The People’s War*, 503.

²⁵⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Policy Scrutiny of Religious Broadcasts,” Feb 1942.

but given the vast scope of the BBC's work – daily broadcasts in numerous departments, a constant search for new speakers and programmes ideas, the need for fast turnaround in production – there was room for the BBC to innovate and circumvent MOI policy. Some pacifist sympathizers made it to air before being barred, and some speakers eager to discuss social reconstruction, most famously J.B. Priestley in his Sunday night series *Postscripts to the News*, were able to do so before Churchill or the MOI expressed their disapproval.²⁵⁹ However, the threat of greater Government control and a loss of autonomy was enough to keep the BBC in line.²⁶⁰ Threats to their independence effectively forced acquiescence, and kept BBC leadership perpetually concerned about negative attention in the press or parliament.

The BBC became adept at dispelling controversy through a cautious and conservative approach; namely, the quick removal of programmes or speakers that courted disfavour. How controversy was defined seems to have been determined by the dominant government or prevailing ideologies of the day. Controversy certainly included any negative press or attention, particularly from powerful political or ecclesiastical figures, debates in parliament, negative press coverage or journal articles, or private letters and phone calls from senior ministers to the Director-General or the Board of Governors. A culture of fear reigned at the BBC and motivated many policy and editorial decisions.²⁶¹ Directors feared imagined or real consequences of wading too far into matters controversial. The Postmaster-General first issued a ban on controversy in 1927, which “forbade any statement of opinion by the Corporation on issues of public policy and speeches/lectures ‘containing statements on topics of political, religious or industrial controversy.’”²⁶² Stanley Baldwin's Government, supported by powerful newspaper proprietors, did not want the BBC entering the terrain of political discourse. The ban was lifted in March of 1928, but with the proviso that “nothing must offend or provoke,” the

²⁵⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Letter from C.P. (Nichols) to DRB, “Religious Policy in Wartime, May 1940; Nicholas, “Sly Demagogues,” 247.

²⁶⁰ MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 231.

²⁶¹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 461.

²⁶² Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 26.

BBC could only represent the voice of the majority.²⁶³ This commitment to representing the status quo remained in place throughout the war years. It was “controversial” to express minority opinions in religious or political matters, meaning that little voice was given to Christian sects, world religions outside of Christianity, or to fringe political groups.²⁶⁴ In political matters, this meant that the BBC strove to keep in step with the Coalition Government, particularly with the message and tone of Churchill’s speeches and pronouncements.²⁶⁵ Churchill’s parliamentary addresses were often invoked in internal debates between BBC internal memos between staff, management and departments, using his words as a guiding text to argue for the inclusion or exclusion of particular speakers, and the appropriateness of certain themes or addresses. At the same time, Listener Research worked hard to establish where dominant popular opinion rested, so that the BBC could represent and speak to the majority views of the public.²⁶⁶

III. The Development of BBC Religion

a) *Programming change*

Broadcasting was able to do what blacked-out churches could not: it could lead millions of listening congregants, simultaneously, in prayers for peace and safety from the comfort of their homes, at all times of day. It could provide familiar hymns and music that would recall moments of public worship, and it could offer a religious perspective on the larger social and political issues of the day in the form of religious talks and discussions. As Welch often remarked, “religious broadcasting can provide some of what the Churches provide but can take it to those who cannot or will not attend a place of

²⁶³ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 27.

²⁶⁴ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, Letter from DRB to Dr. Summers, 8 April 1942.

²⁶⁵ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “CRAC Minutes” October 1941. Churchill’s speeches were used as touchstone in interdepartmental discussion regarding the unofficial ban on pacifists, and the relationship between religion and politics.

²⁶⁶ See Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 for further discussion of changing attitudes towards “controversy” during and after the war.

worship.”²⁶⁷ Radio provided a physically accessible medium for the dispensation of religious messages. It is no coincidence that religious broadcasting output increased nearly threefold from 1938 to 1941 [See Table 1]. Religious programmes were no longer restricted to Sunday hours; there were daytime and evening prayer broadcasts every day, mid-weekly services, religious talks throughout the week, regular dramas and serials that directly or indirectly addressed religious themes, and special programming accompanying National Days of Prayer and major Christian holidays. The audience for religious broadcasting grew exponentially, with three million listening to the Daily Service at 10.15am.²⁶⁸ The number of weekly services increased from three to six, plus an expanded number talks on religious themes, including *A Christian Looks at the World* by Oxford theologian Dr. Nathaniel Micklem, and the popular series of talks on Christian behaviour and morality by C.S. Lewis.²⁶⁹ Religious talks no longer consisted of adult bible study, but covered a wide range of political, social and philosophical topics from a Christian perspective. The RBD also aired a morning prayer programme called *Lift Up Your Hearts*²⁷⁰ designed to be a series of spiritual exercises before the morning news. The programme often included a short bit of music, prayers, or a short message, the precursor to the BBC’s long running *Thought for The Day* programme currently aired on Radio 4. *Children’s Hour* programming began to include religious instruction and prayer, and a number of special and recurring religious features and dramas were produced in conjunction with other departments.²⁷¹ Solemn Midnight Mass was broadcast for the first time on Christmas Eve 1939 for Roman Catholics unable to attend a service in person. Other notable examples of wartime religious broadcasting include *The Christian News Bulletin*, a news programme that provided a bulletin of news about the Church and Christian communities worldwide. The “Radio Padre,” Rev Ronald Selby Wright,

²⁶⁷ BBC WAC, R51/482 “CRAC Review of Religious Broadcasting Aims and Achievements, 1923-1948.” p.5.

²⁶⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy, 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice.” February 1943.

²⁶⁹ See Chapter 3.

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 2.

²⁷¹ See Chapter 4.

broadcast to Home and Forces, but had a particular focus on the spiritual needs and interests of soldiers in his weekly talks. *The Anvil*, a panel show composed of teams of theologians, clergy and Christian thinkers tried “to give honest Christian answers to listeners’ doubts, difficulties and enquiries.”²⁷²

Because of the increased demand for broadcasting output in wartime, Welch repeatedly asked his superiors for extra staff and producers to help him with his ever-expanding list of obligations.²⁷³ Religious broadcasting was no longer isolated within the Reithean Sunday. Contrary to Nicholas’ assertion that Welch feared this change would end the distinctively Christian nature of Sunday programming, he welcomed the opportunity to expand the RBD and their broadcasting commitments. In fact, the expansion of religious services and talks to weekday evenings was actually “the fulfilment of what he had hoped for in peace-time.”²⁷⁴

²⁷² BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy, 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice.” February 1943.

²⁷³ BBC WAC, R13/212, Letter from Welch to Cecil Graves, Feb 1942. “May I plead that a war which means so much to the survival of the Christian Church and in which the Christian Church, in different countries around the world is our strongest ally and support, whatever religious broadcasts we undertake in our ... divisions should be of the very highest quality.” Welch never managed to secure quite as much staff as he wanted or needed, as all of the religious broadcasts aired on the home service were the responsibility of Welch, Fenn, and eventually in 1942, the overseas religious broadcasting assistant, Rev. Francis House. These men were responsible for planning and orchestrating collaborative projects with other departments, organizing speakers for regular series, and broadcasting several sermons per week from the microphone, all of which took at least a day to prepare.

²⁷⁴ BBC WAC, R34/814/1. Memo from DDG to DG, “DRB’s paper on religious broadcasting in wartime” December 8, 1939

Table 1: The expansion of religious broadcasting in the Second World War²⁷⁵

Religious Broadcasting in 1938	Religious Broadcasting in 1941
3 daily services per week	6 daily services per week
3 Sunday services	6 overseas daily services per week
1 Sunday “Epilogue” after evening news	1 Tuesday 10.15pm service
2 Sunday religious talks	1 Saturday 10.15pm service
1 midweek Cathedral Evensong	1 midweek evening service
3 midweek services per month	1 Cathedral Evensong
1 “For the Children” on Sunday occasional features	1 schools talk 1 schools service Children’s Hour Prayers on Wednesday Sunday Children’s Hour Sunday Children’s Hour epilogue 2 Home Sunday Services 2 Forces Sunday Services 1 Forces midweek epilogue 1 monthly Roman Catholic service 6 Lift Up Your Hearts talks or prayers religious features and drama
Total broadcasts per week: <u>12</u>	Total broadcasts per week: <u>35</u>

BBC staff members and listeners alike believed that religious broadcasting had a special significance in wartime. As Director-General F.W. Ogilvie wrote to then Minister of Information John Reith in March 1940, “so far from the war being excluded from religious broadcasting, it has been closely interwoven with it since the beginning of the war.”²⁷⁶ Some staff in the Religious Broadcasting Department believed the blurring of the sacred and profane in wartime broadcasting afforded them a special opportunity to highlight the overlapping of the spiritual and material in everyday life. As one (unnamed) staff member wrote in an internal memo to Welch, “We can convince those who listen that the spiritual is just as real... as the material, and is infinitely more important for it is

²⁷⁵ BBC WAC, R13/212 “Religious Broadcasts for Overseas,” Memo from DRB to C(P). 30 Sept 1941.

²⁷⁶ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Letter from DG to Minister of Information, 29 March 1940.

the root cause of all that is creative and progressive in human life.”²⁷⁷ This initiative was not solely found in the RBD, as staff members in other departments offered their own proposals for the shape of wartime broadcasting. In 1940, Elise Sprott, a Talks Producer and the pre-war Women’s Press Representative,²⁷⁸ sent a detailed memo to the Director-General and the Controller of the Home Programme that called for variety, talks and plays that had a spiritual focus, as well as one minute spiritual interludes between programmes. She believed improving the “spiritual condition” of the nation to be a matter of utmost import, as “the nature of man is a balanced duality, an indissoluble combination of the spiritual and material, and that if either is neglected or starved, Humanity is inevitably faced with degradation and disaster.”²⁷⁹ To Sprott, warfare was a by-product of the degradation of the spiritual condition, and by cultivating spiritual experiences, she believed the public would be equipped with the tools to deal with wartime pressures. “This,” she wrote, “would give back a meaning to life and carry with it new hope and conviction with which to face both the present and the future.”²⁸⁰ Cultivating and maintaining the spiritual health of the nation was certainly a task given a greater urgency during the war.

b) Listener Reception

Religious broadcasting provided spiritual comfort for many of those listening, as letters to the press and BBC Listener Research can attest. An 86 year old listener wrote to *The Times* praising the expanded wartime religious broadcasting schedule, explaining “I have found great comfort and spiritual strength” in BBC programmes.²⁸¹ Another listener described the loyal and attentive audience that listened in to the daily service. As he described, “prayers and hymns in these services [are] offered sincerely to God by those

²⁷⁷ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, BBC Internal Memo “Religion and Post-War Reconstruction,” 1940.

²⁷⁸ For more detail of Sprott’s work and relationships at the BBC, see Catherine Murphy, “On Equal Footing with Men? Women and Work at the BBC, 1923-1939,” PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London (2011), p. 263.

²⁷⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Letter from Elise Sprott to C(H) and D.G., 29 May 1940.

²⁸⁰ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Letter from Elise Sprott to C(H) and D.G., 29 May 1940.

²⁸¹ “Points from letters,” *The Times*, 7 September 1939.

participating in the studio or at home.”²⁸² Religious broadcasts had a special place in the homes and hearts of many listeners before the war, and continued to do so. Undoubtedly, for many listeners tuning in to a broadcast was simply a continuation of pre-war practices. But the frequency with which people would listen to religious programmes was unique to wartime, as was the increased interest expressed by many listeners who did not tune in to these programmes pre-war. Only ten percent of listeners were regular churchgoers. Of the rest, about 30% attended church occasionally, and 50% only attended church exceptionally, for instance, on the occasion of a wedding or baptism.²⁸³ Over the course of the war, approximately 5 million adults had switched away from hostility and indifference to religious broadcasting to an attitude of interest and approval.²⁸⁴ While the BBC continued to consider listener correspondence seriously, the improved Listener Research department offered helpful statistical analysis to give programmers and producers a better understanding of what innovations were appreciated by listeners, and which ones needed further revision.

Certainly some listeners were not receptive to the offerings of the RBD, but many more made it a part of their daily lives and routines. Listener Research reported in April 1941 that there had been a widespread interest in religious programming since the war began, one that crossed class and regional divides. After interviewing 650 correspondents, the author of this particular report felt confident enough to generalize that “there is an unacknowledged feeling that there is something beyond material things, and many listen who would not go to a religious service.”²⁸⁵ As one surveyed individual responded, “I believe a large number of people who never before took interest in religion are beginning to seek the trail since the war started. I know I am.”²⁸⁶ In December 1939, Listener

²⁸² “Points from letters: Fading out a service,” *The Times*, 8 November 1941.

²⁸³ Arthur Mann, “Big Future for Religious Broadcasting,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 June 1945.

²⁸⁴ Arthur Mann, “Big Future for Religious Broadcasting,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 June 1945.

²⁸⁵ BBC WAC, LR/253 “The scope of religious broadcasts,” 8 May 1941.

²⁸⁶ BBC WAC, LR/253. This increased interest directly corresponded with the severity of bombings over various parts of England.

Research estimated that the audience for religious broadcasts was “predominantly middle-aged, middle class and feminine.” They estimated the audience was 3/4 female, 2/3 middle class and 3/4 over 50.²⁸⁷ By 1941, Listener Research reported that there was no difference between middle and working class interest in religious broadcasts.²⁸⁸ Later in the year, based on a survey of 5000 listeners, they estimated that 41.1% of listeners were either “very enthusiastic” or “favourably disposed” towards religious broadcasts, and found a direct correlation between the degree of interest and actual listening.²⁸⁹ With such a large portion of the country listening in, the content and themes expressed in religious broadcasts undoubtedly became part of the national conversation about war, peace and reconstruction. When surveyed about the application of Christianity to public affairs, 60% of the listening public stated that religious broadcasts should explore social and economic questions to apply a Christian perspective to the issues of the day, with 24% suggesting that religious broadcasts should only focus on matters of faith. Only 9% of those surveyed thought “it doesn’t matter because people have lost faith with religious institutions.”²⁹⁰

As Mass Observation surveys on wartime religion have documented, the war appeared to intensify religious belief in a time of crisis, causing those only marginally inclined towards a faith to become more devout, and those opposed to religious practices and beliefs to become even more fervent in their rejection. In their 1947 book *Puzzled People*, Mass Observation reported:

Four studies were made in 1941-2 to assess the effects of war on religious belief and attitude. The general conclusions reached were as follows: War has produced a trend away from religion among those with no pronounced beliefs before. The proportion who feel they have *lost* their faith however, is very small – between 1-4 percent in all samples studied. The indications are that major disillusionment with religion because of the war is confined almost entirely to those who never paid much more than lip-service to it before. In general the wartime trend is for those with a fairly deep faith to have it strengthened; and for those whose faith played little part in their lives before to have it weakened still further.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ BBC WAC, LR/84 “Religious Broadcasts in Wartime,” 7 December 1939.

²⁸⁸ BBC WAC, LR/253 “The Scope of Religious Broadcasts,” 8 May 1941.

²⁸⁹ BBC WAC, LR/411 “The Public for Broadcast Religious Services,” 14 November 1941.

²⁹⁰ BBC WAC, LR/253 “The Scope of Religious Broadcasts,” 8 May 1941.

²⁹¹ Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in popular attitudes to religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London Borough*, (London: Victor Gollanz, 1947), 23.

Overall, Mass Observation found that an overwhelming number of Britons said they possessed a religious belief of some kind, with two thirds of adult men and three quarters of adult women in a London suburb professing a belief in God, only one in twenty identifying themselves as atheists.²⁹² Protestant church attendance rates were low during the war, but as Angus Calder has observed, there was a greater diversity in religious beliefs during the period. Membership in Roman Catholic churches swelled, as did the number of people who identified themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists or Spiritualists.²⁹³ Calder also notes that the erosion of Sunday church attendance during the war was at least partly due to wartime conditions, with ministers telling congregants that it was appropriate to conduct war work on Sundays, and with blackouts and bombings providing physical obstacles to church attendance.²⁹⁴ Churches were understaffed during the war, since many volunteers moving to war-related work, and a number of clerics were called into service as Army chaplains.²⁹⁵ These factors served to increase the usefulness and significance of the BBC's religious broadcasting in the daily experience of the war. An audience of millions wanted to engage with spiritual matters, to find comfort or some kind of meaning that could help them come to terms with indiscriminate death and destruction. It would be reductive to characterize this as a temporary moment of religious "revival;" rather, the public called upon the spiritual resources available to them in order to cope with and try to make sense of a time of national crisis and danger.

The considerable expansion of the religious broadcasting schedule was all the more remarkable given the restriction of the BBC's wartime service to two wavelengths.

²⁹² *Puzzled People*, 24. Calder, *The People's War*, 480. Calder writes "Thoughtful intellectuals on the left were encouraged by the events of the period to open their minds to the serious reconsideration of religion." A *New Statesman* debate on religion in society concluded "Christian doctrines were important as a means of saving us from the immoralism of Fascism or Communism."

²⁹³ Calder, *The People's War*, 479.

²⁹⁴ Calder, *The People's War*, 479.

²⁹⁵ Calder, *The People's War*, 479; Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars*, (London: Routledge, 2005), Introduction.

There was initially a sense of reluctance about this expansion amongst BBC Controllers and Directors. They believed it was important not to inundate the public with religious content, lest they tired of these messages. As Deputy Director-General Sir Cecil Graves put it to Ogilvie in December 1939, “Particularly now we only [have] one programme, we must watch carefully the amount of religious broadcasting material contained within it and see that we [do] not go beyond saturation point.”²⁹⁶ Welch proposed adding a daily evening service in 1939, since the audience for the weekday morning service largely consisted of housewives and the elderly and not working men and women.²⁹⁷ The plan was shelved and BBC leadership only intended to bring it into practice when the country was faced by a “prospective period of invasion or blitzkrieg.”²⁹⁸ When the intensity of bombing over London increased in October of 1940, the Controller of Programmes, B.E. Nicholls, supported the shelved proposal. He noted that the services should be “as simple as possible and designed to appeal to the widest possible audience.”²⁹⁹

c) The Character of BBC Religion

It is possible to identify six core characteristics of BBC Religion: it was ecumenical, nondenominational, accessible, individually focused, theologically heterogenous and exclusively Christian. During the early phases of the war, it was Ogilvie and Graves who expressed concern that strictly nondenominational services could cause “political objections” from denominational leaders, but they were willing to let Welch experiment with creating a service that had “universal appeal.”³⁰⁰ To Welch it was important to present an undogmatic, generic kind of Christianity that did not focus on denominational confessionalism. He wanted a religious broadcasting language that was accessible and amenable, one that connected with people of all manner of allegiance to

²⁹⁶ BBC WAC, R34/814/1. Memo from DDG to DG, “DRB’s Paper on Religious Broadcasting in Wartime,” 8 December 1939.

²⁹⁷ BBC WAC, LR/411 “The Public for Broadcast Religious Service,” November 1941.

²⁹⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Daily Evening Service Note by C(P),” 3 October 1940.

²⁹⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Daily Evening Service Note by C(P)” 3.10.40.

³⁰⁰ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Memo from DG to DDG, “DRB’s Paper on Religious Broadcasting in Wartime,” 8 Dec 1939.

the Christian faith. When American broadcaster NBC sought advice from Welch regarding religious broadcasting practices in 1942, he described his latitudinarian ideology as follows:

We ... emphasiz[e] the measure of agreement among all Christian confessions by broadcasting Christian services which are not specifically denominational and by pointing, in every broadcast, to those things we have in common. But also religious broadcasting can *annihilate frontiers and space and emphasize the universality of the Christian Church* even across boundaries created by war.³⁰¹

To Welch, a strong and confident articulation of Christianity was all-important in a time of crisis, and the issue of denominational representation was largely defunct.³⁰² Kenneth Wolfe describes Welch as a Church of England man who the BBC hired to replace F.A. Iremonger because of his strong reputation as an “educationalist” and his Anglican credentials.³⁰³ He was appointed Director of Religious Broadcasting in September 1938. When he took up his post in April of 1939, *The Times* described him as “a man... with a reputation for organizing ability and spiritual zeal.”³⁰⁴ Then thirty-eight years old, he was an Anglican priest and principal of St. John’s Training College in York. He had a doctorate in anthropology, which he had earned by studying tribal life in Nigeria. During his time at York, he worked closely with Archbishop William Temple, and the two became good friends. Under Temple, York became a centre for those who wanted to promote ecumenical aspects of the Christian faith, and this atmosphere most certainly had a strong influence on Welch.³⁰⁵ During his tenure as DRB, Welch forged a reputation for being a collaborator and innovator. From the outset, he was interested in broadcasting a kind of Christianity that could appeal to all manner of churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike through an accessible message and an engaging presentation that suited radio.³⁰⁶ Welch had strong ties to the ecumenical movement, and was supported in his aims by

³⁰¹ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Dr. Summers, 8 April 1942. [Italics added]

³⁰² Wolfe, *Churches and the BBC*, 154.

³⁰³ Wolfe, *Churches and the BBC*, 140-141.

³⁰⁴ “Broadcasting of Religion” *The Times*, April 1, 1939.

³⁰⁵ Phillips, *C.S. Lewis*, 23

³⁰⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 146.

leading British churchmen and eminent theologians, including Willem Visser t'Hooft, president of the World Council of Churches.³⁰⁷ Welch often hired staff with proven ecumenical credentials, or past work experience with the Student Christian Movement. Temple believed strongly in the importance of an ecumenical and accessible presentation of the Christian faith on the wireless. In January 1941, while he was still seated at York, he wrote to then chairman of the BBC Board of Governors Allan Powell that in broadcasting “every opportunity should be taken to shew [sic] this unity of faith across all divisions of national citizenship, of denominational loyalty, or of practical interpretation.”³⁰⁸ The creation of BBC Religion certainly owed a great deal to Temple and Welch, and their personal commitments to ecumenism; but, without the wartime context this vision would not have been put in place. MOI and BBC management sought to promote national unity over parochial discord in all programming formats, and religious broadcasting was no exception. Welch was placed in a prime position and given a fitting context in which to create a broadcasting vocabulary that focused on what Christians had in common across Britain and even across nations.

Wartime circumstances fostered ecumenical bonds in local communities, as church leaders from different communities worked together to share church space or offer multi-denominational and even multi-faith services to pray for the safety of soldiers overseas, or to comfort crowds in overstuffed bomb shelters. One service in a London tube shelter had among its officiants a Roman Catholic priest, a Nonconformist minister, a Salvationist, an Anglican bishop and a rabbi.³⁰⁹ Worshippers who lost their church buildings due to bombing were welcomed by neighbours of different denominations, and one parish in SE London even rotated ministers from different denominations for the same congregation.³¹⁰ Calder has suggested that the important voluntary work undertaken by local churches during the blitz “made the divisions between the denominations seem

³⁰⁷ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 252.

³⁰⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, Letter from William Temple to Allan Powell, 27 Jan 1941. Temple wrote on behalf of the entire Convocation of York, shortly after its annual meeting.

³⁰⁹ Calder, *The People's War*, 482.

³¹⁰ Ziegler, *London at War, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 202.

more than ever absurd, and the bombing provoked acts of mutual friendship which exceeded the hopes of those who had worked for interdenominational co-operation between the wars.”³¹¹ This was certainly a spirit highly valued by the listening public. In a Listener Research report focused on the public response to a broadcast by Welch that outlined his plans for 1942, 80% of those surveyed reported a favourable response to the programme, with 42% specifically mentioning how “the plans designed to bring people together of different outlooks and points of view were of outstanding importance.”³¹² The strength of the wartime ecumenical movement grew as BBC Religion developed, and the popularity of this movement no doubt underscored the importance of Welch’s project for BBC management.

Changes in broadcasting technology and practices had significant implications for the BBC’s presentation of the Christian faith; the restriction in available frequencies had homogenizing effects. The denominational affiliation of speakers was not mentioned on air after December 1939, and services were required to have a more universal form. Denominational rotation continued behind the scenes to please the different church bodies represented on the CRAC. Anglican and Free Church ministers gave a sermon one Sunday service each week, Church of Scotland once monthly, and Roman Catholic once quarterly.³¹³ Hymns were selected based on the breadth of their appeal. This was the area where the most dissent could be found over the ecumenical form of services. The BBC even made efforts to develop its own hymnal, one that included the most popular broadcast hymns.³¹⁴ A gospel-based message could be familiar enough to a Christian of any stripe, but the familiarity of particular hymns was intimately connected to individual worship practices. After a series of complaints about hymnal selection in letters to *The Times*, Welch explained that broadcast services employed two song books: “Hymns

³¹¹ Calder, *The People’s War*, 482.

³¹² BBC WAC, LR/564, “Religious Broadcasts in 1942.”

³¹³ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy: 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice,” February 1943.

³¹⁴ *The BBC Hymn Book*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951). The Hymnal was developed by an interdenominational committee, whose membership included Hugh Martin, wartime director of the Religions Division of the MOI. It was developed throughout the war but beset by delays, eventually published in 1951.

Ancient and Modern” because it was a book familiar to Anglican listeners, and “Songs of Praise,” because it was “widely known among members of all denominations and especially younger listeners.”³¹⁵ To Welch, it was impossible to suit the tastes of all listeners, but important to try find hymns with enough universal appeal that they could engage listeners with a degree of familiarity.

The RBD worked hard to make religious programmes as accessible as possible to the individual listener. Titles for religious talks listed in the *Radio Times* either had a populist, secular tone, or a direct reference to the immediate circumstances of the war.³¹⁶ Welch also insisted that speakers imagine themselves addressing only two or three listeners in a room, and not a congregation of millions.³¹⁷ Preaching to the masses had the effect of creating an alienating distance between speaker and listener. Priority was placed on bringing to air those ministers who possessed strong broadcasting abilities, so that, above all, the audience would be presented with a good quality programme at all costs.³¹⁸ It was now a matter of quality and skill over creed; Welch placed primacy on the speaker’s ability to engage and connect with his audience, and thought his obligation to producing good radio that would please listeners outstripped any need to rotate between ministers from different denominations.³¹⁹ Oxbridge accents were deemed unpopular and inaccessible in surveys compiled by Listener Research, and diarists were quick to note when a posh accent made a speaker unpalatable, no matter the content.³²⁰ The intention amongst RBD producers was to produce programmes that would appeal to Christians who did and did not attend church, as well as those outside of the faith who were curious about its teachings. Fenn believed that religious talks should “provide a true form of Christian meditation and intercession for anyone who happens to listen.”³²¹ The hope was that both

³¹⁵ “The BBC Daily Service: Method of Choosing Hymns,” *The Times*, Oct 30, 1939.

³¹⁶ BBC WAC, R34/815/1, Memo from Fenn to DRB, 8 Nov 1939.

³¹⁷ BBC WAC, R34/815/1, Memo from Fenn to DRB, 8 Nov 1939.

³¹⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy 6, Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice.” Feb 1943, p.18.

³¹⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy 6, Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice.” Feb 1943, 23

³²⁰ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 13.

³²¹ BBC WAC, R34/815/1 Memo from Eric Fenn to DRB, 8 Nov 1939.

the casual and committed listener would find religious programming appealing. The focus on the tastes and wants of individual listeners was mirrored in the focus on the individual spiritual journey in broadcast programmes. This was a concern for some Roman Catholic listeners and CRAC members, who believed that the communal elements of Christian practice and tradition, particularly the Mass, were undervalued and underrepresented by the RBD in wartime.³²² These unique traditions were sacrificed to create a universally accessible form. Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist or Holy Communion, were not included in broadcasts as the rituals would clearly denote the denomination of the presiding minister.

Liberal theology had a substantial influence on the cooperative tone of BBC Religion, but it also reflected strands of neo-orthodoxy, which enjoyed widespread popularity during the Second World War. Theology naturally shifts according its cultural context, as the experience of believers calls them to find different interpretations to match their religious beliefs to their physical experience.³²³ Just as Christian theology in the patristic, medieval and reformation periods cannot be understood outside of their contemporary philosophical and cultural influences, the same applies for wartime Christianity.³²⁴ Theological liberalism, influenced by the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher, was ascendant from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and some of its influence remained during the Second World War.³²⁵ Schleiermacher argued that religious belief was mediated by its contemporary culture, and this observation necessitated openness and respect for the views and interpretations of others.³²⁶ BBC Religion showed echoes of liberalism in its appreciation for cooperation between different denominations, and matters of social reconstruction. The roots of the social gospel movement can be found in liberal theology, alongside the belief that man

³²² Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 154.

³²³ Richard Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, (London: SCM Press, 1964), 139.

³²⁴ Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson and Matthew D. Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 511.

³²⁵ Plantinga et al., *Introduction*, 527; see also Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., (London: Blackwell, 2001), 101, but he puts the decline of liberal theology in the 1970s.

³²⁶ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 101, 103.

could work towards the betterment of society through political and economic reforms.³²⁷ Neo-orthodoxy, on the other hand, came about as a “theology of crisis;” it was less focused on cooperation and social reform than it was on the separation between God and culture.³²⁸ It was a rejection of Schleiermacher’s insistence that Christianity was one of a number of religious experiences. Neo-orthodox interpretations take truth and justice as absolute. Some human values had to be considered wrong or evil for a state of global conflict to be justified.³²⁹ This theology, shaped by the work of Karl Barth, focused on the “otherness” of God, and his existence outside of cultural constructions. It encouraged a return to the foundations of the Christian church in the stories and scriptures relating to the life of Christ.³³⁰ Indeed, this theology featured prominently in wartime religious broadcasting talks, plays and sermons which emphasized commonality by focusing on a return to gospel teachings. Neo-orthodoxy certainly had a strong influence on the shape of BBC Religion, particularly on C.S. Lewis’ *Broadcast Talks*, as discussed in Chapter 3. But elements of liberal and neo-orthodox theologies were both used in the pastiche of BBC Religion. Critics coined the term BBC Religion to condemn the degree to which it mitigated the significance of theological as well as denominational distinctions. After all, it focused on the uncontroversial messages of the Gospels that were central to all branches of Christianity, it “emphasize[d] much more on the love and mercy of God than His judgement.”³³¹ It shied away from theologically controversial matters that had been the cause of division for centuries, opting instead for a presentation of the basic articles of the Christian faith. Canon Orgill, in an address criticising BBC Religion, said: “we might equally talk of an ‘Army Religion’ or a ‘Ministry of Information religion’ or a ‘Public School religion’ ... [which] were distinctive in what they did not say, rather than what they did say.”³³² BBC Religion omitted difference and celebrated commonality at the cost of obscuring theological complexity.

³²⁷ Plantinga et al, *Introduction*, 528.

³²⁸ Plantinga et al., *Introduction*, 529.

³²⁹ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 106.

³³⁰ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 107.

³³¹ BBC WAC, R34/809/2, “BBC Religion,” Memo from Eric Saxon to DRB, 22 Jan 1946.

³³² BBC WAC, R34/809/2, “BBC Religion,” Memo from Eric Saxon to DRB, 22 Jan 1946.

Even though BBC Religion was ecumenical, it was far from multi-faith and intentionally excluded a number of groups. It extended only to the “mainstream Christian traditions,” and deliberately prohibited Christian Scientists, Freethinkers, Spiritualists, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus.³³³ Lieutenant-Colonel E. N. Mozley wrote two articles in *The Hibbert Journal* about the lack of true religious liberty on the BBC, arguing that the RBD ought to embrace religious pluralism and freedom of expression to make the BBC a truly democratic organization. In October 1941, he stated that the forced homogeneity in religious broadcasts did the country a great disservice, and, borrowing from Julian Huxley, complained that by denying the public the opportunity to learn about the great philosophies and traditions of the world, the BBC was only enforcing a familiar narrowness in religious perspectives.³³⁴ As Mozley put it, “we are in fact beginning to lose religious freedom and to be deprived of the power to know and to choose in things of the spirit.”³³⁵ In a more inflammatory paragraph, Mozley even went so far as to compare the BBC’s policy of exclusion with “the methods of Hitler and Mussolini.”³³⁶ The BBC leadership, sensitive as ever to matters that could quickly become controversial, discussed the appropriate response to Mozley’s criticisms. Welch tried to undermine the accuracy or veracity of his claims by calling his suggestions impractical, and suggesting that the article be ignored. “We exclude non-Christian religions,” he wrote, “You have to draw the line somewhere and we draw it there.”³³⁷ Though Buddhists, Muslims, Spiritualists, Christian Scientists and others were not invited to participate in religious broadcasts, Welch insisted they were not barred from the microphone in other fields of broadcasting. Welch’s frustration and unwillingness to engage with Mozley perhaps stemmed from the nature of their personal relationship, as the two men were old acquaintances who used to play tennis together, and Mozley had mined Welch for information about the workings of

³³³ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy 6, Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice.” Feb 1943, p.9

³³⁴ EN Mozley, “Religious Liberty and the BBC,” *The Hibbert Journal*, 40:38-48 (October 1941), 44.

³³⁵ Mozley, “Religious Liberty and the BBC,” 39.

³³⁶ Mozley, “Religious Liberty and the BBC,” 45.

³³⁷ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Memo from DRB “Religious liberty in the BBC” 24 Nov 1941

the RBD in their private conversations and correspondence.³³⁸ Ogilvie and the Controller of the Home Service, Sir R. R. Maconachie, asked Welch to consider the matter from a public relations standpoint and to speak on the issue sometime in the future. But since subscriptions to *The Hibbert Journal* were below 4000, it was deemed prudent to ignore the matter so as not to draw further attention to it.

To the BBC, “Religious broadcasting” was only synonymous with “Christian broadcasting,” and the development of something resembling a multi-faith policy at the BBC took place after the war. Christianity enjoyed a complete monopoly, as no programmes aired on the BBC were allowed to “call into question the Christian faith,” including *The Brain’s Trust*, or talks on humanism and philosophy.³³⁹ The only exception to the rule was the occasional broadcast by a Jewish rabbi or scholar. In 1939, *The Faith of Israel* addressed “the contribution made by the Jewish Faith to religion in the past and its contribution at the present time.”³⁴⁰ However, both the MOI and BBC Controllers feared that giving too much airtime to Jewish speakers would fan popular anti-Semitism and derail the war effort by creating popular sympathy for Nazism. Nicholas has rightly criticized the BBC in this regard, for cowardly bending to the perception of prejudice in order to retain a wide listenership. She calls it “a tragic blot on the BBC’s wartime record.”³⁴¹ Both the MOI and BBC were reluctant to publicise “atrocities propaganda,” or, details of the horrific murder of millions of European Jews, because they believed it would be ineffectual.³⁴² In 1938, Iremonger refused to broadcast prayers for those persecuted under Nazi rule because he believed the Jewish “record” had not been “blameless enough to make most Christians to feel a sense of vicarious shame for Hitler’s misdoings.”³⁴³ For Welch’s part, he often petitioned his superiors to put more rabbis on the air, but faced hard rejections of these proposals from either the CRAC, who feared

³³⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/1, Memo from DRB “Religious liberty in the BBC” 24 Nov 1941

³³⁹ BBC WAC, R51/482 “CRAC Review of Religious Broadcasting Aims and Achievements, 1923-1948,” p.4

³⁴⁰ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy: Religious Broadcasting,” February 1943, p. 14.

³⁴¹ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 158-9. 160.

³⁴² Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 158.

³⁴³ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 558.

that opening the door to Jews meant allowing Christian Scientists on the air, or R. R. Maconachie, the Director of Talks and later Controller of the Home Programme, who was adverse to anything remotely “political” in religious broadcasts. In 1940 Welch tried to broadcast a talk that addressed the Christian debt to Judaism, but it was blocked from development.³⁴⁴ In 1943, Welch wanted to air a series of *Lift Up Your Hearts* talks by Rabbi Swift of the Dolis Hill and Gladstone Park District Synagogue, but Maconachie sent back a two word memo emphatically stating “No Jews.”³⁴⁵ The only way that other religions were portrayed on the BBC during the war years was through a Christian perspective. The *A Christian Looks at the World* series included episodes on Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism, as well as “Mohammadeans.” The BBC treated Christianity with a special status on the BBC from the inception, as the Corporation’s founding charter promised to reflect “the traditionally Christian character of the British people.”³⁴⁶

IV. Ministry of Information Religions Division and Overseas Religious Broadcasts

The ecumenical nature of BBC Religion had an important function in overseas programmes. The BBC called it an “ecumenical weapon” that could tip the scales of public favour towards the Allied cause by underscoring the fundamental commonalities between those opposed to fascism or restrictions on religious freedom.³⁴⁷ The MOI recognized the diplomatic power of ecclesiastical relationships, and created a Religions Division to foster camaraderie and connections both between Christians in Allied countries and amongst Christians in occupied countries opposed to totalitarian rule. That a movement recognised for its ability to build bridges and alliances could be framed in military terms betrays the state’s utilitarian treatment of religion during the conflict. Christianity had particular uses for the MOI; it could be used as a bridge to connect members of the global “Britisher” diaspora, a site of commonality between the white

³⁴⁴ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 558.

³⁴⁵ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, “Religious Broadcasting Schedule,” Second Quarter 1943.

³⁴⁶ Stephen Parker, “Teach them to Pray Auntie: Children’s Hour at the BBC, 1940-1961,” *History of Education*, 39:5 (September 2010), 661.

³⁴⁷ BBC WAC, R34/814/2 BBC Written Archives Centre, “Broadcasting Policy, 6. Religious Broadcasting: History and Current Practice.” February 1943.

dominions, or as a tool to establish commonality between other faiths to emphasise the importance of defending religious toleration and liberty against fascist oppression. The use of BBC Religion for overseas propaganda points to the significance of religion in constructing narratives that defined the terms of the conflict, and its strategic importance in global diplomacy. While the role of religion in wartime propaganda has been largely ignored in histories of the period, it is clear that it had a significant role in narrative construction that deserves to be closely analysed and understood.

Both the MOI and BBC recognized the propagandistic potential and persuasive power of religion. At the outset of the war, officials at the MOI feared, rather condescendingly, that the working classes could be easily swayed by enemy ideologies.³⁴⁸ Sympathy for fascist principles or communist uprisings would be anathema to the war effort and decimate morale, particularly if the country was faced with the threat of a land invasion or sustained bombing. According to Ian McLaine, “the Ministry appears to have believed that the British people ... yearned for a set of ideas that might invest their sacrifices with a greater significance than the preservation of national sovereignty.”³⁴⁹ Domestically, the MOI sought an ideological underpinning for the conflict that would spur national defence, and took care to represent Christianity and democracy as the twin pillars of Britain’s domestic identity. These ready-made ideologies provided a convenient vehicle for the support and dissemination of Britain’s war aims, and arguments for the morality and justification of war. Though the MOI used these religious teachings in a manner that was “diffuse, vague and lacking the immediacy of Nazism and communism,” they nonetheless created relied on connections between Britishness and Christianity to establish the moral justifications of the war effort.³⁵⁰ To be opposed to the British cause was to be opposed to Christian morality and individual liberty.

King George VI’s speeches and Churchill’s addresses were loaded with generic Christian themes, calling for the defence of Christian civilization and invoking God’s

³⁴⁸ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 150.

³⁴⁹ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 150.

³⁵⁰ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 150.

divine aid. Matthew Grimley has observed that “national culture remained dominated by Christian points of reference in this period.”³⁵¹ George VI’s speech at the outbreak of the war, aired on the BBC and broadcast across the empire, implored listeners to “commit our cause to God,” for “with God’s help we shall prevail... may He bless and keep us all.”³⁵² Churchill used similar language, as he famously declared in June 1940, “The Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization.”³⁵³ Paul Addison and Keith Robbins have correctly observed that this seemingly orthodox statement came from “an undogmatic mind.”³⁵⁴ This was precisely the kind of Christianity with which the nation was familiar. Churchill spoke with respect of the Church of England, but he was not a regular churchgoer. He possessed a deep belief in a personal God and the power of destiny and providence, which aided him in a time of crisis.³⁵⁵ This is perhaps similar to the kind of Christianity observed by Sarah Williams in her study of popular religion in Southwark in the years leading up to the war,³⁵⁶ an undogmatic, everyday Christianity that buttressed moral frameworks and could be accessed at moments of crisis or convenience.

³⁵¹ Matthew Grimley, “The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism and ‘National Character,’ 1918-1945,” *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (October 2008), 887.

³⁵² “Speech by HM King George VI,” BBC, aired 3 September 1939. Available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00d5frm> (Accessed 5 January 2016).

³⁵³ Keith Robbins, “Britain, 1940 and ‘Christian Civilization,’” in *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in honour of Owen Chadwick*, eds. Derek Neales and Geoffrey Best, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 279.

³⁵⁴ Robbins, “Britain, 1940 and ‘Christian Civilization,’” 280.

³⁵⁵ Paul Addison, “Destiny, history and providence: The Religion of Winston Churchill,” in *Public and Private Doctrine: Essays in British History presented to Maurice Cowling* ed. Michael Bentley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 238. Addison suggests that “On any strict reckoning Churchill was no Christian.” Churchill did not attend weekly services and believed he “was lacking in the religious sense” as he did not have a deeply spiritual experience of Christianity. This points to the difficulty of labelling people as “Christian” or “Religious.” These words have loaded, contested and variable meanings, and are often used contradictorily by historical actors and historians alike. Churchill’s Christian identity meant enough to him to invoke in speeches of such high import.

³⁵⁶ Williams, *Popular Religion*, Chapters 3-4.

Particularly after the fall of France, the MOI stressed that BBC programmes and other public talks ought to remind the public “what Britain means to its citizens.”³⁵⁷ Part of this stemmed from a need to define the war as a battle for the survival of British values, and part as a rebuttal to Goebbels’ assertion, voiced by Lord Haw Haw, that Britain was not an open democracy, but a duplicitous, imperialist and capitalist force.³⁵⁸ The BBC aired folk music and programmes that focused on English heritage and British cultural traditions. A number of plays were commissioned that venerated the heroic lives of Tudor monarchs, celebrating Britain’s past military triumphs and rich cultural history.³⁵⁹ Britain’s democratic past was keenly emphasized in historical programming. Talks on Western philosophy used the teachings of Plato and Darwin to undermine and criticize Nazi principles.³⁶⁰ The MOI sought to create contrasts from the totalitarian nature of Nazi fascism by celebrating liberal democracy, praising the British people for their “independence of mind” and emphasizing a long history as a “nation of individuals.”³⁶¹ To the MOI, Christianity had a significant place in representations of Britain, past and present. They wanted to stress “the part played in British history and in British contemporary life and thought by religion, and in particular by the Christian Church.”³⁶²

The MOI was reluctant to depict religion as a force solely in the service of the state, and the Ministry’s Religions Division warned that the Churches themselves should not be suspected of propaganda. They did not want to emulate the overt jingoism of the First World War, or the “onward Christian soldiers” spirit of Kipling and the liberal 19th century.³⁶³ Attempts to use crusade imagery in propaganda were poorly received by the

³⁵⁷ Imperial War Museum Documents Collection, “Directive Letter to the Clergy and Others,” 5 July 1940.

³⁵⁸ MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 93.

³⁵⁹ BBC WAC, R9/5/95 Audience Reports, Sound & Talks, Dec 1941 - May 1943.

³⁶⁰ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 155-158.

³⁶¹ Imperial War Museum Documents Collection. “Directive Letter to the Clergy and Others,” 5 July 1940.

³⁶² National Archives, INF 1/953 “Religion in Britain’s Postwar Publicity,” 19 January 1945.

³⁶³ Keith Robbins, “Onward Christian Soldiers? British Churches and War in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Religious Writings and War*, ed. Gilles Teuile, 192.

public, and many clergymen were extremely resistant to the use of this rhetoric.³⁶⁴ Instead, the MOI sought to impart “a real conviction of the Christian contribution to our civilization and the essential anti-Christian character of Nazism.”³⁶⁵ They believed Nazism to be anathema to Christianity, in all of its forms, thus it could be used as a common identity or rallying point amongst Britons, citizens of the Commonwealth and Allied combatants.³⁶⁶

Churches, the BBC and the MOI did not view the task of using Christian rhetoric to support the war effort to Christianity unproblematically. In 1938, there had been some discussion at the BBC about suspending religious broadcasting completely out of a concern for resources, and a fear that the BBC and MOI could be accused of manipulating religious messages and imagery to fit the needs of the state, creating a political religion to rival the civil religions that flourished in fascist states.³⁶⁷ BBC Governors and Controllers wrote about the difficult position that the church was pressed into in wartime, caught between a desire to support the war effort and the gospel message of opposition to the use of violence.³⁶⁸ In 1939, the MOI observed, “by their nature churches and their missions are ecumenical in outlook and supranational in their objectives, and delicate questions have been raised as to whether it is possible or desirable.”³⁶⁹ Calling Christianity into the service of a national cause required a human presumption to know and understand the will of the divine. Many clerics and members of the CRAC were uncomfortable with the theological and ethical dilemmas that such a stance created. Christians were called to pray for their enemies, but how should a Christian pray for a Nazi? Could German Christians be called enemies if they prayed to and believed in the same God? Would putting Christianity in the service of the state cheapen its message or peace and cooperation between individuals? How could Christ’s non-violent example be carried out in a time of war? In March 1940, Welch wrote “Four Principles” to guide the religious broadcasting

³⁶⁴ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 59; Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 238.

³⁶⁵ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 151.

³⁶⁶ National Archives, INF 1/953 “Religion in Britain’s Postwar Publicity,” 19 January 1945.

³⁶⁷ Briggs, *War of Words*, 620.

³⁶⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/1 “Religious Policy in Wartime” 27 March 1940.

³⁶⁹ National Archives, INF 1/38, “Religious Division,” September 1939.

department on these matters in wartime, and they betray the conflict felt among many speakers, producers and advisors over these issues. His principles for religious broadcasting were as follows:

- a) Patriotism is a part of religion, but religion cannot rightly be regarded as patriotism.
- b) We are under bond to pray for our enemies.
- c) Prayer involves the whole Church of Christ in intercession for the salvation of mankind, divided though it may be in time of war.
- d) Prayer for the victory of the Allied cause is undoubtedly right, but we must also pray for the greater object of the victory of God's cause and purpose in this world.³⁷⁰

Any speaker on the BBC was forbidden from delivering any message that could be considered contrary to the war effort. As a result, “behind all the sermons... broadcast since the war began, lay the assumption that our cause was righteous, and that we were fighting against evil.”³⁷¹ Controversially, pacifist ministers were banned from the airwaves. The BBC was reluctant to call it a formal ban as they could be accused of violating the freedoms of religious expression and conscience that the war was being fought for; instead, they did not issue a formal ban, but circulated memos listing the names of speakers who “would not be invited” to speak.³⁷²

The BBC's religious broadcasting output was not confined to the Home Front; the development of radio technology allowed the citizens of combatant nations around the world to share in the celebration of religious festivals and participate in shared days of prayer. As Simon Potter has shown, the Second World War marked a period of tremendous growth for the BBC's Empire Service, renamed the Overseas Service in the first year of the conflict.³⁷³ This growth was not accidental or incidental; both the Ministry of Information and the BBC carefully crafted programming for the Overseas Service and actively sought technological improvements to increase the number of

³⁷⁰ BBC WAC, R34/814/1 “CRAC Minutes,” March 7 1940.

³⁷¹ BBC WAC, R34/814/1 “CRAC Minutes,” March 7 1940.

³⁷² BBC WAC, R34/814/2 “Policy Direction of Religious Talks,” April 1941; “Banning of Speakers at the Microphone” 12 May 1941. The blacklist included some of the BBC's most popular religious broadcasters, including Rev Donald Soper.

³⁷³ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 110.

listeners abroad.³⁷⁴ Crafting broadcasting messages for listeners in Occupied Europe, North America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa that could bolster support for the British cause was given the utmost priority within the Ministry of Information. As important as it was to ensure that domestic listeners remained committed to the fight and were supplied with information resources to help them to cope with the conflict, both materially and spiritually, overseas propaganda could build alliances and support resistance movements. Overseas broadcasts also made use of religion by emphasising the importance of religious tolerance and respect for difference. In the House of Commons, members supported a motion announcing that Britain's principal war aims were to ensure "opportunities so that all races and creeds may live together in peace, liberty and security."³⁷⁵ They framed the conflict as one where Britain, as a Christian nation, worked in partnership with nations of all faiths and religious traditions against oppression and intolerance. The MOI concluded that the wide influence and propagandistic potential of religion could not be ignored, but that any attempts to persuade on religious grounds "should not have the appearance of government propaganda."³⁷⁶ Indeed, this coincided with a larger philosophy of "democratic censorship" that operated at the MOI throughout the war. According to Phillip Taylor, "it is in the interests of a democratic government to ... give the impression that the media are still operating freely and independently with only a minimum of wartime restrictions."³⁷⁷ The messages emphasising the importance of waging a war against a totalitarian state would be undercut by the denial of press and religious freedoms. Nevertheless, religion could serve as a powerful tool of persuasion. After all, as Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell have argued, in order to be effective "a persuader has to use anchors of belief to create new belief."³⁷⁸ Within the MOI, a dedicated Religions Division crafted white propaganda to develop relationships between religious

³⁷⁴ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 110.

³⁷⁵ United Kingdom, House of Commons, Hansard, 11 Feb 1941, Question from Mr Mander.

³⁷⁶ National Archives, INF 1/38, "Religious Relations Branch," October 1939.

³⁷⁷ Philip Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 154.

³⁷⁸ Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 5th edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2012), 35.

communities in Britain and overseas. Their attention largely was focused their on building personal relationships between churches in different countries, issuing broadcasts and print publicity, and scheduling visits or travelling exhibitions.³⁷⁹ However, some they did engage in some grey or black propaganda tactics, placing articles in foreign newspapers or distributing some pamphlets that had no indication of its true provenance or intention.³⁸⁰

The short-term goal of the MOI's Religions Division was to "enlist the sympathy of religious communities in other countries for Britain's cause in the war."³⁸¹ They did this primarily by spreading news of the Nazi persecution of churches, encouraging religious resistance in occupied countries and spreading news of what they called "unanimous support of the British Churches for the war... and the story of the service of the Churches to the community in wartime."³⁸² The Religions Division actively fostered friendly relationships between chaplains and priests of all denominations in Allied and occupied countries, and within the Armed Forces. This could include scheduled visitations by foreign delegations in Britain, or arranging for British religious officials, both Protestant and Catholic, to visit countries overseas and report back on the best ways to use religion as a means of persuasion.³⁸³

The Religions Division had Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish sections, and mass produced pamphlet publications for worldwide distribution, with titles such as: "Japan and the Church," "Christian Freedom," "Christian Counter-Attack" and several series on religious persecution published exclusively in Spanish and disseminated to

³⁷⁹ National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division."

³⁸⁰ Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 17-18. They define 'white' propaganda as information presented reasonably close to the truth in an attempt to build credibility or trust. Black propaganda "is when the source is concealed or credited to a false authority and spreads lies, fabrications and deceptions."

³⁸¹ National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division," June 1944.

³⁸² National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division," June 1944.

³⁸³ National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division." 1942.

Catholic counties in Latin America through distribution points in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago and Mexico City. The Religions Division also commissioned writers to publish pieces about religious persecution in major newspapers worldwide, keeping the provenance of the content secret. The MOI tried to ensure that many of these printed materials had “the appearance of private enterprise.”³⁸⁴ The majority of their efforts did focus on the Americas, Dominions and Christian countries in Europe. They believed that “developing cultural links between England and Latin American states”³⁸⁵ was a matter of particularly high priority. Regular publications from the Division included *The Spiritual Issues of the War*, *The Catholic Bulletin of Foreign News*, and the *English Catholic Newsletter*. They also organised, in collaboration with the Exhibitions Division, a series of photographic exhibitions that toured Britain and Allied countries. “The Church in Wartime” was shown throughout Britain and South Africa, while collections called “The Persecution of the Church in Europe” and “Christians Resist” were shown in towns across Britain. “Catholic Life in Britain” toured through American colleges and schools.³⁸⁶ Religious propaganda also emphasised the unanimous support for the war effort among the British churches of all denominations.

The Orthodox Section has a particularly important strategic function. It was charged with developing ecumenical ties between the Anglican Episcopate and the Orthodox Patriarchy in the USSR, Yugoslavia and Turkey. The section had a particularly important narrative defining role after the USSR entered the war. Nazism has been roundly condemned in MOI propaganda for its anti-religious nature, a charge that could easily apply to Britain’s new ally. To combat any backlash on this score, stories of religious tolerance in the USSR were circulated in both the British press and on the BBC to combat any negative perceptions.³⁸⁷

The Religions Division publicised the stories of the Nazi persecution of religious communities in a number of languages to countries with large Jewish, Christian and

³⁸⁴ National Archives, INF 1/416, “Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division.” 1943.

³⁸⁵ National Archives, INF 1/416, “Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division.” 1942.

³⁸⁶ National Archives, INF 1/416, “Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division.” 1942.

³⁸⁷ National Archives, INF 1/790 “Religion in the USSR.”

Muslim populations in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.³⁸⁸ The Jewish Section of the Religions Division produced a regular publication called *The Jewish Bulletin*, translated into Yiddish and circulated in the USA, South Africa and the Middle East. Though the Religions Division did not have a dedicated Islamic section, they did create propaganda campaigns for a specifically Muslim audience. Division estimates put the Muslim population of Europe at nearly 6 million, with 55 million in Africa, 21 million in Oceania and 138 million in Asia.³⁸⁹ They believed that Muslims, like Christians, “though by no means united in their political and economic views or social conditions, show an extraordinary unity in sentiment.”³⁹⁰ As a result, pamphlets and literature about the dangers of Nazi intolerance and persecution of religious communities were distributed in Arabic.³⁹¹

In overseas matters, the BBC found itself placed more directly under Government control, obliged to respond to the dictates and interests of the MOI. The Religions Division worked alongside the BBC’s Overseas Religious Broadcasting Department (ODRB), collaborating on a number of programmes including *Democracy Marches*, *News from the Christian World* and *Religion Under Fire*.³⁹² These two departments shared resources and ideas, and even employed staff with similar experience in the Student Christian Movement.³⁹³ The ODRB was divided into Empire and Europe sections and transmitted programmes to four divisions: North America, Pacific, Africa and the East. Religious broadcasts also adhered to a more traditional structure than on the Home Service. This was not a result of a lack of willingness to experiment with formats or a lack of will from the MOI or BBC, but a shortage in broadcasting resources. The RBD, a small department within the BBC relative to the number of weekly broadcasts that it

³⁸⁸ National Archives, INF 2, 1942. “Religious Persecution.”

³⁸⁹ National Archives, INF/407 “Moslems Memo,” August 1939.

³⁹⁰ National Archives, INF/407 “Moslems Memo,” “Memorandum on the general principles of publicity among Moslems,” August 1939.

³⁹¹ National Archives, INF/407 “Moslems Memo.”

³⁹² BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to D. E. S and D EUR S, “Overseas Religious Broadcasting” 6 Oct 1941.

³⁹³ National Archives, INF 1/416, “Reports of Activities of Religious Division,” August 1942, March 1943.

produced, had already been overstretched trying to supply enough programmes for the increased demand for the Home Service. The extent of the demands for overseas religious broadcasting quickly became too much for Welch, who hired Rev. Francis House to take over his commitments to Empire and Europe.³⁹⁴ Welch considered House to be fit for the position because of his ties to Visser t'Hooft and his former position as the Provisional Secretary to the World Council of Churches, and his connections with and knowledge of European and North American churches.³⁹⁵ Even with an extra producer and assistant, the overseas religious broadcasting officers were overstretched and requested additional support so they could stop “overworking continually.”³⁹⁶ Producers of overseas religious broadcasting content also hewed to a more conservative broadcasting schedule of prayers, hymns and services because they knew little of the audience they were reaching. Listener Research did not reach overseas, so the BBC relied on letters sent from listeners abroad to judge the efficacy of broadcasts.³⁹⁷

Religious broadcasts featured on all of the BBC’s overseas networks during the war. The BBC’s Red Network for the Pacific (including Australia, New Zealand, Africa and North America) broadcast a 30 minute Sunday Service, a 5 minute daily service, a mid-week service for Africa broadcast for twenty minutes fortnightly, special “occasional services” for national and Christian holidays, a weekly religious talk and a weekly programme of quiet reflection on Christian hymns, scripture and teachings called *Think on These Things*.³⁹⁸ The Green Network included the General Overseas Service (GOS), whose religious broadcasting content included a 30 minute special Sunday service, a daily reproduction of the 5 minute service, a Sunday Half Hour programme of 25 minutes of community hymn singing followed by a reflective *Epilogue*, occasional short series of talks by the Radio Padre or the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and 15

³⁹⁴ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to DDG, “Overseas Religious Broadcasting” 24 Jan 1942.

³⁹⁵ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to CP, “Overseas Religious Broadcasting,” 9 July 1942. Welch describes House as 33 years old, Anglican, a graduate of Wadham College, Oxford, Vicar of University Church, Leeds and “a B grade man for a B grade job.”

³⁹⁶ BBC WAC, R13/212, “Assistant to ORBO,” 15 December 1944.

³⁹⁷ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo to Assistant Establishment Officer, 1 September 1942.

³⁹⁸ BBC WAC, R13/212, “Assistant to ORBO,” 15 December 1944.

minute services for isolated units. The Violet Network for the Allied Expeditionary Forces included the *Sunday Half-Hour* for Forces, a 90 second broadcast of morning and evening prayers daily, usually live, and occasional special services, and Sunday Half Hours from American sources or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).³⁹⁹ Though the Red Network, GOS and Violet Network had daily religious components, fewer total broadcasting hours were allocated to religious broadcasting each week when compared with the BBC's Home Service. Religious broadcasts on the Overseas Service preserved the Reithean Sunday much more than on Home Service; daily prayers and moments of reflection had a regular place in the week-day, but longer religious programmes were largely relegated to Sundays.

Religious broadcasts had particularly strong listenership in the dominions and colonies. The RBD observed that "Britishers [overseas]... do listen to these services and the nostalgic element is always present."⁴⁰⁰ One woman writing to the BBC from Australia described the joy and comfort she felt listening to the same service that her sons could hear in the Forces, Canada and Britain.⁴⁰¹ These broadcasts were frequently recorded or transmitted from St Paul's Cathedral, but also from parish churches in country settings, or churches with dreaming spires in Oxford or Cambridge. The ODRB found that broadcasts from historic or recognisable locations had greater resonance with listeners abroad;⁴⁰² the BBC projected a pastoral and parochial Englishness abroad, one rooted in a bucolic past. Overseas services echoed the simplified form of those on the Home Service, typically consisting of a hymn, a reading, two prayers and a blessing, including a short sermon when time permitted.⁴⁰³

To the MOI, religious broadcasts to Occupied Europe had great strategic importance. The MOI arranged for broadcasts that paid careful attention to local conditions, customs and festivals to air regularly in Germany, France, Denmark, Holland

³⁹⁹ BBC WAC, R13/212, "Assistant to ORBO," 15 December 1944.

⁴⁰⁰ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to D. E. S and D EUR S, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting" 6 Oct 1941.

⁴⁰¹ BBC WAC, E4/72, "Services for Empire Listeners," 14 July 1938.

⁴⁰² BBC WAC, R13/212, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting," 10 March 1942.

⁴⁰³ BBC WAC, R34/806/3, "Daily Services in Empire Programme," 14 January 1943.

and Czechoslovakia, each intended to bolster the resolve of resistance movements.⁴⁰⁴ The ORBD and MOI collaborated on the form and content of these broadcasts. RBD representatives were required to attend the MOI's monthly committee on Religious Broadcasts to Germany.⁴⁰⁵ These programmes, transmitted in German, often included talks from prominent German theologians, including Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Paul Tillich. The BBC broadcast Lutheran services from London, special services at Easter and a Midnight Mass at Christmastime. They produced a half hour for Roman Catholics and a half hour for Protestants each week. The RBD also produced special broadcasts to mark the anniversaries of Martin Niemöller's imprisonment.⁴⁰⁶ For Holland, the MOI sponsored the broadcast of talks on "Freedom of Conscience" on Radio Oranje.⁴⁰⁷

The ODRB admitted its inadequacy when it came to producing broadcasts for Asian and African audiences. In Africa, they were aware of a large Muslim population, some Christian missionary activity, and a strong Dutch Reformed Church presence in South Africa, but they wrote to superiors that they "need expert knowledge to understand the religious scene."⁴⁰⁸ The MOI focused its attention on areas where it was possible to use religion to shore up allegiances; once those countries had entered the war, they tended to turn their attention elsewhere, with the exception of territories in occupied Europe.⁴⁰⁹ However, the BBC did respond to direct requests for recordings and transmissions as and when they were received. Some countries made direct requests to the MOI for religious propaganda. The colonial government of Kenya asked for a series of five minute religious

⁴⁰⁴ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to D. E. S and D EUR S, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting" 6 Oct 1941. National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division," 1943.

⁴⁰⁵ BBC WAC R13/212, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting," 9 July 1942.

⁴⁰⁶ BBC WAC, R13/212, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting," 19 Feb 1942. The celebration of the anniversary of Niemöller's imprisonment was a practice widespread in America, see Matthew Hockenos, "Martin Niemöller in America, 1946-1947: 'A Hero with Limitations,'" *ACCH Quarterly* Vol. 18, No. 2, June 2012. <https://contemporarychurchhistory.org/2012/06/conference-paper-martin-niemoeller-in-america/> (Accessed 5 November 2015)

⁴⁰⁷ National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division." 1942.

⁴⁰⁸ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to D. E. S and D EUR S, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting" 6 Oct 1941.

⁴⁰⁹ National Archives, INF 1/416, "Reports of the Activities of the Religions Division." 1942.

talks on the moral issues of the war, and five minute epilogues for weekly broadcasting from Nairobi.⁴¹⁰

The BBC made special provisions to create Islamic content for audiences in the Middle East. The BBC's Persian and Arabic Services included prayers and readings of the Qu'ran. R.A. Rendall, the Controller of the Overseas Service in 1944, considered this a part of the BBC's work "projecting Britain to Arab [sic] countries."⁴¹¹ They wanted to provide content that local audiences would appreciate and find appealing, and not simply project Christianity abroad or encourage conversion or missionary activity. Rendall wanted broadcasts to Muslim audiences to highlight "the importance of religion in our [British] national life."⁴¹² But he wanted it to do so in a way that demonstrated that people of all faiths could ally together in a fight for religious freedom, not to assert the dominance of one faith over another. After all, the Arabic Service was engaged in a battle for listeners and sympathy with the Berlin Arabic Service.⁴¹³ When an Anglican bishop wrote to the BBC asking for broadcasts to the Middle East to take a Christian focus, the BBC firmly denied the request.⁴¹⁴ While it was important to project an image of Britain as religious to persuade listeners that their cause was one of freedom and tolerance; it was not a priority to attempt conversion. Ultimately, these overseas religious broadcasts helped to fashion narratives of spiritual consensus abroad. While this consensus had an almost exclusively Christian character at home, it had a deliberately multi-faith expression on the Overseas Service.

V. Conclusions

Religious messages are bent and shaped to their cultural contexts, and in the case of religious broadcasting both the medium of radio and the circumstances of war provided the conditions that influenced the articulation of BBC Religion. The ecumenical nature of

⁴¹⁰ BBC WAC, R13/212, Memo from Welch to D. E. S and D EUR S, "Overseas Religious Broadcasting" 6 Oct 1941.

⁴¹¹ BBC WAC, R34/806/3, "Religious Programmes to Moslem Audiences," 9 October 1944.

⁴¹² BBC WAC, R34/806/3, "Religious Programmes to Moslem Audiences," 9 October 1944.

⁴¹³ BBC WAC, E3/267/1, Arab World, Turkey, Iran, 1942-3.

⁴¹⁴ BBC WAC, R34/806/3, "Religious Programmes to Moslem Audiences," 9 October 1944.

BBC Religion had several practical functions. The nondenominational form of sermons, prayers and talks allowed greater expediency and suited the diminished availability of resources in wartime. Consequently, a speaker's position and affiliation became much less important than their clear presentation of the rudiments of faith. Ministers presenting sermons were simply Christian instead of Anglican, Nonconformist or Baptist. Perhaps BBC Religion could be considered a People's faith, one that reinforced the pervasive mythology of unity and togetherness that informed the "People's war" mentality and the myth of the blitz. The use of Christianity as a common cord of morality and tradition extended beyond imaginings of national community, to include adherents across empire, in Allied countries, and under enemy rule. Religion has been a force that has caused much harm, destruction and devastation as followers of rival faiths have battled for dominance and pre-eminence. But in the Second World War, religion was used discursively as a site of commonality, and an impetus for the formation of allegiances. Not only did the BBC help foster a spiritual consensus at home, expanded this consensus to include other faiths and nations.

The BBC's role in the public sphere has been much debated. Is it an innovator or a servant to the status quo? Does it heed public opinion or bow to government dictates? In the case of BBC Religion, it seems to have been a combination of all four. The latitudinarian principles of BBC Religion reflected the uncomplicated, relaxed, non-dogmatic form of Christianity practiced by most. It could also be considered a novel discursive form. But the unifying tone had propagandistic uses; it was not only a tool to appeal to as many listeners as possible, it was also mechanism for establishing the necessity of the war effort and the importance of sacrifice, while invoking the promise of a divine protection for the cause. BBC Religion offered inclusion for all, but the form it took was undoubtedly more familiar to Protestants than Catholics, with the marginalization of traditional ceremonial forms such as the mass. But it is clear that the BBC was not a unidirectional force, issuing thought and opinion without regard to listener wants and tastes. It was a site of complex negotiation. Just as radio blurred the line between public and private in the home, religious broadcasts merged the sacred and

secular, as they became an important site for national identity construction and conversations about the ideal shape of the post-war world.

Chapter 2

Lift up Your Hearts! Prayer, Public Worship and Spiritual Exercise on the BBC

“To pray is an immemorial duty; for prayer is a kind of potent dream, and everything that is fine in human experience began as a dream, a hope, an aspiration.”⁴¹⁵

Prayer featured prominently in wartime civic celebrations, but people also prayed at home or in their communities for protection, for strength of character, and for courage.⁴¹⁶ Images of Britons and Allies at prayer had a powerful visual currency in *Picture Post*. Judith Walkowitz has described how through the publication of images of people sleeping in tube shelters, sleep became a powerful symbolic protest against the disruptiveness and devastation caused by bombing. No matter the devastation, the noise or the chaos, Britain would continue undeterred, comfortable in new or repurposed surroundings. Walkowitz suggests that these iconic images contributed to the “myth of the blitz” and the “People’s war” mythos by attesting to London’s resilience.⁴¹⁷ It was a common visual trope indicating that “London can take it,” and that “Londoners had formed a self-sufficient, democratic civilian army to resist Hitler, an army that reconciled class differences.” Prayer served as a similar kind of protest, as an admirable calm in the middle of a storm. Images of people praying in the wake of bomb destruction or in sacred spaces render prayer as a symbol of determination and resolve in the face of Nazi

⁴¹⁵ *Daily Mirror*, “Prayer – and after,” May 27, 1940, p. 7.

⁴¹⁶ Imperial War Museum Documents Collection, Eph C. Religion, K 97/104, Programmes. 2nd Cumberland Battalion Home Guard, National Day of Prayer, 7 September 1941; 3rd Cumberland Home Guard, Service in the Covered Market, 3rd December 1944. K 09/500, “Twelve O’Clock Prayer;” K04/501, “Let us Pray for our Country;” K 04/502, “Prayer for daily use at 12 O’clock;” K04/503, “Private Prayers in this Time of War.” See also: Mass Observation Archive, File Reports, FR23; FR1200; FR362.

⁴¹⁷ Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (Yale: Yale UP, 2012), 280; Stephen Brooke, “War and the Nude: The Photography of Bill Brandt in the 1940s,” *Journal of British Studies*, 45:1 (January 2006), 118-138.

aggression. Images of penitent and devoted victims of the persistent bombing⁴¹⁸ helped cement the “rightness” and morality of the Allied cause, while simultaneously condemning the anti-religious tenets of continental fascism. These pictures also showcased the ethnic diversity of the Allied cause, with features that showed images of Muslim and Baha’i communities at prayer.⁴¹⁹ It is no coincidence that these images and themes were popular in the Beaverbrook press,⁴²⁰ though these motifs were also prevalent in the pages of *Picture Post*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Manchester Guardian*. Images of prayer and sleep, of Londoners at work and play demonstrated that ordinary life could continue on undisturbed by conflict.

Wartime prayer was not simply a private practice as large scale corporate and civil prayer events were increasingly used as expressions of both piety and occasions for the affirmation of national character. Churchill approved plans to reintroduce the National Day of Prayer only four days after taking office in May 1940.⁴²¹ He approved six more National Days of Prayer over the next three years, with work stoppages mandated in 1942 and 1943 so that factory and office workers could listen in to BBC broadcast services during the day.⁴²² People prayed for their nation, the Allied war effort, and themselves – they sought deliverance from the perilous circumstances in which they found themselves, but prayers were also infused with repentance, hope and a unified sense of national mission.⁴²³ Many of the official prayers emphasized the importance of surrender to the

⁴¹⁸ “In London they still pray for peace... but they are preparing for the worst,” *Picture Post*, September 16, 1939, p.7; “Three girls go to church to pray for their husbands,” *Picture Post*, June 24, 1944, p.24.

⁴¹⁹ “Britain’s Moslems Get a Handsome New Mosque,” *Picture Post*, September 25, 1943, p.17; “So that’s what a Baha’i feast looks like,” *Picture Post*, April 15, 1944, p.14-15.

⁴²⁰ Lord Beaverbrook owned *The Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express*, the *Evening Standard*, the *Glasgow Evening News* and the *Scottish Daily Express*. He served as Minister of Aircraft Production in Churchill’s wartime cabinet, and was eager to support propaganda efforts endorsed by the MOI.

⁴²¹ Natalie Mears, “Praying for Britain,” in *BBC History Magazine*, 11:4 (2009), 47.

⁴²² Mears, “Praying,” 47.

⁴²³ Imperial War Museum Documents Collection, Misc 192, Item 2844. “Prayers for use in the National Mission, Together with a Litany of Repentance & Hope.” Pamphlet. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).

will and authority of God, while acknowledging the smallness and inferiority of man, expressing hope that “God’s will be done.”⁴²⁴ Prayer can be an act of private devotion, but during the Second World War it also became a uniquely public ritual; a communal, national and imperial moment vested with patriotic meaning. Government ministers, officials and an overwhelming majority of the public expressed a strong support for public prayer, and many believed it to be integral to the war effort. This belief became particularly widespread following the evacuation of Dunkirk, as the public, press and even some speakers on the BBC credited a National Day of Prayer with bringing about the “miraculous” evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force. Prayer was an important medium through which national character could be constructed and negotiated, in addition to serving as a mechanism through which people could express their thoughts, hopes and fears for what lay ahead.

The Days of Prayer received special attention in Britain and the Empire during the war years, but there were also daily prayer initiatives broadcast on the BBC Home Service that have been largely overlooked in recent historical scholarship. These programmes encouraged listeners to pray for the progress of the war and the domestic war effort. However, these were not simply supplicant prayers for victory and peace, they were part of a larger scheme drawn up by the BBC’s governing board to help sustain the daily spiritual needs of the nation during wartime. Prayer could act as a psychological balm for a nation in crisis, providing a means of transcending the horrors or uncertainty of physical reality by offering a source of comfort and strength for listeners. In October 1939, the BBC Control Board issued a directive to the Director of Scottish Programming⁴²⁵ to plan physical training courses that would help maintain the health of the nation in cooperation with the National Council of Fitness. But health was not

⁴²⁴ Imperial War Museum Documents Collection, Misc 16 (367), 43(41) 3/5-8, National Day of Prayer Order of Service, September 3, 1942; Mears, “Prayer,” 50.

⁴²⁵ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Physical Training Broadcasts,” October 31, 1939. That the initiative originated with a directive from the BBC Governing Board in London is contrary to the account given by Justin Phillips in *C.S. Lewis and the BBC*, 282. Phillips erroneously suggests that the programme was a Scottish initiative gradually introduced to a national audience.

conceived and understood in physical terms alone; there was also to be a spiritual component. The BBC even believed that this form of vitality held greater significance, as, “spiritual fitness ... should after all precede physical fitness, and is equally necessary in wartime.”⁴²⁶ The physical exercises programme aired at 7:30 in the morning, and was often referred to during the war as the Physical Jerks⁴²⁷, a term parodied by George Orwell as a ‘Newspeak’ telescreen programme created by the Ministry of Truth in his classic dystopian novel *1984*.⁴²⁸ The Physical Jerks programme, officially named *Up in the Morning Early*, was followed by the spiritual exercises programme, called *Lift Up Your Hearts!* (LUYH), which immediately preceded the morning news from 7.55 to 8.00 am. As the name of the programme implies, it was an exhortation to prayer and spiritual renewal at the break of the day, before a full day of work and after a long, blacked-out night.

It is the aim of this chapter to explore the place of prayer on the BBC, and how deliberations about its appropriate form provide insights into the relationship between the BBC, the state and the public. The “controversies” and debates sparked by LUYH and other prayer programmes allow an opportunity to examine the degree to which the BBC was governed by the wartime cabinet, and how far they could they reach outside of government restrictions. Churchill’s wartime coalition government was eager to use Christian symbols and rituals to create a civic holiday dedicated to celebrating and affirming the national war effort through prayer, but Conservatives took issue with any attempts to cast Christian teachings in a socialist light. They wanted to use Christianity on their terms for patriotic ends, but attempted to block the application of Christian teachings to debates on social reconstruction and reorganisation. Politically, Christianity could become a sword without a hilt. They pressured the BBC to separate the political from the spiritual, though the National Day of Prayer reified this association. Aside from providing a unique set of source materials for analysing the discursive shifts that took place in

⁴²⁶ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Physical Training Broadcasts,” October 31, 1939, R51/491/1.

⁴²⁷ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Morning Prayer,” 7 Nov 1939.

⁴²⁸ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Secker and Warburg), 1949.

prayer programming as the war progressed, LUYH also provides an opportunity to examine the debate over the relationship between religion and politics. This chapter will examine the way that prayer programmes applied the principles of BBC Religion, and how the committed ecumenism of broadcast prayers helped to cultivate a democratically minded People's faith that welcomed all denominations and stressed shared Judeo-Christian values. The debates surrounding the appropriate use of prayer betray the contest that existed between those interested in cultivating a social reform-minded practical Christianity, and those who sought to use Christianity for purely nationalistic and propagandistic ends.

1. Lift Up Your Hearts!

Lift Up Your Hearts! serves as an excellent example of BBC Religion in practice. It employed a colloquial tone, addressed the individual, had a non-denominational character, and offered a kind of practical Christianity that could be used outside of formal religious contexts. The programme was first broadcast on the Home Service in January 1940, after being approved by the Home Service Board on 3 November 1939. It first began in a rather liturgical fashion, with clerical readings from prayer books and scriptures, but expanded to include communal prayer and short talks.⁴²⁹ The Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) authorised an initial plan for a rota of clergymen to offer a “text or thought for the day, with the reading of a few verses of Scripture, a minute’s explanation where necessary, and a short prayer.”⁴³⁰ The programme was initially produced in Scotland under the supervision of Scottish Director Melville Dimwiddie. In July 1940, the evacuated Department of Religious Broadcasting in Bedford began to take over management of the programme and arranged for the entire series to be produced centrally and broadcast nationally.⁴³¹ The programme was initially

⁴²⁹ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 4 December 1939.

⁴³⁰ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Physical Training Broadcasts,” October 31, 1939.

⁴³¹ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, Letter from DRB to MRPD, 12 August 1940. Prior to centralisation in 1940 there was also a Midlands version of LUYH. When the decision was made to nationalise and centralise the programme, it was removed from its original base in Scotland because of BBC objections to “Scots voices,” which they believed would make the programme less accessible than

broadcast in different formats on alternating weeks, with short talks by one anonymous speaker from Monday to Saturday, followed by a week of readings and prayers.⁴³² JCS MacGregor, the Director of the Broadcasting Division of the Ministry of Information, praised the new programming change for introducing an important “daily wartime rhythm”⁴³³ both in British broadcasting, and in British homes. Listener Research found that those who enjoyed the programme “organized their lives around [listening in].”⁴³⁴ The talks commonly focused on the basic, fundamental rudiments of Christian belief and behaviour: weekly series on the beatitudes and the fruits of the spirit were repeated throughout the war, as were talks stressing the importance of ‘Christian behaviour,’ humility, service and cooperation. All wartime religious broadcasts offered an expansive, inclusive version of Christianity, but this was the particular aim of the *Lift Up Your Hearts!* series. The programme was intended to reach an audience of believers as well as unbelievers, and Welch saw *LUYH* as a particularly fruitful opportunity to cater to the tastes of non-churchgoers. In a memo written on October 31, 1940, he argued, “this early morning broadcast should not be designed to reach those we reach on 23 other occasions each week through our religious broadcasts. They should be broadcasts designed to reach

broadcasting in the RP [received pronunciation] of BBC English. R51/491/2, Letter from DRB to SD, 10 September 1940.

⁴³² BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Morning Prayer,” 18 February 1940. Due to the intensity of the bombing over London the decision was made to broadcast *Lift Up Your Hearts* talks daily for the six-month period between 25 February 1941 and 6 September 1941, with the alternating week schedule resuming in October. By 1942, a different kind of three-week rotation was put in place. A week of talks on a spiritual themes by a clergyman or notable speaker was followed by a week of readings from devotional texts or Christian literature, followed by a week of readings from a series of biblical texts, accompanied with music and prayers. The phrase “Lift Up Your Hearts,” borrowed from the Eucharistic Prayer, was commonplace and found political expression outside of the RBD. Both King George VI and Churchill encouraged Britons to “Lift up your hearts” in several key speeches in 1941. “King’s Call to his Peoples,” *The Irish Times*, Dec 27, 1941, p.1; “Mr Churchill’s Speech,” *The Manchester Guardian* Jun 13, 1941, p. 5.

⁴³³ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1943. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, The War of Words*, Volume 3, (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), 122.

⁴³⁴ BBC WAC, R51/491/2, “Home Intelligence Report,” 11 September 1941. Mass Observation found the programme to be extremely polarising, with those who disliked it expressing strong opinions on that score.

the whole nation, or at least that part of the nation which listens to the 8 o'clock news."⁴³⁵ He also described the series as "not really a morning service, but more of a morning tonic before beginning the work day."⁴³⁶

Lift Up Your Hearts was often the highest rated religious programme on the BBC during the war, partly because of its proximity to the morning news, but also because the deliberate accessibility of the programme resonated with a wide audience. According to Home Intelligence Reports, at times as high as 16% of the potential listening audience tuned in to the programme.⁴³⁷ The BBC estimated that the programme had approximately 3 million regular listeners.⁴³⁸ Between 50 and 75% of listeners viewed it favourably.⁴³⁹ Supporters noted that the programme instilled a "quiet courage" in listeners, others thought it was "understanding, well-chosen, and sympathetic."⁴⁴⁰ The programme seemed to be reaching its target audience of those who believed without belonging. A man in Clerkenwell observed that it was popular among those who "did not attach much importance to religion" in an organised sense.⁴⁴¹

The Religious Broadcasting Department saw *Lift Up Your Hearts* as a way to put "practical Christianity" to work in the everyday lives of listeners, to help them cope with the stresses and strains of the war effort. As the anonymous speaker told listeners at 7.55 am on 7 August 1940,

It's in times like this that we feel more than ever the need for practical Christianity in daily life. For so many of us religion is like a best suit or dress. We take it out and wear it on Sunday and then put it away for the rest of the week. [...] Yet what is the good of a religion which is not a practical thing, an animating and controlling force in all our dealings?⁴⁴²

⁴³⁵ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, "Lift Up Your Hearts," Oct 31 1940.

⁴³⁶ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, "Lift Up Your Hearts Timing," 29 Jan 1940.

⁴³⁷ Mass Observation Archive, File Report 23, "Church and Religion in Wartime," p.91.

⁴³⁸ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, "Broadcasting Policy," February 1943, p. 18.

⁴³⁹ BBC WAC, R51/491/2, "Home Intelligence Report," October 9, 1941.

⁴⁴⁰ BBC WAC, Subject File N716, LR/3430, "Listener Research Report: People Matter," Spring 1943.

⁴⁴¹ BBC WAC, R51/491/2, "Home Intelligence Report," 20 September 1941.

⁴⁴² BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, "Lift Up Your Hearts," Wednesday August 7, 1940.

These speakers actively supported the distinction between religious belief and practice. The rigid formality of church attendance was less important than using practical Christianity as a source of spiritual comfort and a guide for right conduct and behaviour. Natalie Mears has suggested that from the sixteenth century onwards many in Britain believed that when God failed to answer common prayer “the fault lay not with prayer or God but with themselves.”⁴⁴³ Perhaps this explains the emphasis on good Christian behaviour throughout the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series; prayers or talks focused on strengthening the character and resolve of the British people, so that they would be worthy of seeing “God’s purpose” enacted. By keeping faith, by being mindful of thoughts and actions, by being thankful, patient and kind, the British public could find itself deserving of grace and deliverance.⁴⁴⁴ These messages were a theological muddle, pairing deliverance with good works, while at other times invoking providential election.

While some of the talks spoke to Christian audiences alone, occasionally a speaker would discuss religious thought in a much more general way. In a December 1940, Canon F.T. Salter, discussed the very basic terms in which religion ought to be understood. He began his talk with this account:

A working man once described religion to me as: ‘The best within us following the best we know.’ I like that definition. Of course it is not complete, but it is compact. Everyone has a god, for a god is what you live for – and a man must live for something – and it is what you live for that makes you what you are and that determines the value of your life for your fellow men.⁴⁴⁵

He concluded the talk by encouraging people not to leave their religion on a shelf only to be used when convenient, but to take it and carry it with them all day. By reducing the idea of religion to its most fundamental level – a belief in something metaphysical, a willingness to transcend, a desire to understand the meaning of life – Salter encouraged a

⁴⁴³ Mears, “Prayer,” 50.

⁴⁴⁴ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: The Right Rev The Bishop of Croydon,” July 30 to Aug 3 1940.

⁴⁴⁵ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Canon Salter,” 9 Dec 1940.

conception of religion that was not confined to the church pew, but part of everyday ethics and experience.

In order to maintain a wide audience and broad based appeal for the series, speakers were under strict instructions to interpret scripture in everyday vernacular. They used references to popular films and sports to make easy metaphors to teach the fundamentals of Christian living. Welch dictated that the content of *Lift Up Your Hearts* must be concrete and not abstract. Adapting a Latin phrase, he advised contributors: “Broadcast things must always be / Things that you can touch and see.”⁴⁴⁶ He thought long, abstract passages about the mysteries of God would alienate listeners, but a story about the prodigal son would be easily understood.⁴⁴⁷ Spiritual lessons were conveyed through metaphors grounded in everyday experiences. Or, scripture would be quoted with a simplified translation of the meaning of the text. Leslie Weatherhead did this at the close of a broadcast in 1943: “So here’s a thought for the day: In your patience ye shall win your souls, or to translate colloquially, ‘Stick it out and you will arrive in the end.’”⁴⁴⁸ Restating scripture in the style of a simple slogan that could stick on a Ministry of Information poster became a common practice in the LUYH talks. The programme rejected traditional religious languages. In memos to his producers, Welch stated, “a strong, virile, natural, secular voice is what we want,” as “we are addressing... the miscellaneous listeners who dislike any voice which suggests Ecclesiasticism.”⁴⁴⁹ The ideal voice preferably belonged “a young man... with something important to say, who can say it in a lay language.”⁴⁵⁰ Before the war, religious broadcasting had served as a kind of substitute church service for those ill and infirmed who could not attend on their own volition;⁴⁵¹ but it quickly became a form of religious practice in its own right, one that could speak in an accessible tone and vocabulary. To put this in Marshall McLuhan’s

⁴⁴⁶ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Lift Up Your Hearts Continued,” 4 December 1939.

⁴⁴⁷ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Lift Up Your Hearts Continued,” 4 December 1939.

⁴⁴⁸ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 10 June 1943.

⁴⁴⁹ BBC WAC, R51/491/1 DRB to SD, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 4 December, 1939.

⁴⁵⁰ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 3 October 1944.

⁴⁵¹ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942, p.1.

familiar phraseology, this was perhaps another case of the medium of radio shaping the message of Christianity.⁴⁵²

Simplifying the Christian message to simple slogans and lessons caused some debate within the BBC, but the programme received praise for its accessibility. Welch believed *Lift Up Your Hearts* had to be presented in a blunt and concise manner because of the time of its broadcast. Its proximity to the morning news made it “not a moment of meditation but of shouting.” He wrote to Dimwiddie,

Remember that the listeners are all tying their boot laces, washing, eating and generally busy before leaving for their daily work; they cannot sit down and listen and meditate. You must broadcast so that he who runs may listen and learn. You are not to plant seeds so much as shoot arrows which reach their mark immediately. Startle, challenge, pull up the listener with simple stuff to which he is compelled to listen.⁴⁵³

Welch wanted to throw simple messages at listeners in the hope that something would catch their ear during a busy workday morning. Dimwiddie feared the programme could foster “a false idea of prayer,” making it something less quiet and contemplative and something that could be fit into quick moments in the middle of a busy day.⁴⁵⁴ Dimwiddie considered it “an item which should be very intimate and personal,”⁴⁵⁵ and thought that the programme should encourage meditative contemplation. In practice, it embodied a combination of the two approaches. The programme included communal prayers addressed to God, but the talks addressed listeners and focused on shaping individual attitudes and behaviour.⁴⁵⁶ Certainly, some of the scripts in the series can be described as a string of platitudes, but many others comment meaningfully on war events and include prayers that are short but compounded with meaning. Tom Harrison, one of the founders of Mass Observation, wrote in his regular series of radio reviews that “religion was radio’s hardest job” as it had to translate the experience of being in a church or chapel,

⁴⁵² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, Introduction.

⁴⁵³ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, DRB to SD, December 19, 1939.

⁴⁵⁴ BBC WAC, DRB to SD, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 31 October 1940.

⁴⁵⁵ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, SD to DRB, 11 March 1943.

⁴⁵⁶ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, DRB to SD, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 15 November 1944.

which relied on visual, social and other influences, to suit the new medium.⁴⁵⁷ He believed the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series offered an opportunity for religious broadcasting to take up a “more contemporary approach,” and praised a week of talks by J.S. Braithwaite for containing readings delivered “without unction,” and for avoiding “the regular sermonico-oratorical style and latinised vocabulary.”⁴⁵⁸ The process of adapting traditional religious messages to suit a public medium intended for universal accessibility required both a flexible theology and accessible language.⁴⁵⁹

Part of the eagerness to reject traditional forms stemmed from a desire to recapture a “lost” audience. In a letter of advice to the producers of religious broadcasts at NBC interested in aping the RBD’s output, Welch described how his intention in every religious broadcast was to encourage “the recovery of a God dimension”⁴⁶⁰ in British lives, popular culture and public discourse. There is an element of defensiveness in this position, a reaction to a perceived assault on Christian hegemony or decline in the prevalence of Christian thought or belief.⁴⁶¹ It was out of this insecurity that efforts were made to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. One producer, E.G. Francis, stationed in Birmingham, believed this motive was linked to declining church attendance, as “vast generation younger than myself do not say their prayers or go to church, nor hear about God, nor sin or angels.” To Francis, “the whole language of religion is clothed in white magic, mystical, [and] wonderful,”⁴⁶² but an appreciation of this language was cultivated over years of church attendance, a practice which had gradually fallen out of favour over the course of the late-Victorian and Edwardian era. There are tones of classist condescension in the Department’s attempt to appeal to the “everyday” listener or

⁴⁵⁷ Tom Harrison, “Radio,” *The Observer*, Jan 17 1943, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Tom Harrison, “Radio,” *The Observer*, Jan 17 1943, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁹ These themes will be developed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

⁴⁶⁰ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942, p.2. In his letter to NBC, Welch repeatedly insists that he does not want to offer a kind of spirituality that was only “an emotional stimulant to help the war,” or “an element in people’s lives which solely concerns their spiritual natures and has no connection with material affairs.”

⁴⁶¹ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942, p.1.

⁴⁶² BBC WAC, R51/491/1, Letter from EG Francis to CV Taylor, 9 February 1942.

“working man” unable to appreciate the “magic” of organised religion. Their stated aim was to target the “artisanal and black-coated working classes” with an approach that followed John Wesley’s advice of “not preaching any sermon which had not been read over to and understood by his illiterate charwoman.”⁴⁶³ However, some listeners found the determined colloquialism of some speakers disingenuous. One man in London reported he found the programme particularly unconvincing called it “sick-making” and “smug.”⁴⁶⁴ A woman in the North East only knew the programme as “one of those clergyman who spout on about religion before the news.” Listener Research recorded a number of objections to the Oxbridge accents of speakers, and their propensity to “vague moralisation.”⁴⁶⁵ Given that it had a working-class audience in mind, the BBC’s schedule for *Lift Up Your Hearts* did not suit the hours of the average working day. As a result, the audience was largely composed of “housewives and office workers.”⁴⁶⁶

Even though *Lift Up Your Hearts* had a largely female audience, female voices were largely excluded from participation in the series. Very few women were invited to the microphone during this period, and religious broadcasting made no exception to the trend.⁴⁶⁷ Only two women were asked to lead the series: Grace Hall from 19 to 24 August 1940, and Mrs. J.M. Anderson from 28 April to 3 May 1941. The Religious Broadcasting Department did not look upon these series favourably, and were quite dismissive of their tone and content. In response to Grace Hall’s talk on August 23, 1940, Welch wrote he found her “very dull, and she has not lifted my heart very high,” but he hoped that “‘the ordinary listener’ and especially the housewife may have been helped by her plain Jane talks.”⁴⁶⁸ The only positive comment he could muster was that she was at least sincere in

⁴⁶³ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, DRB to SD, 4th December 1939.

⁴⁶⁴ BBC WAC, R51/491/2, “Home Intelligence Report,” 11 September 1941.

⁴⁶⁵ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 3 October 1944. Responding to this criticism, the RBD made sure to employ only “tried broadcasters” for the LUYH series. BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1943.

⁴⁶⁶ BBC WAC, Subject File N716, LR/3411, “Listener Research Report: People Matter,” Spring 1945.

⁴⁶⁷ Murphy, “On an equal footing with men? Women and work at the BBC, 1923 – 1939.”

⁴⁶⁸ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, DRB to MRD, August 23, 1940.

her broadcasts, and he hoped that her sincerity would be apparent to others.⁴⁶⁹ The insistence on a male voice for the programme was particularly ironic given that, according to Home Intelligence, supporters for the programme were most likely to be female.⁴⁷⁰

Francis' perception of a faithless, unchristian, non-churchgoing public has not been supported by surveys on religious belief conducted during the war years. As mentioned earlier, although only 10% attended church regularly in this period, as many as 95% of those polled by Mass Observation expressed some varying form of belief in God or a Deity.⁴⁷¹ Helpfully, Mass Observation also polled on the place and practice of prayer in daily life. They found that 6 out of 10 people prayed outside of church services. The propensity to pray was much higher among women than men, as 2 out of 5 men, and 4 out of 5 women reported that they prayed. Interestingly, 25% of churchgoers reported that they never prayed outside of church, while 25% of non-believers said that they prayed in times of duress.⁴⁷² Prayer fit into lives and routines in numerous different ways. It could be part of a fixed routine, or a mechanism for coping with extreme periods of crisis. One 26-year-old woman said that she always prayed every night before going to bed;⁴⁷³ One female shopkeeper said she prayed anytime she felt the need, even "right here in my shop if I have to."⁴⁷⁴ MO also asked 214 people about the general content of their prayers. 34% said that they prayed for family and friends, 32% for protection. 29% prayed for people in

⁴⁶⁹ Unfortunately, due to bomb damage or mishandling, the scripts for these weeks have not survived in the BBC Scripts Collection.

⁴⁷⁰ BBC WAC, R51/491/2, "Home Intelligence Report," 20 September 1941.

⁴⁷¹ Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005), 27. In 1947, Mass Observation wrote: "In all one person in four openly doubts the existence of a Deity, one in twenty expressing definitely atheistic views." The propensity for faith was higher among women than men and people aged over 36. Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study of Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough*, (London: Victor Gollanz, 1947), 22.

⁴⁷² Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study of Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough*, (London: Victor Gollanz, 1947), 53.

⁴⁷³ Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study of Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough*, (London, Victor Gollanz, 1947), 55.

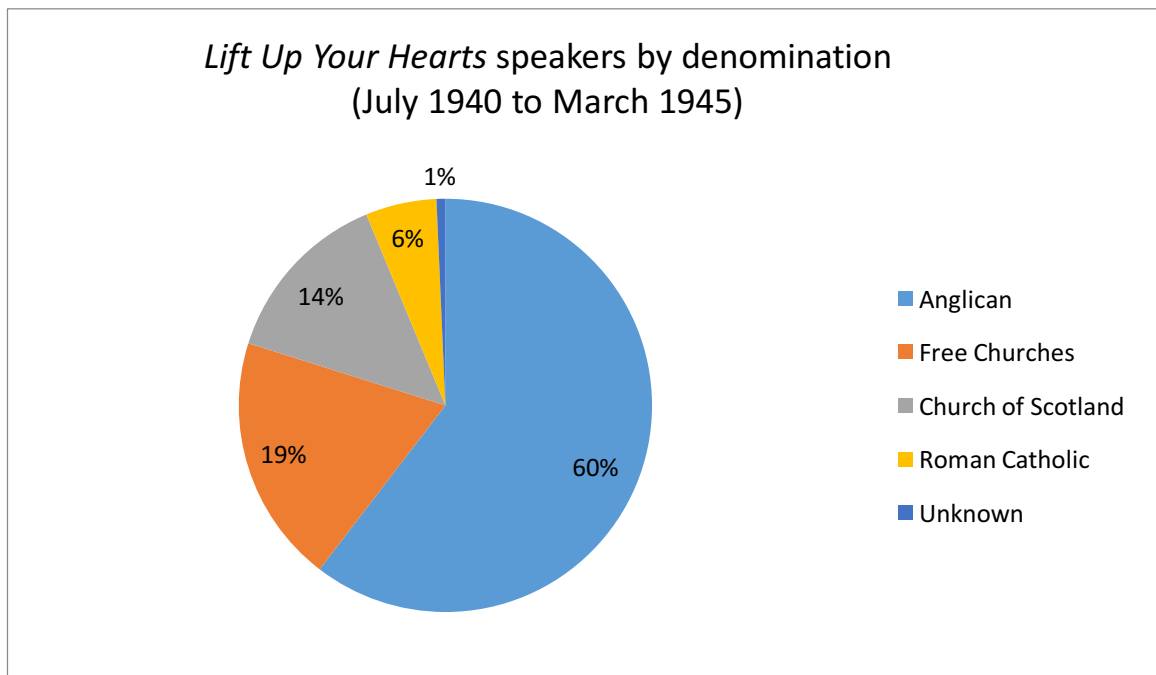
⁴⁷⁴ Mass Observation Archive, Topic Collection 47, Folder I, BW 21/1/41.

general, or the special needs of their acquaintances. 21% prayed about themselves, and 16% about a particular crisis that they were facing.⁴⁷⁵ It is extremely difficult to make generalisations about the “ordinary listener” the BBC attempted to reach through their religious broadcasts. As many varieties of belief exist as individual minds to conceive of them. Life-experiences, family traditions and personal relationships have an enormous influence on the way religious identities are construed and constructed. Mass Observers remarked of the period that “Religion is becoming more personal,” more a part of everyday lives and less wedded to an establishment.⁴⁷⁶ Even denominational labels can be limited in their ability to define personal beliefs and practices, as some Anglicans or Nonconformists are certainly more evangelical, liberal or conservative than others.⁴⁷⁷ All of these ideas and identities overlap in a complex nexus of influence and understanding. Even though the Religious Broadcasting Department offered its accessible BBC Religion to listeners, these broadcasts could prompt as many applications and reactions as listeners switching on the radio. The challenge for BBC producers was to create a basic, fundamental, inoffensive brand of Christianity onto which a variety of beliefs could be projected.

⁴⁷⁵ Mass Observation, *Puzzled People*, p.53. The survey listed 3% as “Other.”

⁴⁷⁶ Mass Observation Archive, Topic Collection 47, Folder I, BW 21/1/41.

⁴⁷⁷ Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century*, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1991).

Figure 2: *Lift Up Your Hearts* speakers by denomination, July 1940 – March 1945

The surviving scripts of *Lift Up Your Hearts* series testify to the wilful latitudinarianism of BBC Religion. Speakers in the series were strictly billed as anonymous, but there was a rotation between clerics from the major Christian denominations. Occasionally, a soldier, layman or politician would be invited to lead the devotional series for a week. In all, about a hundred different speakers led the series between 1940 and 1945, with some of the more successful broadcasters invited to return for multiple weeks. Attempts were made to masque theological differences and emphasise a generalised, shared Christianity recognised across denominations. When Catholic priests were invited to give the morning talk, they made deliberate attempts to minimise theological distinctions, and stress core biblical teachings. A series by Father Wilfred Kelly aired in December 1940 refrained from making much mention of the place of the Virgin Mary in the story of the Nativity, but emphasized the ways that the innocence of the Christ-child should be celebrated and emulated.⁴⁷⁸ The department quickly objected as

⁴⁷⁸ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: The Rev Father Wilfred Kelly,” December 28, 1940.

soon as a speaker demonstrated denominational affiliation. After Father Mangan directed prayers to “Our Lady” in a talk series from 1943, the BBC received complaints that such an invocation alienated non-Roman Catholic listeners.⁴⁷⁹ A departmental memo reminded producers, “Speakers in this programme are asked to avoid as far as possible terminology distinctive of their denomination, though it is our earnest hope that this does not render them innocuous.”⁴⁸⁰ It seems to be the case that Catholic identifiers were objected to more loudly and vociferously. As can be seen from the chart, the clear majority of the speakers were Anglican, and nearly all Protestant. However, the participation of Catholics in this series is notable. Prior to Vatican II’s “Decree on Ecumenism” in 1964, Catholics could not pray or worship with Protestants as a matter of ecclesiastical law, a rule which necessitated separate Catholic services to be broadcast during the week and on the National Day of Prayer. However, the BBC often circumvented this rule in practice. In the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series, Catholic clergy led an audience composed of both Protestants and Catholics in prayer and religious instruction. This Catholic inclusion was important, as it supported the MOI endorsed narrative that all faiths were aligned against Nazism.

Another important element of BBC Religion made manifest in the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series was a committed present-mindedness; religious talks and prayers actively engaged with the day to day circumstances of the war and life on the Home Front. The major themes of the talks changed with the pace and success of the war effort. During the Blitz, as Kenneth Wolfe has observed, the series did not try to disseminate escapist or fantastic messages. They did not encourage listeners to meditate away from their immediate surroundings.⁴⁸¹ Instead, the talks spoke to the experience of the bombings in a direct and immediate way. One parson suggested that emergency was an opportunity for people to respond “with the light of a new meaning and purpose in their lives.”⁴⁸² Welch

⁴⁷⁹ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 22 April 1943.

⁴⁸⁰ BBC WAC, R51/491/3, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” 22 April 1943.

⁴⁸¹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 197.

⁴⁸² BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Rev Canon F.A. Cockin” February 1941.

welcomed a number of speakers who addressed similar themes, but exercised editorial control over those who tried to make arguments justifying the existence of the evil by turning it into the corollary of good. Welch refused to allow a broadcast which claimed that there can be no good without evil. As he saw it, an argument that made suffering necessary for good experiences to happen was incredibly inappropriate, given “the almost animal-like suffering of the people of the East End.”⁴⁸³ Providing answers to questions of theodicy and anthropodicy required finesse and not blunt statements. These discussions were afforded more space and time in the longer religious talks that aired throughout the week, and largely omitted from the early morning series. But one talk that did make it to air in 1940 did not handle this matter with a deft touch. That speaker, Gilbert Russell, tried to encourage listeners to focus on things worth living and fighting for, but as he inelegantly put it, “Being killed doesn’t matter ... it’s being alive that matters. [...] Never mind how you’re going to die – how are you going to live until then?”⁴⁸⁴ Such a dismissive attitude to death and suffering may have only served to alienate listeners experiencing hardships and fearing what form the future might take. *The Manchester Guardian* criticised such broadcasts for “breaking hearts” around the morning breakfast table.⁴⁸⁵

At the start of the war, *Lift Up Your Hearts* grappled with the pervasive sense of uncertainty and fear. Donald Soper drew upon this collective unease to for his weekly series, in which he tried to convince his listeners “how valuable it is to recollect... certainties in an uncertain world.”⁴⁸⁶ He suggested instead, “Everything is not uncertain. Behind all the uncertainties of the day there is the certainty of God. He cannot be defeated.”⁴⁸⁷ The early scripts also relied heavily on classic biblical metaphors involving the light and darkness, and they way that some things are made stronger after being

⁴⁸³ BBC WAC, R51/491/1, “Lift Up Your Hearts, 2nd to 7th December,” 27 November 1940.

⁴⁸⁴ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Gilbert Russell,” 28 August 1940.

⁴⁸⁵ “Miscellany” Edited by Lucio, *The Manchester Guardian*, April 26, 1941, p.5.

⁴⁸⁶ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: The Rev Donald Soper,” 7 September 1940.

⁴⁸⁷ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: The Rev Donald Soper,” 6 September 1940.

tempered and fired in a kiln, forge or crucible.⁴⁸⁸ Comparisons were also drawn with the suffering and temptation of Christ. Leslie Weatherhead encouraged listeners to pray for the strength to act with respect and consideration to others by calling upon “the courage of Jesus, who passed through an agony of fear and distress, and yet went to the cross for our sakes.”⁴⁸⁹ By 1941, the talks took a much more political tone, with a direct focus on the ways a “new world” would be built after the war, and how that world ought to be constructed and ordered. Comparisons were drawn with the disciples and prophets, and they ways they, in the words of Canon Cockin, “confronted ... questions of personal conduct, questions of justice in social and economic affairs, questions of national policy, exactly the kinds of things that we talk about today.”⁴⁹⁰ Eric Gillett told listeners that they “should resolve to make the world a better place with the help of Christ,” and that this new civilisation would should “give equal opportunity to all, and wipe out all barriers of class and snobbery.”⁴⁹¹ By 1943, LUYH was well organised into quarterly series, and speakers met together to plan sustained development of particular themes. That year, the series resumed its incarnational focus on “The Life of Christ.”⁴⁹²

The tone of the talks shifted again as victory became increasingly assured in the last two years of the war. In January 1944, Welch addressed the moral questions raised by victory with a series of talks entitled: “Is killing justified given the sacredness of human life?” Another series followed later in the month by Rev Jack Winslow called “The Secret of Victorious Living,” addressed to those persons afraid of planning for a bright future. Many of the talks began to speak more directly to the experience of soldiers. Rev G.T. Bellhouse spoke of the comfort of returning home, and compared it with what he imagined it would be like to “pass into the beyond.” “What a glorious feeling it is,” he

⁴⁸⁸ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: The Bishop of Croydon,” 31 July 1940 and 1 August 1940.

⁴⁸⁹ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Rev Leslie Weatherhead,” 16 September 1940.

⁴⁹⁰ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Canon F. A. Cockin,” 24 February 1941.

⁴⁹¹ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Eric Gillett,” 10 August 1940.

⁴⁹² BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1943.

said, “to hearing nothing but our own language, seeing nothing but our own people, recognising this bit of scenery again... how free we feel, how understood, how much more able to breathe!”⁴⁹³ Others reiterated that this was a conflict between good and evil, and victory was the result of living a “higher life” of exemplary character. Talks on eternal life, peace and love looked optimistically forward to the creation of a better world in the days ahead.⁴⁹⁴ LUYH closed 1944 with a series on “Justice,” followed by one entitled “People Matter” in 1945.⁴⁹⁵ The RBD embraced the “Justice” theme as an opportunity to reflect on “the righteousness and justice of God,” a topic they believed had been neglected. But they did so by focusing on social justice “in education, in the social order, and among the nations.”⁴⁹⁶ The “People Matter” series of 1945 made explicit connections to the “People’s war” metanarrative, and was “chosen as being particularly relevant to the closing stages of the war and to the problems of peacemaking.”⁴⁹⁷ However, the series also had a particular spiritual aim, which the RBD believed was “the only hope for the world as it moved more and more into the machine age.”⁴⁹⁸ Overall, the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series tended to treat Christianity in largely material terms; the emphasis on good Christian behaviour was paired with messages calling for a better world that was more egalitarian, and the reconstruction of a new order rooted in the principles of the social gospel.

II. *Lift Up Your Hearts* and “Controversy:” The Politics of Religion

In 1941, the discursive shift in religious broadcasting to matters of the social order and reconstruction did not pass unnoticed by Conservative politicians. Indeed, the present-minded ethos of *Lift Up Your Hearts!* caused the series to drift easily into political terrain. As the talks were meant to contain reflections on the issues of the day

⁴⁹³ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: G.T. Bellhouse,” 16 September 1944.

⁴⁹⁴ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts” October, 1944.

⁴⁹⁵ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1944; BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, February 1945.

⁴⁹⁶ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, February 1945.

⁴⁹⁷ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, February 1945.

⁴⁹⁸ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1945.

from a generic Christian perspective, it was easy for speakers to get caught up in interpretations that could be marked in the press as political. The BBC's policy in religion, like politics, was to avoid controversy. Christianity could be used and accessed to suit a number of different party political aims; its various uses were actively contested in parliamentary debates, at the Ministry of Information, the Home Office, and between the BBC directorate and the Religious Broadcasting Department.

Historians often cite JB Priestley's *Postscripts* as the best example of social reconstruction politics reaching the airwaves on the BBC. Certainly, Priestley's statements after the evening news on the kind of world that could be remade out of the ashes and debris cluttering a bombed out London found considerable popularity.⁴⁹⁹ It has been suggested that JB Priestley's *Postscripts*, one of the most beloved series produced during the war, was pulled off the air in 1940 because of Priestley's left-leaning views on reconstruction.⁵⁰⁰ As Asa Briggs' *History of Broadcasting*, points out, the BBC began to participate actively in the reconstruction debate after the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942 because it did not want to be out of pace with popular opinion and discussion, an enduring example of how the perception of opinion shaped broadcasting content during the war years.⁵⁰¹ However, there has been very little acknowledgement of the ways that religious broadcasting participated in the social reconstruction debate before it became commonplace in the rest of the BBC's programming schedule. Contrary to Briggs' timeline, a number of religious broadcasts took up the social reconstruction theme in 1940, but it became a much more regular feature of the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series in early 1941. In March 1941, two speakers from *Lift Up Your Hearts!* found themselves in the throws of political controversy: Rev John Hadham, and the Director of Religious

⁴⁹⁹ Sian Nicholas, "'Sly Demagogues' and Wartime Radio: J.B. Priestley and the BBC," *Twentieth Century British History* 6:3 (1995), 247.

⁵⁰⁰ Sian Nicholas, "'Sly Demagogues' and Wartime Radio: J.B. Priestley and the BBC," *Twentieth Century British History* 6:3 (1995), 247, 256. Jean Seaton, "Broadcasting and the Blitz," in James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 165.

⁵⁰¹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in Britain, Volume 3: The War of Words*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), 605.

Broadcasting the Rev Dr James Welch. Hadham attracted negative attention for simply using the phrase “reconstruction,” which he meant in a metaphysical and not literal sense.⁵⁰² But Welch’s broadcasts in the first week of March 1941 contained controversial political opinions. On Monday, he called for an abolishment of the extreme inequality that existed in material wealth and possessions. On Tuesday, he suggested that every child, regardless of class, should have equal opportunities for education. On Wednesday, he asserted that the family unit ought to be safeguarded against long work hours. On Thursday, relying on examples from Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, he suggested that a sense of “divine vocation” ought to be restored to daily work, highlighting the monotonous perils of industrial labour. On Friday, he urged the responsible usage of the earth’s natural resources, for the benefit of the entire human race not just individual nations.⁵⁰³

Welch’s broader point was that Christian principles ought to be applied to contemporary politics. Welch, the student and friend of Archbishop William Temple, was extremely sympathetic to message recorded in Temple’s Penguin classic *Christianity and the Social Order*, published to wide acclaim at nearly the same time as the Beveridge Report.⁵⁰⁴ Central to the book is an unequivocal commitment to social justice. Temple wrote,

If each man and woman is a child of God, whom God loves and for whom Christ died, then there is in each a worth absolutely independent of all usefulness to society. The person is primary not the society; the State exists for the citizen, not the citizen for the State.⁵⁰⁵

Temple believed that Christians should cooperate with people outside of the Church to create secular policies which achieved shared social aims, but to remain clear about the

⁵⁰² BBC WAC, R51/491/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Week Beginning 3.3.41,” April 8, 1941.

⁵⁰³ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts 61/2, “Lift Up Your Hearts: Rev Dr James Welch,” Week of March 3-8, 1941.

⁵⁰⁴ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942.

⁵⁰⁵ William Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, (Penguin, 1942), 40.

biblical imperatives for such policy directives.⁵⁰⁶ Welch said that Temple's book was the "Magna Carta" of his department; it had an enormous influence on his social and political outlook. Immediately after the broadcast of the first talk in his March 1941 series, Welch's office received a request for the original script of the broadcast from Churchill's private secretary.⁵⁰⁷ Discussion on the manner and mode reconstruction was commonplace on the BBC by 1944, but in 1941 it was certainly a term that was tied to the left, regardless of its popularity among the public.⁵⁰⁸ Two weeks after Welch's broadcast, Maurice Hely-Hutchinson, a Conservative MP for Hastings, raised the issue in the House of Commons, asking then Minister of Information Duff Cooper to explain why such controversial issues had been permitted to air on the BBC. Cooper himself had approved Welch's broadcasts; in Parliament he stated that the BBC's wartime policy was not to broadcast anything that opposed the national war effort.⁵⁰⁹ Whether he saw these talks as a violation of that policy or not, the political response led to a formal restriction placed on airing topics that could in any way be interpreted as political within the parameters of a religious broadcast.

Over the following months, the BBC directorate, in cooperation with the CRAC, creating a formal set of guidelines for the treatment of politics in religious programmes.⁵¹⁰ These officials, with the support of Conservatives in Parliament, tried to wrench the two apart, saying that religious broadcasts must only concern matters of religion and nothing else. *The Sunday Times* weighed into the debate, telling its readers that "on the detailed working out of a problem in politics or economics, ministers of religion, however exalted their posts, have no special competence to speak."⁵¹¹ The Director-General of the BBC

⁵⁰⁶ Alan Suggate, "William Temple" in *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Edited by Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh, (London: Blackwell, 2007), 172.

⁵⁰⁷ BBC WAC, R51/491/2, Memo from M.I. Mackenzie to DRB, 6 March 1941.

⁵⁰⁸ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 262.

⁵⁰⁹ United Kingdom, House of Commons Debates, 26 March 1941, Vol 370, cc569-70.

⁵¹⁰ Sian Nicholas has suggested that Priestley's departure owed as much to his refusal to compromise as the broadcast of controversial material. Welch, as a department manager amenable to compromise with BBC policy, regained the BBC's trust.

⁵¹¹ *The Sunday Times*, 31 January 1941.

called a meeting with the Director of Talks, Publicity, the Controller of Programmes and Welch in July 1941 to establish clear guidelines about what could and could not be said by religious ministers on the air. The summary of the meeting contained a record of an agreement between all of the concerned parties that religious talks would not apply moral principles to political and economic matters, and would instead point to the difficulty of making concrete solutions and indicate that a variety of opinions may be rightly held on the issues at hand.⁵¹² The effect would be to make any political pronouncements quite toothless, as a range of opinion would have to be acknowledged before biblical teachings could be invoked to support a particular policy agenda or perspective. The BBC wanted to use religion as a key part of its wartime agenda, but it wanted limits placed on the ways it could be invoked or applied. It invoked fear of controversy to silence a range of opinion from reaching the airwaves. In August 1941, a formal “Concordat” was drawn up to make the policy decision clear. It read,

Ministers of Religion have, as such, no competence to speak on the detailed working out of a problem in politics or economics, but are concerned with the moral and religious principles and criteria by which political and economic situations, proposals and policies should, according to their belief, be decided.⁵¹³

The Concordat went on to describe how speakers must identify themselves as experts in the areas on which they spoke, and any partisan views must be countered with a speaker possessing an opposing viewpoint.⁵¹⁴

However, both Welch and Temple found a way to circumvent this policy in practice. To Welch, Christian ministers may not be experts, but they had a duty to discuss “the moral and religious principles which Christians claim should govern society.”⁵¹⁵ In *Christianity and the Social Order*, Temple appeared to concur with BBC policy, stating that “The Church is committed to the everlasting Gospel and the Creeds which formulate

⁵¹² BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Policy Direction of Religious Talks,” 7 February 1941.

⁵¹³ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy,” February 1943, p. 26.

⁵¹⁴ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy,” February 1943, p. 26

⁵¹⁵ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy,” February 1943, p. 20.

it; it must never commit itself to an ephemeral programme of detailed action.”⁵¹⁶ But, this did not exclude him, in his opinion, from expressing his own views on political matters in what he termed his “capacity as a Christian citizen.”⁵¹⁷ That the Archbishop of Canterbury would obviously have a much larger platform and a louder voice than the average “Christian citizen” was simply a matter of great convenience. In the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series, speakers continued to offer thoughts about a new, more egalitarian and inclusive world that could be created after the war, but avoided specifics. Instead, they emphasised gospel passages and teachings that emphasised the importance of equality, justice, and the fair distribution of material wealth. In May 1941, the BBC polled listeners on this particular issue to see whether the general public shared the view of Hely-Hutchinson, that politics and religion ought to be treated separately. Listener Research found an overwhelming majority of listeners wanted to hear Christianity applied to public affairs. 60% of respondents to the survey agreed with the statement: “Broadcast sermons and religious talks should deal with the application of Christianity to public affairs, such as political and economic questions.”⁵¹⁸ There was no difference between middle and working class listeners on this issue, and younger listeners were particularly in favour of Christian commentary on political matters. One listener replied to the survey, “Religion is not isolated from social realities.”⁵¹⁹ Listener Research concluded, “The public does not regard religious broadcasts indifferently or the idea that Christian perspective on social matters should be broadcast.”⁵²⁰

Welch believed that religious broadcasting should not be solely concerned with people’s spiritual natures, it had to be connected to material affairs.⁵²¹ He used the example of the Protestant Church in Germany to support his claim, suggesting that they accepted Hitler’s assertion that religion should only be concerned with spirituality, and by

⁵¹⁶ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy,” February 1943, p. 27.

⁵¹⁷ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Broadcasting Policy,” February 1943, p. 27.

⁵¹⁸ BBC WAC, LR/253, “The Scope of Religious Broadcasts,” 8 May 1941.

⁵¹⁹ BBC WAC, LR/253, “The Scope of Religious Broadcasts,” 8 May 1941.

⁵²⁰ BBC WAC, LR/253, “The Scope of Religious Broadcasts,” 8 May 1941.

⁵²¹ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942

so doing they “withdrew from the affairs of men” and “gave Hitler a free hand.”⁵²² By 1943, Welch was able to write that both the BBC and the MOI had agreed that “religious broadcasting is concerned with man in society.” While they were still prohibited from discussing “the technical details of political and economic planning,” they could focus on “the moral and religious principles which Christians believe should test and govern these two activities.”⁵²³ This was a material Christianity on the airwaves, one that focused on the way that religious principles could be applied to daily lives and the shape of human conduct in society.

III. “The Prayer Front:” The National Days of Prayer and the Big Ben Silent Minute

Although certain applications of Christian teachings in radio programming were unpopular with the government, others were actively encouraged, fostered and supported by ministers and officials at the highest levels. At the start of the war, Christianity was called into national service through the resumption of the National Day of Prayer. There were twenty-one National Days of Prayer between 1900 and 1947, most of which were held during the First and Second World Wars.⁵²⁴ The National Days of Prayer were significant public celebrations, though their place in the history of the British home front is often obscured. Philip Williamson has correctly observed that the National Days of Prayer have “fallen between the concerns of different historical specialisms,” and as a result, historians of religion and politics alike have overlooked the significance and influence of these “considerable public occasions.”⁵²⁵ Five National Days of Prayer took place in the First World War, eleven in the Second. Williamson notes that these Days of Prayer were a product of a new spirit of cooperation between the principal churches in all parts of the United Kingdom, which “both affected the relative positions of the main churches and ensured that religious perspectives remained prominent in public life.”⁵²⁶

⁵²² BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942.

⁵²³ BBC WAC, R34/812/2, Letter from DRB to Mr. Summers, 8 April 1942

⁵²⁴ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” p.323.

⁵²⁵ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” p. 323

⁵²⁶ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” p. 325.

According to Williamson, the non-denominational nature of the Days of Prayer created “a tacit alliance” between the churches, monarchy and government, with the Church of England at its head.⁵²⁷ However, Williamson somewhat overestimates the strength Church of England’s leadership in this regard. During the Second World War, the driving force behind these National Days of Prayer was not at Lambeth Palace, but Whitehall. Apart from the first Day of Prayer of the conflict, which was instigated by then Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang on October 1, 1939, the timing of every other prayer day that took place throughout the war was conceived in Cabinet and overseen by the Home Office. The authority to call a National Day of Prayer had technically been vested with the Prime Minister since the nineteenth-century, as “in matters of public worship, just as in political issues, the sovereign only acted on ministerial advice.”⁵²⁸ But government control was not simply a matter of technicality, the Days of Prayer were folded into a propagandistic narrative that celebrated unity and common purpose. National Days of Prayer began at the prompting of the Home Office, which took its cue from the Cabinet. The popularity of the National Days of Prayer across the United Kingdom and throughout the Christian denominations ensured their regular occurrence on every anniversary of the outbreak of the war, with additional Days in the spring or summer called at the discretion of the Government.

It has already been noted that ecumenism had an important strategic function as a tool to unite Christians under one national banner, and that it was referred to at the BBC as an “ecumenical weapon,”⁵²⁹ a tool to foster unanimity and common resolve. In May 1941, an internal BBC policy memo described how “Religious broadcasting has offered to Christians a most potent weapon in emphasising the oecumenical character of the

⁵²⁷ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” p. 335.

⁵²⁸ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” p. 365. Williamson also describes how these days of prayer only applied to established Christians and not free churches or nonconformists. “In practice, as they usually shared the religious diagnosis of the nation’s troubles, some did choose to arrange their own special services on the same day.” Roman Catholics were forbidden to worship with Protestants, but they often planned their own religious services to run parallel with protestant ones on the same day.

⁵²⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “BBC Religious Broadcasting in Wartime,” 23 July 1942.

Christian Church and has helped to bind Christian listeners in all lands together.”⁵³⁰

Again, it is important not to underestimate role that the wartime context played in the cultivation of the ecumenical spirit that thrived on a national level. Williamson rightly suggests that that the reason the Days of Prayer were more numerous in the Second World War was because of the particular circumstances of the conflict. As he puts it, “special worship was a means to take a stand on the highest spiritual ground, to project a common cause to friendly powers and to express moral solidarity with allies and resistance movements.”⁵³¹ But this was not simply a state-backed initiative. Wartime ecumenism owed its foundations to the latticework of interdenominational relationships formed thanks to the cooperative principles of interwar liberalism, and found prevalence because it worked so symbiotically with the co-operative, communal ethos of the “People’s war” narrative. The notion that the entire nation was working together to achieve a single aim, regardless of class, region, ethnicity or creed fit perfectly with the aims of the ecumenical movement, which in turn supported the rhetoric of the “People’s War,” and acted as a fundamental strand in the formation of communal, national and Allied bonds. Indeed, the latitudinarian Christianity of the National Days of Prayer and BBC Religion can be described as a People’s faith, one that included all subscribers to basic Judeo-Christian faith tenets at home and abroad. As I have argued in Chapter 1, Christianity became as much a site of common national interests and ideological cohesion as a reliable source of spiritual comfort for all during times of crisis. The circumstances of national crisis provided a forceful, practical impetus for the non-sectarian practice of Christianity to be accepted on a larger scale, just as the absence of those circumstances precipitated its decline, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Welch and Temple would receive formal notification from the Home Office as to when a National Day of Prayer would take place as soon as the Cabinet had decided upon the date. Though Williamson puts Temple at the centre of these conversations, it is clear from his correspondence with the BBC that he was external to the main deliberations. In

⁵³⁰ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “BBC Religious Broadcasting in Wartime,” 23 July 1942.

⁵³¹ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” 333.

letters to Welch, Temple described the “the powers that be” who were discussing the date of the National Day of Prayer, and how nothing could be settled until those powers had met and deliberated.⁵³² Although both Welch and Temple had central roles in organising the actual proceedings of the Days of Prayer, they were outside of the government circle that instigated them. The Ministry of Information Religions Division acted as a go-between to convey Home Office and Cabinet interests to the BBC’s Religious Broadcasting Department, which was responsible for carrying out the detailed plans for the hymns, speakers, liturgy and music that would be used in the National Day of Prayer broadcasts.⁵³³ That being said, Welch and the Religious Broadcasting Department had latitude to shape the themes and the general content of the broadcast, although the presence of the national anthem was mandatory. Ministers and departments also arranged for a number of special prayer days to mark the contribution of several groups to the war effort, and to mark significant wartime events. These special prayer days including a Battle of Britain day, a civil defence day, farm Sunday and United Nations day.⁵³⁴ There were also special prayers offered in support of Britain’s allies, including the Soviet Union after 1941.⁵³⁵ To Williamson, the prevalence of special prayers at the behest of the government indicated a type of “wartime erastianism.”⁵³⁶ Certainly, the state had direct control over the prayer days, but it was not the architect of ecumenical principles or attitudes, though it certainly encouraged their cultivation as compatible with the war effort. For example, the Home Office weighed into a dispute between the BBC and the Free Church Council over their inclusion in the proceedings for the 1944 day of prayer, insisting that equitable time ought to be allocated to each denomination.⁵³⁷ There were various experiments conducted by the BBC as they tried to establish the correct balance between denominational groups, and some of these experiments proved less successful

⁵³² BBC WAC R34/803/2, Letter from Temple to Welch, 9 July 1942.

⁵³³ BBC WAC R34/803/2, Memo from Fenn to C(P), August 9, 1942.

⁵³⁴ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” 365.

⁵³⁵ National Archives, INF/790.

⁵³⁶ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” 365.

⁵³⁷ BBC WAC, R34/803/4. Home Office to DRB, August 1944.

than others. The denominations were demonstrably less willing to participate in a generic, universalised BBC Christianity towards end of war, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.⁵³⁸

Broadcasting and mass media were completely essential to the celebration and occasion of the National Day of Prayer. The Days of Prayer were not solely marked in churches, although Mass Observation reported that church attendance in a London borough would increase by as much as a third and that special morning services before the work day would be quite crowded.⁵³⁹ In order to reach the entire nation with a uniform, consistent message, the effective use of media was vital. Special film reels and radio broadcasts were created so that the public could participate in the Day of Prayer at work, home or during leisure time. By 1943, orders of service for the day's prayer broadcasts were printed in the *Radio Times* and in national newspapers so that people could participate in liturgy and the singing of hymns in the same way they would if they attended a local church. A film of Temple reading prayers was distributed to cinema houses throughout the country and shown in special screenings.⁵⁴⁰ Natalie Mears has observed that technology has been key to the development of the National Day of Prayer in the early twentieth century, and that these developments were what enabled the Days of Prayer to be heralded as truly national occasions.⁵⁴¹ But the centrality of broadcasting also created some tension between the churches and the BBC. It seemed to some clergymen that broadcasting was being offered as a replacement for church attendance, diminishing the size of potential congregations in local churches to support a national radio religion.⁵⁴² The churches did not control when the National Days of Prayer would be called, but they were insistent about having a role in its celebration. This debate was especially pronounced when the government called for the Day of Prayer to be celebrated

⁵³⁸ BBC WAC, R34/803/4. Free Church Council to DRB, July 1944; "National Day of Prayer 1947", August 1947.

⁵³⁹ Mass Observation Archive, Topic Collection 47.

⁵⁴⁰ British Pathe film 1336.17. *The Times*, 1 Sept 1942.

⁵⁴¹ Mears, "Prayer," 50.

⁵⁴² Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 351.

on a Thursday instead of a Sunday, on September 3, 1942, the three-year anniversary of Britain's entry into the war.

The National Day of Prayer in 1942 marked a significant break with tradition as for the first time, the Day of Prayer was called on a workday. The Cabinet issued orders for government mandated work stoppages in factories, offices and schools so that the whole nation could listen in to a broadcast service aired from 11.00 to 11.15 am. The Ministry of Labour arranged for all services and works to be halted during the broadcast.⁵⁴³ The orders for the timing of the daytime service were issued in a Cabinet minute sent to the BBC, but it was up to the Religious Broadcasting Department to develop the tone and content of the broadcasts from there. The Department had initially made plans for a “workers’ service” broadcast from a Birmingham factory when they heard hints that the cabinet would request a midday broadcast. After receiving instructions for the service to be a moment of prayer shared by people at work, home and in the forces, the RBD had to create a service that would not be seen as catering to one segment of the audience over the others. According to Fenn, the morning service “now becomes of wide and general national importance. A workers’ service representing only one arm of the war effort now becomes inappropriate.”⁵⁴⁴ Temple was initially asked to use the entire fifteen minutes for prayer, reading and a short address. He was considered the appropriate person for the role not simply because of his status as Archbishop of Canterbury, but because of his ecumenical credentials and his reputation as the “People’s Archbishop.”⁵⁴⁵ In Fenn’s letter to Temple describing the plans for the service, he wrote “there is clearly no one else who would be in the least appropriate to such an occasion... On an occasion of this kind, when practically the entire nation will be listening, your judgement as to form and content is likely to be a great deal sounder than our own.”⁵⁴⁶ The Religious Broadcasting

⁵⁴³ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Fenn to Temple, 7 August 1942.

⁵⁴⁴ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Fenn to Temple, 7 August 1942.

⁵⁴⁵ A Free Church leader wrote to Temple upon his enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury: “Nonconformists in England do in fact accept you as the spokesman of the whole Church in a way that is quite new in our experience.” Calder, *People’s War*, 485.

⁵⁴⁶ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Fenn to Temple, 7 August 1942.

Department's private homage to the Archbishop perhaps obscured their sense of how the public would react to an entirely Anglican workday service. The BBC Controller of Programmes objected, but Temple chose to decline the invitation on his own accord, as he felt he could not fulfil his ceremonial obligations at Westminster Abbey and still find time to deliver the daytime broadcast.⁵⁴⁷ The workday service was instead led by Welch, who remarked in its planning that "it will be as "undenominational" as our usual daily service is, and be a "BBC service" rather than an Anglican or Free Church service." Hugh Martin of the MOI Religions Division defined it in a different manner; he called it a "National Service" compared with the "United Service" officiated by representatives of the Church of England, Church of Scotland and Free Churches after the evening news, and the short mid-afternoon Roman Catholic service.⁵⁴⁸ This difference in terminology is significant, and betrays the different perspectives of the government and the BBC. To Welch, this was simply the BBC service of the everyday sort; the kind of unassuming, nondenominational and accessible BBC Religion that had been preached in every prayer programme since the war began. To the government, nondenominational Christianity had a particular use as a pre-existing form on which to ascribe a national, civil religion.

The schedule of the evening service for the first weekday National Day of Prayer was the source of some contention in 1942, and again in 1943. The BBC and the Home Office were keen to give the broadcast service the widest possible audience, and reserved the prime broadcasting hour of 7.30 to 8.30pm to ensure the greatest number of listeners. However, this hour would certainly conflict with 6.30pm services scheduled in local churches, timed to cater to people returning home from their work day, and to stop before the blackout at 8.10pm. To Welch, the choice was plain. He believed the churches would cater to "Church people," but "for the millions who do not attend places of worship that hour seems most convenient."⁵⁴⁹ He even went a step further to say to the head of the

⁵⁴⁷ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Memo from Fenn to C(P), August 9, 1942. Letter from Temple to Fenn, August 14, 1942.

⁵⁴⁸ BBC WAC, R34/803/3, Note from Hugh Martin to James Welch, July 1943.

⁵⁴⁹ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Welch to Aubrey. August 11 1942.

Baptist Church, “we think our broadcast, on a day of prayer, ought to take the first place.”⁵⁵⁰ Clearly, the power of broadcasting to unite the nation in a shared experience or collective moment was not lost on Welch. In the previous year, 1941, he had tried to install loudspeakers in churches throughout the country so that every local church would be participating in the same service, a move blocked by Anglican Bishops who perhaps believed such a practice could produce a strangely authoritarian effect.⁵⁵¹ The churches resisted the encroaching power of broadcasting and feared its ability to replace instead of overlay or supplement their traditional role on the National Day of Prayer. In August 1942, after Temple offered an urgent appeal to Welch, the evening service was moved to take place after the evening news so that the “church people” could both attend a church service before the blackout and be home in time for the national broadcast service.⁵⁵² This decision was widely criticised. The BBC received a number of complaints from hospitals that the hour was too late, since the broadcast ended at 10.10pm. Queen Elizabeth even made a private complaint to the Moderator of the Church of Scotland when he visited Balmoral that the broadcast service was too late for many to listen.⁵⁵³ In spite of the late hour, Temple, the BBC and the Home Office considered the broadcasts a resounding success. Listener Research found it was the most widely listened to religious programme to date, with an estimated audience composed of 21.7% of the nation, or 7 million people. With a listening ceiling of 65% at that hour, the audience was indeed considerable. It was a record figure for any Home Service programme after the news.⁵⁵⁴

The BBC’s commitment to ecumenism in broadcast policy and practice had been reflected clearly in the National Day of Prayer sermons and talks, and received active encouragement from the government for political purposes. For the National Day of Prayer in September 1941, Welch originally intended for Temple to deliver the sermon to

⁵⁵⁰ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Welch to Aubrey. August 11 1942.

⁵⁵¹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 299.

⁵⁵² BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Welch to the Bishop of Bristol, 12 August 1942; Letter from Clifford Cross to Rev. Taylor, Aug 24, 1942.

⁵⁵³ BBC WAC, R34/803/3, Letter from Welch to C(P) April 7, 1943.

⁵⁵⁴ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Welch to Temple, 30 September 1942.

the Home Service, as Lang's broadcasting and rhetorical skills were considerably lacking and altogether uninspiring. In July, Lang sheepishly summoned Welch to Lambeth to notify him that the Prime Minister did not want Temple to deliver the sermon.⁵⁵⁵ Despite his respect for Temple, Churchill preferred an ineffectual minister to one who steeped in rival political associations. Thus began the "Trinitarian" structure to the National Day of Prayer services.⁵⁵⁶ The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and the Free Churches shared ceremonial duties and split the speaking time between them.⁵⁵⁷ The tripartite structure of the National Day of Prayer sermons allowed a number of different themes and topics to be covered in the span of one service. In 1943, the speakers were given equal air time, with one speaking on the meaning of the National Day of Prayer, one on confession and "what it means to be under the Judgement of God," and Temple, fittingly, speaking on "the future as we face it as Christians."⁵⁵⁸

Belief in the efficacy of prayer, and particularly the power of communal prayer, gave root to a number of wartime superstitions. The Days of Prayer became extremely popular with the general public and churchgoers alike. Some elements of the press reified the belief that prayer could produce miraculous results, which in the case of the tabloid press often lent a freakish or gimmicky tone to their accounts. The *Daily Mirror* printed a number of stories that told of a "successful" prayer bringing about deliverance though spared lives. Prayer could avert accidents and limit bomb damage; it printed strange accounts of prayers saving survivors on the Titanic and curing illness.⁵⁵⁹ This theme was not restricted to the tabloids. In advance of the Day of Prayer called on 26 May 1940, the *Manchester Guardian* published a full page of accounts of prayers being answered by

⁵⁵⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 301.

⁵⁵⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 301.

⁵⁵⁷ The tripartite structure continued until 1944. It ended when Welch began to feel that the sermons had no "climax" and felt that the duties should only be split between two speakers, which caused considerable bad feeling amongst the representatives of the Free Churches, an episode that will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 5.

⁵⁵⁸ BBC WAC, R34/803/3, Welch to Temple, 21 July 1943.

⁵⁵⁹ *The Daily Mirror*, "He prayed, saved 700 in Titanic," Nov 6 1940; "They gave him a collar, but..." July 4 1939. "R.A.F's 100 a minute bombing while they prayed." 21 October 1940; "The Priest who makes prayer come true," 23 June 1939.

people in need. “Will he really respond?” asked a bold typeface at the top of the page. “Of course he will!” the article replied, “Let us then as a nation, and as individuals, take it well to heart – pondering over it during the present time of stress and strain.”⁵⁶⁰ The strong response to this Day of Prayer in May 1940 encouraged the government to continue to organise these occasions for the duration of the war. It preceded the start of the successful evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk by one day, and many credited the National Day of Prayer with the “miraculous” delivery of the troops. Writing in *The Spectator*, Canon F. R. Barry wrote that prayer made Dunkirk an “immortal” victory, and served as “a new factor from a dimension unknown to the Nazis” which had the power to change the course of war.⁵⁶¹

Many columnists and editorials defined prayer as a national obligation, a duty that must be performed in service to the country to help secure its survival. *The Manchester Guardian* echoed a turn of phrase coined by Liberal MP Ernest Brown, reminding readers to be diligent on “the Prayer Front,” and encouraging churches to make intercessory services and rituals more accessible to the working public.⁵⁶² The day after the National Day of Prayer on Monday, May 27, 1940, the *Daily Mirror* told its readers that “We have a duty to fight, to work and, not least, to pray. We must get back to the discipline of our faith and often think of it as part of the national service.”⁵⁶³ The BBC received a wave of letters petitioning for more prayer days, which many believed would favourably shape the course of the war. Welch called these requests “panic prayers,” and wrote to The Controller of Programmes, Machonachie, that “The National Day of Prayer has done, I fear, a certain amount of damage to the perception of God and prayer, and we have been blamed for not having a Day of Thanksgiving for the “miracle” of Dunkirk.”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, May 25 1940, p.9.

⁵⁶¹ “Prayer and Dunkirk” *The Spectator* 164:5842 (June 14, 1940), 806.

⁵⁶² “The Prayer Front.” *The Manchester Guardian*, Mar 22 1943.

⁵⁶³ “Prayer and After,” *Daily Mirror*, Monday May 27 1940, p.7.

⁵⁶⁴ BBC WAC, Welch to C(P) 19 June 1940.

The occasion of the National Day of Prayer brought muscular Christianity to the fore. As has already been described, this was in no way the dominant or typical thematic tone of religious broadcasting during the war. But it was certainly marshalled for these occasions, when a swell of patriotic and imperialistic feeling was couched in Judeo-Christian imagery and symbolism for the sake of the war effort. These ceremonies were deliberately masculine in tone. The National Day of Prayer evening service in 1943 was broadcast before a live congregation of 1200 people. The Religious Broadcasting Department sent out explicit instructions that the audience ought to be composed of more men than women to produce a more baritone sound in the broadcast sound of worship. A letter to local clergy with tickets to the event asked them to limit the number of women they brought to the service, as “the singing will be more effective if there are more men than women present.”⁵⁶⁵ Apparently, only a masculine tone to congregational singing would befit this occasion. The masculine British hero had often been associated with imagery of Christ-like sacrifice, the suffering and death of the noble few for the good of the nation.⁵⁶⁶ This mythology was canonised in war memorials from the First World War littered throughout the country. Certainly some continuities between the two wars existed, and hymns that celebrated the “Christian Soldier” were commonplace in National Day of Prayer proceedings. The services employed a barrage of militaristic imagery, implying that the nation could use prayers as a weapon to both cope with and combat the enemy. In 1942, an announcer introduced the Archbishop of Canterbury as follows: “His prayers, the *spearhead* of a Nation’s common supplications. His faith – their faith, Here is his message.”⁵⁶⁷

However, there was a substantial difference in the way Christianity was invoked in the First and Second World Wars. This was not a conflict where lines were drawn in “crudely nationalistic terms ... but as a wider struggle in the cause of the whole of

⁵⁶⁵ BBC WAC, R34/803/3, Form letter to local clergy, 29 July 1943.

⁵⁶⁶ Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, (London: Longman, 2004), Chapter 3, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁷ BBC WAC, R34/803/2, Letter from Mr. Farnell, 1 September 1942. Italics added.

mankind against the excesses of Nazism.”⁵⁶⁸ Nonetheless, clergy were deliberately resistant to describing the war in such simplistic terms.⁵⁶⁹ As Temple asserted in his National Day of Prayer address in 1940, “when we turned to prayer it could not be as Britons who happened to be Christians; it must be as Christians who happened to be British.”⁵⁷⁰ Religious allegiance superseded nationality, even on the National Day of Prayer. Indeed, this distinction was important for depicting Britain’s cause as one shared by its Allies. If Nazism was anti-religious, then religion was anti-Nazi. National Day of Prayer services were broadcast from Britain around the world; American churches and broadcasters made plans to have shared prayer days and special addresses from Temple directed to the overseas audience. The BBC and the major denominations were committed to presenting religion as a supranational force, and feared the consequences of only putting religion in the service of nation. Within the BBC, clergymen discussed how “we are under bond to pray for our enemies,” and prayers for victory could have disastrous implication for the public’s faith in God later after the war or in the event of a military defeat.⁵⁷¹ It was a far less bellicose and jingoistic rhetoric than that employed in the days of prayer in the First World War, when clergymen believed the message of Christianity had been cheapened by being put solely in the service of imperial ambitions or in national conflict.⁵⁷²

Williamson has observed that the National Days of Prayer were underpinned by a belief in the efficacy and strength of corporate prayer, and the notion that communal prayers would be stronger than individual ones.⁵⁷³ Private prayer was undoubtedly an important ritual, but prayers offered in unison or at the same time of day were considered to be more powerful; a chorus of voices raised in unison louder than a single speaker. Perhaps there is something democratic in this belief, that the will of many individuals

⁵⁶⁸ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 250.

⁵⁶⁹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, Chapter 8.

⁵⁷⁰ *The Times*, May 27, 1940.

⁵⁷¹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Religious Broadcasting Policy,” February 1943.

⁵⁷² Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, Chapter 8.

⁵⁷³ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” 30.

focusing on a common purpose could summon change. It pointed to the perceived power of a People's faith that operated in unison and for the good of all, irrespective of status or creed. Every voice was welcomed in these supplicant prayers. As mentioned above, *Picture Post* took great efforts to stress the universality of prayer as a response to war and its place as an appropriate wartime behaviour, a practice undertaken by all Allied nations, by men and women, and by people of belonging to diverse ethnic groups and different faiths.⁵⁷⁴ However, national corporate prayers could also take on sinister, authoritarian characteristics, with cryptofascist dialogue that sacrificed the individual to celebrate mental and spiritual conformity, as will be seen in the case of the group which advocated for the Big Ben Silent Minute. Some fringe groups were committed to the belief that the Christian God was one who did indeed take sides, and his cause could only ever be aligned with the British.⁵⁷⁵

The BBC was home to a number of regular prayer initiatives aside from *Lift Up Your Hearts*, including a Saturday Evening prayers programme, a weekday evening devotional series, and the Big Ben Silent Minute. The BBC broadcast the chiming of Big Ben at 9 o'clock each evening before the news. A small group of influential citizens lobbied for the bells to not only stand as a notification of the time, but also as a mark of remembrance for the sacrifice of soldiers overseas. It became a moment to pray for the safety of the nation and loved ones far afield before the BBC's nightly newscast. The Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society turned Big Ben into the nation's church bell, and the ringing of the bells into a clarion call to prayer or meditative silence. The members of this movement considered it a fitting appropriation, since the bell chimes a part of a hymn with lyrics derived from Psalm 37:23-24: "All through this hour/Lord be my guide/And

⁵⁷⁴ "In London they still pray for peace... but they are preparing for the worst," *Picture Post*, September 16, 1939, p.7; "Three girls go to church to pray for their husbands," *Picture Post*, June 24, 1944, p.24; "Britain's Moslems Get a Handsome New Mosque," *Picture Post*, September 25, 1943, p.17; "So that's what a Baha'i feast looks like," *Picture Post*, April 15, 1944, p.14-15.

⁵⁷⁵ See Paul Addison, "Destiny, Religion and Providence: The Religion of Winston Churchill," p. 245.

by Thy power/No foot shall slide.”⁵⁷⁶ The Big Ben Silent Minute consisted of a minute of silence devoted to prayer and contemplation during the chiming of the bells of Big Ben. In this manner, silence could serve as a unifying respite from the noise of war. The organizers had great faith in the power of silence to unite the nation in a moment of spiritual contemplation. As a pamphlet issued by the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society in 1942 asserted,

The power of silence is very real... When a man turns to his Creator in thought and prayer, it is as if a shutter in the window of his mind were opened to let the sunlight in. If we unite at the same time in opening the windows of our minds, a blaze of illumination will radiate its beneficent influence far and wide.⁵⁷⁷

It was to be a transcendent moment of pause, wherein BBC listeners could think of family members overseas, lives sacrificed, and pray for safety and deliverance.

From the early days of the Blitz in 1940, there were numerous calls from different parties and individuals for the BBC to provide additional space in their schedule for national prayer. As Jane Wyndham-Lewis, wife of J.B. Priestley, explained in a letter to Director-General F.W. Ogilvie, the gravity of the crisis was such that prayer should not only be the concern of the churches, “it was the burden of Christian Britain, and therefore everyone should be given the encouragement to pray when they were – in a real way – gathered together in this manner for the wireless news.”⁵⁷⁸ Such concerns certainly provided some of the impetus for the establishment of *Lift Up Your Hearts!* and the unobtrusive, populist BBC Religion. But the Silent Minute operated in a rather different way, as it was more symbolic than instructive, a spiritual act instead of a moment for religious teaching. The BBC received a number of letters from individuals calling for a

⁵⁷⁶ Ben Weinreb, Christopher Hibbert, Julia Keay and John Keay, *The London Encyclopaedia*, Revised 3rd ed., (London: Macmillan, 2008), 68. These lyrics have been posted on the wall of the clock room in St. Stephen’s tower since its construction.

⁵⁷⁷ Lambeth Palace Library, W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, “A Lighthouse Set on an Island Rock: being the substance of an address given at the Oddfellows Hall, Worthing, on Sunday, September 13th, 1942, by W. Tudor Pole.”

⁵⁷⁸ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 159.

silent minute to be broadcast each evening, and the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society capitalised on this demand.

The Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society saw prayer as a tool for securing victory for Britain. Pamphlets and speeches issued by the society were rife with a bold providentialism and zealous crusading rhetoric. The movement, spearheaded by West End banker and spiritualist Wellesley Tudor-Pole began mid-1940 with a letter-writing campaign to the BBC calling for the establishment of a silent minute or “dedicated moment” in their daily schedule.⁵⁷⁹ The campaign found support in many establishment figures, including the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, the Prime Minister, and several Members of Parliament.⁵⁸⁰ They found supporters among high and low churchmen, as well as Jewish rabbis. BBC Governors, though in favour of the silent minute, displayed considerable reluctance on the matter, as they objected to the elements of “mesmerism” in the providential language of Tudor-Pole’s proposal. Indeed, as Kenneth Wolfe has observed, some of Tudor-Pole’s writings had a rather totalitarian tone.⁵⁸¹ As one pamphlet boasted, through a unified moment of national prayer, “We ... can become a brotherhood pledged to fight together to the end for the great cause we have in common, a Crusade to destroy tyranny and to establish worldwide freedom, truth and justice.”⁵⁸² In another passage, Tudor-Pole emphasized that the individual must be subsumed within the soul of the almighty, providentially anointed nation-state,

What is rarely recognized is that the soul of a nation, as an entity in its own right, cannot become articulate and a power for good until the individuals who make up the nation reach a measure of unity and harmony of purpose among themselves. It is only then that the nation can become an instrument for fulfilling divine destiny among all peoples.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 159; Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.29.

⁵⁸⁰ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, Volume 57, f.19.

⁵⁸¹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 168.

⁵⁸² Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.5, “Lighthouse on a Rock.”

⁵⁸³ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.5, “Lighthouse on a Rock.”

Furthermore, while Judeo-Christian themes are certainly present in some of their literature, at times the group seems to adhere to an anonymous deism that would be unfamiliar to worshippers of the Abrahamic God, calling on the “inexhaustible motive power that spins the universe” or encouraging people to pray to “The Infinite.”⁵⁸⁴

Tudor-Pole wanted a nation bowed in one spirit and one act, a rather different approach than the democratic individualism embodied in the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series. Even though the leaders of the Big Ben Movement used an exclusionary nationalistic rhetoric that preached the superiority of Britain through its spiritual prowess, within Britain they sought to create an interfaith movement that would encourage spiritual moments to unite people regardless of class or creed. It was this facet of the movement that was the most appealing to the RBD, leading them to conclude that despite some of their unpalatable crusading rhetoric, they were ultimately “a force for good.”⁵⁸⁵ Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and Jewish leaders issued independent pamphlets containing their own advice on how best to keep the Silent Minute, along with relevant scripture passages that might serve as helpful meditations.⁵⁸⁶ Protestant literature instructed that the best way to keep the silent minute was through a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, or to reflect on the words of the forty-sixth Psalm, “Be Still and Know That I am God.”⁵⁸⁷ The pamphlet “Meditations for Jewish Men and Women” assembled by Rabbi J. Hertz admirably proclaimed that “Silence, unlike language, is universal; and Jews join with their fellow-men in sending forth silent prayers for the welfare of mankind.”⁵⁸⁸ He encouraged readers to take the example of Hannah in 1 Samuel 19:13, “she spoke in her heart, no sound could be heard.”

⁵⁸⁴ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.21, Big Ben Silent Minute Movement.

⁵⁸⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 167.

⁵⁸⁶ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.20, Letter from W. J Noble, President of the Conference of the Methodist Church to Dr. Temple, 20 Feb, 1943.

⁵⁸⁷ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.22-23, Big Ben Silent Minute Movement.

⁵⁸⁸ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, f.46, “Meditations for Jewish Men and Women.”

Howard Marshall, a well-known radio announcer and presenter, inaugurated the Big Ben Silent Minute in November 1940.⁵⁸⁹ Pamphlets explained that nine o'clock was meant to be "One minute spent with God." This silent minute was not part of the Forces or Overseas transmissions, as it was "not practicable" to share the minute across time zones.⁵⁹⁰ The Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society often made explicit reference to *The Angelus*, a painting by Jean-François Millet that depicted two peasants working with in the fields with their heads bowed in prayer. In this mythologised pre-industrial past, the church bells rang three times a day to call believers to prayer wherever they stood.⁵⁹¹ In this curious juxtaposition of medieval and modern, the Silent Minute Observance Society tried to establish the sounding of the bells of Big Ben at the start of the news broadcast as "a similar summons to quiet reflection and communion with God" as the village church bell.⁵⁹² The society provided suggestions for intercessory prayers that could be offered during the chiming of the bells. They encouraged reflection during the chimes on the words: "O God, we lift up to Thee a world in tribulation: Have mercy upon us. May Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven."⁵⁹³ On each of the nine strokes of the bell, they were encouraged to pray for:

The King and all in authority, All those serving in the Forces, Our allies and those in occupied countries, All members of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets, All those engaged in civil defence, All workers in the public services, industry and agriculture, All who are sorrowful, anxious and bereaved, The sick, the wounded and the dying, The fallen – may they rest in peace.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁸⁹ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, "Letter to Sir Cecil Graves, KCMG from Major-General L.L.Hoare, Chairman of The Big Ben Council," 29th January 1943.

⁵⁹⁰ BBC WAC, R6/41/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1944.

⁵⁹¹ *Nine O'Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 3.

⁵⁹² *Nine O'Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 3.

⁵⁹³ *Nine O'Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 6.

⁵⁹⁴ *Nine O'Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 6.

The Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society taught that prayer was above all intercession, a hope for divine intervention and salvation. But it also tried to emphasise that prayer was not a one-way interaction. It encouraged those who used the silent minute for prayer to “not just do all the talking,” and to consider prayer a moment of “adoration, penitence, thanksgiving as well as intercession.”⁵⁹⁵ At its most basic level, the Silent Minute Observance Society encouraged Britons to believe “No matter what your surroundings are, God is near you.”⁵⁹⁶ Borrowing from Alfred, Lord Tennyson, they encouraged believers to consider: “Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”⁵⁹⁷ The practice of turning part of a government building and national symbol into a call to prayer speaks to a kind of decentred holiness, one that could emerge anywhere and everywhere based on a shared temporal experience of prayer. At the same time, the practice created a new centre for shared spiritual practice on the BBC, and a synchronicity that could only be achieved on a national scale through the medium of radio.

However, the BBC quickly tired of the meddlesome impulses of the movement’s leadership, and what administrators perceived as an obtrusive attack on the Corporation’s guarded autonomy.⁵⁹⁸ In 1943, they ignored requests from the new Chairman of the Silent Minute Observance Society, L.L. Hoare, to give talks on the silent minute or publish further information about how best to keep the minute in the *Radio Times*.⁵⁹⁹ Some internal BBC memos even alleged that some of the Silent Minute’s support had been fabricated in their published materials.⁶⁰⁰ Despite the unpalatable politics of the movement’s leadership, the silent minute received genuine popular support. Editorials and letters in *The Times* praised its place in the BBC’s schedule. But most commonly,

⁵⁹⁵ *Nine O’Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 14.

⁵⁹⁶ *Nine O’Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 14.

⁵⁹⁷ *Nine O’Clock: The Contribution of the Anglican Church to the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance*, (London: SPCK, 1943), 14.

⁵⁹⁸ BBC WAC, R41/16, “Big Ben Movement,” January 1943.

⁵⁹⁹ Lambeth Palace Library, Wm. Temple Papers, volume 57, Letter from Hoare to Temple, 7 February 1943.

⁶⁰⁰ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 163.

listeners seemed to appreciate the way that the Big Ben chimes became a shared spiritual experience across the country. Ethel Snowden wrote in 1943 that the silent minute “helped unnumbered hosts towards practical and physical ends given that sense of holy communion which ennobles conflict and enriches peace,” while meditating on the sacrifices of the Armed Forces created a “bond between our men and women abroad and ourselves at home.”⁶⁰¹ Christopher Roffern of Rochester wrote on 5 June 1941, “To the millions who observe the silent minute when the Big Ben strikes every evening at 9 o’ clock,” comfort ought to be taken in the fact that an orb surmounted by a cross was located at the very top of the St Stephen’s Tower at the Palace of Westminster, identical to the one at the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral, that other landmark of propitious fortune and divine favour.⁶⁰²

The precise composition of these “millions” of adherents to the silent minute is difficult to gauge, and it is impossible to measure popular support according to favourable mentions in *The Times*, a known ally to the Silent Minute movement. Despite the distribution of publicity materials concerning proper conduct during the silent minute in established religious communities, it was difficult to advertise the purpose of the minute of silence to those people who believed without belonging, agnostics, or atheists. When Tudor-Pole petitioned for support of the BBC in the *Radio Times* and received little aid, he took his concerns to William Temple in 1943. The Archbishop was willing to support the cause and wrote several letters on his behalf. But it seems that the BBC, while fundamentally sympathetic to the broader aims of the movement, was unwilling to accommodate what they perceived as a pattern of intrusion by the leadership of the Big Ben Movement. Furthermore, as the war progressed and the imminent threat of death and danger subsided with end of the German aerial bombing campaign, there was less impetus behind the perceived need for a dedicated minute. The chimes of Big Ben were dropped

⁶⁰¹ “The Big Ben Minute, To the Editor of The Times,” *The Times*, 4 March 1944, p.5.

⁶⁰² “Big Ben, To the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, 7 June 1941, 5.

from the Forces programme in 1944, and the bells in the Home programme became more generally recognised as a time signal by 1945.

IV. Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to account for two ways that Christianity was invoked and applied in religious broadcasting during the war; one socially reform minded, and the other focused on fostering national and supranational allegiance. Both of these narratives became a part of BBC Religion, and it could be said that they were elemental in constructing and reifying the spiritual consensus of wartime. This chapter has attempted to advance several claims. First, that BBC Religion, as the practical culmination of the Religious Broadcasting Department, prized inclusivity, and offered prayer programmes that spoke to the lived experience of the war, encouraging defiance though the practice of faith. Secondly, the discursive shifts within the *Lift Up Your Hearts* programme and the contest between different material Christianities showcases the great complexity of religious metanarratives during the Second World War. Christianity, as represented on the BBC, was subject to clear discursive shifts both as the circumstances and contexts of the war changed. Significantly, the RBD was ahead of the rest of the BBC in leading political conversations about the shape of post-war reconstruction, and the social Christianity purported by the department found regular expression in the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series. Its material Christianity was innovative and forward thinking, attacking institutions that upheld social inequality. Ecumenical Christianity could be used by the state to facilitate national consensus, but the state could potentially be changed and reformed by religious teachings. Lastly, this chapter has shown that prayer was a significant mechanism for the expression of national hopes as well as personal devotion and comfort during the war.

Williamson calls the National Days of Prayer civil religious occasions. He suggests that they were a combination of formal Christianity, a generic Christianity approved by state, and the folk Christianity that was part of everyday life “meshed into a

civil religion which ‘sacralised’ the particular purposes of the nation.”⁶⁰³ However, the interaction between these types of Christianity – folk, formal and generic – was not solely the property of the National Day of Prayer. These kinds of Christianity also entwined within BBC Religion, which was not the property of the state alone, and perhaps cannot be defined solely as a civil religion. After all, the BBC’s chief allegiance was ultimately to the public, a loyalty apparent in reams of internal documents fixated on the impact and reception of programmes documented by the Listener Research Department. Stephen Brooke has argued that Mass Observation operated as both part of the state and as part of the “People’s war,” as it worked to create Home Intelligence reports for use in government, and tried to record the variety of experiences from the perspective of the people.⁶⁰⁴ Perhaps the same can be said of BBC Religion, which at times worked as an organ of the state, and at other times worked actively to provide meaningful substance for spiritual contemplation and experience for the people it served.

⁶⁰³ Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” 355.

⁶⁰⁴ Stephen Brooke, “Mass Observation: A Historical Introduction,” Mass Observation Online.

Chapter 3

God, Good and Evil: C.S. Lewis's Broadcast Talks and the Practice of BBC Religion

*“There’s been a great deal of soft soap talked about God for the last hundred years. That’s not what I’m offering. You can cut all that out.”*⁶⁰⁵

While C.S. Lewis (1898 – 1963) is best remembered for his *Chronicles of Narnia*, a beloved series of children’s fantasy stories that hews to Judeo-Christian archetypes, he first found popular acclaim during the Second World War as a Christian apologist. A professor of Modern Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford, academic colleagues marked his decision to spend time interpreting Christian theology for a general audience as a strange one. But Lewis quickly found a large audience for his broadcast talks and published works. These collected works set out the basic premise of Christianity as Lewis understood it, and offered this simplified theology as a meaningful way to make sense of an increasingly chaotic and disordered universe. Lewis’s success in relaying Christian stories and teachings both within and outside of Christian church communities has made him the object of rapturous praise, particularly from evangelical thinkers and writers. The histories and accounts of the life and works of C.S. Lewis have become the substance of a hagiographical canon, much of which has been lovingly curated by his chief acolyte and former personal secretary, Walter Hooper. Hooper has taken an active hand in both the preservation and cultivation of Lewis’s memory, shaping the narrative of life events in biographies, and collecting and controlling access to Lewis’s papers and correspondence at the Wade Centre at Wheaton College, Illinois. His works have been particularly favoured by some fundamentalist Christian writers, and by evangelicals who have used portions of Lewis’s works to defend Christianity against atheist criticism.⁶⁰⁶ Many

⁶⁰⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), 27.

⁶⁰⁶ Michael White, *C.S. Lewis: A Life* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004), 222. Some evangelical Christian groups have reinvented Lewis in their cultural memory by omitting all references to alcohol and tobacco in republished versions Lewis’ works. Hooper, Lewis’ first biographer and a fundamentalist Roman Catholic, has fashioned a cult of sainthood around Lewis

biographies and essays about Lewis ape Hooper's reverential tones, offering a vision of Lewis as a modern-day apostle, one who produced masterful theological treatises thanks to his own ingenuity combined with divine inspiration. Robert MacSwain, editor of a recent collection of essays on Lewis's theology and literary works, has observed that "evaluations and interpretations of his life and work do not simply fall within the 'enthusiastic evangelical' and 'apathetic academic' options [...], but go far beyond them in both directions."⁶⁰⁷ While C.S. Lewis has been exhaustively canonised by biographers and some theologians, his works have not been sufficiently situated within their broader historical context and interrogated for their contemporary cultural significance. One of the aims of this chapter is to examine how the wartime context and the mandates of the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department shaped Lewis's popular apologetics. These broadcast talks on Christian belief provide an opportunity to examine an iteration of BBC Religion in practice. Lewis's talks were ecumenical, colloquial in tone and focused on private practice rather than institutional belonging. Theologically, Lewis inherited from neo-orthodox theologians rather than the interwar liberalism endorsed by William Temple. His talks sought commonality through the firm delineation of lines of inclusion and exclusion, emphasized man's sinfulness and eventual redemption, and stressed the divinity of a historical Christ. The general aim of the work was to establish the core principles on which Christians across all denominations could find agreement. This chapter examines the metaphors, language and theological musings in Lewis's broadcast talks to gain an understanding of how Christian beliefs were constructed and discussed on the BBC in wartime, and in particular how they depicted the character and nature of the God of Christian theology, and how they wrestled with questions about the meaning of life, the nature of the universe, and the existence of good and evil.

which even advocates a belief in his perpetual virginity, despite his four year marriage to Joy Gresham. Hooper, who knew Lewis during his lifetime, intervened after his death to prevent Lewis's brother from destroying private letters and some draft manuscripts, violating instructions that had been set out in Lewis's will.

⁶⁰⁷ Robert MacSwain, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

I. The Development of Lewis's *Broadcast Talks*: BBC Religion in Practice

The relationship between C.S. Lewis and the BBC has been well documented by Justin Phillips. Phillips, an experienced broadcaster writing at the end of a long career at the BBC, describes how “no broadcaster has, to the best of my knowledge, attempted to place Lewis firmly within the historical context of wartime religious broadcasting.”⁶⁰⁸ The same can be said of religious, cultural and social historians. While Phillips provides helpful details about the wartime circumstances at Broadcasting House and Lewis's relationship with Eric Fenn, the Assistant Director of Religious Broadcasting and the chief producer of religious talks, Phillips' work tends towards the anecdotal, providing more of a chronological diary of the development of Lewis's broadcasting career that often relies on generalisations. While he mentions BBC Religion, he does not delineate precisely what this concept meant or included during the war years.⁶⁰⁹ Ultimately, Phillips's work participates in the hagiography surrounding Lewis' life and works.⁶¹⁰ While he describes the wartime context, he depicts Welch, Fenn and Lewis as great men producing works of enduring significance through their ingenuity and personality, and neglects to examine the ways that Lewis's broadcast talks fit into the cultural history of the war, or the ways that these broadcasts contributed to contemporary narrative constructions of God, good and evil.

C.S. Lewis's broadcast talks were initiated and conceived by the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department. Throughout the war, the RBD had a lively roster of religious talks, including *Three Men and a Parson*, *The Christian looks at the World*, *The Church and World Order*, *Religions in Action* and *Great Religions of the World*. Some episodes of general talk programmes produced outside the RBD regularly grappled with religious themes, including *Democracy Marches*, which broadcast an episode called “Aspects of

⁶⁰⁸ Phillips, *C.S. Lewis at the BBC: Messages of Hope in the Darkness of War* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), xii.

⁶⁰⁹ Phillips, *C.S. Lewis at the BBC*, 20.

⁶¹⁰ For example, Phillips attributes Lewis's inspiration for the Screwtape Letters to Holy Communion. *C.S. Lewis at the BBC*, 63.

Church Life in Wartime,” *Inside Nazi Europe*, which explored aspects of religious persecution in occupied territory, and *Under Nazi Rule* which discussed the Nazi persecution of German Protestant churches.⁶¹¹ Because of the expanded number of broadcasting hours assigned to religious programmes during the war, religious broadcasting expanded outside of the Reithian Sunday to fill time slots throughout the week, as has been described in Chapter 1. Aside from the prayer and worship programmes already discussed, Welch and the RBD took care to create a substantial roster of talks programmes that could tackle the important issues of the day, and deal with the questions posed by those listeners facing a crisis of faith, or those seeking a means to make sense of the chaos.⁶¹² Fenn and Welch continually searched for new contributors to help them keep up with the required broadcasting output, especially speakers able to adapt quickly to their brand of BBC Religion by speaking in inviting tones in a colloquial style to a multi-denominational audience.

Lewis came to the RBD’s attention after Welch read his 1940 book of Christian apologetics, *The Problem of Pain*. Lewis had some experience speaking on spiritual matters to a general audience after issuing a series of talks to RAF servicemen in 1940.⁶¹³ *The Problem of Pain* attempted to come to grips with what Lewis considered to be the major philosophical challenges to the Christian faith, attempting to answer why evil could exist in a world created by a good and benevolent, all-powerful God. A determined and outspoken atheist until his conversion to Christianity in the mid-1930s, he preferred to see the Christian religion in more rational rather than spiritual terms. He devoted himself to arguing for the legitimacy and superiority of Christianity as a philosophy, though such an approach was naturally fraught with difficulty whenever matters of faith would have to be invoked or explained. To Lewis, atheism was a creed that could largely be defeated by logic, a combative stance which led to his presentation of a version of Christianity that

⁶¹¹ BBC WAC, Scripts Index: Religious Talks. Democracy Marches and Under Nazi rule were produced in conjunction with the MOI.

⁶¹² Phillips, *C.S. Lewis at the BBC*, 79.

⁶¹³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (London: HarperCollins, 2001), xix; A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1990), 310.

overlooked or maligned the spiritual and social character of the religion. Lewis's apologetic works had a chiefly individual focus, issuing from his contemplation of Christian theology and philosophy. *The Problem of Pain* arose out of his own confrontations with the parts of Christian theology he felt had not been sufficiently or adequately explained, particularly the "problem of evil." Writing during the First World War, a younger Lewis wrote that "a just God that cares for earthly pain" was simply a "dream" or an "ancient hope."⁶¹⁴ Over the following two decades, Lewis found his own answers to this question, of how a benevolent and omnipotent God could preside over a world torn apart by suffering, and decided to share them with a non-academic audience. In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis argues that free will must exist in order for God's creations to choose to love and worship him, and that evil is a perversion of human choice, not an intended state of being envisaged and created by the God of Christian theology.⁶¹⁵ He also invoked the words of Thomas Aquinas from his *Summa Theologica* in support of his argument: "Nothing which implies contradiction falls under the omnipotence of God."⁶¹⁶ Unlike Aquinas, Lewis offered no *a posteriori* proofs of divine existence, the broadcast largely addressed to an audience that accepted the basic premises of Theism.

James Welch, impressed by the answers Lewis offered to ancient theological dilemmas and the clarity of his prose, wrote an unsolicited letter inviting him to the microphone. He thanked Lewis for the help the book provided him on a personal level, and tried to convince him to participate in radio broadcasting. He wrote to Lewis,

The microphone is a limiting, and rather irritating, instrument, but the quality of thinking and depth of conviction which I find in your book ought surely to be

⁶¹⁴ Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 293.

⁶¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (London: HarperCollins, 2001), Ch 2 "Divine Omnipotence."

⁶¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I Q XXV, Art 4; Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 16.

shared with a great many people; and for any talk we can be sure of a fairly intelligent audience of more than a million.⁶¹⁷

He proposed that the series of talks be entitled “The Christian Faith As I See It – by a Layman,” and asked that it offer “a positive restatement of Christian doctrine in lay language.”⁶¹⁸ That Welch wanted a presentation of doctrine in familiar, colloquial language fit with the tone of the BBC’s religious broadcasting output, and the style of BBC Religion already described. Welch wanted to invite a greater number of lay speakers to the microphone out of a justified fear that many clerical speakers alienated their audiences, much in the same way that large swaths of the Christian population found church sermons irrelevant and unappealing.⁶¹⁹ Welch commissioned the first series of talks in June 1941, aired in August of the same year with the title: “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe?” Thanks to an enthusiastic reception by the listening public, a second series was commissioned to follow in January and February of 1942 called “What Christians Believe,” a third series on “Christian Behaviour” in November 1942, a fourth called “Beyond Personality” in 1943, and periodic question and answer sessions to address the flood of audience responses posted to the BBC.⁶²⁰ Though recordings of the first series did not survive, subsequent series were given repeat airings on both the Home and Forces services.⁶²¹ Each series consisted of between five and eight talks depending on Lewis’s availability, typically aired during the Wednesday evening or Sunday afternoon religious talk slots in the BBC’s wartime schedule.

Lewis accepted the invitation to the microphone partly because it offered an opportunity to contribute to the war effort, but also out of a desire to offer a philosophical defence of Christianity against its critics. Lewis, who served as an officer in the British

⁶¹⁷ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Letter from Welch to Lewis, 7 February 1941.

⁶¹⁸ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Letter from Welch to Lewis, 7 February 1941. .

⁶¹⁹ BBC WAC, Listener Research, LR/79; Mass Observation, *Puzzled People*, 1946.

⁶²⁰ Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 303-312.

⁶²¹ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Internal BBC Memo, 1943.

Army during the First World War, had been excluded from military service in 1939, but he possessed a strong desire to contribute in some way. He considered his invitation from the BBC a kind of patriotic service that he could perform, since he was no longer physically fit for service in the armed forces.⁶²² The talks Lewis initially proposed were much more of a philosophical defence against pure materialism, one that tried to reconcile scientific law with what he called a “moral law.”⁶²³ These talks would be called “Inside Information,” told from the perspective of a Christian in a battle between religious and irreligious perspectives. Though Fenn agreed with Lewis’ proposals, BBC Controllers objected to this tone and title, which they found “unseemly.”⁶²⁴ Nichols and Maconachie believed the BBC’s wartime mandate was to present a mainstream Christian faith that all could agree with, not to engage in combative debate.⁶²⁵ Instead, they asked for a talks series called “Right and Wrong,” one that could engage with issues of morality, good and evil in a way that would apply to the war with Germany, not ideological conflicts within Britain. The BBC Controllers did not want to bring anything to air that would prompt listeners to question the Christian faith, or the Christian arguments for the morality of the Allied cause.⁶²⁶ Lewis’s broadcast talks were well received within the BBC; RBD producers were quick to offer praise and thanks to Lewis for his efforts.⁶²⁷ For his part, Lewis refused to accept payment for his work, directing his fee to be paid to charities of his choosing instead.⁶²⁸

Lewis’s series provides an example of the ecumenical, colloquial and materialist style of BBC Religion in practice. Welch wanted a broad statement of Christian principles, a universally accessible Christianity that could appeal to churchgoers and non-

⁶²² Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 318.

⁶²³ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Letter from Fenn to Lewis, 5 June 1941.

⁶²⁴ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, ADPP to DRB and DPP, 15 July 1941.

⁶²⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, (London: SCM Press, 1984), 200.

⁶²⁶ Wolfe, *Churches and the BBC*, 201.

⁶²⁷ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, DRB to Lewis, 7 August 1941.

⁶²⁸ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Lewis to Fenn, Feb 9, 1942.

churchgoers alike. He set out his colloquial approach in his first letter to Lewis, asking him to produce a series of talks in “lay language.” Lewis readily accepted the challenge, but occasionally expressed his frustration at how the use of such language necessarily restricted the range of words he could marshal to put thought into argument. As a career academic, he found the act of expressing complex meaning in simple prose with mundane metaphors jarring and unfamiliar. In 1943, he wrote to Fenn, “this damned colloquial style is so intrinsically honest, concealment is impossible.”⁶²⁹ When he submitted his first series of talks for revision by Fenn, he asked, “Will this do? I find the more colloquial you are in the actual talks the harder it is to make a close précis.”⁶³⁰ By Fenn’s estimation, Lewis quickly found his footing in this new style of communication. In December of 1941, Fenn responded to the drafts of the last broadcasts in the first series with great enthusiasm, suggesting he had not seen anything to match their quality. He gushed, “There is a clarity and inexorableness about them, which positively made me gasp!”⁶³¹ When Geoffrey Bles offered to publish the talks, Lewis tried to preserve this colloquial tone to give the effect of reading a radio address. In the preface to *Mere Christianity*, he described his belief, imparted by his RBD producers that, “a talk on the radio should, I think, be as like a real talk as possible and should not sound like an essay being read aloud.” In the talks he tried to use all the colloquialisms and contractions he would ordinarily use in conversation, and preserved these contractions and expressions in the first printed version of *Mere Christianity* published as *Broadcast Talks* in 1942.⁶³²

Naturally, the colloquialisms of an Oxbridge academic would differ sharply from those used by the “ordinary listener” sought by the BBC and the RBD. But Lewis considered himself rather an expert on the mentalities and opinions of the working and lower middle classes, despite his privileged upper middle class upbringing. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, he wrote of how, in his estimation, through his

⁶²⁹ Letter to Eric Fenn, December 31, 1943. *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931-1949*, ed. Walter Hooper. (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 598.

⁶³⁰ *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 484.

⁶³¹ *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 499.

⁶³² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, vii.

experience as a soldier in the First World War living and fighting in trenches with men from other parts of Empire and other classes within Britain, he learned about their character and that they were worthy of his respect. “I came to know and pity and reverence the ordinary man,” he wrote, particularly a Sergeant Ayres, killed by the same shell that only wounded him. Lewis described himself as an “ineffectual officer” constantly reliant on instructions provided by Ayers, a man he began to see as a father.⁶³³ Though Lewis certainly fit Welch’s criteria as a layman, and held a genuine affection for the men he served with in combat, he saw himself as separate from “ordinary” men. His description of working and lower middle class men is laden with condescension and a sense of his own superiority. But Lewis’s participation in public broadcasting also contributed to feelings of alienation from men he to be part of his own social class. He did not fit with his academic peers, who were extremely critical of his populist works. R. H. Lightfoot, a chaplain of New College, wrote to a young colleague of Lewis’s, “His defection to the area of theology is a sad loss for the English Faculty. I wish it could be said to be a gain to the Faculty of Theology.”⁶³⁴ Lewis’s colleagues at Magdalen and even close friends like J.R.R. Tolkien did not celebrate his wartime status as “Everyman’s Theologian”⁶³⁵ or his successes as a broadcaster. Lewis aped the vernacular of this “ordinary” man to great popular success, alienating those who possessed the same class identity that he did.

The ecumenical spirit pervaded all religious broadcasting during the war, and Lewis followed this particular policy directive with great enthusiasm. Lewis’s generic Christianity was not solely British. He made a concerted effort to unite Christians across national boundaries, as those Christians could all be relied upon to oppose Nazism as the ultimate embodiment of evil. He took up the challenge to create a presentation of the basic tenets of the Christian faith that would appeal to all denominations by sending drafts of his scripts to representatives of each of the major denominations in Britain. He asked a

⁶³³ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 227.

⁶³⁴ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 181.

⁶³⁵ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 181.

Methodist, an Anglican, a Presbyterian and a Roman Catholic to vet the scripts before he brought them to the BBC.⁶³⁶ He feared that his personal connection to the Church of England would lead him to present a kind of general Christianity that was largely Anglican or Protestant. When he described the steps he had taken to include secure the approval of theologians from different denominations, he expressed relief that whatever flaws the talks may contain, he could have confidence that they would at least be ecumenical.⁶³⁷ His reviewers offered favourable comments, each expressing their agreement with the broad principles conveyed, but offering some minor suggestions that did not compromise the central arguments of the talks.⁶³⁸ Lewis stated that his goal was to present a “common, or central, or ‘mere’ Christianity.”⁶³⁹ To Lewis, the matters that caused division between denominations had little practical resonance to believers. He believed those matters should strictly concern theologians, and that the Christian Church should eventually be reunited as a singular whole.⁶⁴⁰ The broadcast talks represented those elements of Catholic theology shared by Protestants, while Lewis completely and intentionally marginalised the Virgin Mary from his talks to prevent divisions.⁶⁴¹ Certainly, Lewis can be accused of overlooking significant theological divides and matters of controversy, taking the listener’s acquiescence for granted while whizzing past complex issues with folksy metaphors or false analogies. For example, Lewis gave very little attention to the matter of the incarnation, telling listeners “If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab.”⁶⁴² Biographer A.N. Wilson calls this “bad theology” and a bad metaphor, as “Man could not redeem the slugs even if the slugs were in need of redemption.”⁶⁴³ When Lewis described the doctrine of

⁶³⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xi.

⁶³⁷ *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 496.

⁶³⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xi.

⁶³⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xi.

⁶⁴⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xi. Lewis used the metaphor of the Christian church as a house with many rooms, each room signifying a different denomination. A person could choose whichever room they wished after they had entered, but it was entering the house that was most important.

⁶⁴¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. x.

⁶⁴² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 152.

⁶⁴³ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 181.

salvation, he bypassed any detailed description, urging the audience to accept his conclusions at face value, as follows:

We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed. Any theories we build up as to how Christ's death did all this are, in my view, quite secondary.⁶⁴⁴

Lewis did not address the ways that salvation as a concept has been alternatively invoked and understood by different denominations at different times. He placed his emphasis on the gospel stories and Pauline epistles, invoking and constructing a sense of historical continuity between his mere Christianity and the one practiced in the first century, CE. The danger in such an approach was presenting a homogenous version of Christianity that alienated fringe, dissenting or marginalised interpretations of scripture and custom, or even liberal theological tenets quite different than Lewis's neo-orthodox ones.

While *Lift Up Your Hearts* programmes celebrated a fully inclusive Christianity, Lewis tried to establish very clearly who could or could not be called a Christian, and how the term ought to be applied. To Lewis, calling Jesus a great moral teacher but failing to acknowledge his divinity was anathematic. In his estimation, if a man claimed to be the Son of God, he had to be thought of as just that, or else as a complete lunatic.⁶⁴⁵ Such a strong assertion flew in the face of rival Christian teachings, and was a direct response to the pronouncements of liberal Congregationalist CJ Cadoux.⁶⁴⁶ Lewis allowed no grey area between the two, even though some Christians possessed differing views on the divinity of Christ.⁶⁴⁷ According to Mass Observation, while 95% of their polled respondents asked about religious belief were deists of some kind, 61% believed in the divinity of Christ, with a further 14% expressing uncertainty on this score.⁶⁴⁸ Some liberal theologians actively de-emphasised the divinity of Christ, emphasising instead the

⁶⁴⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55-56.

⁶⁴⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 53.

⁶⁴⁶ Giles Watson, "Cultural Expressions of Christian Doctrine in Britain, 1937-1949," *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 21 & 22 (June and December 1996), 68.

⁶⁴⁷ Mass Observation, *Puzzled People*, 42.

⁶⁴⁸ M. Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, Chapter 1.

ways that his teachings could be applied to the betterment and equitable reformation of contemporary society. Depicting and defining certain religious beliefs as right or wrong was not always in the interests of the Ministry of Information, who, alongside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, used religion as a diplomatic tool to foster alliance and allegiance. Typically such diplomatic overtures were directed towards Catholic or Orthodox Christian communities by invoking shared Judeo-Christian heritage and values writ large, but the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information did try to build affinity with Muslims in the Mediterranean and Middle East by issuing tracts and pamphlets that depicted Nazism as an unyielding force that universally discriminated against religious peoples of all faiths to create a sense of commonality between wartime allies.⁶⁴⁹ Indeed, Lewis was careful not to be completely dismissive of other faiths. In his broadcast on “Rival Conceptions of God,” Lewis noted,

If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are wrong all the way through. If you are an atheist you do not have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake, even the queerest ones [sic], contain at least some hint of the truth.⁶⁵⁰

Lewis told listeners that Christianity fit with the “majority” of people who believed in gods of a God, and the God he venerated was the same one shared by all Jews, Christians and Muslims. But he repeatedly dismissed atheism, strictly regarding it as a viewpoint that was “too simple,” one that only offered its adherents only meaninglessness.⁶⁵¹ Lewis had evangelical intentions and atheist targets in mind. “The truth” Lewis discussed in his broadcasts was notably singular; he did not leave room for alternative interpretations or conceptions. He did not conceive of religions as alternative paths to a set of spiritual truths mediated by different cultural contexts, languages and traditions. The ‘mere Christianity’ described by Lewis was fixed and unchanging; it was not one whose priorities and practice had undergone revision with each successive generation, it was not one where cultural differences in its practice between region, denomination and class

⁶⁴⁹ National Archives, INF 1/407, “Moslems Memo.”

⁶⁵⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 35.

⁶⁵¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 39, 40.

were acknowledged and celebrated. It excluded the possibility of change over time and the development of new customs and practices. To Lewis, “Christianity is what it is and what it was long before I was born.”⁶⁵² This assumption of permanence speaks to the essentialism that ran throughout the talks. Alan Wilkinson has described how wartime Christianity in general tended to shift away from interwar liberalism, though few fully embraced Barthean neo-orthodoxy. Many clergymen took on the spirit of neo-orthodox theology while retaining elements of a relaxed liberalism animated by an incarnational belief that a better future could be realised on earth.⁶⁵³ Lewis disliked Barth and dismissed him as a kind of theological demagogue who advanced extreme views and positions.⁶⁵⁴ For instance, Barth saw the Second World War in crusade-like terms, purely as a conflict to defend Christianity, not a defence of “western civilisation,” individual liberty, democracy or social justice.⁶⁵⁵ Few British Christians and clerics espoused this view, with the exception of the Big Ben Silent Minute Observance Society. While he disliked Barth’s style and manner, Lewis was nonetheless more closely aligned with neo-orthodox precepts than the liberalism of Temple.

Much like the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series, Lewis’s talks after 1942 focused on the social applications of Christian principles. However, unlike Welch and Temple, Lewis did not focus on the organisation of an equitable, class averse society, or the ways Christian morality could be applied to specific policy areas like health care and education to create a new world order. Politically speaking, Lewis did not earnestly participate in the social Christianity of Temple and Welch. But the programme did contribute to the larger social reconstruction debate. Lewis acknowledged that a strict application of Christian principles to British society would create a country considered “Leftist” by his contemporaries; however, he hedged by saying that “Christianity does not have a particular programme for applying ‘Do as you would be done by’ to a particular society at

⁶⁵² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.

⁶⁵³ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 200.

⁶⁵⁴ Watson, “Cultural Expressions of Christian Doctrine,” 66.

⁶⁵⁵ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 200.

a particular moment.”⁶⁵⁶ He said that while politically and economically an ideal Christian society would be “very socialistic,” he told listeners that it would also be a society governed by social conservatism in matters of family, sex and gender relations.⁶⁵⁷ Indeed, Lewis would go on to write in strong opposition to the principles of the Welfare State after the war. In an article for *The Observer* published in 1952, Lewis set out his strong opposition to a state that would be “everyone’s schoolmaster and employer,” preferring instead a system of deregulated capitalism.⁶⁵⁸ During the war, he refrained from expressing overt opposition to reforming policies in his broadcast talks, but chose to focus his talks on Christian behaviour on interpersonal relationships instead of the ways that the egalitarian spirit and message of core Christian teachings could radically redefine class, wealth and politics in British society. To Lewis, Christian teachings could be applied to politics and society in a number of different ways by focusing on certain teachings and “ignoring” others, which he felt explained how Christians could fight each other while each side still claiming to represent the truth of the Christian cause. Lewis placed less emphasis on incarnational beliefs in the betterment of contemporary society, and offered more of a redemptive theology focused on heavenly salvation and spiritual rewards. In his radio talks, he stayed away from party political matters, and said the priority lay with the “Golden Rule” of the gospels, leaving their application to the listener. This was a teaching that suited the recently instituted Concordat of 1941, which prohibited political applications of Christian teachings in religious talks in favour of a theological focus.⁶⁵⁹ For Lewis, it was of utmost importance to “learn to love God,” and to express that love with obedience to a set of Christian ethics and charitable works. The political application of Christianity in the construction of a new social order was less

⁶⁵⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 82, 84.

⁶⁵⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 85.

⁶⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, “Willing Slaves of the Welfare State,” *The Observer*, Sunday 20 July 1958, p. 6. This essay was part of a series of articles by writers on the state of British society. See also, *A Christian For All Christians: Essays in Honour of C.S. Lewis*, eds. Andrew Walker and James Patrick, (London: Hodder & Stauton, 1990), p. 80.

⁶⁵⁹ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Policy Direction of Religious Talks,” 7 February 1941.

important to him than shifting the focus “from social to religious matters,”⁶⁶⁰ meaning the inward spiritual life of the Christian.

Lewis placed his focus on “Christian Behaviour” in 1942. Though it differed from the material Christianity favoured by Welch, it offered insights into human conduct and interrelationships all the same. In his correspondence with the RBD over potential titles for the series, Lewis wrote of his intention to produce a series on Christian ethics, and asked for suggestions regarding how best to translate the title into “vernacular” language. Welch considered “Christian behaviour” to be the best substitute.⁶⁶¹ Lewis took his inspiration from the cardinal and theological virtues, and arranged a talk for each through the course of the series.⁶⁶² Charity and chastity were a particular focus. Charitable acts were not afforded the significance they were in talks by Temple, Welch and many of the *Lift Up Your Hearts* speakers. Instead, Lewis, loyal to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, depicted charity as the expression of “Christian Love.” This “Christian Love,” he insisted, should not be thought of as liking, admiring or affection. Instead, it was a daily duty to be upheld, as small acts of loving kindness would expand into a broader pattern of behaviour and general disposition. “The Christian,” he said, “trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on – including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.”⁶⁶³ He employed a wartime example to juxtapose this with “The Germans,” who “at first ill-treated the Jews because they hated them: afterwards they hated them much more because they had ill-treated them. The more cruel you are, the more you will hate.”⁶⁶⁴ Lewis made one other mention of how he thought “love” had to be dutifully practiced in his talks: in a marriage marked by female obedience to male control.⁶⁶⁵ Lewis remarked in the course of his broadcast,

⁶⁶⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 87.

⁶⁶¹ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, CSL to BBC on August 15, 1942.

⁶⁶² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 129. The cardinal virtues are: courage, temperance, justice and prudence. The theological virtues are faith, hope and charity.

⁶⁶³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 131.

⁶⁶⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 162.

⁶⁶⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 109.

“Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues,” but in his view, “the Christian rule is, either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.”⁶⁶⁶ He acknowledged a large discrepancy between the Christian rules governing sexual behaviour and contemporary sexual practices, but Lewis preached adherence to a strict moral code. In matters of sexual behaviour, Lewis believed people could follow either Christianity or sexual instinct, but both could not be “right”. Committed to the certainty of biblical teachings as he conceived it, through a literal interpretation of scripture devoid of any grounding in cultural and historical context, Lewis claimed: “it is the [sexual] instinct which has gone wrong.”⁶⁶⁷ Deviance from the strict code of conduct could be prevented with determination and will, he advised. Lewis told his listeners: “It is wonderful what you can do when you have to.”⁶⁶⁸ For Lewis, either all of Christian canon as he understood it was “correct,” or none at all. His argument was constructed like a house of cards, each supposition leaning precariously on the former, all founded on a shaky foundation of false analogy to convey neo-orthodox dogma.

Lewis’s broadcasts included a discussion of sexual conduct firmly grounded in a hetero-normative, masculine perspective. This talk treated women only as objects of the male gaze and desire, or made reference to prostitutes as the ultimate embodiment of “diabolical” sexual behaviour.⁶⁶⁹ He spoke of the temptations facing young men, who “if he indulged his sexual appetite whenever he felt inclined [...] in ten years he might easily populate a small village.”⁶⁷⁰ He tried to ridicule the practice of going to see “a strip tease act” by comparing it with a food-obsessed culture that slowly revealed a plate of mutton chops or bacon to a salivating audience.⁶⁷¹ Male sexuality had to be tamed, female participation in these male acts mitigated. Lewis placed blame for an increase in sexual

⁶⁶⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 95.

⁶⁶⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 95.

⁶⁶⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 101.

⁶⁶⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 103.

⁶⁷⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 96

⁶⁷¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 96.

appetites with popular culture and the increased availability of contraceptive methods. Sexuality ought simply to serve a reproductive function, and anything more was frivolous indulgence.⁶⁷² Lewis told his listeners,

Contraceptives have made sexual indulgence far less costly within marriage and far safer outside it than ever before, and public opinion is less hostile to illicit unions and even perversion than it has been since Pagan times.⁶⁷³

The blame for this shifting public opinion, in Lewis's mind, lay with films, books and posters that "associate the idea of sexual indulgence with the idea of health, normality, youth, frankness and good humour."⁶⁷⁴ Instead, Lewis celebrated Victorian restraint, combated the notion that sexual repression bred psychological danger, and celebrated "virtue" or "attempted virtue" as being pleasing to God.⁶⁷⁵ To participate in or derive enjoyment from sexual acts or experiences was to be "Pagan," evil, and far from God's favour. Although Lewis distrusted human instincts concerning sex and sexuality, contradictorily, an instinctual sense of God's presence, or an instinctual appreciation for an absolute "moral law" was cited in other talks as a natural impulse foundational to the development of a strong Christian faith.⁶⁷⁶ His discussion of sexual behaviour received strong praise internally at the BBC, with some producers remarking that they had never heard such a clear statement of Christian attitudes on matters of sexuality put so convincingly on the air.⁶⁷⁷ *The Daily Mirror* reprinted his talk verbatim, calling it: "a very frank talk we think everyone should read."⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 96.

⁶⁷³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 97.

⁶⁷⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 100. This sense that the normative sexual morality expressed in popular culture was no longer in keeping with Christian social or sexual standards in the Second World War is significant, as it challenges the timeline of social change surrounding sexual mores charted by Callum Brown in *The Death of Christian Britain*.

⁶⁷⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 102, 101, 100, 99.

⁶⁷⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 3-4.

⁶⁷⁷ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Memo from Welch to Fenn.

⁶⁷⁸ Phillips, *Lewis at the BBC*, 209.

II. God, Good & Evil

Lewis's meditations on Christianity eagerly explored metaphysical and existential issues in a manner that would be accessible to a non-specialist but engaged audience. Welch and Fenn believed it was of utmost importance to engage with larger spiritual questions at a time when people were questioning their faith, or turning to it for answers they could not always understand or relate to their present circumstances.⁶⁷⁹ More than just using the war to make his message relatable, Lewis offered religious explanations to make sense of the climate of crisis and uncertainty. The broadcast talks did not celebrate warfare or offer jingoistic encouragements to soldiers at the front. Lewis found such an approach unpalatable, owing to his experiences as a soldier during the First World War. In the preface to *Mere Christianity* printed in 1952, Lewis wrote that he refused to offer any kind of "exhortations to the front," saying that he had a great dislike of those who did so from a position of "ease and safety."⁶⁸⁰ Following on from themes established in *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis sought answers to questions about the meaning of life, the nature of the universe, and the existence of evil. Though the answers he offered to these questions were often littered with fallacies or formed with a brevity that obscured complication, the scope and ambition of the project deserves commendation. Lewis's mere Christianity was a philosophical panacea, something that could provide meaningful answers at a time of crisis, when it was natural to question why suffering had to exist in a universe Christians believed was governed by an omnipotent and benevolent God. However, while he borrowed the linguistic trappings of a well-conceived, logical argument ("this follows," "must exclude," "the same point can be put a different way"), at

⁶⁷⁹ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 1a, 1941-43, Memo from Welch to Fenn. Mass Observation found that, on the whole, religious belief remained constant throughout the war years, though the experience of war did prompt many to challenge and question their beliefs. They found, across all of their surveys in the London borough of Metrop across the war years, a rate of decline in religious belief of only between 1 and 4 percent, and conclude that no major "disillusionment" took place. *Puzzled People*, 23.

⁶⁸⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xii.

certain points he abandoned the pretence of logical form to invoke “unknowables”⁶⁸¹ that could not be fully defined or explained.

Mere Christianity found a global, multidenominational audience and has become an enduringly popular work of Christian apologetics. But the content of the radio scripts which make up the manuscript text, cannot be divorced from their wartime context. The broadcast talks were littered with metaphors and tropes connecting Christian teachings to the wartime experience. Lewis compared the German army with the forces of evil more than once, at times to summon a fighting spirit. Lewis suggested that charitable actions had great spiritual significance because small decisions could have an unseen effect in a raging battle between the forces of good and evil.⁶⁸² A small good may produce unforeseen victories, while a “trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.”⁶⁸³ On 1 November 1942, he told listeners, “Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you only find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in.”⁶⁸⁴ He also used the Nazis as part of his argument for the existence of an absolute good and evil, a “Real Morality” or a universal moral law. As Lewis put it, “If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something – some Real Morality – for them to be true about.”⁶⁸⁵ The

⁶⁸¹ Paul Fiddes, “On Theology,” *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 98

⁶⁸² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 132.

⁶⁸³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 132. This was a direct theme of several MOI poster campaigns about the importance of secrecy, where women were depicted as dangerous sexual temptations trying to gain access to secrets on behalf of Nazi Germany. See for example: National Archives, INF 3/229, “Keep mum – she’s not so dumb.” Available online at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/prop/home_front/INF3_0229.htm [Accessed 24 April 2016].

⁶⁸⁴ *Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 522.

⁶⁸⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 13. Lewis employed a false analogy to try bring this point across, suggesting that two people’s opinions of New York could differ because there was a real New York to have around which to form an opinion. But such an example cannot apply. Comparing morality to a physical place presumes the acceptance of the premise before it has been established. This example is perhaps indicative of the limits Lewis found himself placed beneath by keeping solely to a colloquial style. Or, since this is a problem that tends to recur throughout

argument for the existence of a natural law of human morality and behaviour marks another instance of Thomistic influence on Lewis's theology. Gilbert Meilaender has noted other manifestations of this argument throughout Lewis's canon of works, notably in the *Chronicles of Narnia* books, which describe lion-king Aslan giving the "gift" of enlightened moral reasoning to the talking beasts. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis's chief demon Screwtape calls moral reasoning "primeval moral platitudes."⁶⁸⁶ To Lewis, a natural law existed outside of Christianity and belief in the Christian God, it was part of the way the universe was structured and composed. In his broadcast talks, he suggested that God was "behind" moral law, but he did not arbitrarily create it. It was part of a "human moral inheritance" which reflected the natural order of the universe. It was a set of rational impulses which directed moral instinct.⁶⁸⁷ In this vein he resembled Aquinas, who argued, "the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts."⁶⁸⁸ Lewis's take on the existence of a natural or divine law was much in keeping with ideas advanced by contemporaries. Temple and members of his staff even saw this shared belief as foundational to the ecumenical movement, and a significant bond between Roman and non-Roman iterations of Christianity. According to Dianne Kirby, Pope Pius XII and Archbishop Temple made plans to release mutually agreed upon principles of "divine" or moral law, which some in Temple's service hoped could be a first step towards a reconciled church. The plans to begin such discussions were thwarted by Temple's premature and untimely death before the end of the war.⁶⁸⁹

Individuals subscribed to general theistic beliefs could have found much agreement with Lewis's early broadcasts. Before examining the character of the Christian God, Lewis first defined and described "Something which is directing the universe," a

the talks, it may be Lewis simply felt comfortable taking some liberties to skate past difficult issues within his allotted time.

⁶⁸⁶ Gilbert Meilaender, "On Moral Knowledge," *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120

⁶⁸⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 11.

⁶⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q 90, A 1.

⁶⁸⁹ Dianne Kirby, "William Temple, Pius XII, Ecumenism, Natural Law, and the Post-War Peace," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 36:3-4 (Summer-Fall 1999), 335.

spiritual force which underpinned this instinctive sense of right and wrong.⁶⁹⁰ As mentioned earlier, Lewis recognised Theism as an important starting place for the Christian worldview, and considered it a significant site of ideological common ground between people opposed to fascist materialism. That this “moral instinct” would be naturally inborn into all humanity points to the essentialist character of the larger work, and his negative conception of atheism as a philosophy that had “gone wrong.” But, as his argument developed throughout the series, he lent little support to alternative religions or theist creeds. He credited Dualism with being “the manliest and most sensible creed on the market” next to Christianity, but offered his listeners little alternative to total adherence to the Christian God, apart from whom, he claimed, it was impossible to know happiness and contentment.⁶⁹¹ Dualism received Lewis’s high esteem because of the way he understood evil: as an enemy and opposing force competing for “victory” over human souls.

Lewis described a God that existed both inside and outside of human history. His God was one who had an active hand in human affairs, but also allowed free will to be exercised. Perhaps this marriage of seemingly opposing beliefs developed as a natural reaction to his attempts to reconcile disparate branches of the same religion, making room for predestination, providence and free will within his generic Christian theology. To marry these disparate concepts, Lewis employed another mundane analogy to put his point across in plain terms. He compared humankind with a group of children left in the care of a Nanny. The Nanny established rules for behaviour, “Then she goes up one night and finds the Teddy bear and the ink and the French Grammar all lying in the grate.”⁶⁹² “It is probably the same in the Universe,” Lewis told his listeners, “God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can either go wrong or go right... Free will is what made evil possible.”⁶⁹³ To Lewis, the existence of evil, though permitted by

⁶⁹⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 26.

⁶⁹¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 42, 50.

⁶⁹² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 47.

⁶⁹³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 48.

God, was not part of His creation. Evil found its way into being through the free actions of God's creations. Lewis defends this choice as the only means by which joy and happiness could be possible.

Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata – of creatures that worked like machines – would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other.⁶⁹⁴

He borrowed the language of warfare to describe original sin and evil acts. He characterised the fall of humanity as the result of “an invasion” of evil forces, and describes the physical world as “enemy-occupied territory.”⁶⁹⁵ In his view, the forces of evil had a leader of their own, one whose cunning and guile had a hand in the breakdown of successive civilisations. To Lewis, human history turned upon sinful acts and choices made to bend to temptation. He called cruelty, selfishness and institutional decay “what Satan has done to us.”⁶⁹⁶ That he saw evil as an enemy force explains his affection for dualism as a religious worldview.

In Lewis's interpretation of the Christian cosmology, two opposing forces battled daily for influence in human affairs, in decisions, gestures and attitudes both small and large. This story was perhaps best described in Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, a fictional wartime diary published weekly in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1940 and as a book by Geoffrey Bles, documenting the actions of a “junior demon” named Wormwood through letters of advice written by his uncle, Screwtape. A richly imaginative work, *The Screwtape Letters* depicts demons as enemy spies, infiltrating the minds of Britons, encouraging them to be short tempered with their loved ones, discontent with physical surroundings, proud, boastful or avaricious. Lewis drew his inspiration from the war, after hearing a persuasive speech by Hitler in July 1940.⁶⁹⁷ Writing to his brother, he spoke of

⁶⁹⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 48.

⁶⁹⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 46.

⁶⁹⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 50.

⁶⁹⁷ Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 267.

how he conceived of an idea for a book which “would give all of the psychology of temptation from the *other* point of view.”⁶⁹⁸ Screwtape describes battles that can be won over a human soul with the rhetoric of war, fighting for the gradual control of territory formerly in the hands of The Enemy. It uses the Second World War as a metaphor for the battle between good and evil, as each human being as a territory to be fought for and then brought to destruction, a war conducted in bureaucratic language, recorded in the memos of middle managers and junior officers under the direction of a tyrant.⁶⁹⁹ In the text, the forces of “good” act on human “patients” in a mysterious way, but one that is always more powerful and has more significant resources.⁷⁰⁰ The work emphasised the importance of maintaining constant vigilance against enemy attack and temptation. A similar theme became the subject of a series of MOI propaganda posters on “the Nazi squander bug,” a demonic creature with a forked tail and swastika carved on his belly that tempted well-meaning Britons to engage in wasteful behaviour by spending more than they needed to, or wasting excess goods, activities which aided the enemy by hampering domestic productivity.⁷⁰¹ However, Lewis did not represent these as two equal forces, ultimately the side of “good” prevailed with superior strength.

Lewis taught listeners that God participated in the events of human history; the Christian God was one that gently hinted, reminded and cajoled. This God revealed his divine presence, offered “good dreams” to guide belief and behaviour, and he selected a group of chosen people, the Jews, to whom he would reveal the secrets for life eternal.⁷⁰² But for Lewis, God could not solely exist within the parameters of human history. If He was truly an omnipotent and transcendent force, then He must also exist outside and

⁶⁹⁸ Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 267.

⁶⁹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942).

⁷⁰⁰ *The Screwtape Letters*, 95.

⁷⁰¹ National Archives, INF 2/1, General Publicity Material 1941-2, “Nazi Squander Bug.”

⁷⁰² Though the MOI and the BBC were reluctant to air broadcasts that spoke too favourably of the Jewish people out of a cowardly fear of sparking an anti-Semitic backlash, Lewis did not avoid or mitigate Christianity’s historic roots as an offshoot of Judaism, or Jesus’ Jewish ethnicity, religion and identity. (See Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 51) For Lewis, this would not have been a matter of controversy but a matter of fact, an undeniable part of the Christian canon.

above time as experienced and understood by humanity. In a particularly complex talk given in 1944, Lewis suggested that God existed beyond linear time. As Lewis put it, “Almost certainly God is not in Time. [...] [He] does not live in a Time-series at all. His life is not dribbled out moment by moment like ours: with Him it is, so to speak, still 1920 and already 1960.” For Lewis, God could not be limited by temporal parameters. Eternity meant existing outside of time. God did not experience a past, present and future, or proceed through events in a linear succession. He experienced all time simultaneously, outside of a time-line. To explain this abstract concept to wartime listeners, he summoned plain language and metaphors:

If you picture Time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. We come to the parts of the line one by one: we have to leave A behind to get to B, and cannot reach C until we have left B behind. God, from above or outside or all round, contains the whole line, and sees it all.⁷⁰³

Lewis used this concept to reconcile seemingly contrary beliefs in a God who simultaneously allowed the existence of free will, yet had a total understanding of the ‘direction’ of human history and the consequential outcome of every decision. To Lewis, the idea of a God existing outside and beyond time helped to explain how free will could coexist with divine omniscience. If God understood how human history would transpire before it began, it would undercut a person’s ability to choose to take part in certain actions. But, Lewis contended, the Christian God experienced all time simultaneously, as he existed “outside and above the Time-line.”⁷⁰⁴ Lewis described how this concept helped him to make sense of the Incarnation when he first converted to Christianity. He also offered this explanation to account for how God could listen to millions of prayers simultaneously. If for God all time was the present, then “He has all eternity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flame.”⁷⁰⁵ For Lewis, not everything could be taken as a matter of faith; he had difficulty trying to

⁷⁰³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 168.

⁷⁰⁴ *Mere Christianity*, 170.

⁷⁰⁵ Phillips, *Lewis at the BBC*, 250.

logically reconcile how a triune God could have an earthly existence without ceasing to exist beyond space and time.⁷⁰⁶ At the end of this particular talk, Lewis told his listeners that if they did not like or could not make sense of this idea, they should feel free to abandon it. He said it was not a teaching derived from any Christian scriptures or early theological works, but he defended it as “a ‘Christian idea’ in the sense that great and wise Christians have held it and there is nothing in it contrary to Christianity.”⁷⁰⁷ For those who may not have followed the concept he added, “you can be a perfectly good Christian without accepting it, or indeed without thinking of the matter at all.”⁷⁰⁸ But for those who sought answers to questions about the nature of God, this discussion may have proved thought provoking. That it was an important and valuable enterprise to question one’s faith served as an implicit theme of the entire talks series.

III. Reaction and Reception

The series received a strong, if polarising, response from the listening audience. Listening figures were strong for all four series, though continuous listening from one talk to the next over the course of a series proved a considerable obstacle, given the nature of wartime conditions.⁷⁰⁹ Many listeners reported frustration when they missed the start of a series or if they had missed an episode, as the talks proceeded as if there had been no break between them.⁷¹⁰ Lewis’s talks scored high on the Appreciation Index, with the second series even receiving an outstanding score of 81 out of 100, which LR noted was “above the already very high average ... for religious broadcasts.”⁷¹¹ Nearly all of the respondents to LR questionnaires gave a favourable verdict on Lewis’s speaking ability, with two thirds reporting his speaking ability was very good, and the remaining third grading him as fairly good. The report noted, “Many ... found his voice pleasant and easy to listen to, and others praised him because his manner was particularly sincere and

⁷⁰⁶ *Mere Christianity*, 169.

⁷⁰⁷ *Mere Christianity*, 171.

⁷⁰⁸ *Mere Christianity*, 171.

⁷⁰⁹ Phillips, *Lewis at the BBC*, 255.

⁷¹⁰ Phillips, *Lewis at the BBC*, 255.

⁷¹¹ BBC WAC, Listener Research, LR/1211

‘forthright,’ and carried conviction.”⁷¹² Critics, the report notes, were in the minority, but they objected to the “affected” and “patronising” tones of his “Oxford accent.”⁷¹³ 70% of listeners responded positively to the content of the talks, offering praise for the way in which Lewis put complex ideas into simple prose. One listener remarked,

Mr Lewis has the gift of putting his deep thoughts into such simple language and so plainly that even an ordinary intelligence can understand things that are normally beyond its capacity. While he is speaking, I feel as if I can see the whole thing clearly.⁷¹⁴

However, those who expressed objections offered particular criticism of his argumentative style. They said that he “begged the question” or “beat about the bush,” and objected to his use of metaphor for being excessive, irritating, and confusing the argument.⁷¹⁵ His talks first received average ratings relative to the expected audience for a religious talk – between 2.5 and 3.5 million listeners on their first broadcast – but talks were notable for the intensity of the response, both positive and negative. The BBC was extremely pleased with both the quality of the talks as well as the volume of correspondence received. They continually pestered Lewis for more talks and repeat series during and after the war, but Lewis declined most of their request because of his teaching commitments at Oxford and the inconvenient nature of the broadcasting schedule.⁷¹⁶ As the talks achieved a global popularity, Francis House, then Director of Overseas Religious Broadcasting, begged for more only to be continually rebuffed and eventually ignored by Lewis.⁷¹⁷

The talks received high praise in both the church press and in national broadsheets. *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* offered praise for the quality of the broadcasts, and for successfully offering a presentation of the Christian faith in clear, plainspoken terms accessible to all. They praised the excitement and conviction of the

⁷¹² BBC WAC, Listener Research, LR/1211

⁷¹³ BBC WAC, Listener Research, LR/1211

⁷¹⁴ BBC WAC, Listener Research, LR/1211

⁷¹⁵ BBC WAC, Listener Research, LR/1211

⁷¹⁶ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 2.

⁷¹⁷ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 2, Letter from House to Lewis Oct 1944.

speaker, his humour and his irony. The Church press had similar comments, but also a zealous support for Lewis's neo-orthodox theology. *The Clergy Review* and *The Tablet* each praised the lucidity of the argument, the speaker's charm and sincerity. *The Tablet* in particular praised his 'rational' approach: "He approaches you directly, as a rational person only to be persuaded by reason."⁷¹⁸ *The Tablet* depicted Lewis as a plucky, philosophical hero, defending Christianity from atheist thinkers. Martin Tindal expressed a similar view in *Time and Tide*, calling the talks "the kind of public return to the ancient faith which infuriates other intellectuals."⁷¹⁹ For these reviewers, Lewis was waging and winning a battle against those who sought to adapt and reinterpret or move away from the Christian faith by preserving it in what they imagined to be its "pure" or "ancient" form. These publications supported Lewis's essentialism, and his dogged obstinacy that there was only one right kind of morality, and that was the kind married to Christianity. However, some churches and clerics were upset by Lewis's overwhelming focus on the spiritual life of the individual, suggesting that such an approach minimised the importance of churches in community life and the importance of communal worship.⁷²⁰

That Lewis polarised his audience was unsurprising given the firm lines he drew describing what did and did not constitute a Christian or theist, and his essentialist arguments about the existence of an absolute, inborn, innate moral compass that did not deviate or mutate with time or between cultures. Fenn shared this finding from the LR reports with Lewis, telling him "They obviously either regard you as 'the cat's whiskers' or as beneath contempt, which is interesting; and ought, I feel, to teach us something, but I can't quite think what!"⁷²¹ Fenn was glad that the programme generated discussion and debate, though could not fathom why the programme failed to resonate with certain segments of the audience. Lewis found himself inundated with letters from listeners asking questions and offering criticisms of his arguments. The RDB offered Lewis the

⁷¹⁸ *The Tablet*, 26 June 1943.

⁷¹⁹ *Time and Tide*, 19 September 1942

⁷²⁰ Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*, 311

⁷²¹ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 2, Letter from Fenn to Lewis, 23 march 1944.

opportunity to respond to listener questions on air, to offer rebuttals to particularly provoking letters, or to clarify his earlier arguments. The sharpest objections were to the essentialist and neo-orthodox character of the talks. Lewis offered little room for rival interpretations, and had particularly little patience for anything resembling a relativistic approach. That this part of his argument was unpopular, or at least closely contested, speaks to the enduring popularity of liberal interpretations amongst the listening audience, a common respect for differences of religious opinion, and the great ambiguity and diversity in the practice of religious precepts in practice. On Wednesday, September 3, 1941, Lewis attempted to answer some listener questions on the air concerning relativism and the limits of his essentialist arguments about moral law. A number of listeners wrote in pointing out that “what is thought wrong in one society is thought right in another, and suggesting that a man’s whole conception of right is simply due to the society he’s been brought up in.”⁷²² Such a perspective would have certainly been in keeping with the democratic discourses which provided a backbone for the war: that the allies were fighting for freedom of religious expression, and for cooperation between faiths, both Christian and non-Christian. Lewis reiterated his case for an inborn moral law by comparing it with laws of nature or mathematics, an analogy that certainly illustrated his meaning, but did little to disarm his critics. He continued:

A number of listeners have written pointing out that what is thought wrong in one society is thought right in another, and suggesting that a man’s whole conception of right is simply due to the society he’s been brought up in. [...] Don’t you see if this were so, we could never say that the morality of one society was better than that of another? For to have a better morality must mean to be nearer to some absolute standard of morality.⁷²³

However, in private letters to the BBC after the war, Lewis expressed a shadow of a doubt on this stance, or perhaps an acknowledgement of the relativistic position he was unwilling to embrace. CW Wilke, then Assistant Head of German Service Programmes,

⁷²² BBC WAC, Religious Scripts, “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe,” 3 September 1941, 7.45 – 8.0 pm. Answers to Listener Questions, p.1

⁷²³ BBC WAC, Religious Scripts, “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe,” 3 September 1941, 7.45 – 8.0 pm. Answers to Listener Questions, p.2.

asked Lewis to write a rebuttal to a programme entitled “The Nature of the Universe” by Fred Hoyle in June 1950, to be translated and broadcast in German.⁷²⁴ Lewis happily carried out this task, and shared his thoughts on the talks series with Dilke as he formulated his official response. He thought Hoyle’s conclusions offered some substantial challenges to the Christian faith, not least of which suggested that the existence of life on other planets could be damning evidence against Christian theism. Lewis, a writer of science fiction novels, found this suggestion compelling, and told Dilke, “People may ask themselves, for instance, how other planets would have knowledge of Christ and whether a crucifixion on each of them is to be presumed.”⁷²⁵ The discovery of life on other planets would fundamentally alter his perspective on Christianity and the Christian God, as Christ had been sent to Earth to die, but there would be no way to know of this story of redemption and salvation on other worlds. Thus Lewis assumes sentient species on other planets must have an alternative path to salvation or higher understanding. In this way, Lewis extended a courtesy to imagined alien peoples that he did not extend to human populations unconquered by Europeans and unexposed to Christian teachings.

IV. Conclusions

Lewis’s broadcast talks perfectly filled the mandate of BBC Religion: they were offered in a popular and engaging voice and tone, they were intentionally ecumenical, they were intended for the layman and not the high clergyman. However, what Lewis offered within the parameters of BBC Religion was a different kind of Christian theology and practice than the one offered by Temple and Welch in some other religious broadcasts. Their liberalism was not represented here, this was not an ecumenism that embraced a spectrum of opinion. It is notable that under the banner of BBC Religion there were discrepancies, varieties of perspectives and voices. But Lewis sought homogeneity through commonality, and exclusion for those who did not agree to his terms. These talks celebrated the superiority of certain perspectives and opinions over others. Nevertheless,

⁷²⁴ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 2, Dilke to Lewis, 16 June 1950

⁷²⁵ BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C.S. TAL 1a/910, file 2, Lewis to Dilke 21 June 1950.

Lewis's Christianity was one that was open to all denominations. Its expressed aim was to create an inclusive model of Christianity that could appeal to Christians, including Catholics and Orthodox Christians in Allied countries. Lewis did not espouse a jingoistic Christianity or compel the war to be fought in defence of Christianity alone. Christianity was connected to the war effort as a creed in opposition to fascistic tyranny, and as a moral code that supported the defence of "good" against "evil" acts. Lewis intended for his singular narrative to be a site where multiple Christianities could converge and find consensus at a time when Britain was engaged in a conflict with a political system underpinned by a rival system of morality.

Above all, Lewis's broadcast talks offered a plainspoken exploration of metaphysical and existential questions to a wide audience. The series encouraged listeners to engage with questions about the nature of the universe at a time when a regular confrontation with death, destruction and random violence could shake a sense of purpose, meaning and conviction. Lewis's mere Christianity cannot be separated from its wartime context, though some Christian writers have continued to claim that it offers a clear presentation of the essential, core teachings of Christianity. Much like any other kind of religious teaching, it can only offer one version of a truth, rooted in its own historical circumstances, and cannot be divorced from the culture in which it was created. Lewis's essentialism is notable for its attempt to assure listeners that their shared Christianity had deep historical roots and was derived from assumed laws of human nature and behaviour, a voice of dogged, unwavering certainty during a time of crisis.

Chapter 4

Dialectics of the Sacred: Creating a Sacred Language in Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Man Born to be King*

*"There is a dialectic in Christian sacred art which impels it to stress, from time to time, now the eternal and now the temporal elements in the Divine drama."*⁷²⁶

– Dorothy L. Sayers

That BBC Religion required an accessible, vernacular and inclusive presentation of the Christian faith meant the active construction of a sacred language. As Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams have argued in their thoughtful collection, *Redefining Christian Britain*, Christianity has, throughout its long history, survived and flourished at different times and places by "being repeatedly translated from one culture into another."⁷²⁷ In this way, they suggest that Christianity as a whole operates on a meta-dialectical level, at once comprehending and transcending many different dialects simultaneously. Borrowing from Michel Foucault, they suggest that religious discourses comprise "multiple dissensions," as they contain a discursive formation shaped by anonymous, historical rules that allow a large number of competing and clashing concepts to co-exist.⁷²⁸ As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, this argument forms a challenging rebuttal to the work of Callum Brown, who examined the prevalence and decline of one form of "discursive Christianity," without acknowledging that it was one of many active formulations of Christian language. This dissertation has demonstrated the manner in which BBC Religion was actively formulated and developed in response to the social and political pressures of the Second World War to foster national unity and inclusion. Part of the work of BBC Religion was achieved through the deliberate creation of a new grammar, syntax and tone for religious broadcasting; one that would reach a national audience across age and class divides. As

⁷²⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1943), 2.

⁷²⁷ Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams (eds), *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 160.

⁷²⁸ Callum Brown, *Redefining Christian Britain*, 160.

Patrick Joyce has demonstrated in his studies of working class language, communities are held together by mythologies, shared stories and common beliefs. Language operates at the centre of these mythologies as the very substance of a culture.⁷²⁹ Certainly, the language of the BBC's radio religion functioned in this way; its style, tone and content were instrumental to the very substance and development of this religious culture as a distinctive genre that perpetuated core wartime myths.

The records of the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department detail the deliberate fashioning of a sacred language to suit the mandates of the wartime context. Dorothy L. Sayers' play-cycle *The Man Born to be King* can be considered one of the most prominent, controversial and widely beloved projects of this kind. It helped establish a linguistic community for the BBC's religious programming, one that was separate but compatible with institutional Christianity. As has been detailed in preceding chapters, a clear, idiomatic, vernacular presentation of Christian teaching was a hallmark of all types of religious broadcasting during the war. However, Sayers' project was unique for the detail in which she describes how she fashioned the language of the plays, the controversy it generated, as well as the popularity of the project within the Religious Broadcasting Department and amongst the public at large. In writing these plays, Sayers purposefully experimented with how to reinterpret sacredness and sacred language into modern idiom for the radio. The linguistic choices she made reified some of the central teachings of BBC Religion; that Christianity was anti-authoritarian by nature, that it supported inclusion for all, that allegiance to Christianity in general trumped denominational ties. It also asserted the particular theology of BBC Religion, shaped by the war; that Christianity was at once spiritual and temporal, that it offered transcendence and spiritual relief, and a set of values that promoted the development of a more equitable society.

⁷²⁹ Patrick Joyce, "The People's English: Language and Class in England, 1840 – 1920," in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), *Language, Self and Society: A Social History of Language*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 172.

Because of her vital role in the construction of this language of faith, it is fitting that biographer Barbara Reynolds defines Dorothy L. Sayers as, above all, a translator.⁷³⁰ In the interwar years, Sayers achieved national and international renown for writing detective and crime novels, and made substantive contributions to the arts, forging a reputation as an influential critic. She wrote about politics, feminism, language, morality, and the religious significance of dramatic art. She actively contributed to debates about the place of Christianity in society and the future of the church, advised bishops and archbishops on theological matters, and regularly contributed to newspapers and journals with articles on faith, literature and society.⁷³¹ She could also be counted amongst the ranks of writers and authors involved in the production of publicity at the Ministry of Information, a role she considered to be an act of war service.⁷³² Sayers' letters and diaries attest to her active wartime schedule. She produced a number of popular broadcasts, and spent a good deal of time in the final years of the war translating Dante's *Inferno*.⁷³³ But it was not simply her work on Dante which led Reynolds to identify Sayers as a "translator" above novelist or dramatist; Sayers was dedicated to presenting Christian teachings in modern idiom to promote what she considered to be its true meaning. Truth, for Sayers, was singular and could be made objectively certain. She considered art to be a primary way to access and understand truth. In 1943 she wrote, "At no point have I yet found artistic truth and theological truth at variance."⁷³⁴ She believed that good art and good theatre accessed an inimitable and profound sense of truth or rightness, one consistent with the theological truths she believed she found in

⁷³⁰ Barbara Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

⁷³¹ In 1946, Sayers published a volume called *Unpopular Opinions*, a collection of her wartime writings on theology, politics, and literary criticism. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1946). Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 2.

⁷³² Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 332.

⁷³³ Mitzi Brunsdale, *Dorothy L. Sayers: Solving the Mystery of Wickedness* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990); 176.

⁷³⁴ Sayers, *Man Born to Be King*, 13.

Christianity.⁷³⁵ Sayers used the word “dialectic” in the Classical Greek sense: to refer to use of reasoning and discussion to discover truth.⁷³⁶

The Man Born to be King, written in 1941, found wide acclaim after its first broadcast 1942. The play was well loved by audiences, and re-broadcast annually until 1947. James Welch first commissioned the series in February 1940. In the years leading up to the Second World War, Sayers had begun to form a reputation as a successful Christian dramatist, earning favourable reviews for *The Zeal of Thy House*, produced at the Canterbury Festival in 1937, and *The Devil to Pay*, a Faustian drama staged in 1939.⁷³⁷ In 1938, she wrote her first radio drama for the BBC called *He That Should Come*. The play was set in Bethlehem, and focused on the actions and reactions of the villagers.⁷³⁸ The play was popular with audiences, and BBC management praised it for establishing “the real humanity of Jesus” through its frank and simple presentation.⁷³⁹

Welch wanted to produce a play on the full life of Christ, one that could find a wide appeal though an ecumenical focus on the shared, fundamental rudiments of Christianity, with an accessible presentation that would be inclusive of all listeners. He believed the series could turn mythologized gospel personalities into credible characters, animating traditional stories by projecting a sense of realism and familiarity.⁷⁴⁰ He asked Sayers to produce a series of twelve plays, each focused on a different section of the gospels, and intended to air the series during the Sunday *Children’s Hour* to an audience of millions of parents and children.⁷⁴¹ When Welch first wrote to Sayers on 5 February 1940, he proposed that “we might rightly and reverently use direct speech” in the telling

⁷³⁵ Sayers, *Man Born to Be King*, 14.

⁷³⁶ Sayers does not use the term “dialectic” in a Hegelian or Marxist sense, but strictly in a classical one. The English word dialectic is derived from the ancient Greek συνδιαλέγομαι or προσδιαλέγομαι meaning to converse with or answer in conversation.

⁷³⁷ William Reynolds, “Dorothy Sayers and the Drama of Orthodoxy,” in *As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers*, ed., Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 1979), 97.

⁷³⁸ William Reynolds, “Drama of Orthodoxy,” 92.

⁷³⁹ Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 93.

⁷⁴⁰ Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, 219.

⁷⁴¹ Phillips, *C.S. Lewis and the BBC*, 205.

of the story.⁷⁴² Sayers acceptance letter bullied Welch out of any equivocation on the point, making it a condition of her acceptance of the contract.⁷⁴³ She insisted throughout the long gestation of the project that the plays used vernacular, colloquial speech exclusively, without any exceptions. This stylistic choice was very much in keeping with the rest of the Religious Broadcasting Department's output. However, unlike the talks, sermons and prayers that have been examined in previous chapters, the *Man Born To Be King* marked the first time in British history that actors would portray Christ and the disciples using colloquialisms, slang, and regional dialects. After almost two years of planning and interdepartmental debates, the plays were initially broadcast from 21 December 1941 to October 1942, and covered the entire catalogue of events in the life of Christ.

The plays sparked a significant debate in December 1941 in the press, parliament and among the public over the appropriate language that should be used by an actor portraying Christ on the radio. Many of the oppositional voices that decried the series used rhetoric couched in an illogical and fearful essentialism, one that took the 17th century translation of the King James Bible as the literal word of God, while shaming the use of modern dialogue as unrespectable though the demonization of working class speech. Though the plays initially sparked a great deal of media controversy fuelled by a small but well organised opposition, including the Lord's Day Observance Society and the Protestant Truth Society, the play came to enjoy national renown. The debate surrounding the broadcast reveals a great deal about attitudes to class, Britishness and the linguistic construction of holiness in wartime.

⁷⁴² *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume Two: 1937-1943 From Novelist to Playwright*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press, 1997), 146.

⁷⁴³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 18 February 1940.

I. Developing a Sacred Language: The Production of *The Man Born to be King*

Some details of the play's pre-production have been well recorded by Sayers' many biographers, particularly the more sensational elements of the story: that Sayers tore up her contract and mailed it back to the BBC in pieces after receiving unwarranted criticism from a junior producer, the "disastrous" press conference in December 1941 which sparked a barrage of negative media coverage, and Sayers' insistence that her long-time friend Val Gielgud produce the project instead of representatives from the *Children's Hour* who clashed with her artistic vision.⁷⁴⁴ But perhaps obscured from these biographical narratives has been the ways in which the medium of radio and the mandates of BBC Religion shaped the production, as well as the ways the wartime context shaped the themes and theology of the plays. Crystal Downing has suggested that it is ironic that Sayers has been subject to the kinds of biographical studies she could not abide in her lifetime, ones that have sentimentalised her writing and personal history, without rooting the developments within their cultural context or rigorously examining the theoretical and theological underpinnings of her commentaries and works.⁷⁴⁵ This chapter will examine the intellectual and cultural history of Sayers' plays, since her personal journey before, after and during the war has been well documented elsewhere.

Welch commissioned the *Man Born to be King* for the Sunday edition of *Children's Hour*, following the moderate success of a series of plays on the life and missionary journeys of Paul scripted by L. du Garde-Peach.⁷⁴⁶ Sayers' long popularity at the BBC as a guest presenter, producer and dramatist made her an obvious choice for

⁷⁴⁴ William Reynolds, "Drama of Orthodoxy," Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*; Brunsdale, Dorothy L. Sayers, *Solving the Mystery of Wickedness* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990); Catherine Kenney, *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990); Ralph E. Hone, *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979); Janet Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady: An Introduction to Dorothy L. Sayers*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1975); Crystal Downing, *Writing Performances: The Stages of Dorothy L. Sayers*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

⁷⁴⁵ Downing, *Writing Performances*, 8.

⁷⁴⁶ Hitchman, *Strange Lady*, 147. Welch shared editorial responsibility for Sunday Children's Hour with producer Derek McCulloch. It was the only place in his schedule where he could produce and commission drama. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 217.

collaboration. Sayers had been actively involved in BBC productions since 1930. Her first contribution to British broadcasting was an episode in the omnibus detective serial *Behind the Screen* in May and June 1930. She took on a producer role in addition to writing episodes of *The Scoop*, using her prominence and popularity to invite authors of a similar calibre to contribute stories to the broadcast, including Agatha Christie.⁷⁴⁷ According to Janet Hitchman, between 1931 and 1934 “she was a most willing broadcaster on any subject” and contributed to various forms of programme, from talks and dramas to episodes of serials.⁷⁴⁸ Welch believed that a dramatisation of the life of Christ would do no less than “fulfil the obligation of the Corporation to the nation in this time.”⁷⁴⁹ He thought Sayers was the ideal candidate for the job, and had the ability to reframe the story in a way that would be “fresh and vital.”⁷⁵⁰ Sayers accepted her contract to write *The Man Born to be King* upon several conditions. She feared bureaucratic intrusion and encroachment on her artistic vision, as she was familiar with the obstinate nature of BBC hierarchy and its formal aversion to anything that could be construed as controversial. She requested complete control of the final script that would be brought to air, without editorial interference. It was the author’s prerogative to write the words of the play, she explained, and then the producer’s role to bring these words faithfully to life.⁷⁵¹ She made it very clear that she would not bend from her desire to create a play in which Christ spoke in everyday language instead of the language of the King James Bible. She stipulated that she would accept the offer to write the plays on the condition that she could introduce the person of Christ as a speaking character, and that the play would be written and produced entirely in modern idiom.⁷⁵² Welch agreed to her terms, even though some listeners would find the use of contemporary speech offensive. Sayers joked in response, “I am very glad you feel able to take this line about the plays and about the

⁷⁴⁷ Hitchman, *Strange Lady*, 147.

⁷⁴⁸ Hitchman, *Strange Lady*, 142.

⁷⁴⁹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 218.

⁷⁵⁰ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 218.

⁷⁵¹ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to Derek McCulloch, 28 November 1940.

⁷⁵² BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 18 February 1940.

presentation of Our Lord, and greatly welcome the courageous spirit in which, in order to get the reality of the Gospel across, is prepared even to ‘give slight offense to some adult listeners!’”⁷⁵³ Welch recognised that some listeners would not respect the project, but was determined to continue nonetheless.

The medium of radio afforded opportunities for innovation that the stage would not permit. The office of the Lord Chamberlain banned stage productions depicting the person of Christ until 1967.⁷⁵⁴ The BBC wanted to be sure that it had the Lord Chamberlain’s support for the project, even though he had no jurisdiction over their programming. The Director-General wrote for permission in the hope of preventing any difficulty or controversy.⁷⁵⁵ The Lord Chamberlain responded positively, but stipulated that the play could not be recorded in front of a studio audience. “I can see no objection,” he wrote, “but it would be quite another matter if the proposal was to televise them.”⁷⁵⁶ While it remained heretical for an actor to portray Christ in the West End or on a television screen, it was deemed a different thing entirely to do so on the radio. Radio offered a wider remit on this score, a chance to experiment with form and substance. Radio drama received greater attention from both the public and actors after the closure of theatres in 1940, before bombing intensified over London. The BBC’s Department for Drama (DFD) had a large and enthusiastic audience, and attracted top talent as both producers and performers. Ian Rodger has suggested that the war years provided a new opportunity for dramatists to write to the whole nation. He argues that since the war years were a catalyst for social change, this provided a fertile context for new talent and innovation to flourish in radio drama.⁷⁵⁷ The development and content of the *Man Born to*

⁷⁵³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 4 March 1940.

⁷⁵⁴ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 18 February 1940. The office of the Lord Chamberlain had the right to exert censorship over theatre performances thanks to the Theatres Act of 1843.

⁷⁵⁵ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. Letter from Nicholls to D-G, 11 December 1941.

⁷⁵⁶ Hitchman, *Strange Lady*, 147.

⁷⁵⁷ Ian Rodger, *Radio Drama*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), 152.

Be King certainly reflects this new context, as it marked a moment of true innovation in the style and form of religious radio drama.

Val Gielgud eventually produced *The Man Born to Be King* within the Drama Department, but the broadcasts were marked for broadcast during the *Children's Hour* at the outset. Though the *Children's Hour* fell outside the remit of the Religious Broadcasting Department, Welch shared jurisdiction over its religious content. He made proposals in the early months of 1940 calling for an increase in religious content in the programme. In March, he petitioned for the inclusion of five minutes of hymn singing and prayers, a suggestion put into practice after the intensity of the blitz increased in September of the same year.⁷⁵⁸ Stephen Parker has argued that the religious content of the *Children's Hour* tended to be rather staid and constrained; they often used terms and tones that were stiff and inaccessible to children.⁷⁵⁹ This ethos within the *Children's Hour* department set the preconditions for an eventual clash with Sayers and Welch over questions of language and accessibility; they feared Sayers' concepts were too high above the children's heads, and thought the language at times too low. *Children's Hour* initially agreed to produce *the Man Born to be King* at Welch's urging, with Derek McCulloch of the *Children's Hour* assigned to be Sayers' producer. Sayers privately expressed concern to Welch that McCulloch may not be suitable, but tried to create the conditions for a productive working relationship by sending him a series of letters that clearly defined her broadcasting philosophy.⁷⁶⁰

To Sayers, religious drama had to feel “alive and flexible,” it required “an immense range of expression.” For radio, this chiefly meant creating realistic sound effects, and the use of accessible language that could convey emotion, myth and meaning

⁷⁵⁸ Stephen Parker, “Teach them to pray Auntie: Children's Hour Prayers at the BBC, 1940-1961,” *History of Education*, 39:5 (September 2010), 664-5. The hymns and prayers were fashioned into a *Children's Hour Epilogue* broadcast at the end of the programme.

⁷⁵⁹ Parker, “Teach them to pray,” 668.

⁷⁶⁰ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 30 November 1940, 11 October 1940.

in a simple and efficient way.⁷⁶¹ When McCullough first wrote to Sayers, he praised her recent article on the subject of religious drama, “Divine Comedy,” published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 15 March 1940. McCullough especially liked her observation that in most religious dramas of the time, “At the name of Jesus all the voices go plummy.”⁷⁶² Sayers put this as one of her chief priorities for *The Man Born to Be King*. “The one kind of Christ I absolutely refuse at any price whatsoever,” she wrote, “is a dull Christ; we have far too many of these in stained-glass windows.”⁷⁶³ The BBC’s Religious Broadcasting Department certainly shared this spirit of opposition to rigid, traditional forms of ecclesiasticism, governed by a sense that the language and rituals of the established churches did much to alienate the general public and obscure the spiritual meanings of the Christian faith. Sayers attributed this to an overreliance on the language of the King James Bible, which used “an idiom so old-fashioned that, even as English, it is often obscure to us or positively misleading.”⁷⁶⁴ She, with the full backing of the Religious Broadcasting Department, wanted her version of the gospel story to have resonance and to prompt renewed consideration of a familiar old tale. The dialogue written by Sayers had two functions: both to bring the story to life with contemporary speech, and to reveal the entire plot of the plays without the use of a narrator. Sayers disliked the use of narrators as a means of explaining scene changes and character motivations. She believed such interruptions to be intrusive, that they diminished the potentially immersive experience of listening to well written drama.⁷⁶⁵ Religious drama held considerable spiritual significance in Sayers’ estimation. She believed the classical

⁷⁶¹ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to Derek McCulloch, 25 October 1940.

⁷⁶² BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 30 November 1940, 11 October 1940; Dorothy L. Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions*, 35.

⁷⁶³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to Derek McCulloch, 25 October 1940.

⁷⁶⁴ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 12.

⁷⁶⁵ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to Derek McCulloch, 5 November 1940.

Greek examples worth following in this regard, a time when “a performance of the *Oresteia* was not only an entertainment but an act of *communal worship*.”⁷⁶⁶

Unfortunately, some junior members of staff at the *Children's Hour* took issue with Sayers' stylistic choices. Sayers insisted that the play, though it would be broadcast during *Children's Hour*, would be addressed to an audience of children and adults, just as Welch initially proposed.⁷⁶⁷ But some members of the *Children's Hour* staff believed in targeting programmes to the youngest audience members. Sayers objected on both dramatic and pedagogical grounds, asserting that such an aim would result in a rather uninteresting play to the majority of listeners.⁷⁶⁸ She firmly believed that the unknown held mystery for children, and that they would be encouraged to look up or understand what they had not heard before. Even without such intellectual curiosity, they would at least be entranced by the mystical quality of foreign names and complex words, and captivated by the strength of the actors performances regardless of the words they spoke.⁷⁶⁹ Welch believed that capturing an adult audience for the programme was just as much a priority as entertaining the children who listened.⁷⁷⁰ Welch agreed it was important to write “a little over the heads of the children,” firmly establishing that the plays were intended for the widest possible audience.⁷⁷¹ Relations strained between Sayers and the *Children's Hour* when May Jenkin, an assistant to McCulloch left in charge of the department while he took a short leave, offered strenuous criticism of Sayers' first play in the series, *Kings in Judea*. Jenkin wrote that some passages were sure to be “over the heads of the audience,” particularly the wise man Melchior's astrological

⁷⁶⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 12. [Italics added.]

⁷⁶⁷ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 30 August 1940.

⁷⁶⁸ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to May Jenkin, 22 November 1940.

⁷⁶⁹ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to May Jenkin, 22 November 1940.

⁷⁷⁰ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 28 November 1940.

⁷⁷¹ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to Derek McCulloch, 11 October 1940.

speech and the political plots in the court of King Herod. Jenkin went so far as to suggest that explanatory narration should be peppered throughout the play, or that complex words and phrases should be altered.⁷⁷²

Sayers defended her writing for capturing and creating a sense of mystery around the wise men, responding to Jenkin, “The thing [children] react to and remember is not logical argument, but mystery and the queer beauty of melodious words.”⁷⁷³ She also objected strongly to the suggestion that the matter could be resolved in discussions at Bristol with a “committee of management.”⁷⁷⁴ She complained to Welch that such an arrangement would violate the roles of writer, director and producer. Each had a role to play, she asserted, and if her scripts were not favourably received then the BBC could decline to produce them. She would not consent to a halfway measure whereby her content was heavily edited.⁷⁷⁵ Sayers had a reputation in some quarters of the BBC as being a “difficult” scriptwriter, a rather unjust accusation.⁷⁷⁶ Sayers possessed a clear artistic vision and a strong commitment its realisation in all of her projects. In private letters to friends, Sayers described this conflict as “the usual violent struggle between myself and that body.”⁷⁷⁷ Welch intervened with his usual talent for diplomacy, mending fences between McCulloch and Sayers. He told Sayers “we should ignore the comments made on the play as a work of art,” defending her right to exercise her own artistic vision and authority over the script.⁷⁷⁸ Unfortunately, Miss Jenkin, feeling offended and maligned by the whole episode, wrote a second letter to Sayers reiterating her criticisms. It was in response to this final letter, forthrightly telling Sayers “we cannot delegate to

⁷⁷² BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to May Jenkin, 22 November 1940.

⁷⁷³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to May Jenkin, 22 November 1940.

⁷⁷⁴ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 28 November 1940.

⁷⁷⁵ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children’s Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 28 November 1940.

⁷⁷⁶ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 160.

⁷⁷⁷ “Letter to Nancy Pearn: 28 November 1940,” *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 205.

⁷⁷⁸ “Letter to Nancy Pearn: 28 November 1940,” *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 206.

any author, however distinguished, the right to say what shall or shall not be broadcast in a Children's Hour play,"⁷⁷⁹ that Sayers returned her contract to the BBC in torn pieces.⁷⁸⁰ After investing so much time and energy in the programme, Welch worked determinedly to keep the production on track. He convinced the BBC to circumvent their usual rules for production on the grounds that the plays were sure to be "a landmark in the history of religious education" and of great service to the spiritual development of children throughout the country.⁷⁸¹ He petitioned to have Sayers' regular collaborator Val Gielgud assigned as producer on the project. Sure enough, with Gielgud in place, Sayers agreed to return to the project. The *Children's Hour* would have no further input on the production, through the plays would be aired in the Sunday *Children's Hour* slot.

II. Theology, History and Politics in *The Man Born to be King*

The wartime context in which the series was written undeniably shaped the politics of *The Man Born to be King*. Sayers herself wrote that she wanted the play to remark and reflect on contemporary systems of government around the world. In early letters to McCulloch and Welch, she wrote that the central theme of the entire play-cycle would concern ideas of kingdom and kingship, the possibilities and limits of government. In a letter to Gielgud in March 1941, she explained that a focus on kingdom and leadership, "seemed like a suitable line to take on the thing just at this moment, when everybody is bothered about what sort of government the world should have."⁷⁸² To Welch, she anticipated concerns that such a focus may be obscure to children in the audience. She defended her choice, asserting,

At this moment, even children can't help knowing that there is a great dispute going on about how the world should be governed, and to what end, and I think

⁷⁷⁹ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to May Jenkin, 23 December 1940.

⁷⁸⁰ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to May Jenkin, 23 December 1940.

⁷⁸¹ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 2, Letter to James Welch, 2 January 1941.

⁷⁸² BBC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter to Val Gielgud 3 March 1941.

they are fully capable of understanding what the meaning of the quarrel is, if the situation and arguments are put before them in a simple and vivid way.⁷⁸³

Certainly, the focus on what kind of policies or government Britain and the world ought to have become a recurring theme in religious broadcasts throughout this period, as has been described in earlier chapters. Sayers' work was very much in keeping with the rest of the Religious Broadcasting Department in her desire to use religious programming as an opportunity to reflect on the issues of the day. While Welch and Temple used the radio pulpit to call for a more equitable society, Sayers' play demonised autocratic and tyrannical regimes. Politically, she was extremely sympathetic to the need for a fair distribution of wealth and resources in British society, though she called herself a Conservative and actively supported Churchill's premiership and re-election in 1951.⁷⁸⁴

The first play in the series, *Kings in Judea*, contained the most overtly political content, as it directly concerned the nature of Herod's rule in Judea. The play presented some challenges for Sayers, who despite her assertions that the play would not be too far over the heads of children listeners, struggled to put the political situation of Judea into language which they would understand.⁷⁸⁵ But Sayers doggedly pursued her goal, determined that it would be for the betterment of the audience. "The way in which the Christmas story is usually presented to school children, and indeed to grown-ups too, usually leaves out all the historical background,"⁷⁸⁶ she wrote. Much of the content of *Kings in Judea* certainly would elude the understanding of the youngest members of the audience. Quite unlike her pre-war Nativity play *He That Should Come*, this telling of the Christmas story did not focus on bewildered shepherds or imagined conversations at local inns in Bethlehem.⁷⁸⁷ Instead, two of the three scenes that make up

⁷⁸³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 23 July 1940.

⁷⁸⁴ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 164.

⁷⁸⁵ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 30 August 1940.

⁷⁸⁶ BBC WAC, RCONT1 910, Sayers, Dorothy L, Children's Hour, File 1, Letter to James Welch, 30 August 1940.

⁷⁸⁷ Dorothy L. Sayers, *He That Should Come: A Nativity Play in One Act*. (London: Victor Gollanz, 1939).

the play take place in Herod's court, putting on display his malevolent plotting to destroy any perceived threat to his rule through mass killings, his manipulation of foreign officials to preserve the façade of implacable rule, a convivial public persona masking brutal repression and his constant fear of the mob. Sayers' Herod was a menace; a lashing, biting dangerous villain, who skilfully crafted words to his advantage, enforcing his will with brutal force. Addressing a crowd of rebels, Sayers' Herod shouted: "*(With a sudden roar)* Stop where you are, fellow! *(quietly)* If anybody tries to leave while I am speaking I will have him broken on the wheel."⁷⁸⁸ Or, when defending his decision to kill Jewish children under the age of two to a Roman centurion who refused to carry out the order:

Herod: [...] But which is worse? To kill a score or so of peasant children or to plunge a whole kingdom into war? The Jews cry out for a Messiah. Shall I tell you Messiah's name? Fire and sword. Fire and sword.⁷⁸⁹

Sayers could see two contemporary parallels in her portrayal of Herod's court. In letters to Welch, she compared Judea with a tributary state in the Reich or the British Empire.⁷⁹⁰ Though these private discussions of her intentions were never made explicit in public, the play served as an obvious commentary on the violent nature of tyrannical and authoritarian rule.

Sayers enacted the central theme of kingship through the character arc of Jesus throughout the play cycle. In the fifth play, *The Bread of Heaven*, Jesus is depicted facing and overcoming the temptation to establish an earthly kingdom or regime. As Sayers wrote it, the kingdom of God was purely a spiritual one. She painted Jesus as exemplary for refusing to exploit his followers and rejecting offers and opportunities to gain worldly power.⁷⁹¹ Sayers reiterated familiar passages from the gospels to convince her audience that true power was spiritual and not worldly; the rejection of earthly wealth and power brought happiness and meaning in her plays. As the voice of Jesus proclaimed to a crowd

⁷⁸⁸ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 54.

⁷⁸⁹ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 56.

⁷⁹⁰ *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 182.

⁷⁹¹ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 129.

of believers, “Unhappy are the rich! They have their share of good things already and have nothing more to look for. Unhappy are the well-fed and self satisfied! There is an emptiness in their souls that nothing can fill.”⁷⁹² The distribution of food was used as a recurring theme in the plays, as it was in the Gospels, to teach listeners that followers of Jesus would have all of their physical needs met in an equitable manner when faced with need.⁷⁹³ Sayers emphasised the ways that the principles of fairness and equality governed the community of believers who followed Jesus. While her Jesus continually preached about the greater significance of the unseen spiritual kingdom of heaven, he responded to the earthly needs of his people. She placed her focus on what she considered to be core Christian teachings, those teachings that the “historical Christ” emphasised to his first followers.⁷⁹⁴

In writing and defending *The Man Born to Be King*, Sayers legitimised many of her choices by invoking their historical accuracy. The introductory and explanatory notes in the text of the play are rich with colourful facts and translations of Gospel passages from ancient Greek to her own idiom.⁷⁹⁵ The introduction, published in 1943 only months after twelfth play made it to air, has a somewhat defensive tone, admonishing her remaining critics and carefully explaining the stylistic and theological choices she made while assembling the text. In this introduction, Sayers wrote of her intention to portray the “historical Christ” as “a concrete and not an abstract reality.”⁷⁹⁶ Her Christ was not ethereal, but earth bound. He was wise but worldly, and the power of his pronouncements inextricably linked to the context in which he spoke. Sayers believed that rooting the gospel stories in their historical context would make them more relatable and more easily understood. It would temper sonorous, ecclesiastical readings that had become inaccessible through over familiarity, and reanimate the stories by demonstrating their

⁷⁹² Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 135.

⁷⁹³ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 141. For example, the story of Jesus feeding five thousand with two fish and five loaves of bread.

⁷⁹⁴ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 17.

⁷⁹⁵ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 50.

⁷⁹⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 11.

meaning and significance to the audience in knowable terms. She opposed the sanctification of the text of the King James Bible, and the sense that this seventeenth century translation should not be “expanded, interpreted, or added to, even in order to set the scene, supply obvious gaps in the narrative or elucidate the sense.”⁷⁹⁷ She also objected to versions of the gospel story which did not capture how unexpected and unprecedented the events described in those books would have been to the individuals experiencing them. “We are so accustomed,” she wrote, “to viewing the whole story from a post-Resurrection, and indeed post-Nicene, point of view that we are apt, without realising it, to attribute to all the New Testament characters the same kind of detailed theological awareness which we have ourselves.”⁷⁹⁸ By Sayers estimation, fostering an understanding of the historical time and place in which the gospel stories occurred by relating them to present-day life though modern idiom could endear the story to listeners who had forgotten its meaning and provide a renewed novelty and appreciation for the myths.⁷⁹⁹

It is Sayers’ particular use of and understanding of history that shaped much of the content, language and Christology of the play. She believed Christianity was unique among world religions because of its particular relationship with time. As she put it, “There have been incarnate gods-a-plenty, and slain-and-resurrected gods not a few; but [Jesus] is the only God who has a date in history.” In this way, Sayers defined the incarnation as a completely unique historical moment, preserved in what she took to be an unassailable historical record. This was quite unlike the transcendent God described by C.S. Lewis in his broadcast talks, who could not be bound by the confines of human understandings of time. For Sayers, historical realism would make the miracle of the incarnation shocking and visceral to listeners, and lend Christianity greater legitimacy. Sayers used the weight and authority of a constructed historical objectivism to legitimise her project, her interpretation and her vernacular translation. As Crystal Downing has

⁷⁹⁷ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 12.

⁷⁹⁸ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 16.

⁷⁹⁹ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 12-13.

observed of Sayers' personal beliefs, she took the doctrine of the incarnation to be more than just a creed of the church; to her it was something that made "the Christian story more relevant to lived experience."⁸⁰⁰ She considered the construction of a sense of realism vital to the development of any kind of gospel play, and that an awareness of Christ as a historical person could bring greater resonance to this aspect of the story. Her aim was to achieve a realistic depiction of *Ecce Homo*, an understanding of "this man, this person, of a reasonable soul and flesh subsisting, who walked then and there, surrounded ... by those individual people."⁸⁰¹

It is for this reason that in planning and developing the plays, she committed herself to the principle of dramatic realism. Her mandate for *the Man Born to Be King* was that: "Our Life of Christ should depict, at least primarily, not so much the eternal sacrifice ... it should be handled not liturgically or symbolically, but realistically and historically: this is a thing that actually happened."⁸⁰² The plays shied away from the miraculous and the sublime; no scenes were set in Heaven or Hell, no actor voiced the Devil though Sayers believed the temptation of Christ to be a pivotal part of the gospel stories.⁸⁰³ Partly, this was due to the technological constraints of radio. Sayers omitted any scenes of the ascension or the story of Pentecost, which she said she could easily do "on film or Drury Lane" but not on radio, as

the thing that speech-without-sight is least capable of conveying because the physical movement is of an abrupt and unlikely kind... "speaking in tongues" would sound like a cross between a row at the League of Nations and a zoo at feeding time.⁸⁰⁴

Hers was largely a temporal telling of the story of Christ, one that included the central Christian mysteries of the incarnation and resurrection, but dealt with them matter-of-

⁸⁰⁰ Downing, *Writing Performances*, 123.

⁸⁰¹ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 15.

⁸⁰² Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 11.

⁸⁰³ BBC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter to Val Gielgud 3 March 1941.

⁸⁰⁴ BBC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter to Val Gielgud 3 March 1941.

factly as the accounts of eye-witnesses. The story was anchored to the humanity of Christ, making human beings the primary actors in the tale. While the Kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom in the story, she emphasised the ways it could shape the conduct of human society and everyday life instead of focusing on a deferred paradise accessed through death. She wanted to connect the experience of the characters and side-characters in the gospels with the experience of living through and enduring war. She believed that listeners would be able to see parallels between the society in which the disciples lived and wartime British society. “God was executed by people painfully like us,” she argued, “in the over-ripeness of the most splendid and sophisticated Empire the world has ever seen. In a nation famous for its religious genius and under a government renowned for its efficiency.”⁸⁰⁵ Historical realism and colloquial dialogue could help to reanimate the story and reinforce these parallels. She considered the use of modern speech to be “the swiftest way to produce the desired sense of shock.”⁸⁰⁶ This shock would emerge from an awareness that the people who lived in the first century were not abstract, monstrous or saintly, but everyday, ordinary people experiencing a time they did not know was extraordinary.

The predominant Christology of high modernity informed Sayers’s interpretation of history and her emphasis on the historical Christ. According to Alister McGrath, post-enlightenment rationalism held great sway over the development of Christology as a theological discipline, that is, the branch of theology occupied with questions about the identity and historical personhood of Jesus Christ, his simultaneously divine and human elements.⁸⁰⁷ Sayers’ Christology exhibited a kind of historicism, a prevailing concern for reanimating the past, creating context to promote historical awareness.⁸⁰⁸ She thought the historical record of Christianity lent it a pseudo-rationalistic authority as an empirically

⁸⁰⁵ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 16.

⁸⁰⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 17.

⁸⁰⁷ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 4th ed., (London: Blackwell, 2007), 488. Christology is the section of Christian theology dealing with the identity of Jesus Christ, particularly the question of his human and divine natures.

⁸⁰⁸ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 4th ed., (London: Pearson Education, 2006), 6-8.

true creed that could be proven by the singular “truth” of the gospel accounts. Crystal Downing has anachronistically and incorrectly assigned poststructuralist aims and identity to Sayers interpretation of the gospel stories. According to Downing, her “ionizing of faith vocabularies” parallels the work of postmodern theorists.⁸⁰⁹ But this is a fundamental misreading of Sayers’ intentions. Sayers wanted to root her characters into historical context to understand their points of view, she did not root the gospel texts themselves into context. She takes the record of the gospels as unassailable fact in a literalist manner. She treated them like a set of objective, historical documents that supported the tenets of her faith. Her faith derived from reason, just as her art did not bend to her faith; both were objectivist experiences of a singular, unassailable truth, one that was fixed and immutable. In true modernist fashion, Sayers saw history as both linear and incorruptibly progressive.

Theologically, *The Man Born to King* had much in common with other religious broadcasts produced by the BBC, in that it exhibited some strands of both liberal and neo-orthodox thought, presenting the figure of Christ as both fully human and fully divine. Like liberal theologians, she focused on the humanity of Christ, placing great significance on the incarnation, occupied by her quest to understand and depict the “historical Jesus”⁸¹⁰ while minimising some of the supernatural elements of the gospel story. But the Christology of the plays at times emphasised the transcendent otherness of the character of Jesus. As has been mentioned above, Sayers prized realism over abstraction in *The Man Born to be King*, but some portions of the play did stress the “divine otherness”⁸¹¹ of Christ. Sayers considered Barth an inferior theologian to Temple and Neibuhr,⁸¹² but during the war some elements of neo-orthodoxy gained currency with theological thinkers of many stripes, as their circumstances prompted them to prize definitive interpretation

⁸⁰⁹ Downing, *Writing Performances*, 13.

⁸¹⁰ Plantinga, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 243.

⁸¹¹ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 240.

⁸¹² *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 257

and certain truth in the face of crisis and instability.⁸¹³ Neo-orthodoxy stripped uncertainty and ambiguity from the gospel stories by stressing Christ's divinity, putting aside questions about the role of culture and history in shaping the gospel stories. This hybridity was not indicative of a religious "culture of confusion," as Callum Brown has put it.⁸¹⁴ Instead, it suggests that Sayers' plays were part of an adaptive religious culture, which used elements from separate, and at times contradictory, theological traditions as needed. Perhaps this was less of a blurring of the liberal and neo-orthodox, but a modern homage to the Chalcedonian Christ.⁸¹⁵

Sayers treated the gospels as eyewitness accounts of the incarnation, ones that required editorial precision to amalgamate into a singular narrative.⁸¹⁶ Instead of choosing one gospel as a master narrative in the vein of Marcion, Sayers took elements from each gospel writer's account, in the spirit of Tatian, to create one coherent story.⁸¹⁷ She wanted to combat what she regarded as the common conception of the gospels, that they were a collection of disjointed texts and moral aphorisms wrenched from context, rather than a coherent history of episodes.⁸¹⁸ But, due to the non-narrative nature of the source material, she acknowledged "I shall probably have to do a certain amount of rather bold dovetailing to get action and plot into each section" of the play cycle.⁸¹⁹ She complained of the difficulty in such an approach, and her trouble reconciling contradictory facets of Jesus's persona. After all, each gospel writer painted Christ in a slightly different way, a natural consequence of their differing interpretations of the events and teachings of which they wrote. Richard Burridge has examined the central character of the Jesus portrayed in

⁸¹³ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 86. Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 224.

⁸¹⁴ Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Longman, 2006), 116.

⁸¹⁵ Plantinga, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 243. The Chalcedonian Christ had two natures, equally divine and human.

⁸¹⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 29. Sayers writes: "I have treated all four evangelists as equally 'witnesses of truth.'"

⁸¹⁷ Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (London: SCM, 1994), 24.

⁸¹⁸ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 12

⁸¹⁹ *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 172.

each of the four gospels. He argues that the author of Mark primarily depicts Jesus as an enigmatic wonder-worker and eschatological prophet, a character that can at times be quite passive and one that dies in fearful isolation.⁸²⁰ The book of Matthew's Christ is much more human, an engaging teacher governed by a mission to care for the socially maligned. In Luke, Jesus is depicted as a man of prayer occupied by concern for the poor, who took special effort to provide for the inclusion of women, while John emphasised the divinity of Christ above his humanity.⁸²¹ In the *Man Born to Be King*, Sayers used elements of each gospel-writer's depiction. Her Christ was human and divine, always attentive to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, someone who could be righteously angry and profoundly calm. Sayers also tried to create a psychological realism that would match the historical and linguistic realism of the plays. Her notes throughout the plays demonstrate the careful attention paid to the emotional profile of each character. For example, in her description of Jesus before the third play she wrote, "He, too, is facing the division between his home life and his mission... the sterner side of him is, on the whole, uppermost, though on arriving at the party and while telling his parable he is easy and gentle."⁸²² She wanted to her characters to be believable as real world individuals, facing struggles familiar to the listening audience.

Capturing the personalities of other characters in the gospel stories proved to be another significant challenge. "Mary is the world's worst snag"⁸²³ Sayers wrote to Gielgud. She appeared here and there in the gospels, but never had any ascribed dialogue.⁸²⁴ Sayers' aim was to create a character that was sweet without being sentimental. She was acutely aware that if Mary was not depicted correctly, the plays could easily provoke ill feeling. She wrote to McCulloch, "The part itself presents difficulties in this way, especially as we have to cope with the feelings of Roman Catholics, to whom she is almost as divine as her Son, and deeply dyed Protestants, who

⁸²⁰ Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 12-13.

⁸²¹ Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 21.

⁸²² Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 78.

⁸²³ BBC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter to Val Gielgud 3.3.41.

⁸²⁴ BBC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter to Val Gielgud 3.3.41.

regard everything about her with the deepest suspicion.”⁸²⁵ It was important to craft an ecumenical Mary, one that was human and holy and could be appreciated by all denominations. It was equally challenging to assign distinct characteristics to each of the twelve disciples, since many were little known apart from their names.⁸²⁶ The Evangelists had written much about Judas, but Sayers struggled to understand the character’s motivation at different points in the story. “Judas is an insoluble riddle,” she complained to Welch.

He can’t have been awful from the start, or Christ would never have called him – I mean, one can’t suppose he deliberately chose a traitor in order to get himself betrayed – that savours too much of the *agent provocateur*, and isn’t the kind of thing one would expect any decent man, let alone any decent God, to do. [...] It must have been a case of *corruptio optimi pessima*, but what corrupted him?⁸²⁷

Ultimately, Sayers settled her dilemma by using the character of Baruch to bring about the temptation of Judas. Her Judas was arrogant from the start, but well intentioned. Baruch encouraged Judas to envision the Kingdom of Heaven as an earthly one, and suggested the political climate in Judea could change with a charismatic leader to lead a popular rebellion.⁸²⁸

Although Sayers complained to Gielgud that the play was too masculine, she did little to highlight female characters in the story. She wrote to Gielgud, “We are going to be badly off for female relief – nothing but male voices. I wish Christ’s female friends had been rather more respectable; but we must get Mary Magdalene in however delicately we skip over her profession.”⁸²⁹ Because of Mary Magdalene’s centrality in the resurrection story, Sayers had no choice but to mention her place in the Lazarus story and the household at Bethany. But she approached the task begrudgingly. Though feminist theologians have since reclaimed Mary Magdalene as the first apostle and close friend of

⁸²⁵ *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 187.

⁸²⁶ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 151.

⁸²⁷ *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 172

⁸²⁸ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 125.

⁸²⁹ BBC WAC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter to Val Gielgud 3 March 1941.

Christ,⁸³⁰ Sayers aversion to her perceived lack of respectability is notable. Elsewhere she wrote rather disparagingly that it was impossible to write the character “except by giving the general impression that she lived a fast life and probably had too many cocktails.”⁸³¹ Male characters with “unsavoury” reputations were not given similar treatment, perhaps partly because their offences concerned property instead of sex. Sayers committed herself to interrogating the meaning of the gospel stories in their original Greek, but she does not read around or through the voices of the Gospel writers and the prejudices of their own cultural frameworks. She did not pause to consider that the lack of dialogue assigned to female characters may be a result of an ingrown misogyny among the writers of the gospel texts. In the final version of the play, female voices do recur as minor characters and as part of crowd scenes, but the *Man Born to Be King* is the story of Christ told largely through masculine voice and perspective.

Sayers believed in fostering and maintaining close ties between mainstream Christianity and contemporary British culture. She called “a dramatic handling” of theology a thorough test of its constancy and validity. But she firmly believed that drama could not be shaped to theology, the priority must always be to create a good piece of theatre.⁸³² Sayers contrasted her interests and intentions from those of the BBC on this score. In the introduction to the plays she wrote that many “pious men” thought of the plays as a way to “do good”; but she says her priority was simply to do “good theatre.”⁸³³ She believed, “Dogma is the vocabulary and grammar of... art.” It was “part of the material with which [the artist] works, not ... an exterior end towards which his work is directed.”⁸³⁴ For Sayers, artistic truth naturally aligned with theological truth. She wrote,

The business of the dramatist is not to subordinate the drama to the theology, but to approach the job of truth-telling from his own end, and trust the theology to emerge undistorted from the dramatic presentation of the story.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁰ Karen Jo Torjeson, *When Women Were Priests* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 26-27.

⁸³¹ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 151.

⁸³² Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 13.

⁸³³ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 13-14.

⁸³⁴ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 14.

⁸³⁵ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 14.

Her intention was not to create something solely didactic; promoting learning could be a byproduct of the plays but not its central aim.⁸³⁶ Like later proponents of theological liberalism, including Paul Tillich, Sayers stressed the importance of a strong connection between mainstream culture and the Christian faith in many of her writings and lectures.⁸³⁷ In the Edward Alleyn Lecture of 1944, Sayers argued that the arts in Britain had inextricable ties to Christianity, and that a more vibrant arts community could only come into form with a fully realised Christian aesthetic.⁸³⁸ She believed art could provoke and inspire intangible experiences in the same way that Christians experienced the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Sayers applied Trinitarian doctrine to her understanding of the creative mind, building on R.G. Collingwood's assertion that art was a necessary expression of the human mind and emotion. She contended that there was a "third person" in the mind of the artist that could bring him into direct knowledge of an unknowable and unimaginable reality.⁸³⁹ By Sayers' reckoning, the Holy Spirit was a powerful gateway to truth, in both art and religion.⁸⁴⁰ These beliefs were compatible with her positivistic take on the gospel stories, and her belief in the existence of an absolute truth.

III. Language and Conflict

Sayers crafted *The Man Born to be King* to satisfy what she considered to be the Church's greatest needs: unambiguous clarity, accessible form, and a greater understanding of the culture and people that produced the gospels. The use of language was key to achieving all of these aims. Indeed, the project of BBC Religion forced a reconsideration of what language – what words, phrases, tone and accent – could be publicly deployed to commune with the divine in collective prayer, to discuss Christian teachings, and to voice sacred stories. This voice did not have to be Oxbridge, elite, or

⁸³⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 15.

⁸³⁷ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 83.

⁸³⁸ Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions*, 29.

⁸³⁹ Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions*, 40.

⁸⁴⁰ Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions*, 40.

speak in Jacobean idiom. It did not have to rely on sonorous invocations to prayer. Using a mass medium capable of reaching the entire nation at once, it sought to represent “the ordinary listener”, with a shift from “plummy voice” to “regular speech.” This change had significant implications for constructions of sacredness. The BBC’s religious broadcasting taught that sacred moments could take place anywhere at any time, invoked by any manner of speech. *The Man Born to Be King* was both an indictment of tyranny in its politics, and a celebration of democracy in its linguistic form, through its attempt to be accessible and open to all. Sayers sought the “modern equivalent” for biblical speech, while preserving the ancient setting for the tale, imagining that a military policeman or a tax collector would use bits of American slang, and that local speech would be full of “catch-phrases” picked up from different regions, as trade routes would bring bits of “vulgar Latin, bastard Greek and Syrian dialects” into a community.⁸⁴¹ In this way, the play offered a meditation on the language and meaning of Englishness, that it consisted of a chorus of accented voices, moments of formality and informality.

It was important to Sayers that the “rhythm of speech chosen to represent this ancient modernity” could lift itself from time to time “without too much of a jolt” into the “language of prophesy.”⁸⁴² In her earlier BBC nativity play, *He that Should Come*, she used colloquial speech for the majority of the script, until arriving at the birth of Christ. At that point the language shifted from informal slang (Centurion: “Those are the lads of the sixth, going up to keep order in Jerusalem, “good luck to ‘em!”⁸⁴³) to rigid formality (Joseph: Hark! The dayspring from on high hath visited us. Centurion: Gods be favourable to the boy!⁸⁴⁴). *The Man Born to Be King* marked the first time in which sacred speech, the words spoken by angels and God and the language of prophesy, was performed in colloquial English. She justified this choice by explaining that there were

⁸⁴¹ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 18.

⁸⁴² Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 18.

⁸⁴³ Sayers, *He That Should Come*, 48.

⁸⁴⁴ Sayers, *He That Should Come*, 78.

grades of colloquial speech, so it was possible to fit one as appropriate. “Fortunately,” wrote Sayers,

the English language, with its wide, flexible, and doubletongued vocabulary, lends itself readily to the juxtaposition of the sublime and the commonplace, and can be stepped up and down between the two along an inclined plane which has one end on the flat pavement – *In the south suburbs at the Elephant* – and the other among – *The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces*.⁸⁴⁵

She suggested that the movement between types of speech within the Authorised Version or Shakespearean plays had been masked by time, acquiring “the patina of nobility” over the years since they were first written. These variations certainly existed in the original Greek. The English of the King James Bible had been seen as a little old fashioned and formal even in its own day, due to the strong influence of the Wycliffe and Tyndale translations.⁸⁴⁶ Sayers also suggested that the class striations of English vernacular would not exist in the same way in first century Judea. “The snobbery of the banal had not yet imposed itself” she argued, “you might still speak nobly without being sneered at as a highbrow.”⁸⁴⁷ Sayers may be guilty of idealising the first century in this respect, but she made the point to defend her inclusion of what she considered to be both the “high” and “low” ends of a spectrum of contemporary idiom graded by respectability.

Sayers anticipated some of the controversy that developed around the broadcast of the plays. She believed it might receive a fearful reaction because of the lack of recent precedents “to prepare the minds of critics and audiences for what they were to hear.”⁸⁴⁸ Since the Lord Chamberlain forbade any representation of any person of the Trinity on the stage until 1967, the only widely known precedent was the decennial performance of the Passion play in Oberammergau, Germany. Indeed, the play was pitched within the BBC and in the initial press release as a “Radio Oberammergau” to fortify this association, since Oberammergau had a centuries long reputation for performing the

⁸⁴⁵ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 18.

⁸⁴⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 19; Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible*, (London: Anchor Books, 2002), 75.

⁸⁴⁷ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 18.

⁸⁴⁸ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 11.

Passion devoted and conscientious manner.⁸⁴⁹ Sayers believed the Lord Chamberlain's ban had fostered the belief that any representation of the person of Christ was "intrinsically wicked." Further, she thought this law commit its own kind of heresy, by encouraging a Docetic Christology that denied the humanity of Christ.⁸⁵⁰ Though she was committed to her colloquial approach, Sayers confided her concerns about using idiomatic speech to Gielgud early on in the writing process,

There are going to be lots of snags in this thing – in particular the invention of ordinary, human, connecting dialogue for Christ. It's alright making up conversation for the disciples and people, but it's difficult doing it for Him; and if one doesn't we are going to get the effect one wants to avoid – namely, a perfectly stiff, cardboard character, different from and unapproachable by common humanity, doing nothing but preach sermons. He must be allowed to say at least things like "Good morning," and "Please" and "Thank you," whether they are in the Bible or not.⁸⁵¹

To fit the character of Christ into her narrative, it was essential that he spoke and conversed with other characters on a range of matters, from the trivial to the existential. Sayers' Christ had good English manners, and a familiar conversational style, which she used to create the impression of a warm, friendly and welcoming man.

The first broadcast of *The Man Born to Be King* would have been jarring to some listeners. Sayers' rendering of Matthew would have been one of the more alarming to proponents of middle class respectability. In the character notes, Sayers describes him as "as vulgar a little commercial Jew as ever walked Whitechapel, and I should play him with a frank cockney accent."⁸⁵² This characterization is clearly evident in a discussion between Philip and Matthew in Scene 1 of the fourth play:

PHILIP: I told you I'm sorry. Master, I am very sorry. But it all sounded right when he worked it out.

⁸⁴⁹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "Letter from B.B. Chapman to press," 8 December 1941.

⁸⁵⁰ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 11.

⁸⁵¹ BBC WAC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960, Letter to Val Gielgud, 3 March 1941.

⁸⁵² Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 106.

MATTHEW: Fact is, Philip my boy, you've been had for a sucker. Let him ring the changes on you proper. You ought to keep your eyes skinned, you did really. If I was to tell you the dodges these fellows have up their sleeves, you'd be surprised.⁸⁵³

Sayers hoped to create characters that were recognisable and familiar. BBC producers had strong reactions to this characterisation of Matthew in particular. In a letter to her friend Muriel St. Clare Byrne, Sayers recounted how producer Eric Fenn “didn’t like to think that a gospel should be named after a person so vulgar and illiterate,” while Welch thought he was “so common and so sweet... a real live person.”⁸⁵⁴ Sayers also took care to rephrase Jesus’ central teachings and parables in a colloquial and accessible manner. “Behave to every man as you would like him to behave to you” said Jesus in the fourth play, *The Heirs to the Kingdom*; “Take all your problems to God,” he said in the third play, *A Certain Nobleman*.⁸⁵⁵ She rephrased one of the beatitudes from the sixth chapter of Matthew as follows:

JESUS: But you mustn’t worry. There’s more in life than eating and drinking, and the body is worth more than clothing. Live like the birds, from day to day – they neither sow nor reap nor hoard up food for winter, yet God feeds them all the same. And these wild flowers – think how they grow. [...] And if God takes care of these little plants, which flower for a day and are food for cattle tomorrow – do you not think He will take care of you who mean more to Him than the flowers? [...] Let the future look after itself. And don’t meet trouble half-way.⁸⁵⁶

Her translation remained extremely close to the original text, preserving key words, imagery and details from the gospel accounts. She retained the arcane imagery of the

⁸⁵³ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 105.

⁸⁵⁴ Letter to Muriel St. Clare Byrne, 19 November 1941. *Letters of Dorothy Sayers*, 318.

⁸⁵⁵ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 121; 100.

⁸⁵⁶ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 100. In the King James Version, Matthew 6:25-33 reads as follows: “Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, the body more than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? [...] But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

parables, but used familiar idiom and common phrases to express their meaning in a manner that could be more easily grasped and understood.⁸⁵⁷

The BBC planned a press conference to prepare both the press and the audience for the unique use of language in Sayers' plays, and generate interest from the listening public. Invitations to the press conference, held on 10 December 1941, were sent with the heading "Radio Oberammergau." Welch and the publicity department tried to sell *The Man Born to be King* as a modern update of this unique, longstanding ritual performance, refit to suit 1940s mass communications technology. "This series breaks entirely new ground," they wrote to representatives of local and national newspapers, and would mark the first time "the voice of Our Lord will be represented on the air."⁸⁵⁸ They explained in the letter that they wanted the aims and intentions of the series to be clearly understood, so that there was no mistaking the level of respect and care that went into the production. They released the names of some of the actors in the series, as Welch feared some papers may conduct a badgering witch-hunt to find those giving voice to the characters of Christ and the disciples.⁸⁵⁹ Sayers prepared her own statement to read at the conference, which was not circulated within the BBC in advance.⁸⁶⁰

In this statement, Sayers set out her aims and intentions very clearly for the press, situating her plays as a rebuke of both those who saw the gospel in purely humanist terms, and those focused solely on the divinity of Christ. She attempted to anticipate criticism from every quarter, from the theologians, nonbelievers, traditionalists and theatre critics. Her statement brimmed with a defensive piety, a quality shared by the *Man Born to Be King* plays themselves. She explained how her depiction of Christ was both fully human and divine, rejecting docetic interpretations and those who wanted to accept

⁸⁵⁷ Sayers, *Man Born to be King*, 139. For example, the parable of the prodigal son.

⁸⁵⁸ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "Letter from B.B. Chapman to press," 8 December 1941.

⁸⁵⁹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. Memo from DRB to DP, 5th December 1941.

⁸⁶⁰ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "Letter from B.B. Chapman to press," 8 December 1941.

Christ as a moral teacher but not divine.⁸⁶¹ In much the same vein as C.S Lewis's *Broadcast Talks*, Sayers did not allow any equivocation on the matter of the Resurrection. "It is the history of the judicial murder of God," she said, "either it is a delusion and a lie, or it is the history of the triumph of God."⁸⁶² For Sayers, the gospel story could only be entirely true or entirely false owing to her literalist interpretation and her understanding of the gospels as wholly factual historical texts. Sayers emphasised this discursive blending of elements of faith and reason in to the press by stressing her desire to present the gospel story "not in the form of a devotional exercise, but primarily as a piece of real life – something that really happened – enacted by human beings against the stormy social and political background of 1st century Palestine."⁸⁶³ She explained that in order to accurately convey the "reality" of the Incarnation, the characters in the play, particularly Jesus, must talk in modern English to be convincingly human to the audience.⁸⁶⁴ She rejected the invention of "Bible English" which "too often resulted in making the characters talk Wardour St. English – and nobody who talks Wardour St. English sounds even remotely like a real human being, even less like the God Almighty."⁸⁶⁵ Sayers actively decoupled the accent and diction of the elite from the pronunciation and performance of Biblical text and speech, "Because if not, [Jesus] would appear as the one stained-glass, unreal figure among a crowd of flesh-and-blood people."⁸⁶⁶ Her Jesus was democratic in every respect: in his politics and his mannerisms, particularly in his accessible tone of voice that indicated he was included among the people, instead of set apart from them. This was a people's Jesus for the people's faith.

⁸⁶¹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "BBC Announcement: The Man Born to Be King" [transcript of press conference interview with Sayers] 10 December 1941.

⁸⁶² BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "BBC Announcement: The Man Born to Be King" [transcript of press conference interview with Sayers] 10 December 1941.

⁸⁶³ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "BBC Announcement: The Man Born to Be King" [transcript of press conference interview with Sayers] 10 December 1941.

⁸⁶⁴ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "BBC Announcement: The Man Born to Be King" [transcript of press conference interview with Sayers] 10 December 1941.

⁸⁶⁵ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "BBC Announcement: The Man Born to Be King" [transcript of press conference interview with Sayers] 10 December 1941.

⁸⁶⁶ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L., File 1a, 1941. "BBC Announcement: The Man Born to Be King" [transcript of press conference interview with Sayers] 10 December 1941.

However eloquent and well-laid out Sayers' defence of her writing choices, the press conference generated an immediate and overwhelming controversy over the use of colloquial language, which threatened the survival of the series and triggered well-organised protests lobbying for its cancellation. Press coverage of *The Man Born to Be King* following the initial press conference on 10 December 1941 picked out the use of slang words, and took Sayers' reasoned defence to be dismissive of audience sentiments. For example, on the 11 December 1941 *The Daily Herald* published an article under the heading "Gangsterisms in Bible Play," by P.L. Mannoek. It focused on the use of the words "sucker," "rake off" and "twister," and quoted Sayers as saying "We expect to affront many people ... but as I make the characters speak modern English this is inevitable."⁸⁶⁷ *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* similarly focused on the use of slang phrases out of their context within the plays.⁸⁶⁸ Several articles named West End actor Robert Speight as the first actor to portray Christ in modern English, with the *Daily Telegraph* stressing his respectability and suitability for the role by describing him as a "Shakespearean actor, ... known for his playing of Biblical and historical parts."⁸⁶⁹ *The Observer* reported favourably on the project, and admired the scope of the task Sayers took on to translate the gospels into modern idiom in the plays. It praised the aim and execution of the plays, and Sayers' deft touch, which allowed her to accomplish the difficult task. As the weekly radio column reported,

Since the crux of the story is that Christ is human, he speaks like the others. Some lovely and familiar sayings have had to be reworded, and there will be controversy about it, but her rephrasing of the Beatitudes and the Parables, which she read to journalists today, has been finely done.⁸⁷⁰

The BBC's Director for Publicity called the *Daily Mail*'s reaction the most severe and misleading, but was surprised that some other papers had missed the controversy entirely,

⁸⁶⁷ *Daily Herald*, "Gangsterisms in Bible Play," 11 December 1941.

⁸⁶⁸ "BBC Actor to Portray Christ," *Daily Mail*, 11 December 1941; "Radio Bible Plays," *Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 1941.

⁸⁶⁹ *Observer*, "A Radio Passion Play," 11 December 1941; *Daily Telegraph* "Radio Bible Plays," 11 December 1941.

⁸⁷⁰ *Observer*, "A Radio Passion Play," 11 December 1941.

such as the *Daily Mirror*.⁸⁷¹ Kenneth Wolfe and Asa Briggs similarly target the *Daily Mail* as the source of this controversy. But, as then Minister of Information Brendan Bracken reported to the BBC, it was the coverage of the *Daily Herald* that generated the most attention and controversy around the programme within parliament and the ministry.⁸⁷²

By 12 December, some BBC officials had begun to create distance between themselves and Sayers, particularly B.E. Nicholls and Director-General Ogilvie, calling the play a device purely of her own creation that was not in keeping with her original contract with the BBC in their internal memos, a defence completely contrary to fact.⁸⁷³ Indeed, Ogilvie had to be reminded that it was he who had contacted the Lord Chamberlain months prior to arrange for permission for the broadcast to air, and that no objections to the programme had been raised when it was placed before the Home Board for approval.⁸⁷⁴ Ogilvie passed a note to Welch saying: “Two shocks broke on us this week: Pearl Harbour and *The Man Born to be King*.”⁸⁷⁵

Much of the perception of public outrage was fanned by the Lord’s Day Observance Society. This group, under the leadership of H.H. Martin, had influential connections to parliament and support from both established and nonconformist churches. They had successfully appealed for the closure of theatres on Sundays, and had issued previous protests over the broadcast of jazz and music hall programmes on Sunday as the BBC collapsed the Reithean Sunday into a weekly broadcast schedule that had elements of the sacred and profane throughout.⁸⁷⁶ The Lord’s Day Observance Society sent its first

⁸⁷¹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Born to be King,” 12 December 1941.

⁸⁷² BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Minister of Information: Dorothy Sayers Plays,” 17 December 1941.

⁸⁷³ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Born to be King,” 12 December 1941.

⁸⁷⁴ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Dorothy Sayers Plays,” Letter from C(P) to D-G, 11 December 1941.

⁸⁷⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 226.

⁸⁷⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 227.

letter to the BBC on this matter on 12 December 1941, calling the play “an act of irreverence bordering on blasphemous” and a “revolting imitation” of the voice of Christ, before having heard the play.⁸⁷⁷ The group placed significant pressure on the Lord Chamberlain’s office, prompting Lord Clarendon to write on several occasions to Ogilvie with copies of the protest letters enclosed and a stern charge to “deal with” the group.⁸⁷⁸ One letter called the broadcasts a “breach of Divine Law, profanation of most sacred events and of blasphemous character.”⁸⁷⁹ H.H. Martin paid £1200 of his own money to generate a substantial press campaign in opposition to the broadcast of the plays.⁸⁸⁰ He wrote to members of parliament, Archbishop Temple and the BBC repeatedly calling for action on the matter of barring the plays from public broadcast.⁸⁸¹ He paid the *Church of England Newspaper* to print a one page protest denouncing the broadcast as “a spoliation of the beautiful language of the Holy Scriptures which have been given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit,” and calling for the public to write “in your thousands” to the BBC.⁸⁸²

⁸⁷⁷ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. Letter from H.H. Martin to Ogilvie, 12 December 1941.

⁸⁷⁸ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. Letter from Lord Chamberlain to Ogilvie, 18 December 1941.

⁸⁷⁹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. Letter to Welch, 17 December 1941.

⁸⁸⁰ *Dispatch*, 28 December 1941.

⁸⁸¹ *Daily Express*, “Ban Radio Play Letter to Archbishop,” 30 December 1941.

⁸⁸² *Church of England Newspaper*, “Radio Impersonation of Christ: A Protest,” 19 December 1941.

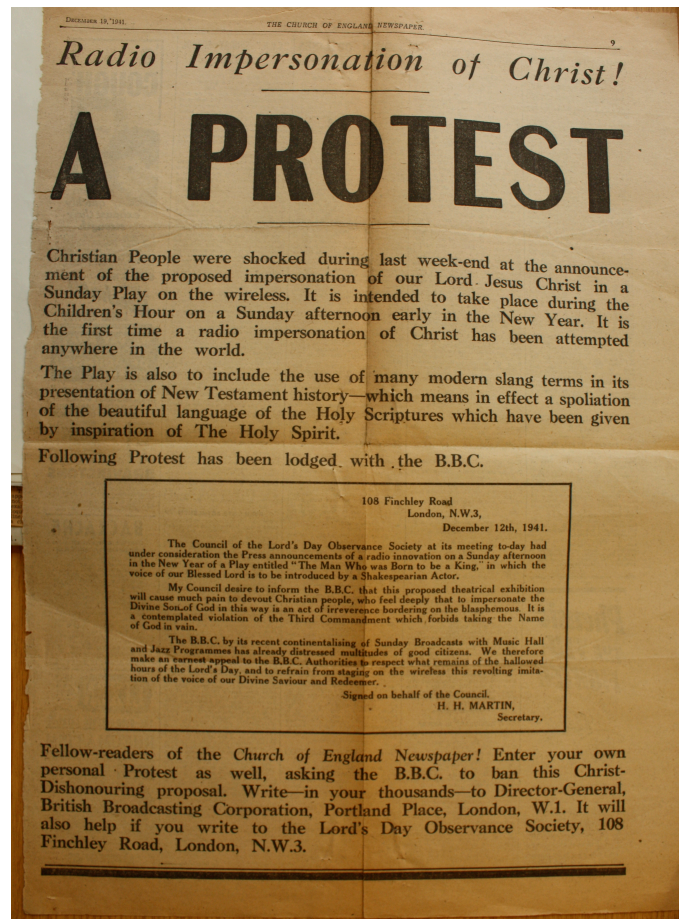


Image 1 - Lord's Day Observance Society Notice of Protest in *Church of England Newspaper*, 19 December 1941. Printed with permission.

Government officials and MPs responded to the barrage of negative press following the initial press conference with fear, urged the programme to be pulled from the BBC's schedule to avoid further controversy. Bracken, in his phone call on 17 December with Ogilvie, expressed his concern that the programme was generating too much "trouble" through its negative press, and wanted it to be dropped from the schedule. He reported that he had been overwhelmed by approaches in the House of Commons about it, and "his feeling was that the whole of the House would be dead against it."⁸⁸³ He

⁸⁸³ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. "Minister of Information: Dorothy Sayers Plays," 17 December 1941.

wanted to be able to explain in his next session of parliamentary questions that the BBC was reconsidering the series. Bracken said that the MOI did not want to get “mixed up” in the controversy, nor did it want responsibility for running and organising religious programmes directly.⁸⁸⁴ He wanted to both assert his disapproval of the programme on the grounds that it was generating bad publicity, even before it was brought to air, but preserve the impression that the BBC had total autonomy in broadcasting matters. Bracken urged the BBC not to use the voice of Christ, as “the war deepened people’s religious feelings, and the gangster language would create a storm.”⁸⁸⁵ To put this request to the BBC so directly was in itself a controversial matter. The typist transcribed Bracken’s approach to Ogilvie as follows:

If the MOI were to offer any advice to the BBC about the plays, then the whole question of the MOI/BBC relationship would be raised, and he did not know where it would end. He suggested saying in his reply that the voice of Christ would not be used.⁸⁸⁶

In other words, Bracken wanted the BBC to drop the whole “controversial” issue by removing the voice of Christ from the play, but did not want to be seen as giving that advice publicly. Bracken was motivated by fear on both counts: a fear that the plays would generate controversy, and a fear of what public opinion would make of direct intervention in BBC programming. Ogilvie replied that it was too premature to say that the voice of Christ would not be used. He put the question to the Central Religious Advisory Committee, the ecumenical body that governed the religious broadcasting department, and advised Bracken to report “he had been in touch with the BBC where the matter was under consideration.”⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁴ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Minister of Information: Dorothy Sayers Plays,” 17 December 1941.

⁸⁸⁵ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Minister of Information: Dorothy Sayers Plays,” 17 December 1941.

⁸⁸⁶ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Minister of Information: Dorothy Sayers Plays,” 17 December 1941.

⁸⁸⁷ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Minister of Information: Dorothy Sayers Plays,” 17 December 1941.

The Ministry of Information received its first official question about the plays on 19 December. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Information, Mr. Thurtle, was asked by Sir Percy Herd, Unionist MP for Devizes “whether he is taking any steps to revise the series of plays on the life of Jesus... so as to avoid offense to Christian feeling.”⁸⁸⁸ Thurtle replied that the MOI and Parliament did not have the right to exercise jurisdiction over religious plays on the BBC, but assured him that the CRAC, under the leadership of the Bishop of Winchester and with representatives from all the major churches in the country, would deliberate on the matter.⁸⁸⁹ The *Daily Mail* reported that the plays were being “reconsidered” by the BBC following the parliamentary debate.⁸⁹⁰ The whole affair highlighted the complex relationship between the BBC and the MOI, with the BBC at times capable of exercising autonomy, and forced to bend to the dictates of MOI censorship at others. In the case of the *Man Born to be King*, enough dogged support for the programme existed that the matter was put to the CRAC first before being cancelled outright.

Internally within the BBC, the strongest support for the broadcast of *The Man Born to Be King* came from Welch, but directors of other departments and regions within the Corporation lobbied for the project. For example, the Northern Ireland Director wrote to Val Gielgud that in spite of the backlash in the local press and the certainty of a petition being written and sent to Churchill, “I seriously hope that those responsible will not give way to protests of this nature” because they had not yet heard what they were objecting to, and if certain sections of the public did not want to hear the plays “they need not listen.”⁸⁹¹ Later in the month he added that the majority of the protests in Ireland did not originate in the Church or Ireland or the Roman Catholic Church, but from “extreme fundamentalist sections of the Nonconformist churches” whose adherents “could not

⁸⁸⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol 376, no 19. Friday 19th December 1941. p. 2245.

⁸⁸⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol 376, no 19. Friday 19th December 1941. p. 2245. The Communist MP for Fife, Mr Gallagher, asked if the parliamentary secretary could look at the manuscript of the plays himself, to which no reply was recorded.

⁸⁹⁰ *Daily Mail*, “Bishop to Rehear Gospel Plays” 20 December 1941.

⁸⁹¹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “Born to be a King,” Memo from Northern Ireland Director to D-G, 18 December 1941.

imagine that Jesus spoke in any language but the Authorised Version.”⁸⁹² Pulling the broadcasts based on a protest that had not heard what it was they were objecting to could set a dangerous precedent. For his part, Welch wrote to the CRAC and the Director-General that the project must be allowed to go ahead. “I ... stand or fall by her,” he wrote in a memo on 20 December, placing his employment and reputation at the BBC on the line.⁸⁹³ He asserted that the plays would achieve the precise aims of the Religious Broadcasting Department and BBC Religion; they would create “a moving religious experience” for millions of listeners, including those outside or only loosely affiliated with the church. He defended the plays as the direction of the future of Christian broadcasting. “What we are hoping to do is precisely what the medium of the microphone should do for the Christian religion,” he wrote.⁸⁹⁴ He also made it clear that a disproportionate concern had arisen from only two paragraphs in “the cheaper press,” and that some newspapers and proprietors had written in support of the plays.⁸⁹⁵ Welch believed that the press coverage could ultimately be to the great benefit of the project, since it would generate greater listenership from the appearance of controversy. He also suggested that the shocked reaction had great significance for the theology of BBC Religion. “People will be shocked, and rightly” he claimed. “We are prepared for our Lord to be born into the language of the Authorised Version or into stained glass or paint; we are not prepared for him to be incarnate.”⁸⁹⁶ Modern idiom broadcast over the radio could summon an appreciation for the incarnation lost from traditional representations and depictions. For Ogilvie, deferring to the leadership of the CRAC on decision of whether to broadcast the plays or not meant that the BBC could justify its decision to

⁸⁹² BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941. “The Man Born to be King,” Memo from Northern Ireland Director to D-G, 30 December 1941.

⁸⁹³ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 155.

⁸⁹⁴ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 155.

⁸⁹⁵ Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady*, 155. BBC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941, Letter from Church of England Newspaper to Welch, 19 December 1941. The Editor of the Church of England Newspaper wrote to Welch encouraging the project and apologising for bad press caused by the Lord’s Day Observance Society protest printed in the pages of his newspaper.

⁸⁹⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 227; BBC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960, Letter from Welch to Sayers, 13 December 1941.

cancel as one that had ecumenical backing, preserving the appearance of autonomy while bending to the will of the MOI.⁸⁹⁷ The first play in the series was allowed to air on 21 December, since it was solely focused on the nativity. The decision whether to air the remainder of the series rested with the CRAC.

Opponents of *The Man Born to be King* attacked its credibility through crude characterisations of the language and dialogue assigned to characters. That the working class speech of east London boroughs or the sayings commonly used by American soldiers were referred to in the press and parliament as “gangsterisms” exposed the class biases of the Lord’s Day Observance Society and their allies. It was the language of the working classes that they deemed improper, heretical and blasphemous. That this kind of dialogue was even referred to as a “gangsterism” reflected a clear criminalisation and demonization of working class speech. Ross McKibbin has suggested that the redistribution of social esteem through rhetoric that emphasized the equality of sacrifice and provision led to a politicisation of working class speech during the war years. Some segments of the middling classes reacted against a perceived shift away from traditional pre-war social hierarchy by taking note of the “rudeness” of working men and women, particularly working class servicemen.⁸⁹⁸ Certainly, this attitude can be gleaned from the letters and official protests lodged in opposition to the broadcast of *The Man Born to Be King*. As J.A. Kensit wrote to the *Daily Telegraph*, “The introduction of slang terminology is in exceedingly *bad taste*, and to bring the scriptural characters to the *common place* is deeply resented.”⁸⁹⁹ The dialects and turns of phrase found in the docklands or the factory or the soldier’s barracks were anathema to the sacred in the eyes of the protestors. The Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland wrote that the use of modern language turned the gospels into a “blasphemous caricature,” and signified a “lamentable spiritual and moral declension of our generation,” while the Committee of

⁸⁹⁷ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941 “Dorothy Sayers Plays,” 22 December 1941.

⁸⁹⁸ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 531.

⁸⁹⁹ *Daily Telegraph* “Letters” 3 January 1942. [Italics added.]

Ministers, Elders and Others in Belfast wrote that the use of modern speech encouraged “paganising influences.”⁹⁰⁰ Some letters in the press suggested this impropriety would be punished with divine retribution. In the *Daily Herald*, a J.T. Lawrence of Worthing wrote that the broadcast of a play which used slang was inappropriate at a time when “we are engaged in a life and death struggle in defence of spiritual values,” alleging that the broadcast would be welcomed by enemies of Britain.⁹⁰¹ Some of the protests objected to the person of Christ being voiced by any actor at all, no matter what variety of speech he used. However loud these voices were, the views represented were firmly in the minority of both the listening public and among church leaders.

The CRAC approved the broadcast of *The Man Born to be King* on the grounds that the use of idiom was historically accurate, and in the hope that the familiarity of the tones of speech could reach new listeners. Each member of the CRAC was given a copy of the second play in the series, *The King’s Herald*, the first play in the series in which Jesus speaks.⁹⁰² Committee members wrote in overwhelming support for the script, with nonconformist, Anglican and Catholic representatives united in their effusive praise. The Bishop of Ripon considered the plays “admirable in taste and restraint,” while Dr Iremonger, former director of the Religious Broadcasting Department, said they were sure to be of great influence to “the average man.”⁹⁰³ Three members of the committee said the plays were of such high quality they deserved a higher billing than the *Children’s Hour*. Only one member expressed dissent before the meeting, before he had a chance to read the scripts. The Provost of Guildford feared that a play which featured “Our Lord speaking in the vernacular of today” would lead to “less gifted writers than Sayers doing

⁹⁰⁰ National Archives, INF 1/434, “Statement of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland,” May 1942; “Committee of Ministers, Elders and Others,” May 1942.

⁹⁰¹ *Daily Herald*, “Letters,” 17 December 1941.

⁹⁰² BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941, Radio Obergammerau, 8 December 1941.

⁹⁰³ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941 “CRAC For and Against” n.d.

the same sort of thing” to a much lower standard.⁹⁰⁴ However, the outcome of the meeting of the CRAC on 8 January 1942 was unanimous. The plays were to continue to air at a pace of approximately once per month, with Welch working as editor and Gielgud producing. Though it was announced in the *Telegraph* that the plays would continue unedited and unaltered, in direct contrast to Bracken’s assertion in parliament that alterations to the plays would be considered, Sayers was told that she had to be willing to make some minor alterations as the committee saw fit.⁹⁰⁵ In some ways, this placed Sayers in the situation she dreaded with the *Children’s Hour*, but she was comforted by the fact that it was her close ally Welch would have final decision making authority over the scripts.

Cyril Wintom, Bishop of Winchester and chairman of the CRAC, wrote a long defence of the committee’s decision regarding the plays in his diocesan letter of February 1942. He remarked his surprise at the committee’s unanimous support for the series, given that the CRAC was made up of a diverse membership with strong credentials and cautious impulses.⁹⁰⁶ He used the ecumenical make-up of the committee to claim its authority as a representative body. He described how the CRAC believed the plays were worth broadcasting because they were accessible and “new.” He believed that through the plays, millions of listeners unfamiliar with the details of the gospel story would “hear of Him as both Man and God,” a figure equally composed of accessibly human and transcendent divine natures.⁹⁰⁷ He compared Sayers’ work with that of early Protestants who translated and retranslated the Bible to bring it to new audiences. Colloquial speech was merely another dialect worthy of translation. He also believed that the novelty of Sayers’ approach made it worthy of broadcast and attractive to new audiences. He praised her ability to bring “newness” to the story through language and the medium of

⁹⁰⁴ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941, “CRAC For and Against,” n.d.

⁹⁰⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, “Life of Christ Plays: BBC Approval,” 9 January 1942.

⁹⁰⁶ *Winchester Diocesan Leaflet*, no. 64, “The Bishop’s Letter,” February 1942.

⁹⁰⁷ *Winchester Diocesan Leaflet*, no. 64, “The Bishop’s Letter,” February 1942.

presentation.⁹⁰⁸ That “newness” had its own intrinsic worth, adapting and reinventing Christianity to suit a mid-twentieth century audience was an important signifier of the impulses that shaped radio religion.

IV. Broadcast and Reaction

The BBC broadcast *The Man Born to Be King* throughout 1942, with the final play airing on 18 October.⁹⁰⁹ Due to the overwhelming popularity of the series, it was continually petitioned to rebroadcast throughout the war. It was brought back to air every Lent or Easter season until 1947. The plays received an extremely favourable response in the press after they were broadcast. *The News Chronicle* called the plays “dignified and simple,” while the *Daily Herald* now pronounced “The BBC’s Gospel Play is Bold - and Good.”⁹¹⁰ The *Daily Express* rather disappointedly remarked that the plays “had no shocks.”⁹¹¹ Newspapers published letters and articles of support, a number of which offered pointed criticism of the actions and intentions of the Lord’s Day Observance Society. For example, the *Daily Mirror* called into question the “cacophonous leadership of the redoubtable Mr H.H. Martin,” whom, alongside “his bigoted friends have long wielded an influence far in excess of their real importance. Their defence of the Sabbath has a shrill acerbity that is not easily reconciled with the day of rest.”⁹¹² In the *Daily Telegraph*, a letter signed by a Lieutenant R.N.V.R reported that he and his comrades felt dismay at the actions of the Lord’s Day Observance Society, defending Sayers as “a staunch upholder of religion ... who is trying to make Christianity a thing in the hearts of the modern generation.”⁹¹³ Three days later, the editorial leader of the *Telegraph* defended the historical precedent of the plays, and called opponents ridiculous for assuming that

⁹⁰⁸ *Winchester Diocesan Leaflet*, no. 64, “The Bishop’s Letter,” February 1942.

⁹⁰⁹ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, 1941, List of Man Born to be King broadcasts, 1949.

⁹¹⁰ *Daily Herald*, “The BBC’s Gospel Play is Bold – And Good,” 22 December 1941.

⁹¹¹ *Daily Express*, “Dorothy Sayers Radio Play had no shocks,” 22 December 1941.

⁹¹² *Daily Mirror*, 3 January 1942.

⁹¹³ *Daily Telegraph*, “Radio Bible Plays,” 3 January 1942

Christ spoke in the language of the King James Version.⁹¹⁴ The series enjoyed an enthusiastic reception from Church leaders. William Temple wrote to the BBC in June 1942 that *The Man Born to be King* was “one of the great contributions to religious life in our time.”⁹¹⁵ In the summer of 1943, he wrote to Sayers, at the urging of Welch, hinting at the offer of a Doctorate of Divinity in honour of her services to the Church of England. According to Peter Webster, it would have been the first honorary degree offered by Lambeth to a woman, but Sayers declined on the grounds that it might muzzle her creatively.⁹¹⁶

Some opponents of the plays continued to petition for the broadcasts to be barred from the air in 1942, despite their popularity. The Christian Institute of Glasgow organised a formal petition to King George VI, a compendium of 31, 232 names bound into four large volumes and sent to the government in July 1942.⁹¹⁷ Activities of this nature belonged to a small, but vocal, fundamentalist minority. This petition largely contained Scottish and Irish names, and included prefatory statements by the Christian Institute of Glasgow, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Committee of Ministers, Elders and Others in Belfast. The petition called on the King to block the remaining broadcasts in the series on the grounds that they were created by “powerful enemies with great resources... attempting to destroy your Majesty’s Empire.”⁹¹⁸ They believed that any depiction of Jesus Christ speaking in his own voice was blasphemy, and claimed that it would threaten the war effort by “increasing the strain and anxiety of your Majesty’s subjects, particularly those who are serving and those who have relatives and friends serving.”⁹¹⁹ The Christian Institute of

⁹¹⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, “Christ on the Radio,” 6 January 1942.

⁹¹⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 234.

⁹¹⁶ Peter Webster, “The Offer of a Lambeth Degree to Dorothy L Sayers,” in Melanie Barber and Stephen Taylor (eds), *From the Reformation to the permissive society: a miscellany in celebration of the 400th anniversary of Lambeth Palace*, (Church of England Record Society, 18), (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 565.

⁹¹⁷ NA INF 1/434, “Petition against broadcasts representing Our Lord Jesus Christ as speaking in his own person,” p.1.

⁹¹⁸ NA INF 1/434. p. 2

⁹¹⁹ NA INF 1/434, p.3

Glasgow also wrote that the plays would dishonour and displease God, and that God would ignore prayers for victory and damn the nation with his judgement. This sharp response to the broadcasts completely missed what millions more found beneficial and engaging in the plays. They framed their objection as a defence of home, nation and empire, but their millenarian fearfulness did not find much resonance in wider public opinion.

The BBC's Listener Research department reported that the *Man Born to Be King* had a both a large audience and a favourable public response. Listener Research estimated that 12.2% of the adult population of the United Kingdom listened to the second play in the series, the first in which Jesus speaks. This was the highest adult audience for Sunday *Children's Hour* in many months, and a high figure for any play of any kind on a Sunday afternoon. The first play in the series was listened to by 8.2%, and the Listener Research rightly surmised that it was the increase in publicity generated by the debate over the plays, which boosted the audience by a third.⁹²⁰ They also estimated the appreciation index for the play to be between 80 and 85 on a scale of 100, meaning that the overwhelming majority of listeners had a favourable reaction to the plays. The report also noted that a very small minority completely opposed the plays, but those who supported it dwarfed this number. 90% of those surveyed completely supported an actor playing the role of Christ in a broadcast play, and the principles of the project.⁹²¹ Respondents wrote appreciatively of the plays, with one "housewife" offering congratulations for "making the Bible 'live' for us, the picture of life in those days was so real, and thanks for the modern dialogue, it made the story so clear."⁹²² At least one listener wrote in praise of the different social classes represented among the disciples.⁹²³ Sayers satisfied her chief aims, and was met with wide audience approval. A mill sawyer remarked that he was glad the

⁹²⁰ BBC WAC, LR/631, "The Man Born to Be King," May 1942.

⁹²¹ BBC WAC, LR/631, "The Man Born to Be King" May 1942.

⁹²² BBC WAC, LR/631, "The Man Born to Be King" May 1942.

⁹²³ BBC File R19/697, Entertainment, The Man Born to Be King, "The King's Herald," Memo from D.F.D. to Robert Speight, 28 January 1942. A letter flagged as being of great interest to Robert Speight, the actor who played Jesus in the Gielgud production, from a man called Wilfred Rooke Ley.

BBC “had the courage to proceed in spite of protest,” while another “housewife” remarked that she expected to be offended due to the press coverage she had read beforehand, but “it was so beautifully acted and brought the Life of Christ nearer to our everyday life, that I much enjoyed it.”⁹²⁴ The plays were also praised for “bringing home the New Testament story in a new and personal way. Just as in the Middle Ages the Miracle Plays brought life into the story to the people.”⁹²⁵ The medium of radio had the powerful ability to be both personal and intimate, and simultaneously a spiritual moment for “the people” to experience in chorus.

The plays continued to be well received throughout the series, with the audience for each play ranging between 8 and 14% of the adult population.⁹²⁶ It received strong praise throughout its broadcast run, though some listeners had difficulty listening in to all of the series. Welch faced organisational obstacles with the *Radio Times*, who first insisted on labelling the play as “Sunday Children’s Hour,” making it indistinguishable from regular Sunday programming.⁹²⁷ Plans were immediately made to rebroadcast the series, due to popular demand and public petitions.⁹²⁸ The Gielgud production was rebroadcast until 1944, until the BBC received a copyright claim from The Gramophone Company over the use of Raval’s “Introduction and Allegro for Harp, Wood-wind and Strings” as background music in the series.⁹²⁹ Sayers was not interested in having the plays continually rebroadcast or reproduced; she saw them as a product of a singular moment, produced for a particular context, and did not want them to be transmitted “for all time.”⁹³⁰ She believed such repetition would diminish the potency of the work. However, in one of his last acts as Director of Religious Broadcasting, Welch re-

⁹²⁴ BBC WAC, LR/631, “The Man Born to Be King” May 1942.

⁹²⁵ BBC WAC, LR/631, “The Man Born to Be King” May 1942.

⁹²⁶ BBC WAC, LR/854, “The Man Born to Be King” May 1942.

⁹²⁷ BBC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 1a, Letter from Welch to Publicity, May 1942.

⁹²⁸ BBC WAC, RCont1, Publicity, Sayers, Dorothy L. File 2, Letter from Welch to Sayers, 15 November 1943.

⁹²⁹ BBC WAC, File R19/697, Letter from MT Chandler, 29 August 1946.

⁹³⁰ BBC WAC, File R19/697, Letter from Sayers to Gielgud, 5 August 1947.

commissioned the plays in 1947, believing that a fresh production could reach audiences anew.⁹³¹ In 1948, Welch was sent a script for a film production of the life of Jesus by Fox studios. He forwarded it to Sayers and asked her to vet it, but Sayers declined, writing in return, “I have been dreading Hollywood Jesus for years.”⁹³²

V. Conclusions

The Man Born to Be King was chiefly a project in democratising the languages of faith by reimagining the form, tenor and tone of sacred speech. It embodied the culmination of the basic principles of BBC Religion through its colloquial, accessible and ecumenical approach. It was written in this way so as to appeal to listeners with all manner of religious leanings and allegiances, from those who believed without belonging to those who actively identified with a particular denomination. Sayers’ plays attempted to achieve a sense of universal appeal by blending dualisms to create a play and narrative composed of common ground. Her approach was driven by her faith, and her reason, by a belief that Christ was human and divine, by a desire to make the story both sacred and profane. The plays were beloved within the BBC’s Religious Broadcasting Department, and were held up the zenith of wartime religious broadcasting achievements in subsequent internal histories and reports. *The Man Born to Be King* occupied an ecumenical and theological middle ground that Christians of all types could appreciate. It decentred sacred language, rejecting the customary Jacobean idiom spoken in the voice of social elites, translating holy words and teachings into modern idiom. Much like the broadcasts already analysed and discussed in this dissertation, the *Man Born to Be King* was a product of its wartime context, and the desire to stress British unity and equality in the face of continental fascism. Sayers provided a people’s gospel for a people’s faith, an accessible iteration of Christianity in modern English, with the voices from all quarters of British society represented.

⁹³¹ BBC WAC, File R19/697, Letter from Gielgud to Sayers, June 1946.

⁹³² BBC WAC, Rcont1, Sayers, Dorothy L., Scriptwriter File 1941-1960. Letter from DLS to Gielgud, December 1946.

Chapter 5

Post-War Directions: The End of the BBC's Spiritual Consensus? 1944-1948

"The BBC must always observe its obligation towards tolerance and liberty of expression for serious thought ... to meet the needs of people who are hungering after information on spiritual issues [it must] broadcast statements of unbelief as well as of differing beliefs."

- Sir William Haley to the British Council of Churches, 1948.

The BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department (RBD) and the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information emphasised commonalities between all kinds of Christians across Britain and Empire during the war years. However, as the war drew to a close, the impetus for a universal, homogenised ecumenical presentation of the Christian faith receded. The RBD had perpetuated an inoffensive, generically broad kind of Christianity, one that could act as a shared national religion. However, when the external threat to national security subsided, so did the need to emphasise commonality and unity above all. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, in order to foster a sense of unity, BBC Religion employed an ecumenical tone, accessible format, and middle-ground theology to create a workable People's faith that could be used by all Christian listeners. However, towards the end of the war, when Allied victory began to seem assured, James Welch began to doubt whether this approach could survive in post-war Britain. In an article published in the *BBC Yearbook* of 1945, he asked, "Will our wartime broadcasts bear the scrutiny of an impartial Christian mind when peace has given us disengagement from threatened interests and has set our work in wider context?"⁹³³ Welch was acutely aware that the situational pressures created in wartime, generated from Government missives, managerial demands or pressure from the MOI, had shaped the form and content of religious broadcasting, and had at times overridden ideals and convictions.⁹³⁴

⁹³³ Welch, "Religious Broadcasting," *BBC Yearbook* 1945, 41.

⁹³⁴ Welch, "Religious Broadcasting," *BBC Yearbook* 1945, 42.

Broadcasting philosophies would have to be rethought to suit the post-war mental, spiritual and cultural landscape.

In 1945, the homogeneity and hegemony of BBC Religion faced considerable challenges. Religious uniformity no longer served an important myth-making function; Churches, individuals and marginal groups began to bristle at what they started to identify as forced conformity. Atheists, fringe traditions within Christianity, and even the “mainstream”⁹³⁵ denominations clamoured for substantive change in religious broadcasting policy so that each group could have its own dedicated time and space on the airwaves. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the BBC and the MOI used a broad interpretation of “democracy” to legitimate the production of broadcasts for the widest possible audience, marginalising special interests. It was for this reason that religious broadcasting focused on the core, shared elements of the Christian faith, with the hope that broadcasts had a sufficiently generic form for individuals to then apply to their own religious practice at home. However, between 1944 and 1948, pressure built both within and outside the BBC to allow true freedom of religious expression and permit the broadcast of what had previously been classified as “religious controversy.”⁹³⁶ The end of the Second World War prompted a meaningful reconsideration of religious broadcasting practices as the spiritual consensus of wartime fractured. The mainstream denominations agitated for the demise of the generic Christian BBC Religion in order to replace it with denomination-specific broadcasts, or co-opt radio religion as a mechanism to increase church attendance. At the same time, the BBC’s leadership pushed for experiments in religious tolerance and liberty, in order to defend the Corporation’s position as Britain’s a truly national broadcaster in terms of both content and reach. During the process of Charter renewal, the BBC faced pressure to demonstrate its commitment to allowing a diverse range of voices access to the airwaves. Furthermore, the return of television from

⁹³⁵ The CRAC defined the ‘mainstream denominations’ as Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Free Churches, Church of Scotland, and Roman Catholic.

⁹³⁶ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 331, 332, 26-31.

its wartime hiatus forced the RBD to attempt to adapt religious broadcasts to a new mass medium; a challenge it struggled to navigate.

I. Post-war Reorganisation at the BBC

a) Changes in size, programming priorities and resources

The logistical and political demands created by the Second World War brought about considerable changes in the size and scope of the BBC. Indeed, the staff and broadcasting capacity had tripled by 1945,⁹³⁷ with the BBC broadcasting from very early morning to very late at night in Britain and around the world. It devoted far more time to news programming than it had in 1939, and offered more popular variety programming, music and entertainment than ever before.⁹³⁸ Critics considered radio programming a new art form. Sound techniques shared between Allies brought new quality to transmissions.⁹³⁹ The medium gained respect and recognition for its ability to reach audiences and regions that print never could. According to Asa Briggs, “Broadcasting as a whole had gained influence not only in Britain but in all parts of the world.”⁹⁴⁰ More than that,

It had given final proof of its power to penetrate censorships and blockades, span oceans, enter fortresses, fox holes and prison camps, to bring news and orders, encouragement and menace, influence opinion, build morale, or spread doubt and despair.⁹⁴¹

Hugh Chignell has suggested that the decade following war witnessed “radio in decline,” and locates the “golden age of wireless” in 1930s.⁹⁴² But Andrew Crisell’s *History of British Broadcasting* rightly claims that in the post-war years “radio enjoyed its greatest

⁹³⁷ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 4: Sound and Vision*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 27.

⁹³⁸ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 274.

⁹³⁹ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 28.

⁹⁴⁰ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 28.

⁹⁴¹ Morris Gorham, *Broadcasting and Television since 1900* (1952), 211.

⁹⁴² Hugh Chignell, *Public Issue Radio: Talks, News and Current Affairs in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 57.

era.”⁹⁴³ A number of famous and influential programmes were made during this period, including Louis MacNeice’s *Dark Tower* (1946), Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood* (1954), the wonderfully subversive and influential comedy *The Goon Show* (1952-9), and the long running serial *The Archers* (1950) -- still broadcast today on BBC Radio 4.⁹⁴⁴ Some wartime programmes continued long after the conflict closed. *Music While You Work*, topical debate programme *The Brain’s Trust*, comedy programme *It’s That Man Again*, and regular news bulletins had come to be considered staples of the BBC’s broadcasting schedule. In her study of wartime broadcasting, Nicholas has rightly observed that “styles of presentation had been revolutionised” during the war. There were more regional accents than ever before, and women could be heard as announcers on the Forces Programme.⁹⁴⁵ Nicholas found “far greater emphasis in the Home Service on presenting ‘ordinary people’” by 1945.⁹⁴⁶ Listeners, for their part, came to expect more technologically sophisticated programmes, while Listener Research became an essential part of broadcast planning and strategy.⁹⁴⁷ Audience opinions and tastes shaped policy and programming decisions, a considerable departure from the pre-war Reithian era.

b) New leadership

The post-war years prompted a careful reconsideration of broadcasting policies, as wartime pressures to emphasise national unity subsided. The BBC’s Charter Renewal on 1 January 1947 ensured a lively public debate on the future of the BBC, as listeners, politicians and BBC staff reassessed the form and function of the BBC’s broadcasting monopoly. Many of the changes and debates that took place coincided with the tenure of Sir William Haley as Director-General. Appointed in March 1945, Haley, a former editor of the *Manchester Guardian* who served as the BBC’s Editor-in-Chief during the war, restructured the BBC’s radio service to create a tripartite platform with three tiers of

⁹⁴³ Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

⁹⁴⁴ Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 57.

⁹⁴⁵ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 274.

⁹⁴⁶ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 274.

⁹⁴⁷ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 274.

broadcasting content.⁹⁴⁸ Reith had established a practice of “mixed programming” that intensified during the war, meaning a Home Service that included all genres of programming (comedy, variety, news, chamber music, quizzes, religious services, vaudeville, drama and talks) broadcast in succession. Different genres of programming were not granted separate platforms; the BBC assumed each listener could find something to suit their own particular tastes on the central service. Jean Seaton has said that this policy “depended on an assumption of cultural homogeneity: not that everybody was the same, but that the culture was singular and undifferentiated.”⁹⁴⁹ This policy of mixed broadcasting deepened during wartime; it had government backing and propagandistic intents. But the development of a sophisticated Listener Research department changed the BBC irrevocably.⁹⁵⁰ No longer could the BBC provide only the kinds of programmes it thought could best educate and enlighten; it now had to cater to public opinion, relying on statistical evidence to determine which formats and programmes were most effective and resonant. Indeed, to keep its monopoly, it had to demonstrate that it could effectively cater to the different social, national, and religious groups in Britain. Since an emphasis on uniformity no longer served a key propagandistic function, it was now possible to accommodate the wishes of the victorious British public.⁹⁵¹ The recognition of distinct groups of listeners combined with and a desire to treat all groups equally⁹⁵² meant the post-war BBC faced greater even pressure to identify rather than change public tastes.⁹⁵³

However, Haley’s broadcasting philosophy was not solely driven by audience interests and his ambitions were not purely egalitarian. He tried to fashion what he termed a “cultural pyramid” that could educate and improve the listening masses.⁹⁵⁴ The tripartite

⁹⁴⁸ Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 58; Crisell, *BBC*, 67.

⁹⁴⁹ Jean Seaton, “Social Revolution?” in *Power without Responsibility: The Press, Broadcasting, and New Media in Britain*, eds. James Curran and Jean Seaton, 6th edition. (London: Routledge, 2003), 143.

⁹⁵⁰ Silvey, *Who’s Listening?* 87.

⁹⁵¹ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 275.

⁹⁵² Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 28.

⁹⁵³ Seaton, “Social Revolution,” 149.

⁹⁵⁴ Seaton, “Social Revolution,” 150.

reforms left the Home Service largely untouched from its wartime format. The Forces Programme, with its emphasis on popular, audience-led programming and music, quickly turned into the Light Programme overnight on 29 July 1945 with little fanfare or announcement.⁹⁵⁵ Peacetime broadcasting began before war in Japan concluded, as “the war which the BBC and the Home Front fought was over.”⁹⁵⁶ On 29 September 1946, Haley launched the Third Programme, which had a focus on high culture, art and substantive debate.⁹⁵⁷ Still influenced by Reith’s original broadcasting mandate to inform, enlighten and entertain, Haley intended the Third Programme to be a platform that would “raise public taste.” This approach had strong support in Parliament, where it was commonly held that “broadcasting should be serious and improving.”⁹⁵⁸ The BBC wanted listeners to begin with the easy offerings of the Light programme, but then be led “upwards” towards the Home Service and eventually to the serious discussions featured on the Third Programme.⁹⁵⁹ In many ways, the Third Programme signified the survival of the Reithean ethic of “mixed programming;” it was an aspirational model that depended on a meritocratic, hierarchical vision of the social order.⁹⁶⁰ The Third Programme catered to very minority tastes with only 0.13% of adult audiences listening in, while many millions listened to the other services.⁹⁶¹ Indeed, the Third Programme was plagued by low listening figures throughout its lifetime. The Home Service continued as a London-based network, but now included a federation of regional services broadcasting from Scotland, the North, the Midlands, the West Region, Wales and Northern Ireland. This was a return to pre-war precedent.⁹⁶² Without the physical constraints of war, it was possible to provide programming for all tastes and interests across the entirety of the BBC’s networks.⁹⁶³ Plans for the Third Programme and other post-war reforms were

⁹⁵⁵ Crisell, *BBC*, 69.

⁹⁵⁶ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, 275.

⁹⁵⁷ Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 58.

⁹⁵⁸ Crisell, *BBC*, 68.

⁹⁵⁹ Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 58.

⁹⁶⁰ Seaton, “Social Revolution,” 149, 151.

⁹⁶¹ Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 58.

⁹⁶² Crisell, *BBC*, 67.

⁹⁶³ Crisell, *BBC*, 67.

circulated as early as 1943, as the BBC faced strong audience pressure for greater choice in programming. However, the implementation of any significant changes to broadcasting policy and philosophy was delayed until the conflict drew to a close.⁹⁶⁴

c) *Regionalisation*

The return of regional wavelengths prompted a significant shift from a singular, centralised national service to one that catered to regional variations in culture and identity. There was strong popular support for the return of regional wavelengths, and loud calls for the end of a homogenous national Home Service.⁹⁶⁵ In July 1945, Haley announced in the *Radio Times*,

It will be the BBC's aim to make its six regionalised Home Services alert, living things; steadily developing in strength and character, drawing on their native resources and taking the best from elsewhere... Their existence should lead to a rivalry of both creativeness and craft, and to the fostering of those local and national cultures which are an enduring part of our heritage and which broadcasting can encourage more powerfully than any other medium.⁹⁶⁶

BBC officials hoped that this structure would create competition between the central Home Service based in London and the regional services.⁹⁶⁷ John Maynard Keynes, writing in *The Listener* as a prominent member of the Bloomsbury Group, welcomed the development, stating, "Nothing can be more damaging than the excessive prestige of metropolitan standards and fashions."⁹⁶⁸ It is important not to understate the cultural significance of the return of regional wavelengths or dismiss it as merely a resumption

⁹⁶⁴ Kate Whitehead, *The Third Programme: A Literary History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 11; Crissell, *BBC*, 67; Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 54.

⁹⁶⁵ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes October 1945. The BBC identified Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales as "regions" instead of nations. The term "regional broadcasting" is being used here in the same way it was used internally at the BBC, to describe a category of wavelengths separate from the Home and Light services.

⁹⁶⁶ *Radio Times*, 27 July 1945, p.1.

⁹⁶⁷ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 88.

⁹⁶⁸ John Maynard Keynes, *The Listener*, 12 July 1945.

pre-war broadcasting practices. The decision to resume regional broadcasting reflected a careful consideration of the Corporation's relationship with the public. The British public was not singular in composition, but composed of multiple audiences, perspectives and tastes.

Within the BBC, there was a growing awareness of the difficulty of the Corporation's post-war task, to provide a broadcasting service that catered to the interests of all listeners, instead of promoting forced conformity and homogeneity. Robert Silvey, the Director of Listener Research, said that his department's findings showed "the population was not monolithic; it consisted of a number of different publics, of widely differing sizes and certainly not mutually exclusive for any listener might be a 'member' of many."⁹⁶⁹ Silvey acknowledged that this had likely been the case before the war, but that they had no adequate basis for comparison.⁹⁷⁰ The reinstitution of regional programming was widely welcomed by those who had tired of the homogeneity of the central Home Service. Writing in the *BBC Yearbook* of 1945, L.A.G. Strong, proclaimed "Long Live Regional Broadcasting!"⁹⁷¹ He wrote that while "a family, however divided within itself, closes fiercely against the outsider," the necessity of such a closing of the ranks had passed with the end of the external threat of conquest and the conclusion of the war. Post-war, it was considered more appropriate to celebrate and value "various kinds of British life: to give expression to those diverse individualities of thought and speech which make up the national character."⁹⁷² The end of the war allowed the articulation of a new kind of Britishness; one that celebrated the diverse character of different parts of Britain, without forcing conformity. Strong wrote,

The value of diversity in broadcasting cannot be exaggerated. A civilisation that tends towards mass-production and uniformity needs the corrective of individual views and ways of life expressed in individual voices. ... I am not sure that this

⁹⁶⁹ Silvey, *Who's Listening?* 122.

⁹⁷⁰ Silvey, *Who's Listening?* 121.

⁹⁷¹ L.A.G. Strong, "Long Live Regional Broadcasting," *BBC Yearbook 1945*, (London: BBC, 1945), 23

⁹⁷² Strong, "Long Live Regional Broadcasting," 23.

isn't the strength of regional broadcasting, that it doesn't try to please too many people at once.⁹⁷³

Nevertheless, the BBC resisted surrendering total control to the regions. B.E. Nicholls, Senior Controller, said that the new system had the benefit of creating “competition within a monopoly.” However, he added that “in competition there must be freewill within limits.”⁹⁷⁴ That the separate nations within the United Kingdom were referred to as “regions” instead of nations in BBC parlance betrays the Corporation’s unwillingness to grant full autonomy to these groups. In 1946, the Saltire Society pressured the BBC to create a separate Scottish Board of Governors to regulate the Scottish regional wavelength, with the aim of ensuring that all programming was consistent with “Scottish cultural interests.”⁹⁷⁵ Though Scotland’s regional service was referred to as the Scottish Home Service, it did not have its own governing board, only a regional Controller.⁹⁷⁶ Regional Directors faced considerable local pressure to ensure that their broadcast wavelengths contained programmes that reflected the mores and interests of the local community. The format of programmes remained much the same as the Home Service, but had a regional focus.⁹⁷⁷ Listener Research attested to a sharp rise in interest once regional programming resumed in Scotland, with the audience for some programmes tripling or quadrupling in size.⁹⁷⁸ The concern was no longer for unity above all, but to find a responsive audience by adapting to local and regional demand.

⁹⁷³ Strong, “Long Live Regional Broadcasting,” 24-25.

⁹⁷⁴ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes October 1945. Quote ascribed to Nicholls by Welch.

⁹⁷⁵ “Broadcasting in Scotland: New Proposals by the Saltire Society,” *The Scotsman*, June 17 1946.

⁹⁷⁶ W. H. McDowell, *History of BBC Broadcasting in Scotland, 1923-1983*, p.55. The next major reconsideration of regional broadcasting policy took place with the Report of the Beveridge Committee, published in 1949. It called for greater devolution in broadcasting decision-making and authority.

⁹⁷⁷ McDowell, 58. Scottish regional programmes included: *Arts Review*, *The McFlannels* (a popular variety serial), *Sportsreel*, *Scottish Digest* (a monthly review of Scottish newspapers), *Seen from Scotland* (weekly talks), *Scottish Opinion* (monthly coverage of current affairs), *Scotland in Parliament*, and *Farm Forum*.

⁹⁷⁸ BBC WAC, R13/411, “Private Memo” from Head of Religious Broadcasting to Religious Broadcasting Assistant, Scotland, 7 July 1948.

II. Changes to Religious Broadcasting Policy

a) *Regional Religious Broadcasting*

The first major change to religious broadcasting policy was prompted by the reinstitution of regional wavelengths by the BBC. Shortly before the war ended, Melville Dimwiddie, the BBC's Regional Director for Scotland, registered his objections to the central control imposed on Scotland's religious broadcasting schedule. He wanted to assert the Scotland's status as a nation rather than as one of several regions.⁹⁷⁹ Welch believed that central control of religious broadcasting would mitigate repetition, Dimwiddie wanted talks and sermons that spoke to a Scottish audience familiar with doctrine, and services that followed a Presbyterian structure.⁹⁸⁰ The RBD conceded that the ethos of religious broadcasting in Scotland was very different from that of England because of the strength of Scotch Presbyterianism. During the war the Church of Scotland and the Free Churches were allocated a percentage of the total number of broadcast services. However, beginning in June 1945, the Scottish Home Service produced its own religious content and broadcast "a number of special programmes of interest to Presbyterian listeners," including services, weekly talks by the General Assembly of the World Protestant Alliance, and talks from respected Presbyterian theologians.⁹⁸¹

Regional producers worked to ensure that the religious services they broadcast reflected the style of Christian worship most prevalent in their area of the country.⁹⁸² By 1945, the BBC appointed Assistant Producers responsible for religious broadcasting content to each regional studio.⁹⁸³ In many ways, this was simply a resumption of pre-war policies and practices, replacing members of staff who had been relocated or dismissed from their positions when the war began.⁹⁸⁴ But Welch hoped that the expansion in

⁹⁷⁹ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 317.

⁹⁸⁰ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 317.

⁹⁸¹ BBC WAC, R13/411, "Private Memo" from Head of Religious Broadcasting to Religious Broadcasting Assistant, Scotland, 7 July 1948.

⁹⁸² BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes October 1945

⁹⁸³ Welch, "Religious Broadcasting," 43

⁹⁸⁴ BBC WAC, R13/211, Memo from DRB to A.C (P), "Religious Broadcasting Assistant: Midland Region," 23 May 1945.

regional programming would be “more ambitious and varied than pre-war Regional religious broadcasting.”⁹⁸⁵ He saw this as an opportunity to build on the variety of programmes created in wartime, and push creatively at what kinds of programmes would reach listeners, rather than simply create a regional repetition of national programming. Instead, it seems this opportunity was missed. Most regions focused on producing weekly sermons, talks and prayers; little time or emphasis was given to creative recasting of religious content to suit the medium of radio. For example, the Religious Broadcasting Assistant for Northern Ireland spent most of his time commissioning religious services and auditioning local clergy to test their suitability for broadcast work.⁹⁸⁶ The regions regained and reclaimed their voices, seemingly lost on the BBC in the din of war. But, just as Welch feared, the regional wavelengths offered little variety or experimentation in format. The fracturing of central authority to allow regional religious broadcasting in 1945 foreshadowed larger changes that would grip the RBD in the post-war years.

Between 1946 and 1948, the BBC tried to establish a burgeoning policy of religious liberty, one at odds with the increasingly defensive evangelicalism increasingly endorsed by many church leaders. In 1944, with Allied victory over Germany near certain, the CRAC faced criticism from prominent church leaders over the nondenominational form that wartime BBC Religion had taken.⁹⁸⁷ Opponents also objected to the ways that BBC Religion had decentred the practice of Christianity by locating worship and religious instruction anywhere a radio set could be found, accessible according to an individual’s personal schedule.⁹⁸⁸ Indeed, BBC Religion had changed the place of the Church as the social site of Christianity by fostering instead a national, imagined religious community broadcast over the radio. The medium of radio allowed the development of a religion that was at once public and private. According to McLuhan, a

⁹⁸⁵ BBC WAC, R13/211, Memo from DRB to A.C (P), “Religious Broadcasting Assistant: Midland Region,” 23 May 1945.

⁹⁸⁶ BBC WAC, R13/409, “Religious Broadcasting Assistant for Northern Ireland,” 19 November 1946. He was responsible for a special broadcast service most Sundays, Saturday morning prayers, and a series of regional talks.

⁹⁸⁷ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes October 1944.

⁹⁸⁸ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes October 1944.

medium can lead to assumptions of uniformity by creating common experience.⁹⁸⁹

However, in practice, radio has a decentralising effect and can become a “pluralistic force” giving voice to diverse perspectives.⁹⁹⁰ Within the BBC, CRAC and the RBD, a competition broke out over how best to use radio to broadcast religion. The BBC, under the new leadership of Haley, pushed for unprecedented changes to religious broadcasting philosophy by trying to overturn the ban on “religious controversy” to allow speakers to openly question the existence of God and represent the voices of other world religions. The CRAC became increasingly defensive of the privileged position afforded to Christianity, tried to block these proposals and push instead for a religious broadcasting that was “handmaid to the church.”⁹⁹¹ Such an attitude was anathema to the precepts of wartime BBC Religion. Support eroded for wartime experiments in form and his careful work adapting an ecumenical Christianity to suit radio as a medium. Instead, the CRAC promoted a salesman-like evangelicalism that would bring listeners assumed lost back into church pews. Alongside changes in personnel within the BBC’s Religious Broadcasting Department, the cultural shifts that took place post-war had a substantial impact on the nature, shape and character of religious broadcasting. Post-war religious broadcasting was far less latitudinarian or nondenominational in scope. Its ecumenism had a wholly different articulation, one that tried to reflect diversity according to denomination and region while defensively asserting the importance of church attendance, instead of solely trying to draw Christians together in shared acts of worship and religious instruction.

b) James Welch’s Post-war Aims

In 1945, Welch wrote that he hoped the chief legacies of wartime religious broadcasting would carry on long past VE Day. Religious broadcasting had become an

⁹⁸⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 17-18.

⁹⁹⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 334. By this, McLuhan means that “radio provides a speed-up of information that also causes acceleration in other media. It... contracts the world to village size.” The experiences prompted by a uniform, common experience are multiple and unaccountably diverse as they are interpreted and filtered through the prism of individual experience.

⁹⁹¹ BBC WAC, R44/514/3, “This is the Way: An attempt at Radio Evangelism.”

everyday feature of BBC programming, with greater variety in format than the pre-war years.⁹⁹² He hoped services would continue to be programmed throughout the week instead of isolated on Sundays, and for *Lift Up Your Hearts*, religious talks, and devotional programmes to keep speaking to the non-churchgoing, but largely Christian, public. He took great satisfaction in the achievements of religious drama during the war, chiefly *The Man Born to be King*, but also *Paul: A Bondslave*, *Job* and *Pilgrim's Progress*. He was pleased that the format of religious programming had broken away from the pre-war model of traditional services and hymn music to include the lively debates, religious drama, and sentimental daily devotionals that touched on current affairs.⁹⁹³ Inspired by the success of the *Man Born to be King*, the RBD commissioned a series of talks that included “dramatic interludes.”⁹⁹⁴ Welch was keen to experiment with performance in religious broadcasting. Though no recordings remain, these were described as “dramatised sermons” performed by an actor, and accompanied with special music. They did not use organ, hymns or traditional orders of service. Welch argued that “the significance of this innovation for the future of religious broadcasting cannot be overestimated,”⁹⁹⁵ as “some religious truths can be communicated best by an appeal to the imagination through drama.”⁹⁹⁶ As of March 1945, the CRAC voted overwhelmingly in favour of continuing to experiment with this format.

However, some Church leaders did not find hope or comfort in these achievements; they saw them as an assault on the traditional hegemony of the Church within town, village or community life. For their part, the Protestant churches expressed concern that BBC Religion was fast becoming a competitor for adherents, rather than a supplemental service. Some church leaders feared that BBC services gave people an excuse to sit in their armchairs instead of attend church on Sunday, and placed preaching on the same level as a concert or variety show when it was a different kind of exercise

⁹⁹² Welch, “Religious Broadcasting,” 42.

⁹⁹³ Welch, “Religious Broadcasting,” 43.

⁹⁹⁴ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1945.

⁹⁹⁵ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Report, March 1945.

⁹⁹⁶ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1945.

entirely.⁹⁹⁷ Protestant leaders were concerned that the BBC had indeed created a BBC Religion of its own, one that ultimately had little in common with the Christianity practiced by each denomination.⁹⁹⁸ In early 1944, the *Church Times* attacked the tone and tenor of religious broadcasting, complaining, “it was designed to attract those outside of the Church rather than those who regularly attend a house of worship.”⁹⁹⁹ They objected to the fact that “the intention of these services had been less denominational in character.”¹⁰⁰⁰ As early as 1943, the Provost of Guildford observed, “many clergy and ministers looked on religious broadcasting as a rival of the work of the churches rather than as a collaborator.”¹⁰⁰¹ Welch, speaking to the CRAC on behalf of the RBD, said that the deliberate policy of the BBC had been to reach as many people as possible outside of the churches, and that Listener Research had showed an increase in the listening public and a favourable attitude towards religious broadcasting as a result.¹⁰⁰² After all, it was the BBC and the MOI that had advised the RBD to pay little attention to denominational and regional interests, focusing instead on recording services and talks from the best broadcasters and churches available.¹⁰⁰³ But Welch had been pleased with the outcomes of these wartime experiments in radio religion and wartime ecumenism. He asked the CRAC not to advise the BBC to return to an allocation of broadcasting hours by denomination according to numbers, a position the CRAC upheld at the start of 1945 with some caution.¹⁰⁰⁴

The conflict between the churches and the BBC intensified between 1944 and 1945. In the closing months of 1944, the RBD aired a series of talks called *Man's Dilemma and God's Answers* that explored some of the basic tenets of a generic Christian

⁹⁹⁷ Francis House, *The Church on the Air: A Brief Account of the Work of the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department* (London: BBC, 1947), 5.

⁹⁹⁸ Francis House, “The Church on the Air,” 5.

⁹⁹⁹ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Report, March 1944.

¹⁰⁰⁰ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Report, March 1944.

¹⁰⁰¹ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1943.

¹⁰⁰² BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1943.

¹⁰⁰³ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1945.

¹⁰⁰⁴ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1945.

moral framework and fundamental gospel teachings. The programme, as Welch put it, “stopped short of any direct appeal to listeners to join a Christian body, a ‘church.’”¹⁰⁰⁵ The programme faced considerable backlash from church leaders, leading to the commission of a series in 1945 entitled *The Nature and Work of the Church*. The goal of the series was to describe the value of organised Christian communities, and how they ought to behave in society.¹⁰⁰⁶ However, while the programme praised the work of churches, it did not emphasise the importance of church attendance as a signifier of belief. Furthermore, perhaps in an attempt to distinguish religious broadcasting from the worship offered in churches, it was on this series that the RDB first experimented with “dramatic interludes,” written and performed by Wilfred Grantham.¹⁰⁰⁷ Welch did not want religious broadcasts to consist solely of a microphone placed in a church service “for listeners to eavesdrop on the worship being offered to God.”¹⁰⁰⁸ He saw religious broadcasting as something separate and supplemental to Church attendance, something that could meaningfully connect with listeners throughout the week as they lived their everyday lives.

c) *RBD Personnel and Programming Change*

By 1947, the core features of wartime BBC Religion were no longer actively supported by the CRAC. The Religious Broadcasting Department experienced a significant a policy shift, forced to become more supportive of institutional Christianity, a differentiated ecumenism, and evangelical mission. Religious broadcasting was reframed as “Church on the Air,” precisely the kind of eavesdropping on church services that Welch decried as an unimaginative use of the medium.¹⁰⁰⁹ Welch’s resignation coincided with major shifts in religious broadcasting output.¹⁰¹⁰ However, he helped to put many of these changes in place six months before his resignation.¹⁰¹¹ Welch decided to resign after

¹⁰⁰⁵ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1945.

¹⁰⁰⁶ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, March 1945

¹⁰⁰⁷ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes March 1945

¹⁰⁰⁸ Welch, “Religious Broadcasting,” 43.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Francis House, “Church on the Air,” 4.

¹⁰¹⁰ “Resignation of James Welch,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 1 Oct 1947.

¹⁰¹¹ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes October 1946.

repeated bouts of illness necessitated a few separate long-term absences from his position.¹⁰¹² His colleagues and supervisors at the BBC regretted his decision to leave, but supported the decision given that the heavy years of war work had left Welch considerably worn out.¹⁰¹³ In his final performance appraisal, R.A. Rendall regretted that his “great contributions to religious broadcasting during and since the war had not been without cost to his own health,” calling him the “complete master” of his job, someone to whom the Corporation owed a great deal.¹⁰¹⁴ Welch was replaced by Francis House, who previously worked in the Overseas Religious Broadcasting Department, the man Welch described as a “B grade man for a B grade job” upon his appointment to his junior post in 1940.¹⁰¹⁵ House would closely follow the mandates of the CRAC during his tenure as the Head of Religious Broadcasting. Briggs has said of the transition in leadership from Welch to House, “There was no major change in direction, although there was a change of emphasis.”¹⁰¹⁶ Kenneth Wolfe has argued instead that the differences between them were “fundamental.” While Welch sought an unwaveringly inclusive brand of ecumenism, House supported the creation of a schedule which reflected a “balanced plurality” of speakers with an even distribution of time allocated to each denomination instead of creating programming that tried to cater to all.¹⁰¹⁷ As Briggs put it, “House was more anxious to reflect the actual thought and worship of the churches as they were” while Welch focused on innovation and provoking “insights” among the non-churchgoing public.¹⁰¹⁸ Indeed, House’s approach to the governance of the RBD was rather less

¹⁰¹² BBC WAC, Staff File, L1/499/1, Welch, James. “Leaving Note,” 3 January 1947.

¹⁰¹³ BBC WAC, Staff File, L1/499/1, Welch, James. “Leaving Note,” 3 January 1947.

¹⁰¹⁴ BBC WAC, Staff File, L1/499/1, Welch, James. Annual Review, 17 October 1946. Welch left the BBC to serve as Principal of the South African Native College in Fort Hare, South Africa. The BBC approached him to return to the Religious Broadcasting Department in 1954 upon his return to the United Kingdom, but since the position of Director was occupied, Welch took a position as Director of Education for a group of steel companies instead.

¹⁰¹⁵ BBC WAC R13/212, Memo from Welch to C(P), “Overseas Religious Broadcasting,” 9 July 1942.

¹⁰¹⁶ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 365.

¹⁰¹⁷ Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC*, 351.

¹⁰¹⁸ Briggs, *War of Words*, 765.

imaginative and more closely wedded to ecclesiastical interests rather than those of the Corporation.

However, both of these scholars incorrectly attribute the change in broadcasting priorities to the succession from Welch to House solely to the character of these men. Such an approach overlooks the wider contexts in which they were working. Welch, as previous chapters have shown, shaped his broadcasting philosophy according to the consensual policies of the wartime BBC. In 1946, the RBD under Welch had started to change, responding to considerable pressure placed on the department and the CRAC by church leaders. At the last CRAC meeting he attended, Welch said that he hoped the RBD would work “towards fuller cooperation with the Churches.”¹⁰¹⁹ Welch had taken on criticisms received in 1944 and 1945, and crafted several series of talks and programmes in 1946 that directly promoted the life and work of the Churches as institutions. The last major series he produced, *What Are the Churches Doing*, focused on the work of the World Council of Churches and the collaborative work of Christian churches worldwide.¹⁰²⁰ House’s tenure as Head of Religious Broadcasting coincided with the wider BBC shift towards heterogeneity, which his RBD tried to make manifest by responding to denominational concerns about church attendance rates.

Just as the regions were granted increasing autonomy and expression on the BBC, Christian denominations petitioned to hear broadcasts that represented of the values and worship popular in their community. As the pressures of war eroded, the spiritual consensus began to collapse. Free Church leaders complained that national services had begun to take a recognisably Anglican form,¹⁰²¹ while some Roman Catholic leaders complained, “the form of service we broadcast... give(s) a completely false impression of Roman Catholic worship.”¹⁰²² Commentary appeared in a number of newspapers challenging the BBC to reconsider its religious broadcasting policy. A critic writing for

¹⁰¹⁹ BBC WAC, R6/21/5, CRAC Minutes October 1946.

¹⁰²⁰ BBC WAC, R6/21/5, CRAC Minutes October 1946.

¹⁰²¹ BBC WAC, R6/21/5, CRAC Minutes October 1944.

¹⁰²² BBC WAC R13/409, “Status of Father Agnellus Andrew,” 16 July 1954.

the *Manchester Guardian* in 1945 hoped that the BBC could offer not one but three religious broadcasting stations, for the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Free Churches. This would “free” religious broadcasting “from the control of a State corporation.”¹⁰²³ The writer also hoped that this structure would allow more men and women to express a greater range of thought and opinions, and the voice the unique interests of different generations.¹⁰²⁴ The *Irish Times* suggested that broadcasting hours should be allocated to each denomination instead of programmed centrally. They called for ten percent of religious broadcasting programming to be Catholic in order to reflect their share of the national population.¹⁰²⁵ Such proposals would turn ecumenical messages into the minority rather than the norm, a significant reversal of one of the chief characteristics of wartime religious broadcasting.

House wrote that the chief aim of religious broadcasting should be to “communicate the gospel” to those outside of the churches to carry out an “evangelistic mission” to bolster flagging church attendance.¹⁰²⁶ To the post-war CRAC, religious broadcasting was regarded simply as a tool to corral wayward members back into the Sunday church pew, not a vanguard for new modes of religious instruction and expression that suited a culture increasingly saturated by mass media. It was now the work of the churches, and not the project of BBC Religion, which took primacy in programming decisions. House explicitly said that “a form of radio religion” built on a generic Christianity was the last thing he wished to develop.¹⁰²⁷ House described his broadcasting philosophy as follows:

Religious broadcasting in Britain is characterised by a combination of evangelistic intention, interdenominational cooperation, and concern on the part of the broadcasting organisation itself to maintain standards in religious broadcasting at

¹⁰²³ “The Free Church Radio, 1955,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1945.

¹⁰²⁴ “The Free Church Radio, 1955,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1945. He also hoped Anglican and Roman Catholic representatives from the other stations and “exponents of the non-Christian religions” would be invited to speak and engage with the Free Church broadcasters in “a frank interchange of opinion.”

¹⁰²⁵ “Catholic Broadcasting in England,” *Irish Times*, 19 February 1946.

¹⁰²⁶ House, “Church on the Air,” 2.

¹⁰²⁷ Briggs, *War of Words*, 781.

least as high as those expected from other departments... The main aim of the planning is to see that the full Christian faith, as it is actually found in the Bible and in the living traditions of the Churches, is transmitted as effectively as possible.... It has one simple over-riding purpose: to help listeners to find the way to living faith in Christ *as members of a Christian Church*.¹⁰²⁸

Instead of rallying Judeo-Christian Britons to the side of the “good” opposed to totalitarian “evil,” the post-war dichotomy was between “believers” and “nonbelievers” within Britain. Atheism was the new enemy, the focus of an anxious new mission to preserve Britain’s Christian civilization by attempting to boost flagging church attendance figures.¹⁰²⁹ “Religious broadcasting must primarily be a means of evangelism,” wrote House, “and this is the light in which responsible churchmen regard it today.”¹⁰³⁰ Listener Research and opinion polls indicate that the post-war emphasis on church attendance was incompatible with public opinion and desires. A Mass Observation study published by *News Review* in 1947 found only 8.6% of respondents to a national survey wanted the churches to focus their message on “attracting people back to church.” Instead, a combined 59.4% believed the churches should focus on looking after youth, teaching the basic message of Christianity, social welfare work, helping people face crisis, extend their work in local communities, and work to preserve the peace.¹⁰³¹ But the churches, their observers, and now the BBC’s Religious Broadcasting Department were occupied with the issue of decline and fixed their attention on reversing the downward trend in Sunday church attendance above all.

The post-war religious broadcasting schedule took on a distinct form from its pre-war and wartime antecedents. Diversity was expressed through the expansion of regional

¹⁰²⁸ House, “Church on the Air,” 2, 5, 6. [Italics added]

¹⁰²⁹ House, “Church on the Air,” 2.

¹⁰³⁰ House, “Church on the Air,” 4.

¹⁰³¹ “Religion: National Poll,” *News Review*, October 23, 1947, p.20. The breakdown for the categories mentioned above was as follows:

Question: What do you consider to be the main job the churches should be doing at the present time?

Looking after youth, 15.7%; Teaching Christianity, 12.9%; Social Welfare Work, 10.5; Helping people face crisis, 9.3%; Attracting people back to churches, 8.6%; More contact with parishioners, 6.5%; Preserving peace, 4.4%; Other miscellaneous jobs, 12.1%; Not sure 20%.

and denomination-specific programming. Some variety in programming format remained, with weekly talks, music programmes, discussions and occasional drama productions, or repeated broadcasts of *The Man Born to Be King*, but the overwhelming emphasis was placed on the production of religious services.

Table 2 – Religious broadcasting scheduled weekly in 1948, by programme¹⁰³²

Home	Light	Third
Sunday services	<i>The People's Service</i> – Sunday	[None]
6 weekly services	<i>Sunday Half Hour</i>	
1 Sunday “Epilogue” after evening news	<i>Think on these things</i> – Sunday hymns	
<i>Lift Up Your Hearts</i> , weekdays	<i>The Silver Lining</i> – Thursday devotional	
Saturday evening prayers (Anglican)	<i>Five to Ten</i> – daily 10 minute service	
Tuesday evening talk		
Schools Department: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday: <i>Religion and Philosophy</i> during term time Tuesday: Service for Schools Wednesday: <i>Children's Hour</i> prayers Friday: Service for Schools 		
Regions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunday Service in Welch Monday: <i>It Begins at Home</i> – West Region; <i>The Parson Calls</i> – North Region Wednesday: Gaelic mid-week service – Scotland Friday: <i>The Christian Outlook</i> – various 		

¹⁰³² The information in this chart comes from: Francis House, “Church on the Air,” 1.

Table 1 indicates a sharp drop in the number of programmes produced by the central Religious Broadcasting Department itself. Religious programmes now had three main audiences in mind. The sick and disabled unable to attend church, the regular churchgoer, and those who did not attend church.¹⁰³³ However, it was the latter category that formed the majority of the religious broadcasting audience, even though Sunday schedules were now built for the middle-class churchgoer to be able to attend church and then return home to hear the day's religious programming.¹⁰³⁴ In 1948, the RBD produced only one weekly talk, and devoted most broadcasting hours to services. The Schools Department and Regions added specially customised programming for their audiences.¹⁰³⁵ On the Home and Regional Services, the broadcast of religious ceremonies and services included sacraments for the first time.¹⁰³⁶ This was truly "church on the air," a remarkable break with past practice.

That religious broadcasting did not occupy a fixed position in the weekly schedule the Third Programme is significant. Welch had hoped for the appointment of a chaplain to the staff of the Third Programme, but the request was denied.¹⁰³⁷ George Barnes, the first Director of the new wavelength told Welch that his department "had no right to a place on the programme."¹⁰³⁸ Barnes wanted the Third Programme to deal with matters of life and death, faith and philosophy throughout its schedule, not in religious broadcasts alone.¹⁰³⁹ This had the effect of further decentring religious broadcasting, paving the way for a generic exploration of spiritual and philosophical issues outside the purview of the RBD and its particular Christian agendas.¹⁰⁴⁰ Barnes did not entirely get his way; religious organ music, hymns and occasional talks and plays that addressed spiritual or allegorical themes were broadcast on the Third Programme, including Louis MacNiece's *The Dark*

¹⁰³³ House, "Church on the Air," 6.

¹⁰³⁴ House, "Church on the Air," 6.

¹⁰³⁵ Parker, "Teach them to Pray Auntie."

¹⁰³⁶ BBC WAC R44/512/2, "Broadcast of the Sacraments," 23 October 1948.

¹⁰³⁷ Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 335.

¹⁰³⁸ Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 335.

¹⁰³⁹ Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 335.

¹⁰⁴⁰ BBC WAC R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1945.

Tower with music composed by Benjamin Britten, and an adaptation of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* featuring John Gielgud as Christian. Religious services were broadcast on the Third Programme for major Christian festivals, including Christmas and Easter. Nevertheless, it established the precedent that religious programmes "no right to be represented" on the Third Programme and their presence was largely ad hoc, a formula repeated on the Television Service.¹⁰⁴¹

At the same time that church leaders endorsed denomination-specific programming, religious broadcasting on the Home Service experienced a considerable decline in listenership.¹⁰⁴² *The People's Service* on the Light Programme received the highest audience appreciation and the highest listenership. This service offered the clearest continuity with the principles of BBC Religion established during the war; it was non-denominational and purposefully broad in theology, intended to be inclusive and welcoming to all. The RBD used their most experienced and populist broadcasters to take on these services, including Rev Joseph McCulloch, who had a strong reputation as one of the most accessible broadcasters in department. These programmes satisfied the majority who believed without belonging, and had the largest listenership of any religious programmes on the entire BBC service. Religious programmes on Light Service had a more engaging tone in order to fit the rest of the programming on the wavelength. The weekly broadcast of *Think on These Things* consisted of a half an hour of popular church hymns, each given a short explanation of their history and spiritual significance with accessible rhetoric and speech.¹⁰⁴³

Roman Catholic broadcasters and clergy had particularly resented the imposition of a universalised BBC Religion on all denominations during the war, but they found greater autonomy and representation beginning in 1947. Father Angellus Andrew, appointed Roman Catholic Advisor to the Religious Broadcasting Department in 1945, looked on the war as a period when Roman Catholic interests were isolated and

¹⁰⁴¹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, CRAC Minutes, October 1946.

¹⁰⁴² Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 350.

¹⁰⁴³ BBC WAC R6/21/5, CRAC Minutes, October 1946.

marginalised. “For many years the Roman Catholic community was out of sympathy with BBC religious policy,” he complained, “mainly because it was thought that we were required to conform to some agreed syllabus of religious belief so vague and wide as to include almost everyone and offend no one.”¹⁰⁴⁴ After the war, the Roman Catholic section of the RBD asserted the distinctiveness of their difference in theology and ritual from the “central Christian position.”¹⁰⁴⁵ The Roman Catholic community wanted to make clear that despite their compliance and participation in the wider ecumenical movement and the British Council of Churches, they did not abandon their specific teachings and principles.¹⁰⁴⁶ In letters requesting an increase in Roman Catholic broadcasting, Fr Andrew tried to assure the BBC that these services and talks would not engage in “an unfair use of airwaves to influence and bring people to our side.”¹⁰⁴⁷ He promised that the Roman Catholic output would not be “militant” or “aggressive,” and simply offer a “fair broadcast of our principles.”¹⁰⁴⁸ During the war, Fr Andrew’s predecessor as Roman Catholic Advisor, Fr D’Arcy, had petitioned the RBD to expand the number of programmes allocated to Roman Catholics. Observing that the total number of Roman Catholic talks had declined over the course of the war, Welch offered an increase to 10% of the total number of talks in exchange for a 30% decrease in the number of multi-denominational Sunday Evening Services led by Roman Catholic clergy. To gain four liturgical services a year, Fr D’Arcy had to sacrifice some of the monthly services he produced.¹⁰⁴⁹ Hard limits on broadcasting hours for Roman Catholic services and talks also reflected the nondenominational preferences of the RBD. After the war, with the return of programmes specific to each denomination, the number of Roman Catholic services and talks increased substantially. In 1947, Fr Andrew produced three Roman Catholic services per month. In 1948, Roman Catholic services were broadcast almost weekly on the Home, Regional, Light or Overseas Programmes, and this

¹⁰⁴⁴ BBC WAC, R13/409, Status of Fr Angellus Andrew, 13 July 1954.

¹⁰⁴⁵ BBC WAC, R13/409, Status of Fr Angellus Andrew, 13 July 1954.

¹⁰⁴⁶ BBC WAC, R13/409, Status of Fr Angellus Andrew, 13 July 1954.

¹⁰⁴⁷ BBC WAC, R13/409, Status of Fr Angellus Andrew, 13 July 1954.

¹⁰⁴⁸ BBC WAC, R13/409, Status of Fr Angellus Andrew, 13 July 1954

¹⁰⁴⁹ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes, October 1945.

continued to rise into the 1950s.¹⁰⁵⁰ In addition to producing services, Fr Andrew also oversaw a number of series of *Lift Up Your Hearts*, produced talks, and acted as a consultant for other programmes that touched on Roman Catholic beliefs or practices.¹⁰⁵¹

d) Pressure for Change from Other Faiths and Marginalised Christian Groups

While the Protestant denominations clamoured for greater representation on the BBC, members of other faith communities were denied the same opportunities. As seen in earlier chapters, Jewish leaders in Britain had been in frequent contact with the RBD, offering to contribute broadcasts or advice as needed. In 1944, the BBC received multiple requests from Jewish listeners asking for a greater share in religious broadcasting, as Jewish rabbis delivered only two talks a year.¹⁰⁵² Jewish leaders asked the CRAC to consider expanding this number, perhaps by including rabbis in a series of talks on the Prophets, Pentateuch, or other segments of the Old Testament. Appealing to the wartime priorities of the BBC, they suggested that through these broadcasts “Jews should be helped to be better citizens.” They also asked to be able to send messages through the European and Overseas Services to Jews in other parts of the world.¹⁰⁵³ Such messages could have been received as beacons of hope for a group of a religious community that had faced horrific persecution and incomprehensible horror. But the CRAC chairman, then Cyril Garbett, Archbishop of York, dismissed the request. He argued that such an approach would conflate differences between the two faiths, claiming, “Any broadcast by Jews or to Jews could not be combined with broadcasts by or to Christians.”¹⁰⁵⁴ Perhaps unconvincingly, he tried to absolve the committee of any decision-making authority on the matter, suggesting, “Jewish broadcasts were for the consideration of the BBC and not the Religious Advisory Committee.”¹⁰⁵⁵ In spite of the CRAC’s distaste for Jewish or inter-faith broadcasts, Director-General Haley and the BBC’s Board of Governors

¹⁰⁵⁰ BBC WAC R13/409, “Office and Secretary for RC Advisor,” 8 July 1948.

¹⁰⁵¹ BBC WAC, R13/409, Status of Fr Angellus Andrew, 13 July 1954.

¹⁰⁵² BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes March 1944

¹⁰⁵³ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes March 1944

¹⁰⁵⁴ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes March 1944

¹⁰⁵⁵ BBC WAC, R6/21/4, CRAC Minutes March 1944

advanced the case for freedom of religious expression and religious diversity on the airwaves in the aftermath of the war.

III. Freedom of Expression and Religious Controversy

How and why did the BBC's religious broadcasting output change so strikingly between 1945 and 1947? It is clear that the Religious Broadcasting Department was not immune to significant shifts in the BBC's wider programming policy. Though the BBC retained its commitment to defending and advocating Christian principles in its post-war Charter, the BBC Board of Governors felt compelled to respond to post-war calls for tolerance and liberty for minority views.¹⁰⁵⁶ The Labour Government's Broadcasting Committee, led by William Beveridge, issued a White Paper in July 1946 announcing an extension of the BBC's Charter for only five instead of ten years so that the BBC's output could be reassessed after adjusting to peacetime conditions. The Labour Government had confidence in the BBC as long as they continued to ensure that "the wavelengths available are used in the best interests of the community, and that, as far as possible, every listener has a properly balanced choice of programmes."¹⁰⁵⁷ Post-war democracy did not enforce homogeneity; rather, it celebrated the articulation of difference. William Haley faced enormous pressure during his tenure as Director to alter the BBC's monotone equivocation between religion and Christianity, and revise its position as a defender of "Christian Britain."¹⁰⁵⁸ Haley allowed a policy change in 1947 that revised the corporation's previous stance on controversy, permitting a freer exchange of ideas and permitting the on-air questioning of belief.¹⁰⁵⁹ Christianity would no longer have the same protected status it enjoyed during and before the war; it would now have to compete for listeners by establishing legitimacy and relevance.¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁵⁶ House, "Church on the Air," 3.

¹⁰⁵⁷ James McDonnell, *Public Service Broadcasting: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1991), 21.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 346.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 346.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Wolfe, *Sound and Vision*, 350.

The renewal of the BBC's Charter on 1 January 1947 took place after substantial debate on the future of broadcasting in the press and parliament. Calls for greater diversity in religious broadcasting were not restricted to leaders of nonconformist churches or fringe religious groups. Fredrick Ogilvie, wartime Director-General of the BBC, wrote a forthright letter to the Editor of *The Times* on the subject in June 1946. *The Times* had advocated the launch of a full inquiry into the BBC's post-war broadcasting practices, a position fully supported by Ogilvie. He argued that "What is at stake is not a matter of politics, but of freedom," calling for an end to the BBC's broadcasting monopoly.¹⁰⁶¹ To Ogilvie, the broadcasting monopoly inhibited freedom of expression and artistic license, as major broadcasting decisions were made by small committees. Regardless of how well meaning of well-intentioned these persons sitting on those editorial committees may have been, their ability to control the narratives and formats broadcast by the BBC denied "freedom of choice to listeners ... [and] freedom of employment to speakers, musicians, writers, actors and all who seek their chance on the air."¹⁰⁶² Ogilvie also took aim at the BBC's easy use as a tool of government coercion and persuasion. He wrote that the BBC merely had the appearance of independence, but could be controlled at will. "Automatic nationalisation of the infinitely precious things of the mind and the spirit – this is no part of true Socialism."¹⁰⁶³ Spiritual and intellectual matters should not be controlled by the state; after the war, such an approach was considered untenable in the press, theatre and film industry.

Arthur Mann, a former governor of the Corporation, wrote of his hopes for the future of the Corporation in *The Observer* in May 1946. Imagining "The Future of the BBC," Mann contented there was great opportunity for reform specifically in the scope in religious broadcasting. He wrote that the policy of refusing time for any talks that concerned religious cultures "outside of the mainstream of the Christian tradition" ought to be reconsidered, as the idea of religious controversy had been "interpreted so narrowly,

¹⁰⁶¹ "Letter from F.W. Ogilvie to the Editor of *The Times*," *The Times*, 26 June 1946.

¹⁰⁶² "Letter from F.W. Ogilvie to the Editor of *The Times*," *The Times*, 26 June 1946.

¹⁰⁶³ "Letter from F.W. Ogilvie to the Editor of *The Times*," *The Times*, 26 June 1946.

in a doctrinal sense, as to exclude the expression of minority creeds.” He continued, “It appears to many people either that religious broadcasting should confine itself to simple Christian ethics and the teaching of good citizenship or be boldly directed to encourage a more vigorous and thoughtful approach to religious beliefs.”¹⁰⁶⁴ A more “thoughtful approach” would not concentrate on the shared rudiments of the Christian faith alone, but the particulars of minority beliefs so as not to exclude many millions from receiving any benefit from religious broadcasting, or prompting feelings of exclusion and frustration that only mainstream Christian views were represented.

The Religious Broadcasting Department had been discussing the ways that greater religious diversity could be represented in 1944 and 1945, particularly the ways that humanist opinion could be incorporated in religious talks and programmes.¹⁰⁶⁵ As in debates on regionalisation, much of this discussion was tabled until the war had been brought to a close. Haley first proposed an expansion of the BBC’s religious policy to include other faiths and perspectives to the BBC’s Board of Governors early in 1944, but opposition from Churchill prevented any further development.¹⁰⁶⁶ The Board of Governors agreed that they were not prepared to make any substantial departure from current policy during wartime.¹⁰⁶⁷ However, by 1946 Haley and the BBC’s Board of Governors were eager to push at the boundaries of religious and political controversy. They asked the CRAC to reconsider the BBC’s entire religious broadcasting philosophy, and determine whether the Christian monopoly could be overturned. Correspondence in *The Listener* had shown that “even Christians” disliked the current policy, which forbade overt attacks on the Christian faith, and assumed listeners to religious broadcasts accepted the same basic premises of faith as the presenter and the Corporation.¹⁰⁶⁸ This left many programme producers and speakers unable to grapple with the most significant challenges

¹⁰⁶⁴ A. Mann, “The Future of the BBC,” *The Observer*, 19 May 1946.

¹⁰⁶⁵ BBC WAC, R34/814/2, “Policy for Interdenominational Broadcasting,” 4 December 1944.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Asa Briggs, *Governing the BBC* (London: BBC, 1979), 85.

¹⁰⁶⁷ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Excerpt of Board of Governors Minutes,” 2 November 1944.

¹⁰⁶⁸ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Freedom of Religion Discussion: Statement for Meeting of CRAC,” 28 February 1946.

to faith. Welch, citing precedent on the *Padre's Hour* broadcast on the Forces Programme during the war, wrote that a policy supportive of religious diversity and inclusive of other perspectives would ultimately enhance Christian programming. "Broadcasting must foster a respect for and a love of truth," he argued, "in one important field, that of religion, broadcasting gives the impression of one-sidedness and dogmatism."¹⁰⁶⁹ Welch believed that freedom of religious expression had strengthened discussions in the *Padre's Hour*, which allowed agnostic and atheistic questions about the Christian faith to be put in conversation with the doubts and beliefs of Christian chaplains and servicemen.¹⁰⁷⁰ He proposed a series of discussions and debates between prominent humanist and Christian thinkers, including a conversation between C.S. Lewis and Julian Huxley. The BBC warned that this change in policy would mean "the Christian faith would have to be defended by reason alone,"¹⁰⁷¹ betraying a conception of truth as singular, only attainable through rational argument.

The CRAC held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the extension of religious broadcasting policy to include minority Christian and non-Christian views on 16 June 1946, attended by thirteen members of the CRAC and six representatives of the BBC leadership, including William Haley. The BBC asked the committee to give advice to the Board of Governors and Director-General on relaxing the rule on allowing only those in the mainstream Christian traditions to speak from the microphone on matters of faith and belief, though the final decision would rest with the Board of Governors.¹⁰⁷² The CRAC chairman, then Dr. C.S. Woodward, Bishop of Gloucester, asserted at the beginning of the discussion that "this is probably the most important and serious subject we have ever had to deliberate during the whole time of the existence of this Religious Advisory

¹⁰⁶⁹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, "Freedom of Religion Discussion: Statement for Meeting of CRAC," 28 February 1946.

¹⁰⁷⁰ BBC WAC R6/21/5, "Freedom of Religion Discussion: Statement for Meeting of CRAC," 28 February 1946.

¹⁰⁷¹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, "Freedom of Religion Discussion: Statement for Meeting of CRAC," 28 February 1946.

¹⁰⁷² BBC WAC R6/21/5, "Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC," 16 June 1946.

Committee.”¹⁰⁷³ Woodward encouraged those in attendance to consider the matter from the perspective of Christian evangelism, fearful that any attempts to pierce the Christian monopoly on the BBC would weaken the position of Christianity in the nation. Dr Scott Lidgett, the Methodist representative on the council, paraphrased Roman Catholic Cardinal Newman, claiming it would be harder to “defend” Christianity than to “render an easy attack.”¹⁰⁷⁴ Dr William Wand, Bishop of London, tried to stand apart from the rest of the assembled clergymen, suggesting that the BBC, as “a great public utility company,” had to “think of the public as a whole and not only a cross-section of it, and we therefore might be expected to [consider] the needs of those who do not accept the Christian faith.”¹⁰⁷⁵ M.E. Aubrey of the Baptist Union suggested that an honest and frank examination of various religious beliefs could benefit the country by using the promise of controversy to generate large audiences.¹⁰⁷⁶

The committee struggled with the question, echoing Woodward’s fear that unprecedented religious freedom could lead many people away from the churches. Their reluctance betrayed a deeply condescending view of public attitudes to religion. They shared an assumption that the public did not possess deeply held religious convictions, and for this reason they should be guarded against philosophies that would lead them away from faith. Woodward, completely misquoting Rowntree’s *Poverty and Progress*, told the committee that only 15% of people in York attended church or “are in any convinced sense Christians.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Rowntree actually found that 39% of men and 61% of women attended churches regularly, with many who did not attend listening in to services on the BBC.¹⁰⁷⁸ The committee had very little sense of religious belief and opinion among the public at large, at one point asking to delay their decision until statistics on religious belief could be consulted. Wand, dubious of Woodward’s claims about

¹⁰⁷³ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁷⁴ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁷⁵ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁷⁶ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁷⁷ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress*, 419.

religious belief, drew from the Australian example to suggest that religious broadcasting time could be allocated according to the size of a faith group. In Australia, Wand claimed, 88% of people had identifiably Christian beliefs, while 12% did not.¹⁰⁷⁹ The confusion over the religious situation in Britain amongst Church leaders entrusted with editorial decisions over public broadcasting is revealing. The churchmen assembled feared widespread unbelief or indifference to religion, and in their anxiety tried to shore up their position by denying a policy of complete religious diversity. The final resolution unanimously passed by the committee stated,

The Committee do not feel able to advise a general opening of broadcasting facilities to anti-Christian speakers; but we are of the opinion that some further experiments should be tried in giving opportunities for the sincere representatives of non-Christian views to explain these views.¹⁰⁸⁰

Before passing this final resolution, the Committee tried to create a more equivocal position. Aware that the continuation of a monopolistic policy was out of step with the heterogeneous spirit of the post-war BBC, they first suggested that “some freedom” could be granted to humanists, Christian Scientists and Quakers, but only if Christian broadcasters could be present to answer and respond convincingly to any questions of doubt about the legitimacy of Christian doctrines. Perhaps non-Christian broadcasts should be permitted but not anti-Christian ones. They were comfortable with the 1942 series of broadcasts on *Great Religions of the World*, which showcased the principle beliefs and practices of the major religions, or even the series of talks about classical and scientific humanism in 1945, which included a talk by Julian Huxley. They were not comfortable with well-reasoned attacks on the Christian faith. Christianity, as Professor John Baillie of the Church of Scotland remarked, “is a supernatural thing. How can you defend the Trinity by reason alone?”¹⁰⁸¹ Haley responded that religious freedom must mean freedom; there could be no equivocation on that score.¹⁰⁸² The CRAC countered

¹⁰⁷⁹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁸⁰ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁸¹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁸² BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

that they were being asked to do something that other public institutions in Britain had not been forced to do; as universities and schools were uniformly Christian “it would be a rather strange thing for that this body should be the promoters of that novelty.”¹⁰⁸³ Britain was a Christian country, they affirmed, “public services so far as they concern themselves with religious matters at all – and they all do to some extent – they represent the Christian view.”¹⁰⁸⁴ Indeed, it seems altogether rather optimistic to expect an assembled group of Christian clergymen to altruistically surrender a Christian monopoly for the sake of religious freedom.

The BBC’s Board of Governors moved a step beyond the CRAC’s recommendations to encourage active experimentation with non-Christian broadcasts. It considered the eventual adoption of a policy of complete religious liberty inevitable. The immediate consequence of this decision was that the RBD surrendered control of religious talks to the Talks Department.¹⁰⁸⁵ The Third Programme became the main site of these initial experiments. Indeed, it was on the Third Programme’s that Bertrand Russell first questioned the existence of God on air on 28 January 1948, the first time that Christian dogma was openly questioned in British broadcasting history.¹⁰⁸⁶ In May 1947, Russell had been invited to participate in a series called *What I Believe*, alongside humanist and Unitarian thinkers. Russell, who asked to be described in the *Radio Times* as an “agnostic and rationalist,” expressed his gratitude to the BBC for the invitation to participate in the series, stating he was “glad the BBC has adopted a more liberal policy.”¹⁰⁸⁷ Buoyed by the success of this initial series, the Third Programme invited Russell participate in an unprecedented two part series called *The Existence of God*, in which Russell would engage in direct debate with a clergyman about this most basic of

¹⁰⁸³ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁸⁴ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “Extraordinary meeting of the CRAC,” 16 June 1946.

¹⁰⁸⁵ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” October 1947.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Crissell, *BBC*, 69.

¹⁰⁸⁷ BBC WAC Talks, Bertrand Russell, File 1, 1944-1949, “Letter from Bertrand Russell,” 15 April 1947.

Christian beliefs.¹⁰⁸⁸ Father F.C. Copleston and Bertrand Russell were invited to attend a three-hour script conference to prepare an exact transcript for the broadcast, to ensure nothing was left to chance on the air.¹⁰⁸⁹ In 1946, the CRAC had agreed that if any experiments in religious controversy were to take place, the Third Programme would be the natural location for such programmes “since the programme would not be listened to by people who might not understand and might only be hurt by the free discussion of religious matters.”¹⁰⁹⁰ This kind of thinking betrays the inherent cultural elitism at the core of the cultural pyramid. Those who found the Third Programme’s talks inaccessible could not be trusted to think for themselves on religious matters; lower down the pyramid, questioning the Christian faith could not be condoned or permitted.

By 1947, a clear divide emerged between the BBC’s advocacy for increasing religious liberty, and the CRAC and RBD’s defensive protection of Christian values. Haley continued to cajole the churches into accepting broader religious liberties, attempting to convince them that permitting freedom of expression had to be considered the natural obligation of a public broadcaster. In an address before the British Council of Churches in November 1948, Haley observed that there had been a trend for religious broadcasting to “become increasingly evangelistic,” but the Corporation’s “highest duty is to search for the truth.”¹⁰⁹¹ In this search for truth, as Haley saw it, the BBC had a duty to “broadcast statements of Unbelief as well as of differing Beliefs.”¹⁰⁹² The Corporation’s aim was not to equivocate between different beliefs, but to encourage tolerance, liberty of expression and serious discussion free from censorship. Drawing a comparison with the importance of diverse opinion for free discussion in universities, Haley argued it was only through open discussion with other faiths and perspectives on equal terms that Christians could grapple with the ultimate questions about the meaning

¹⁰⁸⁸ BBC WAC Talks, Bertrand Russell, File 1, 1944-1949, “Talks Booking Requisition,” 7 January 1948.

¹⁰⁸⁹ BBC WAC Talks, Bertrand Russell, File 1, 1944-1949, “Booking slips for Lord Lindsay and Professor Levy, Lord Russell and Father Copleston,” 7 January 1948.

¹⁰⁹⁰ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” February 1946.

¹⁰⁹¹ William Haley, *Moral Values in Broadcasting* (London: BBC, 1948), 6.

¹⁰⁹² William Haley, *Moral Values in Broadcasting* (London: BBC, 1948), 6.

and purpose of life.¹⁰⁹³ But Haley did not see a new policy of religious tolerance as something that necessitated a radical rethinking of the place of Christianity in British public life. “We are citizens of a Christian country,” he said, “the BBC – an institution set up by the State – bases its policy on a positive attitude towards Christian values. It seeks to safeguard those values and to foster acceptance of them.”¹⁰⁹⁴ While Britain was a Christian country, it was also one with diverse religious views, opinions and practices. This burgeoning policy of religious diversity could not coexist without some equivocation on the notion that Britain was a Christian country alone. Indeed, Haley reaffirmed that the purpose of religious broadcasting should not be to “make people join the Christian faith,” but to “provide... listeners with the best in all the various aspects of life ... and put the Christian point of view wherever it is relevant.”¹⁰⁹⁵ This policy of religious diversity did not mark a death knell to “Christian Britain.” On the contrary, it marked the start of a significant policy of religious diversity, and an acknowledgment that public institutions in Britain had an obligation to reflect the myriad religious voices and perspectives in the nation, whether they were Christian or non-Christian. Haley and the BBC were drawing a delicate distinction; they were not taking an anti-Christian stance or removing Christianity from the public sphere, but encouraging the celebration and appreciation of differences in perspective. The BBC, as a public organisation responsible for a medium capable of stimulating, challenging and persuading, redefined their moral responsibility in the post-war years. Their obligation was to reflect religious diversity of the public, instead of emphasising common values above all.

IV. A Case Study in Post-War Change: The National Days of Prayer, 1944 and 1947

In many ways, the debates over the BBC’s broadcasting schedule on the National Days of Prayer of 1944 and 1947 reflect the major shifts in culture and intention at the BBC in the post-war era. The organisation of the National Day of Prayer of 1944 reflected the growing strength of regional and denominational affiliation above national

¹⁰⁹³ William Haley, *Moral Values in Broadcasting* (London: BBC, 1948), 7.

¹⁰⁹⁴ William Haley, *Moral Values in Broadcasting* (London: BBC, 1948), 7.

¹⁰⁹⁵ William Haley, *Moral Values in Broadcasting* (London: BBC, 1948), 9.

unity. Plans for the day were far less collaborative than the previous year, when the leader of the Free Churches, moderator of the Church of Scotland and the Archbishop of Canterbury each gave a short sermon at a central service intended for all. Trouble began in the early planning phases, as the anniversary of the start of the war fell on a Sunday instead of a workday for the first time. The RBD feared that the collaborative model would not suit a Sunday service schedule. They invited William Temple to exclusively preside over the morning and overseas services as Archbishop of Canterbury. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster presided over his own short afternoon service, as usual. The evening address would be hosted in Scotland for the first time, with officiating duties shared by the moderator of the Church of Scotland and the President of the Federal Council of Free Churches.¹⁰⁹⁶ Welch expected the Anglican service in the morning to conflict with church attendance, but gave little pause at the proposed Anglican service structure, believing that Temple could command a multi-denominational audience because of his considerable personal popularity, and that his status as a leader of the ecumenical movement would grant the affair ecumenical credentials.¹⁰⁹⁷ His overseas recording would reach Africa, India, the Pacific, North America, and be broadcast on both the General Forces Programme and the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme.¹⁰⁹⁸ Indeed, Temple was unique in his capacity to fill this role as a church leader with near universal appeal. Welch believed placing the service in Temple's hands was appropriate because "the Archbishop of Canterbury is so acceptable to all non-Roman traditions in this country, as chairman of the British Council of Churches and President of the World Council of Churches."¹⁰⁹⁹ Welch overestimated the strength of Temple's appeal on this score. The Free Churches protested to the Home Office that the BBC had not included a service for their denomination, while the other major denominations had clear representation.¹¹⁰⁰ Mr Townsend, the President of the Free Church Council, objected that

¹⁰⁹⁶ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, "National Day of Prayer, September 3," 31 May 1944.

¹⁰⁹⁷ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from Welch to Temple, 3 July 1944.

¹⁰⁹⁸ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, "National Day of Prayer, September 3rd 1944," 7.7.44.

¹⁰⁹⁹ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, "National Day of Prayer," 14 July 1944.

¹¹⁰⁰ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from J.I Wall to Welch, 19 August 1944.

the Archbishop of Westminster had a short afternoon address, while he only had a half share of the evening broadcast. The Home Office stipulated that in future, all arrangements for the National Days of Prayer had to be approved by both the Ministry of Information and the Home Office.¹¹⁰¹ The spiritual consensus began to stretch thin as the war waned, there were louder calls for special individual treatment for each denomination, rather than collaborative services.

Temple's premature death in October 1944 had a significant impact on the Anglican Communion as well as the ecumenical cause. One of his last official acts ceremonial acts had been to participate in the religious broadcasts for the National Day of Prayer. He had travelled to the broadcasting studio in Luton from Lambeth in great pain, and he recorded a final series of five religious talks for the Forces Programme from his sickbed in the final days of his life.¹¹⁰² Mass Observation argued that Temple had considerable gifts that the churches were simply unable to replace, chief among them his ability to speak directly and openly to the public. His death created a leadership gap, they suggested, and no one seemed to be able to match his ability to intuitively grasp the popular mood and sentiment of the time.¹¹⁰³

Instead, post-war Britain faced a "habitual negativism, gradually shedding its present elements of idealism" in the absence of leaders that could foster a dynamic feeling about religious and national identity. There was a "starving the spirit" that created "prolonged undernourishment" which would lead to a "spiritual hunger-strike."¹¹⁰⁴ By Mass Observation's reckoning, a kind of post-war spiritual malaise overtook both religious and political sentiment, an apathetic response to the absence of the purposeful mission of wartime. At times of national crisis, religious broadcasting would now experience contraction rather than expansion within the BBC's schedule. During the Fuel Crisis during the winter of 1946-47, *Lift Up Your Hearts* broadcasts were cancelled, along

¹¹⁰¹ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from J.I. Wall to Welch, 19 August 1944.

¹¹⁰² BBC WAC, R6/21/4, "CRAC Minutes," March 1945.

¹¹⁰³ Mass Observation, File Report 1612, "Faith and Fear in Postwar Britain," p.26.

¹¹⁰⁴ Mass Observation, File Report 1612, "Faith and Fear in Postwar Britain," p.27.

with all other religious broadcasts scheduled before 6pm.¹¹⁰⁵ During the war, religious broadcasting had been national necessity; in a time of austerity, it was an expendable commodity. Indeed, the RBD struggled to find a way to comprehensively deal with the economic crisis. At a meeting of the CRAC, it was observed that the crisis had brought about “a sense of the meaninglessness of life, the futility of effort... and the threat of total ruin through an outbreak of Atomic warfare.”¹¹⁰⁶ Religious talks series for 1947 included *What is Man?*, *Voting*, *Buying and Selling*, *Men at Work*, and *Tragedy Fulfilled*.¹¹⁰⁷ The broadcasts tried to engage with the mundane day-to-day experience of austerity, but offered little of the sublime in exchange.

Prime Minister Clement Attlee called a National Day of Prayer in 1947 to bolster national morale in the face of post-war austerity, scarce food, fuel, money and trade.¹¹⁰⁸ The planning committee for the day’s broadcasting schedule feared a repeat of conflicts that arose in 1944, and wanted to prevent the broadcasting schedule from being carved up by a series of successive services by each denomination.¹¹⁰⁹ Each region now had its own programming that had to be put into chorus, or at least in conversation with one another. The initial plan consisted of a morning national service to be broadcast from St Paul’s Cathedral attended by the King and led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the nation’s de facto national cathedral, imbued with mythological significance as a result of its miraculous wartime survival. Each region could then offer a supplemental service in the afternoon. The Assistant Director of Religious Broadcasting, Rev K. Grayston, proposed that the evening service be conducted in a London studio, conducted by a layman with three short talks by “a housewife, a working-man and a school teacher.”¹¹¹⁰ Certainly, the plan would limit interdenominational squabbling over broadcasting hours, and create a novel programme led by the people, for the people. As Rev Grayson put it, “It would

¹¹⁰⁵ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” February 1947.

¹¹⁰⁶ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” October 1947.

¹¹⁰⁷ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” February 1947.

¹¹⁰⁸ Philip Williamson, “National Days of Prayer,” 323.

¹¹⁰⁹ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from R.B.A. Bristol to A.D.R.B., 19 May 1947.

¹¹¹⁰ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from A.D.R.B. to Rev Falconer, 22 May 1947.

really be the ordinary Christian people of the nation asking God's help and making their own dedication, instead of parsons telling them what to do."¹¹¹¹ It would also encourage a shift away from reliance on the established Church to provide the ceremonial trappings of national occasions. This proposed schedule marked a complicated separation of the institutional church from the celebration of a national civic religious holiday. Churches and church leaders could be placed on the margins at will. The evening service was placed entirely in the hands of the people instead of the church, though thoroughly Christian in content. The People's faith was now the direct reflection of the people's own interests.

Grayson faced some strong opposition to his proposal, particularly from the Roman Catholic and Free Churches.¹¹¹² Father Angellus Andrew sympathised that it was difficult to placate and please all of the denominations, but hoped that some compromise could be reached to avoid causing deep offense within the Roman Catholic community.¹¹¹³ Some believed it was wrong to hold an evening service led only by a layman. But Grayson replied that he could not see how they could ask one Christian leader to convene the most significant service of the day.¹¹¹⁴ Grayson found approval for his proposal after convincing church leaders that there now had to be "a very clear distinction between the great Christian festivals and certain national occasions."¹¹¹⁵ On the "great Christian festivals," all denominations would have their own representation, but on national occasions it was more important to host one, national "People's Service" that was not divided by confession.¹¹¹⁶ Without external pressures of war, the denominations no longer spoke in a united voice, and clamoured instead for their unique voices to be heard. The fight for representation from so many sectors had the effect of excluding the Churches from national religious occasions. The National Day of Prayer on

¹¹¹¹ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from A.D.R.B. to Rev Falconer, 22 May 1947.

¹¹¹² BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from Angellus Andrew to ADRB, 4 June 1947.

¹¹¹³ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from Angellus Andrew to ADRB, 4 June 1947.

¹¹¹⁴ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from A.D.R.B. to Rev Willson, 2 June 1947.

¹¹¹⁵ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from ADRB to Angellus Andrew, 13 June 1947.

¹¹¹⁶ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, Letter from ADRB to Angellus Andrew, 13 June 1947.

the BBC no longer included united Christian churches, but placed its entire focus on a united Christian people called to prayer. The final arrangements included an evening service hosted by a layman with short addresses from speakers in the North, Midland and West Regions for a “nation-wide act of worship.”¹¹¹⁷ The speakers included a London housewife, a West-country farmer, a Manchester schoolmaster and an engineer from the Midlands.¹¹¹⁸

V. Religion and Diplomacy

In terms of its overseas reach, the BBC was virtually unrecognisable from its pre-war form. The BBC had quadrupled the available transmitter power for overseas broadcasts, with four Overseas schedules for North America, Africa, the East (including India and broadcasting in a number of Asian languages) and the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand).¹¹¹⁹ The General Overseas Service (GOS) was made available to British listeners at the end of the war, which Simon Potter remarks was “the only time when the boundaries between internal and external audiences, home and empire, were comprehensively removed.”¹¹²⁰ During the war, producers of the GOS took care to stress to speakers that careful attention must be paid to language and phrases that could exclude or isolate potential audiences. For example, the Overseas Presentation Handbook stressed that speakers must avoid using racial epithets, and remember that the “Empire war effort” must be presented as “a case of ‘Brothers in Arms’ and not ‘Help for the Mother Country.’”¹¹²¹ Speakers were also warned not to broadcast anything that might suggest privilege or elitism in Britain, to emphasise the cause as one in which everyone took part without drawing attention to the novelty of cross-class cooperation.¹¹²² In religious matters, speakers were reminded,

¹¹¹⁷ BBC WAC, R34/804/4, “Broadcast Services for England on the National Day of Prayer,” 6/7/1947.

¹¹¹⁸ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” September 1947.

¹¹¹⁹ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 117.

¹¹²⁰ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 118.

¹¹²¹ *Overseas Presentation Handbook*, 2nd Edition (London: BBC, August 1944), 24.

¹¹²² *Overseas Presentation Handbook*, 2nd Edition (London: BBC, August 1944), 24.

Christianity is Britain's established religion. There is no need to conceal this fact – but there should be no occasion to offend peoples of other creeds. Remember that non-Christians are in a substantial majority in the Empire.¹¹²³

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Overseas programmes emphasised commonality above all, uniting all faiths and religions on the side of “the good.” According to Briggs, “Religious issues, like political issues, were international in character, and the question of how to treat the enemy was at least as basic to Christian behaviour as it was to political warfare.”¹¹²⁴ The Political Warfare Executive and the Ministry of Information had direct influence on the Overseas Service, more than any other wartime department at the BBC.¹¹²⁵ This influence began to slack in 1943, and in 1944 Bracken forcefully asserted in Parliament, “the BBC is not a Government Department, but a public corporation controlled by an independent board of governors.”¹¹²⁶

The Overseas Religious Broadcasting Department continued some of its operations post-war even though the immediate need for religious propaganda had passed, but the propagandistic use of religion in overseas broadcasting to foster unity was largely discontinued. Instead, the religious broadcasting that remained focused on the “white Britisher” overseas. Post-war broadcasting had an increasing focus on colonial development and the justification of colonial control.¹¹²⁷ This led to a programming focus on the work and activities of missionaries. Post-war religious broadcasts had missionaries in mind as their intended audience, and offered talks series on ecclesiastical matters.¹¹²⁸ By February 1947, the World Service cancelled religious talks due to low listening figures.¹¹²⁹

During the war, religious broadcasts to Germany had considerable strategic importance. Indeed, the BBC was considered a practical tool for Britain to shore up its

¹¹²³ *Overseas Presentation Handbook*, 2nd Edition (London: BBC, August 1944), 24.

¹¹²⁴ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 630; Briggs, *War of Words*, 831.

¹¹²⁵ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 29.

¹¹²⁶ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 29.

¹¹²⁷ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 171.

¹¹²⁸ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” October 1946.

¹¹²⁹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” February 1947.

cultural and political influence in Europe as well as Empire. The *Manchester Guardian*'s Paris correspondent praised the BBC for maintaining essential links with France during the German occupation. "Radio as a means of contact between the two nations not only survived German efforts to nullify it by jamming," wrote the correspondent, "but gained enormously in prestige and importance."¹¹³⁰ The BBC broadcast a regular weekly Protestant service to Germany, voiced by German speakers, clergy or theologians. Towards the end of the war, the BBC even made arrangements for German pastors interned in prisoner of war camps in Britain to participate in the services, either from a studio or by making a pre-recording at the camps.¹¹³¹ After VE Day, the BBC immediately discontinued the practice of broadcasting religious services to Germany.¹¹³² "With the restoration of freedom of worship in Germany," not to mention the defeat of the Nazi government, the persuasive purpose of such broadcasts vanished.

Overseas broadcasting was more easily subject to political pressures, as it was financed by a separate grant than the license fee.¹¹³³ The *New Statesman* objected to any suggestion that overseas broadcasting should be included in the license fee. Since the Home listener would not receive any direct benefit, they did not see that such funds should rightfully be expended. They wrote, "Certainly the Home listener cannot reasonably be asked to pay for the cost of the Overseas and European Services which supply him with no service at all?"¹¹³⁴ Consensus opinion within the BBC and Parliament favoured the continuation of foreign language services, subsidised by the Treasury instead of the license fee.¹¹³⁵ A White Paper issued in July 1946 stated that the Corporation should remain independent in the planning and development of overseas programmes, "though it should obtain from the Government Departments concerned ... such information about conditions in these countries and the policies of His Majesty's

¹¹³⁰ "France and the BBC: A link between two nations," *The Manchester Guardian*, Feb 12 1945.

¹¹³¹ BBC WAC R6/21/4, "CRAC Minutes," March 1945.

¹¹³² BBC WAC R6/21/4, "CRAC Minutes," October 1945.

¹¹³³ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 137.

¹¹³⁴ "Government and BBC," *New Statesman and Nation*, June 29 1946, p. 463

¹¹³⁵ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 138.

Government towards them as will permit it to plan its programmes in the national interest.”¹¹³⁶ This was something of a continuation of the wartime dynamic with the MOI. The BBC would have a measure of autonomy, but was obliged to broadcast programmes consistent with national interests abroad. Overseas broadcasting had an obligation to “make clear British attachment to truth, freedom and Christian principle.”¹¹³⁷ Increasingly, religious broadcasts took the form of a rebroadcast sermon or service relayed to Europe or Empire for particular anniversaries or religious festivals.¹¹³⁸ These services were typically recorded in well-known churches or cathedrals, including St Paul’s Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, St Martin’s-in-the-Fields and prominent Oxbridge churches,¹¹³⁹ the churches that served as symbolic sites of Englishness, invoke a pastoral familiarity for overseas listeners, or, in the case of St Paul’s, serve as a symbolic heart of empire.

Post-war overseas religious broadcasting lacked the concerted diplomatic focus it had been governed by during the war because of the disbanding of the Ministry of Information’s Religions Division. While some departments and divisions of the Ministry of Information were incorporated into the Foreign Office or the British Council, the unique work of the Religions Division was subsumed within larger departments. R.R. Williams, the Director of the Religions Division began to petition for the department’s inclusion in the Foreign Office in January 1945. He asked the Government to consider peace-time possibilities for the division’s work.¹¹⁴⁰ Williams thought the division could fit in the Foreign Office, as the main the focus of the Religions Division since 1943 had been international rather than domestic.¹¹⁴¹ The Religions Division had made use of

¹¹³⁶ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 154.

¹¹³⁷ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 161.

¹¹³⁸ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 158.

¹¹³⁹ BBC WAC R6/21/4, “CRAC Minutes,” October 1945.

¹¹⁴⁰ NA INF 1/950, Memo from R.R. Williams, Director of Religions Division of MOI to K.G. Grubb, Controller of Overseas Publicity. 12 January 1945.

¹¹⁴¹ NA INF 1/950, Memo from R.R. Williams to K.G. Grubb, 12 January 1945. At the end of the war, the staff of the division included a director, specialists to head Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish divisions, two female research assistants and two female clerks.

literature, newsletters, broadcasts, news cables, “the stimulation of visits by church leaders to other countries,” and by providing “assistance to missions in their wartime needs.”¹¹⁴² Williams claimed that their wartime work had ensured “the anti-Christian nature of the Nazi policy has been recognised throughout the world, and has been a major cause of hostility to Nazism in America, the Dominions and in Catholic countries (e.g. Latin America).”¹¹⁴³ Indeed, religious organisations in America and the Commonwealth had been particularly active and effective at lobbying US Government officials before their entry into the war.¹¹⁴⁴ Williams saw religion as a central connection which bound a real or imagined Empire together, and spoke to Britain’s moral authority as a global power. He believed “British religious life” was an inspiration for Protestant and Catholic countries, and that many parts of the world “looked to Britain for leadership” in religious matters.¹¹⁴⁵

More concretely, Williams observed the ways that religion had operated to connect communities, individuals and nations through the course of the war, and insisted that the work of prompting and supporting these connections must continue. Refugee communities in Britain had developed active fellowships and friendly contact between religious groups from various continental countries and their British counterparts.¹¹⁴⁶ Religious rites and customs united comrades encamped as POWs.¹¹⁴⁷ Ecumenical organisations with global membership grew larger as a result of wartime collaboration, including the British Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. Most notably for diplomats, the United Nations received its start at Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, and received the support of church leaders worldwide. Regarding the development of the UN, Williams said it was a testament to the “vitality and adaptability

¹¹⁴² NA INF 1/950, Memo from R.R. Williams to K.G. Grubb, 12 January 1945.

¹¹⁴³ NA INF 1/950, Memo to R.R. Williams from K.G. Grubb, 19 January 1945.

¹¹⁴⁴ NA INF 1/950. Memo to R.R. Williams from K.G. Grubb, 19 January 1945. For example, An American grant of 50 destroyers came at the urging of church leaders effectively placed to petition for government action.

¹¹⁴⁵ NA INF 1/950. Memo to R.R. Williams from K.G. Grubb, 19 January 1945.

¹¹⁴⁶ NA INF 1/950, Memo to R.R. Williams from K.G. Grubb, 19 January 1945.

¹¹⁴⁷ Imperial War Museum, Documents Collection, Major L V Taylor, p.15-16.

of British religious institutions,” and gave “evidence of constructive planning on the part of British religious bodies” to religious communities in other countries.¹¹⁴⁸ In other words, the proximity to power enjoyed by established churches, the connections between religious communities across national borders, and the strength of British ecumenism as a model for cooperation were cited as substantial reasons for the Foreign Office to consider the ways religion could be effectively used in foreign diplomacy. Williams observed that the “ramifications of links between religious communities are innumerable.”¹¹⁴⁹ Anticipating the cold war, he expected that “the penumbra between war and peace” and wartime conditions would continue in the East, and that religious relations with the USSR could play an important diplomatic role, just as they had during the war.¹¹⁵⁰ He contended that the government had an obligation to take over and nurture the relationships that have formed between and within denominations during the war, or they may cease to exist, losing their diplomatic and propagandistic potential.¹¹⁵¹

The Foreign Office strenuously objected to any proposals that the Religions Division could be transplanted elsewhere outside of the MOI, or be of use after the war. Sir David Scott rejected the idea firmly. He replied that connections between the churches in different nations should be left to grow “organically” without stimulation. The Foreign Office would only offer guidance if appropriate under guidelines set out by “The Organisation of Foreign Publicity” paper of 1945.¹¹⁵² Williams tried to assure Scott that his proposal was not an evangelical one. “Religions Division does not hold a mandate to promote the extension of any particular religion,” he wrote, “but it is concerned to see that the contribution of religion to national life is not omitted in any general treatment of the British theme.”¹¹⁵³ But Scott believed the British Council should not “harness religion to its chariot.”¹¹⁵⁴ The British Council even took the step of excluding religious works

¹¹⁴⁸ NA INF 1/950, Memo from R.R. Williams to K.G. Grubb, 12 January 1945.

¹¹⁴⁹ NA INF 1/950, Memo from R.R. Williams to K.G. Grubb, 12 January 1945.

¹¹⁵⁰ NA INF 1/950, Memo to R.R. Williams from K.G. Grubb, 19 January 1945.

¹¹⁵¹ NA INF 1/950, Memo from R.R. Williams to K.G. Grubb, 12 January 1945.

¹¹⁵² NA INF 1/950, Letter from Scott to Grubb, 10 March 1945.

¹¹⁵³ NA INF 1/950, Letter from Grubb to Sir David Scott, 26 February 1945.

¹¹⁵⁴ NA INF 1/950, Letter from Scott to Grubb, 10 March 1945.

and journals from its reading rooms.¹¹⁵⁵ This marked a sharp break with official policy established during the war. Religion was no longer to be used in formal diplomatic work, or as an element of foreign publicity. Though Christianity remained an element of the British national identity and national life, it was no longer used as a means of establishing formal ties or encouraging multifaceted alliances.¹¹⁵⁶ The Religions Division of the MOI shut in May 1945, a year before the MOI formally disbanded in March 1946, even though they were handling the arrangements of a sensitive visit of Russian clergy to Britain at that time. Religion was no longer formally connected to the projection of Britain's democratic values abroad.

VI. Television

This study of "Radio Religion" would be incomplete without discussing the return of the medium that would eventually eclipse radio as the dominant form of mass entertainment and communication in Britain. The resumption of the BBC's Television Service from Alexandra Palace in 1946 marked the start of a new era in British mass media. Given the contemporary ubiquity of TV, it is important not to overstate the place of television in British culture in the immediate post-war years. Costly sets, short range of transmissions, and few available programmes meant few owned or had access to a television. Nevertheless, the post-war years marked an important time for experimentation with format and scheduling on the BBC's Television Service. Religious broadcasting was largely marginalised from the new medium, an intentional development on the part of the Directors of both the revived Television Service, and, initially, the RBD.

The BBC had become involved with the development of television in 1929, pressed by the Post Office to create facilities for experimentation.¹¹⁵⁷ The BBC Television Service formally launched on 2 November 1936, funded by the existing

¹¹⁵⁵ NA INF 1/950, Memo from Williams to Grubb, 17 February 1945.

¹¹⁵⁶ NA INF 1/950, Memo to Mr Gaines from Williams, 15 May 1945.

¹¹⁵⁷ Crisell, *BBC*, 77.

license fee. It provided the world's first high-definition service, transmitting from Alexandra Palace and received within a radius of 40 to 100 miles by a few thousand viewers in about 400 households.¹¹⁵⁸ Early broadcasts ran for two hours a day, excluding Sundays. Largely aimed at a small and affluent audience in London and the Home Counties, there was a tendency to regard television as a frivolous toy of the rich.¹¹⁵⁹ Transmissions resumed in 1946 to 15,000 households. The service was bolstered by a new combined radio and television licensing scheme that increased the volume of subscribers. The service expanded to the West Midlands in 1949, to Manchester in 1951, and to parts of Scotland and Wales in 1952. By 1954, it broadcast up to six hours of content per day.¹¹⁶⁰ The largest increase in television sales and licensing subscriptions took place in the year preceding the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The BBC's Listener Research department estimated that 53% (19 million) of the adult population viewed the procession to Westminster Abbey and 56% (20 million) watched the Coronation service.¹¹⁶¹ Crowded into the homes of friends and neighbours, the nation made great use of the two million extant television licenses across the country.¹¹⁶²

Television as a medium presented new challenges for religious broadcasting. Welch was initially optimistic about the opportunities that the new medium would create. In April 1945, in an address to the Carlisle Diocesan Conference, he said that he believed television provided "a great opportunity in front of religious broadcasting."¹¹⁶³ In January of 1946, Welch wrote a series of proposals to Maurice Gorham, Head of the Television Service, suggesting a range of programmes from a documentary of "a day in the life of a parish priest," religious plays, and Father Wilfred Kelly doing a "diagrammatic talk with

¹¹⁵⁸ Crisell, *BBC*, 77.

¹¹⁵⁹ Crisell, *BBC*, 78.

¹¹⁶⁰ Crissell, *BBC*, 79.

¹¹⁶¹ Henrik Ornebring, "Writing the history of television audiences: The Coronation in the Mass Observation Archive," in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, Ed. Helen Wheatley (London: IB Tauris), 174.

¹¹⁶² Ornebring, "Television Audiences," 174.

¹¹⁶³ "Big Future for Religious Broadcasting," *The Manchester Guardian*, April 12 1945.

a blackboard and talk.”¹¹⁶⁴ Initially, Gorham was open to the producing a documentary and plays, but rejected the blackboard talk as poor television.¹¹⁶⁵ He thanked Welch for his suggestion, but stated that the most likely occasion for religious broadcasting would be televising services in churches to mark grand ceremonial occasions or major Christian holidays.¹¹⁶⁶ Welch continued to suggest creative ventures, including a mimed performance of a Passion play set to dramatic music. Again, Gorham rejected the idea, suggesting that it might be “affecting” to one family, but could seem “ridiculous” to another.¹¹⁶⁷

While Welch was open to experimentation with religious broadcasting for television, he opposed the filming and transmission of ordinary church services. In May 1946, Welch told an assembly of the Congregationalist Union that such recordings did not suit the new medium. “It would be intolerable to televise ordinary Church services,” he said.¹¹⁶⁸ “The camera would rove around the chapel and record everything worth recording in the space of three minutes.”¹¹⁶⁹ Gorham received news of these statements after their publication in the press. He reminded Welch “we shall certainly not want to do religious services regularly, but I did say that we should want to do occasional services of wide public interest and of a ceremonial nature.”¹¹⁷⁰ To the meeting of the CRAC in February 1946, Welch reported that while the inclusion of religious material had been discussed with the Head of the Television Service, it was agreed that “there was not much that religion could rightly contribute, but it might be possible to include ceremonies such as enthronements, drumhead services, religious plays and religious documentaries.”¹¹⁷¹

The RBD ceded important ground within the new Television Service; it contented itself with the broadcast of an occasional religious service, creating a strong precedent for

¹¹⁶⁴ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Television: Religious Broadcasts,” 15 January 1946.

¹¹⁶⁵ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Television: Religious Broadcasts,” 15 January 1946.

¹¹⁶⁶ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Television: Religious Broadcasts,” 10 April 1946.

¹¹⁶⁷ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Religious Television,” 15 January 1946.

¹¹⁶⁸ “No television of church services,” *The Manchester Guardian*, May 10 1946.

¹¹⁶⁹ “No television of church services,” *The Manchester Guardian*, May 10 1946.

¹¹⁷⁰ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Religious Television,” 24 May 1946.

¹¹⁷¹ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” February 1946.

the marginalisation of religious broadcasting on television, one that would prove difficult to overturn. Unlike on radio, religious broadcasting did not hold a daily or even weekly place in the broadcasting schedule. The sporadic broadcasts did not seem to alarm the CRAC or the RBD, as their focus was fixed on radio broadcasting practices. Perhaps this indicates a failure of imagination on the part of the RBD, and an inability to anticipate possibilities and potential reach of television. The CRAC delayed deliberations on how best to make use of television, and often failed to come to terms with the technological challenges and the difficulty translating a church service into a visual medium.¹¹⁷²

“Talking heads were not thought to make good television, least of all when they were in a pulpit.”¹¹⁷³ To the present day, the recording of church services on the BBC can feel staid and uninspiring. Marshall McLuhan has argued that while the radio can lure the listener into feeling a sense of person-to-person intimacy and directness, the eye is far more discerning.¹¹⁷⁴ In a televisual medium, the eye can interrupt immersion by being alert to aesthetics. The experience of attending a church service relied on a number of sensory cues lost in static video of people undertaking quiet contemplation or slow pans of church buildings. More importantly, television erected a Fourth Wall between viewer and programme not present in radio. That Fourth Wall separated the listener from direct participation in the religious service.

Televised services reified the association between religiosity and church buildings in a way that radio broadcasts did not. Radio turned the home or workplace into a place of worship, while television tried to bring people at home into a church. The first religious broadcast on the television took place on Sunday 15 September 1946 for Battle of Britain Sunday, a broadcast from Biggin Hill RAF Station lasting 25 minutes, without a sermon.¹¹⁷⁵ The BBC’s filmed its first Christmas Day broadcast in 1949 at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Filmed by three cameras and accompanied by announcer commentary,

¹¹⁷² Briggs, *War of Words*, 783.

¹¹⁷³ Briggs, *War of Words*, 782.

¹¹⁷⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 330.

¹¹⁷⁵ BBC WAC R6/21/5, “CRAC Minutes,” February 1946. No Listener Research exists to gauge the impact or reception to this first television broadcast.

the service had a loosely Anglican structure, with readings from Psalm 100 and 150. The opening remarks to precede the service had strong focus on monarchy, military and English history.¹¹⁷⁶ Audience Research rated broadcasts on the Christian holy days highly, but admitted they had no grounds for comparison.¹¹⁷⁷

In 1950, Francis House approached the Television Service to ask for a more expansive role for religious broadcasting. He called for a dedicated Assistant for Religious Broadcasting in the Television Service, and assured his colleagues that “a good deal of promising religious material for adult audiences was available.”¹¹⁷⁸ Indeed, religion had flourished as a regular feature of the Children’s Hour.¹¹⁷⁹ House complained that religious broadcasting received no dedicated budget for staff or development on the Television Service.¹¹⁸⁰ Initial plans for the construction of White City, the BBC’s central television production studio, included no provision for production equipment, gear, or studio space for religious broadcasting.¹¹⁸¹ The lack of studio space meant that religious broadcasts would always be external to the BBC, limited to recordings in churches throughout the country. House recognised the importance of creating a precedent and provision for religious broadcasting early on as the sale of television sets increased and the scope of the television service grew, and pushed for greater resources.¹¹⁸² The Television Service agreed to allow four religious broadcasts per year for two years, with a full report on the full policy implications of religious broadcasting in television to follow.¹¹⁸³ The focus was placed on Christmas and major religious festivals. This marked a significant departure from the broadcasting philosophy in radio. Instead of offering religious broadcasts on a daily or weekly basis, religion on the Television Service had a

¹¹⁷⁶ BBC WAC, T14/1016, “Christmas Day, Religious Service, Royal Hospital Chelsea,” 25 December 1949.

¹¹⁷⁷ BBC WAC, R9/4, “Audience Research Bulletins,” January 1950; January 1951. Note: a regular measure of religious broadcasting on the Television Service began in 1953.

¹¹⁷⁸ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Religious Programmes on Television,” 24 March 1950.

¹¹⁷⁹ Stephen Parker, “Teach them to Pray Auntie.”

¹¹⁸⁰ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Religious Programmes on Television,” 24 March 1950.

¹¹⁸¹ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Religious Programmes on Television,” 31 March 1950.

¹¹⁸² BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Religious Contributions to Television Programmes,” 6 July 1950.

¹¹⁸³ BBC WAC, T16/181/6, “Minutes of the Board Meeting,” 20 July 1950.

strictly “calendrical role” – a sporadic feature removed from everyday experience. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff’s *Social History of British Broadcasting* has observed of the Interwar years,

Nothing so well illustrates the noiseless manner in which the BBC became perhaps the central agent of the national culture as its calendrical role; the festivities, rituals and celebrations – major and minor, civil and sacred – that marked the unfolding of the broadcasting year. ... The BBC not only coordinates social life, but gives it renewable content, anticipatory pleasures, a horizon of expectations.¹¹⁸⁴

As has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, religion took on far more than a calendrical role on radio in wartime. But post-war television ascribed religious broadcasting this function alone; religious ceremony was used a punctuating moment throughout the year to mark the passing of seasons and a feature of civil or sacred occasions. Little attention was given to programmes that might supply spiritual nourishment or instruction for the nation.

VII. Conclusion

The end of the Second World War undeniably brought about significant changes to religious broadcasting at the BBC, and alterations to the place of religion in public and national life. The post-war years witnessed a strong call for greater diversity on the airwaves, with the rise of regionalism and a multiplicity of religious viewpoints providing a substantial challenge to the wartime hegemony of BBC Religion, and a fundamental fracturing of the spiritual consensus. BBC Religion faced significant obstacles that barred its continuation in the immediate post-war years. Firstly, the denominations were less willing to collaborate and cooperate within shared airtime, and agitated for their own programming and greater representation. Secondly, the RBD took on a more evangelical focus, and tried to use broadcasting as a lure to draw wayward believers back into the pew. During the war, BBC Religion was offered as an alternative to institutional religion,

¹¹⁸⁴ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting, Volume 1: 1922-1939, Serving the Nation*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 171.

one that could be customised and adapted to individual lives and needs. After 1947, religious broadcasting was used as a means to an end, rather than a sufficient means in and of itself.

While it was vital for the BBC to respond to accusations that its wartime species of democracy did not include minority voices or perspectives, the consequence of increase in diversity for denominations and religious groups was the sacrifice of programming hours for creatively diverse and imaginative programmes. Religious broadcasting became more formulaic and static as a result, as the RBD staff and church leaders failed to take advantage of the opportunities presented by radio. By the 1950s, television replaced radio as the dominant broadcasting medium. Evening audiences fell from 9 million in 1949 to 3.5 million in 1958.¹¹⁸⁵ However, some creative programming decisions did make it to air. “The People’s Service” for the National Day of Prayer in 1947 marked a significant break with wartime practices by creating a service carried out by the people and for the people, without the involvement of many Christian organisations and denominations. The People’s faith was now formally decoupled from the churches and aligned with public interests, leaving open the precedent and possibility for a multi-faith civic religion. Nevertheless, Christianity continued to be a site of national identity-making, even though it was no longer formally tied to the government through the Ministry of Information or the Foreign Office.

1948 marked a significant year in religious broadcasting history. For the first time, the BBC allowed humanist and rationalist voices to openly question the existence of God, and the CRAC allowed the first broadcast of sacraments. Both of these developments transpired as a direct reaction to the 1946 debate about religious controversy and liberty on the air. While the BBC under the leadership of William Haley embraced a policy of religious liberty, the CRAC and RBD defensively placed their focus on the churches, using religious broadcasting as a “handmaid to the church” to attempt to bolster church attendance. These evangelical efforts would find disfavour among listeners who preferred

¹¹⁸⁵ Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 56.

the social conscience, generic Christianity and present-minded focus of wartime BBC Religion. The RBD and CRAC also placed themselves outside the central directive of the post-war BBC, and found their department with fewer programming hours and resources as a result. Experiments in religious diversity and engaging conversations about the meanings of life and morality took place in programmes produced by the Talks Department instead of the RBD. Callum Brown has explored the extension of the BBC's religious controversy policy through the Mrs Knight affair of 1955, but his assessment obscures the ways that the public, politicians and the BBC experimented with controversy as a direct reaction to wartime policies.¹¹⁸⁶

The BBC had undergone an important shift in the post-war years; as a public institution, it now placed its focus on speaking to and representing the multiple publics that made up the United Kingdom, instead of emphasising commonality above all. For this reason, Mass Observation's charge that the post-war spiritual landscape was made up of a "Puzzled People" seems misleading.¹¹⁸⁷ The public was not homogenous in its beliefs, but that did not necessarily confer a sense of bewilderment or contradiction in their viewpoints. For the BBC's part, religion remained an active part of the public service ethos of the Corporation, but religious beliefs and customs held throughout Britain were acknowledged to be multiple and at times contradictory. Under the guise of a search for a singular truth, the BBC allowed a plurality of perspectives to access the microphone.

¹¹⁸⁶ Callum Brown, "'The Unholy Mrs Knight' and the BBC: Secular Humanism and the threat to 'Christian Nation'," *English Historical Review*, 525 (2012), 345.

¹¹⁸⁷ Mass Observation, *Puzzled People*, 1947.

Conclusion

In August 2015, Sally Magnusson, presenter of the BBC's *Songs of Praise*, visited a makeshift church set up in a migrant camp in Calais, France. Made of tarpaulin and corrugated iron, the shack had become home to members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, with hundreds gathering in worship every week. The migrant camp was a non-official, but tolerated, area where thousands of migrants or refugees set up temporary shelters while waiting for an opportunity to cross the Channel tunnel into the UK, legally or illegally, disparagingly referred to as a "jungle".¹¹⁸⁸ More than a million migrants from Syria, Afghanistan and Africa currently seek refuge or resettlement in Europe.¹¹⁸⁹ The migrant crisis has produced the greatest displacement of people and largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. In spite of vocal anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK, *Songs of Praise* filmed a service at the camp, highlighting the diversity of contemporary global Christianity, and emphasising commonality through shared beliefs.¹¹⁹⁰ The right-wing press seethed at news of the programme. *The Sun* denounced the portrayal of "Hymnigrants," while the *Daily Express* complained in its front page headline, "This is how the BBC is spending your money: Songs of Praise filmed in Migrant Camp."¹¹⁹¹ Tory MP Andrew Rosindell called the programme's use of religion to emphasise the common humanity between Britons and migrants: "an insensitive thing to do."¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁸ "Introduction to Calais," Calais Migrant Society, updated 2015.

¹¹⁸⁹ <https://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com/introduction-to-calais/> (30 August 2015)

¹¹⁸⁹ "Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe explained in Seven Charts," *BBC News*, 4 March 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911> (Accessed 10 May 2016)

¹¹⁹⁰ Giles Fraser, "Songs of Praise shows the Calais migrants do not sing alone," *The Guardian*, 16 August 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/16/songs-of-praise-calais-migrants-common-link-christianity> (30 August 2015)

¹¹⁹¹ "This is how the BBC is spending your money: Songs of Praise filmed in Migrant Camp," *The Daily Express*, 11 August 2015.

¹¹⁹² "Hymnigrants: BBC blasted for filming Songs of Praise at Calais," *The Sun*, 11 August 2015, <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/6578181/BBC-film-Songs-of-Praise-at-Calais-migrant-camp.html> (30 August 2015)

For a student of the history of BBC, it is easy to draw parallels between this event and the spirit of religious broadcasting during the Second World War. Wartime BBC Religion emphasised commonality between believers of all nations. At times, it courted political controversy by boldly speaking on matters of social reconstruction and reform that the Conservative members of Government found unfavourable. However, then unlike now, the Government believed it was in the national interest to emphasise commonality and unity between peoples of different countries, creeds and races.¹¹⁹³

The parallels between the recent *Songs of Praise* broadcast and the aims of the wartime Religious Broadcasting Department do not suggest an unchanging or fixed religious picture in Britain; on the contrary, they suggest that the picture of religious change is a complex one, one that has been underserved by sweeping narratives of religious decline that do not account for smaller shifts in religious attitudes, liberty, tolerance and diversity. Indeed, the religious history of the twentieth century can also be read as a series of powerful contests between a hegemonic Christianity, a burgeoning spirit religious diversity, and the public negotiation of conceptions and practices of inclusion. The *Songs of Praise* episode points to the enduring place of religion in the nation's public life. Though *Songs of Praise* has been dismissed as “smug geriatric wallpaper”¹¹⁹⁴ in the recent past, its determined ecumenism has sparked controversy at a time when many of the major narratives in the national press rely on creating divisions and distinctions between groups of peoples. Competition over the use of religion to bolster or support particular political perspectives denotes the continued power of religious broadcasting as a rhetorical tool.

This dissertation has argued that the history of ecumenism and religious cooperation in wartime, processes that were essential to the development of BBC Religion, must be seen as integral to the history of religious diversity, liberty and tolerance in twentieth century Britain. BBC Religion developed in response to its wartime contexts, and ended when the political and ecclesiastical circumstances that

¹¹⁹³ *Overseas Presentation Handbook*, (London: BBC, 1944).

¹¹⁹⁴ Giles Fraser, “Songs of Praise shows the Calais migrants do not sing alone,” *The Guardian*, 16 August 2015.

allowed its articulation shifted after the war. It was an intentionally constructed national Christianity that tried to unite Britons and allies under the banner of an ecumenical and accessible faith, ultimately setting the ground for a significant post-war debate about religious diversity and inclusion in Britain. Its hybrid theology, colloquial tone and accessible format found a large listenership among a public eager for both spiritual comfort in crisis, and lessons on Christian citizenship. BBC Religion participated actively in the reconstruction debate, and became major loci for the articulation of a wartime People's faith. It bridged denominational divides, and worked to appeal to both Protestant and Catholics alike. It operated as a "spiritual consensus," one that placated opposing theologies and traditions with a brand of inclusion that focused on shared elements and rudiments of the Christian faith. It used colloquial, accessible language and metaphors rooted in the everyday experience of war to communicate its message. Uniquely, BBC Religion was not only a vehicle for national religion, but also a religious subculture in its own right, one that responded to public demands for a non-ecclesiastical articulation of the Christian faith that individuals could privately practice on their own terms.

Religious broadcasts managed to find resonance as a source of spiritual instruction and inspiration for the listening public. Jean Seaton has remarked, "modern wars change the status of entertainment: leisure is seen as an aspect of public morale."¹¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the public entertainments on the BBC had an important strategic value, purveying light music and variety programmes to keep listeners from dwelling on the harsh realities and tragedies of war. Religion and worship were also used as aspect of public morale, and as a persuasive narrative device to foster commonality and stress unity. Radio, as a medium, was integral to the articulation and expression of this kind of Christianity, through its accessibility and ability to foster a sense of intimacy or personal connection. The radio could bring forth matters of grave import alongside trifling distractions. It aired ideas and ideologies of personal and public significance, and created moments for listeners to reflect on, define and redefine their attitudes and beliefs on matters of social, cultural,

¹¹⁹⁵ Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, 148.

religious and political import. It also had the unprecedented ability to link Britons worldwide in shared acts of worship, and allow the projection of a spiritual community beyond the British Isles.

At times, it appeared that the spiritual consensus was a fragile veneer, a construct perched atop significant and real divides were open to vociferous expression post-war, when the propagandistic need to assert equality through homogeneity had passed. Some conservative lobbying groups, including the Lord's Day Observance Society, crusaded for some of the more liberal aspects of the Religious Broadcasting Department's output to be curtailed, such as to the colloquial language used in *The Man Born to Be King*. Conservative politicians also objected to the use of religious sermons, talks and prayers to issue messages of support for reconstruction policies. However, the compromise remained intact during the conflict, and the BBC Board of Governors dissuaded any attempts to alter the wartime broadcasting formula until after VE Day. By 1948, the spiritual consensus had degraded and collapsed. Each denomination and region lobbied for their own broadcasting hours and authority, eliminating scope for creativity and innovation in programming. The BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department took its cues more closely from church authorities rather than public ones, leading to a more evangelical presentation of the Christian faith that hoped to bring people back into the churches. However, the BBC's central Board of Governors and Director-General pushed to allow "controversy" on the air, with humanist and minority Christian voices allowed to broadcast their perspectives and beliefs for the first time. Furthermore, the post-war evangelical presentation of Christianity appeared at odds with the spiritual needs of a nation experiencing post-war malaise during years of austerity; some sociological and Listener Research studies found that the evangelical themes failed to connect with the public at large.

The years between 1945 and 1948 were something of a missed opportunity for the churches. They were unwilling to experiment with new forms of religious practice entwined with mass media. Instead of building on the resonance and success of BBC Religion, they tried curtail religious broadcasting and turn it into a promotional device

that could attempt to shore up church attendance. But they may have been trying to sell a communal practice that failed to suit the lives and lifestyles of Britons as easily as radio and television. The CRAC's failure to innovate after the return of the Television Service revealed more than a lack of creativity. Without adaptation, religious cultures ossify and can easily become irrelevant.

There are obvious limits to what it is possible to extrapolate from a study of religious broadcasting framed between 1939 and 1948. This dissertation has attempted to offer modifications to the "caesura" and "gradual declinist" models of religious change by asserting that 1) changes in the use of religion and the rise of religious diversity in the immediate post-war years suggests a more complex model than the one Brown and Davie have suggested. Instead of a picture of evangelical revival, this study has shown a church-sponsored evangelicalism of insecurity, anxiously responding to the admittance of differing and opposing perspectives on the BBC in the post-war years, some of which were anti-religious. 2) The strength of religious attitudes and the prominence granted to Christian narratives by the state in wartime suggest some clear flaws in the 'gradual declinist' model for the period, as the Second World War otherwise appears to be an aberration in this explanatory framework.

These may appear to be minor revisions to two lengthy and long-established narratives of religious change. But they have been advanced in order to suggest that it may be more sensible to examine the decades of the twentieth century as moments of episodic rather than inevitable change, ones that do not lead to a predictive end point. By doing so, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of the sub-currents of intellectual and religious thought that compete within a culture, puncturing the idea of a singular hegemonic discursive Christianity, and encouraging an assessment of the multiple, overlapping discursivities that occupy a broader cultural framework. Such an approach can allow a more informed assessment of the ways these discourses are formed or undone, outside of the prism of the history of respectability and sexuality alone. Secondly, the history of religion in the mid-twentieth century can also be told through the

framework of an emerging religious diversity, one that has not unfolded simply or straightforwardly, but continues to be contested in the present day.

Historians of the British experience of Second World War have long emphasised the social and cultural significance of the conflict. Indeed, it has become commonplace to argue that the world war has been the agent, or at least the catalyst, of major change.¹¹⁹⁶ As such, it is curious to find the place of the Second World War marginalised in the rendering of twentieth century religious history. Similarly, the history of broadcasting, persuasion and the Home Front in the Second World War largely excludes religion, omitting its vital role in the construction of a unified British national identity, its place in sacred and civic public rituals, and its discursive role, purveying the terms through which the conflict was represented and, in many instances, understood. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study is the relocation religious broadcasting within the larger history of the Home Front.

This dissertation has argued that the particular contexts and pressures of war allowed the articulation of a BBC Religion built upon ecumenical foundations established in the Interwar years. Domestic politics, international relations, foreign diplomacy, daily wartime experience and the progress of the conflict each played a role in shaping the expression of BBC Religion, its programmes and policies. Without the pressures of war, BBC Religion would not have taken its particular form, or have found such an expansive reach in the BBC's programming schedule. 1940 saw the development of BBC Religion in the crucible of war. Following Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, BBC management accelerated plans put in place by James Welch, allowing the daily broadcast of religious programmes at morning, noon and night. These programmes were designed to be beacons of hope, a steady presence to supply religious comfort to those uttering "panic prayers" in the dark. In addition to its propagandistic use, religious broadcasts offered psychological or spiritual comfort to a nation in crisis.

¹¹⁹⁶ Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, 143.

BBC Religion was not static but fluid; it adapted to the different phases of the war as necessary. The changing themes addressed in the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series over the course of the war reveal the adaptability of BBC Religion. Indeed, this has been one of the major themes of this dissertation; that religious cultures adapt to their cultural contexts, and is continually redefined to suit the demands of crisis or peacetime.

As part of the BBC's efforts to create religious programmes that would find the widest possible appeal, prominent writers and theologians, including Dorothy L. Sayers and C.S. Lewis, were drafted in to the RBD to create innovative programmes for a national audience. The work of Sayers and Lewis best epitomises the spirit of BBC Religion. Sayers produced a passion play written entirely in colloquial English, an unprecedented piece of religious drama. Lewis crafted a popular theology that attempted to bridge all denominations and communicate the shared rudiments of the Christian faith. The focus on accessibility and universality in the BBC's religious broadcasting output developed out of conversations within the BBC concerning how best to appeal to audiences, while adhering to MOI principles. Listener Research fundamentally changed the starting point for programming conversations. Public appeal, and perceptions of public desire, shaped the feasibility of programming experiments. In this way, religious broadcasting was both shaped by public opinion and tried to shape public sentiment according to MOI directives.

The study of religious broadcasting in wartime has raised a number of questions for further inquiry that could not be fully resolved here. This dissertation has shown that it is possible to look to wartime for the roots of a differentiated religious culture, but the analysis of the roots of religious diversity in Britain deserves a prolific historiography. Jane Garnett and Alana Harris have engaged with these important questions in their recent edited collection, *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis*.¹¹⁹⁷ There is significant scope for inquiry into the shifts

¹¹⁹⁷ Garnett and Harris, *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis* (London: Ashgate, 2014).

in ideas and mentalities of religious liberty and tolerance in the twentieth century and beyond. Furthermore, the use of religion as means of persuasion has an unwritten place in the history of Cold War Britain.

As the BBC undergoes a painful charter renewal process in 2016, public conversation has centred on the monetary and cultural value of public broadcasting.¹¹⁹⁸ The planned closure of BBC Three and the reduction in license fee funds may suggest that the early 21st century has seen the BBC at the apex of its reach. Indeed, the Conservative Government has criticised the “imperial” ambitions of the BBC, and called into question its long-held mission to inform, enlighten and entertain.¹¹⁹⁹ Such an attitude, cynically informed by obvious sympathy for private media interests, seems unfathomable for cultural historians of the Corporation, who have seen the history of the twentieth century British unfold through its programmes, policies and research. Indeed, British cultural history cannot be easily separated from the history of media. This study of the BBC has attempted to show the importance of public broadcasting as a site of national identity formation, shared experience, and the negotiation of the place of religion in public life.

¹¹⁹⁸ Hannah Elias, “The Public’s Broadcaster: A Battle for the BBC,” 9 May 2016, History Workshop Online. <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-publics-broadcaster-a-battle-for-the-bbc/> (Accessed 10 May 2016)

¹¹⁹⁹ Will Hutton, “The Public Loves the BBC,” *The Guardian*, 13 September 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/13/bbc-belongs-to-us-stop-tories-vandalising-it> (Accessed: 10 October 2015).

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