

THE CHURCH OFFICE
SYMONDS ROAD
BURY ST. EDMUNDS
SUFFOLK IP32 SEW
Tel & Fax 01284 725391
Email: ccmh@mame.com
www.ccmh.freeseve.co.uk

17th January 2002

Tessa Jowell, MP
Secretary of State for Culture
Media & Sport
2 - 4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Minister,

THE NEW BROADCASTING BILL

Thank you for allowing further discussion and dialog on the Broadcasting Bill before publishing your proposals in the spring. There has certainly been a large degree of confusion as to the position of some of the denominations over the position of Christian Broadcasting on both radio and television.

I am member of General Synod and a parish priest, and in the last few months I have been approached by, over 200 people, expressing concern over the lack of Christian broadcasting in the U.K. The view from the parishes is that both the quality and quantity of broadcasting provided by the BBC is not adequate. The programs that are broadcast are often on at the wrong times or on channels with limited access or of poor quality. While many people do not wish to see evangelistic style programs, they do wish to see programs that would nurture and encourage the Christian faith. The BBC's line in recent years is to treat Christianity as an alien phenomena rather than a living reality. This is unfair and unhelpful. It is also wrong that the BBC retain large numbers of quality channels that go largely unused, while Christian Broadcasters are only offered inferior channels

If the BBC is to fulfil its role as a public service broadcaster, it is essential for it to be in competition with a strong, vibrant, independent sector. This new industry, in addition to providing jobs and revenue, will also provide an increasingly skilled work force of producers, writers, directors, presenters and actors that could enable the BBC to fulfil its responsibilities. We are in a similar situation to the 1950s before ITV was allowed to broadcast. The quality of the BBC television programs was poor. The arrival of reasonably financed competition improved the quality of what the BBC did and also made sure ITV strived for excellence.

A recent survey published on Ceefax stated that over seventy-five percent of the population consider themselves to be Christian. Fifty-four percent of them say that they are members of the Church of England. While these statistics need to be seen in the light of declining church attendance, it does show that in addition to those who attend church, there is a huge number of people who are interested enough in Christianity to say that they are adherents. Such a market would support a Christian broadcasting industry and ensure its survival.

It seems strange that at a time when everyone is concerned by violations of human rights that there are only four countries in the world that place restrictions on Christian broadcasting. Sadly, one of these is the United Kingdom. Countries like Iran and Iraq allow a greater freedom to Christians than a country that is supposed to be Christian and has Christianity as its official state religion.

I hope the forthcoming legislation will allow greater freedom and create an environment by which a fledgling broadcasting industry (worth over £30 million per annum) can grow and achieve its full potential. Such an industry would bring balanced broadcasting to the U.K. and it would also be able to sell its product to the rest of the English-speaking world, thus generating more jobs and income for this country.

I hope this submission is of some assistance and I would like to assure you that most Christians who attend the established denominational churches in this country are dissatisfied with the level of broadcasting they receive. Many people outside the churches, but nonetheless with Christian sympathies, would like to see more and hear more about the faith which is supposed to be their own.

I do hope you will be able to address all these issues in your forthcoming legislation.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely,

Reverend J.L.Alderton - Ford Bth.
General Synod 246
MINISTER CHRIST CHURCH MORETON HALL