

Bias and the BBC: A study of BBC *Panorama's* investigation *Sex and the Holy City* broadcast on 12 October, 2003

Introduction

At the screening of this BBC programme by Television Trust for the Environment, Sir Anthony Young, a former BBC governor, introduced the debate by saying: "I want to underline the importance of the BBC continuing to produce the original journalism exemplified by programmes like this – journalism that will withstand scrutiny."

The BBC retains a great deal of influence around the world, but whether a programme such as *Sex and the Holy City* can be said to 'withstand scrutiny' is a matter of debate in itself. This critique takes a detailed look at the programme and its agendas. It focuses particularly on:

- Allegations made, particularly the use of unreferenced figures and case studies
- The use of slanted language and interview tactics
- The omission of information
- The use of negative stereotypes

SPUC is a non-religious organisation and has no official line on some of the issues raised by the programme. However, as the programme transparently supported abortion, which SPUC opposes, it is necessary for the Society to expose misleading or biased assertions which may damage the pro-life movement both in this country and abroad. All quotes from the programme are taken directly from the BBC transcript, though spelling, grammar and other typing errors have been rectified.

Title of the programme

The title *Sex and the Holy City* is clearly disrespectful, with its close similarity to the TV series *Sex and the City*. Whereas irreverence might be acceptable in the arena of, for example, comedy, it was inappropriate in the title of what purported to be a serious and balanced investigation.

Timing of the programme

The BBC guidelines point out that "careful consideration should be given to the timing and the tone of the programme." [p. 41] Catholics who complained to the BBC were assured that the programme was not intended to offend. However, there are many aspects of the programme that call this assurance into question, one of which was the timing of the programme. In this case, the BBC decided to screen a vicious personal attack on Pope John Paul II to coincide with the 25th anniversary of his pontificate. Even if this had been a balanced and fair investigation of the Church's stance on one particular issue, the fact that the BBC launched such an attack at a time when millions of Catholics around the world were celebrating John Paul II's 25 years as pope is a cause for serious concern.

In response to SPUC's open letter, Fraser Steel, the head of the BBC's programme complaints unit said that the anniversary 'provided the necessary current affairs "peg"'. He then added, 'I

think it reasonable to expect a programme such as this to mark an occasion like the Jubilee by asking questions.’ As is clear throughout this investigation, the programme did not so much ask questions as air a pre-determined agenda with scanty attempts at objective reporting. The *Radio Times* may have billed the *Panorama* programme as an investigation into ‘the arguments for and against the Vatican’s campaign against contraception and abortion’ but the emphasis from start to finish was clearly against. Those Catholics who voiced outrage at the timing of the programme were surely entitled to question the motives of a broadcasting corporation that produced such a ‘tribute’ to a man who dealt a hammerblow to communism, champions the cause of the poor and oppressed, speaks out in defence of the dignity of women, publicly forgave his would-be assassin and is widely regarded as one of the outstanding spiritual leaders of the twentieth century.

The BBC’s possible vested interests

The BBC guidelines state that: “The BBC should be satisfied that all programme makers are free from inappropriate outside commitments.” [p. 114] and “People who work on these programmes should have no outside interests or commitments which could damage the reputation of the BBC or damage the trust which must exist between the BBC and its audience over the issues of impartiality, fairness and integrity.” [p. 115]

Later we are informed that “Associations with campaigning bodies can present great difficulties” [p. 122] This is particularly the case when not just the programme-maker but the corporation itself has strong connections with campaigning bodies and organisations. The BBC’s connection with International Planned Parenthood Federation is no secret. The BBC and IPPF have worked together on campaigns such as Sexwise, through which, according to the BBC World Service website, “the BBC World Service (BBC) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) have been working together in different regions of the world to speak to people in their own languages about sexual health and reproductive rights.”¹

The very fact that the BBC uses an expression like ‘reproductive rights’ without qualification suggests that it takes the same view on the abortion issue as IPPF, who use the expression ‘reproductive rights’ to include access to abortion on demand. This stance was underlined in Mr Steel’s letter to SPUC, which described the Nicaragua section of the *Panorama* programme as “an investigation into the impact of the lack of availability of terminations for girls who have been made pregnant in abusive circumstances.” Though ostensibly neutral, ‘lack of availability’ in this context makes the assumption that abortion is itself a neutral procedure that should be available. This assumption goes some way to explaining why *Sex and the Holy City* was so weighted in favour of abortion.

TVE, the Television Trust for the Environment who were heavily involved with the programme and held a private screening of it, also, coincidentally, has connections with IPPF and has produced films and documentaries with the organisation. IPPF promotes abortion and contraception throughout the world and therefore has a very clear stance on the issues investigated by the BBC *Panorama* programme, a stance that appears to be endorsed by the BBC in the above statement and by the fact of the joint production/promotion of Sexwise. Certain questions surely follow; does the BBC’s association with such a campaigning body damage its ability to produce impartial, fair and honest reports on subjects within the said campaigning body’s remit? Can viewers reasonably expect a balanced and fair investigation of controversial issues when those associated or involved with the making of the investigation have clearly established agendas? As Steve Bradshaw is married to an employee of TVE, can

¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/sci_tech/features/health/sexwise/ippf.shtml

he be said to be free from ideological or emotional bias in his treatment of such issues as birth control and abortion?

The BBC guidelines demand that “Audiences should not be able to gauge from BBC programmes the personal views of presenters and reporters on controversial issues of public policy.” [p. 37] On a personal level, it was clear from the outset where Mr Bradshaw’s sympathies lay. This could be inferred from his use of language and his treatment of contributors who were either spoon-fed easy questions or treated with rudeness and, according to one, dishonesty, depending upon their views.

Nicaragua

Setting the scene

The first country to be investigated was Nicaragua. Viewers were told that Nicaragua is:

Like other Latin American countries, overwhelmingly Catholic. This is a macho country of often distorted sexual values, where official estimates suggest one in three women has been physically or sexually abused, and where age and close relationships are sometimes no barrier to abuse.

Violence and abuse towards women appear to be a serious problem in Nicaragua, as the Catholic Church itself testifies. However, the juxtaposition of the two comments, that Nicaragua is ‘overwhelmingly Catholic’ and a country of ‘often distorted sexual values’ suggests that Nicaragua’s Catholic culture is responsible for this. If Catholicism were indeed responsible, we would expect other Catholic countries such as Malta or Spain to have a similar problem, which is not the case. It might also be expected that a westernised, secular country with a Protestant/secular background such as the UK would have much less of a problem. Instead it is estimated that 1 in 4 women in the UK suffer domestic violence at some stage of their lives and almost as many children suffer abuse. The UK also has the highest child murder rate in Europe.

As a footnote, ‘physical or sexual abuse’ is a broad term that can cover anything from smacking to penetrative rape. Placing the 1 in 3 figure in the introduction to a feature on girls made pregnant by their fathers without also pointing out the above context was misleading. Mr Steel alleged that this point would have been more valid had the word ‘physical’ been excluded but this makes very little sense, given the context. Even if Mr Bradshaw had erred on the side of accuracy and simply quoted sexual abuse statistics, the case studies he used were still at the extreme end of the sexual abuse spectrum. Moreover, as any child protection expert could have pointed out, ‘age and close relationships’ virtually never form a barrier to abuse as the majority of abuse cases around the world occur within families.

Mulukuku

As Mulukuku was the major focus of the programme’s exploration of abortion, it would have been professional and responsible journalism to provide viewers with adequate information. The programme-makers might have pointed out that:

Mulukuku and the 19 mountain communities for which it forms a centre, has a combined population of 25,000. The major reasons agencies give for its abuse/violence problems are poverty and the aftermath of a civil war, not macho Catholicism. Mulukuku was formed in the 1980s by people displaced by the war and was later destroyed by Hurricane Joan. Violence, including violence against women and children continues to be a problem because many former Contra and Sandinista fighters have not yet integrated into society.

Case studies and Dorothy Granada

Viewers were next introduced to four girls, three of whom had babies as a result of rape by their fathers. It is difficult to see what the programme was trying to establish. We were told in emotive terms earlier that “this is the story of two school girls in Latin America, raped by their father and given no choice but to have his children” [sic]. This is a loaded enough

statement on its own, using ‘pro-choice’ rhetoric whilst never once examining the arguments against abortion or the reasons for the Church’s opposition to it in any depth. However, it becomes a non sequitur when the ‘story’ is told. The girls are asked if they thought of having an abortion. Neither states that they wanted an abortion, that they asked for an abortion or attempted to obtain one. Neither expresses anger or distress that they did not have the opportunity to have an abortion. The only girl who voices an opinion on the subject expresses opposition to abortion.

Mr Bradshaw went on to describe the clinic where he met the girls.

We met the girls in a woman's health clinic run by Dorothy Granada. She says such cases are not unusual.

This is an extraordinary claim to make unchallenged, as it flies in the face of both statistical and medical evidence. Firstly, conception and sustained pregnancy as a result of rape is rare, occurring in approximately five percent of cases of rape according to an authoritative study published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* in August 1996. There are sound biological reasons for this:

- A woman is only fertile for 5-7 days of her cycle
- One or both parties may be sterile/infertile, either through illness, *age* or contraceptive use.
- The rape must be ‘complete’ i.e. sperm must be deposited in the woman’s body.
- The trauma of the rape experience can impede ovulation and render it more difficult for the woman’s body to sustain the pregnancy.

A sustained pregnancy as the result of the rape of a 12-to-14-year-old is likely to be extremely uncommon and cannot form the basis of an honest debate on abortion.

Ironically, the BBC complaints unit were prepared to accept that this information on rape and pregnancy ‘may well be true’ but that it did not invalidate Dr Granada’s claims even though this information at the very least called her claims into question. However, as Dr Granada suggests that there is a serious problem of adolescent rape victims facing pregnancy in Mulukuku, ‘such cases are not unusual’, it would be prudent to examine the incidence of child rape in Nicaragua specifically. There were 1,216 reported cases of child abuse (physical and psychological) in Nicaragua last year. Of the 935 child rape cases reported, 277 concerned children under the age of 13 and 658 between 13 and 17.² In spite of the work of the Mulukuku women’s co-operative in getting cases prosecuted, the true figure is likely to be higher as rape goes almost universally underreported.

According to the UNFPA State of the World Population report for 2000, the percentage of rape cases reported varies from less than 3% in South Africa to 16% in the US.

If Nicaragua had the lowest reporting rate in the world, the child rape figure would increase from 935 to 31,166. The vast majority (96.6% according to Save the Children Norway) will be female, though only some would be old enough to conceive. Allowing for these factors, the number would be approximately 23,181. The percentage of rapes resulting in pregnancy stands at approximately 5%, according to the most recent authoritative study, meaning that there would have been approximately 1159 pregnancies from rape last year. Using Save the Children’s data on paternal abuse (op cit), it is possible to calculate an average of approximately 112 pregnancies from paternal rape annually.

² From the website “Angel de la Guarda” <http://www.angel.org.ni/info.htm>

Mulukuku accounts for 0.6% of Nicaragua's population, meaning that, if Nicaragua had the worst rate of rape reporting in the world, Dorothy Granada would come across a pregnancy resulting from paternal rape about once every two years or so. If Nicaragua had the best rate of reporting (16%), Dorothy Granada would have cried over approximately the same number of 'not unusual' case studies in her entire twelve-year career in Mulukuku as viewers were shown. However, instead of questioning whether such pregnancies were as common as she was suggesting, or confronting her with the facts, Mr Bradshaw chose to ask a leading question to a convenient answer.

BRADSHAW: So when you come across a girl 12 or 13 or 14 who's having to carry her father's child to term....?

GRANADA: It's very awful. It's very terrible. It's very terrible. We cry a lot in this clinic.

Panorama's failure to give the most basic background information on Dorothy Granada prevented viewers from giving her comments a clear context. Mr Steel considered Dr Granada's presence in the programme to be 'in the further interests of objectivity' and she was presented as simply a local medical professional. This was misleading as she is neither local – she is from the United States - nor is she the objective medical observer viewers could have been forgiven for believing her to be. The fact that she is a political activist of forty years standing, advocates 'reproductive health' in Nicaragua (a term which covers abortion) and opposes the Catholic Church, particularly its teaching on human sexuality, was surely significant considering the hostility of her comments about the Church. It would also have been intellectually honest to point out her involvement in events funded and organised by groups such as abortion promoters Planned Parenthood and the Women's Empowerment Network.

BBC treatment of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua

Cardinal Obando y Bravo featured highly in this section of the programme and appeared to have been cast in the role of 'villain'. Viewers were told:

BRADSHAW: Cardinal Obando y Bravo has wielded the power of the church here for over three decades. He's just helped persuade the government to pulp copies of a sex education guide that mentioned abortion and contraception. As a political player, press and cabinet ministers hang on his words, today about Nicaraguan troops in Iraq.

The expression 'wielded the power of the church' is derogatory and evokes negative stereotypes about the clerical hierarchy. As the BBC guidelines indicate, "BBC interviewers should avoid impressions of bias through tone and inflection or through careless wording. The BBC should be known for a dispassionate approach to contentious issues." [p. 137] In fairness to Cardinal Bravo, it would have been reasonable to point out that besides dealing with matters such as sex education booklets, the Cardinal 'wields' his power and influence in defence of the poor, as a broker for peace (notably in 1990) and to fight against corruption. No acknowledgement was made of the persecution of the Church in Nicaragua or of the apology made by the Sandinistas in 1996, who used the occasion of the Pope's visit to Nicaragua to ask forgiveness of the Church and its bishops.

The BBC's failure to acknowledge the persecution of the Church and its social justice work was not only apparent in the programme's treatment of Cardinal Bravo. A notable information gap appeared in the report on Mulukuku. What viewers were not alerted to but which the programme-makers must have been aware of, was that there is another women's centre in Mulukuku besides Dorothy Granada's, run by the Catholic religious order the Sisters of Notre Dame. This order, founded in the early nineteenth century to teach the poor, has a presence in

35 countries. In Mulukuku their school and women's study centre provides education for women and young mothers. According to a visiting UK teacher: "During intensive workshops (6 to 10 weeks per year) over 50 students aged between 14 and 35 live at the centre and follow regular primary classes. Most of them do the equivalent of an academic year in 10 weeks, but they can go at their own pace. They have no other access to education. In April 2000, the first five students of the centre received their Primary Cycle Diploma, proof that dreams can become reality."³

The sisters are in the process of completing 12 new schools/study centres throughout Mulukuku and are starting seven new ones this year, so that there will be one school per community.

It is inexcusable that in a report purporting to examine the effects of Church teaching upon women that the immense amount of work being done for women by Catholic religious in the very village the programme-makers chose to visit should have been ignored.

The Case of Rosa

The portrayal of this case was a transparently slanted piece of reporting, both in its approach to abortion and the Church's teaching on the subject. Maria and Francisco were portrayed throughout as "an ordinary couple defying the church and making a stand for women's rights", a partisan and Hollywoodesque approach unworthy of a serious BBC investigation. Their unsubstantiated comments were never challenged, medical evidence was simply ignored, as were the unsavoury details of the campaign that developed around the child.

Rosa's mother claimed:

She wasn't like someone whose body is capable of surviving pregnancy when they become pregnant. She would never have been able to get to that stage because she... a child, let's face it. So we had the pregnancy terminated because she didn't want to die.

Where was the medical evidence to back up such a serious claim, let alone any balancing evidence to the contrary? It would have been prudent for Mr Bradshaw to have mentioned at this point that as early as 1992, the foremost gynaecologists and obstetricians of Ireland (another country where abortion is illegal) stated unequivocally:

As obstetricians and gynaecologists, we affirm that there are *no medical circumstances* justifying direct abortion, that is, *no circumstances* in which the life of a mother may only be saved by directly terminating the life of her unborn child.⁴

This would have been particularly pertinent to the debate as Ireland's medical profession has a first-class record in caring for mothers and their unborn children. Nicaragua is certainly not Ireland, but Ireland's situation gives the lie to the suggestion that good reproductive health care and maternal survival are in any way connected with easy access to abortion. In his response to SPUC's open letter, Mr Steel stated: "Rosa's mother was clearly speaking not from a dispassionate medical point of view but as the parent of an eight year-old girl who had been raped and made pregnant." This was abundantly clear and hardly needed underlining by

³ Report by Dominique Olney of Notre Dame School, Plymouth to the National Board of Catholic Women (UK)

⁴ John Bonner, Eamon O'Dwyer, David Jenkins, Kieran O'Driscoll, Julia Vaughan, 'Statement by Obstetricians', 1 April 1992.

the head of BBC complaints. It does not alter the fact that what she said was highly dubious from a medical perspective and was allowed to stand alone without questioning or analysis.

Mr Bradshaw did interview Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo to solicit his opinion on the case and he stated:

It's not the norm for a child of 9 years to give birth, but if this child had the misfortune to be raped by someone and then became pregnant, it's always possible, according to doctors who are experts in this field to save both lives.

However, Mr Bradshaw's failure to include an interview from any of the 'experts in the field' mentioned by Cardinal Bravo gave the distinct (and we can only assume, deliberate) impression that Rosa's survival was only certain in the mind of a man who was not medically trained.

According to Dr Raphael Cabrero, a doctor with years of experience in gynaecology and obstetrics, the BBC interviewed him regarding the Case of Rosa. He went through the medical evidence backing up the view that Rosa's life was not endangered by her pregnancy only to be asked why he was not bringing religion into it. The BBC did not feature this interview and did not get back in touch with him. In his words, they simply disappeared. This odd and somewhat unprofessional behaviour raises a number of questions:

1. Why did the BBC request or even anticipate a religious slant to a medical question?
2. Why did the reporters concerned fail to inform Dr Cabrera of their intention to 'pull' the interview and their reasons for doing so?
3. Why did they fail to include any medical evidence whatsoever when they clearly had evidence available to them? Are viewers to conclude that it was because the doctor concerned provided them with evidence that would have cast doubt on the unsubstantiated claims that they wished to make about the case and about abortion in general?

The reason given for the omission of Dr Cabrera by Mr Steel at programme complaints was that his views "were considered inappropriate for inclusion in the programme without proper scientific interrogation." This is a very telling omission as other medical and non-medical personnel who fell in line with the programme's agendas were permitted to give their views without the slightest attempts at 'scientific interrogation.'

The programme aired, unqualified, Maria's comment: "He doesn't have the right because only God can excommunicate us. I seem to remember that there is only one Son of God on earth, not two".

Excommunication is a penalty in canon law used only in response to specific serious *unrepented* offences. It does not mean that a person is either damned or thrown out of the Church, it means that they are barred from full communion. Nor was it the Cardinal imposing the penalty, it was the automatic application of the Church. Both the suggestion that God is some kind of ecclesiastical bureaucrat and that the Cardinal believes himself to be the Son of God were grounded in ignorance and superstition that the BBC chose to propagate rather than question.

This may appear to be a minor point, but it is symptomatic of the deliberate misrepresentation of Church teaching by the programme. After a visit to an illegal abortion clinic, Mr Bradshaw asked Alfonso Cardinal Lopez Trujillo of the Pontifical Council for the Family in Rome:

Bradshaw: Cardinal Obando in Nicaragua told us that he believes that if a 9 year old girl is pregnant she should not have an abortion. Is that the position of the Vatican?

Cardinal Trujillo: I have followed these events personally. I am writing to the Cardinal personally to express to him in all sincerity my support because public opinion was quite confused with regard to that case. It did not spare a thought to defending the rights of unborn babies who are people who have a right to live. The church wanted to help this young girl; she'd have been helped up until the birth of her child. But it also came out and stated the truth. And the truth is that human life is inviolable.

However, in an unjustifiable suppression of the facts, the programme failed to make any mention of the medical, financial and pastoral support that the Church in Nicaragua offered Rosa but which was allegedly rejected by both her parents and feminist campaigners. All viewers saw was a Church making a stand against abortion, which was only part of the picture.

Cardinal Trujillo's comments were reported but Mr Bradshaw patently ignored the implications of what the Cardinal was saying and went on to label opposition to abortion as 'just one way the Vatican is trying to impose its sexual values across the world' as though he had made no comment at all. It should not be necessary to point out that this is a simplistic, partial and misplaced suggestion.

The underground abortion clinic

In the section that followed, viewers were informed:

It's thought there could be as many as 60,000 illegal abortions in Nicaragua every year

and

It's estimated that up to one in four pregnancies in Latin America end in illegal abortion, and that worldwide over 70,000 women die from illegal abortions every year.

Advocates of liberal abortion have an established strategy of claiming unsubstantiated and often wildly exaggerated rates of illegal abortion and maternal abortion death. In quoting such figures uncritically, the BBC is again aligning itself with those who propagate these unfounded estimates. I repeat some of the examples cited in SPUC's open letter to Greg Dyke which were not commented upon.

For example, in 1982 it was claimed that 2,000 women died in Portugal every year as a result of illegal abortion. The figure was published in serious news reports (including the BBC, coincidentally) even though the UN Demographic Yearbook found that only 2,099 women in their main childbearing years died from *all* causes in Portugal during the year for which statistics were most recently available. Either Portugal had an extraordinary absence of fatal accidents and disease amongst younger women or the 2,000 figure was a pure fantasy.

In Britain, it was suggested that, before the passing of the Abortion Act, there were as many as 100,000 or even 250,000 illegal abortions carried out every year. However, in 1966, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists stated that "these, and an earlier figure of 50,000, are without any secure factual foundation of which we are aware."

Former abortionist and abortion campaigner Bernard Nathanson has admitted that he deliberately deceived people about the number of abortion deaths in the United States. Dr Nathanson, joint founder of NARAL, claimed that backstreet abortion was killing over 10,000

American women every year. However, when he changed his mind over the abortion issue he admitted that the true figure was approximately 200 but abortion advocates continued to use his original figures in spite of his admission.

Dr Malcolm Potts, a neo-Malthusian abortion pioneer and former director of IPPF, wrote in his book *Abortion* (CUP, 1977) "Those who want the law to be liberalized will stress the hazards of illegal abortion and claim that hundreds, or thousands, or women die unnecessarily each year, when the actual number is far lower." (p. 529)

In response to queries over the sources of these statistics, SPUC were informed: "The sources for these estimates were a mixture of Nicaraguan government and international organisations' statistics." This is a vague answer to a specific question: what are the references for these figures? If the sources are international organisations, which organisations? SPUC and IPPF are both organisations but their aims and objectives are rather different. What stance do those organisations take on abortion? How are the figures calculated? BBC programme complaints went on to side-step the question by adding: 'But in any case, while they may be important indicators, they are not central to the case being put by the programme's contributors.' This is hardly relevant, as the BBC has a duty to broadcast accurate, substantiated information however 'central' the programme-makers deem it to be.

Having used these massive, unsubstantiated figures to forward the programme's agenda, Mr Bradshaw then appears to contradict himself by introducing us to a backstreet abortion clinic that is, he claims, 'relatively safe, absolutely illegal.' Is illegal abortion the terrible scourge Mr Bradshaw tells us that it is? Or is it the compassionate and 'relatively safe' answer to women's needs that he also informs us it is? The programme's confused and contradictory messages regarding this part of the abortion argument are most conspicuous here. The programme-makers appear self-consciously aware that they are not in possession of real facts and figures. The language used is deliberately vague, suggesting situations it cannot verify. The doctor speaks of the women she deals with as 'women who have absolutely nowhere else to turn to economically speaking. Women who have been abused; women who have no access to any kind of contraception.'" Precisely who these women are, the numbers they deal with, how much, if anything, they charge these women, how much information they give out about abortion beforehand and how much medical and emotional back-up they offer afterwards is never recorded or enquired about.

At the prompting of Mr Bradshaw, the doctor claimed that "I think that if we did not exist, I think that there would be many more maternal fatalities, more adolescent deaths." In the absence of any reliable evidence, the doctor's dramatic and self-justifying claim rings hollow. No evidence is presented of the number of abortions performed at the clinic, the number of women seeking abortions at the clinic but refused for any reason, or the reasons for the maternal deaths she mentions. No comparison is offered of the number of abortion deaths locally and for other parts of the country without an illegal abortion clinic.

Mr Bradshaw went on to state that: "Women who don't make it to an underground clinic often end up in Managua's women's hospital after botched back street abortions." Facts and figures are again notably absent. We see a hospital ward, we see intravenous drips, we see female patients but whether or not these women are actually the survivors of botched abortions is not clarified.

On the question of legality, the BBC's sympathetic treatment of what is a criminal activity in Nicaragua is a matter of serious concern, as is its intrusion upon and undermining of Nicaraguan law. The programme-makers showed gross insensitivity to both the culture of

Nicaragua and the medical services which operate in sympathy with the laws and values of the country.

Panorama and the Pope

Introducing an agenda

Sex and the Holy City began with the following introduction:

STEVE BRADSHAW: Imagine a land in which ideal love is a reality and ideal sex; simultaneous climax between a loving couple, and in this land all couples are married. No barriers to perfect self-giving; no barriers to childbirth; no condoms, IUDs or pills. Abortion is illegal too. This land does not exist, but these ideals do in the work and thought of Karol Wojtyla, now Pope John Paul II. This is a film about what happens when those ideals clash with reality.

The agenda of the programme was laid out in this inaccurate, prejudicial and melodramatic beginning. Contrary to the reporter's assertion, a place where abortion is illegal, where there is no artificial contraception and where couples are married was the norm internationally until relatively recently. For millions of families around the world, it remains the norm, but the implication of the opening is very clear. By creating a false dichotomy between the Pope's 'ideals' and the programme's definition of 'reality', the Pope was immediately presented as completely out of touch before the investigation had even started.

Psychoanalysing the Pope

After the Nicaragua section, the programme made an attempt at psychoanalysis under the pretext of examining John Paul II's 'vision of womanhood rooted in his personal history'. Viewers were informed that the Pope's mother died when he was eight and that he attended a Marian procession 74 years ago. The programme might have pointed out that the idea of Mary as 'the image of the ideal woman, a mother to all' is rooted in centuries of Catholic tradition, is shared by millions of Catholics around the world, not to mention members of other Christian traditions such as Copts and Orthodox Christians. It is by no means a peculiar quirk of a Pope who lost his mother when he was very young. All practising Catholics are brought up to regard Mary as their spiritual mother as a cursory glance at Catholic prayers, hymns and iconography would have clarified. The programme's treatment of Marian devotion pandered to ignorant, outdated prejudices about the Catholic vision of womanhood in relation to Mary, which Mr Bradshaw endorsed rather than questioned.

Dishonest handling of contributors

Mr Bradshaw interviewed an old friend of John Paul II, Professor Karol Tarnowski, who was seen giving some background to the Pope's philosophy on love and relationships. He was portrayed as a married man 'living the new Pope's dream of love and responsibility' but unable to share his views on contraception. John Paul II's failure to change his views after Professor Tarnowski's wife wrote him a letter was seen as "a perhaps painful reminder of the Pope's unmovable convictions."

Leaving aside the question of why a BBC journalist finds it 'painful' for a man to remain true to his principles, the BBC's treatment of Professor Tarnowski led him to condemn the BBC for what he saw as a deliberately dishonest approach and a predetermined agenda on the part of the programme-makers. In a statement that was reported in a UK Catholic paper, *The Catholic Herald*, Professor Tarnowski denounced the programme, stating that he had been "patently misled regarding this production's intention and direction". He went on to say: "It is intellectually dishonest to trim statements to suit a thesis (or theses) already decided a priori

from above. This practice was typical of the ideological mentality which Poles experienced in excess under Communism, and whose manifestations now appear to be found in Anglo-Saxon journalism, perhaps in Western journalism as a whole.” He went as far as to warn others not to have any dealings with the BBC. “Since the BBC has acted so unfairly towards me, I feel I have an obligation to forewarn all those with whom it may seek co-operation in the future”.

Professor Tarnowski was not the only one to express the view that the BBC had behaved badly. Cardinal Trujillo, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family reflected on his encounter with the programme-makers:

On that occasion, I answered different questions for more than an hour, especially those dealing with the family. But, surprisingly, what was shown from the whole interview on the BBC Panorama’s film *Sex & the Holy City* were merely three questions of less than half a minute each, the answers to which were certainly much more complete. The program apparently tried to deliberately and systematically criticize the Catholic Church for supposedly contributing to the death of people by not allowing the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁵

Ironically, Mr Steel cited the inclusion of both Professor Tarnowski and Cardinal Trujillo in his defence of the programme, unaware, it would seem, that both men had publicly criticised their treatment at the hands of the BBC programme-makers.

In an exclusive report published on the Human Life International website, the Rev. Thomas J Euteneuer, the president of Human Life International spoke of his organisation’s contact with the makers of *Sex and the Holy City*. According to him:

“In the first week of September HLI received a call from the BBC claiming that they were going to be in the Washington D.C. area and wanted to visit our offices to interview us about our mission. According to the secretary who called, they were preparing a *documentary on the work of the Catholic Church in providing healthcare around the world*, and everywhere they went in the Third World they had heard of HLI. We were flattered. We began, however, to be suspicious when *they would not provide us more details of the show and refused to be specific about the themes to be addressed.*”⁶ [my emphases]

The Statement of BBC editorial values contains the words: “Contributors should be treated honestly and with respect. They have a right to know what a programme is about, what kind of contribution they are expected to make, whether it will be live or recorded and whether it is to be edited.” Later on, the BBC guidelines go on to state: “They should not feel misled, deceived or misrepresented before, during or after the programme, unless there is a clear public interest, when dealing with criminal or anti-social activity.” [p. 52]

According to Fr Euteneuer’s account of events, this was not the approach the BBC chose to take with his organisation, leading them to cancel the interview when they discovered the true nature of the programme. When both the president of an international organisation and a respected academic express such opinions in the public domain, viewers are forced to consider whether distortions of the truth were incorporated into the rest of the programme, or indeed, whether the BBC’s own guidelines regarding fair reporting were followed with other interviewees.

Karol Wojtyla and *Humanae Vitae*

⁵ Family Values Versus Safe Sex: a reflection by his eminence, Alfonso Cardinal Lopez Trujillo (December 1, 2003)

⁶ http://www.hli.org/bbc_bbc-vs-hli.html

It is not an exaggeration to describe *Sex and the Holy City*'s reporting of the events surrounding the writing of *Humanae Vitae* as little short of simplistic propaganda. Viewers were told:

Incredibly as it now seems, the Vatican almost endorsed the pill in the 60s, after all, there was no explicit ban on contraception in the Bible. But the then Pope, Paul VI, received a gift from Krakow's Karol Wojtyla, a report attacking contraception and promoting natural family planning. To the dismay of liberal Catholics, Pope Paul VI using arguments Wojtyla had advocated, reaffirmed the ban on contraception. Karol Wojtyla, who'd been made Cardinal by a grateful Paul VI, had stood against the tide of Catholic opinion and won. And once elected Pope, 25 years ago this week, he would use his extraordinary popularity to stand against the tide of world opinion, condemning contraception and the trend to legalise abortion.

The puerile reasoning of 'the Bible doesn't ban it' is barely worthy of a mention, except that it may be worth asking Mr Bradshaw if he has any idea why none of the biblical prophets made any 'explicit' reference to the IUD or the contraceptive pill. To clarify, some Christians do believe there to be a ban on contraception in the Bible, expressed in the story of the sin of Onan (Genesis 38: 8-10). Among both Catholic and non-Catholic exegetes good arguments can be found for the assertion that Onan was slain for his sin against chastity; the story could refer at the very least to *coitus interruptus*, from which conclusions could be drawn about other forms of contraception.⁷

However, the greater misunderstanding here is not of scripture itself but of the relationship between sacred scripture and tradition within the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal." [Catechism, point 80] Therefore 'the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.'" [Catechism, point 82]

To attribute almost entire responsibility for *Humanae Vitae* to John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla) was simply inaccurate. It was Pope John XXIII who, in 1963, set up the Commission for the Study of Population, Families and Births. The Commission was reconvened after John XXIII's death by Pope Paul VI. It produced a report entitled "Responsible Parenthood" calling for a change in Church teaching on birth control. Four members of the Commission dissented from this view and produced another report "State of the Question: The Doctrine of the Church and its Authority". Pope Paul VI rejected the 'Majority Report' and even the 'Minority Report' did not form a substantial part of *Humanae Vitae* when it was eventually published. That Karol Wojtyla and the Krakow commission he set up had a profound influence over the final draft of *Humanae Vitae* is widely known. But to reduce this encyclical to the manifestation of a single man's crusading ideals was simplistic in the extreme.

Furthermore, such an interpretation ignores the Church's teaching on the matter over a period of centuries. It was Thomas Aquinas, not John Paul II who wrote: "This disorder in the emission of the seed goes against the good of nature, which is the conservation of the species. Therefore, after the sin of murder, which destroys an already existing human nature, the sin of preventing the generation of one comes next in gravity."

⁷ John C. Frod, SJ and Gerald Kelly SJ, Contemporary Moral Theology, Vol. II, Marriage Questions (Newman Press, Maryland, 1963) p. 272

What might have been more interesting to mention in the programme is the view held by some, including John Paul II's biographer George Wiegel, that, had Paul VI adopted the arguments of the Krakow commission's memorandum and Archbishop Wojtyla's counsel *more closely*, the result would have been 'a more intelligent and sensitive debate.'⁸

John Paul II and Women

Following the BBC programme's interpretation of *Humanae Vitae*, viewers were subjected to a scurrilous repetition of outdated, ignorant and prejudiced assumptions about alleged Catholic clerical views on women, all of which were referred to without qualification or challenge by Mr Bradshaw:

As well as sympathetic doubters there have been harsh critics of John Paul's vision of love and responsibility. On their view, he is a man who had never been close to a woman and so fell victim not to ideals but to stereotypes. A vision of women always defined by their reproductive powers -mother, wife, temptress.

It was at this point in the programme that Nafis Sadik, former head of the UN Population Fund was interviewed. She claimed that the Pope told her, in response to a point of hers about the exploitation of women by their spouses: "Don't you think that the irresponsible behaviour of men is caused by women?"

Mr Bradshaw echoed Ms Sadik's words and asked her to reiterate that those were the Pope's words, but beyond that, he did not challenge what she said. It is somewhat surprising that he did not as her claims were so extraordinary. Mr Steel assured SPUC that "Nafis Sadiq was categorical about what Pope John Paul II had said to her" and that "Cardinal Trujillo confirmed that the meeting between the two had taken place." No one is calling into question that the meeting took place. However, it seems highly unlikely that a man who has spoken in defence of the dignity of women and their right to freedom from abuse and exploitation – views that even Mr Bradshaw was good enough to acknowledge, albeit briefly, elsewhere in the programme – would have made such a comment. In a radio interview about the *Panorama* programme, Bishop Fisher OP expressed incredulity that Ms Sadik should have made such a claim, saying:

ANTHONY FISHER: I don't believe that he [the Pope] said such a thing; I think it's so different to all his writing. Now we've got fifty years of his writing about sexuality and marriage and family, and it's never along those sorts of lines at all. He's been very strong on respect for women, and respect for their rights, and for consent, and that men and women are equally responsible for their sexual activities.⁹

In George Weigel's comprehensive and critically acclaimed autobiography of John Paul II *Witness to Hope*, the meeting between Nafis Sadik and the Pope is described in rather different terms. John Paul II allegedly attempted to explain Church teaching but 'she didn't want to discuss it'.¹⁰ Her description of the Pope and his attitude afterwards 'made little sense to anyone who had ever known or worked with him' and her assertion that 'he doesn't like women. I expected a little more sympathy for suffering and death' was described as 'simply bizarre.' To further discredit herself, according to Wiegel, 'on the evidence of her own testimony, Mrs Sadik misrepresented both the work of the agency she headed and the implications of the Cairo draft document in her conversation with the Pope, going so far as to

⁸ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (Harper Collins, 2001) p. 210. All further quotes in this paragraph are taken from this section of the book.

⁹ <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/re/rpt/stories/s986591.htm> The Religion Report, 12 November 2003

¹⁰ Wiegel, pp. 718-719

suggest that the UNFPA was not involved with abortion.’ In light of the fact that the UNFPA (UN Population Fund) promotes abortion around the world, this claim was clearly ludicrous.

Neither version of events has any pretensions at infallibility, but it was singularly remiss of Mr Bradshaw to exclude one side of what was clearly an important meeting when the BBC guidelines place such emphasis upon balance and impartiality. The Guidelines state: “Due impartiality lies at the heart of the BBC. It is a core value and no area of programming is exempt from it. All BBC programmes and services should be open minded, fair and show a respect for truth.” [P. 36]

However, whereas the guidelines demand fairness and impartiality, Mr Bradshaw chose instead to ask questions leading to predictable answers:

BRADSHAW: You came out of this one to one meeting with the Pope believing that the Pope's understanding of the plight of women in poor countries was what?

SADIK: Was very inadequate.

The Pope's attitude towards women was treated in such a shallow and misleading manner as to be potentially defamatory. The worst example of this was Mr Bradshaw's throwaway comment:

The Vatican can point to the Pope's support since his days in Krakow for women's right to equality, to work and to freedom from abuse. But his critics say his conservative views are having consequences beyond the lives of individual women.

It is not just the Vatican as Mr Bradshaw suggested that admires the Pope's work and recognises its positive impact upon the lives of women and men throughout the world, nor has the Pope worked for 'women's right to equality, to work and to freedom of abuse' only in Krakow. As a cursory glance at the Pope's writings clearly shows, the Pope's work for women has never been on a purely individual level as Mr Bradshaw asserts. In the interests of fairness and professionalism, it would have been helpful for the programme-makers to have mentioned John Paul II's encyclical on the dignity of women, *Mulieris Dignitatem* and his belief that the Christian Gospel is a “consistent *protest* against whatever offends the dignity of women.” It was surely significant in the context of the programme and Nafis Sadik's allegations, that the Pope has spoken against the abuse of women by men in sexual and marital relationships. Note the Pope's condemnation of the hypocritical treatment of women facing an unplanned pregnancy by patriarchal societies:

“A woman is left alone, exposed to public opinion with her 'sin', while behind 'her' sin there lurks a man – a sinner, guilty 'of the other's sin', indeed equally responsible for it. And yet his sin escapes notice, it is passed over in silence... How often is she abandoned with her pregnancy when the man, the child's father, is unwilling to accept responsibility for it?” *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

Furthermore, it should be noted that by his concern for such matters, John Paul II is continuing, not creating, the long held tradition of the Church. This is particularly important to emphasise as the BBC appears unaware of the fact. The programme's pro-abortion agenda and its dishonest, ill-informed attempts to portray the teachings of the Church as the views of a single man were underlined by Mr Steel's comment to SPUC: “Their concern, as reflected in Steve Bradshaw's report, was that the teaching of the Church, based on the profoundly-held beliefs of the Pope, has caused young girls to run the risk of taking unwanted pregnancies to term.” The pro-abortion slant is obvious enough without further attention being drawn to it. To re-affirm once again, the teachings of the Church are *not* based on the beliefs, 'profoundly-held' or otherwise, of one man. That the head of BBC programme complaints should back up

this simplistic and ignorant attempt to turn John Paul II into a scapegoat is revealing to say the very least.

The Holy See and the UN according to Catholics for Free Choice

The programme chose briefly to explore the Holy See's UN role. Its exploration was so brief and so one-sided in fact that it was described entirely through the eyes of a well known opponent of the Holy See, Frances Kissling of 'Catholics' for a Free Choice. She was quoted (unchallenged) stating:

When I go to the United Nations and watch the Vatican representatives operate right on the floor, I see them going up to Libya, to the Sudan, to Oman, very often to Muslim countries that have similar conservative views on women and reproduction and wheeling and dealing just like every other government official in the world.

Frances Kissling is a popular media figure because she is pro-abortion and claims to be Catholic. She makes a great deal about the fact that she has never been formally excommunicated for attacking the Church. However, under canon law she is already ipso facto excommunicated because of her work in abortion.

Viewers might have been able to draw their own conclusions about just how pro-woman and 'Catholic' Catholics For a Free Choice actually is if they had been informed that CFFC has received sponsorship money from Playboy¹¹ (an institution not universally known for its respect for the dignity of women) and has been denounced not just by Catholic bishops but by one of its founder members. Marjorie Reiley Maguire, who wrote some of CFFC's founding material, said in a letter to the National Catholic Reporter in 1995:

I now see CFFC's agenda as the promotion of abortion, the defence of every abortion decision as a good, moral choice, and the related agenda of persuading society to cast off any moral constraints about sexual behaviour. I don't think this is a Catholic or pro-woman agenda whether you are liberal or conservative, pro-life or pro-choice.

Gail Quinn, executive director of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. wrote in an article on the US bishops' conference website:

Money allows one to veil distortions and lies with a patina of respectability. It even allows one to disguise anti-Catholic bigotry as a religious voice. But in the end, neither media nor money can make a virtue of what is inherently evil, and neither can change Catholic teaching or Catholic beliefs. And despite the label on the letterhead, there is nothing Catholic about Catholics for a Free Choice. And neither money nor media can make it so.

In a paper analysing Catholics For a Free Choice, Dr Thomas E Woods commented:

The media should not look to CFFC for Catholic opinion – because CFFC is not a Catholic organization. It is, instead, composed of a very small group of non-Catholics and ex-Catholics, and perhaps even excommunicated Catholics, who do not believe the Church's fundamental dogmatic teachings (sexual or otherwise)

In May 2000, the head of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington issued a statement on Catholics for a Free Choice, saying:

For a number of years, a group calling itself Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) has been publicly supporting abortion while claiming it speaks as an authentic Catholic voice. That claim is false. In fact,

¹¹ <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=17391>

the group's activity is directed to rejection and distortion of Catholic teaching about the respect and protection due to defenseless unborn human life.

On a number of occasions the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has stated publicly that CFFC is not a Catholic organization, does not speak for the Catholic Church, and in fact promotes positions contrary to the teaching of the Church as articulated by the Holy See and the NCCB.

CFFC is, practically speaking, an arm of the abortion lobby in the United States and throughout the world. It is an advocacy group dedicated to supporting abortion. It is funded by a number of powerful and wealthy private foundations, mostly American, to promote abortion as a method of population control. This position is contrary to existing United Nations policy and the laws and policies of most nations of the world.

In its latest campaign, CFFC has undertaken a concentrated public relations effort to end the official presence and silence the moral voice of the Holy See at the United Nations as a Permanent Observer. The public relations effort has ridiculed the Holy See in language reminiscent of other episodes of anti-Catholic bigotry that the Catholic Church has endured in the past.

As the Catholic Bishops of the United States have stated for many years, the use of the name Catholic as a platform for promoting the taking of innocent human life and ridiculing the Church is offensive not only to Catholics, but to all who expect honesty and forthrightness in public discourse. We state once again with the strongest emphasis: `Because of its opposition to the human rights of some of the most defenseless members of the human race, and because its purposes and activities deliberately contradict essential teachings of the Catholic faith,....Catholics for a Free Choice merits no recognition or support as a Catholic organization.

It is likely that the majority of licence-fee payers 'expect honesty and forthrightness in public discourse' from the BBC, whatever their religious leanings. Giving a platform to a member of an organisation that operates under false pretences without questioning its credentials cannot conceivably be described as honest or forthright reporting.

Frances Kissling's comments themselves raised a number of questions. If they were intended as criticisms, what precisely was the point she was trying to make? Viewers were again left to ponder why was she not challenged to clarify herself. Is it the fact that the Holy See has representatives that upset Ms Kissling? As a point of information, it is not the Vatican city state that is represented at the United Nations, but the Holy See, which is the government of the Catholic Church, representing well over a billion Catholics worldwide. Is it distressing to Ms Kissling that the Holy See talks to Muslims?

In his response to SPUC, Mr Steel explained that Ms Kissling's comment was clear in that the Church's policies on 'reproductive issues' had resulted in "global alliances which many would find surprising" but this assertion has overtones of sectarianism in itself. The BBC complaints unit, like Mr Bradshaw, failed to question the offensive and racist implication that Catholics and Muslims should not work together, or that it should count against the Catholic Church that it works with Muslim countries. Consider a documentary looking at Northern Ireland including a commentator saying: "This protestant politician actually goes up to Catholics and parleys with them." Such a criticism would be seen as blatantly sectarian.

Manila

The Philippines and population

Mr Steel informed SPUC that “it did not seem from our viewing that the programme made a direct connection between poverty and contraception” and placed the emphasis instead upon contraception and overcrowding. This is disingenuous when one consider the facts. At the start of the Manila section of the programme, as with the other sections, viewers were left in no doubt as to the agenda of the programme-makers. Mr Bradshaw stated:

We came here to the one Catholic country in Asia to look at the effects of the Pope's teachings on contraception, effects his critics say you can see in the streets. In the Philippines there are over 40,000 street kids

And later:

You don't have to step far outside Congress to see what ignorance about sex and lack of contraception can lead to. This is a city so overcrowded that even a railroad track gets called home, no wrong side of the tracks here.

Women's groups say lack of reproductive rights are causing *over population, poverty* and death. [my emphases]

The neo-Malthusian assumption that overpopulation is the cause of poverty and, therefore, that population control is the answer to the problem of poverty, is re-iterated throughout the Manila section of the programme without ever being seriously questioned. The BBC is being less than frank when it denies that it made a direct connection between poverty and contraception.

What has been described as the ‘overpopulation myth’ has been questioned by economists, social scientists and statisticians amongst others for years. It is not just the Church that believes “the root cause of this appalling poverty is not too many people, it's too few resources unequally shared out” (though ‘it's resources unequally shared out’ would have been more accurate). In the words of Bjorn Lomborg, associate professor of statistics in the department of political science at the university of Aarhus, Denmark:

The point is, however, that the number of people is not the problem. Many of the most densely populated countries are in Europe. The most densely populated region, Southeast Asia, has the same number of people per square km as the United Kingdom. The Netherlands, Belgium and Japan are far more densely populated than India, and Ohio and Denmark are more densely populated than Indonesia.

Today, Ehrlich [Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*] and others also agree on this. Nevertheless, two other interpretations of overpopulation have come to the fore. One of them conjures up images of starving families; wretched, cramped conditions and premature death. Such images are real enough but are actually the result of poverty rather than population density.

Another interpretation of overpopulation which Ehrlich employs these days, focuses on the population density being *sustainable*. If a nation's present population cannot sustain itself in the long term then the nation is over populated. But to put it mildly, it seems bizarre to insist that a population should be able to support itself from the specific land on which it lives. The whole idea of a trading economy is that production does not necessarily have to take place at the physical location of demand, but where it is most efficient.¹²

¹² Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* (Cambridge University Press, 2001; 2002) p. 48

Not only was the overpopulation argument repeated without challenge, it was propped up by misinformation.

BRADSHAW: There are already 80 million people in the Philippines and the people is expected to double in three decades, yet the Catholic Church opposes contraception and wants to leave sex education largely to families.

This is quite simply untrue. According to the UN Population Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs report, *World Population 2002*, the population of the Philippines which currently stands at just under 80 million (79,999) will increase to 126,965 by 2050, not to 159,998 by 2033 as Mr Bradshaw suggests.¹³ Furthermore, the growth rate of the Philippines is not vastly out of control as the programme suggests, in spite of being a Catholic country. The birth rate of the Philippines is 3.2. This is certainly above average for both Asia and south-east Asia specifically, which have birth rates of 2.5. However, it is by no means the fastest growing population in the region where birth rates range from 4.8 in Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, to 1.4 in Singapore. The thrust of the programme's argument regarding the Philippines is based upon the principle that the Philippines has a serious (and indeed atypical) population problem based upon its Catholic traditions, a principle that on analysis appears to be unfounded.

Contraception

Viewers were then introduced to 'bizarre myths' such as the use of toothpaste as a form of contraceptive. The Daily Telegraph's *Beebwatch* noted the suggestion in the programme that the Church was responsible for this myth, particularly because the story was placed immediately before an interview with a woman complaining about 'how much of a need this is in this Catholic country for adolescence, sexuality and reproductive services.' Again, the language used was vague. We were told that 'Claudia wasn't the only girl who'd used toothpaste for birth control.' How many were there if this was not an individual case? Two? Twenty? Would we be right in thinking that there might be an epidemic of young people sleeping around with only their tube of Colgate for protection?

The decision to allow the Mayor of Manila to explain his philosophy was a welcome if insubstantial glimpse into the philosophy of a man who opposes abortion and contraception. As a point of information, it is not just the pro-life mayor of Manila who thinks that a foetus is 'the body of a tiny person.' Besides the inescapable reality of an aborted baby's humanity – the body is recognisably human in shape and form from as early as nine weeks – viewers might not have been aware that some abortion advocates promote burying the bodies of aborted babies to help their parents with the grieving process. The US-based 'November Gang' go as far as to offer imitation baptisms of aborted babies. Giving a decent burial to aborted babies is far from a merely pro-life initiative as the programme suggested.

After the Haven of Angels, the programme moved to 'the no choice clinic.' To re-iterate what was stated in SPUC's open letter, this derogatory comment cast the clinic in an immediately negative light before its work or ethos had been examined. SPUC was assured that the comment was a reference to the fact that the Billings method was the one method of family planning provided by the clinic, but this was hardly sufficient justification for the negative, even condescending implication of the comment. The programme offered no investigation into the work of the clinic. A brief glimpse of a natural family planning chart was symptomatic of the tokenism inherent in this programme's approach to the other side of the argument. As natural family planning is endorsed by the Church, it is astonishing that this

¹³ http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2002/POP-R2002-DATA_Web.xls

method was not explored in any depth at all in a programme on the subject of the Church's teachings on sexuality. It would have been helpful and arguably in the public interest (the major justification given by the BBC for the programme itself) to point out that:

- Much of the bad press surrounding natural family planning and its practical use is based on NFP methods that are up to fifty years old and long superseded by modern, effective methods.
- Modern NFP is easy to learn and does not require a high level of education
- It is drug/device free (surely a bonus in a poor country)
- Most importantly, NFP liberates women by educating them about their own menstrual cycle and to regulate their own fertility.

The programme-makers slanted treatment of the pro-life clinic was completed with its one-line interview with the nurse in charge of the clinic.

ANNA DAHILIG

Anti-contraception campaigner

Since Mayor Lito Atienza, I haven't seen any pills or condoms or any artificial method here in Manila anymore.

Viewers were told that she is 'thrilled' by the Mayor's ban on contraception. She was permitted to say that she had not seen any artificial contraception in Manila but was given no opportunity to explain her objection to contraception, her views on Church teaching or to discuss her NFP courses and its effects on the women she teaches. Viewers could only come to their own conclusions about the reasons for the conspicuous lack of interest in one woman's work and opinions and the free rein given to those who gave the 'correct' answers. Women such as, for example, Dr Junice Melgar.

Dr JUNICE MELGAR: I think personally that John Paul's teachings are taking a toll on people's lives here, that his admonition against reproductive health care is actually causing deaths of women here from unwanted pregnancy and even from pregnancy that's complicated.

This section ends with Dr Melgar making yet another unchallenged and unfounded allegation. The justification for including this was that "it was clear from the terms in which Dr Melgar spoke that she was expressing her own opinion, not citing a scientifically proven fact. However, as her opinion derived from her own extensive experience, I think the programme was quite entitled to present it." The comment may have derived from her experience or from another source, such as for example, a personal dislike of the pope or a misunderstanding of Church teaching. However, these possibilities were not explored.

As a point of information of which Dr Melgar appears to have been unaware, neither the Pope nor the Church in general has any problem with women receiving the antenatal and postnatal care they need. Its objection is to the destruction of innocent life. For a reputable broadcasting corporation to allow what is effectively an accusation of unlawful killing to go entirely unchallenged in a report of this nature represents a grave breach of judgement. Explaining it away by stating that "although Steve Bradshaw didn't question it directly, he did put it to the Archbishop of Manilla, which is an equally valid way of proceeding" beggars belief. Mr Bradshaw was quite happy to question those he evidently disagreed with. Putting the question to a third party was clearly not 'equally valid'. Dr Melgar made the allegation. It was her responsibility as a competent adult to explain herself, not that of a third party.

As a sop to critics, Mr Steel mentioned that the programme-makers had decided not to include an interview by a 'non-Catholic' bishop who held the Church responsible for the local conditions on the grounds that it was unfair. As the programme-makers were quite happy to

include other figures with possible personal animus against the Church and who made similar allegations, this point cannot be taken seriously.

Dr Melgar's unsubstantiated attack was further compounded by Mr Bradshaw's patronising glossing over of Church teaching.

BRADSHAW: But the Vatican has its own vision of the threat to women. Look at MetroManila this way, if they'll let you, and it's a city where women in their tens of thousands are sexually exploited for profit, a city where Catholic ideals of love and the family are undermined by western style hedonism and avarice.

Who is 'they' exactly? Is the assumption here that the Vatican's view of women can only be considered if women are ignored? The conviction that hedonism and avarice undermines family values is not peculiar to the Vatican as is suggested here, but yet again, an opportunity to look beyond the fixed angle of the programme was lost.

Kenya, Condoms and the Church

The Church, the WHO and abstinence programmes

The last stop for the programme was Kenya where viewers were told: "It is in Africa where the AIDS pandemic has struck hardest and it's also where the church is ignoring widely agreed scientific evidence on AIDS." The basic thesis was that condoms work, the scientists agree with this, the Church does not agree. The Church is wrong. The Church is causing misery and death by failing to endorse an effective means of preventing the spread of AIDS.

Let us begin by taking a look at what the Panorama programme failed to mention, information that might have helped to give a more balanced picture of the Church and the AIDS situation in Africa.

Mr Bradshaw mentioned in passing that "the World Health Organisation says the best way to prevent AIDS is abstinence, or monogamy with an uninfected partner." Coincidentally, this is a view shared by the Church, but all that was noted by Mr Bradshaw was that the WHO promotes condom use and the Church does not. Given that the Church endorses a form of AIDS prevention that is accepted by the WHO, according to Mr Bradshaw, as the *best way to prevent AIDS*, it seems somewhat remiss of the Panorama programme not to look into this a little further or at least acknowledge it frankly and noticeably. One conclusion that might be drawn from this is that the Church's support of the *best way to prevent AIDS* did not fit into the programme's predetermined agenda against the Church.

Mr Steel informed SPUC that "the programme was careful to present the view that the best protection against the spread of AIDS/HIV is abstinence or monogamous sexual activity" but the subject was barely 'presented' at all. Whatever the motivation for this silence, the question needs to be asked – when abstinence and monogamy are so central to Church teaching on human sexuality, why was this common sense approach and its endorsement by the World Health Organisation given only the most cursory of mentions in an investigation that purported to explore the impact of Church teaching on certain parts of the developing world?

It would have been helpful if viewers had been informed of the success of abstinence-based programmes in Uganda, for example. According to USAID's report *What Happened in*

*Uganda?*¹⁴ Uganda is ‘considered to be one of the world’s earliest and best success stories in overcoming HIV’ [p. 2] with HIV rates declining throughout the 1990s. What is most interesting about Uganda’s successful approach to the HIV crisis is that condoms did *not* play a major part in reducing the rate of HIV infection in Uganda. A major factor was the widespread encouragement of ‘partner reduction through talking about delaying sexual debut – remaining abstinent, remaining faithful to one uninfected person if “you’ve already started”, “zero grazing” and using condoms if “you’re going to move around”’ with the emphasis on partner reduction, abstinence and delaying sexual activity. The approach was so successful that in the Soroti District, the percentage of sexually active 13-16-year-olds dropped from 60% in 1994 to less than 5% in 2001 [p. 6]. The report states that ‘condom promotion was not an especially dominant element in Uganda’s earlier response to AIDS’ [p. 7] as ‘nearly all of the decline in HIV incidence (and much of the decline in prevalence) had already occurred by 1995.... Therefore, it seems unlikely that such levels of condom ever-use in Uganda (let alone consistent use, which was presumably much lower) could have played a major role in HIV reduction at the national level, in the earlier years.’ [p. 8]

Condoms: viral leakage and other issues

The first person Mr Bradshaw consulted about the condom situation in Kenya was, bizarrely enough, a coffin maker.

COFFIN MAKER: Many young people don’t trust condoms, they argue that dying of AIDS is like being killed in an accident. People think condoms are not 100% secure and they treat it as a similar risk to a car crash so they don’t like using them for those reasons.

The macabre gimmickry in interviewing coffin makers on this subject was so crass, insensitive and unprofessional as to beggar belief. The Washington Dispatch’s satirical article *The BBC’s War on the Pope* could be forgiven for asking with some astonishment, ‘have you ever seen a current affairs report that kicks off by asking Kenyan coffin makers for their views on condoms?’

Setting aside this extraordinary lapse in taste and judgement, it is important to note that the people the coffin maker refers to are correct in thinking that condoms are not 100% secure and it is not (as the programme implies) only the Catholic Church promoting this information. The Catholic Church was accused of ‘peddling rumour and superstition’, preaching ‘scientific nonsense’, ‘ignoring widely agreed scientific evidence on AIDS’, ‘peddling superstition and ignorance’ and making ‘extraordinary claims’. As was noted in SPUC’s open letter, Mr Bradshaw comes within an inch of accusing the Church of mass murder, yet none of these claims that there is a link between Church teaching and deaths from AIDS is backed up by a single scientific study. Anecdotal evidence and opinion constitutes seriously inadequate support for an allegation of this nature.

Much of the following information is taken from SPUC’s open letter but in the interests of thoroughness, it is included again in this report. Not only are there no scientific studies stating that condoms are 100% safe but the condom companies and promoters themselves acknowledge that condoms, even when used consistently, are not foolproof. The cost in human and legal terms is too serious for them to risk stating otherwise. The programme failed to mention Durex’s statement on their website: "Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly are a highly effective barrier to the sexual transmission of HIV and other STIs." Unfortunately, as well-informed people are aware (but not, it would appear, the makers of *Sex*

¹⁴ http://www.usaid.gov/pop_health/aids/Countries/africa/uganda_report.pdf

and the Holy City) 'correct and consistent use' is the ideal more often than the reality. The success rate for 'typical' use is much lower. More interestingly in this context, Durex goes on to point out that there is only one 100% effective way of preventing HIV infection. "However, for complete protection from HIV and other STIs, the only totally effective measure is sexual abstinence or limiting sexual intercourse to mutually faithful, uninfected partners." Coincidentally, the Catholic Church endorses this radical, practical and foolproof method of HIV prevention, as does the World Health Organisation.

What was even more misleading, however, was the *Panorama* programme's misuse of the US National Institute of Health's report. We were told:

Bradshaw: The most authoritative recent report is by the US National Institute of Health which concluded: 'Intact condoms are essentially impermeable to the smallest sexually transmitted virus' and 'that the consistent use of male condoms protects against HIV/AIDS transmissions.'

This quote does not come entirely from the conclusion of the report and is not a single, condensed reference at all as was suggested. It is spliced from two different sections of the report, p. 7 and p. 27. Furthermore, *Panorama* omitted to mention other key aspects of this report:

- i) The introduction to the report (p. ii) concluded that 'because of limitations in study designs there was insufficient evidence from the epidemiological studies on these diseases to draw definite conclusions about the effectiveness of the latex male condom in reducing the transmission of these diseases.' Why should an investigation by an allegedly impartial broadcasting corporation fail to mention that the authoritative report it cites acknowledges itself that it is not authoritative in so far as its evidence is insufficient and (as point ii illustrates) prone to error?
- ii) It recorded the fallibility of any study on condom use because 'all studies must rely on self-reported use, a potential source of error due to recall bias' (p. 5)
- iii) It recorded that 'the combined method failure (slippage plus breakage) is estimated at 1.6% - 3.6% (p. 9) and
- iv) 'approximately 3% of couples who reported using condoms consistently and correctly (considered "perfect use") are estimated to experience an unintended pregnancy during the first year of use' and 'in a recent well-controlled randomized clinical trial of monogamous couples using latex male condoms for contraception over six months, the pregnancy rate during "typical use" was reported at 6.3% (p. 10).
- v) Finally, 'from the two incidence estimates, consistent condom use decreased the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission by approximately 85%. These data provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of condoms for reducing sexually transmitted HIV.' Note 'reducing' not 'preventing'. The programme's major source of scientific information for its premise that condoms prevent AIDS transmission admits itself that condoms decrease risk by only 85% and goes on in its conclusion to state: "it is important that robust research be pursued to ascertain the true benefits and limitations of an available risk reduction technology". As John Smeaton commented in an interview about the *Panorama* programme: "Condom use may reduce the risk of transmission but to spread the message that condom use prevents AIDS is a dangerous lie. It is no good saying that the risk is 'only 15%', or 'only 1 in 10' when we are talking about human lives."¹⁵

The fact that latex is porous is not a matter for debate. Whether or not the porous nature of latex can result in viral leakage is a matter of serious contention. What is of interest here,

¹⁵ <http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=44970>

however, as with the rest of the programme, is the BBC's handling of the subject and the material it chose to expose and withhold regarding viral leakage.

Viewers were subjected to an outraged Mr Bradshaw dismissing the archbishop of Nairobi on the views of the Kenyan bishops regarding viral leakage. A nun, the head of a pro-life clinic and Cardinals Bravo and Trujillo also offered the view that the HIV virus can pass through the pores of the condom. The assumption was that high profile Catholics are deliberately putting lives in danger by spreading false rumours and deliberate misinformation. To make such an assumption, one can conclude that the programme-makers believe:

- 1) The Church's views and motives are malicious.
- 2) The Church's views and teachings are founded on myths/old wives' tales/wishful thinking.

Though there are no doubt some who believe the Catholic Church to be a malicious and/or ignorant institution, it would be insulting to suggest that the BBC would promote or subscribe to such bigoted, offensive or indeed, extremist, views. However, the *Panorama* programme's unwillingness to investigate the background to the claims made by certain members of the clerical hierarchy rather than simply dismissing them as 'scientific nonsense' gives further credence to the view that the programme had a predetermined agenda.

It was notable that Mr Bradshaw did not enquire as to which scientists and scientific studies had helped form the opinion that viral leakage was a risk factor in condom use. If Mr Bradshaw had been interested in finding out 'who has been telling them this?' he might have cited:

- C.M. Roland, The barrier performance of latex rubber *Rubber World* (June 1992), which states that the pores in latex condoms are a minimum of 50 and up to 500 times larger than the AIDS virus
- Roland et al., *Rubber and Plastic News* January 12, 1998: "More than one million HIV sized particles pass through a square centimetre of rubber within 30 minutes."
- J.A. Levy, *J. Amer. Med. Assoc.* **261**, 46 (1989); J.N. Krieger, *J. NH Research* **4**, 104 (1992) "HIV semen can be cell-free or cell-associated. Cell-free HIV means the HIV virus is not attached to any other cell in semen and therefore may pass through an intact condom."

When the Linacre Centre (the leading Catholic bioethics body in the UK) spoke to Dr Roland of the Naval Research laboratory (NRL) about the issue, he said that none of the research he has monitored over the last 10 or so years contradicts the conclusion he came to from his own work that leakage of HIV through condoms was a definite possibility. He was prepared to be quoted on this point.

When the Linacre Centre contacted Mr Bradshaw about Dr Roland, Mr Bradshaw's response was: "My understanding of the NRL is that they do not wish to be quoted and never intended their work to be used in the HIV debate and have no view as to its relevance or otherwise." Mr Bradshaw apparently only contacted him after the programme had already been completed and privately screened.

Dr Roland's response to Mr Bradshaw's comment was: "a rather strange claim to make, considering that my earlier papers (which certainly discuss HIV transmission) were all approved for publication by NRL". Interestingly enough, Mr Steel stated in his letter to SPUC that "the programme-makers made strenuous efforts to get one scientist in particular, C M

Roland, to confirm his previously-stated view that latex was not impermeable, but he failed to respond to several requests.” I leave it to the reader to determine the truth of the matter and who is telling it.

Even broadly ‘pro-condom’ studies such as N. Hearst and S. Chen’s *Condom Promotion for AIDS Prevention in the Developing World: Is it working?* (May 26, 2003) supported by UNAIDS, do not express the unquestioning faith in the efficacy of condoms presented by *Panorama*. In spite of arguing in favour of condom promotion, the study readily accepts that ‘condoms may occasionally be permeable to virus-size particles’ [p. 5] and that ‘sad experience shows that high HIV transmission can coexist with high condom use’ [p. 7]

The other major bone of contention regarding condoms was the archbishop of Nairobi’s assertion that condoms encourage the spread of HIV. In his own words: “You give a young Kenyan a condom for him or for her it’s a license for sexuality. They think they’re protected and they’re not protected.” Mr Bradshaw’s tone, particularly his habit of echoing the archbishop’s answers made it quite clear that he was perplexed by the suggestion, but the archbishop of Nairobi is not alone in believing that condom usage may encourage the spread of AIDS. A study published in the leading British medical journal *The Lancet* stated: "Increased condom use will increase the number of [HIV/AIDS] transmissions that result from condom failure" and "a vigorous condom promotion policy could increase rather than decrease unprotected sexual exposure if it has the unintended effect of encouraging a greater overall level of sexual activity." [‘Condoms and seat belts: the parallels and the lessons’ *The Lancet*, 29 January 2000] The Hearst and Chen study already cited expresses a similar concern: “the possibility that presenting casual sex with a condom as socially acceptable, enjoyable, and safe might increase sexual risk in the general public cannot be dismissed.” [p. 11]

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has indicated in the past that ‘the risk of contracting AIDS during so-called "protected sex" approaches 100 percent as the number of episodes of sexual intercourse increases’ (Cates Medical Bulletin, IPPF 1997).

Mr Steel assured SPUC that “the production team also invited the Church to present any empirical evidence on which the notion of the perviousness of latex was based. None was forthcoming.” As SPUC’s own research has revealed that such studies exist, it seems unlikely that a team of BBC investigators could not have found any, had they been open to the possibility.

The Church and the archbishop of Nairobi

It was not only scientific views and studies that were missing from the programme’s examination of the Church’s impact in Kenya. By way of background information on Kenya and the Church, Mr Bradshaw stated:

About a third of Kenyans are Catholic and many clinics, hospitals and schools are Catholic run. But while the church does promote abstinence and fidelity to prevent AIDS it does not promote condoms.

This is yet another example of a token reference. As the programme acknowledges in passing, the Catholic Church provides a vast amount of medical care and education in Kenya and, indeed, throughout the world. The impact of the Catholic Church’s educational and nursing work must therefore be both considerable and, one would suspect, positive, as many areas in the developing world where the Church provides health care and education would otherwise be without these essential services. Yet all the programme chose to point out about the Catholic Church is that it does not promote condoms, undermining the weight of the Church’s

social justice work throughout the world. This is not only unjust and unreasonable, it is an insult to the work of tens of thousands of Catholics to alleviate poverty and suffering world-wide. Although the programme-makers may not have wished to portray the Church in a fair and balanced light, they must surely have been aware that they were under a professional obligation to do so.

The BBC statement of editorial values states very clearly that: “BBC interviews should be well mannered and courteous. They may be searching, sharp, sceptical, informed and to the point – but not partial, discourteous or emotionally attached to one side of an argument. They may be challenging but not aggressive, hectoring or rude, whatever the provocation. Interviewees should be given a fair chance to set out their full response to the questions.”

However, in a programme that could be a case study in what happens when BBC ideals clash with reality, the interview with the Archbishop of Nairobi was everything that the BBC guidelines state it should not have been. Mr Bradshaw was clearly ‘emotionally attached to one side of the argument’. His treatment of the Archbishop was aggressive, rude and patronising. His pretensions at speaking ‘with the greatest respect’ only served to highlight his undisguised contempt for the man. His comment that the Archbishop was ‘peddling superstition and ignorance’ was particularly offensive and insulting. Mr Bradshaw used a similar expression later in the programme ‘peddling rumour and superstition.’ The use of such words panders to old-fashioned anti-Catholic stereotypes that are rooted in centuries of prejudice.

The BBC programme complaints unit’s response to criticism about this interview bears repeating here. Mr Steel “didn’t find it surprising that Steve Bradshaw interviewed the Archbishop robustly,” slipping into euphemism of frankly ludicrous proportions. He acknowledged that the interview “did indeed contrast with his conversations with the other Kenyan representatives of the Church to whom he spoke”, justifying this with the explanation that “these were ordinary people in extraordinary situations, whereas the Archbishop was a senior representative of the Church and occupied a position of considerable power and authority.”

The guidelines do state: “Anyone expressing contentious views during an interview must be rigorously tested”. However, besides the guidelines already cited against this particular interview, it may be worth re-iterating that nowhere in the guidelines does it state that it is acceptable for an interviewer to treat a person badly because they happen to be a senior ecclesiastical figure. And the Archbishop was treated not robustly but disgracefully.

A later interview, this time with counsellor Gordon Wambi, followed the trend set earlier in the programme of withholding information about interviewees that would have given an adequate context to their comments. Gordon Wambi talked about his inability to distribute condoms on Catholic premises which was ‘not good.’ He was introduced as an HIV counsellor, giving the impression, as with Dorothy Granada earlier in the programme, that he was being interviewed in his capacity as an independent medical observer. It would have given a more balanced picture of Mr Wambi’s position if he had been introduced accurately as an HIV counsellor and activist. Being an activist is not in itself a problem and does not preclude a person from contributing to a programme such as this, but it does indicate that a person is dedicated to a particular ideological goal and/or set of values. Alerting viewers to this fact would have allowed them to make their own assessment of Mr Wambi’s stance regarding the HIV issue.

Mr Bradshaw and Sister Akoth

In answer to complaints, offended viewers were told that the programme-makers had given priests and nuns the opportunity to voice their opinions. The one nun Mr Bradshaw interviewed gave her opinion only to have her work disparaged in the most offensive manner in her absence. Mr Bradshaw lamented:

What's really heartbreaking is that the sisters here seem kind, they seem intelligent, they're hard working and they could be the front line in the war against AIDS, and yet what they're doing is peddling rumour and superstition, and the question is really, who has made them believe it?

Having made every appearance of being friendly and sympathetic during the interview, to make such a patronising and insulting accusation in the woman's absence was at best discourteous and at worst gutter journalism. Beyond the glaring irony of a white Anglo-Saxon male journalist passing judgement on a group of women who have dedicated their lives to working with AIDS victims in the poorest areas, a significant fact appears to have been omitted. The Catholic Church *is* on the front line in the war against AIDS. In a report by USAID on HIV prevention programmes in Uganda, it was stated:

The Catholic Church and mission hospitals provided leadership in designing AIDS mobile home care projects and special programs for AIDS widows and orphans. The three chairpersons of the Uganda AIDS Commission have included an Anglican and a Catholic Bishop. (The first leader was President Museveni.)

Not only did Mr. Bradshaw undermine Sister Akoth's own work and that of her community, he went as far as to misrepresent her advice to her patient. In an article on the programme on the BBC website, he wrote:

Sex and the Holy City includes a Catholic nun advising her HIV-infected choirmaster against using condoms with his wife because "the virus can pass through".¹⁶

What we actually saw in the programme was a Catholic nun endorsing an HIV-infected man's position which was not to risk using condoms with his wife and, even more crucially, to abstain from having sexual intercourse with her. The above quote states that she told him not to use condoms with his wife, giving the impression that a nun advised an HIV-positive man to continue having sex with his wife but without condoms. This is an extremely serious and potentially libellous misrepresentation of her actual words.

The Church as a scapegoat

Perhaps the most serious and unfounded accusation made by the programme appeared in its last minutes. Mr Bradshaw commented that: "Some of the women who work here say Catholic propaganda against condoms is partly to blame for their HIV positive status." This is effectively an allegation of unlawful killing by deception that is not backed up by objective evidence, or even the anecdotal evidence that followed:

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When I engaged in sex I didn't use a condom. I can remember my headmaster one day was trying to tell us about the condom but when we went to church I heard something the priest was saying that condom is not good for people, and in my life I say that if I could have had enough information on the condom use, I couldn't have contracted the virus.

¹⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/3180236.stm>

This is then echoed by another interviewee, Joab Othatcher, who states: “Most of the girls that we have here are girls from the Catholic background, and yet they are infected, they are HIV positive. If they used a condom one time it would have saved their lives.”

Emotive anecdotal evidence is a poor foundation for an argument, particularly when the information it purports to disclose is inaccurate. The programme-makers should have pointed out that:

- a) If a priest told this girl not to use condoms, he almost certainly told her to abstain from sex, a method of AIDS prevention that has already been discussed. Even if he had not spoken about the Church’s teaching on premarital sex, it is unlikely that she would have been unfamiliar with the Church’s stance if she was aware of its stance on contraception. Without wishing to be insensitive to the woman’s situation, the fact that she disregarded one Church teaching surely raises the question as to why she then obediently followed another.
- b) To re-iterate, there is not a shred of evidence to support the assumption being made here that condoms are foolproof. It is not the case that she ‘couldn’t have contracted the virus’ or that a condom ‘would have saved their lives.’ To suggest this is quite simply a lie, as condoms have a known and publicised failure rate.

The ‘appeal to the Pope’, for all its emotion and loaded language, was equally disingenuous:

That's my appeal to the Pope. You can do something. You can say something that will come down to the church and the young people of the world will be saved. We are losing a generation of young people.

It was not entirely unfitting that such a programme should reach its climax with the unfounded, unchallenged and simplistic assertion that the young people of the world are entirely in the hands of one man who with a word has the power to end a global pandemic.

The programme ended with Mr Bradshaw narrating in the background: “In countries where Catholic belief counts, the Vatican's teaching can still be a matter of life and death” with an image of the Pope elevating the host at the moment of the consecration on the word ‘death.’ This is the most sacred moment of the Catholic Mass, the central focus of Catholic worship. To exploit such a moment in what can only be described as a gratuitous abuse of religious imagery was insensitive and offensive, betraying a stark disregard for the beliefs and traditions of the Catholic minority in this country.

Conclusion

The BBC programme complaints unit concluded its response to SPUC by finding that “the programme supported its claims with properly researched and journalistically sound examples” and could “find no grounds for upholding your complaint against this programme.” Our own investigation, free of the need for self-justification and face-saving, begs to differ.

As has been demonstrated in this report, the BBC *Panorama* programme *Sex and the Holy City* breached BBC guidelines on numerous occasions and presented a biased account of the Catholic Church’s teachings and their impact on the developing world. This was achieved through the use of slanted language, unreferenced or inaccurately reported material, the suppression of information that would have provided balance to the programme, unprofessional interviewing tactics and anachronistic stereotypes. The BBC is now under a

moral and professional obligation to issue a formal, public apology, to withdraw the programme from further transmission and to work to alleviate the damage and distress that this programme has caused.

It is fitting to remind the BBC once again of its own guidelines. “Remember that viewers and listeners have the right to expect our programmes to have been made in accordance with these Producers’ Guidelines.” [p. 349]

Quite so. We await the appropriate remedy.

Fiorella Sultana De Maria
SPUC research department