

BBC DG sets out his vision for the Corporation's future

October saw Tony Hall's first major speech since becoming BBC Director-General. In it he set out his vision for the future of the Corporation. A central theme was how the BBC would use new technology to become more responsive to the changing needs of the audience. Hall spoke of transforming the iPlayer from "catch-up TV" to "online TV" and "demonstrating we can do public service broadcasting on iPlayer as much as we have done on television and radio". Tony Hall also promised to "unlock all the fantastic speech programmes on Radio 3, Radio 4 and the World Service from their schedules" in a project called Open Minds.

While he said he would ensure "the arts don't disappear into niche channels", Hall made no specific undertakings with regard to religion, although he did mention Simon Schama's series 'The Story of the Jews' in the context of keeping BBC Two "broad and popular".

You can read the full speech [here](#) and, by clicking on their respective names, reactions to it from [Lis Howell](#), [Charlie Beckett](#) and [Nigel Walley](#).

A new public service broadcaster for Scotland?

One consequence of a Yes vote for Scottish independence in September 2014 would be a new, publicly funded Scottish Broadcasting Service, according to proposals set out by the SNP in its white paper on independence. The service would start broadcasting when the current BBC Charter comes to an end on 31 December 2016.

You can read the proposals [here](#).

Religious literacy key to understanding contemporary issues, says Ahmed

Speaking to [The Independent](#) at the launch of the BBC2 series 'Pilgrimage', BBC Head of Religion and Ethics Aaqil Ahmed blamed failings in religious education for undermining public understanding of contemporary national and international issues.

He said: "One of the things we have had to learn over the last ten or 15 years is that religion is back in the public sphere. To understand a lot of what is happening around us, whether you are looking at what is happening in Syria or women wanting to cover their face in Bradford or Birmingham, or the demographic shifts in London with regard to party politics, you have got to have a conversation that looks at this through the prism of religion," he said. "I think that anybody who thinks that religion is no longer an important thing has to ask themselves [why] it is all around us. We have such a lack of religious literacy in this country."

Praise for 'Cathedrals', mixed reviews for 'The Bible'

"An underrated gem" was John Crace's verdict in [his review for the Guardian](#) on Richard Alwyn's series for BBC4, which over three episodes took an in-depth look at Wakefield, Wells and Southwark Cathedrals respectively. Writing about the episode on Southwark, Crace said: "When I started watching, I imagined I was just going to be treated to a snapshot of diocesan life, but by about halfway through I realised this film was – intentionally, presumably, unless God really does move in mysterious ways – a meditation on the nature of faith." Andrew Billen, reviewing the first episode in The Times said: "Dean of Wakefield Jonathan Greener's crisis of doubt cannot have been helped by Richard Alwyn's cruelly aimed questions, such as the one about whether Jesus would have spent £3 million doing up a building".

Christopher Howse, writing in [The Telegraph](#), deemed Channel 5's US mini-series acquisition 'The Bible' "utter tosh" in which "sublime incidents" were "reduced to the dramatic level of a game of cowboys and Indians". [The Independent](#) took a less harsh view overall, though felt the adaptation "erred on the side of tasteful understatement, an approach that occasionally backfired". The first episode pulled in 1.3 million viewers at 9pm on Saturday, beating 5's average rating for that slot.

Europe's top religious television to be aired in Hilversum

Hard on the heels of the Sandford St Martin Awards on 3 June 2014 comes the European equivalent for television programmes. Organised by SIGNIS, the Catholic world communications organisation, and its Protestant counterpart, the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), the 18th edition of the European Festival of Religious Programmes will take place from 11–14 June in the Dutch city of Hilversum, home to many of the country's broadcasters. The deadline for submitting entries to the competition is 28 February.

Shortlisted programmes will be screened throughout the festival, which will also feature a seminar entitled 'Behind the Front Door or in Plain Sight: Religion in a Pluralist Society'. One of the keynote speakers will be the broadcaster and Sandford St Martin Trustee Roger Bolton.

More information on how to submit programmes is available [here](#).

New book takes an in-depth look at media portrayals of religion

The results of an extensive academic study into how the media – and in particular, television and newspapers – portray religion have been published by Ashgate. [Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred](#) by Kim Knott, Elizabeth Poole and Teemu Taira draws on detailed analysis of the British media in exploring whether their coverage supports or undermines assumptions about secularisation and the declining significance of religion.

Religious broadcasting or 'meaning-making' broadcasting?

Christmas tends to be a time when more religious stories than usual crop up in the media – and Christmas 2013 was no exception. One interesting aspect of the recent festive season, though, was the extent to which non-belief, as well as belief, was discussed. [This story from YouGov's Peter Kellner](#), for example, analyses the results of two polls – undertaken more than 50 years apart – into religious allegiance and attitudes, and finds today's Britons apparently equally poised between belief and non-belief.

The issue of belief and non-belief also surfaced in Radio 4's 'Today' programme. Unable to have an atheist contributor for 'Thought for the Day' in the programme he guest-edited on Boxing Day, Sir Tim Berners-Lee opted for both an official and an alternative 'Thought'. Each was delivered by a Unitarian. It gets more complicated still – not least because the 'atheist' Unitarian, Andrew Pakula, resists being labelled as a non-believer and challenged the accuracy of that definition in his broadcast. He's written about the experience, and what he calls "the changing face of meaning-making" in [this piece for the Guardian](#).

'Who' knew?

And finally... Those of us who took refuge behind the sofa when the theme tune started up may have missed out on a deeper message. [According to the University of Manchester's Dr Andrew Crome](#), 'Doctor Who' "has continually engaged with important religious themes across its 50-year run" and "can help us contemplate a range of different moral and religious scenarios, allowing us to explore in a fictional setting the way we think about beliefs and ethical viewpoints which differ from our own".

Scholars from around the world clearly agree, flocking to the University's 'Religion and Doctor Who Day' in November. The event was fully booked and had a long waiting list.