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**FRANK GILLARD interviewing REVEREND DOCTOR COLIN MORRIS**  
**9 DECEMBER 1992**

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GILLARD

.. Oral History of the BBC. This is Frank Gillard and this morning I'm in conversation with the Reverend Doctor Colin Morris at his home in Lewes in East Sussex and the date is the 9th December 1992.

Dr. Morris came into the BBC in 1977 in the Religious Broadcasting department and for the last eight years of his service there he was the .. the Head of Religious Broadcasting and also was the right-hand man of the Director General on matters of taste and standards and programme behaviour generally. And ultimately became a Special Assistant to DG for a short period of time. And then he moved .. to everybody's surprise really - we'll talk about this - to Northern Ireland as Controller over there for the last three years of his BBC service. But let's go back to the beginning, Colin. What led you to join the BBC in the first place?

MORRIS

Well I had .. I'd been a missionary in Africa in .. in what was Northern Rhodesia and then became Zambia and I had done quite a lot of broadcasting out there and I happen to be around there when television arrived in Central Africa so I was in at the beginning. And then when Zambia became independent, the commercial company that ran the television service in Zambia pulled out - because they came from what was then Southern Rhodesia - and so it had to become a state service and President Kaunda was very short-handed for people who had very much experience and so he sort of brought me in really to sort of look after television, you know, as a sort of .. to establish a kind of commission. I only did that for .. quite a short while really. But that gave me some experience with the administration of television as opposed to performing. Therefore, when I came back to Britain in 1970 various people said, you know, would you like to do **Thought for the Day** and would you like to do this and eventually they said, would you like to do some television. They were just setting up **Everyman**, you know, which became a fairly standard BBC religious series on television. And so I became one of the presenters of **Everyman**. So I was



GILLARD

You didn't have that problem.

MORRIS

Well, the .. I didn't see very much of Ian Trethowan who was the Director General at first. All my dealings really - because of course I was strictly on the Television side at that point .. were with . with Alasdair Milne and with .. with the two Controllers - Bill Cotton and Brian Wenham, with both of whom I established very good links. Bill Cotton became a very close friend. His .. his first wife had died very distressingly of cancer and she had been nursed very faithfully by some Catholic nuns and this had made a tremendous impression religiously on Bill. And therefore he was very open, I mean, he was you know, he was very much sold on .. on the religious output. Brian Wenham had this rather engagingly sceptical view of religion. But I mean, you know, because he has a very very good mind, he had an astringency which was actually very good. I mean, he brought to bear on our programme ideas, you know, a very sharp mind. So really I had a very happy relationship with the two Controllers.

GILLARD

What was the status of Religious Broadcasting in the BBC. I mean, did they look upon it as a .. in a positive way or was it something that had to be accommodated and rather tiresomely provided for?

MORRIS

I .. I really inherited .. I just came in after the sort of .. the very very significant changes that were brought about by Peter Armstrong when he was my predecessor as Head of Religious Television. He .. he did not come out of the usual stable. Before him, all the people who'd run Television, Religious Television had been clerics, were often refugees from religious radio and came from that tradition. And therefore, for them worship, **Songs of Praise**, the sort of religious exercises were the key to the output. Peter Armstrong who was a sort of general trainee came out of television generally and therefore was looking all the time to .. for ways in which he could do for television what he'd been doing in other areas of the BBC which was to say, religion is a fascinating area of human inquiry, let's see what we can do by way of making

programmes that reflect that - documentaries and so on. But without the kind of .. the halo around them of the traditional religious programmes. He had swung the department that way by recruiting other general trainees, who also didn't come out of the old religious stable. So you had quite a core of religious agnostics who were extremely competent television programme makers - Bill Nicholson, of course, who afterwards became famous for writing C S Lewis, you know, the play, **Shadowlands**, Daniel Wolfe, David Thompson who later became a very distinguished Drama producer. Now, none of them were in the conventional sense of the word, religious. But they found religion a fascinating subject. So there was a tension in the department between the traditional religious producers doing **Morning Worship**, doing **Songs of Praise** and the new generation who wanted to look critically at religion without any degree of commitment. And of course, that tension was reflected in things like the division of resources, staffing and so on. And when I came to the BBC (LAUGHS) I mean, I really inherited that tension because Peter decided he didn't .. he hated being an administrator and .. and a manager and so he went back to being Editor of **Everyman**. But .. and therefore, I sort of came in at a time when you know, the .. the balance of resources had swung this probably too far in the direction of documentaries and all the rest of it. And there was a sense that .. that the traditional programmes were being starved of resources. So that was quite a critical issue.

GILLARD

Did .. did Religious Broadcasting get a fair deal over air-time, over resources, over finance, that sort of thing?

MORRIS

I think that .. I think that over air time undoubtedly because of course this was still the page of .. still the era of the closed period where .. where religious programmes on television were guaranteed.

Originally when I first came they were guaranteed from 6.15 to 7.25 .. The religious slot ran for an hour and ten minutes, half of which was **Songs of Praise**, half of which was whatever other programme was put in there. And at the time

that I came the programme that was in there was **Everyman** and it struck me that **Everyman** really as a documentary series ought to sit in the mainstream of the output. And so my first real battle was to get **Everyman** moved to ten o'clock on Sunday evening. And this was a complicated issue because ITV also had the same closed period - in other words, we had religious programmes back to back. And therefore, I had to get their agreement that we could move out of .. of .. of the 'god-slot' as it was called and to move to ten o'clock. They agreed to do .. (CUT)

GILLARD Off you go.

MORRIS So that was .. that was a .. an issue which involved both programme decisions but also a certain amount of inter-church diplomacy because the Central Religious Advisory Committee, as it were, rode shotgun on the closed period and therefore I had to have their agreement and they were an unusual body in that they advised both ITV and the BBC. In fact, they were very useful because the fact that they did advise both meant once the argument was won there, you know, one had their support in .. in negotiating with ITV.

GILLARD What .. what was the role of religious broadcasting in a .. well, Charles Curran called it 'a post-Christian ..

MORRIS Yeah.

GILLARD .. society'? I mean, was it a role of proclamation of the gospel or was it a role of holding moral standards and moral issues .. that sort of thing? What .. was there any codification of this?

MORRIS Well it's interesting really because you see before I went to the BBC to work for it, I'd been a member of the Central Religious Advisory Committee and in fact, I had been one of a team of three on .. on CRAC

who had drafted the BBC's religious submission to the Annan Committee. And that .. and it was in fact the definition of Religious Broadcasting which the Annan Commission incorporated in their report and which became the kind of BBC's manifesto for religion. I was very familiar with it because .. (LAUGHS) .. quite a bit of it was my kind of phraseology. And I mean, the characteristic about that was that as between Annan and say, Pilkington in the Fifties, in .. at .. in the evidence of the Pilkington Committee, the BBC stated that .. that Religious Broadcasting was Christian and that therefore it was concerned with proclaiming the gospel and in fact had an evangelical component of trying to get hold of the, you know, the general .. the general viewer or listener.

GILLARD

Yes.

MORRIS

By the time we started re .. sort of redrafting the definition, we'd recognised the multi-religious nature of .. of Britain, though still accepting that it was predominantly a Christian country. So that we .. instead of talking about churches which .. which Pilkington .. I mean, actually had talked about 'the churches' and you know, Religious Broadcasting's role basically of supporting them. We talked instead about traditions and we talked about .. about Religious Broadcasting basically being concerned with a county<sup>2</sup> which was predominantly, but not exclusively Christian, and that there must be some reflection of all the various main traditions. So that had been a great sea change and one, of course, which some of the churches were bitterly opposed to.

GILLARD

Were they really?

MORRIS

Well they felt, you see, that Religious Broadcasting should be Christian. They were opposed to giving air-time to other denom.. to other religions, not necessarily in a kind of bigoted way, but simply out of their feeling that this was a balancing act you couldn't really pull off. That you couldn't one week be sort of, you know, endorsing Christianity and the following week endorsing Hinduism.

GILLARD  
the Jewish faith?

Mm. But how did you cope with Jewishness ..

MORRIS  
Well of course, the very .. the very first non-Christian member of CRAC was a .. was a Rabbi - Hugo Gryn who was appointed in my time and there's been one on ever since. And then toward the end of my time the first Muslim was appointed. So that we were inching toward that situation from the beginning. But that was a real tension within the churches and it's a tension which, because the theological climate of the churches was becoming more evangelical, more conservative .. I mean, obviously the whole country was going conservative, both politically and religiously, there was a kind of groundswell all the time during my period as Head of Religious Broadcasting from evangelical groups saying, you're not proclaiming the gospel. All this wishy-washy stuff every week is not what it's all about. Furthermore, these documentaries you're making which claim to be religious, in fact, are just current affairs. I mean, they're .. you know, they could be made by **Panorama**. And therefore you're actually selling the pass on the gospel. That was a heated debate really for the whole of the time that I .. that I was Head of Religious Broadcasting. And interestingly enough, a book has just come out called "**Secret Agendas**" written by an ex-BBC producer who was very evangelical who basically argues that there was a conspiracy on the part of the BBC, and particularly ITV, more the ITV than the BBC, to keep evangelicals off the air and to .. to prevent them from making direct appeals for, you know, religious allegiance. That was a debate that rumbled on the whole of my time.

GILLARD  
Anglican?

Did the churches try to proselytise over the

MORRIS  
Well of course in a way .. in terms of .. in terms of worship really apart from overall editorial control, what .. what the parson did in

his pulpit in a broadcast service was up to him. Obviously scripts were checked. But on the whole, if it .. if it suited a minister to make an evangelical appeal, that was up to him and you know, there was no attempt to prevent him from doing it.

GILLARD Did you have pressure, not only from within the various churches, which one understands .. they're in conflicts there all the time but also from people like the humanists. The humanists in my day in the BBC were always getting at me and saying, well the believers have dedicated air-time, why don't the unbelievers have dedicated ..

MORRIS Yes, yes ..

GILLARD .. air-time?

MORRIS Yes, though it .. it had become a very very attenuated organisation by the time I joined the BBC. I mean, there were people like Nicholas Walter, and in fact, I established quite good links with Nicholas Walter 'cos .. who strikes me as a very able man. He was the kind of spokesman of the humanists and in fact, I tried .. I tried to sell Brian Wenham the notion of a history of atheism 'cos it seems to me that's a very important religious subject. And it .. it might well have come off, but I mean I moved on and I don't .. I really don't know what happened to that project. But the idea would have been not for us to do it, you know, looking at it from a religious point of view but to get Nicholas Walter to write it. And indeed, probably present it and .. and you know let the chips fall where they may. But I don't honestly .. I can't honestly claim that they were .. they harassed us in any very major way.

GILLARD What about integration within the BBC between Radio and Television. Did .. did the two media go their separate ways or did you try to bring them together? Did they support each other? How did that go?

MORRIS Well I established joint staff meeting .. I say I established them .. it may well that .. be that there were such before I came along. But they had, you know, for a while been dropped. I tried to get the two departments together. But I think there was a certain degree of tension and partly it came from the feeling of Radio. That they really were the poor relations. I mean, even .. even comparative salaries were lower in Radio than in Television and this caused quite a lot of problems and meant that there were always people in Radio who wanted to transfer to Television and so on. And also a feeling that because Television is such an exciting an dramatic medium, and of course, because it's such an expensive medium, that Radio really got the thin end of the wedge .. you know. I mean they really felt that they weren't being properly sort of cared for.

GILLARD But as a medium, what did you make of Radio?  
Was it effective any more?

MORRIS Oh I .. I personally believe that probably on balance Radio was certainly a more effective medium.

GILLARD A more ..

MORRIS .. oh yes. For .. for .. for dealing with religion than Television. I mean, I think .. it's a very crude generalisation but I think on the whole, Television creates personalities. But I think Radio is the medium for dealing with ideas. And I never really felt that .. except in the kind of documentary sense that Television could really capture the essence of religion. I think there's something about Radio that enables you to deal with ideas. I think it's a much more flexible medium. I mean, as you know, just to put one person in a Television studio talking to camera, you need an army of people and a .. multi-million equipment and all the rest of it. Whereas Radio can move around and .. and so on. So I .. I personally always felt that .. that Radio was the spearhead

rather than Television, though Television had the .. the majority of the resources of the two departments.

GILLARD But you've already spoken about **Everyman** which is an outstanding Television religious documentary series - am I defining it properly and reasonably? Right. Well now, where's the equivalent of that in Radio in your day?

MORRIS There were Radio documentaries done, though I can't .. you know, I mean I can't think of one that comes to mind. You see, when I first joined the BBC, of course, my sole responsibility was Television. Therefore, I was on the other side of the fence. It's only when I became Head of Religious Broadcasting that I had to take, as it were, official note of Radio as well. But there's no doubt that **Everyman** is .. was and is an outstanding series which walks the borderline. I mean it really .. it does a tightrope act really. When I used to go to Programme Review Boards in the Television Service, not infrequently the news .. the News and Current Affairs lot would attack me and say .. that .. "What has that got to do with religion? That .. we could have made that programme." Interestingly enough, of course, if there was a religious story which they felt they should take account, e.g. the appointment of a new archbishop, they didn't return the compliment and say, well of course Religion should have done that. There was a kind of .. a sort of an imperialism on the part of News and Current Affairs that said the whole world is our parish and really you're trespassing on it.

GILLARD You .. but for instance, if the Current Affairs people were doing a documentary about say the ordination of women as priests in the Anglican church, wouldn't they have to come to you as Head of Religious Broadcasting for a comment on it or for support or for advice? And wouldn't they have to listen to you?

MORRIS Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't.

GILLARD

It was not obligatory.

MORRIS

It was not obligatory, no. And there were .. from time to time, issues raised because we felt that they really had got the wrong end of the stick. That, a sensitive producer would ring us and say, "Look, you know, can you give us a staff list for a sort of .. you know, a kind of group of people who we can pull in the studio, who are the ideal people to talk about this?" That happened not infrequently. But there was no rubric that said they had to consult the Head of Religious Broadcasting until the visit of the Pope. And the visit of the Pope really was such a mega operation that obviously by then I was Head of Religious Broadcasting and I was really, you know, at the centre of that operation and in that sense, everything went through me. And that was .. I mean, I think the Director General laid that down. But on the day to day operations sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't.

GILLARD

Well vice versa, if in fact the current affairs people were mounting a .. a major documentary or even a discussion programme on some topic of great moral importance, did you feel that you had the opportunity of suggesting to them the inclusion of a Christian point of view there? Or would you just sit back and let it happen?

MORRIS

Well you see, very often, as you know, one didn't even know these programme .. if they were .. if they were sort of urgent and topical, you had a pretty good idea they were bound to deal with them. But very often programmes in the pipeline for months, you had no idea unless someone brought them to your attention. Bill Cotton was very good about it. Bill Cotton always said to these people, look, you'd better go and talk to Colin Morris about this. If you have a Controller who is open and sensitive to religious susceptibilities, that will happen. If you have a Controller who isn't, then it won't happen.

GILLARD But it's the Head of the Department even more than Controller who matters here isn't it? Head of Talks and Current Affairs, for example? Head of that group - never mind .. don't let's pursue it .. because I don't .. you know, you've given me the answer I wanted anyway. You said that .. you were speaking about the Programme Review Board - in my time that was very stimulating and .. argumentative truly but very very stimulating.. You went there in your own right, did you?

MORRIS Yes. Yes, as Head of Religious Television and .. and .. not only enjoyed it hugely but in my earlier days in the BBC .. BBC I'd say that those .. those senior people sitting round that table taught me everything I knew about Television. I learned an immense amount .. I mean, there were very able Drama producers like Shaun Sutton and Chris Capron and .. was running News and Current Affairs and you know, there were a whole .. there were a whole - Cliff Morgan was Head of Sport - and they taught me an enormous amount about Television. I mean, that was my education really. 'Cos all I'd done was be a performer until I joined the BBC.

GILLARD Yes. The department .. I think you've indicated you felt you were reasonably well staffed .. but what sort of people, I mean, what was the balance between in your time, ordained and lay people? And what about training? And what about tenure? There was always a big problem in my time whether in fact this was a job for life or not and I had great trouble over Elsie Chamberlain, for example, who didn't want to go ~~in~~ the department, thought she'd said her piece. What about these things?

MORRIS The preponderance of clergy had declined quite dramatically I think by my time. I'm just trying to think. I think there .. there was myself and a Methodist, Ray Short, running **Songs of Praise** and Peter Brook running **Worship**. We three were clerics, two Methodists and a .. a Presbyterian as it happens. So that by then this army of parsons who once ran Religion in the

BBC - many of them had gone - and they were being replaced by really what I would call the 'Young Turks' - highly trained, very professional people who would not have said they had any sense of personal vocation, they were just interested in a particular area of television.

GILLARD

Were they believers?

MORRIS

Some were, some weren't. A significant number, as it happens, were Jewish. But they were, I would say, probably secular Jews in the sense that I .. I never recalled them sort of saying, you know, we ought to have the kind of Jewish angle on this. That was the change that had occurred .. really just before I came and it had both advantages and disadvantages because in a sense, although it is the part of the output which attracts the smallest ratings .. that's **Morning Worship**, it's the output that gives the rest of the department its .. its validity in a way. I mean if .. if .. if you .. if you start from the assumption that God exists and that therefore the Religious department is concerned with exploring that reality, then worship is the part of the output where you actually address him directly and .. and by so doing you validate all the other areas of output in which you're indirectly concerned with him. But at the same time, worship really was the lowest ratings .. the least exciting, the one that fewest people wanted to work on and sometimes because you reflected the life of the churches as you went around from denomination to denomination, it could sometimes be dire. So there was always that tension. And of course obviously in the past, the great champions of 'let's address God directly' had been the clergy. I mean, there are always some very devout laity as well. But I mean, you know, the clergy had been the sort of .. the leaders in this. So the whole .. the whole ethos was changing and becoming much more confused.

GILLARD

But did .. was it a job for life?

MORRIS

Head of Religious Television?

GILLARD

No, well .. or membership of the department?

MORRIS

It had been. The vast majority of people were .. were sort of you know, permanent staff. It was .. it was the advent of the **Everyman** strand, then the **Heart of the Matter** strand, which I started in order to bridge the gap between .. between runs of **Everyman**, where we started having much more mobility between our department and other departments in Television. Obviously, a parson who'd spent his life doing worship was not really equipped, necessarily, to go to Music and Arts or whatever. Whereas these young professionals were. And therefore, there was .. there was much more movement which I think was probably very healthy.

GILLARD

'Cos you're speaking here mainly of Television.

What about Radio?

MORRIS

Well at that time of course I had nothing to do with Radio, other than to go to joint staff meetings and so on. The .. I, again I was at the tail end, I suppose, of a Radio department which had been dominated by clerics. But they .. by then Michael <sup>MAINE</sup> Maine was by then Head of .. of Radio .. Religious Radio, John Lang, of course, was Head of Religious Broadcasting .. he'd moved on. But I .. I would have thought, yes .. I mean, there were Hubert Hoskins and you know, I mean, there were some very long-serving distinguished religious Radio producers who were still clerics.

GILLARD

Yes. I would have thought that if a broadcast is coming from a church of some kind, it .. it's easier for the local congregation and the local ministry to identify with an ordained BBC person than with a lay person, especially if the lay person belonged to a different branch of the faith. Is that .. is that an argument at all? Did you ever think about that?

MORRIS I don't think that the argument .. I don't think that the argument worked that way. The real argument was a technical argument. And that was the argument whether or not there is something generically different between a religious worship OB and a general events OB and this was a big argument and it always came to a head over the same issue and that was the visit of the Royal Family to St. George's, Windsor on Christmas morning. The BBC alternated with ITV. I think we each got to do it every three years and the Outside Broadcast department always argued this is a national event, we must do it. We argued this is a religious service, we must do it. And that was a big battle and in the end every year the Controller had to settle it. And you see the argument was that according to the OB people, one OB is like another ..

(CUT)

## Side 2

GILLARD .. and he will continue. He was talking about the Christmas morning service at St. George's, Windsor.

MORRIS The OB department argued one OB is like another. As long as your camera's in the right place and as long as you've got a good camera script you know what you're doing. The Religious Department argued that unless you had religious sensitivity you would not make sense of what was happening and that debate raged. (LAUGHS) Just .. it was never settled. In the end, you know, Bill Cotton had to do a kind of Solomon, you know, chop it in half approach to the thing. I felt strongly about it quite simply because my people had been doing what might be called routine OBs, worship OBs - every Sunday of the year. And therefore, for the .. for the Outside Broadcast lot then to come along at St. George's, Windsor was like Sport doing .. you know, a football match every week and then when it came to the Cup Final, Religion being

given the .. you know, the right to do it. So that was a very interesting argument we used to have.

GILLARD (LAUGHS) It sounds a bit petty to me .. but still.

MORRIS (LAUGHS)

GILLARD Never mind. We'll talk about bigger things. I'd like to hear a little more from you about CRAC. You've mentioned it once, the Central Religious Advisory Committee. I mean, how extensive was its influence in your time? How much was it .. was it of any value to you and who were the Chairman and the big shots on it? Who were the people who influenced CRAC?

MORRIS Well of course CRAC had had some very distinguished chairmen. It .. by tradition, it had always been an Anglican bishop and just .. when I had .. when I was a member of it, as opposed to working for the BBC, Ian Ramsay, who was then Bishop of Durham had been Chairman .. he was a wonderful chairman and a great loss when he died suddenly. Then of course, Bob Runcie took it over and was a very senior bishop. And .. and I found CRAC of immense value to me. It was really a kind of club which I could wield to thump over the head Controllers who decided they either wanted to sideline our output or cut down our resources and I would say, well CRAC won't like this. Oh dear, there'll be a big row about this. And of course because the Chairman of CRAC, you know, always had access to the Governors and so on. CRAC was a very very valuable ally. It was also important in keeping the two authorities marching in step. In other words, protecting the closed period. By then I was beginning to get grave doubts about the value of the closed period but nevertheless, it would have been disastrous for any unilateral movement there and so .. CRAC was very very important in ensuring that neither authority reneged on its commitments.

GILLARD I suppose all the mainstream churches were represented on CRAC. Did any differences of opinion arise between them at

CRAC? I mean, were they harmonious, were they .. were they united or did they use CRAC as an instrument to air their grievances?

MORRIS Well CRAC, you see, began to develop exactly the same problem that any attempt to have a representative body of .. of the churches would have and that is, that denominations are no longer the key determinants of people's theological positions. As you know now you've got people like charismatic Catholics, you've got highly .. you know, you've got very evangelical Catholics, you've got very high Methodists. You know. In other words, it's not so much formal denominations but theological positions within them and therefore the real problem wasn't so much getting the right number of Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians and Catholics and Anglicans and all the rest of it, it was ensuring that the spectrum of theological opinion was represented. That was much more difficult. And that was becoming a much more obvious fact. It was also a fact that .. that some of the .. of the churches that were growing were churches which on the whole had always been excluded from CRAC as being rather cranky or what have you. Whereas the mainstream churches were declining and therefore CL.. CRAC to that extent was becoming less representative of the more vigorous aspects of the religious life of the country. For instance, the black Pentecostals were growing and are growing at a very very great rate. And it was only in my time actually that we put a black Pentecostal minister on CRAC and so on. So I mean it was a constant battle really to .. to ensure that CRAC did represent, you know.

GILLARD How did the churches generally regard Religious Broadcasting? I think with .. I .. quite frequently think of something said by one of your predecessors when I was talking to him and recording him like this that he'd had a letter one day which touched him and remained in his memory from a parish priest, an Anglican man, who wrote to him about something and said, "I regard myself as the vicar of all the people in my parish who come to my church or use my church, but you are the vicar of all the rest." Did you ever have

that sort of feeling? I mean, and how do the churches .. don't they feel anxious about that kind of position?

MORRIS Yes, and with some cause really. I .. the argument I came up against and the one that I found most difficult to cope with when I first joined the BBC was the argument that really the Religious Broadcasting was a kind of ambulance service for Christians <sup>hors de</sup> order combat who could not get to their local churches. They were either old or they were sick and therefore, what they had to have on television, since this is the era I was concerned with, was as near a representation of what they would get if they went along to their local Methodist church as maybe. And I always found this argument very specious because it seems to me .. you know, the New Testament makes it clear that the responsibility for looking after Christians <sup>hors de</sup> order combat is not any kind of Television Service, it's other Christia.. it's the local Christian community. And .. the fact that this view was very strongly held meant that it was very difficult to be experimental and innovative because people said that programme doesn't look anything like a worship programme we'd get if we went to the local Methodist church. And there was a lot of resistance and .. you know they were very vocal and .. said you're not really doing your job. On the other hand, with glorious illogic, you see, when we were doing our job and reflecting the life of the church as it really was, they then came onto us and said, "That was a terrible service you transmitted last Sunday." Why couldn't you go to a church which has a great choir and a wonderful congregation and all .. and a great preacher and all the rest of it. You know, the churches were kind of ambivalent about us always. They always felt that we really were not giving them the support that they were entitled to and were appalled when we said that really that's not our job. We are not in the business of shoring up the churches.

GILLARD Well as .. as somebody who's heard more sermons in his lifetime .. (LAUGHS) .. and attended more services than most, I have never yet heard a parson in the pulpit or seen a parson in his parish magazine or whatever it is he's issuing, say you really, my dear people, ought to





that .. that you've only got so many ideas to .. to get across and I do believe you can get very very rusty. I mean, I sometimes listen to **Thought for the Day** and to some of the real old war horses and I think .. old fella, you really need six months break, you know. You've really come to the end. You're recycling now talks that you've already recycled, you know. All you do is put a different topical headline to them and so on. And I .. I always felt that .. that the churches had a point and those churches particularly which had always been excluded because their theology was regarded as too intense or too quirky. I always felt they had a real point when they said, look, you never come and .. you never come and see whether we could produce good broadcasters.

GILLARD Yes. Look, what about the audience reaction, so to speak? I mean, the congregational reaction .. (LAUGHS) .. I should say in speaking to you. Was there much of it? Did you get much reaction from .. from the viewers and the listeners? And what about the religious press.

MORRIS The religious press was fairly am.. ambivalent about us because .. I mean, they were declining anyway. I mean, as all weeklies are declining, not just religious weeklies and therefore, they to some extent regarded us as rivals, particularly when we moved into the areas that they felt had always been their bailey wick. I don't think they were too concerned when we were doing **Worship** and so on but when we started doing documentaries and exploring topical issues and so on. On the other hand, particular editors were very supportive, very sensitive and .. you know, did everything possible to provide us with good criticism. You know, with .. two critics of one kind or another. So that I really have no complaints about the religious press. On the whole, I think that you know they were .. they were .. they were dealing with a particular constituency - the dye in the wool Methodist/Baptist/Anglican, you know, people who bought that .. their journal weekly. And therefore, I think they were fairly secure, though they were declining. But on the whole they were fine. The audience reaction was always the same basically, it was the reaction from ..

which always split into - why do we have to keep going through the same old stuff? When are you going to do something original? All we .. you know, all we see (LAUGHS) .. on **Morning Worship** .. I mean, we're actually staying away from church in order not to have to go through what you're putting us through every Sunday morning, which always struck me as a fair comment. On the other hand, another lot saying, why is this religious output so wishy-washy? Why can't you pound out the gospels like .. like Billy Graham does or the television evangelists do in America? Why can't we hear the gospel hot and strong? If you .. if you really put it across, then you would find that people, your audiences would .. would rise and you know, you would really be doing the job effectively which of course sadly is the opposite of the truth. I put this to the test when Billy Graham came over to do one of his missions .. I think this was in .. 1985 .. I think .. and we decided to cover it extens.. extent .. extensively on the BBC. In fact, I did an in-depth interview with him every evening on BBC-2 and then we covered his big rally in .. which was somewhere in Birmingham, West Bromwich, the whole .. you know, from beginning to end, including his evangelical appeal, the lot. And as the programme wore on .. and it was a couple of hours, the ratings measured every quarter of an hour, as they are on BARB, dropped steadily. So that by the end of it, there was virtually nobody watching. And therefore after that whenever the evangelicals wrote and said "If only you people would preach the gospel you would increase your ratings" I would always say, "Well look, you know we've had what you would regard as the best - and it just ain't true."

GILLARD

What about ordinary people though? Did they write in large numbers? Did .. were their hearts touched and .. did they get an impulse to respond to sermons and programmes and that sort of thing? Did you get a flood of correspondence?

MORRIS

The kind of programmes that .. that .. that attracted most correspondence usually were .. we did a .. we did .. there was a series we did during the week which was produced by Shirley de Boulez called

**Light of Experience** where people just talked on television .. I think it was a ten minute programme .. about their experience. Not all religious, not all Christian. That always generated a lively correspondence. The interviews in **Songs of Praise**. The great difference of my time was that before my time **Songs of Praise** had been a straight hymn, you know, a series of hymns just with a short introduction by a presenter. In .. the beginning of my time it had been changed to include these sometimes very moving statements by people about what had happened to them and why a particular hymn meant a great deal. That always generated a lot of correspondence. There's no doubt about it. It's this personal testimony aspect - this happened to me.

GILLARD

The road to Damascus.

MORRIS

That's right. That always .. I found always produced correspondence.

GILLARD

You take a rest for a minute and just let me tell you a little story. It's worth putting on tape.

It goes back to the days when I was the Head of Programmes in Bristol in the years fairly soon after the war. And I had a great friend of mine as Head of .. the Religious Broadcasting Organiser in the region, a chap called Martin Wilson, an Anglican. And we had .. this was Radio .. and we had full authority to opt out of the network and do our own religious services whenever we wanted to on Sundays. And there was one particular Sunday when we had a service coming from a village church and I was assured that it was going to be a reasonable standard in Somerset. All the other regions in London were taking a series from somewhere else. The RBO .. Religious Broadcast Organiser came to me in advance and said, now look, the preacher here, the vicar of the parish, he said, very .. very very decent chap .. and a godly man and he runs a prayer group and he wants to say in his broadcast that if there are people listening who particularly have anxieties and sufferings and so forth and would like to be prayed for, if they

would write to him, his prayer group would be only too glad. Do we allow this? So I thought well it's a summer Sunday evening, the audience will be quite small, it's just our region, why not? So I said okay. And he did it. What, of course, we didn't foresee was that the OB, for all the rest of the country broke down at the very beginning and the London continuity suite had to switch to us because we were the .. sort of alternative service on the line. So this little man from Huntspill in Somerset was speaking to the entire nation and saying, "If you .. (LAUGHS) .. if you want intercessions, we're only too pleased to undertake them."

MORRIS Gosh.

GILLARD And he got them. The Post Office had to lay on special vans to bring the stuff to him.

MORRIS Not surprised.

GILLARD And in the end we had to organise .. or he organised it, I suppose, or somebody did .. the prayer groups all round the whole of the <sup>West</sup> ~~Western~~ South of England to take it over because his own group .. we .. the BBC had to provide him with ..

MORRIS (LAUGHS)

GILLARD .. secretarial assistance to cope with it all.

MORRIS Yeah, I'm not surprised. I'm not really. Would you like another coffee?

GILLARD Wait a ... still on the air ..

MORRIS Oh .. beg your pardon.

(CUT)

GILLARD   You've said a word or two in passing about the relationship with commercial broadcasting services. I suppose commercial Television, there wasn't much commercial Radio was there? Do I understand then that the relationship between the two was not competition but co-ordination?

MORRIS   Oh no. No, no, no. No, I wouldn't put it like that. There was .. there .. there was considerable competition and a competition which, in the early days of my time, we were losing because ITV had that very very high rating **Stars on Sunday** programme with Jess Yates which was actually getting huge ratings 'cos it actually was an entertainment format, high budget, big star names. There was a tendency on the part of the intelligentsia in the BBC and in CRAC to sneer at **Stars on Sunday** and I felt that was a great mistake. 'Cos I think of its kind it was a very effective programme. And in a way, ITV always had a capacity for being in the best sense of the word, vulgar, that the BBC never had. I mean, the embarrassment on our faces whenever we tried to be vulgar was just laughable. But there was very considerable compe .. When **Stars on Sunday** collapsed because Jess Yates .. I mean, had personal problems and there was a scandal and so on, the .. ITV was then left with quite a considerable sort of hiatus. And **Songs of Praise** then began to surge and .. and for a considerable time, you know, dominated that .. that slot. Though ITV pulled back later. Oh no, there was very considerable competition and one of the .. one of the gambles we took when we moved to ten o'clock with **Everyman** was the recognition that a religious documentary would be up against - not another religious programme - but ITV's high rating general entertainment programme, whatever they happened to be putting out. So that there undoubtedly was very keen competition. But I always felt .. and I mean I .. you .. one would have to consult the figures really to prove this - I always felt that the religious constituency was of a given size and therefore, you know, if we took forty and they took sixty, if then we hauled up and

we got fifty and they got fifty, we were really slicing up the same size of cake basically in different proportions.

GILLARD Mm. What about overseas Religious Broadcasting? Did that come under you?

MORRIS No.

GILLARD It didn't.

MORRIS No there was no .. there was no you know World Television Service or anything of that kind.

GILLARD And what about Radio? You had an ..

MORRIS Oh .. when I became Head of Religious Broadcasting, oh yes, yes. Then .. then I was responsible for it. And of course, it was .. it really was a trail-blazing operation fundamentally because the World Service had .. had to face up to the realities of a multi faith universe in a way that we never had. And therefore, when we thought in mainstream we were being frightfully daring, we suddenly discovered that (LAUGHS) World Service had been doing this sort of thing for years. You know, I mean .. although they .. it was small, their unit there, they did some very very distinguished work, I think, and had a number of very very eminent you know religious broadcasting officers.

GILLARD So BBC World Service didn't say "We're a Christian country, therefore in terms of religious broadcasting we confine ourselves to Christianity".

MORRIS No, I think .. I think what they had to say is, what kind of .. what is the religious com .. composition of the countries to which this broadcast will go? Therefore the Christianity that we proclaim has got to

avoid, either on the one hand being a chaplaincy service for colonials, you know, that will give you the kind of Anglicanism you'd still be getting if you were in Somerset, or being a missionary faith, you know which could create tensions in .. in certain countries and so on. They had to strike a very nice balance and I think that they had great experience in doing that.

GILLARD

Mm.

Just to wind it up, a thought that .. a point that came up in something you said earlier but I didn't want to interrupt you and I'd like to put it to you now.

Back in the history of BBC Religious Broadcasting, there was a period - it was the James Welsh years - in which James seemed to want to find a highest common factor in the beliefs and practices of the various denominations in the Christian faith in this country and it came really frequently, it was talked about as the BBC's religion. Then in came Francis House to succeed him who was quite determined that that was the wrong way to go and broke it down and said, no, each of the different denominations must be given full play .. full opportunity to present its own interpretations. What did you feel about this dichotomy? Is it too much of a question to ask you or have I not made it clear?

MORRIS

No, no you've made it perfectly clear. I .. I think that the aspect we never tackled systematically - I suppose I'm of the James Welsh tradition in a way in that I think that what we never really explored was what I would call the .. the basic religious sense that people have which is probably deeper than individual denominationalism. And which goes much further back into their psyche, much deeper in their psyche than a specific religious allegiance and that at that level, it's possible to argue that probably the vast majority of viewers and listeners are religious. But what kind of programmes would .. would strike a chord with them? Now, I don't really think that we addressed that seriously. Partly because we had specific responsibilities. I mean, how .. how do you produce a kind of basic worship that isn't the worship you know, recognisably of this, that or the other religion or denomination.

GILLARD Yes, I take your point. I think I agree with you too. I .. and I think that might be a great role for a responsible broadcasting service there .. and hasn't yet been achieved.

MORRIS I would actually add that I think that when that was done it was prob .. (PHONE RINGS)

(CUT)

GILLARD We're proceeding again after an interruption.

MORRIS Where this .. this issue I think was tackled best was not in religious programmes at all but very often in programmes like **Horizon**. Scientific programmes, arts programmes, programmes which dealt with the mysterious. Not necessarily in the religious guise at all. Or even a programme like .. series like **Civilisation** or **Bronowski**, you know where they were dealing with these fundamental questions of .. about you know human aspirations and so on. And I .. I .. in a way I feel that we never did as much as we could in that area.

GILLARD Mm. We'll let's move on because you became more and more drawn into advising the Director General, Alasdair Milne on matters of taste and standards in programmes and that sort of thing and ultimately you .. you really moved into doing that full time didn't you, for a short while. Were there special reasons for concern about programme standards in this respect at the time?

MORRIS Yes. I mean, the public periodically and Parliament, periodically, goes through one of these agonising reappraisals about it all. It's very often spurred by a particular series that is .. that is regarded as being too explicit or a particular bout of bad language or whatever. But it .. but there really had been a growing .. plaque from MPs. Mrs. Whitehouse, of course,

always active and finding you know, things to seize upon. You know, perfectly legitimately I never had any complaint about Mrs. Whitehouse. I didn't agree necessarily with her. But I always felt it was perfectly legitimate what she was doing. And .. and it really got to a point where the Governors got very edgy and .. I did a paper for them which really was about Religious Broadcasting but which kind of edged into this whole area about our responsibility as the Religious Broadcasting lot, not for monopolising or being the kind of censors of what was going on, but that we ought to be trying to make sense of all this. And Alasdair, Alasdair was seized of this and took this up and .. and said, look you know, will you .. will you do some work on this? And at first I did that sort of really part-time. I also did one or two speeches and .. and articles for him. And then eventually he said, well look, you know you can't do both these jobs. Stephen Hearst who had been his Special Adviser was .. was finally retiring and so he said .. Alasdair said, come to Broadcasting House and .. and do this full time and that's what happened.

GILLARD Oh yes. Did .. did you find it difficult to defend .. it seems to me to be an area which you can't codify and regulate very well because each case is sui generis isn't it? And you never know when it's going to arise and decisions have to be made on quite borderline issues, on the spot, in the studio or wherever the cameras are .. or the microphone and all you can do is vague generalisations, I suppose.

MORRIS Yeah. It all .. I mean it led eventually to a book I wrote for the BBC called "**Toeing the Line: Tastes and Standards**" which the BBC itself produced. I mean, again it was originally a report for the Governors.  
(CUT)

### Side 3

GILLARD .. on the third side, this is a new cassette and Dr. Morris was talking about the .. the work he had to do on advising the Director General on tastes and standards in programmes and that he'd written a book for the Governors.

MORRIS The conclusion I reached that .. was that although there had to be guidelines and in fact guidelines followed .. I mean, we had the Wyatt Committee which produced the Violence Guidelines shortly after that .. the conclusion I reached was that in the end of the day, the arbiter of taste and standards is not the Governors or the Board of Management or the guidelines, but the producer's conscience. That .. that 99% of programmes are never checked by anybody and therefore you're abjectly dependent on .. on the producer's conscience and the way in which he or she's been trained and brought up in the BBC ethos and so on. And I .. you know, having looked exhaustively at programmes and listened to them, I came to the conclusion that I was amazed how often they got it right. It was the odd .. fairly obvious mistake that produced you know, a great row but basically I think that they .. on the whole, did a remarkable job. And that really was reflected in this book and reflected in this report I did to the Governors.

GILLARD You worked I suppose there fairly closely with .. with Milne, with DG Milne did you? I mean, were you seeing him regularly on it or .. and what did you make of Milne as a chap?

MORRIS I didn't .. I .. I wouldn't say that I worked with him regularly in the sense that every day I was in his office. I mean, I .. in a way I had assignments, I had projects which .. you know, which I went off and did and .. and you know, every now and then I'd touch base with him and .. and if ever I wanted to see him, he was always available and so on. I never had any problem there. But I .. I would not say that I was one of his close confidante in the way that certain other people, you know, spent much time with him. I got on extremely well with him .. he was very kind to me. I learned to sort of appreciate his



GILLARD (LAUGHS) The correspondence, the difficult letters and that sort of thing - I always think of <sup>AGNELLY</sup> Ignelis Andrew, the RC Roman Catholic man in Religious Broadcasting who .. that delicious story, the fact how he was called in by the Cardinal Archbishop to write a letter of protest to the BBC about something that had happened (LAUGHS) and then was called in by the Director General of the BBC to write the reply to .. to the Cardinal. You didn't quite get in that jam?

MORRIS No, not quite, not quite. But fairly close to that I think.

GILLARD You can see .. see it happening in the Roman church can't you ..

MORRIS Oh yes, oh yes .. oh easily easily.

GILLARD Were you a witness through that period to the .. the deterioration and relationships between the Board and the Management. Did any of that come to your notice?

MORRIS Yes, I suppose .. I suppose occasionally Alasdair, late in the afternoon, you know, would express exasperation and so on. This was .. this was in the sort of George Howard period and then of course Stuart Young took over and it was clear that the gap was widening and this was very worrying in a way.

GILLARD Did, I mean .. did you have any feelings about the dismissal of Milne?

MORRIS Yes, I thought it was .. I .. I thought it was done in a boorish and totally uncivilised way. I mean I think .. I think that the Director .. General of the BBC is entitled to a certain dignity. And I think, although it is true

that in a way, you know, Alasdair flared and sort of pressed the trigger for them possibly, I think that there are ways of doing it which are consonant with his dignity which would have produced the same end result, but really would not have left this .. this awful feeling of you know .. that this was a barbarous way of doing something.

GILLARD

Mm.

MORRIS

And .. I mean I can't in all honesty say that it was a gross miscarriage of justice. That .. you know, I mean the actual decision - I think the way it was done was appalling.

GILLARD

The .. the general morale of the staff at that time was pretty low wasn't it?

MORRIS

Well yes and no, you see. I mean, I think that .. I mean .. I think that .. that .. Alasdair had a way of .. of attracting the loyalty of people. I mean, considering the way he used to treat them (LAUGHS) .. it was quite extraordinary but I mean he really could .. rally the troops. And I remember him doing this on one or two occasions. So that although there was those who sort of were sufficiently senior to recognise that it was important that .. that although there should be a tension between the Board of Management and the Board of Governors 'cos if there's not then one of the two is .. is superfluous. But although there's got to be a tension, they still are capable of working together. Lower down in the ranks, I suppose, there was a jolly feeling of you know, like the head prefect having a go at the headmaster, you know and cheering him on. No, I mean it was .. it was a very unhappy phase though I think.

GILLARD

Yes. Well, you sort of moved to a completely new sphere of activity. What took you to Northern Ireland?



England at the time and we had monthly meetings so I knew him fairly well but I always felt that .. that he was always a Minister but only sometimes a BBC person. How did you feel yourself?

MORRIS Well of course in Northern Ireland I had to be very careful. I mean, I think that .. the whole question of, was it an advantage or disadvantage to have a Minister of Religion in a province that is torn by religious division, was a very .. was a tricky one and I mean, that was reflected, I'm quite certain, in the kind of discussions before I was appointed. That on the one hand, it meant that I had the theological background - an understanding of church history to know what .. what the issues were. But on the other hand, I was from one of the two camps. So I really had to make it clear that I .. that I was going over there, not as a parson but as a professional broadcaster. And I .. I kept a real arms length relationship with .. with the various churches. I'm very wary of you know .. I mean, I didn't do any preaching because even to get up in a pulpit and say 'good morning' over there's a political statement. And I .. you know, I avoided getting involved in the sort of religious policy discussions that my Head of Religion should deal with but who might come to me because I was also of .. of the .. of the trade as it were. You know, I made it absolutely clear I just did not want to be involved in anything like that. And I must say to give them their due, even those sort of political groups who felt least well disposed toward me because of certain policies that I pursued, never once .. never once, I think, threw at me the fact that I was a parson or .. I have to say, they played the game from that point of view.

GILLARD And are you speaking there of people outside the BBC or inside?

MORRIS No, outside the BBC.

GILLARD   What about inside? I mean, how did they regard the fact that you were coming in .. you were a man of the cloth coming in to be the Controller.

MORRIS   Well I .. I never got .. I have to say that .. again, it never .. it never seemed to be an issue that .. that was raised by anybody. Now as you know, I mean, the fact that it wasn't raised with me doesn't mean it wasn't (LAUGHS) .. a matter of heated discussion somewhere in the engine room. But I can't honestly say that I ever got the impression that it was a critical issue.

GILLARD   Well Northern Ireland, I suppose was absolutely catastrophically riven, wasn't it, at this time when you .. when you got there? I mean, conditions generally were appalling weren't they?

MORRIS   Well I .. no I wasn't there during the worst of .. of the troubles. The worst of the troubles really were the 1970s .. I mean, those were the days when BBC staff had to sleep in their offices because they couldn't .. they couldn't cross the firing line or they .. they couldn't get through barricades or whatever. I mean those were the kind of grey days of the BBC in Northern Ireland. Though I notice recently from a graph I saw in one of the newspapers that it was .. in the year I went, the following year, that the number of incidents of violence peaked and was as high as it had been any time during that twenty years. So there was an upsurge but I mean it wasn't the sustained campaign of the .. of the 70s. But there were one or two specific incidents that .. that were very very difficult to deal with from our point of view. I mean, the shooting of the two soldiers in the Milltown Cemetery, for instance, which virtually happened on television, led to all kinds of .. of pressures being applied to the BBC.

GILLARD   What sort of kinds would they be?

MORRIS

Well, you see we .. we obviously had a camera crew there and we shot footage. Now the footage did not show the two soldiers actually being shot because of course they were shot in a .. in a .. in a yard. It does show the two soldiers being attacked in their .. in their car and being pulled out of their car. And of course, the RUC under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, were hammering on our door saying "We want that footage." On the other hand, the IRA, recognising that the RUC had very sophisticated techniques for analysing video and would obviously look at every face in the crowd to see who they could identify, the IRA sent death threats to our Head of News and Current Affairs and to the girl reporter who'd happened to be there reporting the event and who in fact smuggled the film out because the .. the police and army tried to take the film off them whilst they were actually on the spot. That resulted in my losing a very very experienced Head of News and Current Affairs who had to be relocated in Bristol. And the girl reporter had to be moved out of Northern Ireland for nearly a year. And this of course led to all kinds of problems with the unions, understandably, who said you know we go on the streets at the risk of our lives .. is the BBC going to stand behind us? Is .. does it mean that from now onwards, any .. any footage we shoot is likely to be used in evidence in court? In which case, we're going to be sitting ducks for the IRA. So that there .. the relations were very very fraught at that time and .. I have to say that Mike Checkland, who was by them the Director General was .. was .. and .. and Stanley .. Geraint Stanley Jones who was Managing .. my Managing Director were towers of strength in what was really a very very tricky situation. We had to appoint a new Head of News and Current Affairs, we had .. I had to lay down some kind of rules about when we did and did not you know, appear on the streets and of course we .. we had to fight this whole question of .. of the use of video in court.

GILLARD

Did those battles ever go your way or did the courts always get possession of them?

MORRIS

Oh no, we .. but we .. we .. lost. But I mean, the Prevention of Terrorism Act actually gives the police the right to do virtually



GILLARD That was a very sticky situation ..

MORRIS Yeah.

GILLARD And I suppose it's liable to occur again and again.

MORRIS Oh yes. Oh yes.

GILLARD But .. were there other dispensations at your disposal? I mean did .. did London regard the .. the fact that staff in Northern Ireland were under .. acting under circ.. working under circumstances which had no comparison whatever to BBC operations anywhere else at all and that you as Controller might feel that here is somebody who's been through a most agonising situation when his life was at risk .. or her life and .. and that person really needs a month's holiday .. takes time to get over that. Did you have .. were you able to say to such a person, "Go off"?

MORRIS There was a special allowance, a Northern Ireland allowance which was a sum of money to all the BBC staff in Northern Ireland to give them a few days break away from the province. I always felt that the Board of Management were not only towers of strength but showed every possible understanding. I would say that from time to time I didn't feel the Governors did because I think that the Governors were all the time conscious of "the BBC" and its relationship with the Government and .. as they would put it, "After all, we are in the battle against terrorism." Whereas nobody in Northern Ireland would put it that way. They would say we're in the business of reporting what happens. Now that was a distinction that the Governors, with exceptions, found it extremely difficult to understand. As far as they were concerned, particularly new Governors, and particularly the Chairman I think, felt that really our .. our job .. we were part of the war machine. And therefore of course we had

to cooperate in every conceivable way. And it was very difficult to get across the notion that that really was not how we could operate. That we were the only objective source of news of two communities which were riven by propaganda 'cos everybody had a propaganda machine - the army, the police, the IRA, the paramilitaries - and that if anything, sort of undermined our objectivity. So that even people who hate us would say, "Well the BBC said it, so it must happen ... it must be true." If anything undermined that, we were lost. Now that was sometimes difficult to get across. On the other hand, when the .. Tom King decided that .. that Sinn Fein's spokesman should no longer be allowed on television, I have to say the Chairman of the Governors backed our protect to the hilt .. I mean, Hussey .. very courageously, I thought, when he was Guest of Honour at a dinner given by Tom King in Belfast, got up and said, "I am opposed to this, I think it's a bad move and thank you for your hospitality but we've got to disagree about this."

GILLARD  
State for ..

We should say that Tom King was Secretary of

MORRIS

He was Secretary of State, yes.

GILLARD

Yeah. You presumably, on the staff, had members of .. people who were Republican minded and some who were Unionist minded, did you? Or was the staff all one kind?

MORRIS

No, they weren't all one kind. But the Catholics were a very small minority and when I went there wasn't a Catholic on .. on our local Board of Management and I think there was only one Catholic who was a head of department .. no, there were two. One of whom, oddly enough, was .. was Head of Religion - a Catholic priest called Jim Skelly whom, oddly enough, I'd appointed when I was .. when I was Head of Religious Broadcasting.

GILLARD

But how did they get on with each other?



own Northern Ireland programmes versus, I think probably a majority of people who say when we time shifted network programmes in order to put out local programmes, we said, "Look, we're not second class citizens - why can't we have **Mastermind** when the rest of the United Kingdom has **Mastermind**?" And as you know, 'cos you've been responsible for Regional Broadcasting, this is an irr .. it's an irresolvable problem.

GILLARD Yes it is. What about the special circumstances of Radio Foyle, that's the Local Radio station in Londonderry isn't it?

MORRIS That's right. Well that was a remarkable operation altogether. I mean, they were in a predominantly nationalist area. They .. they had one bombing. I mean, their building had been virtually destroyed. When they rebuilt it, they decided not to build it like a fortress and so they had a completely open door policy. They .. they produced programmes which were probably more critical of the IRA in an area where the IRA was very strong. I .. I had immense admiration for Radio Foyle and its staff and I learned very soon that the thing to do was let them get on with it and keep out of their way. And that's what I did really.

GILLARD What about this business about the .. the terrorist broadcasting ban? I mean, how could Radio Foyle operate under such a ban?

MORRIS Oh it .. it made their life impossible because there were a number of Sinn Fein councillors and all the time they had this crazy situation where they had to .. in the middle of an interview, they might have to stop it because the councillor was in .. you know, in somebody's view, no longer speaking about health or you know, public cleansing or something qua councillor but was starting to express a Sinn Fein view. And as you know, I mean, how do you distinguish between, you know, a Conservative local position about dustbins



easily be got at. And I thought for them to stand behind the programme, their names on the credits and so on was immensely courageous.

GILLARD But what were the findings of the programme?

MORRIS Oh the findings of the programme basically were that this had been an SAS execution. And of course in Northern Ireland, you see, unlike Britain where people got all into great state and you know, our troops wouldn't do that sort of thing, in Northern Ireland of course, this was regarded as .. as .. as normal. I mean, people said, (LAUGHS) "Well of course this .. of course they have. What do you think they do in Northern Ireland every day of the week?" So to them it wasn't regarded as being something, you know, extraordinary.

GILLARD In your programming generally in Northern Ireland, was the main emphasis on journalism?

MORRIS Oh an immense amount of emphasis on journalism because .. I mean, because of the kind of things .. I mean, unlike any other region I think of the BBC, the chances were that we would have at least one item on a national news bulletin every day of the week. And therefore, the .. well, we had the biggest newsroom outside London of course, and highly professional which had of course also to handle all the kind of programme proposals that came from the rest of the BBC. And of course, from the world's television services as well and when there were things like the shooting of the two soldiers and so on, I mean, we were absolutely at full stretch servicing, you know, television services all over the world.

GILLARD But you .. you did also do the normal things that a broadcasting, comprehensive broadcasting..

(CUT)

#### Side 4

GILLARD .. you were running a fairly normal broadcasting service alongside all the journalism.

MORRIS Yes, I got into a lot of trouble over a Light Entertainment programme called **The Show** which was a live studio, satirical .. it was set in a kind of night-club and it sent up everybody. It sent up the IRA, it sent up Paisley. But it made the mistake of having a kind of a satirical parson in a pulpit who really .. I mean, I understood the religious point they were making but a lot of the churches in Northern Ireland took against this satire, saying that he insulted god and .. and the church and so on and so there was an enormous row about **The Show** and I mean, I of course .. in the end of the day, I was responsible. I hadn't actually seen that particular episode, in fact, my Head of Programmes had cleared it and I trusted him and that's the name of the game. And .. it was still my responsibility and I had to fight off Cardinals and Archbishops and heaven knows what and .. I mean, all the kind of thing that I suppose happens. But what was curious was that it actually made fun of the IRA, it actually poked fun at the IRA which was something nobody'd ever dare do in Northern Ireland before. And therefore it was a very .. I thought a very courageous programme indeed. But .. but certainly, I mean the Broadcasting Council were very exercised about it and the Governors were and .. I suppose it was regarded as being, you know, a .. a programme where we really went over the top.

GILLARD And I think what surprised me more than anything else about the programmes from Northern Ireland in recent years has been how music has been strengthened. The Ulster Orchestra is really quite a good band now.



trouble, it was ruled that any .. any programme to do with Northern Ireland from any part of the BBC had to be referred to the Controller, Northern Ireland at .. at the stage when it was an idea, before anybody came with a camera or a tape recorder so that .. that was quite a considerable part of the job. We had an avalanche of programme ideas and proposals. And then of course when a crew came over we had to sort of look after them and see that they didn't get into areas where they didn't know what they were doing and so on. That was .. that was .. that was a quite taxing part of the job.

GILLARD Did you have big struggles with producers unwilling to accept your judgements?

MORRIS Not really because at the end of the day they knew that the whole weight of the Board of Management was behind this proposal and therefore I had .. they knew I .. at any time I could pick up the phone and speak to the Director General and that was that. And therefore, I never had any real trouble at all basically. I mean, they accepted loyally I think any .. any restrictions we placed on what they did.

GILLARD Didn't it mean that you had to be on duty 24 hours, seven days a week?

MORRIS Indeed, it would yes .. yes. That could be a problem. And the loss of my Head of News and Current Affairs who was a particularly splendid man was a grievous blow to me from that point of view 'cos I could trust his judgement absolutely when I was completely new.

GILLARD Yes. What about the Broadcasting Council because they'd always been an advisory body up to the fairly recent years. Now there was a Broadcasting Council. Did it settle down? Was it any good?

MORRIS Yes. I mean, the point is that .. that like all these broadcasting bodies, it .. it kind of was neither one thing nor the other in a way. I mean, meeting once a month was not sufficient to be a controlling body in any real sense. You can't decide on all programme policy in half a .. half a day a month. On the other hand, it was clearly laid down that they were at the end of the day, to be the decisive body to determine what local programmes should be. It also led to a very interesting conflict between the Broadcasting Council and the Board of Governors because it .. it looks on paper as though the Broadcasting Council are the people who say, this local programme will go out or it won't. When it came to the .. a BB.. a Government proposal that there should be an anti-terrorist video put out in Northern Ireland, the Broadcasting Council were utterly opposed to it going out, the Board of Governors were, on balance, in favour of it going out and the key issue was who finally determined .. Now the Board of Governors obviously said well the Charter makes it absolutely clear, we are the BBC. The Broadcasting Council said, hang about, it says here local programmes are clearly the responsibility and that was quite a tricky issue really. I mean, in the end the Board of Governors won, of course.

GILLARD Yes. I thought you were going to say they left it to you. (LAUGHS) Might have happened.  
The .. what about the National Governor - you had Jim Kincaid as your ..

MORRIS I did.

GILLARD How do we spell him? K-I-N-C-A-I-D.

MORRIS Yeah. Kincaid, yes.

GILLARD Yeah. Sorry, I'm just .. that's for the transcriber.

Yes. Sorry.

You had good relations with him. He was a school master, wasn't he?

MORRIS Yes .. yes he was Headmaster of the Methodist College. I found him amazingly friendly and supportive and so on. We did not always agree and particularly on this question of the Government anti-terrorist video and putting out the confidential telephone line. I took the view that the staff took and that the Broadcasting Council took that this would be a mistake and would put our staff at risk. He felt very strongly that it should go out and of course, because he was a member of the Board of Governors, obviously his voice was very influential over there. So there were one or two tensions of policy. But I have to say they were never personal and I never had any feeling that you know, that he was doing me down across the water, or whatever.

GILLARD Of course the English regions are always very envious of you people in the national regions ..

MORRIS Yes, having a Governor, yes. I mean, it's a mixed blessing I think to be honest. I think it's a mixed blessing.

GILLARD Well now, getting near the end. But an important question: How did the public in Northern Ireland regard the BBC? Did they trust the BBC and .. were they in favour of what .. the kind of policy lines you were taking?

MORRIS I would say they treated .. they regarded us with respect but not much liking. I think by definition, anything we did we had half the population up in arms because any .. if you .. if you take an objective view on an issue then it's almost certain that you're going to upset somebody in Northern Ireland and we .. we certainly did. But we also, of course, upset Stormont which was the .. you know the Government, I mean, the Northern Ireland office. We .. there were considerable tensions with them because they .. they had a paradoxical view. They thought that on the one hand, 'the BBC' was part of the war effort. There was a battle going on against terrorism, it had to be beaten, the BBC should weigh in and get on with it, just like any other arm of the British



MORRIS

So they .. that could be tricky.

GILLARD

Yes it could be. Yes it really could. I can quite see that. What about your relations then with Dublin, with RTE?

MORRIS

My relations were not as good .. well not .. sorry, 'cos that's the wrong word. They were perfectly cordial. I didn't have as close relations with Dublin as my predecessor had because I had the fatal defect in any Controller, Northern Ireland of having no interest in Rugby. My predecessor had been a fanatic. Therefore, Rugby matches at Lansdowne Road where meetings, where RTE and Jimmy, having a great do happened regularly. Because I wasn't interested in Rugby I always gave my tickets to somebody else and the result was that I .. I didn't see the RTE Director General as often as Jimmy did. But when I did see him, we .. and of course, once the .. the provision that there had to be 25% independent productions came into effect, we started to develop programme links with them that we hadn't had in the past.

GILLARD

They came under the 25% ..

MORRIS

We .. yes, I mean we could use .. we could use Dublin, though again it was politically sensitive because you know .. if .. if certain of the politicians in Northern Ireland heard that we were using a Southern Irish television company and therefore taking bread out of the mouths of Northern Ireland, that became another great political issue. It was a mine field really but fun.

GILLARD

Well it sounds like a knife .. knife edge sort of job. Were you glad to come away from it in the end?

MORRIS

No, I loved every minute of it. I mean, it was only the fact that I was way over retirement age .. I'd have .. I'd have done it forever if I could have done. I loved every minute of it really.

GILLARD Mm. Does that go for your BBC years as a whole?

MORRIS Oh yes. Oh I'm immensely grateful to the BBC and I .. and I, you know, I feel having retired now as though I've left a warm womb in a way. I no longer feel part of that club. I mean, even BBC gossip which I think is you know, part of the fascination of the place, when I have to read now in the paper that the Board of Governors are doing this or the Board of Management are doing that .. you know, I sort of feel deprived really.

GILLARD Well at least you're still of the BBC if you're not in it. I mean, you're on the air a great deal in Radio and Television, long may it continue.

MORRIS Well thank you.

GILLARD Well, thanks very much. Good.

MORRIS Are you happy?

GILLARD Yes.

**(Ends)**