

9 RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITIES

Programme makers dealing with religious themes should be aware of what may cause offence. Programme makers and schedulers of international services should consider carefully the varying sensitivities of audiences in different parts of the world. What may be unexceptional in a U.K. programme may raise strong feelings elsewhere. Advice can often be given by the departments dealing with religious programmes in both domestic and international services, or by the relevant World Service language sections.

Deep offence will also be caused by profane references or disrespect, whether verbal or visual, directed at deities, scriptures, holy days and rituals which are at the heart of various religions – for example, the Crucifixion, the Gospels, the Koran and the Jewish Sabbath. It is against the Muslim religion to represent the Prophet Mohammed in any shape or form. Language must be used sensitively and accurately and be consistent in our description of different religions. Use of a term such as “Islamic Fundamentalist” has to pass the test of whether we would talk about Christian or Hindu Fundamentalism.

Particular care should be taken with programmes to be broadcast on the principal holy days of the main religions to ensure that unnecessary offence is not caused by material that might be more acceptable at other times.

What constitutes blasphemy and how seriously it is viewed, varies within and between different religions and cultures. Blasphemy is a criminal offence in the UK and advice should be sought, through Heads of Department or Commissioning Executives, from Editorial Policy and lawyers in any instance where the possibility of blasphemy may arise.