

1 December 2008



ABC

Australian
Broadcasting
Corporation

Br P S Cram
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW
Social Justice Committee
P O Box 259
ROSEBERY 1445

Radio & Regional Content

ABC Southbank Centre
120 Southbank Boulevard
Southbank VIC 3006
GPO Box 9994
Melbourne VIC 3001
Tel. +61 3 9626 1600

Dear Brother,

Thank you for your letters of 26 October 2008 on behalf of the Social Justice Committee addressed to Mark Scott, Jane Connors and me, expressing concern about changes to the ABC Radio National schedule in 2009. I have been asked to respond on behalf of the ABC.

The ABC recognises the passion and commitment of the Radio National listenership and we acknowledge the concerns some listeners have about the changes to the Radio National schedule. The ABC is just as passionate about our programs and we are fully committed to maintaining Radio National as a conduit for ideas, discussion and debate.

The changes to Radio National's 2009 program schedule are consistent with the ABC Charter obligations to broadcast programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community; to broadcast programs of an educational nature; and to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia. They are focused on ensuring Australian audiences have access to "a comprehensive range of content that is relevant to, and representative of, the range of groups within society".

The ABC believes that the changes are necessary as ABC Radio National looks to the future to ensure that its radio line-up is focused not just on traditional content genres but on contemporary, intellectual discourse in Australia and worldwide. The changes to the schedule in 2009 aim to refresh and revitalise Radio National's programming by offering new and more relevant programs to its audience. Specifically, this will include a new *Future Report* (working title) on Thursdays which will analyse trends and predictions arising from changes across science, religion, art, economics and technology. There is no alteration to the fundamental foundation of Radio National's success in delivering high-quality, distinctive programming to the Australian people.

The mix of specialist programming, intelligent talk programming (like Counterpoint and Late Night Live) and live flow programming, like Radio National Breakfast with Fran Kelly will remain. Decisions around the specific elements within this mix of programming are nothing new and some of the programs on Radio National, including The Religion Report, have been around for more than a decade. The ABC believes that it's time to develop new ideas and new specialist programs.

The ABC recognises the vital role played by religion and religious beliefs in the lives of many Australians. Religion will remain an essential component of ABC Radio National's output, with 2.5 hours of religious content broadcast weekly, including *The Spirit of Things*, the award-winning *Encounter* program and *The Rhythm Divine*. This coverage will be complemented by *For the God Who Sings* on ABC Classic FM and John Cleary's *Sunday Night* program on ABC Local Radio – all produced by the ABC's religious radio unit. Religious programming will also continue to feature on ABC Television.

The ABC has recognised for some time the need for more original content relating to religion on ABC Online. The limited amount of content relating to the impact of religion and beliefs on contemporary Australian society that has been included on the ABC's "Unleashed" site has received a very positive response from audiences. Radio National is keen to develop more content relating to religion in this area and a new online site providing a gateway for all religious content on the ABC is under development.

We are confident that these changes will make Radio National's distinctive, high-quality content available to a burgeoning online audience – an audience which is identical to Radio National's listeners in wanting to make sense of the world and broaden their experience with trusted, thought provoking and sometimes risky content. However, this new audience's interaction with media is almost purely via the internet and to reach them Radio National must improve its online presence, ensuring that this audience's bandwidth is as richly populated as Radio National's airwaves.

The changes in 2009 will enable Radio National to carry specialist coverage into the online space including improved radio feature material, arts content and religion.

I hope this reassures you of the ABC's, and Radio National's, ongoing commitment to the role of religion in our society.

Yours faithfully,



 **Sue Howard**
Director, ABC Radio & Regional Content