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STATEMENT FROM THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES (MEETING IN ROME, 17 OCTOBER 2003)

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La Conferenza Episcopale dei Vescovi di Inghilterra e di Galles, a Roma per la Visita "ad Limina", ha rilasciato questa mattina la seguente Dichiarazione:

During this week the BBC, mainly through its Religious Affairs Department, is giving good coverage to the celebrations of the twenty-five years of the Pontificate of John Paul II and to the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This is much appreciated.

In this same week, however, BBC News and Current Affairs, have broadcast two programmes which have been biased against and hostile to the Catholic Church. In doing so they have given offence to many Catholics.

The first was a BBC Panorama programme, on Sunday 13 October, entitled 'Sex and the Holy City'. The main argument of the programme, which cannot be sustained, was that while the Pope preaches peace and life, his teachings and the actions of the Catholic Church (in opposing abortion and contraception) bring about widespread poverty and death.

The second was a 'Kenyon Confronts' programme, on 15 October, which focussed on past cases of the abuse of children involving two priests over twenty years ago. The programme did contain significant disclosures: the whereabouts in America of a priest of the Archdiocese of Birmingham and a tape recording from 1985. But they were set alongside contentious and biased reporting of the Church's actions, both past and present. For example, the programme regrettably persisted in using a single, uncorroborated source of proven unreliability as the basis for serious allegations against the Church.

For many decades the BBC has deserved and enjoyed a world-wide reputation for fairness and objectivity, especially in its News and Current Affairs. This reputation is increasingly tarnished. In England and Wales there is considerable concern that elements within the BBC are simply hostile to religious belief and to any traditional sense of the sacred.

Furthermore, the decision to broadcast both of these programmes in the week when Catholic people throughout the world are celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the Pope and the life of Mother Teresa is a distressing sign of this insensitivity. It contributes to a further loss in the trust of many in the BBC as a public service broadcaster.

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