

Report of the Jury

WACC/SIGNIS European Television Festival of Religious Programmes

16–20 May 2007, Kristiansand, Norway

Jury Members: Anca Berlogea (Romania), Erwin Koller (Switzerland), Rachel Viney – Jury President (United Kingdom)

General Comments

The overall quality of programmes in the competition was high. Production values were good.

We were particularly pleased to see how many of the programmes featured strong, articulate women in prominent roles.

Many of the programmes did not fit neatly into the categories assigned to them – either by the programme makers themselves or the pre-selection jury. This is not a criticism of individuals, but rather a reflection of the fact that there is a greater blurring of boundaries between programme genres. Because of this, we believe there may be a case for revising – perhaps radically – the categories in any future festival.

The four awards we have made are for what were, in our view, the four best programmes in the festival, irrespective of categories. In the case of each of the winners, the jury were unanimous. What the winning programmes have in common is their humanity.

Special Mentions

The jury would like to give a special mention to two programmes in the competition. The first of these is Words of Wisdom (NCRV, The Netherlands). We admired this attempt to bring religious questions into an entertainment programme. We also liked the fact that the subject was not compromised – as celebrities in this kind of programme sometimes can be – by having to act as though she was more religious than she actually was. The second programme is The TV Pastor (TV Inter, Norway). This was a good attempt to reach a different target audience than one might necessarily expect for a religious programme. We particularly liked the sequence showing the TV Pastor speaking with the couple who were about to get married. It was a moving and meaningful pastoral interaction within a made-for-tv format.

The Prizewinners

These are announced in reverse order of category. In category 4, General, one programme stood out as a wonderful piece of communication: The Gospel Sower (Présence Protestante, France). It showed gospel music communicating across social, ethnic and religious boundaries. The central figure was very sympathetic and always convincing, without ever seeming to preach – and the programme successfully conveyed his infectious enthusiasm. In fact, all those who appeared in the programme had something worthwhile to say. We were continually surprised by the way the programme developed. And it was fun!

In Category 3, Reflection, Worship and Meditation, we award the prize to a programme that was everything we hope for in a programme broadcast at this time of year – but rarely get. Silent Night, Holy Night (IKON, The Netherlands) had high production values, great music and a strong emotional resonance. Starting with a surprising location for a Christmas broadcast – a synagogue – it went on to include all kinds of people and experiences in a genuinely inclusive way. It made explicit the connections and feelings we all have at this time of year and – like the previous winner – it kept surprising us.

I have already mentioned that we had some difficulty with the categories. This was particularly the case with categories 1 (Documentaries) and 2 (Magazine Programmes and Features). Although it is hard to draw up hard and fast rules – and conventions vary between countries, the traditional definition of a documentary might go something like this: collect facts, translate them into pictures, analyse and contextualise them and present them convincingly. Whereas a Feature (we didn't see anything that looked like a Magazine programme) could be characterised as being more about exploring personal feelings and convictions, as well, perhaps, as being shorter than a documentary. However, a number of the programmes we saw didn't seem to fit neatly into either definition. We decided therefore to combine categories 1 and 2 into a category that might broadly be called Factual, and to award two prizes.

The first of these goes to a programme that brought the conventions of the traditional documentary into a much more personal and subjective framework. It was a tremendously powerful programme, dealing with utterly relevant questions. With a strong presenter, and first-class interviewees, it never lost sight of the theological issues at its heart: forgiveness and the response to suffering. It was Every Parent's Nightmare (BBC, United Kingdom).

Our second prizewinner in this combined category was another programme that in some ways was very personal. It offered an interesting and convincing example of how a presenter can have an active and stated interest in the subject matter, yet still do an effective job of presenting and provoking different points of view. This powerful and courageous programme was informative and multi-layered, and had strong contributors. It showed clearly the tension between a pronouncement from a church and the effects of that pronouncement on the ground. The programme was Last Judgement (RTE, Ireland).

This concludes the report of the Jury.

Rachel Viney
Jury President
20th May 2007