

30 October 2012

Complaints about a Close Up item on church not upheld

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has declined to uphold complaints about a *Close Up* item in March on the activities of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

The item profiled an ex-member, X, who claimed that she had made substantial donations to the church which left her in a position of financial hardship. It included hidden camera footage of a church service.

The church and two individuals made formal complaints that the item was unfair to the church and its members, lacked balance, created inaccurate and misleading impressions and encouraged the denigration of church members. The complainants also argued that the broadcast breached the privacy of X and the privacy of others on church premises.

The BSA found that X was a willing participant and although the Church asserted that she had sought to withdraw her interview, there was insufficient evidence to show that she had.

The church argued that the hidden camera footage of a church service breached the privacy of the Bishop and Pastor but the BSA disagreed. The BSA said that in any event, the public interest in the information disclosed clearly outweighed the competing privacy rights of the Bishop and Pastor.

In regard to the fairness complaint the BSA found that the item was X's opinion and included opinions from other members, and that the terms 'sect', 'cult' and 'brainwashed' were framed as questions and opinion.

The BSA also found that these terms did not carry the level of invective necessary to breach standards relating to discrimination and denigration.

The full report is available at www.bsa.govt.nz

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