[IE] Comedian's comments on religious figure did not violate broadcasting code

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The executive complaints forum of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) has rejected a complaint against the broadcaster TV3 that a comedian's joke referring to Jesus was offensive and disrespectful to Christian beliefs. A complaint had been made over the December 2014 broadcast of the comedian Tommy Tiernan's Crooked Man programme by TV3, when the comedian stated "On St Patrick's Day, Jesus himself comes out of the desert, 'mother of fuck... any chance of a pint is there. The Devil is driving me demented. Question after fucking question. Pint of Guinness please Seamus, thanks. What's that? I'd love to judge the parade, I'd love to. I know fuck all about floats but I'll give it a go".

Under section 48 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, individuals may make a complaint to the Authority that a broadcaster failed to comply with the broadcasting rules. The complainant argued that the comments violated the Code of Programme Standards principles that broadcasters must have respect for community standards, and show due respect for religious views, images, practices and beliefs in programme material.

The Authority unanimously rejected the complaint. First, it was noted that "comedy content may be offensive to some", but will only breach the code when the content "was offensive in a manner that would infringe general community standards and which could be considered unduly offensive". Second, the Authority had regard to the fact that (a) the programme was broadcast after 10pm; (b) the comedian regularly uses "coarse and offensive language" addressing topics such as religion; and (c) the "humour was not aimed at the figure of Jesus, but rather at the attitudes of Irish people to alcohol". The Authority concluded that the "item would not offend General Community Standards or cause undue offence but was instead an exaggerated comparison used for comic effect".

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, Broadcasting Complaint Decisions, June 2015, pp. 47-49

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