

Speech by Michael Wakelin, Head of Religion and Ethics, BBC for the first Insight Film Festival 21st November 2007

These are indeed interesting times for dealing in the currency of religious media. Not in living memory has the stake of religion been so high.

The days when sociologists were predicting the demise of faith have long gone and academics are talking about an end to secularism and a re-enchantment of society.

Therefore this is very much a festival for the here and now.

How appropriate that it is taking place in Manchester, a diverse and religiously charged city, and how appropriate it is taking place now when religion is so high in the nations and the world's agenda.

At the BBC we are earning some huge new commission for our output and winning secular awards confirming not only our production values but also the importance, relevance and audience grabbing nature of our content

So I come to this INSIGHT festival full of confidence that the chosen subject matter is at the very heart of the nations need and full of admiration for the vision and ambition of this project.

I am convinced that we as a people must learn to understand each others faith and values in order to create a better society I am convinced that unless we do so we are facing a future flecked with fear and fracture

And I am convinced that it is through utilising all the media platforms available that we will be able to erode the factions of hate and intolerance and start to engineer a society accepting of difference and celebrating diversity.

So let me give my fulsome backing to the purpose of this festival – it is in some ways a small beginning but in my faith tradition small beginnings can grow in to mighty concerns.

It has a champion in John Forrest who is a man of vision, commitment and huge energy.

It sets an important challenge to young filmmakers to grapple with the faith issues that surround them and treat them with robust journalism, incisive wit, irreverent insight or creative thought.

I have had a taste of the rich variety and texture that has been entered and am impressed and encouraged for the future of this event.