

OSCAR® CLEANS UP ITS ACT

By Dr. Ted Baehr

The 74th Academy Awards this year marked a warm, friendly, positive, emotional, and sometimes even patriotic departure from the scatological, politically correct Oscar® ceremonies of the last few years. This year's event not only returned to Hollywood Boulevard for the first time since 1960, but also recalled a time, which seemed to end with the DRIVING MISS DAISY Oscar® ceremony in 1990, when moral values and spiritual references were an integral part of the Academy ceremonies. Even Kenneth Turan, the senior movie critic for the entertainment industry newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, commented on the dramatic sea-change in an article appropriately titled, "A Change Has Come" (*Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 2002):

"...the entire Academy Awards process also got a heartening, emotionally stirring Hollywood ending. With Sidney Poitier's special Oscar, Halle Berry's best actress triumph and Denzel Washington's best actor nod, the Oscar ceremony touched chords of genuine feeling you would have sworn were beyond the grasp of this often derided ceremony."

Not that this year's event was as pristine as the awards ceremonies of the Golden Age. There were some references to bodily functions, domestic partners, sexual innuendoes, and light obscenities, but actually they were far less than the Billy Crystal hosted Oscars ceremonies of the last few years, and the Academy seemed less uptight about the heart of the event, which is the emotional responses of the award winners.

Although a few of the awards went to some bad, immoral movies, in Christian terms, such as the pro-lesbian IRIS, or the politically correct, pornographic MONSTER'S BALL, many of the awards went to movies MOVIEGUIDE® could commend, even if they weren't our first choice. A BEAUTIFUL MIND has a wonderful redemptive base, and producer/director Ron Howard even intoned, "God bless you." The highly redemptive LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING got four awards, but none of the big ones. NO MAN'S LAND, which explored the sinfulness of man in an unique way, was our first choice for the Best Foreign Language Film, and it beat out the secular favorite, AMELIE.

For many years, the Academy has been accused of neglecting minorities, which this year's vote radically changed by giving awards to some very good actors, Denzel Washington and Halle Berry, though, quite frankly, these were not their best roles. This recalls the fact that it has often been said that the Academy Awards are given in hindsight to performers and filmmakers who should have been awarded for better work in earlier productions. Randy Newman's award for best song certainly falls in that category. I have interviewed Randy several times. He has good values, but he seemed off his game in this reception speech, noting, "I don't want your pity" after he won his first Oscar after 16 nominations. He thanked the Academy "for giving me so many chances to be humiliated."

Denzel Washington opened his acceptance speech with, "God is good...God is great from the bottom of my heart...God bless you" and ended with another "God bless you." Several of the recipients for BLACK HAWK DOWN and PEARL HARBOR expressed patriotic themes. Julian Fellowes, scriptwriter of GOSFORD PARK, offered a heartfelt, God bless America, and some of the LORD OF THE RINGS people gave clear endorsements of

enthusiasm for the United States of America. Furthermore, professing Christian Kevin Spacey, who should choose his roles more in line with his faith, presented a memorable patriotic moment.

In spite of his politics, Sidney Poitier has been a positive influence on the movie industry. He deserved the lifetime achievement award much more than last year's winner did. His LILIES OF THE FIELD brought many people closer to Christ, including me. This may have been unintentional, but he always portrayed people with good values, strong common sense and strong spiritual concerns. His acceptance speech was very moving and thought-provoking, in a good way.

Although, regrettably, Halle Berry usually does not portray the same kind of values in her recent movies, she seems to have those values lurking in her past. We need to pray for her, and all the other celebrities and filmmakers in Hollywood.

It was also disappointing that the Academy used Woody Allen to introduce the tribute to New York City. Although his homage to New York in his movie MANHATTAN is a brilliant piece of filmmaking, most of his movies and personal behavior in recent years have left a lot to be desired, morally speaking.

Whoever wrote Helen Hunt's introduction to documentaries gave an incredible nod to faith. Helen said, "We are now going to honor movies where God is the director," then proceeded to talk about God four more times. This type of God-talk was practically unheard of in recent years, when MOVIEGUIDE® was writing very disappointing articles about the Academy Awards.

In all, the good outweighed the bad at this year's Academy Awards. They were more in line with the MOVIEGUIDE® Awards, and this is a great encouragement to us and a great testimony that God is at work in Hollywood.