

Whatever...

Words from scripture inspired institutions like the BBC. Phil Jump suggests we use them today.

The recent debacle between Gary Lineker and the BBC highlighted the significant changes that have taken place in society and the world of media since the idea of a national broadcasting corporation was first conceived. The row revolved around the former England captain and sports presenter's comments about the language used in the UK Government's latest immigration bill; comments which the Corporation claimed were in breach of its impartiality rules. Much of the debate centred around whether the stringent guidelines that apply to political and news editors can be equally applied to those who work or operate in other areas.

But influence and attention are big business, not least illustrated by the fact that both now append their names to "economies". So when high-profile individuals like Lineker use social media to express an opinion on anything, the viewing public takes notice. Once upon a time such people's opinions, no matter how appropriate or otherwise, could only achieve widespread engagement with the public by using the very channels with whom the presenter was now in dispute. But how that has changed!

So argues Andrew Graystone, writing in the wake of the affair for Theos think tank¹. But his insightful analysis of events also reveals the lesser known facts that the BBC's founding mottos are both based on Scripture. The coat of arms still on display in its council chamber bears the Latin word *quaecunq̄ue*, which translates as "whatever" and is based on the words of St Paul to the church in Philippi "Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things


are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are of good report: if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things." It would be interesting to consider the degree to which the BBC's current output aligns with what the New Testament writer had in mind when those words were first penned – or indeed the expectations of those who first adopted them as a foundational motto for the broadcaster.

It is hard to imagine that such an intentional connection with the Bible would be so instinctively embraced today. Indeed one might wonder at the degree to which this commendation has, in recent times, become subsumed by the need to chase ratings, maintain popularity and appease the expectations of celebrity presenters. The motto, we are told, was adopted in 1933 to replace the corporation's founding emblem from 1927 bearing the words of the Old Testament Prophets Micah and Isaiah "Nation shall speak peace unto nation." These also inspired the inscription at the entrance to Broadcasting House describing it as a place "dedicated to Almighty God".

On reflection, it seems that it is not only media technology that has undergone seismic change in the decades since – it would be pretty inconceivable for a broadcaster to define itself in such terms today. The same reality impresses itself on me whenever I visit the Port of Liverpool building in my native city. It remains an impressive centre of trade and commerce and its central atrium is dominated by a decorative lantern around which are inscribed the words of Psalm 107:23: "They that go down to the sea in ships that do business in great

waters, these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."

We might well lament that a world now appears past where business and industry was so at ease in defining itself and its purpose through the words of Scripture, and at the very least this reinforces the importance of publications like this one, which seek to reclaim and develop these key relationships. But we must look to the past with realism; while the Port of Liverpool might well commend to its patrons "the works of the Lord", we should also remember that this was once the centre of a system of trade that displaced and enslaved millions of Africans. We cannot assume that those who emblazoned their headquarters with the words of Scripture were as ready to put its message into practice through the pursuit of their operations. This is a sobering reminder of the importance of not simply recruiting great words of faith to somehow justify our enterprises but genuinely being open to their scrutiny and challenge. However, we will all have our blind spots which it will take future generations to highlight.

Yet this might nonetheless remind us of the importance of maintaining a meaningful engagement between the words of faith and business. Our economy is no less plagued with ethical challenges and scandals today, and however it might be expressed in our current era, it would do us all no harm to recognise that there are higher principles and accountabilities to which our business activities need to answer. Whether or not we emblazon our offices with words of Scripture, we should recognise Scriptures' timeless relevance to our contemporary workspaces. 

1. <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2023/03/14/who-are-todays-content-regulatorsership>



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