

Publishing Editor's column

THERE has recently been a fashion in the broadcasting world for putting groups of people in some kind of close confinement (such as a house, or a small island), filming everything they do night and day, and broadcasting the most interesting bits. The whole idea, according to one newspaper article I read, is to put together the sort of people who are likely to behave badly and fail to get on with others, because this, naturally, makes the most entertaining watching. The fact that such programmes are broadcast late in the evening, when children are supposedly in bed, indicates their character, which was confirmed by another writer who complained about the constant use of foul language.

Earlier this year, an academic who specialises in the history of broadcasting complained about the growth in broadcasting programmes of this sort, and was interviewed on the radio. In the interview he contrasted the present situation with the high ideals of Lord Reith, the first director-general of the BBC, and a devout member of one of the nonconformist churches, who apparently quoted Philippians 4:8 as representing the sort of things that the BBC should broadcast: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things".

We might perhaps think that even in Lord Reith's day some of the programmes would not have been quite what the Apostle Paul had in mind when writing to the Philippians, but there can be no doubt how badly things have declined since. A further recent experience comes to mind. In glancing through a leaflet advertising videos I was struck by the fact that most of them were rated '15' or '18', indicating of course the age at which it is considered appropriate for young people to see them. Many of these videos were in fact of popular recent TV programmes. In contrast, most videos of TV programmes from twenty or thirty years ago were rated 'U' or 'PG', indicating suitability for children. The deterioration in broadcasting standards that has occurred is clear, and the question arises as to how young people reaching fifteen suddenly become able to watch such material without it harming their minds.

The BBC has always been publicly financed, and not dependent on advertising revenue, but the introduction of broadcasting paid for by advertising led to competition for audiences and the need to pull them in by lowering standards. Standards of behaviour in the world have in the meantime dropped, with attitudes being increasingly liberal; in my life homosexuality has gone from being illegal, to being permissible, to being accepted as a valid lifestyle in its own right. One thing is sure, we will not get much help from the media of today in seeking to fill our minds with things that fit the six categories of Philippians 4:8; only the Word of God and things that conform to the standards laid down there can do that.

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