



THE ARCHBISHOP
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The Archbishop writes in the Christmas edition of the [Radio Times](#). The article follows in full...

One of the television programmes I'm looking forward to over Christmas is Gogglebox. Ever since it started in 2013 it has been something of a surprise hit, because who would have thought that watching other people watching television could be so entertaining?

What I love about it, is that I see in the people I'm watching, a joyful and diverse common humanity and a country that is represented in all its constituent parts – north and south, east and west. Somehow it restores my faith in humanity. I see how everyone responds and see my own responses and my own humanity. So when people are watching Strictly, they join in the dance moves from their settee. When it's the News at Ten or Question Time, they argue back. When it's something frightening, they hide behind a cushion. Whether it is Top of the Pops or Songs of Praise, they sing along. When it is something moving, they weep.

It turns out that television is not the passive intruder into home life, that we sometimes think it is, but a companion. Even a friend. And British television in general, and the BBC in particular is, like the very best friends, not just there to entertain you, but also to educate and inform.

Lord Reith, the great Scottish pioneer of public service broadcasting, had a vision which was not just about impartiality and regard for truth, but public service as well, weaving together those three elements of entertaining, educating and informing. This vision is as relevant today as it ever was. It is also under threat. The echo chambers of social media and the fake news that often goes with it have led us to mistrust and cynicism. In other parts of the world even news channels seem to be the mouthpieces of certain political parties or vested interests. Look at how the US election was covered in the US. Or look at how divided and mistrustful of each other that nation has become. Most alarming of all, there seems to be no common understanding of what is true or who could be trusted. Truth itself seems to have become a commodity that is bought by the highest bidder.

Divisions in our own country tell us that this could also happen here. I know that there are many across the country who feel that during this terrible pandemic year others have been favoured at their expense. The vision of a united but diverse United Kingdom that we see on Gogglebox, is not what we always see around us. Couple this with the rise and spending power of Netflix and Amazon and our British way of doing broadcasting is under threat. A voracious, unchecked market may just sweep it away. Even some of our own politicians don't always seem to see this. But along with the NHS, and possibly even the Church of England, the BBC and other providers of public service broadcasting like Channel Four (who gave us Gogglebox), are a precious part of our cultural ecology. They help us to see ourselves clearly. They can be trusted.

Also, at the end of this dark and difficult year, I know that many lonely, frightened and isolated people will have turned to the television (and

indeed the radio) for help, companionship, relief and guidance. This is a model of broadcasting which we should be proud of and not take for granted. The vision of a common humanity serving a common good is something worth holding onto. I want us to be a Gogglebox Britain, laughing and weeping together, and seeing our diversity as a great strength.

There is one other place this year where we watch other people watching, and that is the Christmas story. While shepherds watched their flocks by night, a glory shone around. When we observe and tell the Christmas story we watch Mary and Joseph respond to the call of the angels and the birth of Christ. We watch the angels visit the shepherds, and then the shepherds visit the manger. We watch the arrival of the wise men.

On Gogglebox we see a glorious, diverse picture of the United Kingdom, people from all walks of life, all regions, all colours, all faiths, all ethnicities, all ages, laughing and joking and arguing and weeping around the television. That same glorious, diverse humanity is also invited to the manger. Gathered there, we can look around and discover that we belong to one another. We are one humanity. We can also receive the help, guidance and friendship we need.

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