

17th November 2025

Truth

“It’s my morning drug.”

Dalai Lama, as quoted in ‘Les mots du dernier’ by François Gautier

The BBC is the oldest and largest local and global broadcaster by stature and by number of employees, employing over 21,000 staff in total, of whom nearly 17,900 are in public-sector broadcasting. And the BBC is in a bit of a pickle: it’s Director General has resigned; the Chief Executive Officer of BBC News has departed; and the President of the United States has filed a billion-dollar Lawsuit for reputational and financial damage.

The Dalai Lama’s morning drug was listening to BBC radio after his meditations. For many people – me included – BBC news coverage is second to none. Though “drug” may not be a metaphor of choice, nonetheless it points us in the right direction – if you can’t trust the BBC, who can you trust? Donald Trump, as we know, calls anyone from the media who dares to criticise him, fact-check his speeches, ask awkward questions, press for truth instead of lies, “a third-rate journalist”. But “speaking truth to power” matters: probing those who are in positions of authority; looking for transparency, honesty, integrity in public life.

In a 1919 eulogy for Senator William Joel Stone, one of his colleagues stated: “I honoured him because he was among the few men who dare to speak truth to the people in the presence of the king and dare to speak truth to the king in the presence of the people.” The specific phrase *speaking truth to power* is credited to Bayard Rustin in 1942. Rustin was a Black Quaker and a leader in the Civil Rights Movement, advocating nonviolent methods in his fight for social justice. In a letter written that year, Rustin stated that “the primary social function of a religious society is to ‘speak the truth to power.’ The truth is that war is wrong.”

However it’s done, whatever the target might be, no matter what the issue is, we need people – a free press, a persistent media, dedicated journalists, brave editors – who will similarly speak truth to power. The BBC has made some mistakes. There may yet be more casualties. But pray God that we don’t end up with bland reporting, or sycophantic journalists, or media that’s government controlled. Come on, BBC! We need you and others to keep speaking truth to power, perhaps more than ever before.

A prayer for today

Let us speak truth – to, and about, power – and value those who do so on our behalf.

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