

2011 08 Fowey News

Dear Friends

The demise of the *News of the World (NOTW)* ought give us pause for thought about the culture of our media and politicians - and both seem to have spiraled into a frenzy of navel gazing, accusation and witch-hunt. However it also holds a mirror up to us personally.

The tabloids feed on the scandal and misfortune of celebrity, royalty and public figures, happily allowing the ends (soaring sales and handsome profits) to justify the means. The wonder is that, knowing this to be the case, over 2.6 million of us regularly used to scour the pages of the *NOTW*, and about 4.5 million invested in the last edition when its headline 'Thank You & Goodbye' wrapped up 168 years of expose.

Tellingly, when the phone hacking scandal appeared limited to footballers' wives and film stars, the public barely raised an eyebrow, but once Milly Dowler and the families of soldiers lost in Iraq emerged as victims of eavesdropping reporters, outrage at illegal invasions of privacy abounded.

However, there is an old adage that whenever we point the finger at someone, we point three back at ourselves. Could it be that the nation has been so wrapped up in righteous indignation that we've failed to acknowledge our own part in the crimes? Murdoch's smart decision to pull the plug on the *NOTW* may ensure his empire's longevity, but the public's - our - hunger for salacious information about our favourite celebrities will surely see the gaps he's left quickly filled again.

Increasingly relevant, then, is the Bible's insistent warning in the book of Proverbs against the seemingly innocent indulgence of gossip: those little tit-bits that slide so deliciously into the gullet, provoke us to self-righteousness, snap judgements and unloving speculation.

We all know from our daily experience that it remains extremely difficult to stop a would-be informant from speaking, that it's almost impossible to refrain from passing the message on or walk away from friends discussing the latest scandal. And I am no exception. It is a generic 'sin', but it's also a peculiar failing of small communities like ours.

In a world where gossip generates entire business empires, the Christian worldview challenges us not only to resist the temptation to buy into the gossip culture in our choice of reading material and sources of news, but also in choosing what to discuss with friends, colleagues and family, refusing to play any part in the rumour mill, even that of the listening ear.

I wonder how much healthier, more enjoyable and positive Fowey would be without gossip?

With every blessing  
Philip de Grey-Warter