

Resisting the infallibility of hindsight

Thought for the Day

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As you know, the news has been very much in the news recently.

First there is the still-simmering row between the BBC and Downing Street about the so-called "dodgy dossier", then the Israeli government black-listed the BBC on grounds of alleged bias, and now the publication of the BBC annual report has generated the annual cacophony of synthetic rage on the back-benches.

Meanwhile, back in a surreal corner of what passes for the real world, the Church of England is once again on the brink of schism over the appointment and immediate dis-appointment of Dr Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading.

I was very struck by one comment the Archbishop of Canterbury was reported to have made. The media, he said, had turned the whole matter into a soap opera, peopled by characters who were at once utterly unbelievable, but at the same time utterly compulsive.

This is not an original point, but it was tellingly made: we live in a world in which we are increasingly unable to distinguish between truth and fiction, not so much because our own brains have atrophied, but because of how information is prepackaged and presented to us. There are only goodies and baddies; and never any shades of grey. Just as war reporting now happens in real time, so hindsight now is instant.

We need to remind ourselves that complex issues are just that – complex! And difficult decisions are, well, difficult! It's all too easy to subject an action replay to forensic standards of examination, and then declare the referee a blind idiot. Or to watch the cricket highlights and declare the game exciting – forgetting that it took 3 days for these wickets to fall, not 3 minutes.

We need to remind ourselves too that we can all be both honest and wrong.

It is hardly an original thought that to err is human - but that is no less true for being a triuism! Judge no-one, says the Talmud, till you find yourself in their place; give everyone the benefit of the doubt; and know when to say you don't know.