

## **Private and Public Morality**

### ***Thought for the Day***

***Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)***

***Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 21 June 2011***

It's been a bad few weeks for sex. A New York Representative resigns after sending female acquaintances the kind of photos that I can't even describe on family radio. The Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is revealed to have fathered a child, as Americans and Victorians quaintly say, out of wedlock. I need hardly mention the tabloid obsession with the off-field activities of certain footballers, or the forests-worth of magazines speculating about the affairs of entirely fictional television characters.

Why is our society collectively so obsessed? Why do the French seem to have an entirely different attitude? And the Americans yet another? Should we be agog, unconcerned, or censorious?

I know it's sacrilege to say this in Scotland, but speaking as one who has no interest in football, my only concern is when its antics transfer from the back to the front of my newspaper, displacing real news – you know the kind of thing: the state of the planet, poverty and natural disasters, war and peace. Of course, as the old saying goes, these are just matters of life and death; football is much more important than that!

But there is a serious point to be made about the boundary between private and public morality. Infidelity doesn't make someone a worse footballer, or a worse banker, or even a worse Governor. But it may tell the rest of us something about whether they can be trusted to keep their promises – and that is something that matters in politicians. Even more, if they parade one set of values in public, but conspicuously fail to live by them in private, then that really matters.

That's why exposing some of these human foibles may be in the public interest – and not merely something the public is interested in. But there also have to be limits. The measure of what we need to know is not what sells salacious magazines. But where do we draw the line? I don't know – and if I did, someone might get a superinjunction to stop me telling you!

*Ephraim Borowski*

*Thought for the Day: Radio Scotland, 21 June 2011*