

A required element for any train journey I make is that I read *Private Eye*. It usually takes from London to Peterborough, because I don't understand the business pages In the Back. It's the cartoons which I remember most. One in particular contrasted the past with the present. In the past a young woman is committing her deepest thoughts to a diary which she keeps under lock and key, to be seen by no-one. In the present the equivalent young woman is committing her deepest thoughts to her social media profile, to be seen by as many people as possible on the internet, in the hope of a publishing deal.

Our personal lives have never been so visible, and the possibilities for us to promote ourselves are endless. We watched the latest Bourne movie last week. There the CIA have access to absolutely everything. But the point is that it's not that the internet is sinisterly full of secret information about us. It's that we are choosing to make ourselves public as never before. Google, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, Instagram...all say 'look at me'. And don't think this is all about the young. The most avid users of Instagram are the retired. They are called Instagramers.

How can I make my blog popular? How can I get more friends on my social network site? Do you care that people are going to him, not you? That last question is two thousand years old, and asked of John the Baptist by his followers, who see that Jesus is gaining followers: a key marker of the success of a rabbi's teaching style, and his livelihood. There was 'look at me' then, as now. The Baptist's reply, in a complex passage at the end of John 3 which includes editorial comment from John the Evangelist and words of Jesus, is masterful, and a necessary challenge to those in a headlong pursuit of fame. In the world of the spiritual teacher, the world of the one who speaks as God demands, the only power is that given by God, not generated by humans. If his words bear lasting fruit, says the Baptist, it shows that what he has comes from God.

This is wise, but the rest of what he says is stunningly counter-cultural, for then and for now. You know, he says, that I never said I was the Messiah. I have always said that I was the best man, not the Bridegroom. John might have used all sorts of distinctive methods to get his message across, but the whole point of it has not been to draw attention to himself, but to point somewhere else. His greatest joy is to recognise that Jesus is what he was looking for, preparing for, and talking about. And then come the words which really bite in a self obsessed generation. 'He must increase, and I must decrease'. Archbishop William Temple, commenting on this passage asks "is not this near to the perfection of humility and self abnegation?" It may well be so.

The Church has to walk the way of the Baptist. We have the greatest message, the richest treasure, the finest beauty, the deepest love, the most profound healing to share. John the Evangelist sums it up at the end of Chapter 3: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath". What do we have to offer people but eternal life: life in all fullness? So, like the Baptist, we must point to that with everything that we have, use every skill and gift we have been given, draw attention to the message in new and exciting ways. We should use Google and Facebook and YouTube and blogs and everything else, just as we have already used word and print and art and music. The problem is that all of these can serve to make *us* look good, when all we should be about is drawing people closer to God. It happens in places like this too.

Looking grand in a grand place is not unpleasant. It will be great to bask a little in the splendour of the ITV series *Victoria*, starting tonight and filmed here. Oops. 'He must increase, but I must decrease'.

You don't need a Facebook profile or a blog to make a spectacle of yourself. How you act in the street, or with your friends, or in a meeting, or by letter, or in your personal diary, or by what you wear in church - all of those are media where we are projected. The key is to accept that God has made us who we are so that we can become ourselves in him and for him. So what will you project? For Christ to increase is not for us to disappear, but it is for us to be found newly made in him. To rejoice in that - to decrease ourselves - is to find true fulfilment. Then we can be as loud as we like about the God who has given us voice.