

Bloggers buzz over Murdoch as 'Bible mogul'

by [Troy Reimink](#) in the [August 23, 2011](#) issue

The scandal involving Rupert Murdoch's British tabloid empire brought scrutiny to, of all places, western Michigan and the Zondervan publishing company.

Among the major holdings in Murdoch's News Corporation is publisher HarperCollins, which owns Zondervan, the Christian publishing giant known for prominent Christian authors and best-selling editions of the New International Version Bible.

Murdoch's Bible connections set the blogosphere abuzz. The Zondervan connection to the still-unfolding scandal was first pointed out by Will Braun, former editor of *Geez* magazine, on his Holy Moly blog, where he described the 80-year-old Murdoch as a "Bible mogul."

Or, as *USA Today's* Faith & Reason blog put it, "Would you buy a Bible from Rupert Murdoch . . . ? You probably already have." Zondervan, formed in 1931 in Grand Rapids, has become the nation's largest Bible publisher. HarperCollins bought the company in 1988.

Murdoch is best known in the U.S. as the tycoon who owns media properties such as Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*. Murdoch was forced to close one of his British tabloids, *News of the World*, following allegations that its reporters had hacked the phone accounts of thousands of people, including victims of violent crime and terrorism, families of dead soldiers, and politicians and various celebrities.

The controversy has rattled British institutions, resulted in several high-profile arrests and resignations and thrown the country's tabloid media culture into harsh focus. In his blog post, Braun highlighted some ethical issues the Murdoch connection raises for writers who work with Zondervan:

"For those of us who care about the Christian scriptures, what are we to make of this mix of billionaire media tycoonery, allegations of phone hacking and bribery, and the Holy Word of God?" he asked. "What are we to make of the fact that every time we buy a Zondervan product we contribute to Murdoch's mogul-dom, which includes a personal fortune that Forbes pegged at \$6.3 billion last year?"

Braun interviewed Christian author Shane Claiborne, who has published books with Zondervan, about the potential ethical conflict and whether it would affect his future with the company. Claiborne said he has mixed feelings but would likely continue working with Zondervan as long as he could "protect the integrity of the message."

"I don't think that the world exists in 100 percent pure and 100 percent impure options," Claiborne said.

Zondervan spokeswoman Tara Powers told *Christianity Today* that the Murdoch scandal "does not present an ethical dilemma for Zondervan," and she said she was unaware that any of its authors had serious concerns.

To the *Grand Rapids Press*, Powers said: "Throughout our 80-year history as a leading Christian publisher, Zondervan has always operated with autonomy, editorial independence, and the freedom to fulfill our mission to meet the needs of people with resources that glorify Jesus Christ and promote biblical principles."

Jeff Jarvis, author of *What Would Google Do?*, said he had been scheduled to publish his next book, *Public Parts*, with HarperCollins but pulled it and found a different publisher.

Evangelical scion Frank Schaeffer, whose father Francis Schaeffer was a fundamentalist figure of the 1970s, has called on Rick Warren, Rob Bell and other prominent Christian writers who have published with Zondervan/HarperCollins to stop doing business with the company and thus enriching "this dreadful man."

—RNS