

The End of Celebrity Worship?

David Posey

We are not, under any circumstances, to worship anyone but God. Jesus was tempted by the devil to worship him in exchange for the souls of all people for all time (the devil promised to give Jesus control over the kingdoms of the world). But Jesus' response was quick and unyielding: "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Matthew 4:10).

Yet, if I was asked to describe one constant in the culture during my lifetime, I might be inclined to put "celebrity worship" at the top of the list. Many other aspects of our society have changed and in some cases, those changes have been dramatic. The most glaring example has been the systematic removal of God from the public square. But the curiosity about, the fascination with — even the worship of — celebrities has been consistent in my 7 decades of life. In the 50s, it was Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and Elvis Presley. Many people worshipped at the altar of these iconic entertainers — and some still do, even though they died long ago. Even the presidency of John F. Kennedy was turned into a celebrity event; they called it "Camelot."

Later, Jackie O had her disciples and her every step was cherished by some in our society. Then, it was Princess Diana, certain rock stars, actors, athletes and comedians who were taken way too seriously. Even some of these celebrities were surprised. Someone once said, "we are famous and admired because we are famous and admired." Today, Oprah probably reigns as the most iconic figure of our time. She's even being promoted as a presidential candidate. Seriously. But, after all, we have a celebrity for a president; and even he is "worshipped" by a segment of our society.

This tendency to worship big name entertainers and celebrities may be in decline. An indication of this is the steep decline in viewership of the Oscars.

According to this week's The Culture Translator,* "The awards show has been criticized for its elitism, lack of diversity, and... the dark cloud of sexual misconduct... Why it's a sign of the times: A generation ago, Hollywood A-listers inhabited an alternative universe of unattainable wealth and fame. Now because of YouTube and Instagram, anyone can be a star. They don't seem as otherworldly as they once did. Notions of fame have been reinvented, and the audience has become the star. And since Gen Z isn't watching as much traditional media, many actors have zero celebrity status with them. They are more influenced by YouTube celebs because 'they create communities of fans. They interact with and listen to these fans. As a result, the fans feel a real connection' to their favorite YouTube celebrity. On Sunday as you're anticipating who'll win picture of the year... your son or daughter is more likely to be watching Liza Koshy or PewDiePie."*

Look at that again: "since Gen Z isn't watching as much traditional media, many actors have zero celebrity status with them." My first reaction is, "Bravo, Gen Z!!" But I know, deeper down, that's two-edged sword. I'm only a tiny bit familiar with YouTube — I consult it when I can't install something, and that's fairly often. What concerns me is that, while movies and video games at least have ratings that help you know whether it's appropriate or not, there are no such guidelines for YouTube, as far as I know. But that's another issue. Meanwhile, it's a good thing for our culture to move away from the worship of anyone other than God himself.