

JC - Just Celebrity?

When I was in Los Angeles earlier in the year, I thought I would go see a movie in the landmark cinema complex, Grauman's Chinese Theatre, in the heart of Hollywood. On arriving I found that I was not exactly welcome that night as it was the premiere of *Ironman*, and I

- (a) did not have a special invitation;
- (b) was not dressed appropriately, and
- (c) did not have a model hanging from my arm.

Having arrived I decided to stay, along with thousands of other people, and watch the curious, if somewhat vicarious spectacle of the movie premiere. I was able to find a good spot at the top of the Kodak Theatre complex overlooking the red carpet zone, and there witnessed that most fascinating phenomenon I will call the arrival pageant. As cars approached people would scream and shout louder, and then when the people alighted from the car, there were two reactions; silence, as people realised the people arriving were not celebrities, or more enthusiastic screaming as the stars emerged.

In some cases, there was almost a lull in the reaction as people tried to work out if the people were really celebrities, and then once realising they were not, or one couldn't be sure, they simply moved their attention to the next car arriving.

One of the more interesting reactions was for one of the oldest and perhaps most intriguing member of the Hollywood set, Stan Lee (the guru of comic book action heroes), who has his own section of fans, in fact distinct groupies. It appears that while youth is prized in Hollywood, being an icon can help one maintain celebrity status.

In another case of celebrity following, I watched a report about a TV station which had arranged for a makeover for a 'country girl', and then passed her off as a new celebrity at a party in Sydney. Her photo even made the society pages on Sunday, mingled with other 'real' famous people. This put a new twist on the cultural expression - 'famous for being famous'.

Reading through the whole bible can be a very sobering experience for someone caught in a culture that portrays celebrity as the central focus for life. One comes to a quick realisation that fame is very temporary, and that celebrity status is a fleeting star. I am also reminded of the film, *The Life of Brian*, which is really one critical analogy, where the mythical, and even crucified Brian is soon forgotten, along with all the other Jesus pretenders of the day, and the different versions of the People's Front of Judea (PFJ, or is it the JPF?).

Do you love the celebrity life? Do you like to be associated with fame? Who do you really follow? Even many Christians today unwittingly follow Christian celebrities, some even self-anointed. Whether they are a retired bishop, a Christian singer, or even your local preacher, perhaps you have placed someone on the altar of the celebrity church and are praising their name whenever you speak, or even worshipping using their latest sacred writings?

I hope that I am never harnessed to the millstone of stardom, but then I am aware that the world-wind of popular culture is a category 5 force, and sometimes I am even so fascinated by celebrity status that I find myself wanting to know the names of Angelina and Brad's latest offerings. Thanks be to God though, I am usually brought back to reality by one name – Jesus Christ. Our hope is in looking to Jesus, rather than looking to become a member of a celebrity cult that has infected the church as well as the world.

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