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Gleanings

The Real American Idol



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It seems that America has gone wild over the American idol craze. (For this article, I am using *idol* in the sense of something that is admired and respected, and therefore worthy of emulation.) Within human beings there appears to be an insatiable desire to admire and model the lives of others.

What makes idols so special is their ability to do something very well—something that we respect and value. For example, in the world of investing, Warren Buffet is a revered pundit; in golf it is the redoubtable, though tarnished, Tiger Woods; in business, icons such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates are held in high esteem; in philanthropy the late Mother Teresa is venerated; and in public policy some idolize President Obama.

And yes, there is a popular television program that bears the name *American Idol*. The program features nascent unknown entertainers seeking an opportunity to expand their careers. It is indeed amateur hour. But in the world of entertainment, particularly music entertainment, arguably the idol of pop music for the past several decades was, and still is, the late Michael Jackson. His music prowess is widely acclaimed. And his popularity is evidenced by his elaborate private \$1 million funeral and the continued admiration of his music. Since his death in June 2009, his estate has earned more than \$300 million.

(<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/celeb/articles/2011/02/18/20110218michael-jacksons-estate-nets-310-million-since-death.html>)

Apart from music, however, the rest of Michael's life seems unenviable. Consider the following:

Marriage: He had two failed marriages.

Parenting: He displayed poor judgment by dangling one of his children from a hotel balcony.

Financial: At his death, he reportedly owed \$400 million and was on the verge of financial collapse.

Maturity: His Neverland Ranch was a testimony to his desire to remain a child.

Blame: He was frequently portrayed as a victim, beginning with his early years of torment by a tyrannical father.

Child molestation charges: At least twice he was accused of molesting children and in one case settled the dispute by paying \$22 million.

Are these traits worthy of emulation? Hopefully you agree that these are not enviable characteristics. So it appears that the fans of Michael Jackson ignore these unenviable traits and focus on one feature that they value—his music.

By contrast, there was a man who lived many years ago who displayed impeccable qualities. For example, though he never married, he respected the sanctity of marriage. His sensitivity to and love for children was legendary, but he never abused them. He worked in a pedestrian profession faithfully submitting to and apprenticing under his father. Money was never his goal; instead he was committed to simply serving others. His focus was on truth and encouraged all who would listen to learn and follow truth. Taking responsibility for his life, he never blamed anyone, even though he was misunderstood and unjustly treated, particularly during his latter years. In the end, he was arrested; his followers abandoned him. During his trial, he was maliciously maligned, wrongly convicted, mercilessly tortured and eventually brutally executed. Though he did not accumulate a large financial fortune, he died solvent and made sure that his mother was cared for by one of his few faithful friends. An unknown follower buried him. There was no funeral or memorial service for this man who was the most righteous man who ever lived.

He died in obscurity, though there were many events that accompanied his passing, such as a prolonged period of darkness, a sacred curtain torn in two, the earth shook, rocks split, tombs broke open, and some deceased people came back to life. The people who witnessed these events were at a loss to explain them.



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Though this man displayed wonderful traits, he was not idolized like Michael Jackson nor did his estate reap a financial windfall after his death.

Who was this man? By now you have probably guessed that I am talking about Jesus—the most significant and successful person in human history. He was the only one who lived sinlessly and therefore did not deserve to die. But he chose to die so that he could defeat death for us.

So significant was Christ that even the widely used Gregorian calendar testifies to his centrality in history. Years before his birth are designated as BC, which stands for “before the conception of Christ”; years after his birth are designated AD, which stands for “after the birth of Christ.”

Notwithstanding the preeminence of Christ, why would someone like Michael Jackson be so idolized and Christ suffer such rejection?

This reality is a testimony to the depravity of man. In the first three chapters of Romans, the apostle Paul eloquently argues the case for human depravity. His conclusion is clear and, I believe, irrefutable: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 NIV).

Evidence of this truth can be seen in the treatment of Jesus on the day of his death. Sometime overnight, Jesus was arrested at the request of the religious leaders. Though the civil authorities conducted the arrest, they questioned the motives of the religious leaders. In the end, the civil authorities found Jesus innocent and offered the religious leaders an option—release a nefarious character named Barabbas or release Jesus.

Barabbas was a notorious prisoner who was incarcerated for murder and insurrection. Perhaps the civil authorities assumed that offering a choice between Barabbas and Jesus would be a “no brainer.” Surely the religious people would choose Jesus, who was clearly a very righteous person, over a very unrighteous person like Barabbas. But they didn’t. The religious people chose Barabbas. Indeed, the apostle Paul was correct, we are all sinners by nature and therefore default to rebellion against God.

Like the religious people of Jesus’ day, we today select Barabbas over Christ; that is, we select alignment with sin rather than alignment with righteousness. So it is not surprising that people, many of whom profess Christ, idolize a person like Michael Jackson.

Michael Jackson did not epitomize a person who is worthy of emulation. Notwithstanding his music prowess, he was not a good role model. Michael Jackson’s life does not demonstrate that he was a follower of truth. Nor was he successful in any area of life other than pop music. The only reason that he is idolized is because his music tickles the itch of depraved men and women who worship pleasure and entertainment instead of the living God.

Sadly many today fail to recognize that the one genuine advocate of truth was and is Jesus Christ. The consummate sage in life was and is Jesus. He was and is the only one who is truly worthy to be idolized. We should focus on emulating him and seeking wisdom from him.

How would you answer the question of Barabbas or Christ? May you choose Christ and pattern your life after the one person entirely worthy of your emulation—the one real “American idol.”

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