Why We Love Celebrity

(April 26, 2011) So I guess there's going to be a royal wedding "across the pond" on Saturday. Just like when the groom's mum and dad got married, there will be pre-dawn wedding watching parties over here in the States (since for some reason, the Brits couldn't be talked into waiting for American prime time, I suppose).

The royal festivities have put Kate Middleton, about to become "Princess Catherine," in the celebrity spotlight. And oh, how we love our celebrities! Celebrities are people who are famous, sometimes simply because they are celebrities and not because they've done anything especially noteworthy.

Technology makes it possible to feed our insatiable hunger for "celebrity news." 24/7 news channels have to fill their time somehow when there isn't any *real* news, so they create news by reporting on people's divorces and pregnancies, what's happening in the entertainment world, and show pictures of unrealistically and artificially beautiful women strutting and posing in their gowns on a red carpet somewhere.

Why are people so taken with celebrity, anyway?

I think it is yet another reflection of the brokenness of our fallen world. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I believe God hard-wired us to worship Him because He is the source of life and all that is good, beautiful, and true. I think He created us as worshiping creatures because He knew it would "fill our tanks" and deeply bless and nurture our souls to pour out adoration and worship on One so infinitely worthy of praise. In the same way that we love to see great beauty in spectacular sunsets and want to share it with someone else, in the same way that we love falling in love, in the same way that we love being part of a crowd when our team is winning—we were created to long for a connection to the transcendent,

especially the transcendent God.

God creates us for Himself; He creates us to love us and draw us into intimate fellowship with Father, Son and Spirit. Our natural response to that kind of unimaginably huge and powerful love is worship.

But then sin entered the world, and the Fall distorted and messed up everything. Instead of relating rightly to our Creator and the Lover of our souls, upright with faces upturned in love and adoration, we were bent and twisted. After the fall, when we reach out, we are no longer reaching up—because of our "bentness," we reach out to other parts of the creation. (See also: idolatry) Yet we are still hard-wired to worship.

So we worship each other.

And celebrities, distant and unattainable, function well as objects of worship since we usually don't see how they are flawed and fallen just like everyone else. Like us.

Cue hordes of screaming, worshiping fans at rock concerts and movie premieres.

Cue tears of loss and sorrow when a movie star gets married and takes himself out of the pool of eligible bachelors that fuel girls' fantasies of marrying "Prince Charming."

Cue "entertainment news" anchors reporting breathlessly about the latest Hollywood gossip and speculations as if TV, movie and music stars were more important than other people.

Celebrity, I submit, is broken, misdirected worship of the creature instead of the Creator. It is yet another way in which we see the brokenness of a fallen world.

But there will come a day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11). There will come a day when Jesus will come with the clouds,

and every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7). And we will worship rightly.

Because Jesus is the *ultimate* rock star.

This blog post originally appeared at
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Paris Hilton and What We Want

Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton.

Please excuse the repetition, but I want this article to score highly in Google searches.

You see, *Google Zeitgeist*, the mega-search engine's report on its most popular search topics, says the heiress scored number one on 2006 Google News searches. The report presents a glimpse of the "spirit of the times," giving clues to websurfers' interests.

In news (yes, I said "news," not "entertainment") searches, Paris beat Orlando Bloom, cancer, and Hurricane Katrina. Borat and Hezbollah topped "Who is" searches. Among U.S. searches for "Scandal," the Duke Lacrosse episode took three of the first four slots.

What else do people want to know about? Google's top-ten lists in various categories include MySpace, Nicole Kidman, Tom Cruise, Britney Spears, Paul McCartney, Pamela Anderson, Reggie Bush, and Clay Aiken.

Why do celebrities and entertainment rank so high? Perhaps

it’s the desire to connect with something larger than ourselves. Maybe boredom explains some celebrity obsession. And don’t rule out diversion.

For some—maybe many—daily life ranges from harried to overwhelming: soured relationships, job conflict, financial pressure, health distress. Diverting focus can ease your troubled mind, at least temporarily.

Of course, everyone needs mental and emotional breaks. Diversion can be a healthy coping mechanism—until it becomes obsessive. Then it can lead to denying reality, perhaps obscuring genuine wants and needs.

Suppose we had a mind/heart/soul reader to discover what people really want once their basic physical needs are met. What would we find? Psychologist Abraham Maslow’s renowned hierarchy of basic needs includes safety, love, esteem and self-actualization.{1} Perhaps our soul reader would detect desires for acceptance, thriving personal friendships, peace of mind, health, security.

Maslow also realized that several profound fears—including the fear of death—trouble humanity.{2} Our soul reader might find that people also want an answer to death.

Anthropologist Ernest Becker argued in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*,{3} that much human behavior can be explained by a deep desire to deny death’s reality, to repress “the terror of death.” No wonder. Which would you enjoy more, right this minute: contemplating your own death and its aftermath . . . or reading, exercising, web- or channel surfing, conversing, partying, working, shopping, etc.?

If we don’t have a solution to fear of death, we can invent ways to avoid thinking about it. Alas, attractive and even worthwhile pursuits can become enslaving. Amassing the most “toys”; rat-race schedules; obsession with career, job,

education, sports or even friends can insulate people from facing their own mortality.

The biblical book of Hebrews presents a similar analysis of the human dilemma, reasoning that people "have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying." {4} It claims that Jesus died to "deliver" people from this slavery so they might connect with God in time and eternity.

It seems morbid to always be thinking about your own death. But could avoiding it altogether constitute unhealthy denial? Could excessive focus on certain pursuits become risky diversion from life's real issues, like personal meaning, personal worth, fulfilling relationships, and what Sigmund Freud called "the painful riddle of death"?{5}

Could obsession with Paris Hilton and her *Google Zeitgeist* pals conceal deep longings, insecurities and fears in individual websurfers and in society at large?

As the esteemed British philosopher and rocker Sir Mick Jagger famously counseled, "You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometime . . . you just might find you get what you need." {6} A friendly question for my fellow websurfers: Is what you want, what you need?

Notes

1. A. H. Maslow (1943), "A Theory of Human Motivation"; Originally Published in *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396; at http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm, accessed December 28, 2006.
2. Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (Penguin Books Limited, ©1964 by Kappa Delta Pi and ©1970 [preface] The Viking Press), Appendix A, "Religious Aspects of Peak-Experiences," items 8 & 14; at http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/maslowa.htm, accessed December 28, 2006.
3. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press

Paperbacks, 1997; original copyright was 1973).
4. Hebrews 2:15 NLT.
5. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961 edition; James Strachey translator and editor; original work was published in 1928) 19.
6. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (songwriters), “You Can’t Always Get What You Want.” Lyrics at http://rollingstones.com/discog/index.php?v=so&a=1&id=124; accessed December 28, 2006.

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