

Venerating Icons

Cecil Hook

We don't call celebrities idols. Icons sounds better.

Through the influence of the press, movies, and television our generation has fully developed the cult of the personality. The successful athlete, actor, musician, entertainer, or celebrity in general becomes an icon representing the highest fulfillment of earthly ambitions. They depend upon the media to create their image and then complain about the hounding media. Admirers help to make them grossly wealthy; yet they may demean a hard-working CEO in a giant corporation for making as much money as a sleazy actor or an athlete.

Countless people died this month whose names will never be heard outside their family or neighborhood. Of such as they, Thomas Gray urged in his *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard*:

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

Following in the character of Jesus, Mother Teresa made us aware of the worth of the nameless poor. She did not go to them as a celebrity or politician who takes advantage of a good photo opportunity. Her love was out of a pure heart with no hypocrisy. The cameras only found her after she had been doing that for decades. The media tried to make her an icon, and succeeded in a sense, but she wanted the attention given to God's most forgotten people. While I strongly disagree with some of her theological beliefs, I dare not compare my facilitation of the two greatest commandments with hers. It scares me to ask: does God respect correct theology more than love which is the doing of his will?

Princess Diana, was at the other end of the spectrum, born in privilege, a beautiful woman of elegance and grace, and capturing the admiration of the world as she married a future king and gave birth to a future king. She also showed compassion. The world overlooked her indiscretions which sold the tabloids. I am not her judge. I would like to know she was right with God. I listened for some expression of her faith but did not hear it. Whether her benevolent acts were simply of humanitarian concern or expressions of Christian love, I will not surmise. Whether she was an icon of Christianity or humanism is left unsaid, as far as I know. The world seems not to care. Whether in the pomp of royalty of London or among the filthy homeless of Calcutta, both had opportunity to honor God.

There is no harm in wondering. I wonder, if Princess Diana and Mother Teresa met on the other side of the veil, enabled to look back on the scene they left behind. Would there be joy, or grief, as they looked upon their mourners?

In the country cemetery, Gray concluded:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
All that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

The grave is the great equalizer of earthly mankind. The resurrection and judgment will reveal the heroes worthy of our emulation, whether they were famous or obscure. []