

The Danger of Christian Celebrity

I have been back in the USA for over a year now. After living in South Asia and Africa for almost 10 years collectively, I'm noticing things I probably didn't before. I'm older, not nearly as starry-eyed and have had opportunity to see the beautiful and the broken in so many places as I have traveled.

There is a trend in some parts of our Western Christianity that is dangerous and counter-productive, especially as it has recently been amplified by social media's explosion. It mirrors the "cult of celebrity" in popular culture where twitter feeds dictate reality and reality TV is anything but real.

Let me preface what I am about to say by saying there have always been leaders who were well known in their day within the church and recognized by history as influential. I am not talking about being well known in and of itself.

In the last few years as the selfie has become a social media staple, it seems the goal has shifted even in ministry to becoming well known, as well as having a more powerful platform, a bigger ministry, a wider-reaching Facebook presence and a broader personal branding empire ... for Jesus' sake of course. #allforhim (I couldn't resist.)

History's "famous" leaders—and many of today's—became known simply as a by-product of their fixed gazes following Christ, the only famous one, and paying unimaginably high prices to do so. **Being "well known" was *never* the goal. Being known well by Him was.**

I've been hearing a subtle shift (and sometimes not-so-subtle) in some emerging leaders away from sacrifice and servanthood to savvy staging and success, from empathy to empire, from

celebration to celebrity. “I want to be famous for Jesus so I can influence many.”

Celebrity—not to be confused with having a broad influence as a leader—has no place in the church. Period. It is dangerous and subversive to the gospel itself. *Celebrity puts leaders on pedestals (usually not of their own making) and then crucifies them when they fall off or fail to meet the image others have created for them.* Celebrity creates unreachable “guru-status” with special inside knowledge or gifting and by default makes that gifting seem unattainable to the masses.

Jesus Himself rejected man’s pedestals and crowns, instead choosing a cross.

The gospel is a celebration of His strength in our weakness, His faithfulness in our failures, His beauty in our brokenness and His victory in places of our defeat.

Are we raising up a generation truly hungry for Jesus even if He takes them to a place of utter obscurity where they never see a stage or receive a speaking invitation? If they never become a “revivalist” or are never recognized as an apostle? If they never sign a book deal or garner 1000 fans on Facebook? The ultimate goal must be to hear His “Well done” when the race is finished.

We create the benchmark of success for the next generation by what we celebrate in our own. That is why “Christian celebrity” is possibly one of the greatest dangers to the future of the Western Church.

Let’s begin to intentionally cultivate celebration and not celebrity, where Jesus is celebrated in each of our lives, whether we are known throughout continents or simply to a few immediate friends. Where we celebrate the truth that everything He paid for on the cross is available to every single person who believes and that there are no glass ceilings in God’s Kingdom.

The church that lives out this kind of celebration becomes dangerous to darkness and unstoppable in His love that never fails.

Michele Perry is the founder of Create61 and River Tree Creative based in Jacksonville, Florida. She is an artist & author who spent the last seven years in an African war zone as a founder of an international development and ministry base with a children's rescue home. You can find her online at .