

Hero Worship and Idolatry

It's a multi-billion dollar business, embracing films, video movies, TV soaps, books, magazines and newspapers—the business of attempting to satisfy the insatiable appetites of millions of people who wish to know every detail possible about the private lives of their "stars," their heroes. Who is your "hero"? A few candidates might be: General Norman Swartzkopf, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, General Kelly, General Neil, or the staff sergeant who lives in your own home town. Or Michael Jordan, Nolan Ryan, Jack Nicklaus, Joe Montana, Boris Becker, Julio Iglesias, Mike Tyson, George Bush, Martina Navratolova, Michael J. Fox, Lorrie Morgan, Barbara Walters, Ytzak Shamir, Jessie Jackson, or Jesus Christ. Is there anything anomalous about this list?

by Garner Ted Armstrong

President Bush has dubbed all the more than one half million American servicemen and women who participated in Operation Desert Storm, "America's Heroes."

We all know what heroes and heroines are. They are people who are admired for their great deeds, bravery, or noble qualities, according to the dictionary. Originally, the term "hero" meant a person who was a demigod—half a step above mortal humans, not quite divine, endowed with supernatural strength and powers.

The heroes of history are many. To even begin to list the names of the heroes of but one nation would require many pages. In a continual procession of parades, welcome home parties, public appearances and media events, America celebrated the homecoming of her living heroes, culminating in perhaps the greatest Fourth of July celebration in the nation's history when hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on parades, parties, and fireworks displays.

People admire other people who excel or succeed. In a special way, we tend to admire those who have performed a truly "heroic" deed, like rescuing a potential drowning victim, foiling a bank robbery, winning a major championship, setting a new record, or climbing the tallest mountain. Most especially, millions admire people they dub "stars" (an incredible accolade all by itself, since a star is a sun or a super nova, a million times larger than our sun), who act in movies or television.

In early frontier American actors and actresses were held largely in contempt, assumed to be what their careers required: less than honest, fraudulent; a put-on, a mimic; someone who hid his or her true character behind an assumed one, and who, often as not, was considered to be a con artist and a thief as well.

With the advent of motion pictures, all this changed.

Today, "movie stars" are the fascinating *idols* of millions. This is why they are in such demand by "peep hole" and "dirty linen" type publications, like those festooning the check-out counters in thousands of super markets with blaring headlines about this or that screen idol's homosexuality, or latest divorce, remarriage, or paternity suit, or alleged drug use. Many movie magazines, and classier, slick and successful ones like *People*, continually explore each and every available tidbit, real or imagined, about these movie idols.

Their biographies are usually instant best-sellers. It seems to matter not that some are perverts, drug abusers, or converts to this or that Indian guru with Zen Buddhist or TM connections; nor whether they die of AIDS—still, they are "stars," to be adored, admired, worshiped.

Should the average politician or CEO of a major corporation be exposed as a closet queen, or become the defendant in a lawsuit from a homosexual live-in, his career is over.

Not so with a "movie star." His or her career is only enhanced. Like a herd of grunting, squealing Yorkshire hogs, the general public lunges toward the slop trough of purely fictionalized people—fantasy land characters who do not really exist—voraciously shouldering each other out of the way to be first in line to *see* one of their idols on stage, or deftly pressing their hands into wet cement on Hollywood Boulevard. Once within sight and sound of their "star," they stare glassy-eyed, their breath coming short, clutching autograph pads, appearing as if in the final stages of a pseudo-sexual paroxysm, absolutely mindless in their wriggling, clammy-palmed, sensual enjoyment.

Each year, they spend prodigiously to read interviews, biographies, scandals, confessions, and largely fictitious and inventive snippets about their idols of television and screen.

The new host of idols are not known to most of the population over 30. They are often rail thin, pasty-faced, pimply youths with a chronic snuffle from the smack, crack, or heroin they use, wearing clothing obviously retrieved from a trash bin *behind* your local Goodwill store, replete with beads, weird symbols, gold chains, a couple of frayed holes which were probably eaten into the denim by acid.

When it is rock concert time, they leap onto center stage carrying a musical instrument to the shrieks of a maddened crowd of youths in various stages of alcohol or drug-induced inebriation.

With pallid, pock-marked faces, large, irregular noses, bad teeth, and a shocking thatch of orange-yellow hair flaring forward from the top of their "Mohawk," clutching a microphone in a huge outdoor stadium, wildly mincing, gyrating, kicking, wriggling, stamping their long, bony feet, they effect weird imitations of burlesque dancers as they bump and grind their way through a clashing jumble of noise called a "song."

The audience goes wild as a pimply-faced "star," hair wildly flopping, leaps onto center stage, jabbing his guitar into the air like a lewd phallic symbol, and screeches unintelligible noises into a microphone accompanied by the maddening booming of drums, and the ear-shattering wail of electronically boosted, vibrating strings.

The glassy-eyed crowd of worshipers seems to go immediately into a trance. They shriek and scream, shake their heads, stamp and jerk, twist and spasm as if in the throes of demon possession.

The other day, some in such a crowd were killed, others injured, in a mad melee. Sometimes, when for some reason (perhaps a drug overdose?) their "idols" do not show for such a concert, the enraged "fans" riot, having decided to kill each other.

The themes of these "heavy metal" and "acid rock" and "hard rock" and "satanist" groups are usually suicide, mutilation, satanism, murder, nihilism, and death.

To many people over 30, their words and their music are about as amusing as watching a 40-year old documentary about some stone-age society in Papua painting each other with ashes and cow urine, so they discount them as merely a "bunch of kids having a good time," confident they will soon grow out of it.

But music and acting are only a part of the modern scene of idol worship.

Professional Sports Idols

Each week through the seasons, millions avidly watch sports "heroes" batting baseballs, slam dunking basketballs, smashing golf balls, swatting hockey pucks, throwing long "bombs" into the end zone in a football game, or perhaps sweating and posturing in a so-called "wrestling" match.

Our "heroes" call down enormous salaries for all this—some as high as three to five million dollars in a year—to keep us admiring their incredible athletic prowess and skill.

Just a month or so ago, an American football player who is reportedly being paid four million dollars a year to play in Canada brought the stands to their feet when he returned the opening kickoff 78 yards. He didn't score in the game, but the sports commentators all agreed he was "well worth" the money he was paid for those moments of adulation.

From the military to corporate business; from the science lab to the ski slopes; from the high school homecoming game to the outdoor rock concert, the adored, the admired, the respected, the fascinating, gifted, wondrous, talented, groovy, tough, brave, "far out" and courageous continue to overawe, dazzle, delight, fascinate and inspire millions with their own special kind of "heroism."

Perhaps the highest paid of all are the pugilists. For some reason, probably because their size, weight and power tend to produce more knock-outs, the heavyweights are the highest paid of all other boxers. But 17 million dollars for a few rounds of boxing?

How many times has the general public responded like so many hogs trampling each other to get to the trough in their eagerness to pay money to see some tired old has-been attempt the come-back trail?

Presumably, the next time Mike Tyson fights to regain his heavyweight title, he will make enough money to represent a sizable portion of the national debt. This translates into several thousand dollars for each punch—whether it lands or not.

Someone once did some figuring, and found that some superstars in the sports world are paid, say, 12,000 dollars per basketball goal, or several thousand dollars for every pitch, or stolen base, or hockey goal. Is it somehow obscene that these sports idols can be paid more money for one single act that millions of Americans—many of them World War II veterans and their spouses—make in one year?

Is it equally obscene that such "heroes" are making more money every single day than the entire average yearly incomes of perhaps four billion people in hundreds of nations the world over?

But who pays them?

The public. Perhaps you.

With the advent of television, all has changed. Sports heroes of the past made only tiny fractions of the money commonly paid to professional athletes today. By throwing money at their feet, the public shows its worshipful attitude toward these paid professionals; adores them with the dollars they earn, which represent hours and hours in the work place, money they would grudgingly resent to give to the federal government in taxes, or pay for a speeding ticket, or give to charity, or to the work of God—but money they cheerfully pay to *see their idol!*

Morning Worship Hour

All the major networks do it. Each morning, taking large segments of "prime time," they interview the "star" of the day; rave, chortle, gurgle, squeal, laugh, chuckle and delightedly comment about the role he played, the song he sung, the book he wrote, his latest divorce, or how he recently overcame his drug habit.

Millions sit, fascinated, as everything from personal tastes in jewelry, diet, exercise, reading, cosmetic surgery or self-hypnosis are explored.

In my own case, each time *Good Morning America* announces they are about to review the latest movie, and interview the "star," I instantly do one of two things: (1) flip the channel to CNN; (2) get up and go to work on my next article.

The interviews are a tiresome repetition of questions and answers about the "stars'" personal life, latest misfortune, drug bust, divorce, release from prison, hit single, book, live-in relationship, whopping film success, cosmetic surgery, fight against AIDS, lawsuit against some peephole magazine, or homosexual proclivities.

"Is it difficult for you, being away on location all the time, being away from the family?" asks the famous interviewer, usually a "star" of the top rated major networks—one "star" interviewing another.

"Oh, yes," he or she will answer. Then, the millions of lesser mortals sit there and listen to the "hardships" of this grueling life the poor "star" is forced to live—a life which nets them a million dollar motor yacht, several Rolls Royces, Ferraris, Mercedes, antique cars and other motorized toys, five or six houses, two or three condominiums, a private golf course, tennis courts, six swimming pools, furs, jewelry, and a bank account that would make Lee Iococa jealous.

It's a tough life.

Just this morning, immediately before coming into my study to sit before my word processor, I flipped off ABC's *Good Morning America*, which had begun the tiresome "morning worship hour" routine with their "star" of the day. This "star" was playing a "new role," excitedly gurgled Joan Lundun, herself a "star" of television news. The role was some kind of "terminator," who changes into metal, absorbs bullets, and generally slashes, stabs, and machine-guns his way through countless humans in non-stop violence.

ABC reported the movie had made something like 17 million dollars in the first few days at the box office.

Once I heard what the interview was going to be about, I went through my usual routine. Since they were finished with the news; said nothing about Israel or the Mideast; said nothing about the Soviet Union, or Yugoslavia, or Mount Pinatubo, but were going to spend television time worth perhaps 20 million dollars to interview this "star" (whose name I never caught, and wouldn't recognize if I had, and would not repeat here in print even if I knew it) I came directly into my study, sat down at my word processor to type out these words—this specific subtitle.

I am at least as interested in the private or public lives of "stars" as I am in going directly to the local barber shop, and spending the entire day watching haircuts. I am even less interested in their professional performances.

Yet, if such a "star" has written a book, acted in a TV series soon to be released, or sung a song to be released as a single, such interviews are guarantees of instant success—a few minutes of coyly quipping their way through the adoration, being quixotic, enigmatic, shy, brazen, entertaining, or huffily indignant as required—and the millions avidly watching all this drivel are guaranteed to stand four abreast around the block, patiently waiting in line to see the latest film in which this person "stars."

Amazing that our idolatry has required that we change a gargantuan portion of God's creations super nova—an exploding, radiating, helium/hydrogen sun into a *verb*, for pity's sake!

Acting is pretending.

Why not call them all "pretenders," or, better yet, "fakers"? Somehow, the introduction, "And now, the faker, Joe Jones," does not carry the same luster as "star." The other day a famous comedian-actor, a "star," was being

interviewed, and said plainly he was a "good liar." He said all acting was "lying," since it was a put-on role. At least, he was honest.

What if they were introduced: "And now, the consummate liar, Joe Jones, pretending in his false role as...?"

But no.

"And now, the *star* of our show..."

Sunday School Heroes

Which kid in America ever traded "Bible cards"? When you hear of some fortunate person finding an ancient baseball card in an attic, and being paid several hundred thousand dollars for it, you are hearing of idolatry in a bizarre form.

Perhaps it is difficult to imagine that the tens of thousands of little cards with baseball player's pictures on them which came enclosed in bubble gum packages in the 1920's and '30's could make you *rich*, but such is the case.

Millions of kids who are now in their 70's remember Babe Ruth, Lou Gerhig and Dizzy Dean, but how many of them ever traded pictures of Samson, Daniel, Noah, or Christ?

Consider the plight of the poor Sunday-school teacher (a term which should be investigated, since God says the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath): How do you make the Bible interesting to elementary school children?

It is fairly simple.

You wax eloquent with stories about David and Goliath (carefully omitting the fact that David collected two hundred fleshy proofs he had slaughtered two hundred Philistines to gain the hand of Saul's daughter in marriage, of course, since there is no telling how much brain damage such historical events could cause to a 10-year-old), or about Noah and the animals and the ark, or about Daniel in the lion's den, or about Samson and his haircut, or about, about, about—well, maybe a little about "Jesus," and how He loved little children.

Jesus?

Here is the Person who gave His name to the professing religion of "Christianity," the One Whose name is on myriads of bumper stickers ("Honk if you love Jesus"), the One Who is the subject of tens of thousands of sermons and Bible studies each week, and the One Who would come in dead last in any list of heroes, "stars," or "matinee idols" of the general public.

Consider major magazines and their search for the most important people in all history. Invariably, Adolf Hitler Winston Churchill, FDR, and probably Atilla the Hun are included. But Jesus?

It is no wonder it is difficult for the average Sunday-school teacher to interest children in Christ, for *the false* Christ of this world—the one with effeminate features, long hair, petulant look, white robe, open-toed sandals, shepherds' crook, carrying a lamb, never existed. The *real* Jesus Christ didn't look like that.

He had short hair; was common-looking—an average Jew of His day; managed His family's business from his early teens until the beginning of His ministry at about age thirty; worked as a site-preparer, mason, contractor, builder, and carpenter; had at least one home of His own, perhaps two; was the member of a family of at least seven children.

What is an Idol?

Everyone knows what an idol is—or so they think. An idol, to most, is a statue. It is a figure carved in stone or wood, representing some ancient culture's idea of what their "gods" were supposed to look like.

Who is not familiar with the idols of ancient Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome? Who has not seen pictures of the huge stone idols of Easter Island, or the "totem poles" of the Indians of the Pacific Northwest?

Idolatry is as old as human civilization itself. Men want to *see* their "gods," to have them where they can approach them, touch them, throw money and jewelry at their feet.

The ludicrousness of such practices is shown by God through Isaiah, who wrote, "Thus saith the Eternal the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Eternal of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God ... fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any.

"They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable [desirable] things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

"Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?

"Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together.

"The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.

"The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.

"He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it.

"Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto.

"He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire:

"And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.

"They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand" (Isaiah 44:6-18).

Is idolatry "out of date"? "Surely," one would reason, "there is no idolatry among *Christian* nations today."

The Forces in Your Life

What *drives* you? What energizes you, motivates you? Think about it. Millions are inspired, enthused, excited, driven, by things like *The Wheel of Fortune*, or *The Price is Right*, where they can enjoy, vicariously, others striking it rich—winning fabulous vacations, furniture, a new car, or perhaps a hundred thousand dollars cash.

Millions more enter the more than one dozen "sweepstakes" continually bombarding your home as junk mail. Just this morning, in our prayer breakfast, we read at least two letters from poor people, people with terrible health and financial problems, who urged us to pray they would *win the sweepstakes*. Sorry, but we do not believe God intervenes in such things.

Most people, without consciously realizing it, *worship the things man's hands have manufactured!* They eagerly desire, to the point of *coveting*, new homes, double ovens, dishwashers and refrigerators, a host of appliances and gadgets, work-saving devices. They worship *things*, like boats, motorcycles, snowmobiles, recreational vehicles, airplanes, and, especially, *cars*.

Millions attend "boat shows" and "car shows" each year, exclaiming over, gazing at, touching, sitting in, *lusting* after the "sexy-looking" sports cars on display.

Do you doubt it? All you need do is look around you. We are a materialistic, hedonistic society, a modern civilization whose imaginations are inspired by *things*.

How earnestly, eagerly, excitedly, would the average person accept the news he or she had won a *new car*? How excruciatingly avaricious are millions about buying such toys—possessing them, driving them?

Dream vacations, exciting travel, luxuries—especially money—is what inspires, excites, "turns on," and *DRIVES* millions of people. It is what makes their hearts beat faster, their breath come short, their palms sweat.

It is the stuff of their dreams.

And all that, whether we want to believe it or not, IS IDOLATRY! It is the breaking of both the First and the Tenth Commandment, for it is worshipful concern over something *other than God*.

Paul wrote, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection [illicit, illegal, *wrong* desires and lusts], evil concupiscence [strong desires; especially of a sexual nature], and COVETOUSNESS, *which is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5).

Shocking though it seems, *idolatry* is one of the most COMMON of all sins today!

*How to Exchange Wrong Desires
and Thoughts for Right Ones*

How do you get rid of negative thoughts, doubts, or evil compulsions? How do you *quit lusting* after things men's hands have made, or get rid of your desire to look at, listen to, and hear about various "stars," and other so-called "heroes"?

David knew how.

He wrote, "O Eternal, thou hast searched me, and known me.

"Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

"Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with *all my ways*.

"For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Eternal, thou knowest it altogether.

"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

"Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

"If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

"Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

"For thou hast [formed] my reins: thou hast [knit me together] in my mother's womb.

"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

"My substance [body, or being] was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" (Psalm 139:1-17).

David absolutely *marveled* at the incredible magnificence of such things as human eyesight, our ability to *hear*, to taste, to smell, to feel; the various bodily functions and systems, such as our skeletal, circulatory, digestive, muscular and nervous systems—the way we are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

When was the last time you picked up an encyclopedia, and turned to the article entitled "Eye"? Few take the time to really *study* into the intricacies and marvels of God's magnificence creation!

God says: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold [back] the truth in unrighteousness;

"Because that which may be known [about] God is manifest [evident] to them; for God hath shown it unto them.

"For the invisible things of [about] Him from the creation of the world [by looking at the creation—that which has been created!] are clearly seen, being understood by the things *that are made*, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God; neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:18-21).

When was the last time you studied articles in encyclopedias about birds, their beaks and claws, their migratory patterns, nest-building habits, camouflage and other survival techniques? When was the last time you looked up and read articles about our fabulous universe, the Milky Way, the solar system, our sun, the moon, and the other planets?

The way to get negative, fearful, doubting or lustful thoughts OUT of our minds is to put Godly, positive, beautiful, inspiring and worshipful thoughts IN!

Each day, there are *millions* who become irritated, angry with other drivers who slow them down because they want to rush home from work to be in time to watch *The Wheel of Fortune*. How many Americans, Britons, Canadians or others are eagerly rushing home because they want to spend time *talking to God* in prayer?

Again, you need to wonder, deeply inside your own introspective thoughts, what it is in your life that "turns you on," concerns you, excites you, inspires you, and gets you truly motivated.

Is it the thought of wealth, trips, cars, homes, a movie star, an exciting movie or television show, or your neighbor's wife?

Or is it God's Word, the Kingdom of God, to know more about Jesus Christ and His soon-coming intervention in human affairs? Is it God's marvelous creation, His laws, and His glorious plan of salvation?

Almighty God simply will not settle for second place in your life!

He says you "Cannot serve God and mammon [this world's materialism and its money]—that we must worship God and "Him *only* shall we serve!"

How much of a *habit* is your television set? How many books or magazines are in *your* home which are adulations and adorations of so-called "stars," and other "heroes"?

Are you the kind of person who would be extremely *excited* if you had an opportunity to be next to, perhaps touch, talk privately to, or obtain the autograph of a so-called "movie star"?

Are you practically *addicted* to certain game shows, television "soaps," or video movies?

To test yourself, you might try *unplugging* your television set *for one full week* just to see whether or not you have terrible "withdrawal" symptoms—the surest sign that you have become actually "hooked" on the Satan-inspired, worthless, time-wasting "entertainment" of this present, evil world!

Make no mistake. Idolatry is one of the most COMMON of all sins today! It is a *sin* to place *anything* between you and your great Creator God, who gives you every breath of air you breath!

Only when He *is first* in your life, when you have *given* yourself to Jesus Christ of Nazareth in unconditional surrender, and when you are motivated, excited, interested, inspired, and really "turned on" by the things of God and His soon-coming Kingdom, will you come to know that you are utterly *free* from the sin of idolatry.

-End-

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

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