

American Idolatry Goes to the Dogs

by Robbie Sagers

We're all accustomed to seeing pop culture icons Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie on the cover of magazines such as *People*, *Us*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. But imagine my surprise when I saw their faces on the covers of *Animal Fair* and *New York Dog*. The images were even more startling because the two reality television princesses were caught in a rare moment of sharing the spotlight with others: Honey Child, Foxy Cleopatra, and Tinkerbell.

No, these aren't supermodels or pop divas. They are Paris and Nicole's dogs. Honey Child is Nicole's four-year-old Shih Tzu. Foxy Cleopatra is her eight-month-old teacup Pomeranian. And Tinkerbell is Paris's Chihuahua.

It is hard enough to understand exactly why Hilton and Richie are famous. They didn't rise to fame for singing or dancing or acting. As a matter of fact, their singing and dancing and acting came along only after they had achieved fame. They are just famous for being famous. Their renown is reduced to the fact that they have super-wealthy parents and they know how to play the media. And so their interminable fifteen minutes of fame ripples out from Paris's pirated sex tape video with her boyfriend, and their "reality" television show, "The Simple Life," in which the two wealthy women march through the rural countryside with the great unwashed, with cameras rolling, of course. So why exactly are these *dogs* now celebrities?

It is precisely because Paris and Nicole pamper their animals the way Americans imagine a celebrity should. According to Nicole, Honey Child and Cleopatra go "everywhere" with her, she buys them "really cute clothes," they have "sleepovers" with other dogs, and they receive more attention from her than her boyfriend does. Nicole remarks that the dogs have taught her "unconditional love and patience."

It is much the same story with Paris. When Tinkerbell disappeared recently, Paris posted large banners across West Hollywood promising an extravagant amount of money for her safe return.

Kindness to animals is a biblical mandate, and everyone likes the idea of a well-treated pet. But what is wrong when two of our famous celebrities have "unconditional love and acceptance" for animals when they have made their careers off of mocking and caricaturing rural human beings for fun and profit?

For Christians, this really shouldn't come as a surprise. The Scripture tells us that all human beings (not just the famous ones) "exchange the glory of the immortal God" for idols—including those resembling animals (Rom 1:23). Could it be that for Paris and Nicole these animals are just one more trapping of celebrity? Could it be that for them a dog in a purse is really just one more golden calf?

But we shouldn't be too quick to ridicule the extravagance these ladies expend on their dogs. After all, American culture has idolized these two women—often for no other reason than animal lust for their bodies and covetous envy for their wealth and fame. And American Christians are just as prone

to the celebrity culture as anyone else.

The prophets and apostles warn us against such things. The apostle John is writing to believers when he commands, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). That’s because he understands that the old order within us constantly beckons us away from the worship of God. As the Reformer John Calvin put it, our minds are “idol factories”—as soon as one is destroyed it creates another one in its place.

We might not be consuming our free time fantasizing about the jet-set lifestyle of the world’s favorite televised socialites. And we might not be planning a sleepover for a Shih-Tzu. But we can grasp with abandon for our next promotion, an elusive wedding ring, or the power to decide what color the congregation’s carpet will be. These idols peek out of our purses and briefcases, no matter how we try to push them back in. And that tinny little “woof” is that of a golden calf.

Most of us will never have the fame or money to propel our pets to super-stardom. But that doesn’t mean that we can’t dote on our own idols with just as much care. Let’s remember that our inheritance isn’t here. It is waiting to be revealed with the unveiling of Christ Jesus. Until then, let’s hold loosely anything that isn’t him, lest we build our lives on something as fleeting as the fame of a reality television “star.”

After all, that kind of world isn’t fit for a dog.

Robbie Sagers is a Master of Divinity student in the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and an intern with Dean Russell D. Moore.

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