

Life and death of a hero

A hero. That was Michael Jackson to many people. That was obvious in the past weeks. The death of Michael Jackson had a hold on the world. It twittered around the world in a matter of minutes. Internet cracked and squeaked, never before had there been such a run on news-, fan- and music sites worldwide.

Amazing that one person has such an influence worldwide. We would think that in a time of postmodernism and tendencies of anti-globalization there would be no place for great, universally linking events. Great movements which *appeal* to people worldwide and *touch* people seem to become rare. We see it everywhere around us. People look for identity and shelter in their own culture and their own nation and their own religion.

The multitude of comments showed what Michael Jackson meant to millions of people. He wrote history with his high-quality music, with his innovative influences on music, video-clips and entertainment. He can rightfully be perceived as *a human being with many gifts and talents*.

'He was greater than Martin Luther King, he was greater than Obama,' I heard someone say from America's black community. He gave people hope and self esteem; he gave people a reason to live and gave people music they could identify with in a world of chaos, confusion and disruption. Rightfully he can be perceived as an *exemplary person, an icon*.

How should we look upon this from our Protestant tradition? Of course we could have a critical review on the various aspects of the life of Michael Jackson:

- At the least his lifestyle was rather dubious and from a Christian point of view there was a lot to be said against it.
- A lot of question can be raised – especially by us sober Protestants - about the way he was worshipped by millions of people.
- We could point at the dark dangers of the popular music. Is it indeed constructive for our young people and does it not even contain anti-Christian powers?
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These questions should be raised as well. But I would really like to take this one step further and I would like to try to 'read' and understand this development. Then I see various aspects which tell us something and make us think.

- Mankind has received many qualities. Whatever we feel about the music of Michael Jackson, it goes without saying that he was richly blessed with gifts and talents. So many even, that they appealed to the whole world.
- People draw hope from another human being. Obviously universal and linking movements are still possible after all.
- In this time people obviously are in need of a hero who appeals to them and gives them self esteem and identity.

If we draw the lines to the Gospel and the message from the Bible, we see that we end up really very close to the biblical message. Indeed God created man in a very special way: to His own image! Or, as we read in Psalm 8: God made man almost divine. It is possible that people stand up who give hope that is so profound and far reaching that it transcends borders. Examples of that we read in the many stories in the Bible about hope, protection, salvation and redemption. The Bible too speaks of man looking for restoration of self esteem and search for own identity.

Should we look at Michael Jackson in the Christian tradition as a special person who can be an example for many Christians as well?

Ultimately I must say radically no... Especially the unique message of the Gospel is missing in this almost mythical life and strife of this hero.

Where is the self sacrifice? Where is the notion that man ultimately comes to a stand-still in his life? Is that not the sad reverse of the life of this hero? His life and death were ultimately utterly sad. The hope, the expectation turned into despair and emptiness; and now for his followers as well.

Exactly there the Gospel may proclaim the message of a true hero in life and death: Jesus Christ. Precisely He fulfilled as human being completely the image of God. Precisely He gives hope and prospect and can bind people together and touch them worldwide; because He became completely man with a Divine mission. No human hero can live up to that. But it gives us a mission as well. Are we able to pass on this message of hope, prospect and salvation on with all of the gifts and talents that were given to us? With all the means the Spirit wants to use: stories, proclamation, music, video, art, and so on. All of humanity has shown that it is waiting for such a hero!

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