# Commentary: Queen, culture & love—thoughts on Christians & entertainment

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I have a confession. Back in the summer of 1974, I bought Queen's eponymous debut album—only because the cover was simple and unique, not because I'd already heard about this fledgling, quasi-androgynous band. I dropped the album onto my turntable after setting it to spin at 33-1/3 rpm. With the volume cranked to the max, I hoped to discover something bold and new. And the 12-inch vinyl LP certainly delivered.

The first track, "Keep Yourself Alive," was nothing short of mesmerizing. Then came "Liar" on the flip side, and I was transported instantly to another, seemingly faraway world. Nobody came close to sounding like this. With lyrics from "Liar" imploring, "I have sinned, dear father, father, I have sinned," and another song entitled "Jesus," I couldn't help but react, "Whoa, where'd these guys come from?" England, of course. No surprise there.

In March 1975, I experienced their show live at Southern Methodist University's McFarlin Auditorium, scooting right up to the edge of the stage to take pictures. Nobody stopped me in those days before mosh pits. The only thing I remember Freddie saying—rather pretentiously—was, "This IS Dallas, isn't it?"

After the concert, even the word "extraordinary" wasn't forceful enough to describe what I'd seen and heard. Flamboyance, glam and decibels aside, somehow I knew intuitively they'd go far because of their sheer musical distinctiveness—and they did. As Mercury once said, "I won't be a rock

star. I will be a legend."

Chalk up my early fascination with Queen, if you wish, to being an immature Christian of barely three years.

# Christians in a Queen culture

With America's current cultural climate—characterized by "To be is to be entertained"—it's obvious every Christian must now draw a line somewhere, often an indistinct boundary between being in the world but not of it (John 17:14-19). Christians often draw the lines poles apart when it comes to the entertainment industry, whether music, film or even sports. Our cultural activities are expressed in thoroughly human ways.

Some, like philosopher Arthur Holmes, argue our cultural ways are to be regarded honorably as sacred pursuits, and not merely secular. Realistically, however, music, film and other arts are reduced too easily to deviations from all things holy. In other words, perversion rears its ugly head, and not just sexually, though this seems to dominate. Culturally, there's a difference between being human and being sinfully human.

Just as Queen pushed the envelope culturally via their music, so too most Christians—I'm convinced—push things as far as their conscience will allow—and too often beyond their conscience. This is a tacit but well-known secret. We toy with, trifle with, dally with our entertainment choices, maybe wondering whether the Lord cares about such choices or takes notice of our wrong-headed motives when crossing the line. We don't talk about these dalliances much with our friends, but we can be assured, God knows.

So, will we be judged regarding where each of us draws the line? Yes, I believe so. Each Christian must decide for themselves where to set limits on their entertainment, which we do anyway—consciously or unconsciously.

A former colleague of mine listens only to Christian music. A former student—now pastor—listens only to secular music. One student went ballistic because Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* was once on my reading list, whereas another refused to watch a PG movie from the 1970s and left my class until the film was over.

Each Christian must decide for her- or himself what entertainment to consume, but checks and balances must be established.

What to do: immerse, isolate or something in between? Resolve the tension well.

# Christians in an entertainment culture

Christians must choose carefully who they love, what they love, how they love. Is God loved most—really and truly? Though perhaps cliché, questions of the heart like these may make us uncomfortable, especially if conviction should arise.

What if we didn't binge-watch our favorite shows on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu or wherever? What if we didn't spend inordinate amounts of time watching football? What if we disavowed making our presence known on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and elsewhere? What if we didn't glut our depleted souls with all kinds of music—as some do—turning this beautifully created gift it into a god of sorts?

What if the time expended, money spent and efforts employed to create over-the-top comfort for ourselves were directed more toward prayer, Bible study, church work and fellowshipping face-to-face as followers of Christ? What if we reconfigured our lives to draw our cultural lines elsewhere—closer to the holy? Wouldn't the church universal be in much better shape, more in tune with sharing the gospel with those whose lives ultimately may be destroyed by cultural evildoing?

This isn't to say Christians can't find a proper role for entertainment. They can, but it isn't easy. If our lives are monopolized by cultural pursuits adverse to the gospel—over time drawing us away from what pleases God—we should ask ourselves the same questions a searching Freddie Mercury did: "Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?"

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