

THEOLOGY OF PRINCE



Journal of Theology & Culture

2018-2019

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THEOLOGY OF PRINCE

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Theology of Prince Panel from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities at *Prince from MPLS, A Symposium at the University of Minnesota, April 18, 2018*

Max Brumberg-Kraus, Winning Poet, MA Student: read his winning poem, “Ours to Give,” and Thomas G. Wilson’s Winning Open Submissions poem, “The Ladder.”

Vernell Garnett (not present), Winning Visual Open Submissions Artist: *Prince Roger Nelson’s Parade*, Oil Pastel, Acrylic and Collage on Water Color Paper.

Cindi Beth Johnson, Director of The Intersection, Wilson Yates Center for Theology and the Arts: commentary and read part of the Winning Academic Paper, “Prince’s Spiritual Terroir.”

Zada Johnson, Winning Open Submissions Essay Author, Associate Professor of Inner City Studies and Anthropology at Northeastern Illinois University: read from her winning essay, “Prince, the Beautiful Oshun: The Purple One as Embodiment of the River Goddess of Love.”

Amoké Kubat, Winning Essay Author, United Seminary Alum: read from her winning essay, “The Ascension of Prince.”

Lisa Myers, Winning Visual Artist, Master of Divinity Student with concentration in the Arts: discussed her winning photograph, *All Excited*.

Lianne Raymond (not present) Winning Academic Author: “Prince’s Spiritual Terroir.”

Phillip Romine, Director of Admissions: Commentary.

Danny Solis, Winning Video: performed his (video) poem “The Moment of His Arrival.”

Thomas G. Wilson (not present) Winning Open Submissions Poet: “The Ladder.”

Pamela Ayo Yetunde, Assistant Professor of Pastoral and Spiritual Care and Counseling, and Director of Interreligious Chaplaincy: read from her anchor academic article, “Prince: A Spiritual Bioarchetypography of Nondualism and Dialectical Psycho-Spiritual Healing, Part I.”

Style Manuals

The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

Turabian Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations.* 8th ed. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 2013.

PREFACE DR. PAMELA AYO YETUNDE

THE VOICES CONFERENCE SERIES OF FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH PRESENTS



**JUSTICE,
RENEWAL, &
THE THEOLOGY
OF PRINCE**

Presenters:
Christian Piatt - Speaker, Author, Antagonist, God Nerd.
Dr. Pamela Ayo Yetunde, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

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At United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, we value exploring the multiple intersections of theology, culture, embodiment, and art. Hence, we began the 2017-2018 academic year with a special opportunity for the community of students, faculty, staff, and alums to engage the theology of Prince as expressed in his life and music.

“The idea was extraordinary for a multitude of reasons. United is an ecumenical and progressive seminary where students are encouraged to question [doctrine] and engage in candid conversations about spirituality, social justice, chaplaincy, life and death—conversations about gender identity and human sexuality with support for the full inclusion of our LGBTQI+ siblings. All these conversations have crossover points, intersections, with what we know about Prince, his music and his life.”¹

Prince was an intergenerational and international musical, fashion, and cinematic artist best known for his funky dance rhythms and explicit sexuality—and a Minnesotan! Even though he sold more than 100 million records and won seven Grammy awards, little is known about the impact religion and spirituality had on his music and artistic expression.

Yet, who has not had a ‘holy’ moment listening to one of Prince’s songs or attending one of his concerts?

United Seminary has consistently recognized the vital role the arts play in life, religion, embodiment, and spirituality. Dedicated to theological education, this school commits to infuse the arts in this critical endeavor. Students come to understand the arts as conduits for the holy, to the Divine.

Hence, United Theological Seminary issued a United-wide and an international call for submissions to inquire into the “Theology of Prince.” We asked for visual

artwork, personal essays, videos, poetry, music, and academic papers to respond to the theological, spiritual, and religious motifs in Prince's work, with different juries from the United Theology of Prince Committee selecting a winner in each medium. A monetary award was granted to the juried winners. Winners presented their work at the University of Minnesota's Prince from MPLS event, and United hosted a Prince dance party, poetry and essay reading.

The final intent was for the school to release a curated, online journal in theology and culture: *Theology of Prince*. This journal consists of student, alum, faculty, and international guest submissions from a variety of religious, spiritual, and theological landscapes. Our intention is to allow each Voice to be heard in its distinctive quality, rather than edit all pieces to echo a hollow tune of conformance in theology and tenor: a fusion of melodies comprise this singular journal.

Furthermore, with this journal, United Seminary lives into the ethic of embracing sexuality as intrinsic to spirituality, as inherited from our famed and beloved professor, Dr. James B. Nelson, Professor Emeritus of Christian Ethics (1963-1995), an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. In the early 1970s, Dr. Nelson, along with his wife, Wilys Claire, developed a program at United that "became a national model for seminary sexuality education."² Dr. Nelson's teaching and publications (*Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (1978), *Between Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience* (1983), and others) affirm sexuality as central to one's spirituality and relationship with God.

Within this journal, authors and artists interrogate how Prince expressed his sexuality in relation to his theologies through his lyrics, subsequent albums, and live performances: Did Prince exorcize alleged conflicts between sex, sexuality, gender identity, and his faith traditions? Did devotees of Prince find a needed liberation for their sexuality from an oppressive theological interpretation of sexuality? Did Prince allow us to acknowledge and transverse our gender fluidity?

A friend and colleague sojourned to the outer fence of Paisley Park soon after the death of Prince. Upon seeing signs and notes left by grieving patrons, she felt moved by the number of people who attributed to him a rare affirmation: Prince testified they were created 'holy' and not something 'different'.³ As a Rock Icon,

Prince unveiled a sacred space in which all could see the hallowed in themselves and one another.

United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities is honored to present the first issue of our Journal of Theology and Culture: *Theology of Prince*.

Dr. Pamela Ayo Yetunde
Theology of Prince Committee Chair
December 3, 2018

PAMELA AYO YETUNDE

Pamela Ayo Yetunde is Assistant Professor of Pastoral and Spiritual Care and Counseling and Director of Interreligious Chaplaincy at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She came to United in 2017. She received her Th.D. from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA, where she specialized in pastoral counseling. Her research and scholarship focus on Object Relations Theory and psychotherapy, Buddhist psychology, Womanist Theology, Christian-Buddhist spiritual transitional stages, Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde as a spiritual and psychological resource, and chaplain formation. Yetunde authored *Object Relations, Buddhism, and Relationality in Womanist Practical Theology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and has published a number of blog and magazine articles, as well as journal articles. Yetunde lives in Minnesota with her spouse. She is an interfaith Buddhist practitioner.

Notes

¹“Theology of Prince Gallery,” United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities | Theology of Prince, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2BOq8bd>.
²“Dr. James B. Nelson | Profile,” LGBTQ Religious Archive Newswork, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2QuoML7>.
³Cindi Beth Johnson, emailed to author, December 3, 2018.

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ESSAYS

“Anna Stesia”: My Triune Hymn

Devin Parrish

Abstract: Prince’s song, “Anna Stesia,” from his *Lovesexy* album is a personal hymn for writer Devin Parrish. Its theme of loneliness—specifically the loneliness that comes with answering an extraordinary calling—has spoken to Parrish for decades of her life, starting at age ten. In “Anna Stesia: My Triune Hymn,” Parrish explores how the song’s meaning has evolved over the course of her life and continues to inspire how she’s developed her personal relationship with God.

In April 2002, I saw Prince perform at Symphony Hall in Atlanta’s Woodruff Arts Center. He was on his *One Nite Alone* tour. I’d only lived in Atlanta five months—a young-adult starting a new career in TV journalism while navigating a foreign city. I didn’t know anybody there and hadn’t made any friends yet. I was profoundly lonely.

Prince put on a nearly three-hour show that felt like a Pentecostal tent revival. He was in the middle of yet another spiritual transformation in his life, and likely still grieving the recent loss of his parents who had died six months apart. He exhaustedly poured his soul out to us in this intimate theater, going from piano to guitar, from jazz to funk, to pop, to unrecognizable genres. Then—when I thought I couldn’t take any more—he sat at the piano alone on stage under a spotlight dressed in all white and played the opening chords of “Anna Stesia.” A visceral, primal scream escaped from my mouth, causing the skin under my eyes to vibrate. I needed to hear I would be all right—and that song was about to tell me so.

I first heard “Anna Stesia” when I was ten years old. It’s the fourth song on Prince’s *Lovesexy* album. My dad bought that album for me even though Prince is naked on the cover. Dad’s an artist, so I was used to seeing naked people in works of art. From Prince’s opening shout of *Hundalasiliah!* on “Eye No” to the closing sounds

of rushing water at the end, even as a fifth grader, I knew *Lovesexy* was a gospel album. My late mother was a gospel musician—a pianist, composer, and arranger. Gospel was some of the first music I ever heard. “Hundalasiliah” sounded like “Hallelujah” to me. Prince was teaching me how to have a personal relationship with God, and that it’s okay to develop a unique communication style with Him, especially in my prayer life.

“Anna Stesia” captured me. This grown man had written a song that immediately connected to the heart of a ten-year-old girl.

Initially, the song addresses loneliness with a couple of questions: Have you ever been lonely to the point of feeling like everyone else has fallen off the face of the earth? Yep. Have you ever been so desperate for company you’d entertain just any ol’ body? Yep.

I’d already experienced the loneliness of perpetually being the new kid because my family moved so much. I was always saying tearful goodbyes and changing schools and neighborhoods.

As a child, I considered Anna Stesia to be an imaginary friend who gets you through the tough, lonesome times. Now that I’m older and maturing in my Christian faith, “Anna Stesia” represents the Holy Spirit—the Comforter, the Advocate, the Helper—who inhabits me and activates my “higher self.”

Prince’s performance of “Anna Stesia” on that spring night in 2002 not only comforted and encouraged me; it also foreshadowed another kind of loneliness I would experience later during my time in Atlanta. After I’d made friends and built community, I would come up against the isolation of answering an extraordinary calling.

Once I accepted my call to love the unloved and heal the unhealed, I responded radically, wildly. This is the wildness for Jesus that Prince mentions in the coda of “Anna Stesia.” When I chose to be wild/radical for Christ, eventually I didn’t care what others thought of my life choices; to leave the only career I’d ever known or travel to “scary” places or write a play. I have lost and continue to lose friends, relationships, and opportunities, but this is my calling, and I only have to answer to God for my stewardship of it. There’s freedom in that kind of wildness, but hardly any company. It was in Gethsemane where Jesus’ calling was pressed to the point that even his disciples couldn’t hang anymore and abandoned him.

I believe this was also Prince’s experience. In a broader sense, the career choices he made post-*Purple Rain*—including his last-minute decision to not release *The Black Album* and do **Lovesexy** instead—shows he chose God over people, even over himself or the temptation to settle for comfort or appeasement. Most notably, Prince changed his name to a symbol on his thirty-fifth birthday, then spent the rest of his life flipping the music industry on its head while fighting for artists’ rights. That was one long, lonely journey.

During his *One Nite Alone* tour, Prince often closed a show with “Sometimes It Snows in April.” I don’t know why he performed “Anna Stesia” the night I saw him. I’d like to think the Holy Spirit whispered to him and he listened last-minute. I’m so glad he listened that night—and whatever day he wrote the song that keeps changing my life.

DEVIN PARRISH

Devin Parrish is a writer, journalist, and playwright who left the corporate comforts of CNN/HLN for the starving artistry of writing plays and traveling. She’s still starving but also thriving on her “Unmarried and Childless” Tumblr blog.

A True Prophet of God in these Latter-Days: Prince Brian Jorgensen

Abstract: An unexpected discovery of Prince's sexually explicit work made me, as a Mormon teenager, rethink everything I had been taught to be true in church about what it meant to be a good person. Without any direct effort of his own, Prince took over the mantle of being my spiritual guide simply through living the beautifully diverse, expressive, and honest life he did. Prince re-calibrated what it meant to me to live a good life and enjoy it all the same.

The very first female orgasm I ever heard was in my head-phones in a public library, and it was entirely Prince's fault. While I was ripping Prince's less well-known *Come* CD onto my computer, (a regular tradition of mine to pilfer the local library's CD collection), I started up the track "Orgasm" and began to hear the soft moans of Denise Matthews (aka Vanity) flow into my ears and hit my teenage brain with that overwhelming force testosterone has on an adolescent male brain.

I cautiously looked over my left shoulder, then my right, to make sure no one could castigate me for indulging in whatever this captivating sound was because I also knew it probably wasn't something my parents would want me listening to despite how much my curiosity was piqued. It didn't feel wrong, it felt all kinds of right, and I wanted to know so much more. I listened once, then twice, then five times in a row.

How could this be made by Prince? I knew Prince as the androgynous, musical virtuoso who was also a Jehovah's Witness. Growing up in the LDS (Mormon) church, I couldn't reconcile how someone who was an adherent to such a conservative sect of Christianity was essentially recording himself sinning—and sinning quite beautifully I might add. I didn't know it then, but that moment signaled the genesis of my own divergence from the generations-long religious and spiritual beliefs I had assumed would define my life.

Before that day, I never had reason to question the orthodox dogma of the LDS church in which I was raised. My life was unraveling exactly as my leaders told me it would: everyone at church seemed happy; when I prayed I felt "the spirit"; my parents held leadership positions in the church; and the girls at church were more than enough reason to keep coming back—and the youth leaders obviously knew this.

They tried to get us mentally prepared for the hormonal hurricane building inside of us by using the usual fear-based tactics deployed all too often by Mormons: "You could get a disease and die,"; "You will be like a chewed piece of gum that nobody will want,"; and the uniquely Mormon-kicker, "The only sin worse than sex outside of marriage is murder." It scared us all stiff... and not in the way we would've preferred.

Like all of my peers, I was convinced God wanted me to wait until marriage, and if I didn't, I would almost be the same as a murderer. But if this was true, I thought, how could someone as successful as Prince adhere to the tenets of his religion, be accepted by his religious community, and simultaneously treat sex like something that was meant to be personally experienced and not be ashamed of having that experience? Prince wasn't a murderer-adjacent.

The intermingling of Prince and sex couldn't be separated, but you also couldn't doubt his faith and love of his God. In the 'black-and-white' culture in which I was raised, Prince was greying up my brain. I drew more and more attracted to the enigmatic, driven, and carefully curated devil-may-care approach to life that Prince carried. I watched his Saturday Night Live performances, found every piece of music I could, learned the legendary nature of all stories involving Prince, and realized that Prince was taking up root as the main spiritual guide in my life.

This came to fruition at a senior high-school dance: while standing awkwardly and trying not to seem too overly anxious for any girl to lock eyes with me, I gained confidence by thinking, “What would Prince do?” “Well, he sure as hell wouldn’t just stand against the wall and hope someone finds you.” I got off the wall and shuffled over to Kathryn, whose attention I craved more than anyone’s, and softly asked “Wou.. would you like to dance?” Kathryn lifted her eyes from her slumped focus on the ground and quietly said, “Sure.” The Prophet Prince did it again, praise be.

The summer after our senior year, I found out that Prince was on his *Musicology* tour and would be gracing my hometown of Detroit with his presence. At this point, Prince was already pseudo-deified to me. He wasn’t God, he wasn’t the actual prophet of God; he did represent an evolved form of what COULD be the prophet, and I wanted to be ahead of the curve. I was going to be at that show. I even made my own custom-designed, purple t-shirt.

Prince peppered his performance with a mixture of old and new hits and would make sure everyone was paying attention to his magnetic performance—almost like a fire-breathing preacher at the pulpit. Prince closed with an epic performance of “Purple Rain.” As I watched and listened to the beauty emanating from this man, I recognized a feeling I had felt a million times before but never in this situation: the spirit.

I didn’t know how or why, but I was being told that everything Prince represented was what I wanted to be: free, coyly expressive while remaining elusively eccentric, confident, powerful, talented, kind, and welcoming to all. As those final notes of “Purple Rain” echoed through the halls of Joe Louis Arena, I realized I didn’t want, or need, to be Mormon to be spiritually centered and at peace, because this man whom I respected more than most adults—I knew was able to have it all.

As like all prophets, Prince represented what I could become and, more importantly, that it was okay to become that. My spirituality was now going to be defined through the lens of what I felt to be true through experience, and not what others told me was right. On that warm summer night, Prince allowed me to “break [my] chains and throw off [the] shackles” (Psalm 2:3 NIV) that I had let define me.

BRIAN JORGENSEN

My name is **Brian Jorgensen**. I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in Cell and Molecular Biology at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am from Detroit, Michigan, raised Mormon, and was surrounded by the music that inspired Prince while growing up in Motown. I have been an acolyte of Prince’s work since I discovered his music in my teenage years, and I have only found more respect and love for the work of Prince with each passing day.

An Open Letter to Prince

Solveig Nilsen-Goodin

Abstract: “I am music.”—Prince, interview with The Guardian, 2011. In this essay, written as an open yet intimate letter to Prince, I illustrate the impact of Prince’s music—Prince’s entire being—on my spirituality. Confessing that I prayed directly to Prince in a particularly trying moment in my life, I explore the following: the transformative and healing power of fiercely claiming one’s freedom in everything from musical expression to physical movement; the paradox of God expressing God’s infinite-self most powerfully through particularity and uniqueness—Prince’s most certainly, but also my own; and the possibility of images of Prince functioning as sacred icons, inviting the one gazing into a deeper experience of God and their own beloved-ness.

I think when one discovers himself, he discovers God. Or maybe it’s the other way around.
—Prince, *Rolling Stone*

I prayed to you today, Prince.

Forgive me. Your religion, and my own faith tradition would have me pray directly to the Source, directly to God, not to the ancestors of faith or family, nor even to the saints, and certainly not to a gender-bending, iconoclastic, horny, musical genius.

But I remain unrepentant. I prayed to you.

Here’s why.

I hate to admit this, but while you were alive, I wasn’t a big fan. Nothing personal, I’m just not inclined toward fan-dom so I didn’t pay much attention. But after you died, for some reason beyond reason, I felt compelled to buy every life-retrospec-

tive magazine I could get my hands on—*Rolling Stone*, *People*, *Condé Nast*, *Time*. I scoured YouTube for your music, videos, interviews.

After decades of cultivating my spiritual life, I have come to pay attention to these rare and sudden obsessions, recognizing them as God’s way of revealing something important I need to learn about myself. That’s why I prayed to you.

You see, my critics were bringing me down. I thrust myself out into the cold day to take a walk and clear my mind of those voices, but they got inside my head anyway. They got inside my head, Prince. No, worse, they got inside my heart! And shame, like that elevator in “Let’s Go Crazy,” was bringing me down. I needed to punch a higher floor, but in the darkness, I couldn’t find the button. So, I reached for you instead. I called to you, and you spoke to me.

Actually, you spoke to your sax player, Marcus Anderson; in that moment I remembered what you said. You said to Marcus, “*You* should be your favorite musician.”* Mine is a different vocation, so what I heard was this: “You should be your favorite *pastor*.” I should be my favorite pastor? Critics or no critics, I should be my favorite pastor. I had never thought about it that way before. The elevator stopped with a jolt. I found the button. It started going up.

And, yes, Prince, I’m a pastor.

Praying to you.

Unrepentant still.

Because after I heard those words that lifted me to a higher floor, I remembered your walk—the dignity with which you carried yourself, and the swagger. The swagger. Powered, some thought, by ego, by persona, but no. Your walk was the empowered and open-hearted gait of a free man—

A man knowing deep in his bones that freedom is the birthright of every human being;
A man claiming this freedom every second of every day because he knew

the system would take it the moment he let it down, and maybe even before;

A man embodying this freedom in every possible way because he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt he was exquisitely made in the image of God—on the seventh day of creation, no less!—and the whole point of being alive was to give glory to that God through the expression of exactly who he was, exactly as he was.

You, Prince, walked like a man so convicted by his own beloved-ness, so in love with The Lover, so devoted to making love with music, making music with life and making life with love, even the critics threw their cloaks and branches on the ground before you, daring to believe something new was possible because it was walking right toward them.

So I started walking. Like you.

And although the last thing my battered heart wanted was to lead the way, I threw my shoulders back and, like a sexy MF, I got my swagger on, Prince. And, damn, (sorry for cussing) if not by the time I made it home, all that shame and hurt and defensiveness that had consumed me not twenty-minutes earlier, was gone. Just like that.

I poured through my stack of magazines looking for one of my favorite pictures of you (there are so many). And when I found the one I wanted, I just gazed at it. Just gazed at you. Gazed at you like I gaze at my images of Jesus or St. Francis or St. Teresa of Ávila.

Did you know President Obama called you a “creative icon”? Beyoncé too, along with every other fabulous artist in the world.** And they’re right. Everything about you was iconic.

But that’s not how you are an icon to me. When I gaze at you, I don’t actually marvel at your irrefutable genius. No, when I gaze at you, I marvel at how your fierce particularity reveals God. And when I gaze long enough, I realize that if your fierce particularity reveals God, then (my God!) so does mine!

Icon. An image prayed into being with the express purpose of illuminating the divine shining through a particular person, and enticing those gazing at it to discover their own radiant beloved-ness in the eyes of God.

You are an icon, Prince. Every picture of you is an icon. Your picked-out afro, more luminous than any halo around the head of any saint in any cathedral anywhere in the world. Because you reveal in the depths of your—my—our—everyone’s—complex and often maddening uniqueness, God waits like a lion, ready to roar into the world, and turn the whole blessed place into Paisley Park, or, at least, leave it better and more beautiful, more playful and more free, more loving and more just, just like you did.

I think when one discovers herself, she discovers God. Or maybe it’s the other way around.***

Or maybe it goes both ways.

“It’s a feeling—someone knows when they get it,” you said.***

You got it. And I just got it too. Thanks. And Amen.

Notes

* Azhar Mobeen, *Prince: Chapter and Verse* (New York: Sterling, 2016), 132.

**Katie Reilly, “President Obama Praises Prince as a ‘Creative Icon,’” *Time*, April 21, 2016. accessed February 12, 2018, <https://ti.me/1SwYtMK>, and Afshin Shahidi and Beyoncé, *Prince: A Private View* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2017), 10.

*** Neal Karlen, “Inside the Pleasure Palace,” *Rolling Stone*, September 12, 1985, in *Rolling Stone Special Collector’s Edition: Prince—The Ultimate Guide to His Music and Legend*, 2016, 33.

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REV. SOLVEIG NILSEN-GOODIN

Rev. Solveig Nilsen-Goodin is ordained in the Lutheran Church (ELCA) and is a certified Spiritual Director. As a Spiritual Director, Solveig accompanies all who yearn for the good—leaders, activists, organizers, ordinary citizens—in accessing spiritual power in their lives and work. She offers spiritual direction both online and in her backyard yurt. In 2011 she founded an alternative church—the Wilderness Way Community—a community to support the development of “wild” Christian disciples and fearless spiritual leaders who deeply engage the perils and possibilities of this historical moment. Solveig is also a leader within EcoFaith Recovery, coaching people of faith in The Practices for Awakening Leadership and working for climate justice. Solveig is a writer and editor, grief ritual leader and musician. Her books include *For Everything A Season: 75 Blessings for Life’s Milestones*, which she co-authored with her family, and *What is the Way of the Wilderness? An Introduction to the Wilderness Way Community*. She also recorded two CD’s with the group Seven Times Seven in the early 2000s: *For Everything a Season* and *Live at the Kennedy School*. Solveig is a graduate of St. Olaf College and Harvard Divinity School, and loves reading, dancing, and Zumba. With her husband, Peter, Solveig is actively raising two beautiful boys, Soren (12) and Stig (9). They live in the Willamette River watershed, originally home to the Kalapuya and other indigenous peoples who were forcibly removed from the land otherwise known as Portland, Oregon.

Baptist Boy
Mark Beaver

Abstract: This personal essay renders the influence of Prince’s music on the author as he attempts to reconcile faith and flesh throughout his evangelical youth.

It’s a tribute to my adolescent ingenuity that I conceived a foolproof strategy for keeping my parents out of my room: I plastered my walls with Prince posters. My father, especially, kept his distance. A Baptist deacon whose musical tastes ran toward gospel groups singing of Beulah Land, Dad possessed no firsthand knowledge of Prince’s raunchy tunes. He didn’t need details. Prince’s mere appearance was enough. In his worldview, no self-respecting man would dare broach a space enshrined to a prissy waif sporting heels, bikini briefs, and a pompadour.

Although our minister had ignited a bonfire in the church parking lot by dousing a vinyl copy of *Dirty Mind* in lighter fluid, at age fourteen I bought my first Prince record. From the intro of “1999,” when our hero cryptically announces his intentions—“Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you... / I only want you to have some fun”—I stumbled into a carnal world that threatened to undo every Sunday morning sermon I’d ever endured. I locked my bedroom door and huddled against the speakers, as though I were hoarding a stash of particularly smutty porn.

One night I was visiting my girlfriend, Yvette, while news of a tornado warning spread across Atlanta’s suburbs. Outside, alarms sounded in the distance. The wind gathered in gusts of fury, and the whole house seemed to shake on its foundations. I should’ve headed home an hour earlier, but now it was too late to risk the roads. So we just hunkered down and heard Prince telling us “Everybody’s got a bomb / We could all die any day.”

In the 1980s, we were all accustomed to such talk. We'd seen that red splotch on Gorbachev's head. We'd squeezed under countless school desks. But when he sang, "2000 zero zero party's over oops out of time," I felt like I had special insight.

I was a Baptist boy and knew my book of Revelation.

I believed him.

So, I bought the earlier albums, including *Dirty Mind*, a thirty-minute middle finger to "society and all its games." Pulsing with funky synths and propulsive rhythm guitar, the album perfectly captured the growing tension between my body and soul. "In my daddy's car / It's you I really wanna drive," he sings. Though my dad's Ford was the site of our most heated encounters, Yvette and I vowed to go only so far within its confines. Granted, there were those bench seats, which seemed an open invitation to vehicular amour. But Dad kept a pocket-sized New Testament in the glove compartment—out of sight, sure, but like the Holy Ghost, always present.

It's hard to say exactly whose idea it was, but eventually, we began thinking of ourselves as Prince and Apollonia. We'd cruise over to the local park, where we'd feed the ducks and pretend the murky pond was Lake Minnetonka. Inevitably I'd tell Yvette she'd have to "pass the initiation" by stripping to her skivvies and "purifying yourself in the waters of Lake Minnetonka." If she took the bait, she'd jump in, just as I half-heartedly hollered, "Wait—". Then, when she emerged from the water, retching and gasping for breath, I'd, of course, say, "That ain't Lake Minnetonka." Yvette, however, did not follow this part of the script. She had smaller breasts than Apollonia, but a bigger brain.

Side 1 of *Purple Rain* concludes with the tune that provoked Tipper Gore to kick-start the PMRC and commence stickering albums with warning labels. The story goes that, after overhearing her eleven-year-old daughter listening to "Darling Nikki," Tipper was moved to action. But if she'd had the time, know-how, and inclination to play the ending backward on a turntable, Tipper would've heard Prince saying, "Hello, how are you? / I'm fine, / 'cause I know the Lord is coming soon." Only Prince could finish off one of the decade's most salacious tracks with a reminder that the Rapture is nigh.

Of course, like the 1980s, like Prince's purple reign, like youth, Yvette and I came to an end. I was headed to college, and—she did not take the news well. What she took instead was a bottle of pills.

Her stepfather phoned me from the hospital. "I'm the one calling," he said, "because her mother can't bear talking to you. But Yvette wants you here."

On the drive, I had ample time to consider my culpability. Instead of pondering the cause-and-effect, though, I played the song "Purple Rain." It only seemed right. I figured I owed Yvette eight-minutes-and-forty-five seconds of my undivided attention.

When I arrived at the ER, I found her clutching a pan of puke in her lap. Her lips were black with charcoal.

I don't recall much else, except this: I took the long way home, out where the streetlights disappear and the road is bible-black. I rolled down the windows and cranked up the volume—"I never meant to cause you any sorrow / I never meant to cause you any pain."

It was true. I hadn't wanted to hurt Yvette. I'd only wanted her to have some fun.

Later came *Lovesexy*, which contains as much evangelical zeal as any altar call I heard in my youth. In its thematic centerpiece, "Anna Stesia," Prince sings, "Save me, Jesus, I've been a fool / How could I forget you are the rule?" Then in a climactic sing-along, he testifies, "Love is God / God is Love / Girls and boys, love God above." Biblical words, sure, and nothing new. But when Prince utters them, they're striking him as nothing short of an epiphany.

Eventually, I would marry a woman with a Jewish father, a Catholic mother, and her own religious identity to reconcile. Today we're raising our daughter Jewish, and she's a Bat Mitzvah. Recently she asked me the inevitable: "Dad, what do you believe?"

How does one distill his theology into a few words?

I pondered the question, then answered the only way I can nowadays: "Love is God, God is Love," I told her. "Girls and boys, love God above."

MARK BEAVER

Mark Beaver is the author of a memoir, *Suburban Gospel* (Hub City, 2016). His prose has also appeared in numerous journals and magazines, including *Gulf Coast*, *Crazyhorse*, *North American Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Tampa Review*, and elsewhere. He’s a graduate of UNC-Greensboro’s MFA program and lives with his wife and daughters in his native Atlanta.

Blessed Be the Lovesexy Fan
Jason Benjamin

Abstract: In my essay, I describe how Prince’s album *Lovesexy* initially impressed me and introduced the concept of “spiritual crisis” to me at a young age. I explore what kind of influence the album had on my spiritual growth. In retrospect, I see the ways in which *Lovesexy* encouraged me to break from my traditional religion and validated a unique, personal relationship with God.

Lovesexy was a daring purchase. For me, a fourteen-year-old Catholic boy in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a town as conservative and bland as a communion wafer, it was a test of faith. I loved Prince, but I had to weigh what my friends might say about the nude album cover. Would girls think I was gay? Would the store clerk laugh? Would my parents throw it out?

Before I realized its deeper meaning, in 1988 the album just looked like another one of Prince’s sexy stunts.

It didn’t take long to figure that any album this risky must be pretty great. I trusted Prince to deliver me from shame. I paid \$8 for it at the mall music store and put the cassette in my Walkman.

Upon closer look, there was nothing sexy about the album cover. Prince looked like a cherub caught bathing on an orchid. The music was exciting with a huge, crystal-clear sound and seemed to get raunchy at times, but not nearly like “Darling Nikki” or “Dirty Mind.” In fact, like the album cover, there was something antiseptic, cold and lonesome, vulnerable and hopeful, about the sexy allusions.

This was a new kind of Prince. We had known and loved him since 1982. By “we” I mean my older brother and me. Into our lives Prince came sliding down a pole like

a purple Batman in the 1999 video. At first, we were rolling on the floor, laughing at this clown, but before long we had found our new hero and were miming his moves, singing his songs.

Purple Rain exploded all over 1984, and although my parents forbade me to see the movie or own the album, I taped the songs off the radio to listen endlessly. I connected to the serious, emotional man beneath the funk. I felt he understood my heartache for love and acceptance, like a friend. He seemed to have it all and he exuded supreme confidence. As an artist, he won my heart.

Listening to *Lovesexy*, it was a surprise to hear Prince singing so much of God and worship, but more so. It was a mind-bender for me to hear him struggling with something beyond his romances, something bigger than himself.

The more I listened, the more I heard Prince celebrating a resolution to some kind of spiritual conflict. But “spiritual” and “conflict” were two words I had never put together before.

In our home, questioning faith or religion was taboo. I come from a long line of Irish Catholics. Religion is right, it is true, and you are all in or all out. At fourteen, I was really trying hard to get with it. I made it a habit to pray twice a day. I paid close attention to everything said, read, and sang during our weekly Sunday mass. I seriously considered attending seminary like my father had. If God were real, it seemed that extra effort should produce some concrete proof. I needed assurance.

But of course, the more I prayed, the less convinced I was it did any good. It didn't bring me a girlfriend, better grades, better luck at sports, or take my teenage mind off sex. Catholic practices just seemed tedious. I figured I wasn't doing something right.

But now Prince, my hero, had just made a profound connection with God. He obviously had experienced something powerful. I believed him. Most importantly, Prince had gone about it in his own unique way. *That* was cool.

Lovesexy seemed to say that Prince was saved from demonic temptations by focusing on the light of Christ. So, just as I had mimed his stage moves, I tried to imitate my hero's spiritual victory by shutting out my negative thoughts. Alas, after a few months, no vision of God nor a desire to shout “Hundalasillah!” emerged—only a tormented teenager.

In frustration, my interest in Prince waned, and I lost my faith in God. For years, I wandered through a desert of agnosticism, then dark, free-falling canyons of atheism.

In 2004, I got to see Prince on his *Musicology* tour. I had told my friends that seeing him live was something I needed to do before I died, and, ironically, that same night I nearly did. Walking home alone after the concert, way past midnight, I was attacked and robbed. Afterward, shaken and angry, I had nowhere to turn. Desperate, I prayed, and I asked God to forgive my attacker. Almost immediately I felt relief and stability flow back to me.

I soon gave God another chance and read the entire Bible, critically, on my own terms. It proved to be undeniably weird and wonderful. My personal relationship with God soon emerged. It gave new definition to every aspect of my existence and spirit.

As new-found faith returned to my life, so did my love of Prince's music. The *Musicology* concert inspired me to dig out my old favorites. The spiritual meaning of *Lovesexy* then came full-circle for me.

It dawned on me that *Lovesexy* is ultimately Prince's statement of purpose: music as a holy mission. The song “Anna Stesia” is the centerpiece of the album. It tells how he made the journey through darkness to light. It culminates in the epiphany that “God is love / Love is God.” Coincidentally, I joined a church with a banner in place above the altar reading, “God Is Love Is God,” a perfect welcome home. Looking at Prince's nude photo now, I realize it depicts “rebirth.” I see how the album encouraged my departure from traditional understandings of God and religion, setting a precedent for my return. *Lovesexy* validated a personal,

highly esoteric relationship with God. It emboldened me to be confident in my own unique journey to arrive there.

In a way, the album was the answer to my prayers of 1988, one that no one, except maybe Prince, would have expected.

JASON BENJAMIN

Jason Benjamin is a musician and educational program manager who lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife and three children. As Music Minister at Greenpoint Reformed Church, Jason has led a unique music worship service since 2009. His church band, The Milton Street Revival, has proudly performed several Prince songs in Sunday services, including “Still Would Stand All Time,” “Free,” “Eye No,” and the tribute, “Sometimes it Snows in April.” Jason also writes a theological-music blog at <http://greenpointchurch.org/blog>. His top three favorite Prince albums are *Dirty Mind*, *Sign ‘O’ the Times*, and *Lovesexy*.

Dichotomy and the Liturgy of Prince

JD Mercado

Abstract: Can comparisons be drawn between Jesus and Prince? This personal essay shares glimpses of Christ through the lens of Prince's music and vice versa, guiding us through the liturgy of Prince's landmark album *Purple Rain* and exposing the dichotomies that made both figures so universally influential.

Prince is raging emotional energy channeled through blistering guitar work; glam that would shame the Duke of Wellington, poise, finesse, and passion. My mind tumbles with rock-star fantasies as I reflect on how influential he's been to my artistry. When I consider my spirituality though, the stage dims, the fog lifts, and the synth-bass lines decrescendo—Prince walks over to me and takes a seat. Prince was both larger-than-life and extremely relatable. The endless stream of dichotomies embodied in his person has taught me many valuable lessons.

Prince was the spirited partner of “I Wanna Be Your Lover” and the violent aggressor in “Lady Cab Driver.” He was the meticulous artist, fixated on the perfection of his craft, and also a death-defying stuntman on stage, letting go of control and surrendering his body to the music.

Prince was what some considered a god, and yet in so many ways, he possessed humility and fragility. It was these qualities that added a human element to his persona, and that balance was perhaps his most brilliant. In this way, The Artist was not unlike the Savior, Jesus Christ, himself.

To recall the life of Christ is to remember the plethora of dichotomies that flowed from Him as well. He gave us puzzling expressions: the meek shall inherit the Earth; the last shall be first; give up your life to find it. He was both the man who said “let the children come to me” and, subsequently, the one who flipped tables

in the temple and chased the money changers out with a whip.

He is King of all Creation and the living Word by which all things were made. Yet He chose to walk among us, a poor refugee from Nazareth. (John 1:46) Fully divine and fully human, Jesus wrestled in the garden of Gethsemane and asked for another way. He pleaded with the Father despite a perfect understanding of His Kingship and Sonship. The foundation of my faith was built on these dichotomies.

It's through that lens I view Prince's music. I've been to the Church of Prince on numerous occasions in my mind. The organ blares as Prince begins the liturgy with “Let's Go Crazy.” He begins to testify of life beyond this world, where the sun is never hidden. As we launch into the time of worship, I find myself taken by the spirit of it all, my hands clappin' and my feet shoutin'. In a brilliant climax, God's people cheer as the purple pastor launches into a breathtaking solo and the house erupts with praise.

As the sermon proceeds, the Gospel message is unashamedly presented: Jesus says, “I Would Die 4 U.” There are innumerable parallels between the words of Prince's fast-footed workout and the invitation of *Christus Victor*, but the strongest comparison is yet again found in dichotomy: replacing our sadness with happiness; giving us good things when we don't deserve them.

Too often, the takeaway from Sunday morning is lost in a haze of flowery language. Jesus came and spoke clearly to us about Himself. And the dove, Prince, descends to offer us that same message in that language any person could follow. Just as Jesus intended, the Church of Prince is a house for all nations.

Service concludes with the beautiful confession of “Purple Rain.” The sins of all the world are laid upon the altar as we sing in one voice. Never meaning to cause sorrow or pain, we are all still guilty of sin despite our otherwise good intentions. Prince personified that for us. He understood that often, even when we confess our sins, there are ramifications for our actions beyond our control: it is a shame when friendship ends. Prince falls on his knees and begs forgiveness in the most

raw and emotional guitar solo ever played. The veil in the Holy of Holies is torn and the people's cries of joy are heard in the closing moments. God hears our pleas and grace abounds. Let us pray.

Despite the evidence that suggests Prince's clear understanding of corporate worship and personal relationship with God, there are still those that use Prince's sin to find errancy in his spiritual life. Undoubtedly, Prince was most honest and vulnerable about himself in his music, and, for this, he has been both publicly and privately ostracized.

In the garden, when Adam and Eve discovered they were naked, they ran away to hide. Though we have all sinned and fallen short, I never saw Prince flee as they did. The sexuality of his music and the borderline pornography of his wordplay have been used to deem him unworthy, while many overlook his conversion in 2001, a product of personal devotion to God.

It's meaningful for me to see Prince as a man of faith who so publicly battled with his sin nature. The apostle Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12 (KJV); Prince knew what his thorn was and boasted in his weakness just the same. These public struggles with our depravity are missing from our Christian circles today, bottled up in each of us behind the illusion of perfection.

God enacted the plan of salvation knowing we would turn from Him. He knew that, just like Adam and Eve, our sinful nature would cause us to turn and run from Him; His answer to that was Jesus, God incarnate. As we run from holiness and deeper into our flesh, Christ in His humanity is there waiting to receive us.

Jesus Christ and Prince both understood the gravity of human existence and offered us a better way. They have guided me to the Purple Rain, to the understanding of the fullness of salvation and the beauty of dichotomous Kingdom living.

JD MERCADO

JD Mercado is an indigenous poet and recording artist currently residing in Flagstaff, Arizona. A recent graduate of Northern Arizona University, he is slated to make his literary and solo musical debut in 2018.



Finding My Soul

Rachel Kayla

Abstract: This essay describes how the author, Rachel Kayla, discovered her own spirituality through Prince’s music after experiencing two devastating losses in 2016. Raised Roman Catholic but agnostic most of her adult life, she turned to Prince’s music for comfort but found something more profound—spiritual guidance. A Prince fan since her childhood in the early 1980s, she discovered all new meaning to his music and found her soul in the process. (This is the story of how one woman coped with tragedy through the power of Prince’s music and in the process started a spiritual journey that led her to find her soul.)

“Read times online. Cade shot (fatal). In Aliquippa”

That’s the text message that changed my life. My dad sent it at 8:21 a.m. on Friday, September 30, 2016. My sixteen-year-old Godson was shot five times in the head when he went to sell marijuana to another teen in Aliquippa, PA. The teen buying the pot had planned to rob Cade and his friends of their cash and drugs. The shooter also killed Cade’s friend Dane who was driving. I never thought I’d be calling into work and saying, “I can’t come in today. My Godson was murdered.” My world collapsed. Well, a better way to put it, my world collapsed for the second time that year.

The first collapse was on April 21st. I was at work when I saw the news that a body was found at Paisley Park. Like many, I brushed it off and figured it was some fan who’d snuck something into the party that weekend and had passed out or possibly worse. Then my phone, email, and social media started blowing up. The worst was confirmed. Prince was dead, and anyone who had ever known me was calling to see if I was okay. I wasn’t.

I was gutted. I experienced a grief unlike any I’d ever known. What’s worse—I couldn’t understand why. Yes, I’d been a fan since I was about five-years-old (before “Purple Rain”), but I never met this man. Why was I so upset? It frustrated some people close to me, too. “Sure, it’s sad, but why can’t you get over it already? You didn’t know him.” This is where spirituality began to come into play for me.

I was raised Roman Catholic, but by my late-twenties my belief system was pretty much agnostic. I needed proof in order to believe in a higher power, and I just hadn’t seen anything compelling enough to give me faith. Something started stirring in me to find that proof when Prince died, but I held off not knowing why I was feeling this way.

When Cade was murdered, everything changed. The first thing that came to mind and gave me comfort was the phrase and name of Prince’s former foundation, “Love 4 One Another.” Cade’s death cemented in my mind what my heart had already been starting to feel. Many of the tragedies occurring in our world today could be prevented if we just showed more “Love 4 One Another.”

Rather than getting angry and seeking revenge. I started to seek answers. The way I saw it, four lives, not two, were lost that night. Dane and Cade left this earth, but the shooter and his co-conspirator would be heading toward a lifetime in prison, which could be just as bad, if not worse. I realized that to be able to get through the devastation without it destroying me, I needed to find faith. However, I needed to find faith in a way that made sense to me.

Music has always been a coping mechanism for me in life and this time was no different. I turned to Prince’s music to see if I could find guidance and inspiration. Like so many other times in my life, he didn’t let me down. It started with the song “Love” from his album *3121*. I had that song on permanent rotation for months. The chorus is what really called out to my soul:

Like a bird flying over the hilltops
Love is like the sky, you know it never stops
From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks

Love is whatever... whatever... You want it to be

I found I could heal when I approached the loss from a place of love. AND, I finally started healing not just from losing Cade but also from losing Prince. I started to think maybe love was my religion.

This realization led me to another important one. People with some form of faith seemed more resilient to me than those without any faith. I'd been battling depression and anxiety since childhood. I didn't want to allow this situation to send me back into a depressive abyss. It made sense to me that if I could search and find a form a faith that resonated with me, I could become more resilient too—pushing my depression back into the shadows. With that thought, I began my spiritual journey in earnest.

Suddenly Prince's music took on a whole new life for me. Songs I've loved for years began to have an entirely new significance. I always knew his music was laden with spiritual and religious references, but that doesn't mean anything until you need it to. His music was guiding me, teaching me, and giving me the confidence to find my own spiritual way.

Prince's music didn't instruct me on a specific spiritual path. Instead, it instructed me on how to find my own path. I learned I didn't need organized religion, but that I could connect with the Creator in my own way.

Prince's songs showed me how to be unafraid to speak about my spirituality and to be open to learning about what others believe. His music makes me feel comfortable with being in touch with my soul. That was something I felt awkward about in the past. As a result of finding my own spiritual path through his music, I have become more resilient. Probably even more than I thought I could be.

I realize, as awful as it was to lose Prince and Cade, I needed to lose them to find my soul and my soul's purpose in this life. One loss started the stirrings, while the other forced me to examine them. Without Prince and his music, I would have never survived the loss of my Godson—or saved my soul.

RACHEL KAYLA

Rachel Kayla is a REALTOR®, blogger, and life-long Prince fan from Columbus, Ohio. Her earliest memory of Prince is from 1982 when she declared to her family at age five that she was going to marry him. She never did get to marry him, but she has loved him and his music ever since. Raised Roman Catholic and spending most of her adult life as an agnostic, Rachel felt a shift in her world when Prince died. This led her on a journey that profoundly changed her personally, professionally, and spiritually for the better. She now considers herself to be a Spiritualist and enjoys studying all forms of religion and spirituality. Rachel graduated from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, in 1999 (yes—she planned it that way) with a Bachelor of Science in Journalism. Shortly after graduation, she moved to Columbus, Ohio, to work in public relations. She explored a number of careers after that before discovering her passion for real estate in 2014. Rachel continues to hone her writing skills with her real estate blog, www.RachelsRealEstateGuide.com, journaling, and writing poetry. In her spare time, Rachel loves to belly dance and has recently started performing publicly. She also loves all forms of art, and you can easily find her at a museum, concert venue, or theater soaking in the creativity that others graciously share with the public.

Free to Change Your Mind: Prince and my Spiritual Path

Haiji Shearer

Abstract: As a teen who was born four years after Prince, I fell in love with his music and style early in his career. Our spiritual/psychological growth shared a similar trajectory until one song and album disappointed me and we began to grow apart. Eventually, we took very different paths, but the roots remained connected.

I fell for Prince in the good old days when Michael Jackson was a Jehovah's Witness and Prince was a freethinker. In those days, Prince was my hero. I loved the androgynous sex fiend so much, I thought I might be bisexual. I ramped up my courage and fantasized about having sex with him—the only man I've ever done that with. This experiment convinced me I was definitely heterosexual. I didn't want to f*** Prince. I wanted to be Prince!

I'd like to say I was prescient enough to buy every album as soon as it came out, but that's not true. As a teenaged R&B head, I liked "Soft and Wet," but not enough to cough up \$7.99. The second album was different. When *Prince* was released, he was twenty-three. I was seventeen. A four-year difference is significant at that point. "I Wanna Be Your Lover" creatively captured how I felt all day long. I bought the album, but the picture of him naked on that horse with wings did make me pause.

The *Dirty Mind* album got me hook, line and sinker. Every song a hit and every hit salacious. "Sister" was strange, but at less than two minutes, including his admission that "incest is everything it's said to be," he seemed to draw a healthy line around some sexual behavior while maintaining a radical honesty. With no in-

terviews, I could read into his music whatever I wanted. My spirituality was building around a Rasta-Yogi synthesis, liberal enough to embrace the funky mix of spiritual sexuality that flowed from "*Dirty Mind*."

In terms of Prince's theology affecting me, "Controversy" was big. Chanting the Lord's Prayer, in this context, was brilliant. Now, over thirty years later, given who he became, it almost seems sane. But back then, the blasphemous juxtaposition was mind bendingly bizarre. And not just to Billy Graham types—to me, the Lord's Prayer had been hands off. I would have never considered adding it to a freaky piece of art I created. But the outrageousness of co-opting the most famous prayer in Christianity made me love him all the more and reminded me that the Billy Grahams don't own Jesus, much less God.

1985 brought *Purple Rain* and global fame. I saw the film twice the day it came out. I took some LSD before the evening show, and that night entered a sexual triangle with two of my best friends. The entire experience was epic. One of the most enduring lessons I learned from Prince is highlighted in *Purple Rain*. It happens after the Kid's father tries to kill himself, and the Kid trashes his room. Exhausted, the Kid sleeps, and when he wakes, his first desire is to create music. This scene offers a powerful statement about the nature of work and love. In *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran writes, "Work is love made visible."* In *Purple Rain*, Prince shows us.

The next year, *Around the World in a Day* came out, and I met a gorgeous young woman. I had never met a woman before who loved Prince and cannabis as much as I did. Despite our mutual love of weed, if it wasn't for our mutual love of the purple funkster, we might have missed each other. She was seventeen and had posters of Prince and Pee Wee Herman on her wall. I was twenty-three and had posters of Prince and Paramahansa Yogananda on my wall. Prince was so powerful, he was able to bridge the gulf between Pee Wee Herman and Paramahansa Yogananda. That's powerful magic!

"The Ladder" remains one of my favorite Prince songs. That he co-wrote it with his father after the *Purple Rain* hullabaloo was a big deal. It was nice to see some

reconciliation between them. Eventually, the gorgeous girl with the Prince posters became my wife. It seemed like she and I—and Prince—were feeling a pull toward the ideals emanating from the Yogananda poster. It felt like we all had found the ladder, but still needed to convince ourselves that climbing away from the Elektras of the world was the thing to do.

“Temptation” is the logical conclusion to the album. It’s an omen that the center between the extremes of hedonism and piety could not hold. Neither for Prince, nor for me. I found a wife, hooked up with a meditation master, and dedicated myself to a spiritual path. In listening to “Temptation,” it’s clear Prince was going through a similar transition. He renounced the hedonistic joys that had defined his—and my—youth. In a way, that song externalized an ongoing conversation I had been having with my own conscience. “Climb the ladder, give up the silliness,” it said. I again appreciated Prince voicing my thoughts. From “Soft and Wet” to “Temptation,” he provided a soundtrack for my life.

It was because I loved him so much and felt so connected to the “Temptation” storyline, that his flirtation with the *Black Album* made me angry. The grapevine was buzzing that Prince had created another erotic masterpiece. I didn’t care that he pulled it at the last minute. After what he said in “Temptation,” how could he even go that far in the studio? I thought about giving away his albums but settled on just packing them up. We grew apart.

Still, I was shocked when he joined a doomsday cult. Initially, I was pissed at Larry Graham when Prince died. If the funky fundamentalist hadn’t offered Prince the Kool-Aid, he might still be alive. But I can’t hate the messenger. If Prince fell for it, that’s on him. I used to joke with people by asking how long they could listen to Jehovah’s Witnesses’ propaganda if Prince knocked on their door and refused to talk about anything except the JW interpretation of the Bible. Despite my never-ending love for him, I think I could last twenty, maybe thirty minutes, tops.

*Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet: Gibran’s Masterpiece* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 23.



Autobiography of a Yogi, first ed., 1946© Paramahansa Yogananda

HAJI SHEARER

Haji Shearer is a social activist, husband, and father. He teaches meditation and relationship skills.

How has Prince’s Music Impacted my Spirituality

Basmin

Abstract: How Prince’s music has impacted my Spirituality: God’s plan is bigger than I can figure. Whenever I step out on faith, miraculous adventures unfold! Do what you feel in your Heart is right and your footsteps will be guided by the Love of God’s Light. Spiritual occurrences can be difficult to translate. If a person has never experienced the synchronicity of the HeartsMinds guidance system, any testimony can sound too strange to be true. Spirit often defies and exceeds earthly expectations when Dreams are made real. In the Divine plan, I first crossed paths with Prince at a piano long before his genius was known to the world; a mystical connection was ignited. Our interactions changed the course of my life, propelling me to creatively express what I believe is my higher purpose in the World. My essay interprets Prince’s film, *Graffiti Bridge* (1990), depicting facets of esoteric exchanges; significant moments that led me to interpret how Heaven is directing my earthwalk.

Creator’s Breath animates every Spirit in the flesh. Subjectively I can’t separate the kaleidoscopic complexity of Prince’s personality from his essence-infused music or how it continues to impact every iota of my Being. Unconditional Love juxtaposed with awareness of his personal struggles doesn’t allow me to place him on a pedestal as I reflect on my admiration and inspiration from his presence in the World. There was rarely an instant in his sleeping or waking where music was absent, every composition held a personal reverberation. Prince was One I could discuss the principles of living in Maat, the Gnostic gospels, Rosicrucian teachings, the Bible, the Essenes, beliefs of Indigenous and African Peoples, Egyptian, Mayan, and Aztec mythology/cosmology and their concepts of time. He motivated me to recognize astral projection, utilize telepathic communication, manifest precognitive Dreams, inspired me to lend my talents to original work in stage performance, singing, songwriting, spoken word, and an assortment of creative conceptions.

Music was our first connection. I met this extraordinary HueMan Being before he came to celebrity status. Thanksgiving night, Gary, IN 11/26/72, he came over while I was playing piano and sat on the bench next to me. Prince was able to coax music from twelve instruments by then and spoke of what he Dreamed to accomplish. That moment had a profound effect on me, warranting an entry in my diary. Six-years later, hearing *For You* as the featured album on V103FM in Atlanta, it was undeniable that this solo effort was borne from a genius of the craft.

An improvised “Conversation with God” on stage in St Louis, MO, struck a chord deep within me. Prince called 12/22/84 at 4:44am the next morning, igniting esoteric exchanges spanning decades that sustains to this day. He compelled me to send cards, letters, poetry, music; those, as well as our phone conversations and path crossings, were often mirrored in his work. Endeavoring to shed Light on this platonic friendship’s influence, I’m guided to give my interpretation of *Graffiti Bridge*, a film which sought to illuminate our clandestine mystical communication.

The majority of this project was filmed on the Paisley Park soundstage, a literal interior landscape in his realm which he calls 7Corners. Flashes of lightning are relevant to Aura’s character (there was always a thunderstorm when Prince and I were in the same city). The female lead, Aura, writes poetry (referred to as her ‘children’) that’s often a voice-over in scenes. She resides in a place called The Bridge which represents an ethereal plane where communication occurs. Characters never explain how they’re aware of its location. Aura says, “One wants money, One wants Light,” questioning her assignment from Heaven to address the conflict on Earth she’s been called to resolve. “The Kid” portrays Prince’s Spiritual self, Morris portrays his earthly expression, and Aura comes to settle the contention between these characters.

The first scene demonstrates astral projection and telepathic communication. A female voice speaks a message, Aura appears in The Kid’s room, he wakes up, sees her, she disappears, he hears her telepathically repeat the message, then gets up and begins to work.

Next, we’re in The Kid’s club, Glam Slam, where Aura is present. Morris arrives condemning the “Spiritual noise” made in the club that “ain’t hitting” and his band begins to play. Morris grabs a phone during the song talking to a ‘Stella’, then takes the crowd to his Pandemonium club.

The Kid hops on his motorcycle to The Bridge, makes eye contact with Aura and returns to his place. The Kid tries to expand on her message, dozes on his motorcycle, awakens when Aura appears, then disappears. He asks, "Are there really angels or are they just in your mind?"

Tevin [Campbell] sings "Round and Round," a song that speaks of this young man's hopes for the future and what isn't found. Morris and Aura are at Pandemonium where she talks about a "Spiritual substitute for sex," knows the words to a song composed in her honor, and telepathically responds to questions asked by Morris and his sidekick Jerome. They kidnap her and she's rescued by The Kid.

A shared Dream is depicted when Aura awakens in his room, attests she belongs to God, reads his written music, and reassures him of success. They ride around town to The Bridge. The Kid reads her poetry written in colors then returns to his place. He talks with Aura about writing letters to a deceased father, indicates he's contemplated suicide, doubts the significance of his music; her responses are meant to indicate Heaven has sent One who listens.

Challenging Morris to a battle, The Kid comes to Pandemonium while Aura is there and performs "Tick, Tick, Bang," exclaiming, "You're such a QueenB." It seems The Kid won't win a musical battle in this struggle. Morris has a plan to take over 7Corners by getting all the club owners to sign over their deeds by threatening them. After "Melody Cool" sings her signature song, looking towards Heaven Aura says, "Whatever you ask of me, I will do." Aura steps into the path of a Jeep fleeing this scene and is killed.

Believing he's lost everything, The Kid goes to The Bridge reflecting on his conversations with Aura. She appears, discouraging his thoughts of suicide. Returning to Glam Slam, The Kid sings, "Still Would Stand All Time" with the Steele Family as background singers, and his conflict with Morris is resolved. He wins the battle with a gospel-inspired ballad. The poem he struggled to write becomes the hand-writing on the wall.

God's plan is bigger than I can figure, occurrences on Spiritual levels are difficult to translate. My friendship with Prince changed the course of my life, propelling

me to creatively express what I believe is my higher purpose. His profound gift of a friendship made many Dreams Real and enhanced the way I move through the World. The resonance of Prince's music will indisputably impact and influence perspectives of God's presence for generations to come.



Basmin is a native St. Louisan of diverse experience and versatile expression. As a character innovator and vocalist, her memorable presence has been commissioned by writers/producers/directors to illuminate the vision of a project. BASMIN has shared her talents exclusively in original theater, musical, and film productions for local and national audiences. Original spoken word, sagas, songs, and several exciting productions that feature her can be found by searching on YouTube for “Basmin Live Performance.” No Brag —just facts: Every 28 Hours/One Minute Play Festival performer and *Stay out dem Streets* playwright for October 2015 St. Louis, MO project focusing on Ferguson and racial justice in America; writer/producer/performer *Bitter Crop: Tribute to Billie Holiday* presented First Annual St. Louis Filmmakers Awards Honorable Mention; original performance given for Awards Ceremony at The Pageant in St. Louis, MO July 31, 2001; Honorable Kentucky Colonel May 15th, 1997; Five State Multicultural Conference Award San Antonio, TX March 1996; Socialization of the Culturally Diverse Child Appreciation St. Louis, MO May 17-18, 1996; First woman of color to photograph NFL games in St. Louis, MO 1981; First Place Eighth Annual Writers Conference Clark-Atlanta University April 15, 1977. Poet, pianist, lyricist, vocalist, storyteller, actress, intuitive, songwriter, spoken word artist.

I Wish U Heaven: The Gospel According 2 Prince Carmen Tanner Slaughter

Abstract: This essay examines how Prince’s music impacted every facet of my life including my spirituality. It reflects the longevity of his influence and how his music allowed me to make peace with his death.

“All of this and more is for U / With love, sincerity, and deepest care / My life with U I share.” These are the lyrics of the opening track to Prince’s debut album. He is often described as enigmatic and private, but those of us who truly understood him know better. Perhaps he didn’t give frequent interviews and, sadly, he left us before his memoirs were complete but he was a lyrical raconteur. He is beloved because he was able to express his multi-dimensional empathy in a way that defied restrictions. Admission to his world was easy for those who wanted (or needed) to go. All you had to do was listen with your heart and mind and soul.

Four decades of my life are interwoven with his musical generosity. I always felt like he held the answers to my questions in his mystical fingertips. His virtuosity served many purposes in my life. Every instrument he played could satisfy a particular yearning. If I was sad, I sought comfort in his haunting piano orchestrations. When I wanted to dance in celebration, I cranked up a blistering guitar solo or a funky groove. Tender moments were enhanced by his melodies. He composed the score for my personal highlight reel, but my faith journey with Prince began after the release of the *Controversy* album. “Do I believe in God? / Do I believe in me? / Some people wanna die / So they can be free / Life is just a game / We’re all just the same.”

I was a teenager who grew up in the church and the lyrics went straight to my heart. I couldn't understand why so many people focus on our differences when we're all made in the Creator's image. Hearing those words validated my feelings, and subsequent recordings established that Prince was a spiritual guide for the times of my life. Each album would have at least one track to shore up my faith. I learned the importance of sacred prayer, finding strength in our common need for salvation, and accepting the beauty of our oneness with God and each other. There were constant reminders to seek faith and share hope, but the ultimate goal was to love one another.

My attendance at Prince concerts was in the double digits, and I was fortunate enough to acquire tickets for both of his final shows. It had been ten years since he visited Atlanta, and I was especially excited because of the format. Over the years I saw him in a variety of settings but nothing this intimate. From the first song to the last encore, it was an intensely personal evening. He was more indulgent than ever before, and his enjoyment of the audience was obvious. It seemed as if we were performing for him. His final words to us were to take care of each other. As he left the stage, I watched until his afro blended into the darkness. Something in my spirit told me it was the last time I would be in his presence but I was not prepared to say goodbye so soon.

I have a pale "7" on my inner wrist. It is my birthmark as well as my favorite number. It also has recurring significance throughout Prince's life. He was born on June 7th. His first album was recorded in 1977. The budget for *Purple Rain* was seven million dollars. We're all familiar with the track from the *Love Symbol* album. He spent seven years disentangling himself from Warner Brothers. He won seven Grammys. He played the Super Bowl in 2007. There were seven days between his last performances and his death at age 57. It is no coincidence that there are seven stages of grief, and I experienced the first four on April 21, 2016.

When I learned of his passing I could not breathe. Anyone who ever met me knows about my connection to Prince Rogers Nelson and my perception of him as an older brother. A working knowledge of his catalogue was a prerequisite for potential suitors. Friendships were cemented due to a mutual reverence for his

talent. It was hours before I could respond to all the people seeking to comfort me and share my grief. They reached out because they knew I had lost a family member. I felt completely helpless. I couldn't rely on his music to soothe me because it was too painful to hear his voice. In an interview, he once said, "I'll celebrate the day I die." When he left us it was difficult to accept. I didn't want to celebrate because I had to focus on how deeply spiritual he was.

The day after the Atlanta concerts he tweeted, "I am #Transformed." The Biblical symbolism of the number seven is completion. I had to chastise myself for being selfish. He was ready to go, and I realized we had him far longer than we deserved. John 14:2 (KJV) speaks of the mansions in heaven. *The Emancipation* album featured a track titled "White Mansion," which was a reference to Paisley Park. Whenever Prince was in the building, the color purple flowed throughout the grounds.

On April 21st, while the world mourned, a rainbow (they have seven colors, you know) appeared over his haven and royal colors graced the clouds. I always thought he'd be somewhere here on earth but he found his way back home. He led me on a unique and unconventional journey of faith through his music. I am striving daily to follow his example. I live for love and look forward to the day we all see the dawn.

CARMEN TANNER SLAUGHTER

Carmen Tanner Slaughter, a Georgian, discovered Prince at the age of ten and never looked back. She is a voracious reader and an avid cinephile. She appreciates all genres of music and loves to travel. Carmen has been a featured storyteller at many Atlanta literary events including Carapace, Stories on the Square, the Peach State Storytelling Festival, and A Novel Idea. She has been a panelist at Berry College's Southern Women Writers Conference and serves as a moderator for the Broadleaf Writers Conference held each September. Carmen is always in search of the next adventure.

Prince and Peace Tonya Parker

Abstract: My name is Tonya Parker and my personal essay is entitled "Prince and Peace." The title hails from my visit to Paisley Park in May of 2017. The experience was fulfilling—full of Prince and full of peace. Prince has been part of my life since I was a little girl. My father often listened to Prince, and he also played Prince's music on his guitar. I was intrigued by both my father and Prince, and both of them deeply influenced my search for God and my spiritual foundation. I lost my father in a car wreck in 1988 when a seventeen-pound cinderblock was thrown off an overpass and hit my father in the head, killing him instantly. My older sister and I survived, but our lives were forever changed. Readers of my essay may find insight into my spiritual life as I lead them on the journey to the understanding of how I kept my connection to my father by following Prince's life and music. It is because of Prince Rogers Nelson that I truly understand that spirituality does not have to be stifling. I am a licensed minister, an associate pastor, and my spiritual life involves a lot of Prince Theology.

Devout Christians of various denominations wanted Prince to be more like them, less him. Prince wanted to be more like God. I want to be more like Prince. Most remember Prince as a beautiful man, physically; I also remember Prince as a beautiful man, spiritually. I credit him as one of the most influential people who, through his music and what I know of his life, has taught me to keep an open mind and always seek God for myself, and in the process, to always be myself.

I paid close attention to my father as a child in the early 1980s; I paid close attention to Prince because of my father. My father was a musician in his own right, playing the guitar as a hobby. His biggest inspirations were Prince and Jimi Hendrix, though I heard more Prince than I did Hendrix playing in our home.

When “Controversy” spun on the record player, I recalled Prince chanting the “Our Father” prayer—the same one we said at church! So in my mind, Prince went to church. Perhaps he even read the Bible, or he did both—just like me! Prince and I said the same prayer, and we may even talk to the same God. The thought excited me and piqued my interest in God and in Prince.

The song “Annie Christian,” which played on the same *Controversy* album, scared me a little; it sounded like hell, instrumentally and lyrically. The words, “*anti-Christian, anti-Christ / Until you’re crucified*” continuously rang in my head. I didn’t realize until I was older that the title of the song was actually “Annie Christian.” I just add it to the genius of Prince. I was certain I heard exactly what he wanted me to hear. When I was able to read and understand the lyrics, I found Prince also loaded “*Annie Christian*” with political messages as well as spiritual ones.

That confirmed it for me—Prince was brilliant! This realization was just scratching the surface of the depth and complexity of this unique, spiritual force, known to us simply as *Prince*.

I listened to Prince more intentionally and intensely after the release of the *Sign ‘O’ the Times* album. It was the first and last CD my father would ever purchase, as he was killed in 1988 when a cinderblock was thrown off an overpass, hitting him in the head while he was driving. My older sister and I survived the wreckage, but the damage I endured from watching the whole incident occur was inescapable. I turned to writing, and desperately seeking more of God for relief and emotional healing.

Prince was introduced into my life through my father, so in the early 1990s, I decided to continue to follow Prince and his music—in honor of my father, in reconciliation of myself. In some strange way, my father lived on as long as I kept my connection to Prince. That thought, and Prince’s music, got me through high school and college.

As a matter of fact, I got to see Prince in concert for the first time in January of

1997 at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia. My stepfather took me to the show for my birthday, which was two days later. Needless to say, it was the best birthday gift ever, and I could not but see the spiritual connection—my stepdad, in my biological father’s absence, took me to see Prince, whom I embraced as the connector between my deceased father and me. I shed a few tears as I watched Prince work his magic, performing miracles on stage right before the eyes of every individual present. I didn’t just see Prince. I felt him. I also felt the presence of my father.

Since 1997, I continued to listen to Prince as promised and planned, and I continued to grow spiritually with him. When I started college, I was certain I wanted to be an English teacher, but as I studied religion and philosophy, my interest changed. My curiosity and yearning for something greater and more meaningful kept me seeking.

I kept a personal journal, documenting my thoughts and experiences, as I argued with or against those whose opinions are respected as worthy of discussion by a select group of informed others. I never thought for a moment that Prince didn’t deserve a seat at the table. As an aspiring “believer” myself, I read into Prince’s songs as I did the Bible, searching for meaning and understanding, and at times, for salvation.

Some Christians needed Prince’s songs to bear titles such as “The Holy River,” “And God Created Woman,” “7,” and “The Cross” to believe Prince had any kind of spirituality, no matter what he said about being a Jehovah’s Witness during his interviews and the testimonies of others who knew him. Some seem to enjoy holding Prince down to their description of “lost, over-sexualized, possibly gay, sinner.” I’ve heard terms such as these from people who wouldn’t know Prince any more than someone who had seen the film *Purple Rain* once and maybe heard the song “Kiss” twice.

My spirituality is closer to what I know of Prince’s more so than many “believers” who I know personally. I felt the connection even more when I visited Paisley Park in May of 2017, which was an amazing, humbling experience. The aura of the

space is calming and peaceful, the overall tone, enlightening. I felt as if I were on a spiritual journey—my Mecca. I think I just might go back annually: Paisley Park, a place of Prince and Peace.

It is because of people like Prince Rogers Nelson, I know spirituality can be freeing; it makes you more of who you are meant to be. If you don't think so, dive a little deeper, listen more intently to Prince; the message is in the music. Watch him perform; he is spirituality in motion.

It didn't take Prince to die for me to realize he was true to himself and true to God, simultaneously. That's how I live my life. I do not allow others to bind me with their religious ropes and duct tape. I am a free spirit, meant to boundlessly soar. I thank Prince for paving the way, contributing his truth and wisdom to my spiritual journey. Onward, I go.

TONYA PARKER

Tonya Parker is an inspirational speaker and licensed minister, and she holds a B.A. in English and an M.A. in Theology. Ms. Parker is currently the Assistant Dean of Students for Diversity and Inclusion at Wesleyan College and Associate Pastor at First Assembly of God in Macon, Georgia. She works independently as Inclusion Practitioner® for public speaking events, civil discourse and dialogue facilitations, and inclusion workshops. Ms. Parker served as executive camp director, field executive, and program director for the Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia, Inc. for over 13 years. She served as a Girl Scouts camp director for girls ages 5-18 for nine years and was chosen by the Girl Scouts of the USA to represent our country in Mexico for an international leadership conference in 2008 where she presented her project, "Change Her Mind, Change Her World," a ten-week character- building and self-esteem course for girls ages 11-18.

As Director of Education of the Tubman Museum from 2012-2016, Ms. Parker designed and implemented new learning formats to increase museum program offerings, and she added the International Children's Village component to the Tubman's annual Pan African Festival. She directed the Tubman's Heritage Camp for three years while strengthening the museum's volunteer corps by creating a high school and college student docent program. Ms. Parker enjoys traveling, reading, listening to music, writing journal entries, dancing, and spending time with friends and family.

Prince and Sexual Redemption

Karen Medin

Abstract: In this essay, Prince and Sexual Redemption, I briefly trace a history of childhood sexual abuse, coming out, a sexual dream about Prince, and the redemptive effect his image has had on my coming to love myself as a sexual being.

I grew up not quite a child of the 1960s but with the 1960s sexual liberation movement consequences. Free love was highly prized by the boys of my childhood and the girls tried to accommodate. Many times they were forced to accommodate. One of my friends was gang-raped while babysitting. As for me, I was cajoled at far too young an age, so I was physically and spiritually damaged. I also turned to God in prayer for healing. The damage was extreme and my psyche found ways to deny what had happened even to the point where I'd forgotten it had happened.

The consequences of this burial of reality were mixed. I became extremely bookish and religious. At the proper time for exploration, I turned to girls for a safer sexual experience. At what I now perceive to be the true onset of adulthood, I returned to a boy/man. After four years of struggling with what I now perceive as trying to be straight, I fell in love with a woman. The veil separating me from my past suddenly lifted in the moment I experienced love at first sight. I tumbled into a full adulthood of painful memories that could no longer be hidden, much less abolished.

My first thought was that I could not pursue my career as a minister in my evangelical, protestant Christian tradition as planned. They had just begun the discussion of the ordination of gays and lesbians, and had concluded they would require celibacy. My personal sexual liberation took place in the form of accepting and celebrating my love of women, and I couldn't accept that celibacy was God's will. Instead of ministry, I would pursue scholarship in religion.

I arrived at Harvard Divinity School in 1988. As I looked around for dating opportunities I was discouraged by the lack of choice. It seemed the most attractive and interesting women were bisexual. One night after considering the means whereby I would pursue a bisexual woman, I had a sexual dream about Prince. I was shocked by this, having concluded a full-year earlier that I was no longer into men. Perhaps his motorcycle riding in Purple Rain was attractive to me as a fellow motorcyclist? Anything to prevent a return to the conundrum of questioning my sexuality! Knowing full well that the motorcycle connection was not the basis of the dream, I returned to thoughts of why Prince. His body was similar to the boy's with whom I'd had my first sexual experiences. That idea horrified me. Was he even a man, I wondered?

My research through Harvard Divinity School and the Boston Theological Institute was filled with interesting discoveries about God. In a course called "Gospel Stories of Women," we formed groups to create or incorporate rituals with our classmates. In preparation for my turn to lead I returned to the writings of Starhawk, a dynamic speaker, writer, and leader of wiccan rituals. I felt some healing as I expelled my bad memories of sexual violation into salt water. I felt safety and power as I called the elements and set the boundaries of the rituals using the four primary directions.

It didn't seem so bizarre anymore to think I had something to do with my own spirituality, that if something wasn't working I could fix it. I was relieved to think I might apply the powers of the universe to my own healing. I had grown sick of expecting that God/healing would someday instantly remove the creepy-crawly body memories of what had happened to me as a child. It seemed to me I'd been expecting something like the reverse of the Star Trek phenomenon of being

beamed up by Scottie; that God would beam Himself down to me to massage my body, mind and soul back to purity.

Another big influence on me during my time in graduate school was Mary Daly, the author of *Beyond God the Father* and many other radical feminist writings. Most stunning was the experience of being interviewed at her Boston College office for the privilege of taking her advanced feminist ethics course. Women leaving the office after their turn informed the others in line that she expected you to slam the door closed. The ill-fitting door became a test to demonstrate how willing to demonstrate force a female student was. She wanted nothing to do with you if you were too meek. As I passed her initial test I realized—as I had in the ritual group—that my body could be a vehicle of theological discovery. I felt as though God was bodily with me as I engaged with the course that semester.

One of my best friends that semester was a lapsed Hare Krishna who attended school with me. My boss for my work-study job warned me that she had a bad feeling about him, but he was wonderfully exotic to me. He was interested in earth-centered spirituality. He enjoyed being naked, out in nature, photography. He introduced me to Indian food and music, to the love of broccoli and tea. He also had a love of psychedelics, which I found strange. While I did not take him up on most of the offers of sex and drugs, I intensely enjoyed spending time with him, going to the maypole dance of a local Wicca community, hanging out in Mt. Auburn cemetery, or going to classical music concerts.

I was far more physically involved with myself. The mind/body split I had fostered in my religious and my academic life evaporated when I was doing things with him. Spirituality for and with him meant engaging with the body rather than transcending it.

How is this related to Prince? Prince's music and performances also demonstrate a profound spirituality that is a byproduct of intensive and deliberate bodily activity. He made a point to discourage drug use yet was found to have done so himself. He was in great pain I have heard, even while performing so rigorously, jumping and doing the splits in a seemingly effortless manner. His sexuality was

seamlessly woven into his persona. Mine was split off due to abuse.

This, I believe, is why I dreamed of having sex with him. He was beyond the socially imposed categories of gay and straight. To me at least he was beyond the physical categories of adult and child. As such, he embodied the godhead. God is beyond the limitations of categories, be they those of nature or nurture. Prince's art tells me that I, as a part of God, am free to be exactly who I am, even if that means being bisexual.

Prince's addiction and death tell me that I am not free to transcend pain and suffering even as a spiritual being. Prince believed he was redeemed by God exactly as he was. His non-admission of a drug problem was not wrong because he was not wrong before God. His work and his life remain with God, pure and holy. As such, I refer to him as I continue my journey toward self-acceptance, which actually is acceptance of God.

Most of all I forgive myself. Jesus says we are to forgive others as ourselves or not be forgiven by him. Implicit in forgiveness is forgiveness of self. Just as we cannot love others without first loving ourselves, so too we cannot be forgiving and forgiven without first forgiving ourselves. This is the root of the acceptance Prince so aptly portrayed. Sexuality is our most tangible exposure of ourselves. Prince's ability to portray his sexuality so consistently and vividly proves he adopted a theology of sexuality. He portrayed that ultimate holiness of our God-given sexuality I have so earnestly tried to find in my healing from sexual abuse.

KAREN MEDIN

Karen Medin has a Master of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School and a Master of Library and Information Science from Simmons University. She is an academic library faculty member with numerous publications in the field of librarianship. She is a practicing Episcopalian/Lutheran. She lives with her dogs, daughter, and her daughter’s father.

Prince
Keisha Kogan

Abstract: This essay is about the work of Prince and how he is a post-modern theologian. First written as a sermon, the words presented here tell the story of how Prince’s lyrics and existence remains a testimony to love and free expression, as well as self-determination. Here Prince is compared here to the [womanist] theologian Delores Williams, who writes that there is no redemptive suffering—a suffering from which good things will flourish. Prince follows in Williams’ footsteps by encouraging his listeners to love the life they have here and now. To live and that suffering is just that—suffering. There is nothing good that comes out of it, so we should do our best to live without it. His spirituality has affected me personally, in that he encourages me to see the world through his eyes—eyes, that are generous, tenacious, and which stands up for their beliefs no matter the personal cost or loss. Through Prince’s eyes and music, we see the perfection of our existence and the promise of the world to come. No matter what you believe spiritually, you can take comfort in Prince’s desire to make you feel love—all kinds.

The church was huge. And even though I was there with over 40,000 of my fellow worshippers, it felt small and intimate. The pastor was charismatic, beautiful, and dangerous. Donned in white, he took us through the stages of grief and levels of ecstasy. We were different when we left than when we entered. Wiser, older, enlightened?

From my seat I could see so many different people who also came to worship and be transformed. There were the couples who had been married for a long time; the best friends since high school; people on first dates trying to figure out if the other person was someone they wanted to spend more time with or at least have sex with. And then there were the people like me, being transported to a time of wild abandon.

What were we all doing there? We were probably there for the same reason everyone goes to church—to feel part of something larger than ourselves. To touch the infinite—just for a moment.

The sermon went on for over two hours with ebbs and flows, and call and response. We all knew when to stand up and scream or sit down and reflect. Each of us had a different word or phrase that caused us to close our eyes, lift up our hands and silently testify. The Great Reverend took us through so many phases of life, taught us so many moral lessons about birth and death and pain and sex, about oppression and religion and drug addiction. We swayed and clapped and stamped our feet and had a good—hell, a great cry. We forgave wrongs and woke up old pains. We stood still and broke down. And in the end, we said good-bye and went back to our ordinary lives.

I have three children. It was 2004. I was eight-and-a-half-months pregnant with my second child and oldest son, Max. The Prophet was performing at The Meadows in New Jersey. No one was interested in going with me, so I got one ticket and went alone. He played amazingly, and Max danced in-utero all night.

He started playing “Sweet Thing,” a song he wrote for Chaka Khan. He literally played two chords and the entire audience of over 40,000 people, including my hugely pregnant self, stood up and started singing. He didn’t sing one word—not one. We all sang the entire song. At the end he stood up and applauded us. That’s the night I tell people that I sang and was accompanied by Prince. His generosity was true. His love palpable. Generous and loving is how I think about Prince. And that is why I find God in his work.

In the song, “I Would Die for You,” he pens the now-famous line that supports and validates queer, non-gender conforming people everywhere: “I’m not a woman / I’m not a man / I am something that you’ll never understand.” Prince reminds us we are of one family.

Prince is a theologian. He reminds me of Delores Williams, another theologian,

who says there is nothing redemptive in suffering. We should strive in this life to live the best life we possibly can and to enjoy it. We should make the most of this life even if the odds are against us—especially when the odds are against us.

This is one of Prince’s many messages to us: paradise is here on earth and in the afterlife—how lucky we are. Most see him as the sexy, gender-bending, guitar-shredding demigod that he was. And like a true prophet, he did not come here to speak to just one group of people. Much like Jesus, he came to speak to us all: the exalted, the “least of these” and the children.

One of my children’s favorite songs by Prince is “Starfish and Coffee.” The lyrics tell the story of a little girl named Cynthia Rose who brings the most amazing things to school every day for lunch. No one believes her, until one day they open her lunchbox and find the truth of what she’s said. They find, “Starfish and coffee / Maple syrup and jam / Butterscotch clouds, a tangerine / and a side order of ham.” Prince encourages us to set our minds free, so maybe we will understand the wonder—not only of Cynthia Rose—but the wonder in each of you—the joy in each of us—the life we must live while we are here to live it.

I will always remember Prince and his lyrics as being those of a theologian who both taught us about God and the nature of religious ideas: from the exuberance of life to the idea of soteriology—our collective salvation—and then brings us right into eschatology—or our common movement toward death and the afterlife. Prince is a post-modern theologian in that he doesn’t take sides, at least in most of his music. He doesn’t tell us what is “true” and what is not. He always puts the questions before us and allows us to pick up what we need and to leave the rest behind. He is prophetic witness.

My favorite Prince lyric perhaps speaks the loudest to what a prophet would tell us about God. Even though he is singing to a particular person, his lyric is not lost on the expanded love he has for all of us. We can hear Prince speaking for God when he sings: “Until the end of time / I’ll be there for you / You own my heart and mind / Truly I adore you.”

The charismatic one in white walked away but left the scent of earth and passion in his wake. We stood there frozen, mesmerized. Had we really just gone there? And was it over so soon? We were drunk and shocked when the bright lights came back on. Dream over, liminality ended. But the words lingered: “Truly I adore you.”

REV. KEISHA KOGAN

Rev. Keisha Kogan is an interfaith minister who works to educate faith communities about Domestic Violence /Intimate Partner Violence. Rev. Kogan holds both an MFA in directing for the stage and a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary where she also works as a teaching fellow. Rev. Kogan loves to bring her educational backgrounds together by working with playwrights about the stories of women in the Bible who have experienced violence, and educating seminarians, who will one day go on to lead their own congregations, about Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence. She is presently working on a play about Tamar, the daughter of King David, who was raped by her step-brother. Rev. Kogan’s overall work is to educate people about gender-based violence with the hope of helping to create a safe and peaceful world.



Prince 3:16: The Gospel of an Artist

Monica Martinez

Abstract: My personal story on the one and only time I went to a Prince show, specifically his last performance in my hometown of Austin, TX, during the 2013 SXSW Festival and Conference, the obstacles I faced to getting there, but discovering what God and Spirituality really mean to me in the end.

I do not consider myself a “God-Fearing” woman. I am not a devout reader of the Holy Bible, nor do I attend church regularly. Growing up as an unconfirmed, baptized Catholic, I often questioned my spirituality and struggled to find what faith and God meant to me in my life.

As a Prince fan of many years, it was clear to me where he stood in his spirituality and beliefs. With every song, you could tell he was an anointed being with passion and sincerity in his voice. I believe Prince understood that music had the power to unite all people. He knew to be spiritual was to utilize the gifts God had given him, and to share his creations was to connect with God.

At the tender age of seventeen, I fell in love with the man behind the melody, but inadvertently began the journey of my personal spirituality. I never imagined Prince’s music would later lead me to what I often mention as the happiest day of my life, and the absolute definition of God’s grace. If you asked me if I believe in God, I would tell you about the night I saw Prince.

On March 10, 2013, there came confirmation of Prince’s arrival, sending my hometown of Austin, Texas, ablaze with a furor that I can only describe as a combination of disbelief and excitement. Like any Austin native, I understand that SXSW does not come without rumors and surprises. When both involve Prince, you make sure to pay full and undivided attention.

That night, I did further research to find when and where Prince would be performing. I was delighted at the news until I read the fine print. Samsung was the sponsor for his show, and only those who owned a Samsung mobile device and completed a “scavenger hunt,” would receive a purple wristband to attend his show. At the time, I owned an iPhone. Although discouraged, I decided I was determined to do whatever necessary for an experience that happens only once in a lifetime. I was even prepared for humiliation and ridicule. But little did I know God’s work was already done.

March 11, 2013, word was hot and whispered on the street. I expressed my deepest enthusiasm of Prince’s upcoming show to almost everyone I encountered. One specific person I spoke to that day was my friend Nichelle whom I had met the year prior. As we discussed our plans for the evening, I mentioned how much I wanted to see Prince but did not own the Samsung device required to do the “scavenger hunt.” She responded by saying, “I have a Samsung, and I’m doing the ‘scavenger hunt.’ If I win, I will give you my ‘+1’ wristband.” Overzealously, I cried, “Really? That would be awesome, thank you so much!” With a friendly smile, Nichelle said, “Oh girl, it’s nothing, you’re welcome.” At that moment, I realized the situation was about to change drastically.

A few days later, March 14, 2013, Nichelle and I were on a mission to find the last item to complete the Samsung “scavenger hunt.” We found it, of course, but unfortunately it came with an obstacle. As Nichelle finished the “scavenger hunt” on her phone, I anxiously waited to know if her attempt of winning tickets was successful. “I didn’t win.” Nichelle sighed. In a panic, I motioned to look at her phone screen and yelled, “What?” Sure enough, there lied a notification with the statement: “All Prince tickets are sold out.”

My heart immediately sunk; at that point, I was sure it was over. I looked back at Nichelle and lamented, telling her, "Well, thank you for trying." Positive there was nothing else I could do, I accepted my fate. But again, God already had plans.

The next morning, March 15, 2013, started like any other. As a volunteer for SXSW that year, I was at the Austin Convention Center preparing for the day when, lo and behold, my phone rang. It was Nichelle. "Hey!" I answered. Before I could say anything, she exclaimed, "Monica! I need you to come to the Samsung lounge right now. I'm in line for Prince tickets." With a gasp, I shouted, "Are you serious!" "Yes, you better get down here. I'll save you a spot in line," she replied. Without hesitation, I hung up and began to run. Bolting through the doors, I sprinted all the way up Trinity Street to meet her. About fifteen minutes later, Nichelle and I received our purple wristbands. I was in such shock, my excitement would not hit me until the next night.

March 16, 2013, my heart raced in uncontainable joy, eager to get downtown as early as possible. In fact, I arrived at the venue so early the Austin Police had to stop me from forming a line. Minutes later Nichelle joined me, which lead to a five-hour wait once the line formed. When time came for us to enter the doors, I ended up with a standing spot in the front row.

Once Prince appeared on stage I was overwhelmed with emotion, so much so I trembled and was brought to my knees, crying tears of happiness. Encore after encore, he performed well into the early hours of Sunday morning, as if he were singing the entire audience into eternal salvation.

That night, I learned my spirituality lies within everything I love and enjoy, and to surround myself with them is to experience the grace of God. I understand now that God's will is no coincidence or accident. Above all, Prince's music taught me that God has a plan for all of us; we just have to follow the signs along the way.

I used to end my story by saying I was lucky; this time I choose to end it in the word of God, with Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV): "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ."



Monica Martinez at Prince concert,
SXSW, March 16, 2013
Austin, Texas
<https://bit.ly/2Mmns7E>©
Digital edit by j. cather

MONICA MARTINEZ

Monica Martinez is an avid music lover, devoted SXSW volunteer, vinyl-record collector, and former Audio Production student of the Art Institute from Austin, TX. She became a Prince fan at the age of seventeen after watching *Purple Rain* and listening to her first vinyl album, which was Prince’s *Controversy*. She is also one of the very few who had the privilege of seeing him at his last show in Austin, TX, during SXSW 2013.

Prince Rogers Nelson: Spiritual Band Leader
Kellyn McGee

Abstract: I attempted to convey how Prince’s music permeated my teen years and continued to be an important part of my growth even through adulthood, that I used his music as my own spirituals when I needed uplifting. Prince’s legacy for me was saying it was okay to find God outside of traditional Christian or Gospel music.

1980s Atlanta: My “spiritual” life was defined by the shuffling between Catholic schools and the Baptist church—Mass sprinkled in. Although my parents worshipped God in different ways and in different buildings on the weekends, ours was not quite a house divided, because mom took the rein when it came to the spiritual nurturing of my brother and me.

I didn’t know what “spirituality” was then, but I knew spirituals: “Kumbaya,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Nobody Knows De Trouble I’ve Seen.” I sang them at day camps and vacation bible school during the summer, at children’s usher board rehearsals, and in the Catholic schools I attended. I sang them but feeling them, connecting with them, was outward, peripheral. I was part of the group who knew the words and how the melody worked with the music. And we would sing loud and giggled at each other as we deepened our voices several octaves on the “swing low” part. But the songs didn’t move me inside. I didn’t sing them randomly around the house like my mom sang, “Nobody told me, the road would be easy.”*

The shuffling between the Catholic and Baptist faiths fortified my acceptance of

the tenets of different religions and my openness to adapting my own spirituality to include many paths on my road to God. That road included Prince songs.

I don't remember how the Prince's music came into my life. Likely via "Controversy," the single, assailing the radio station. *Controversy*, the album, was the fourth in Prince's catalogue, but it was my introduction into his world. Like many preteens and teens who danced and sang to the album, I didn't know much about Prince. I just knew his music was cool, if forbidden. My aunt took my cousin's copy of *Controversy* and broke it in half over her knee after hearing some of the songs. She probably came across "Do Me, Baby" before even flipping over to get to the more risqué singles.

My parents either didn't hear the not-PG-rated songs or they ignored my indulgence and for that I am grateful. 1999 came along and I followed the crowd and fell in love. With a friend, I camped out for tickets to the International Lover Tour, which sold out before we got to the front, but I was fortunate to have another friend whose mother had tickets to the midnight (!) show and they invited me along. By the time *Purple Rain* was released, I was all in. Prince crossed over with that one, but all the "new" fans weren't die-hard like I was.

In the midst of me hopping onto the Prince bandwagon like many other girls my age, I was beginning to realize that his music had more than the "you belong" effect. When I was low or lonely, I could put on a Prince song and my mood would shift. His song became my spirituals.

"Kumbaya, my lord, kumbaya. Someone's crying lord, kumbaya"? Listen, instead, to "Free": "Don't worry about tomorrow, don't worry about your pain / ... Never let that lonely monster take control of you."

Prince wrote lyrics for my teen angst and spoke to my heart in ways black spirituals did not. When a boy broke my heart, I wasn't crying to "Someone's praying Lord, kumbaya." No. Through my tears, I was singing, "Why you wanna treat me so bad / When you know I love you?" That was my plea to God since the boy didn't hear or care.

As I grew beyond teen fandom, Prince's songs remained with me. Even now, decades after I first heard him, his music still calms me. But more than that, it's allowed me acceptance. Much like I can take what I need from the Baptist and Catholic (and other) faiths to seek and worship God, and to know that God loves me in spite of, or because of, my curvy path to him, I can add any Prince song to my worship playlist and know I'm getting to the same place, in my time, on my road.

Michaela Angela Davis said about Prince, "...[H]e was able to negotiate God and sex in his subject matter in a way that we had never seen before. Every song was either a prayer or foreplay."** That is true. What is also true is that I never felt any of his songs or their intent was wrong. It was okay for Prince to "negotiate God and sex," and as I struggled with that negotiation myself, and finally came to stand firmly as a God-loving, sex-loving person, I realized Prince's music and manner helped me get there. I see God in the lyrics to "She's Always in My Hair":

Whenever I feel like givin' up
Whenever my sunshine turns to rain
Whenever my hopes and dreams
Are aimed in the wrong direction
She's always there
Tellin' me how much she cares

Who can say those words are not God's voice soothing a tired soul?

A piece of my heart, of my life, floated away on April 21, 2016. As I told the woman who was my best friend during our formative Prince years, "We loved Michael, but we lived Prince." Though sad he is gone, I am grateful for the time I had with him, for the music he left that continues to be my balm of Gilead.

Many years ago, when I no longer had a stereo system, turntable, or record player, I gave my brother all of my albums, except one. The 12-inch of "Purple Rain" on purple vinyl. On the B-side: "God."

*"Can't Give Up Now," written by Curtis Burnell, Peermusic Publishing©, accessed July 5, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2S40ZyJ>.

** Michaela Angela Davis in Jessica Moss, "Nothing Compares 2 U, Prince," *John Jay Focus*,



Prince—Purple Rain
Beverly & Pack©
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<https://bit.ly/1pawxfE>

KELLYN MCGEE

Kellyn McGee is a teacher of the law and of yoga. She is a learner and a seeker. As a Christian, she might be considered wayward, but she stands firmly on her own beliefs and the knowledge that He loves her.

Prince

Po Tin Mak

Abstract: Prince, to many of us, is not only a legendary musician. He is also a cultural icon made in Minnesota who incorporates spirituality, political consciousness, social justices, and other spheres of the world into his music. His influences to the society and to the world are immeasurable. Particularly, three of Prince's songs, "New World," "Purple Rain," and "Colonized Mind" exhibit how Prince addresses different spectra in our world. The embodiment of politics, spirituality, and social parity in Prince's music has a huge impact on me as well. Prince's music has helped me to understand the words of God, has inspired me to honor Jesus in my life, and has influenced me to care more for people surrounding me. Thus, we all can help each other grow spiritually.

Prince, to many of us, is a legendary singer-songwriter, instrumentalist, record producer, actor, director, a generous philanthropist, and a compassionate humanitarian. To me, he is much more than that—he is also a spiritual mentor to me. He is my spiritual and musical mentor. His music has played a huge influence on my spirituality and my philosophical thinking.

Prince was one of the most important people that helped me to pave a way in believing in God, even though I did not have a chance to meet Prince personally during his lifetime. It was his music. As a person who did not grow up in America, Prince and his music opened the door for me to decipher the musical, historical, and cultural facets of America. Prince's music constantly enlightens my spirituality, love, peace, and mind magically.

Prince's music has consolidated my firm belief in God's words through the concept signified in Scripture. Prince has acknowledged God in his music. He recognized the Scriptures as the Words of God. Scriptures' presence is very evident in

Prince's music. In the song "New World," Prince's message, "Love for One Another," elucidates the inspiration and influence from Scriptures. This is clearly inspired by John 13:34-35, which signifies Jesus' desire for his disciples to spread the love within the community in unity.

One of Prince's goals in making music is to bring people of various colors together. Prince always spreads this message, for example, after his shows in Paisley Park: "Do me a favor and take care of each other, all right? It don't matter the color. We are all family." This conviction resonates with the message in the Scriptures. Prince's music invariably reinforced my belief in God's words. I am constantly edified of God's messages and words, not only by studying the Scriptures with my friends, but also by Prince's music.

God is the constant source of inspiration not only to me but to Prince as well. Prince honored the image of God in the song "Purple Rain." Prince once said, "When there's blood in the sky—red and blue = purple.... Purple rain pertains to the end of the world and being with the one you love and letting your faith/God guide you through the purple rain."* Jesus will come back when the end of the world prophesied by the Scriptures comes. By that time, the sky will turn from blue to red. Whoever truly believes and follows Jesus in their life will be guided by Jesus in the New World, which is eternal life.

Prince's explanation could suggest inspiration from the Scriptures in Revelation 6:12-13 (NIV), "I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind." The presence of purple rain could be inferred as an influence when the stars in the sky fell to earth in the Bible. To me, the entire song is spiritual. I always feel the purple and God in the song. I remember listening to the song many times a day. Before the last chorus of the song, Prince sings, "Let me guide you to the purple rain."

From the song, I felt I definitely needed a spiritual mentor in my life journey. Therefore, from that day on, I started to read the Bible more frequently and went to Bible study with friends regularly to be educated by the wisdom of the

Scriptures. The pulchritude of the song amazes me every time I listen to it, even though sadness is still pervading my mind because I know Prince is no longer physically with us.

Prince wrote the song “Colonized Mind” to express his viewpoint that the US should be in godly leadership. “Upload: the master race idea / Genetically disposed 2 rule the world.” This begins a history with a group of white-Europeans settled in the land of the US and built-up colonies three-hundred-years ago. They became the rulers of the states.

People of color automatically become the people of oppression and inferiority, even up to today. In the lyrics of the song, “Upload: a 2-party system / The lesser of 2 dangers / Illusion of choice / Download: a veiled form of fascism / Nothing really ever changes / U never had a voice.” This is a clear manifestation of the current political situation of the society. Americans basically have no authority and agency under the system of so-called democracy.

In the chorus, Prince sings, “If you look, ur sure gonna find / Thruout mankind’s history / A colonized mind / The one in power makes law / Under which the colonized fall / But without god it’s just the blind leading the blind.” This firmly demonstrates Prince’s thought and aspiration that the US should be led by the hands of God. The rulers should make decisions for the country in God’s honor.

With God’s grace, the leaders of the US will take good care of the country, so that they can make the best decisions for their people. The lyrics embody Prince’s vision for the utopian US. This song primarily focuses on the ideas and notions that spirituality and God would bring society love and peace.

The song reinforces my faith in Jesus. I would never be lost in my life with Jesus being my shepherd. I shall always honor Jesus in my life and in my spirit. Prince’s music not only instills the history but also the knowledge of God in my mind. The duality of Prince’s music is the paradigm for young musicians nowadays to follow.

I love Jesus. I love Prince. Upon Prince’s wishes, let us take care of each other, skin

color doesn’t matter. I pray that solidarity, love, peace, and joy are present in people’s lives for as many as possible in this world. Love one another, Amen.

* Mary Grace Garis, “Why Did Prince Love Purple? Let’s Revisit the Importance of the Icon’s Signature Color,” *Bustle*, April 21, 2016, accessed July 14, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Nh7v2F>.

My name is **Po Tin Mak**. I am an international student at the University of Minnesota. I was born and raised in Hong Kong, China. I began my study at the University of Minnesota in 2015 for my bachelor degree in mechanical engineering. I am a lover of African American music including Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, James Brown, and Prince. Bridging spirituality and music—Prince is the first artist who exposed me to this connection. It was Prince’s music and life that inspired me to keep my vision clear and put my life and trust in God. I love Prince forever and always, with purple love. Prince and his music also inspire me to learn more about African American music, African American history and culture.

Thank God for Prince: My Journey in Search of Faith, Salvation, and Grace

Tony Kiene

Abstract: This essay represents a personal account of how Prince Rogers Nelson, and the gift of his music, helped to substantially inspire and inform the spiritual development of a fellow Midwestern kid. It tracks the subject’s chance discovery of Prince at a rather young age, when the music’s style and sound alone spoke to him, through his pre-adolescent years and beyond, as Prince introduced social, political, and ultimately religious themes into his extraordinary catalogue. The story reveals how the subject found solace in meeting like-minded peers, or fellow “Prince freaks,” if you will, in his church youth group in spite of a dismissive encounter with the priest who led them. More than anything, the essay highlights how Prince, one of history’s most electrifying and controversial icons, influenced the subject’s journey not only through the spiritual motifs in his music, but also by way of the revolutionary racial and cultural inclusivity that Prince championed through his utopian visions of spaces such as “Uptown” and “Paisley Park.” This ideal loomed considerably large in light of the subject’s own struggles with the issues of faith, salvation, and grace.

Although I would have much rather stayed home to watch *The Cisco Kid*, growing up in a Catholic home meant Sundays were reserved for mass. In spite of this weekly obligation, religion was otherwise not discussed much in our house. Catholicism seemed an inherent part of our family identity, but there was a quiet informality to it.

As a young boy I thought about God a lot, yet kept those contemplations to myself. I loved God, and Jesus, more than any of the other things I loved: football, basketball, music. It was music, however, principally that of Prince, which would fortify my faith and shape my spiritual view of the world.

I discovered Prince early, before my eighth birthday in fact, as I traded my 45 rpm of The Jackson 5's "Dancing Machine" for a friend's 8-Track of *For You*. I didn't know anything about Prince. Nonetheless, when I saw his image on that tape I thought "That guy looks so cool." I took it home, played it, and never looked back. A year or so later, "I Wanna Be Your Lover" was released, and to my young ears was the greatest song ever recorded.

I didn't have money to spend then so I couldn't buy Prince's eponymous second album. But as the 1980s arrived, I had a regular allowance and spent every cent building a record collection, which included Michael Jackson, Earth, Wind & Fire, Donna Summer, Kool & The Gang, and Andy Gibb. I wanted *Dirty Mind* so badly, and later *Controversy*. And while my parents weren't particularly intrusive as to my listening preferences—for which I always wore headphones—I was concerned they might stumble upon the lascivious imagery that accompanied Prince's albums, especially *Dirty Mind*.

So, I resorted to borrowing Prince's third and fourth albums from a friend, minus the cover, and hid them in the sleeves of other records. The sexual innuendos throughout *For You* and *Prince* were over my head. But the sexuality of those next two albums was unmistakable, even for a ten-year-old. Yet it was not the raunchiness that drew me in, but Prince's indomitable rebel spirit which I dug as it alluded to politics, history, society, and ultimately religion.

I was intrigued by Prince's unconventional use of Christian themes and representations, including the interspersing of the sacred with the "profane." Since I wasn't yet familiar with U2, Prince was the first artist I heard talk about God. To me, that was so bold. After all, who recites the Lord's Prayer in a song? Perhaps more than anything, I was captivated by the radical, transcendent vision expressed in songs like "Uptown" and "Sexuality."

With the masterpiece *1999*, underscored by his manifesto at the end of "Let's Pretend We're Married," Prince took me higher. As to this revolutionary utopia of his—where social categorization was met with disdain—I was all in. Moreover, this ideal was more than political; it proved foundational to my faith.

Entering junior high in 1983, I also joined the church youth group and met other teens who were Prince freaks, including one who'd recently seen the *1999* tour. Chicago and Indianapolis were the two major cities nearest my hometown of South Bend, but the *1999* tour ventured even closer with stops in Gary and Kalamazoo. Alas, there was no way my parents would let me go, so I had to settle for Prince on Solid Gold and MTV.

Bonding with my new friends over our musical hero, I also began to take religion more seriously. Although our parish seemed progressive, it was overwhelmingly white, and its limited diversity was rooted in kids of color being adopted by white families, two of which were my Prince pals.

Around this time I thought about grace, salvation, and tolerance. It occurred to me there were people in the world who believed a Jewish boy in Brooklyn, a Muslim girl in Cairo, or a Hindu child in Bombay, etc., would—regardless of the righteous, principled life they may lead—not find the Kingdom of Heaven. That I could not accept. How can that be just? Does catholic not mean universal? Prince's music, and its inclusivity, proved to be my spiritual anecdote to that sort of nonsense.

The phenomenon that was *Purple Rain* and Prince's subsequent genius only bolstered my resolve and buoyed my faith in a just God. At youth group dances and other functions, no music was forbidden. Still, I sensed the priest, who was the leader of our youth group, didn't appreciate Prince. I played him "God," "4 The Tears in Your Eyes," and "The Ladder." His response was essentially, "So what?" and he went on to disparage Prince as a sexual deviant.

Not surprised, I was still dismayed by his sentiments but didn't push the matter. I knew how this music made me feel, and that it brought me closer to God. For me, a song like "The Cross," was gospel music, a sermon even.

In 1988, I saw Prince live for the first time. Thirty years later it remains one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. I mean, talk about going to church. After seeing Prince dozens of times in at least a dozen cities, I've never left disappointed.

I realize Prince was only a man and certainly not perfect. But I believe God spoke to us through Prince. I know he did to me. And I've come to realize that for the

better part of my life, Prince has been my preacher. And I'm not sure anyone has expressed these emotions better than an anonymous fan in the documentary *Prince: A Musical Portrait* (1989) when he said:

You leave a concert like this inspired. He's [Prince] actually got the nerve to say God is alive. How many people can say that to 17,000 people and get them to all say it back to him?... It tells you there's a future to the world. He's got a message, he's got a reason for being up there.*

Amen.

* "Prince: The Musical Portrait" (video), 1989, 4:57-5:11, accessed July 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeESp2aiBOg.v>

TONY KIENE

Tony Kiene is the Executive Writer at Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties in St. Paul, Minnesota. His twenty-two years working in the nonprofit and entertainment sectors consists of service to The Minneapolis Urban League, Penumbra Theatre Company, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, the Black United Fund of Oregon, and Pepé Music, Inc. Additional experience includes work as a Graduate Research Intern/Archivist at Stanford University's Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Graduate Teaching Fellow at the University of Oregon, and Public Relations Associate at the Purdue Black Cultural Center. He holds a B.A. in sociology and African American Studies from Purdue University, as well as an M.A. in American Studies from Purdue where his Master's Essay was titled, *Uptown: The Racial, Sexual, Spiritual, and Political Sociology of Prince and The Minneapolis Sound*.

The Great Hunter

Audrey Williams

Abstract: This essay is a short but to-the-point idea of how Prince has shaped my spiritual beliefs.

As a child, I never knew much about religion. I was told that God did not exist because if he did, why would he allow bad things to happen to good people. I have two siblings, and as young children, we were homeless and had parents who were very abusive. We were taken away from them, and at that time we were eleven, nine, and one. We were separated and lost touch with one another.

About four years later when I was fifteen, I was introduced to Prince’s music. When I heard his sound, it resonated with my soul. His song titled “The Arms Of Orion” was something I would listen to all the time when I thought about my siblings. (I would not see my baby sister for twenty years.) Every time I heard his music, I felt more in touch with my siblings. When I listened to that song, I felt there was more to life than what I had in front of my eyes. When I listened to that song, I knew the vastness of the universe. At that time, I knew we were together as long as the universe still existed. Throughout my life, I have always had Prince and his music to get me through any situation.

His belief that we are all one race, the human race, is around what I have shaped my current spiritual beliefs. Prince’s music has an effect in every aspect of life. His androgyny at times made me aware that there were so many different types of people in the world. I started to become more aware and thirstier for the knowledge of how many different people there were. There was so much to learn. He taught me how to ask questions about things I did not understand. He taught

me how to love, how to cry, how to laugh, and how to touch.

When I was eighteen, I was given a ticket to a concert he was to play at the Great Western Forum in Los Angeles, CA. I only had enough money to take the bus, and when I arrived with only my ticket and \$1.35 for my bus fare home, I was devastated to learn the concert had been canceled. I cried all the way home, and all I could think about was how can I tell him I love him? How can I tell him my life would not be the same without him in it? How can I tell him I love more because of him, and that I am a better person for having known of him? Sadly, this day would never come.

I have two children of my own, and when my son was born (12-7-1999) he cried so much. On the last night of that year, Prince had a concert that played live on Pay-Per-View. I purchased it and watched it with my baby boy. He stopped crying and slept through the night. Prince’s soul is in his music and his music is in my soul. I love him for all things he was and even more for all the things he was not.

My spirituality is a direct reflection of the things I have learned from listening to him speak, listening to him play his instruments, and listening to his voice sing songs of neutrality and non-conformity—songs about war and peace—songs about love and sexuality. I loved him then and I love him now. I will always miss him and I know that Orion is holding him extra tight for me.

AUDREY WILLIAMS

Audrey Williams is a mother of two working in the Mental Health field. She has been a follower of Prince since the age of fifteen. She likes to listen to his music, which inspires her creativity and joy.

The Music of Prince has Impacted my Spirituality
Thenisha Smith

Abstract: Spirituality has many meanings. For some it means to be a part of organized religion, for others it means to get in touch with one’s sacred self, and yet for others it means something completely different. For me, spirituality is my connection to God and includes prayer, going to church, actions, and relationships. Being a listener of Prince’s music all my life, I have recognized how his spirituality and music have impacted mine. ... Prince and his music have shaped my spirituality in many ways and for that, I am forever grateful.

Spirituality has many meanings. For some it means to be a part of organized religion, for others it means to get in touch with one’s sacred self, and yet for others it means something completely different. For me, spirituality is my connection to God and it includes prayer, going to church, actions, relationships, and it is all-consuming. Being a listener of Prince’s music all my life, I have recognized how his spirituality and music have impacted mine.

The first way Prince impacted my life was that when he said he loved God in his music, I thought, “So do I.” This created an instant connection because we both loved God and that made it very appealing to me, very COOL. While the church was preaching fire and brimstone, Prince was singing, “God is Love / Girls and Boys love God above.” Musically, there is not a better writer or performer. So, in a lot of ways Prince shaped the worship music I listened to.

I prefer happy, danceable music with a modern message. Prince’s music spoke mostly of love but at times also dealt with hate; it was always up to me to listen or not. Just like in Christianity today, you have a choice to listen or not. His music spoke of love and inclusion and not division and separation, even if we didn’t worship the same God—I still love you, we can be friends. Prince and his music have shaped my spirituality in many ways and for that, I am forever grateful.

In 1992, Prince released his *Controversy* album, and the first time I listened, in the middle of the song, I heard the Lord's Prayer. For a young person just learning about God, to hear the prayer that Jesus used to teach the disciples how to pray, in a soul song created an instant bond with the Prince. Throughout his musical career, I found many spiritual gems in his music. "The Cross," which I believe was an expression of the Easter story, was used in an Easter play in which I participated. One of the young men in the play says I know a great song to use and we both say, "The Cross." The song "Anna Stesia" from the *Lovesexy* album, which replaced the infamous *Black* album, gives inspiration for the lonely or those going through hard times; God is Love and God loves everyone. The connection between Prince's music and me was bonded because I found ways to include it in my spiritual journey.

When I listened to Prince's music, not the lyrics but the music, it is top notch and innovative. When I listen to gospel music, I normally find it loud and hard to understand. I prefer studio recordings, in lieu of live recordings. Although Prince is known for his screams, I don't mind those because they are few and far between. In most gospel music, screaming, in my opinion, is a requirement. I like music with full band, rich tones, much like the music Prince created. Listening to Prince's music shaped how I like to worship, which is integral to my Christian faith.

The duality of Prince's music was something I noticed while on my spiritual journey. The fact that he struggled and put that in his music let me know it was okay for me to struggle. That helped me to understand the free will concept: you can follow God or not. You make the choice. I choose to follow God. Even after Prince's conversion to Jehovah's Witnesses, I could see that while he may have found peace, he had not overcome the free will concept.

Prince's music shaped my spirituality by showing me that you must love everyone. Love for everyone has shaped my mission work; I work hard to show love for everyone and try not to leave anyone out. I have found that love and giving love is easier than hate. It is all about love, which is why Jesus Christ came to Earth, walked the Earth, died, and rose to sit on the right hand of God. Through Prince's music, I was able to make friends and connect with people from all over

the globe with different opinions and ideas. On the surface, it may seem hard but love builds bridges and moves mountains. So, we may not think or have the same views, if we are about love, we can get things accomplished.

Prince provided the soundtrack of my life, so if I have a spiritual side, he played a part. Relating to his spirituality in his music was the first way he influenced my spirituality. He made me feel it was cool to be a Christian. His music shaped the music I prefer to worship to—innovative, up-tempo music. Singing with little screaming, just good full-band. The free will concept, that you have a choice was another element that helped shaped my spirituality. Love for everyone is the message both Prince and Jesus left for us.

THENISHA SMITH

Thenisha Smith is currently employed by the Fort Worth Library as a Program and Events Coordinator for the Youth and Teen Services of the Fort Worth Library. In this capacity she is responsible for planning programs for youth and teens for the entire library system as well as coordinating special events. A member of Armstrong AME Church in Arlington, she has served as President of the Viola Walker Women's Missionary Society, a steward, and usher. She is a certified wedding and event planner and the owner of the Moment Weddings and Events. Thenisha has lead mission projects for local colleges, hurricane relief, and human trafficking. Serving in the community is important to Ms. Smith as evidenced by her involvement with Church Women United Fort Worth, Longhorn Toastmasters, and the Miss Juneteenth Pageant. For ten years, Thenisha served as pageant director for the Miss Juneteenth pageant. In her role as pageant director, she was responsible for recruiting the participants, coordinating educational activities for the contestants, providing mentors for the contestants, and making sure that each young lady felt empowered. She holds a Bachelor of Science in environmental science from the University of Oklahoma and a master degree in public health from the University of North Texas. A lifelong Prince fan, Thenisha has been influenced by his spirituality, activism, movies, and, of course, his music.

The Theology of Prince: When Separation Ceases

Kari Carlson

Abstract: When we come into the world, we wonder—what is this place? What am I doing here? Who am I supposed to be? If we ask deeply throughout our lives, the answers form our personal theologies. But, first we turn to our elders to understand life's meaning and patterns. Growing up on the East Side of St. Paul, Minnesota, during the 1980s, I saw two potential patterns. With 3M and Whirlpool fueling our economy and Hamm's brewery sweetening our air, we could do physical labor or get a desk job. But Prince flitted in and out of our lives—through our radio, newspaper, and local rumor mill—and hinted at a third, fascinating option. He patterned a life around his creative impulses. When Prince died thirty years later, I was already soul-searching, having forged my own adult path in a creative field, wondering if I was living purposefully enough. In mourning Prince, I discovered he'd laid out his personal theology in a seven-minute, nine-hundred-word video. In it, he unraveled the secrets for living a spiritually enriching creative life. He affirmed that most of us choose a path pre-determined by social pressures, and in so doing, forget our spiritual desires. Who better to counsel me as I searched through these questions, then Prince, my Minnesota elder?

When we come into the world, our curious eyes open wide and we wonder: what is this place? What am I doing here? Who am I supposed to be? If we ask deeply, the answers form our personal theologies. But first, we look to grownups to show us life's pattern. Born twenty years apart and across the Mississippi River from each other, Prince was one of my grownups.

In the early 1980s, Prince was artist-in-residence at a purple house in the woods outside of Minneapolis. I was preschooler-in-residence at a modest Cape Cod on St. Paul's East Side. Our block was filled with Cape Cods, all filled with kids. Everyone wore Northern European surnames, brownish hair cut at home, and off-brand sneakers. Scotch tape and Whirlpool factories fueled our economy; Hamm's brewery sweetened our air. Each day offered us adventure: snow fort building; vacant

lot exploring; doorbell ringing. But, the adults appeared to have just two options: physical labor or desk jobs.

One day, after my morning Big Wheel race, Mom wanted to update my wardrobe. We put on our favorite records—Diana Ross’ *Diana* and Prince’s *1999*—and sorted through my sister’s hand-me-downs. Mom prodded me into dresses, reminded me if I danced too hard the records skipped and indulged my questions about Prince: “Let me get this straight, there’s a man who lives in a purple house in the woods with his friends Sheila E. and Sheena Easton? And one of those girls plays drums?”

Prince flitted into our lives through the radio, newspaper, and rumor mill, and so, held a folkloric presence in my mind. He kept odd hours, wore his hair like Farrah Fawcett, had a butterfly sanctuary and a garden gnome in his foyer, and made Minnesota music without Garrison Keillor’s fiddles. He didn’t follow the grown-up patterns of my neighborhood. As it turns out, neither would I.

I heard about Prince’s death while standing in the middle of a taqueria in an upscale, Chicago suburb. Giant decorative geckos crawled the tiled walls. Moms and ‘tweens crowded metal tables, leaving their Teslas at the curb. Ranchera blasted from the speakers, turning conversations into a festive din.

Alone in the midst of the crowd, I scrolled through my social media feed and froze at the sight of one simple phrase: “RIP Prince.” I stopped breathing and scanned the tiny restaurant for distress that mirrored my own; no one’s mood had changed. “This is so weird,” I thought, “I’ve never been on the planet without Prince.” His name, alone, rooted me to my origins.

I was already soul-searching when Prince died, wondering if that little girl dancing on the East Side was leading the life God intended. I’d spent seventeen years editing films for a religious organization—an immersive and mesmerizing creative process, often performed alone at night. After two decades, I noticed something new about my work: the act of creating relaxed me into a meditative zone. Thoughts quieted; life’s problems became solvable. An insatiable curiosity about

creativity’s power replaced my fascination with filmmaking.

When I finally remembered to look up from my work, I was single and reaching mid-career. I hadn’t earned a factory pension or climbed a corporate ladder. My peers had moved on without me into marriages, parenting, home ownership. American culture was changing rapidly. Social media surfaced the constant assault on black lives and my white peers shocked me with racist rants. I felt the quietude of collective creativity could sew up some of these rifts, but how?

Who better to counsel me than Prince, my Minnesota elder who patterned life around creative impulses? Our conversation, facilitated by YouTube, began the day he died and stretched for months. I consumed bootlegs galore: acceptance speeches; interviews; obscure tracks. One soupy afternoon in August of 2016, I ritualistically typed his name into YouTube, then stepped into the shower, expecting to hear “Raspberry Beret” or “Kiss.” Before long, beyond the sound of water hitting my porcelain tub, I heard a man speaking in a tender monotone. I slowly turned the knobs of the faucet to realize the voice was in my living room! Wrapping a towel around me, I raced to confront the intruder, only to find Prince preaching through my laptop. I immediately knelt in my terry-cloth toga, welcoming the great philosopher to the Coliseum.

Over the next seven minutes and nine-hundred words, Prince uncovered his personal theology, unraveling secrets to creative living. He called it “One Song.”

He sent “One Song” in video form to his fan club on January 1, 2000, greeting them in the new millennium. As he spoke, each word appeared against a white background. First, he explored life’s patterns: “...[M]any people grow up and blindly assume their pre-selected role...,” he said. “When asked what they r doing here on earth, most will answer with statements that do not reflect their natural God-given desires.” Disconnected from their truth, humans seek stimulation in entertainment, but “very few of mankind’s [*sic*] creations r designed 2 make u feel good...”^{*} Disconnection deepens until we no longer sense our own sacredness.

Prince said artists could mend these connections:

With an all-knowing mind, made in God's image
U can create as ur Creator—God intended
With Love, Honor and Respect
4 every living thing in the universe
separation ceases
and we all become
One Being singing the
One Song*

I replayed the song several times, writing “separation ceases” on a notecard. I knew the concept well. In creative process, divergent ideas synthesize, like images and sounds merging in film.

Prince knew it too: red and blue made his color; funk and punk made the Minneapolis Sound; women and men made love; masculinity and femininity forged love's symbol. Prince didn't tell me how to affect social change through creative process, but he gave a nod through “One Song.” I was headed in the right direction. After all, when we create—separation ceases.

* Prince, “One Song” (video), December 31, 1999, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2mlhClG>.



Excerpt of Narration
Screenshot from YouTube
“One Song” by Prince©
<https://bit.ly/2mlhClG>

KARI CARLSON

Kari Carlson is a content strategist, documentary filmmaker, and creative process facilitator, transplanted from the East Side of St. Paul in Minnesota to the northern suburbs of Chicago. As a creator of digital, nonfiction content, she strives to tell stories that broaden our view of what it means to be American and reduce the segregation of our inter-related lives. Kari has a passion for digging up little-known episodes in history, as well as telling current stories of everyday people and their communities. As a creative process facilitator, she designs experiences that help individuals develop intimate relationships of their own and assist groups of people pool their talents to generate new ideas, approaches, and understandings.

Preaching from The Palace Walls: How I Received the Gospel According to Prince

Sheri Taylor-Solomon

Abstract: Prince Rogers Nelson built a body of work that influenced the world. Throughout his career we witnessed his transition from *enfant terrible* to a messenger of love, peace, and our oneness with God. Prince's music also emphasized the duality of humanity as a spiritual and sensual being. While most know his more commercial hits, he created a wide variety of songs that are boldly and unapologetically spiritual. This essay details Prince's influence on my youthful quest for spiritual and sensual identity as set to the soundtrack of Prince's *For You*, *Dirty Mind*, and *Controversy* albums. My research for this essay was accomplished through countless hours of listening to Prince albums, cassettes, CDs, reading album liner notes over and over again, watching Grammy awards, Don Kirshner's Concert, American Bandstand, and attending over 100 Prince concerts.

Spirituality is the ultimate form of sensuality, and there is no artist who influenced me as spiritually and sensually as Prince.

I first encountered Prince's music as a naïve, teenage girl of fifteen, raised in the Midwest Bible belt. I'd won Prince's first album, *For You*, in a high-school dance contest. I can assure you no one at the Catholic school had a clue as to the content of the record. As soon as I got home I ran to put it on my parent's behemoth entertainment console, lying on the floor right next to the speakers.

A mellifluous chorus filled the room. It felt as though I were in Heaven itself, witnessing the angels singing to God. Prince's flawless falsetto on the opening track, "For You," was the first of many epiphany moments I would experience with his music. "With love, sincerity and deepest care / My love with you I share." This is the same promise God gives to us. This is what I felt when I heard this track.

The rest of the album was filled with songs of tender love, loss, and devotion. But there were also songs of a more sexual nature. I remember feeling very naughty listening to the more erotic tracks that were so different from the other romantic ones. This conflict was the beginning of my exploration of self as I had minimal understanding of where and who I was emotionally, sexually, and spiritually.

I was taught love is good, sex is sin, and sin separates us from God. I was experiencing both adolescent romantic feelings and teenage sexual curiosities. So was I a child of God or a dirty sinner? *For You* seemed to bear witness to Prince's own burgeoning quest to understand the duality of spirituality and sensuality, and through this album, I began to perceive that perhaps both spiritual ("For You"), and sensual ("Soft and Wet") emotions can exist in the same space.

I continued to follow Prince's career closely. As he grew artistically, I grew emotionally, yet I felt my connection with God diminishing. I experienced heartbreak, death, and was watching the world change into a harsh and dangerous place. I didn't understand why God was allowing bad things to happen to good people and why bad people seemed to flourish. I felt rebellion rising within me, yet I didn't have the voice to express my feelings adequately. Enter *Dirty Mind*.

Once again it seemed Prince and I were walking the same path. The songs on *Dirty Mind* were full of raw emotion. Surface wounds and deep cuts. I needed this album, which scorched me like a brushfire. Forget the "Be a good girl and you'll go to heaven—Be a bad girl and you'll go to Hell" rhetoric. Yes, I have a dirty mind! I'm going to do what I want and be unconcerned with any spiritually damning consequences.

I screamed out "Ok, God! I'm a bad girl. You made me this way. Do you still love me now?" I felt like Lucifer, the beautiful angel of light, rebelling and cast from Heaven. Even in my newfound belligerence, nothing could have prepared me for *Controversy*.

Controversy inspired me to challenge how concerned I was with what people thought about me, but more importantly, what I thought about myself. Prince

dared me to pick at the scab of traditional religious doctrine. He created an anthem around lyrics like “Do I believe in God? Do I believe in me?” and reciting “The Lord’s Prayer,” setting the record straight regarding his spirituality.

As if the lyrical content of the album weren’t enough, the poster included in the album was a red flag waved in front of the bull. His stance is arrogant, and he is dripping wet in a shower wearing nothing but a G-string. But the most interesting aspect of this highly sensual image was not Prince but rather the crucifix on the shower wall. Many were outraged by what they perceived as being blasphemous disrespect. Some even determined him satanic, even the antichrist himself. This perplexed me greatly. Again, I recognized this common thread that would reoccur in his works to come: we are both spiritual and sensual beings making our way through life.

Time passed and I still bought every Prince album that came out. There was never a doubt I’d like the music, but would I still connect with his message? He never failed me. Prince continued to unabashedly express his spirituality and woo his audience with his beautiful voice and lyrics. However, he distanced himself from the agent provocateur attitude he reveled in previously, as did I. Perhaps the greatest impact Prince has had on my life is most appreciated now, in my older years.

Reflecting on his body of work, I realize Prince was a musical prophet, spreading the message that spirituality and sensuality are more relative than opposing, symbiotic in nature, and omnipresent. They are reflections of who we are.

Prince’s music celebrates the harmony of our becoming one with ourselves and with God. He also taught us there are grace and peace in learning to appreciate this harmony, knowing that each of us is made in the image of God, both sensual and spiritual. We can rest in the knowledge that God loves us unconditionally even as we search for self, rail and rebel against Him, give His glory to things and people, or lay crying in the gutter of despair. A love like that is more precious than diamonds and pearls and perhaps the greatest love song ever written.

Prince’s time in the flesh was limited, but his music is the stuff of immortality.

SHERI TAYLOR-SOLOMON

Sheri Taylor-Solomon is a stay-at-home mother of one human and one crazy dog, devoted wife, and lover of all things Prince. Her dream was to move to New York, live in an awesome brownstone, and attend New York University's journalism department. But now she is old and will just settle for watching *Sex in the City*. She would love to visit Paisley Park in Minneapolis, however, the cold would break her in half.

The Everlasting Now: Prince and The Communion of Saints

Penny Hummel

Abstract: In the Christian tradition, the Apostles' Creed affirms the existence of the communion of saints, which connects those of us who are alive with those who have died but who continue to nurture, inspire, and sustain us. Within this theological context, this essay describes the author's personal experience of Prince Rogers Nelson following his death, and reflects upon the ways in which Prince's life and music embody the extravagant, messy, flawed, and glorious path we all walk as God's people.

My heart, therefore is glad, and my spirit rejoices;
my body also shall rest in hope.

You will show me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy,
and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

— "Burial of the Dead: Rite Two"
The Book of Common Prayer

On April 21, 2016, a small, middle-aged man suffered an accidental death at his home in Chanhassen, Minnesota. Though it was in some respects a humble passing, his death was like a bolt of electricity that blasted around the globe, reflecting the extraordinary life Prince Rogers Nelson had lived as well as the frequently confounding yet astonishing body of work he left behind. To those who gave him the sustained attention he deserved throughout the decades of his long career,

the grief resulting from his death was as simple and as complex as any heart-searing loss can be.

However, for me and many others—a world apart from the long-term faithful—his death was a revelation, a surprising baptism of holy water that drenched our spiritual, sexual, and creative selves. Glimpsing for the first time the full power, artistry, beauty, and wisdom of this man's life force, it became impossible to look away. Like the foolish virgins in Matthew's parable who arrive at the wedding only after the bridegroom has departed, we were left stunned, attempting to understand what was gone, as well as what remained.

As an artist with more than a bit of a messianic complex, Prince would probably be gratified to know some of his fans are now describing him as having ascended instead of died. While I understand the impetus for thinking of him as some sort of semi-divine entity, I prefer to comprehend him from the opposite perspective. To me, despite his myriad of transcendent gifts, Prince was touchingly and sometimes shockingly human—exactly in the sense that we are all human, with the delight and the angst and the craziness and the brilliance that shape each of our lives as children of God.

Like the rest of us, he experienced intense moments of joy interspersed with dark valleys of loss and despair. Like the rest of us, he deeply yearned to love and be loved, yet often fell horribly short on both counts. Because he never hesitated to wear his heart on his sleeve, his songs reflect a naked emotional reality that speaks to, and for, all of us. A lifelong seeker of oneness with God (a theme that wends throughout his music), Prince was forthright in articulating the bittersweet nature of the spiritual path: "I've heard about those happy endings / But it's still a mystery ... I'm happiest when I can see / My way back home."*

In the weeks and months after Prince died, his life and work beckoned to me. I plunged into the hagiography that is common in the purple world: listening to his recorded works, poring over the visual record, reading everything I could about the twists and turns of his fifty-seven years, and ultimately, discussing all of this endlessly with other similarly obsessed members of my newly found tribe.

Meanwhile, in the pew of my Episcopal church, when we got to the Prayers of the People, I found myself praying for the repose of his soul.

When autumn rolled around, I submitted a picture of him to be included in our parish's annual celebration of All Saints Day, which involves covering the walls of our sanctuary with photos of loved ones who have passed away. That Sunday, looking at him amidst the sea of humanity beloved by my community; I felt an indefinable sense of harmony and joy. Hanging on a purple banner, lit by the sun shining through the stained glass, he was exactly where he needed to be as a person whom I hold in my heart. Despite the tragedy of how his life ended, I felt deeply at that moment that he is now eternally enfolded in the arms of Love.

In a way I can't really explain, Prince is now a part of my spiritual ecosystem. A little over a year after it all began, I got on a plane to Minneapolis and made a pilgrim's journey to Chanhassen, where I danced in the old NPG Club space at Paisley Park and gave thanks to God for the honor of being a guest in the home of this great and ultimately unfathomable man.

Yes, he was astonishingly gifted—a splendid, bawdy, tender, witty, sensual, rainbow-hued genius we will never see the likes of again. But it seems to me that a major lesson of Prince's life is that he wasn't born that way—instead he claimed his own uniqueness and did the work to earn it, never accepting limitations on what he could accomplish or who he could be.

Now that he is gone, I consider Prince to be an active member of the communion of saints—those who support the rest of us still living and struggling on this earth, and encouraging us, as we say in one of my church's closing prayers, "to do the work God has given us to do, with gladness and singleness of heart." His life and music embody the extravagant, messy, flawed, and glorious path we all walk as God's people.

In the words of one of his songs, he reminds us that, despite the moments when we inevitably trip or fall on that path, we are nonetheless "beautiful, loved and blessed." Although I missed almost all of it when he was alive, I am abundantly grateful my soul has been touched by his life-affirming music and personal example.

*Prince, "Way Back Home" on *Art of Official Age*, CD Warner Bros., 2014.



Penny Hummel©
Digital Editing by j.cather
All Saint's Sunday, November 2017
St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church,
Portland, Oregon

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These are the Days of Wild: The Influence of Prince Rogers Nelson

Harjot Dhami

Abstract: An article depicting and breaking down Prince's music and influence through an in-depth look into his career.

It is safe to say that the ones we look up to the most hold the key pieces of who we want to be as human beings. It is their influence that fuels our desire to be as brilliant as they are. Throughout the history of pop culture, many musicians, artists, writers, poets, instrumentalists, vocalists, architects, sculptors, painters, and overall visionaries have stepped up to the pedestal of greatness, showcasing their talents for the world to marvel at.

The thought that one person can change your perception of the world is baffling to some, as they look at it from an outside view. However, it's a reality to many people, including myself. As particular as I can be, recognizing and praising true wonderment and genius in music is a fond lifestyle I have picked up. Who better to admire than His Royal Badness?

A wise man once said: "A strong spirit transcends rules." And to me, admiring such a spirit has opened my mind to music, love, resentment, happiness, and sadness, along with many more aspects of this fascinating thing we call life. For me, I feel as though genius can be perceived in various ways. That is something I have always been taken by—a beautiful mind.

Some say complexity is what truly defines a mastermind. I find that to be true, but I also find simplicity; the art of taking something as basic as a drum machine or

a tap-dancer, for example, and incorporating the sounds into intricate, beautiful, and creatively-made music is also the essence of excellence. That excellence is what ultimately entices me as a person.

Prince is one of the main reasons I wanted to become a writer. It was through his lyrics, charged with raw emotion, pulsating sexuality and inspired by his own realities that I found myself influenced by his outlet: making music.

Prince isn't just a musician. That is what is so captivating about the man as well, apart from his wildly-gifted music abilities. Where else are you going to find a man who pretty that can also be a composer, producer, director, multi-instrumentalist, and fashion icon? Not to mention Prince makes a great preacher, as well as a philosopher and bright-minded individual in general.

This essay isn't necessarily to gush about the undying love I have for my favorite singer, as most seventeen-year-olds do. This essay is to appreciate the man behind the masterpieces. Through the many years Prince has made music, his legacy has cemented itself into history as being one of the most interesting, eccentric, effervescent, and inspiring journeys one musician has ever taken. Without those vital pieces of his career, from the innovation of *Purple Rain* all the way to the rebellious statement of the "SLAVE" era, it's clear to see that Prince has made his name and symbol recognizable and respected. Music history surely would lack substance without Prince's pieces of the puzzle.

In the music lies the most extraordinary scenes and entrancing sounds. It's the way the intimacy of "In This Bed I Scream" displays his deeply connected emotional state with the person he's writing about. It's the way "Condition of the Heart" brings us, the listeners, to acknowledge our natural ability to feel sadness and loss. It is these characteristics that make you fall in love with the music. That's mainly what it falls down to—the balance of how the music makes you feel and how the music affects you as a person.

For one musician to capture your roots and reflect the same beliefs, feelings, and common interests as you do causes a lot of satisfaction, doesn't it? Most things

you need to understand to truly love, but the things you simply cannot fathom give you more craving to try and comprehend them. People are like that. I find Prince to be like that, too. That’s what I find in the core of his music—the idea of pure allure: romantically, intellectually, and spiritually, whatever you want to take it as.

It’s a broad spectrum of enlightenment being able to listen to Prince’s music and gain something from it. The gorgeous concepts he presents through his bodies of work continue to astonish me to this very day. I can’t wait to tell my children that I was a teenager when I first saw Prince live and how euphoric and honoring the experience was. I also can’t wait to make them Prince fans, too. Thank you, Prince. We love you.

With utmost sincerity,
— Candy Dhami.

HARJOT DHAMI

Harjot Dhami is a nineteen-year-old inspiring writer from Vancouver, British Columbia.



What Prince Taught Me About Being Spiritual and Being Human

Aimee Mackovic

Abstract: This is a personal essay about how Prince has impacted my notion of spirituality for thirty years. Although the story is rooted in the awe-inspiring experience of seeing his very last concert, it weaves in pertinent stories from the past three decades.

It's 12:10 am, April 14th, 2016 at the Fox Theatre and I'm just now coming back down to earth. Prince has just glided off stage after a two-hour musical soul-jam aided by a simple (well, if a purple piano embossed with your personal glyph is simple) piano and microphone. The stage is still awash in a glowing purple with stars, and the crowd is loath to leave. I turn in a daze to my friend. "It can't be over," I cried. She cocks her head. "Parties weren't meant to last," she quips.

I didn't intend to write an essay about death and spirituality. I'd rather it be a gushy essay about that last show at Fox Theatre in Atlanta on April 14th, 2016. A humorous tale about me coaxing a best friend to fly from Austin to Atlanta, and how we were deplaning on April 7th, 2016 when we got word that the show was postponed. We looked at each other. WWPD? What would Prince do? We made the most of our three-day weekend: botanical gardens, Cirque du Soleil, rooftop bar. She texted me the following Monday, saying "Prince rescheduled for this Thursday." Before even checking my frequent flier miles, I texted back, "We're going." Prince spiritual lesson: go with the flow and try not to blow only chances.

"Duh," she replied.

I'd rather try to describe the impossible-to-describe euphoria that overwhelmed me in seeing the marquee, as well as the splendor and intimacy of the theatre itself— gorgeous with not a bad seat in the house. I'd love to tell how it felt to encounter the crowd coming out of the 7 pm show, how they were abuzz, how I asked one lady passing by "how was it?" and her eyes got huge and emotional. "It was magical," she sighed, breathless. Prince spiritual lesson: music can be transformational and transcendent.

I hardly go a day without thinking about that concert, how he started by 10:07 (only seven minutes late!) and strode up from the back of the stage to a few thousand of us lunatics, cane in hand, and stood for just a brief moment soaking in the energy that, we became only retrospectively aware, he must have needed. How, with only a piano and microphone, he played non-stop for a little over two hours (and this was the second concert of the night). It's slightly depressing to tell you how the concert was strategically lit to minimize focus on his pale face, how he "begged our forgiveness" for canceling, saying "Wait a few days before you waste any prayers on me." I don't have to tell you that when he finally stopped playing at 12:10 am and it was obvious he wasn't coming out for an encore, that my gut did a little lurch.

Stumbling onto Prince around ten or eleven years of age, thanks to radio and the newly launched MTV, which I snuck down to watch late at night, was a bit like lighting a fuse to an internal bomb. When the album cover for *Purple Rain* hit the stores, I, a white, midwestern, suburban pre-teen girl, did not know initially how to process this gorgeous male creature wearing ruffles, boots, with long, shaggy hair and those eyes: and then they had the audacity to put him on a forbidden (to me) motorcycle? I wanted all of it, and I didn't even know what it was quite yet. Even though it took some careful listening and study to catch the nuances and double entendre in his songs, he was able to hook the world with his melodies and music and mad guitar skills. More than his music, I deeply respected, admired, and tried to emulate his belief that he was really just a conduit of creativity walking around in skin. One of my favorite moments in the movie *Purple Rain* is when Prince is experiencing some spiritual and musical growing pains and has stormed off the stage after a splintering performance. The manager of the club, Billy, is pissed. "No

one digs your music but yourself." A flicker of self-doubt crosses Prince's face, but his eyes quickly steel, yelling at Billy to "f*** off." In the movie and in reality, Prince had a fast-track to the divine source and knew it. Price spiritual lesson: tap into your own unique powers, for they are god-given.

This is a great time to tell you the light stories about how in the mid-eighties, I used to sit by my radio for hours, waiting to tape his songs off the radio. How I had to sneak to watch the now-infamous awards show with him and his, um, perfectly tailored yellow suit. I was sixteen and riveted at his unabashed autonomy over and awareness of every human and supernatural aspect of himself. Coming of age in the late '80s and '90s, I was still weeding through the throngs of adolescence and young adulthood, and Prince seemed to have answers to my questions. Those of a certain age might confirm that he taught a whole generation of young women that we "don't have to be beautiful" to turn a guy on, that we don't even have to be "cool," that he just wants our extra time and our... kiss. Prince worshiped every part of a woman, from brains to boobs, to ass, to their assertiveness, and he held himself accountable for being able to live up to her fantasies. His muses always embodied authentic confidence and unapologetic swagger. Prince spiritual lessons: act like the goddess you were born to be and sex, to be a truly sacred act of soulful and spiritual connection, must be mental fireworks mixed with physical fun.

Now I want to tell you about the time in New York City, somewhere in 1999-2000, when the Internet and chat rooms were beginning to flourish. Prince had launched 1-800-NewFunk, a website and telephone number where he could sell his new music directly to customers and keep his fans abreast of his pursuits. One day, somehow (fairly certain it was through an email delivered through the website) I caught wind he doing a secret/private aftershow (as he was prone to do) that night. I was temping at the time. I jotted down the name of the club and left my apartment at what must have been around 10 at night. There was no official time or anything; all I had was an address. I went solo to the club, ordered a coke, and waited. I surmised I was in the right place after confirming with a couple other people also standing around that they, too, were here for Prince. Finally around 1 am, I was tired and still had to work in the morning. The next day

I found out that he did, indeed, show up (around 2:30), and I have never forgiven myself. Prince spiritual lesson: live moment to moment as much as you can, or you might miss the party.

April 21, 2016, was a warm, perfect spring day in Austin. I don't really want to tell you how I was beside myself excited to have bought a tee shirt at the concert the week before, only to wear it once before he died, not even washing it, how it now sits at the bottom of my dresser. Every once in while I pull it out, wondering if I can stomach wearing it, but I have yet to have the heart. I had also bought a shirt for a friend. She would later tell me she had been wearing it when the world found out. She promptly pulled it off and threw it across the room in tears. When the news of his death was confirmed, I immediately left work, drove straight home blaring the song "Purple Rain" while bawling, cued up *Purple Rain* the movie on Netflix, and sat numb for hours. Later that night, I made my friend (the same one that went to Atlanta with me) go with me to a bar that had decided to throw an impromptu tribute night complete with DJ spinning Prince all night and the movie *Purple Rain* playing on a loop in the background. I have never experienced love manifest like I did that night. True, the night was laced in grief, but the power of Prince, his music, and his absolutely ineffable mojo was captivating and cathartic. People dressed up. Purple balloons were batted around. A packed house danced their way through the night, screaming, "and if I gotta die, I'm gonna listen to my body tonight!" And I swear, when the DJ closed with "Purple Rain," Prince felt our love and grief and was smiling. Well, he was probably doing that half-smile/half-smirk he wore, but his energy still controlled, enthralled, and enraptured the crowd, even from the afterlife. Prince spiritual lesson, a quote: I'll celebrate the day I die.

Aimee Mackovic is a poet and professor of English currently living in Austin, Texas. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Main Street Rag*, *Gravel*, and *Shark Reef*, among others. She was the featured poet of Issue 9 of *UCity Review*. Her chapbooks include *Potpourri* and *Dearly Beloved: the Prince poems*. Her debut collection, *Love Junky*, was released in October 2017 from Lit City Press. In *Love Junky*, she explores being female from the lenses of sister, daughter, lover, patient, and friend. Obsessions include traveling, buying books at used book stores, Prince & the color purple, her rescue dog, and Broadway musical soundtracks.

“Text Tuesdays”—Posted April 26, 2016

Why I Mourn Prince Rogers Nelson 1958–2016

Kenneth Suffern, Jr

Abstract: A post on my blog regarding the passing of Prince Rogers Nelson. “Thursday evening, I realized you couldn’t sing at my wedding, and I didn’t think about whether I could afford it, and it was then, that I realized the finality in the terrible news that you were gone. Prince Rogers Nelson 1958–2016, gone way too soon, and well before your time.”

“Sometimes it Snows in April”

I am still not accepting this. Prince was never meant to be this world’s “week-end lover / (he was supposed to) be some kind of friend / ... it’s such a shame our friendship had to end.” “Times are (definitely) changing,” but I can’t reach for something new. Thursday evening, I realized you couldn’t sing at my wedding, and I didn’t think about whether I could afford it, and it was then that I realized the finality in the terrible news that you were gone. Prince Rogers Nelson 1958–2016, gone way too soon and well before your time.

Today the feelings are still raw. At times I can listen to his music, and other times I have to turn off any Prince song that comes on. It was 1984 when I first remember a Prince song. I knew I had heard his music, but as a music virgin of eight years, I was in awe of the 45 rpm my mother purchased of “When Doves Cry.” I would spend hours in my parents’ vast basement listening on their turntable and component set.

Sonically amazing, and sexually charged—for a child who had no ideas of what these concepts were. I knew what the feeling of “the butterflies all tied up” by the little girl from the school I went to a year prior—Genene. The transitions throughout the song trapped me at that point. It would be years before I finally saw *Purple Rain*, but the album was the soundtrack to my childhood and adolescence. Listening to Prince in youth would release a myriad of emotions: happiness, sadness, longing—there were many times as an innocent child I would blush listening to his music.

When I started having “thoughts” about the second-grader I liked, it was inspired by Prince. Purple by no means is one of my top colors, but when I got into grunge in the early 1990s, the first plaid shirt that I purchased was purple. Prince’s music always was a constant, whether it was playing by choice or on the radio, spanning all years of my musical development.

I remember my childhood friend and I chuckling when radio was unaware, and Prince said “bullshit” in the song “Housequake.” When I was enthralled with Gun’s & Roses, or when the Golden Era of Hip-Hop was taking place in the late ’80s and early-to-mid-’90s, I was listening to Prince’s catalogue. I listened to him make a guitar cry, to his reinvention of his own work at a traditional concert, and definitely to his *Piano and a Microphone* tour this year. His influence was in meeting girls, the cockiness, and the high opinion of self—or playing THAT song, that was needed at the time.

I remember borrowing the four-record vinyl of *Sign ‘O’ The Times*, and playing the entire album while reading each song’s lyrics, trying to memorize everything. The juxtaposition of the title track and its record of the state of the world to “The Ballad of Dorothy Parker”: I had not thought of Prince in the realm of social conscientiousness prior to the release of that album, and it was that try alone that endeared me to his music further. The way he could make a song like “If I Was Your Girlfriend” and you wouldn’t think twice about singing it was an unmatched talent. There was nothing like the crack of that vinyl. I remember being homesick and convincing my Dad to get himself the Prince *Love Symbol* album that had just released.

“Joy in Repetition”

In 1993 I finally had the chance to see Prince live. I was a senior in high school, and was sick and left school early. In an age that predates “smartphones” and simply everyone having mobile devices, the advent of the Internet was not upon us, and we had to find out information from our local record stores, like Turtles or Tower Records, radio, show bill, etc. It escapes me how I found out Prince was performing a free show in Atlanta on the roof of Turtle’s Rhythm & Views record store. The events of the day aligned; I had stopped by Tower Records to grab Nas’ *Illmatic*, which had released that day, and having used that to gauge my “sickness” level, I made the journey to see Prince.

I was in utter awe watching him perform, standing there in my Catholic school uniform and trench coat. Since then, I have seen him across the country, in clubs at afterparty performances that were more robust than the arena show. This year, I was fortunate to see him again, three times actually. In the stars aligning I was able to share in the experience with my girlfriend in Oakland and then seeing his last two performances, Thursday, April 14th in Atlanta at the Fabulous Fox.


I cannot explain the emotion he exhibited in his performance, that was eerie, and unlike any Prince performance I had witnessed in my life. I initially was only going to see the first show, and after that experience, I walked to find dinner only to run into a couple who had seen the same show and bought standing room only to return to the second performance. Knowing what my decision was, I texted my girlfriend so she could reinforce it, and I went to see Prince again that night. Unfortunately, leaving those shows I felt, but would not verbalize that I “knew” this night would be the last time I would see Prince perform. Writing this, “Purple Rain” started playing, and knowing that I will never hear him perform this again stings deeply, and makes me aware of how final this is.

Musically, Prince never fit into a category for me, he was all his own. If I wanted to listen to a love song, I would throw on R&B, or Prince. If I wanted to rock out, I’d choose some metal, or Prince. Prince, like Michael Jackson, was his own category, and what you experienced listening to the music, is beyond the comprehension that my words can express.

“How can you just leave me standing?”

With a text, I lost an integral part my childhood and upbringing. I had to pause, arrange my thoughts, contact two people I knew would either have more information, or whom I needed to make aware. I was away for a planned weekend of music and fun. It was a rough series of events, and though I appreciate the regard, the constant calls, and texts, and Facebook messages really made the moment more painful as I tried to reconcile Prince’s death at fifty-seven when I had just seen him.

Recently my best friend and I had a conversation regarding music and relationships with people, while in New York. We conversed on how music plays into the path of your life, and different songs and artists evoke such emotion, especially when experiences and events are tied to them. I also mentioned how Prince was mine. Meaning that artists and songs now, or during the recent past, fit many of my new experiences, but my Prince experiences had long since been created.

My girlfriend and I share a deep love for Prince—she may actually exceed me, if possible—, however my experiences and what his music means is associated with life before we met. Songs like “Adore,” and “The Beautiful Ones,” could seamlessly be used to describe her (and her love of Prince would make it fitting). However, when I hear these songs, they echo my development and past. My Prince experiences include sitting in an empty basement in East Point, while my family was upstairs. It is completing my Prince collection on BMG or Columbia House. It is listening to “ H8 U,” when it actually applied as the song was released. Yet, we were able to share in the Prince experience twice, most notably when Prince performed for three hours, and presented her with every song she wanted to hear—it was special to see her in her moment with an artist I feel was mine—and she feels is hers.

To compound events that happen when at a Prince experience, an usher asked, “Is that your girl, man? She is beautiful,” and shook my hand. I said, “I’m a lucky man.” He replied: “You’re not lucky, you’re blessed. There’s no such thing as luck, that is something special that God created.” Where else would this have happened outside of music and Prince?

“Take Me With U”

Coachella, unfortunately, had the shroud of Prince’s passing hovering over it this weekend 2. For what it’s worth, it allowed us to remember the artists that blessed us for those thirty-something odd years. With interpolated Prince tributes, artists allowed us to celebrate the being who had blessed our lives with his work, and dedication. DJs let us sweat and dance out our sorrows, having our own moments, and just remembering Prince Rogers Nelson. And Coachella’s Yuma tent dance party was our savior.

Did I know Prince Rogers Nelson—yes. My life and upbringing included him as a very integral part, especially being a person whose love of music is a way of life. Why am I writing this? Because he was an important part of me, and one of the few artists I would pay what I did to see him this year.

What have I learned from this: loss, I just have to be honest. Love, this resonates more with me today. We sometimes see people die and think that we have to hold those we love closer, but with someone like this who has almost been a part of my life like family, and a part of my socialization, growth, and upbringing, I learned that I can’t wait on the things I want and people I love, life is short, and it’s time for us to move forward together. It didn’t take Prince to learn that, but he reinforced it.

Rest in Peace, sweet Prince.

KENNETH SUFFERN, JR.

Kenneth Suffern, Jr., describes himself as a professional, who is a Prince and music/concert/festival aficionado, and aspiring author.



Photo by Kenneth Suffern©
From LCD Soundsystem's Coachella 2016 Tribute

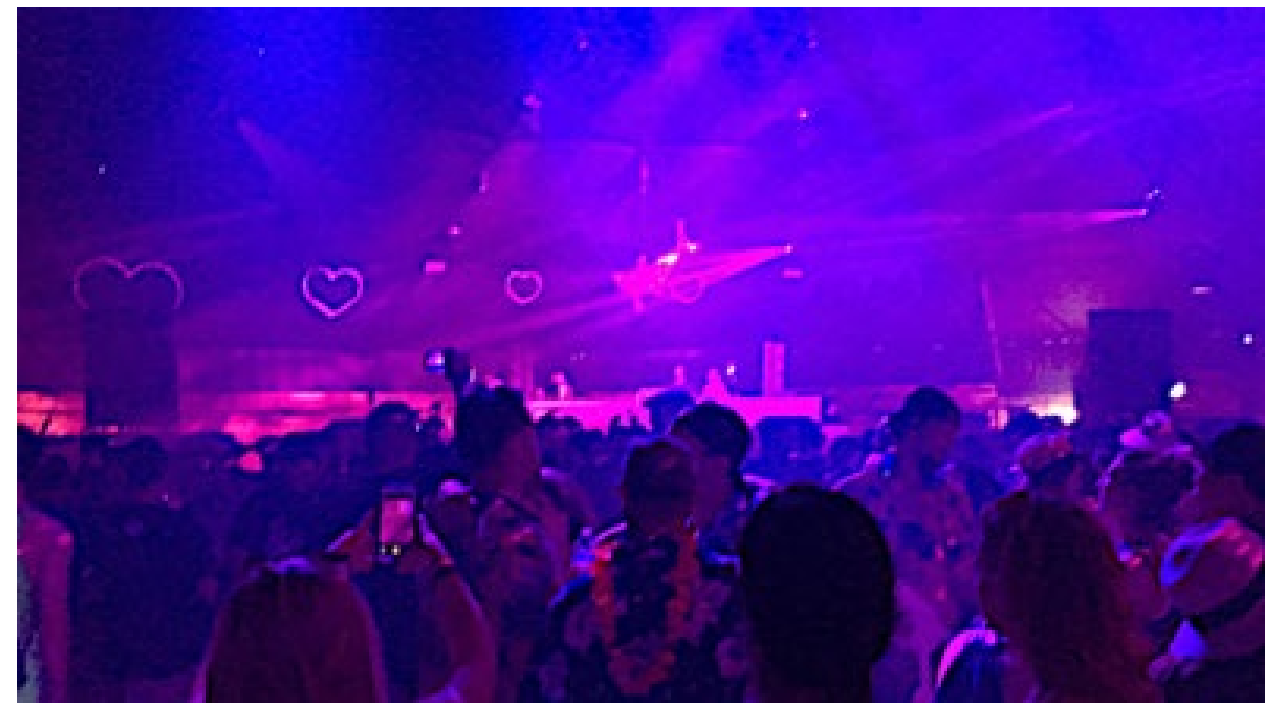


Photo by Kenneth Suffern©
Musicology tour in Atlanta.

Without Prince

Mark Bonde

Abstract: “Without Prince” is Mark Bonde’s story on how Prince’s Music has impacted his spirituality.

Without Prince I would not be the person I am today.

I have had many great teachers and role models that came before and after him that have left their impression on my heart, but Prince served to not only spark my faith but to blow wind on the spark he set to fuel its growth. His influence and the trajectory that he set my life on cannot be overstated and is present in my daily reality. I cannot imagine my life without Prince’s influence.

Without Prince I would not be married to my wife. Without Prince I would not be the father of two beautiful children. Without Prince I would not have so many wonderful friendships. Without Prince I do not know how my relationship with God would have taken root. Without Prince I cannot imagine how my life would have unfolded. Without Prince?

It didn’t happen in an instant. There was no epiphany when a flash of light struck, or a moment where scales fell from my eyes and I saw the world anew. I did not set out to have him influence me so. I could not have predicted it but it did happen and my life was forever changed because of his.

Prince demonstrated to me that loving God could not only be cool but was absolutely necessary if you were going to fully live. He taught me that the creative process was not exclusive but was for everyone, including me. He showed me that if you have a platform and a position of power that it was incumbent upon

you to use your voice for the cause of justice.

When I met him, and I use the word “met” loosely here, I was just a boy. Eighteen to be exact.

My worldview at the time was forming, and I had little in the form of spiritual roots. Sure, I had grown up in a family that went to church each Sunday and we prayed before dinner. I had spent time at Bible camps in the summer and after-school church groups throughout the years; still there was no depth to my faith. It was a passionless relationship where God was rarely on my mind and certainly not in my heart.

I could not have known that walking into Paisley Park late that Thursday night in the spring of 1995 that Prince would set in motion a spiritual journey; that in the months and years to come he would inspire me to go inward, challenge my thinking, and introduce me to spiritual things.

He had already achieved success on a global stage. He was a multi-platinum recording artist who had won Grammys and Oscars. He had starred in movies, made music, and performed for millions. I was a middle-class, teenage, white boy with no rhythm and a very limited understanding of how the world actually worked.

It was by chance that I was invited that evening to Paisley Park. Tagging along with a friend who knew somebody that said we could go to a party with Prince.

I had no idea what would happen that night. Less than a hundred people had gathered to dance to the latest music and find their groove. I had no business on the dance floor that night, but I mustered the courage and gave it a go as Prince looked on from the DJ booth.

After that first visit to Paisley Park, I was hooked. Hooked on the music. Hooked on the scene. Amazed that a guy like me could be at a party like that.

Over the course of the next two decades, I would visit Paisley Park again and again. I attended hundreds of parties and performances. I had front-row tickets to one of the greatest musicians of this generation, and I planned to push the experience to the max.

On the journey I would learn that Prince was going to do more than just play music and dance. While there were good times to be had, the party was never just about the party. Prince had a platform, and he was not afraid to use it. He was not only going to help me improve my dance skills, he was going to inspire and inform my worldview. Prince would become a catalyst for my faith journey and encourage me to think about who God was and what God wanted from me.

Embedded in the music were signs and symbols that pointed to a higher force. That showed vulnerability; that acknowledged that God should be put in charge. In the song “Anna Stesia” he said:

Save me Jesus, I’ve been a fool
How could I forget that U are the rule
U are my God, I am Your child
From now on, 4 U I shall be wild
I shall be quick, I shall be strong
I’ll tell Your story no matter how long
No matter how...No Matter how...
No matter...no matter...

We’re just a play in Your master plan
Now, my Lord, I understand

These lyrics are a snippet of the catalogue of music that have dug themselves into my being. My experience has taught me that music has a way of seeping into your bones. If you let it, it can penetrate the deepest parts of you, finding residence in your marrow. Music has the power to move you in directions you otherwise would not have known existed and expose you to things you did not know were there. It can facilitate transformation and is used by God.

God used Prince and his music to touch me. I am forever grateful. I found faith in God, joined a black church, taught Bible study, preached sermons, lead worship, ministered in prisons, mentored youth, and the list goes on.

Without Prince these things may not have come to be. Without Prince they would not be how they exist today. Without Prince I would not have become who I am. Without Prince? Never.

MARK BONDE

Mark Bonde is a native of Minneapolis. He lives in north Minneapolis with his wife and two children. He has been a member of Liberty Community Church in North Minneapolis for the past 15 years serving in various capacities. An alumnus of the University of Minnesota and an avid Prince fan, he has been part of the Minneapolis Prince community since 1995, attending more than 160 Prince concerts. Mark is a passionate preacher and speaker. Full speeches he has given on Prince can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQNgdZRsBvE> and
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fm3hWWmql8g&t=3s>.

Prince, the Beautiful Oshun: The Purple One as Embodiment of the River Goddess of Love

Zada Johnson

Open Submission Winning Essay

Abstract: “Prince, the Beautiful Oshun: The Purple One as Embodiment of the River Goddess of Love” explores the ways Prince’s musical legacy has helped me to understand the characteristics of Oshun, the African Goddess of love, sensuality, and beauty.

I remember the first time I suspected Prince was a child of Oshun the African deity of love, beauty, and sensuality. I was an undergraduate student in anthropology, studying the religions of the African diaspora, often listening to his vast catalog of music as I explored the history and culture of the Afro-Atlantic World. It is probably not often one thinks of Prince in the same instance they think of African religious systems, but the moment I saw him in the somewhat obscure footage of the 1986 *Parade Tour*, resplendent in a yellow-and-white Armani suit, I was sure I was looking at a contemporary manifestation of the beautiful Oshun.

Over the years that I have studied the various religions and cultures that honor Oshun, I have always thought back to the ways Prince reflects her attributes of elegance and erotic license. From his visual aesthetic of male beauty and exquisite style to his lyrics that often merge themes of spirituality and desire, Prince has helped me understand the many ways the characteristics of deities like Oshun can be expressed in all aspects of our lives, even in the genius of a music icon.

In the Yoruba cultural traditions of West Africa, Oshun is part of a pantheon

of deities known as the orisha. Each orisha has a designated set of attributes, often representing elements of nature, such as crossroads (Eshu), oceans/salt water (Yemoja), thunder (Shango) and iron (Ogun). Within this pantheon, Oshun is the goddess of river waters, the personification of love and desire, the spiritual embodiment of both the sacred and profane.

During the Atlantic Slave trade, enslaved African populations brought their reverence of Oshun to the Americas and the Caribbean, where she would be associated with the Virgin Mary and New World objects such as pumpkins and copper. New World interpretations would also represent Oshun through the color combination of yellow and white (or sometimes yellow and green), and dress her altars in luxury fabrics such as lamé, silk, and brocade.*

In African diasporic religions such as Santeria and Candomble, the children of Oshun are characterized as flirtatious and sensuous lovers of music, dance, fine clothes, and expensive perfume. As with the other Orisha, both men and women can be children of Oshun, with male devotees often adorning themselves in her finery as an embodiment of her power. According to African-art-historian Rowland Abiodun,** this not only includes the wearing of brass and copper accessories by her male devotees, but also the adornment of her elaborate coiffure and lace cloth.

“The Pretty Man”: Oshun and the Visual Aesthetic of Prince

The signature visual aesthetic of Prince exudes the elegant and erotic imagery of Oshun. His career of performing in bikini briefs, thigh highs, ruffled Edwardian collars, Cuban block heels, and lace bodysuits recall Oshun’s predilection to adorn herself in the finest and most alluring accoutrements. In the love ballad “Adore” from *Sign ‘O’ the Times*, Prince declares his “exquisite taste” to the object of his affections by telling her that not even his fondness for “a hundred percent Italian silk” or “imported Egyptian lace” could compare to his admiration for her beauty.

In the *Parade* tour footage mentioned in the introduction of this essay, Prince radiates the imagery of Oshun in a stunning yellow-and-white Armani suit. Aside

from the signature shades of purple for which he is most known, Prince would also frequently wear ensembles of yellow, including the infamous rear-end cutout, yellow-lace suit he wore to the 1991 VMAs.

The elegance of Oshun is also present in Prince’s flawlessly made-up face (complete with the beauty mole birthmark on his left cheek) and elaborately coiffed hair. In the hagiography of Oshun, a finely styled coiffure is a representation of her relationship to the well-kept “inner head” or inner divinity.** Throughout his career, Prince’s hairstyles have been a central feature to his overall visual aesthetic. From the perfectly shaped Afro of his debut *For You* album cover, to the pompadour of curly ringlets he wore in *Purple Rain*, to the slicked-back pixie of *Under the Cherry Moon*, to the long-straight tresses of *Lovesexy* and the whimsical-plaits of *Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic*, Prince’s always-laid hair game was its own glamorous shrine to Oshun.

“Sexuality is All You’ll Ever Need”: Prince, Oshun, the Sacred and the Profane

Perhaps the most recognizable feature of Prince’s music has been his ability to merge both the sacred and the profane, often times fusing together themes of intense sexual desire with themes of strong religious conviction. The dichotomous relationship between the sacred and the profane is also a core characteristic of Oshun.

Among the litany of descriptors used to depict Oshun, there are a host of complex contradictions. She is at once a divine mother and shameless coquette. In the Santeria/Lucumi religious systems of Cuba, her presence is central to representations of the Virgin of Charity, the Catholic patron saint of the island. Yet, as Oshun, she is revered as a deity who is brilliantly versed in the carnal language of pleasure.

This complex dichotomy between God and sex abound in Prince’s music. In the provocative love scene between Prince and Apollonia in *Purple Rain*, the instrumental of his song “God” plays in the background as they make love. Written during that same time, his “Erotic City” collaboration with Sheila E. features

the lyrics “You’re a sinner, I don’t care / I just want your creamy thighs.” In the film *Graffiti Bridge*, he is passionately entangled with the female angel who is sent down to show him the salvation of religious faith as his song “Joy in Repetition” plays in the background. At the end of the video for “Sexuality” from his 1982 *Controversy* album, Prince undresses as he sings the lyrics, “Sexuality is all I’ll ever need / Sexuality, I’m going to let my body be free.” Similarly, in the video for “Controversy,” he performs in bikini briefs and thigh-highs as he sings, “Was it good for you? / Was I what you wanted me to be?” Later in the song, he recites The Lord’s Prayer. Both the “Sexuality” and “Controversy” videos are filmed on the same soundstage, which features a cathedral-like, stained-glass window backdrop, as though he were performing in a church.

In one of my all-time favorite Prince lyrics, from the song “Adore,” Prince tells his beloved, “When we be makin’ love / I only hear the sounds / Heavenly angels cryin’ up above / Tears of joy pourin’ down on us.” These examples of Prince’s merged representations of religious faith and erotic desire reminds me of one of Oshun’s most profound lessons—sexual desire is not antithetical to spirituality. Both the characteristics of Oshun and the creative expression of Prince speak to a radical consciousness regarding the ways sexual desire and spirituality work in tandem with one another to provide the most beautiful experiences of our existence.

Conclusion: “Love is God, God is Love”—Prince as an Expression of Oshun’s Message of Love

When I spoke to a fellow devotee of Oshun about this essay, she shared a very valuable insight about how she perceived the relationship between Prince and Oshun. “Prince’s music is a conversation with God,” she said, “He brings us messages, healing, happiness and joy through his lyrics and magical musical compositions.... Oshun is the orisha sent to this Earth to remind us of God’s love and our right to a joyful existence. They are indeed kindred spirits.”* To that I would add that Prince is a luminous example of Oshun’s overall message, that our lives are enriched by giving and receiving love. In the various narratives of Oshun known as pataki, she often uses her powers of love to save the world and restore order to chaos.

In my journey of learning about Oshun since those days of undergrad, I find her message of love to be one of the most important lessons of my life. In the same regard, Prince’s music carries a central message of love—love for ourselves, love for one another, romantic love for the ones we desire, and radical love for a better understanding of our place in the world. Through his body of work, I have come to better understand not only his creative genius but also the deeper logics that constitute the messages of love and self-awareness embodied by Oshun. And for that, I will be forever grateful.

*Flores-Pena, 2001. (See bibliography.)

**Rowland Abiodun, 2001. (See bibliography.)

*** Many thanks to Oshun devotee Shukrani Grey for her interview (February 14, 2018) regarding her perceptions of the relationship between Prince and Oshun.

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ZADA JOHNSON

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The Ascension of Prince
Amoké Kubat

United Community Winning Essay

Abstract: Introduced to Prince by my three-year-old daughter in 1980, I watched as an invisible witness as Prince, a black man from Northside Minneapolis, evolved into a self-actualized man and artist. Music saved Prince, and his music came to embody love.

My daughter, when three, introduced me to Prince. Little did I know I was on the verge of a strange relationship for what would span almost four decades. I remember that day clearly.

I was cleaning out the fridge: shuffling containers, sniffing the remains of leftovers and marveling at how a well-chewed carrot stood steadfast in a bowl of lime-green Jell-O. Then my child was screaming in that urgent pitch that beckons all mothers.

She pointed at our old TV. I expected smoke, flames: its demise. She said, “There’s a woman on American Bandstand with a mustache.” I looked. A diminutive figure with long permed hair, wearing a large hoop earring, tight gold-lame pants, and heels, sang and pranced with an animal grace and an alluring swagger. In a throated Banshee falsetto, I hear, “I WANNA BE YOUR LOVER,” and after a tooth-pulling interview that revealed little, “WHY YOU WANNA TREAT ME SO BAD?”

I didn’t readily offer any explanations. I was fascinated. Transfixed. My response had to be well thought out. She had asked about God. Once. From my meandering of religious exploration, I told her God was not human, male or female. God was not in the sky but resided in us. That frightened her. She wanted to be an

astronaut. When I told her I wouldn't come help her fight acid-drooling aliens, she changed her mind. I got better responding to her inquiring mind. When (after watching a Disney movie), my little one proclaimed, "One day **my** Prince will come," I slammed my mouth shut! I did not, would not tell her that Princes did NOT come for little black girls. I just hugged her.

That someday came on January 26, 1980. Gingerly, I told her, "He's a man, sweetie. His name is Prince." And to myself, our black Prince has come!

I joined the ranks of millions who adored this Northside Minneapolis prodigy. I purchased everything he sang, wrote, or filmed. I went to as many concerts as possible. Prince music dominated my stereo. A friend who worked at Warner Brothers satiated me with any morsel of information she could share about Prince.

It was never his most popular music that I enjoyed most. Despite my indigenous African spirituality and emerging Christian hermeneutics, I still find a deep connectivity to the songs "God," the instrumentals "God (Love Theme from *Purple Rain*)" and "Father's Song," his cover of "What if God Was One of Us," and "She's Always in my Hair."

Listening to Prince, I became audience and worshipper at sacred spaced sculpted by guitar, piano, drum, and his five-octave voice. He evokes Ori (personal consciousness) as his guitar weeps. He is Obatala (the peaceful one) who cries with an urgency to commune with Creator Spirit. He is Esu (messenger) offering dualistic, apocalyptic cautionary tales like "Annie Christian," "Sign 'O' The Times," "The Cross (The Christ)," "The Ladder," and "Thieves in the Temple." Prince held court (Somgo) with his Saints: Joni Mitchell, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, and Santana. Prince (as Ogun) infused Jazz, Rock, Blues, and R&B, African, Latin and Middle Eastern music that created familiar Holy Afro-Asiatic landscapes. Prince, (as Osun) satisfied spiritual and physical hunger at his feasts of artistic abundance.

Prince's music became sanctuary. Not Christian or Muslim, I became an outsider in my family and community. I am a black woman who blurs lines too much. If the shape of all things were a box, I'd never fit. I sought (and seek) a freedom from

rules and expectations that are culturally and biologically mismatches to my spirit. I equate God as Love. Prince's music embodies *Agape*.

Prince imbued his progressing understanding of God from a kaleidoscopic lens. "Was he black or white? Was he straight or gay?" "I'm not a woman / I'm not a man / I am something that you never ever had." Prince worked out warring dualities of sin, salvation and new dawns into love-centered realities. Prince was a black man who forged a strong identity of self; race, gender, and class despite oppositional odds. He was short, gender-fluid (although he did not call himself that), had epilepsy, had experienced abuses, poverty, colorism, relentless bullying, and profound loneliness. We don't get to witness many Black men become self-determining, independently wealthy and continue to evolve. Black men are heavily oppressed: forced into narrow confines of blackness, maleness and hyper-masculinity, servitude and chattel, and into daily living death. Music saved Prince.

Prince acted out his heaven and hell in front of millions. Throughout loss and tribulation, he always expressed his love of God. I loved him for that. I was an invisible witness to his development as artist and spiritual friend/lover/other. I confess: I didn't love all of Prince's music. There were songs I didn't like. Some of his lyrics were immature, misogynistic, and hedonistic. I chose to be patient as I felt his heart was loving. When my Ancestors asked me to sacrifice what I loved the most, it was my Prince collection. I didn't want him to self-destruct. He fought "his inner-me's," fought a music empire to reclaim his NAME and legacy, and won.

Prince evolved into some higher truths and put them into practice. He treated women with more respect, championed diversity for working musicians, stopped swearing, toned down the hedonism, became vegan, and a philanthropist.

Fans, that Prince called friends, experienced a man who grew to be unapologetically HIMSELF. He fully self-actualized then transcended into the realm of Masters. Prince did what he was born to do—create music, and more.

On April 21, 2016, Prince ascended. Minneapolis turned purple and grieved a collective loss. People stood as family in the streets and openly wept. In his honor, many partied like it was 1999. It was a worldwide shared spiritual experience. Prince was the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. of musicology. Yes, my daughter, Prince was a man.

Amoké Kubut

Amoké Kubut is a “Northsider for life” from Minneapolis, who has been involved in empowering mothers and families since 1987. She is a Yoruba Priestess, teacher, artist, and writer who partners with community artists, activists, and organizations to bridge African/African American culture and historical contributions into transformative actions for healing and building sustainable families and communities.

Amoké is the designer of YO MAMA! This soon to be non-profit provides “The Art of Mothering Workshops” as art-making support groups for mothers, as well as customized Art Residencies for organizations that serve mothers. YO MAMA’s mission is to empower mothers by disrupting the devaluation of women’s invisible labor and showcasing their mastery of the art of mothering, traditional women’s work that transforms into art-making and economic security.

Amoké uses writing and art-making to speak truth to power and to hold a position of wellness in an America sick with inequalities and inequities. *Missing Mama: My Story of Loss, Sorrow and Healing* is her self-published memoir. [Angry Black Woman and Well-Intentioned White Girl](#) is her first play. It has begun its five-city, South-Central mini-tour. Amoké is excited that her vision for this work has led to the creation of a TOOL KIT for having pre/post-performance discussions; audiences now include IPOC and white men. There will be pre-play workshops to permit white men to address male toxicity, their intersectionality in “Minnesota Nice,” and internalized oppression.

POETRY

The Ladder (Homage to Prince, 1958-2016)

Thomas Wilson

Open Submission Winning Poem

i.
Inspire me oh Muse lift me
to your higher plane, if I cannot
rise to you fall down on me
like rain, let me be a rainbow
a graffiti bridge, from dry
land to sky
I wanna be your Prince

ii.
My dove my Holy Spirit my cloudburst-ing the sun,
for you I'd ride a Pegasus as naked as the day was young
but for this purple loincloth
draped by providence
scandalously
I wanna be your Prince

iii.
They say the best way to learn
is by immersion, be it bath
water rain water lake water
or ocean, give me your wet bap-
tism just gimme a little
rinse, oh kiss me true
I wanna be your Prince

iv.
Wash me with your music of loneliness and pain, wash my weary feet in your
perfumed purple rain, wash me with my guitar and
my pulsing polysynths
weep for me
I wanna be your Prince

v.
Sound me like a symbol like an alpha and omega, what it means
is in-between the legs of
the enigma of the two-
headed eagle* the ladder and the sphinx, riddle me
I wanna be your Prince

vi.
The way I like to dance some think
that I'm a jerk, my body pop-locked
for you, what hides behind my smirk
is this pain in my side that makes
me secretly wince, I break
for you
I wanna be your Prince

vii.
After forty days of downpour after
the world's destroyed, will there
be a rainbow will there still be
girls and boys? bring me your
electric blues sing me your
coral pinks, stir it up
I wanna be your Prince

*A symbol of Mercury, the first and last step in alchemy, combining the male and the female.
See C.G. Jung's *Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy*, figures 15 & 20.

This poem draws on Prince’s explicit and implicit religious imagery to reveal the reconciling Christ-image in his work. In form, the poem is a love song, written in broken blues couplets in seven seven-line stanzas, addressed to the Holy Spirit as the female aspect of God. In his life, Prince showed us that Dance Music Sex and Romance can come place of deep spiritual yearning and have the potential lift us into communion with each other and God. At the same time, we are fallen and desperate for God’s intervention. Prince’s story is a not victory march, but one touched with humiliation and tragedy. The path to communion is painful, ambiguous, obscure and labyrinthian. While Prince is at times freed by sex, he is simultaneously a slave to sex. The Christian path is paradoxical, like Christ who is paradoxically fully God and fully human. Therefore, the ways Prince mixed genres of music as well as gender identities (genres in French) illustrate a Christ-like turn towards reconciliation and acceptance. As Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (NIV)

THOMAS WILSON

Thomas Wilson is a songwriter who has performed and released two albums, and was once commissioned to write a song for CBC radio (Canada). He has a MA in English, and studied creative writing, as well as philosophy and English at the undergraduate level. He has not published any poetry since publishing in his undergraduate university’s literary journal. He was also a college-radio DJ, spinning Prince records on his funk show. He is married to a professor of theology and is currently the primary caregiver for their two, young children.

Ours to Give
after two songs in succession from Purple Rain
Max Yeshaye Brumberg-Kraus

United Community Winning Poem

“When Doves Cry” starts with a fissure of sound-
—a buzzing flies
then drum then synth then voice
begging me to hold a picture of a kiss, repeated
between the kettle drum beats
as the lifefull dirge progresses into beasts, into man
devouring woman and vice/versa, demanding sacrifices—too high, too hot—
until the dove remains alone in ash,
nipping the feathers from his ruff.

Naked, he is notawoman, notaman,
he evades the plan that binds him
to his father, that binds the ephemeral “you”
to his mother.

His beak cracks, makes way for a mouth opening
with a tongue composed of hands reaching to touch
stone into flesh, promising:
“I would die 4 u.”

This is the second song, a pick up line in the fashion of christ,
Prince fondling wounds through teeth and lips,
leaving bodies genderblent in the ecstasy of oils dripping
from his body, fingers smudging my figure into the chorus,
imploing me to speak his words:
“I would die 4 u!”

Then he steals back the picture I held of the kiss—that schism of sexes,
that massacre, that molting of a dove—
and trading an image for a touch,

imparts:
"life is a transaction of heat we never consented to."
Devastated,
I want to call: "Then what is ours to give?"

But the song ends before I utter; cold spills in his wake.
And without thought or comprehension
but through the mechanism of a jaw unhinged,
I am left repeating, repeating:
"I would die 4 u..."

MAX YESHAYE BRUMBERG-KRAUS

Max Yeshaye Brumberg-Kraus is a playwright, poet and performing artist living in St. Paul, MN. He is the co-founder of the House of Larva Drag Co-Operative and has done work with Pangea World Theatre, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet & Mask Theatre, the Rochester Arts Center, and Patrick's Cabaret. Max's art explores how trauma and memory live in the body, the relationship between the holy and the embodied, the formation of LGBTQ identities and communities in history, and theatre as a form of healing. When not performing or writing, Max blogs and curates social media for the Marketing and Communications at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. Max is also a student at United, where he is pursuing an MA in Theology and the Arts.

To see more of the submitted poems, please visit our online [Theology of Prince Gallery](#).

ACADEMIC PAPERS

The New Testament of R & B

Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder

Abstract: There is indeed rich, complex history of the marriage of the New Testament and rhythm and blues. For the sake of this paper, I aver that this marriage and merging of what may appear to be two different ends of the philosophical, theological, and cultural spectrum continues even today. What started as a hidden, cryptic and sometimes cumbersome crossing over in the 1920s is now a full-blown accepted form of artistry. This is evident in the music of three prominent R and B artists whom I will discuss here: Prince (“I Would Die 4 U”); Lauryn Hill (“Tell Him”); and Kanye West (“Jesus Walks”). I chose these works because the artists themselves hold such prominent places in the music history of the 80s, 90s, and now in the 21st century, respectively. Their popularity and influence are by no means confined to these decades. The artists were indeed icons during this timeframe, but their music tentacles are as expansive today.

Hear these words from those famous theologians, The Staple Singers:

I know a place
Ain't nobody cryin'
Ain't nobody worried
Ain't no smilin' faces
Mmm-mmm, no, no
Lyin' to the races ...
(I'll take you there)
I'm callin' callin' for mercy ...
(I'll take you there)
You oughta, you gotta gotta let me
(I'll take you there)¹

“I’ll Take You There” comes from The Staple Singers’ 1972 album, *Be Altitude: Respect Yourself*. I remember hearing this song growing up in Memphis, which ironically is the home of Stax Records, the company that produced this album. “I’ll Take You There” is the second hit from this album. The song itself is quite churchy and rings of something you could hear at any given worship service. I was always a little confused as a child hearing this song played on R & B or rhythm-and-blues stations. It just did not fit.

Playing this right after “Brick House” or “Love and Happiness” caused a little confusion for me. After all, it was apparent that the song was talking about heaven and life after death. It was talking about church, God, and Bible—although it did not really mention church, God, or the Bible specifically, it did refer to biblical themes. In this song, I could see as a child the allusion to Jesus “going to prepare a place and if it were not so I would have told you.” (Jn. 14:2 KJV) The song resonates with the Book of Revelation, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.” (Rev. 21:4 NRSVCE). So it was obvious to me then as it is now that although this song could be couched between Aretha’s “I Never Loved A Man” and Earth, Wind and Fire’s “Can’t Hide Love,” there was something a little different about the message of the song despite its intermediary placement.

Yet, more poignant than the positioning of “I’ll Take You There” on the radio back in the seventies was its presence in such a popular context. The fact the song with its gospel sound and biblical themes held and still holds such a prominent place in contemporary culture is what I find most intriguing. I find just as enlightening the idea that “I’ll Take You There” was not the first song with such an ecclesiastical message to “preach” to a non-church audience. Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers with “Jesus Gave Me Water” had done the same a decade or so prior.

The Staple Singers were not the first artists with “sacred” roots to crossover into the secular world. Ruth Lee Jones or jazz legend Dinah Washington as we know her, originally sang with gospel’s The Sallie Martin Singers. The Staple Singers with “I’ll Take You There” was not the first time or the last time biblical themes or

more specifically, New Testament themes, would find themselves incorporated or merged into a non-biblical musical flavor. Frank Stokes with “You Shall” and Jim Jackson with “I Heard the Voice of a Porkchop” made similar moves in the 1930s as did Duke Ellington and Mildred Jackson’s “Is That Religion?” There is indeed rich, complex history of this marriage of the New Testament and blues, and, yes, the New Testament, and rhythm and blues.

For the sake of this paper, I aver that this marriage and merging of what may appear to be two different ends of the philosophical, theological, and cultural spectrum continues even today. What started as a hidden, cryptic, and sometimes cumbersome crossing over in the 1920s is now a full-blown accepted form of artistry. This is evident in the music of three prominent R & B artists whom I will discuss here: Prince (“I Would Die 4 U”), Lauryn Hill (“Tell Him”) and Kanye West (“Jesus Walks”). I chose these works because the artists themselves hold such prominent places in the music history of the eighties, nineties, and now in the 21st century, respectively. Their popularity and influence are by no means confined to these decades. The artists were indeed icons during this timeframe, but their music tentacles are as expansive today.

My purpose in this exercise is two-fold. First, to highlight the use of the New Testament in these three songs in order to maintain that the partnership between this corpus of literature and R & B cannot be discarded. If anything, it helps to shed light on Andrew Greeley’s declaration that “popular culture is a ‘locus theologicus’...” Greeley posits that popular culture is a theological place where one might encounter God, and thus it serves a new arena for religious expression.²

My second aim is to show how this current syncretization of sacred and secular flows along the historic waters within African/African American culture that have always seen the divine in everything. Thus “I Would Die 4 U,” “Tell Him,” and “Jesus Walks” are current representations of the manner in which African people have not erected a worldly-spiritual dichotomy or boundary. Instead, the world is spiritual, and the spiritual is of the world. Thus, music produced in this worldly context is indeed spiritual.

I will begin with a brief discussion of this merging of sacred and secular by showing how various artists have crossed both worlds, thus providing a historical-cultural framework for what Prince, Hill, and West do through their songs. I will then move to individual assessments of the songs to show more specifically how they incorporate New Testament themes.

Playing a Similar Song

The beginning of this merger of the world with the divine finds its root in the tribal mores and folkways of the Yoruba, Fan, and various other West African cultures. In these settings there was no distinction between the holy and the profane. Therese Reed maintains that the first Africans to arrive in the Colonies had no concept of sacred/secular distinction in music or any other aspect of life. Black Americans incorporated this duality into their awareness as a result of exposure to Western culture. In addition, subsequent Evangelical and Holiness movements further reinforced this separation.³

Yet, artists, composers, producers, and radio stations attempted to push back and make pliable any sense of border between the Bible and the booming bass of a rhythm section. For example, while recording under false names, it was facile for blues artists in the 1920s and 1930s to produce religious music. Blind Lemon Jefferson did so under the pseudonym of Deacon L. J. Bates, and “Georgia Tom” was the other side of hymnist Thomas Dorsey. From the 1940s to 1960s, rhythm and blues emerged as an art form emanating from the blues and rooted in the “urban context.” In the 1970s, R & B connoted “soul funk.” In both cases the heavy beat or heavy bass was the distinctive sound.

During this period from the 1960s and 1970s, more and more artists continued to blur the music lines. Artists who started out in the church but whose careers blossomed in R & B include the following: Marvin Gaye; Aretha Franklin; Curtis Mayfield, Stevie Wonder; Teddy Pendergrass. Those who publicly crossed from gospel to R & B number Sam Cooke, Dinah Washington, and the Staple Singers. This second group is different from the latter phenomenon that began in the 1970s with The Hawkins’ Family, “O Happy Day.”

Those in this third category prominent in the 1980s and 1990s are artists who identified themselves as strictly gospel singers, but whose music could be heard on any “101.1 FM The Beat” station: The Clark Sisters (“You Brought the Sunshine”); The Winans (“The Question Is”); Tramaine Hawkins (“Fall Down on Me”); Mary/Mary (“Shackles”). Of course, we have to include Kirk Franklin’s use of the P-Funk sound with his remix of “Stomp,” Patrice Rushen’s “I’ve Been Looking for You” and many others. Again these singers although self-identifying as gospel artists cultivated a sound that continues to have widespread appeal.

On the other hand, as it relates to the work of Hill, Prince, and West, one cannot overlook musicians whose careers began and still are rooted in R & B. However, they have taken up the mantle from Bates/Jefferson and “Georgia Tom”/Dorsey to record songs that are indeed biblically based. This category includes: The Commodores (“Jesus is Love”); Earth, Wind and Fire (“Devotion”); Aretha Franklin (*One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* Album); Al Green (“Sailing on the Sea of Your Love”); Tupac Shakur (“Black Jesus”); D’Angelo (*Black Messiah*); Chance the Rapper (“Blessed”) among many others.

Again the purpose of this abbreviated analysis is to show that within the African framework there has been this “dance” between the music of God and the sound of the devil. Yet what is unique now is that there is less resistance to this marriage and perhaps an expectation that artists will blend the sacred and secular world. In decades past (1920s-1970s) when artists undertook such an endeavor, the voices of cultural critics loomed large, and these artists sometimes suffered personal and financial consequences. Conversely, what makes today’s artists able to make a smooth transition from the holy to the profane is the age of the audience. Young adults, as keepers, movers, and shapers of this popular culture, do not hold such divisive restrictions on when or where to speak of God, Jesus, or anything biblical or spiritual. Related to this are the loose reigns this audience holds on the church. I think Spencer’s assessment is correct that traditional religion has been relocated from the church to the streets, nightclubs, concerts, and music festivals.⁴ Third, there is almost an expectation in this current cultural pop milieu, that R & B performers and others will define and acknowledge the “divine” in some fashion. Now the harvest is ripe, and the laborers are not few.

A Glimpse of the New Testament According to Prince, Hill, and West

Allow me to say at the onset, I do not purport that Prince, Lauryn Hill, or Kanye West are biblical scholars. I do not maintain they had the Bible in mind when they were composing “I Would Die 4 U,” “Tell Him,” or “Jesus Walks” respectively. Neither is it my position that Prince was nor Hill and West are Christian, Bible-thumping, scripture quoting persons of faith. I have not found liner notes that maintain any of the aforementioned statements.

Furthermore, I must declare that I am not an ethnomusicologist, a student of music theory, a producer, composer, or songwriter. Who I am is a New Testament scholar, a preacher who enjoys various genres of music and a listener who pays attention to lyrics. Thus, I could not help but notice resonances of the New Testament and in many cases outright parallels to such biblical literature upon hearing these songs.

Prince: “I Would Die 4 U”

The artist known as Prince released his Grammy award-winning album *Purple Rain* and its accompanying movie in 1984. (Note: I say album because CDs, MP3 downloads and iTunes were unavailable at the time of release.) Over three decades on the market, and still both album and movie rank in a class all their own. Sales of both increased immensely after Prince’s untimely death in 2016.⁵ One of the songs on this album is “I Would Die 4 U.” Some of the lyrics are as follows:

I’m not a woman
I’m not a man
I am something that you’ll never understand

I’ll never beat you
I’ll never lie
And if you’re evil I’ll forgive you by and by ...
No need to worry

No need to cry
I'm your messiah and you're the reason why

'Cause you, I would die for you yeah,
Darling if you want me too
You, I would die for you

You're just a sinner I am told
Be your fire when you're cold
Make u happy when you're sad
Make u good when u are bad

I'm not a human
I am a dove
I'm your conscious
I am love
All I really need is to know that
You believe⁶

Prince makes obvious correlations to biblical texts. He uses the word "messiah" in the same stanza where he maintains "If you're evil I'll forgive u by and by / ... You're just a sinner I am told." The concept relates to the manner in which the gospels refer to Jesus as the "messiah." Matthew begins with an account of the genealogy of Jesus "the Messiah," the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1 NRSVCE) Mark's account of the crucifixion includes witnesses deriding Jesus saying, "Let the 'Messiah,' the King of Israel come down from the cross now, so that way may see and believe." (Mk. 15:32 NRSVCE) Luke maintains that even demons recognize Jesus' messianic embodiment for Jesus rebukes them "because they knew that he was the Messiah." (Lk. 4:41 NRSVCE) A crowd in the gospel of John anticipates the signs and wonders of the coming Messiah. (Jn. 7:31) Thus Prince's reference to a messiah who forgives evil is in line with the many depictions in the gospel narratives of Jesus as this messiah with varying and special gifts.

A second theological move this song makes is to connect the activity of the messiah with suffering or martyrdom. The title of the song is "I Would Die 4 U." "U, I would die for you, yeah / Darling if U want me 2." Thus, Prince not only sheds light on the identity of the messiah and his affiliation with humankind—the messiah forgives sinful humans, but the artist continues to borrow from biblical literature in that suffering is the mechanism in which this messianic redemption occurs. Bart Ehrman declares that according to the Gospel of Mark Jesus did not come to overthrow the forces of evil aligned against God. He came to suffer and die at the hands of these forces.⁷ Mark presents three passion predictions in which, yes, Jesus foreshadows his suffering and death (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). This theme of the suffering messiah is also prevalent in Acts 2:36; 3:18; 17:3.

Lastly, in addition to New Testament accounts of a redeeming messiah and a suffering messiah, a misunderstood messiah also appears in Prince's work. The song speaks to the incomprehensible nature of this messiah, "I'm not a woman, I'm not a man / I am something that you'll never understand or comprehend." Emerson Powery asserts, "Despite numerous predictions about a 'suffering messiah,' they (the disciples) fail to comprehend the implications of this type of leader."⁸ In the Markan passion narratives, the author does not fail to comment on the lack of understanding that emanates from the disciples. Prince includes this same sense of confusion.

Again I do not maintain that Prince intended to weave such literary seams, maybe he did. However, I would be hard pressed to see this as accidental or coincidental. Nonetheless, again as one who teaches, preaches the New Testament, these references ring loud to me.

Lauryn Hill: "Tell Him"

Abraham Smith asseverates "Lauryn Hill, on her *Miseducation of the Lauryn Hill* album, draws on the Paul of I Corinthians 13 for lyrics of 'Tell Him,' but she changes Paul's words in accordance with the harsh realities of urban life."⁹ Hill's song from her 1998 premiere, Grammy award-winning, solo album makes more than just thematic references to the New Testament. Hill infuses almost verbatim Paul's

challenge to the church at Corinth regarding “love as the more excellent way.” Hill’s modern-day take on these first-century words are as follows:

Let me be patient let me be kind
Make me unselfish without being blind
Though I may suffer I’ll envy it not
And endure what comes
Cause he’s all that I got and
Tell him...
...
Now I may have faith to make mountains fall
But if I lack love then I am nothin’ at all
I can give away everything I possess
But left without love then I have no happiness
I know I’m imperfect & not without sin (& not without sin)
But now that I’m older all childish things end
And tell him...
...
Now I may have wisdom and knowledge on Earth
But if I speak wrong then what is it worth?
See what we now know is nothing compared
To the love that was shown when our lives were spared
And tell him...¹⁰

In comparing Hill’s lyrics to Paul’s writing almost two thousand years earlier, there are clarion similarities. Her statements about being patient, kind, and unselfish are almost replicas of Paul’s words in I Corinthians 13:4. Her notation regarding “faith to make mountains fall / But lacking love and being nothing at all” comes directly from Paul’s comments on the same. (I Cor. 13: 2) In addition, Hill as Paul wrestles (I Cor. 13: 11) with what is proper behavior for the spiritually mature: “But now that I am older all childish things end.”

However, Hill takes artistic license in that her recontextualization and reinterpretation of I Corinthians 13 flow through some different streams. Whereas

Paul says, “Love is patient; love is kind.” (I Cor. 13: 4 NRSVCE), Hill personalizes the matter stating: “Let me be patient let me be kind.” Paul declares that love is not envious and bears, believes, hopes, and endures all. (I Cor. 13: 4, 7 NRSVCE) Hill again speaks to and for herself, singing, “Though I may suffer / I’ll envy it not and endure what comes.” She continues, “I can give away everything I possess / But left without love I have no happiness.” Paul uses “gain nothing” (I Cor. 13: 3 NRSVCE) where Hill has inserted “no happiness.” Another distinction occurs with Hill, singing, “See what we now know in part is nothing compared / To the love that was shown when our lives were spared.” I Corinthians’ original statement only includes “now I only know in part...” (I Cor. 13: 12b NRSVCE) A final contrast is in Hill’s use of “him”—tell him. Tell who? We do not know if “him” in Hill’s work refers to God, Jesus, a son, husband, or significant other. It is clear it is a personal reference, again unlike Paul who addresses corporate concerns in I Corinthians 13.

Thus, in reviewing the song it is apparent Hill or someone in her social or musical circle had some working knowledge of I Corinthians 13. Nonetheless, Hill reconfigures, re-contextualizes the song to speak to her own social location and sense of identity. It is just as possible that like Prince she modernizes a concept, in this case love, but in a different vein. Hill employs a specific New Testament text to address a popular culture whose locus theologicus has indeed shifted. Kanye West busts a similar move with “Jesus Walks.”

Kanye West: “Jesus Walks”

Hear these edited words from Mr. West:

To the hustlers, killers, murderers, drug dealers even us scrippers
(Jesus walks with them)
To the victims of welfare for we livin’ in Hell here hell yeah (Jesus walks with them)
...
They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus
That means guns, sex, lies, videotape
But if I talk about God my record won’t get played, huh?
Well let this take away from my spins
Which will probably take away from my ends

Then I hope this takes away from my sins ...
 (Jesus Walks)
 God show me the way because the devil tryna to break me down
 (Jesus walk with me)
 The only thing that I pray is that my feet don't fail me now (Jesus Walks)
 And I don't think there's nothing I can do now to right my wrongs
 (Jesus walk with me)
 I want to talk to God but I'm afraid because we ain't spoke in so long¹¹

Like Hill's "Tell Him," Kanye West's "Jesus Walks" comes from his debut solo album released in 2004. This Grammy award-winning song is the third single from West's *College Dropout* production. West not only intermingles an R & B sound with this song, but he employs as a thematic overlay through the engagement of a different musical genre, a spiritual. Thus, in a move similar to Hill, West employs biblical references on top of biblical references. Whereas Hill takes a specific biblical passage and filters it through pop culture lenses, West begins with a Negro spiritual, "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me,"¹² and reinterprets it in light of his own R & B flavor. In each case there is the merging of sacred and secular.

In examining the New Testament references in "Jesus Walks," one begins to see that West employs a literary and musical strategy similar to Prince in "I Would Die for U." While not quoting exact biblical passages, West does highlight a certain element of the nature of Jesus as evident in the New Testament. In the case of "Jesus Walks," Jesus finds community among the marginalized, the decentered and disenfranchised. According to West, Jesus walks with the "hustlers, killers, murderers, drug dealers, strippers, and victims of welfare." Such an ontological statement aligns with Luke's Jesus as one who "brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captive, gives sight to the blind and lets the oppressed go free." (Lk. 4:18) This Jesus is a Jesus of the people. This Jesus is "a Savior accessible to all people who not only transcends race and ethnicity, but also wealth and poverty."¹³ It is the same Jesus who according to Luke spends time with Zacchaeus a tax collector, a man whose fiscal accounting is questionable at best (Lk. 19:1-10). Zacchaeus in many ways holds a similar social standing as the hustling outcasts mentioned in West's song.

West highlights the issue of personal sin and wrongdoing evident in New Testament writings. He maintains that he is taking a risk by talking about God (*as a rapper*) and that maybe by taking this risk (*for God*), this will help to "take away from his sins." There is indeed a reciprocal relationship between faith and works and the idea of doing something to help attain salvation. It is a theological concept present in the book of James where the writer declares that "faith without works is dead." (Jas. 2:17) Ironically James is also speaking about taking care of the less fortunate. West makes a reference to persons on welfare.

Finally, West adds a confessional element to the song in a turn similar to Hill. He has urgent need to be in communion with God; yet, "the devil (is) tryna to break him down." However, while needing and wanting to be in relationship with the divine, West admits, "I want to talk to God but I'm afraid because we ain't spoke in so long." This idea of an individual's sense of unworthiness and the tension between the divine-human relationship comes to the surface in Luke's story of the sinner woman who wipes the feet of Jesus with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50) and in Paul's own desire to do good while battling the desire to do evil (Rom. 7:14-15). Both examples speak to the conundrum of the human longing to be in the presence of that which is divine but yet feeling ashamed in such this presence. One must note that perhaps more contextually West's appearance as a thorn-crowned figure on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine (January 25, 2006) is an outward display of this inner turmoil.

I must reiterate that neither Hill nor West confesses nor did Prince attest that their works were indeed speaking to biblical texts. Yet perhaps just as there is artistic license, I contend there is also interpretive license. As a proponent of cultural studies that affirms the importance of social location in interpretation, my social identity, as a preacher who uses the Bible as a source for my own homiletical practices and as a biblical scholar who teaches the Bible in an academic setting, has influenced my own approach to gaining meaning from the previously discussed songs.

What Do We Now Sing?

I began by discussing how growing up I thought it peculiar and perhaps damning to hear “sacred” songs surrounded by “secular” songs. Yes, I grew up in the church, and, yes, there was the music we listened to on Sundays. But yet, I grew up in Memphis with Isaac Hayes, Al Green, and The Staple Singers blaring on WDIA and K-97. So there were the hymns, gospel songs, spirituals, and Jesus on Sunday, and who-knows-what Monday through Saturday. I was “troubled,” but not “distressed” by the varying sounds I heard.

Now I must admit I have gotten over it. I no longer am surprised or have any sense of chagrin when I hear any sacred artist “troubling secular waters.” It does not bother me when a West, Prince, Hill, Tupac, Common, Chance the Rapper expresses spiritual wrestlings with the boom, boom, boom of the bass. It just seems natural. It is all a continuation of who we are as both temporal and eternal people. It is all an expression who we are as women and men wedded to both human and the divine. This merging of the holy and profane is an outpouring of “these treasures in earthen vessels.” (II Cor. 4:7 RSVCE)

So where do we go from here? What do we now sing? Well, this is what I sing: I sing Mary J. Blige’s “Work What You Got” as the song of invitation after a sermon from Philippians 1:6 where Paul says God will complete God’s work in us. I sing Michael Jackson’s “I’ll Be There” to remind me of Jesus’ promise in John 14:3, “That where I am, you’ll be there also.” I sing Stevie Wonder’s “Signed, Sealed, Delivered” to help me get through Revelation 7. I sing this way not because I am conflicted, but because I am comfortable with the biblical scholar, preacher, pastor, teacher, mom, and wife that I am. It is not that I am confined, but I have no desire to conform to restrictive measures.

If Spencer and Greeley are correct that popular culture calls us toward a new ‘locus theologicus,’ then we in this academy have to be willing to do a new thing. We have to be willing to let the Bible and those interpreting the Bible outside of our ivory towers, do a new thing. Now there is a new creation; the old has gone; the new has come, and the beat goes on....

STEPHANIE BUCKHANON CROWDER

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Notes

¹The Staple Singers, "I'll Take You There," on *Be Altitude: Respect Yourself*, Stax, 1972, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2vW01fe>.

²Andrew M. Greeley, *God in Popular Culture* (Chicago, IL: Thomas More Press, 1988), np, quoted in Robin Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit: the Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 78.

³Teresa Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 90.

⁴Jon Michael Spencer, "Preface: Sacred Music of the Secular City," *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 6:1 (Spring 1992): v-vi, quoted in Robin Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit: the Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 78.

⁵Keith Caulfield, "4 Million Prince Albums and Songs Have Been Sold Following His Death," accessed November 30, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2wflGgr>.

⁶Prince and the Revolution, "I Will Die for You," on *Purple Rain*, Warner Bros. Records, 1984, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2nPLsFr>.

⁷Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writings*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.

⁸Emerson B. Powery, "Gospel of Mark," in *True to Our Native Land: an African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 142.

⁹Abraham Smith, "Paul and African American Biblical Interpretation," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 37.

¹⁰Lauryn Hill, "Tell Him," on *Miseducation of the Lauryn Hill*, Sony Legacy, 1998, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2MD8Ow5>.

¹¹Kanye West, "Jesus Walks" on *Get Well Soon* accessed 30 November 2017, <https://bit.ly/2nTjTuR>.

¹²Public Domain, "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me," accessed 30 November, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2eXxXCB>.

¹³Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, "Gospel of Luke," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 158.

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**In this Church-Sized Stage,
You can Guess the Offering—
Theological Reception in Prince’s Fan Culture**
Carla Schriever

Abstract: Prince fans have diverse understandings of the theology of Prince. This case study depicts their stories and continuous belief in the artist.

Within the fan culture of the late, pop icon Prince, religious narratives seem to involve diverse contradictions. While joining in faith and devotion for their fan object, Prince fans tended to be known for harsh criticism, which even included practices of hate, depicting it on the brick of aca-fandom.¹ Even though the Prince fan community can be understood as long-term or even life-long fans, their worship practices vary from religious practices of other popular music fandoms, and I would like to examine these differences in this article.

Fandom and Religion

Jennifer Bickerdicke turns to the theories of Matt Hills and Henry Jenkins to examine the relationship between fandom and religion as having been incited by "faith, personal taste and applicable societal norms differing from each individual."² The connection challenges an understanding of the intertwining of these terms on the basis of intersectionality. In becoming a fan, diverse aspects of social norms and personal motivations and beliefs connect and eventually cling to an object featuring the needed characteristics the fan is aiming to fulfill. This ful-

fillment of needs tends to offer a religious understanding, even though the individual fan may refuse to believe this. Even if refused fandom and fan practice, especially if understood in community terms, are abstract categories of collective practice, just as religion.³ Similar practices like gathering, the meaning of certain symbols, collective singing, certain dress practices, the collection and sharing of associated goods, resemble proceedings within different religious communities. In this dimension Hills perceives religion as offering “template model for fandom practices” as both are “centered around acts of devotion.”⁴

In comparing fandom with religion, I would argue that fandom is not the simple replacement of religion but a para-religious and secular practice in a world centered around the fulfillment of individual needs. According to Daniel Cavicchi’s study on Bruce Springsteen fans⁵ fandom contains diverse parallels to religious practices, especially in the “development of a close attachment to an unobtainable other, a kind of moral orientation, a daily life devoted to the inspiration and a community based on a shared assumption of devotion.”⁶ Bickerdicke continues this notion in perceiving the spiritual practices within fandom communities by focusing on an object that is designed in physical unreachability but nevertheless always available with a similar array of believers.⁷ She focuses on what I would like to call the “metaphysical” aspects of fandom being mediated by the work cooperation of the artist, which even transcends his/her physical existence and the mediated narrative.

I would divide the mediate narrative into the media-narrative, which is a part of the fans knowledge, and into what I would call personal-narrative. Personal-narrative features diverse emotional experiences the fan has with the fan object over time, including physical encounters, face to face interactions, co-existence in the same space and time (e.g., concerts), individual emotional states concerning the artist’s work, and even dreams about or associated with their fan object. These mediated narratives, combined with the importance of collective practice, influences the fan’s dimension of devotion.

Chris Rojek argues that, in contrast to religion, “celebrity culture is only a cluster of human relationships in which mutual passion typically operates without physi-

cal interaction.”⁸ Fandom seems to involve physical and metaphysical dimensions that seem to be different from dimensions and practices offered in religious communities. But they also share extensive features, like a definition of canon and non-canon within a community, both expressions of belief encourage massive amounts of community, both own special/sacred places of worship, and both change the devotees’/fans’ approach to life in general, which I will examine in the following research.

To examine the individual practices of fan worship, I conducted an interview-based research with European Prince fans, which offered a closer look into personal practices of fan faith and community practices. [Editor: The author noted interviewee comments in parentheses, followed by the age of the interviewee.] First, one has to understand that the fan culture around Prince features special characteristics being influenced by the artist’s antipathy against mainstream media discourse by the beginning of the 1990s. Most of the interviewed fans became fans during Prince’s mainstream success of *Purple Rain* in the early 1980s.⁹ Being in their adolescence, these new fans experienced an attraction because of the artist’s anti-normative ideas, dressing practices, and behavior, which allowed a new understanding of normativity, especially because most of them grew up in middle-class environments: “He was so different from anyone I have ever seen, his shows were eye-opening;” (Hannah, 46) “There was no one who could just walk in a room, wearing high-heels and still being the worst of all.” (Mark, 51)

To gain a better understanding of the different aspects of their fan/worship practices, I interviewed participants via online-video-chat with open questions to allow them to explain their personal motivations and developments over time. Most of them started their fandom in the 1980s when Prince was at the height of his career. He often referred to religious topics that alluded to a kind of self-construction as a messianic figure, a narrative that was continued by a majority of the interviewees for the average course of thirty-five years.

The selected interview participants feature an analogous social background and are part of Prince’s most solid fan group since the beginning of his career for he mainly focused on Europe within the last twenty years with concerts or releases.

So, the participants of my study had the possibility to experience physical and metaphysical dimensions of their fandom and to share wide knowledge of their fan culture canon and para-religious practices. This study derives from participant observation, since I have been part of the fandom for over ten years, which separates my own fandom practice from my participants because of the duration.

In this case study, I seek to explore the contradictory relationship many fans established to their fan object over the course of their fandom. Moreover, I will focus on the physical and metaphysical dimension of fandom practice and on the sacredness of object-associated places and pilgrimage. In the end, I will consider the fans' para-religious practices before and after his death in April 2016, concluding with the dimension of fan devotion transcending the life of the fan object.

Fandom, Worship, and Narrative

At the beginning of the 1980s, when *Purple Rain* was released, Prince was at the height of his success. He designed his stage persona to become an ambiguous figure, keeping his age, gender, and sexual orientation a mystery. Even though his shows used to be a mixture of sexually explicit lyrics, dance moves, and idioms, he always used to refer to God, even wearing a cross, depicting himself as a Christian. This combination of Christian motifs and sexual connotations irritated many potential recipients and invited a huge media hype around his persona.

His fans, young adults in this time, soaked in his anti-normative approach to combine faith practices aiming to end the demonization of sexuality. His textual approaches to topics of sex and faith formed a different understanding of religious practices for many of his young fans: "Why hate your body, your desire? He taught me how to love my body—it is God-given." (Clare, 44) This revaluation offered a different ingress to the dimension of fandom practices: "For us he was the epitome of a new world, a spiritual leader." (Markus, 43) In ending concerts with songs like, "The Love We Make," featuring a sexual connoted reading while featuring religious motifs, which was meant to reconcile the dimension of religious practices—obeying God. Following his rules of love and peace and joining a movement designed for creating a more peaceful world: "Sacred is the prayer

that asks 4 nothing / While seeking 2 give thanks 4 every breath we take / Blessed are we inside this prayer / 4 in the new world, we will be there."¹⁰ Narratives in dreaming about a new joint world in which human beings would continue to strive for peace and togetherness formed a major part of every concert experience.

At the end of a 1988 concert in Dortmund, Germany, part of the *Lovesexy* tour, one can hear the crowd reciting a song's lyrics: "Love is God, God is love / Girls and boys love God above."¹¹ The joint experience of religious connoted songs and quotations led many fans to a new understanding of Christian terms. They felt affected by the combination of believing in a higher force while simultaneously believing in the prophet being Prince. When asked how this connection between religious terms and sexuality was received by his fans, many of them "see both as intertwined to understand the whole picture of life, things that are missing in religion." (Harry, 41) This combination showed its influence on the recipients by adding to their own ideas or even going beyond them to open up new dimensions:

Well, sex was created by God as the highest expression of love, and God is Love; so it really goes hand in hand that's what I understand and the meaning I get.
(Donnie, 48)

In addition to that, the sexually connoted songs on albums, for example, the famous "Darling Nikki,"¹² dealing with a promiscuous woman dragging the male persona into sexual intercourse, to which he gladly consents, ends in the sound of rain. Touré¹³ argues that the sound of rain or water used at the end or directly after a song with sexual content evokes acts of purification and, thus, a dedication to God and the remission of sins in the end:

To be honest, there is a paradox between both (religion/sexuality) where Prince is concerned. It seemed as if he had freedom within himself to behave in a very sexual way and, then, to redeem his sin, he would have praise to God and declare his love for him. As an

onlooker, this gave me a kind of comfort in that this person I have chosen to follow so closely has license to be naughty because, at the end of it all, he devotes himself to God. That made me less guilty as a consumer with the product I was buying into.”
(Raymond, 55)

The different approaches to the combination of religion and sexuality formed a fan culture that became highly diverse concerning personal identities but also in the way of interpreting the artist’s testimony. This even increased when the fandom narrative engaged with the para-religious depiction of the artist himself, reaching its peak by the mid-1990s when Prince changed his name into an unpronounceable symbol to regain his independence as an artist. The glyph merged ancient symbols for man and woman, creating a new, sexual, gender-fluidity in combination with a cross and a part of a musical note. Mitch Monson, who designed the symbol logo, explained: “Like a human body, it’s asymmetrical, imperfect. Lastly, the symbol also evokes a cross.

“It is impossible to know the depths of Prince’s intentions, but the Love Symbol swiftly harmonizes ideas often in conflict—man vs. woman, sex vs. religion.”¹⁴ With the harmonization and the acceptance of everybody who was part of this one sign, it became the religious symbol for his fan community through today. The artist’s self-depiction was read as being a kind of messianic form, a reason for many fans to take up the symbol and to use it during their everyday fan practices, for example, by wearing it as a necklace or even having it inked into their skins as tattoos. Wearing a Prince symbol defines a fan as belonging to the canon-knowing community and differentiates him/her from outsiders or regular fans. The knowledge they share also combines the respect for their para-religious leader and his wishes even when they contradict with fan’s desires.

Even though many fans continuously perceive him as their messiah or some form of spiritual leader since the beginning of their fandom, they used to get into conflicts because of adoration and devotion practices. This evoked two sides: Prince as the physical existence, the private person; and Prince as the stage persona, the owner of his artistic work and rights. Looking at popular music, fan cultures using

the artist’s work for fan creativity is a natural practice to show one’s adoration, if given to the fan object or made available exclusively within the culture. Creating associated artwork, covering songs, or writing fan fiction seems to belong to many different fan culture canons.

Within the fan culture around Prince, this has always been a controversial issue. For instance, the artist’s approach in giving his fans less opportunity to buy merchandise and, at the same time, forbidding them to create their own to honor him; such as posting videos on video-channels like YouTube, filming at concerts, or even sharing pictures online. If fans tried to express their adoration in one of the enumerated forms, he used to sue them, a controversy which problematized the relationship between fans and the artist. Refocusing the on-goings in the last twenty years, this has greatly affected the fan community canon, because it divided fans into certain groups: those that respected his wishes and reduced their acts of devotion to fit his demands; and those that repeatedly got into fights with him:

Once I was visiting Paisley Park, I met him there and we had a talk, he wanted to know how many bootlegs I owned and if I would give them back to him. I explained to him that I bought a lot and that I did it to express my love for him and that I will never let go of them. He turned away and I was escorted by his guards.
(Raymond, 55)

The quoted fan did not end his fandom at the doormat of Paisley Park, but continued like others who were sued on copyright issues and had to pay hundreds of dollars, a no-go for many fan communities. Respecting the artist and his rights is still one of the highest rules in fandom practice, but nevertheless getting into fights with him seemed to be equally important: “Now that he’s gone, I will not post any more videos to YouTube—I don’t see any sense to that anymore.” (Frank, 47)

To tackle the sensitive area of his artistic rights seemed to be a way to be in contact with their messiah, even in making him mad. It was a way to gain his attention,

which seemed to be worth the efforts of money and sometimes even pain. The results of the interviews show that this form of possible interaction and attention was ended by his death and, in this way, does not need to be continued while the fan culture transformed into private-space practice, which I will examine later on in more detail.

Even wearing the Love Symbol, which he used to wear or use as stage decor, used to be a controversial topic in the fan-star interrelation. Even though for many fans, the symbol was a highly para-religiously connoted sign, symbolizing their membership of the community and their devotion to Prince, fans had to turn to their own creative surroundings because of a lack of suitable manufactured jewelry by the artist himself.

“I don’t wear a cross, I wear a Prince symbol.” (Martin, 45)

Fans used the symbol to identify each other and to situate themselves within fandom hierarchy. Wearing the symbol means (even today) believing in the freedom of the artist’s rights (even if it is sometimes a controversial issue), believing in the unity of the fan culture (preferring the term fam, an abbreviation for family, over the term ‘fan’, being considered as fanatic), believing in the protection of the artist’s property and his “Love4oneanother”¹⁵ ethics, which have always been part of concerts and other gatherings.

The religious dimension of the “Love4oneanother-focus” derives from the idea of Christian altruism, the topic Prince used to refer to as the focus of his work corpora in the late 1990s, in which he named a charity organization and a music video anthology. For fans, “Love4oneanother” has always been a part of their shared ethical canon, meaning to respect and include the diversity of people gathering in the fandom around Prince. Even though these ethics always seemed to be a foundation for many fans, they were at times suspended concerning concert experiences.

Fandom and Metaphysical Physicality

Many fans described their fandom as being largely structured around live performances/concerts by the artist. Since the lack of mainstream media marketing led to unstructured tour schedules creating last-minute ticket sales and show notices, fans had to adapt to these practices to keep track of the artist’s career. The immaterial concert experience is understood as the most desirable artifact for fans in the culture, “collecting” these nonrecurring moments was of high importance for fans and for the fandom hierarchy. To situate oneself in the structure of fandom, the amount of concert experiences and the specifics of time, venue, duration, and setlists were important. Because of the short-term notice of concerts within the last fifteen years, fans had to organize their lives around fandom to participate regularly. This also included assigning concert participation a priority in one’s personal life:

If he announced a concert for the next day, I called [in] sick to work and left in the early morning hours right after I secured my tickets. Everybody at home was informed. It was a life—always on call—for him!
(Tim, 39)

Even family and job responsibilities were set aside to focus exclusively on the participation opportunities of the fandom. In the context of my study, I talked to interviewees who told me that everyone knew about their priorities at work and that when they were called, they took time off to attend concerts or even associated events. Since concerts were sold-out within a few minutes, fans did not have much time to reconsider their possibilities.

“It just had to work—and it always did—somehow.” (Maria, 41)

Being able to participate in concerts did not solely affect the fan interrelation, but was an expression of adoration for the artist. Since fans traveled far distances (across Europe) to witness as many concerts as possible, regardless of social responsibilities and even financial or health issues, I wanted to understand the

effect these concerts had on them, as a single individual in their interrelationships with other fans and with the artist. Even though a front-row phenomenon seems to exist in most popular-music fan cultures, it appears to be gainful to revisit the motives behind the attraction of the first row, considering its physical and metaphysical dimension.

Prince had always constructed his persona in a certain unreachability, giving few interviews, not giving autographs or not interacting with fans. In their identification process with an idol, we know from Bettina Fritzsche's study of popular music culture that fans tend to seek a certain closeness to their fan object.¹⁶ This closeness seems to be the need to transgress the metaphysical relationship and to create a physical reality of interrelation and coexistence. During the concert, the fan object, which only exists in the fan's mind in daily life experience, reveals itself as a physical human being. The experience of this physical coexistence adds to the connection between fan and fan object.

At the moment in which the artist comes to the stage, the mediated narrative becomes a tangible materiality. In comparison with religious practices, the concert hall offers a space for community gatherings, in which people can sing and consume song narratives together. The mediated power of community is organized by the preacher, the God, the artist, giving his teachings to the devotees, the fans: "Whenever I feel like I need answers in my life—I always return to what he taught me!" (Nadina, 41)

Another comparable element can be seen in the physical distance between the 'holy' and the 'devotee', the stage can be understood as a form of an altar for the mass. The concert is a place that is constructed due to its textual unreachability for the believer. The fans are located on a lower level or on higher levels (seating) with even more distance. Considering the standing places before the stage, this seems to symbolize the separation between the space of the 'holy' and the space reserved for the 'devotee'. The space delineated between the stage/altar and the standing level/prayer benches separates the physical from the metaphysical. The fan object represents itself as unreachable and, in this way, retains its metaphysical dimension.

In the considered fan culture, I witnessed situations in which the border was suspended and fans were welcomed on stage, but, even on the same level, fans stayed at a certain distance, which had not been discussed before accessing the stage. It was clear that physical contact was prohibited, so fans who transgressed this border did not receive recognition in their community but were criticized or even expelled. The metaphysical element was also strengthened by the fans' wish to get as close to the stage border as possible, which was mostly described as aiming to,

"...feel his energy." (Paul, 46)

"... experience his aura." (Tina, 44)

"...to be showered with his light." (Mark, 51)

Expressions like these emphasize the metaphysical dimension of front-row experiences. The willingness to feel a certain immaterial connection between the artist and the fan seemed to be the ambition for concert participation for many fans for a timeline lasting over decades. During the event, the metaphysical relationship, the mediated narrative, the fans' unfulfilled wishes and fantasies cling together with the fact of physical coexistence, which evokes the possibility of a physical interaction.

The dimension of this physicality also features metaphysical components. For instance, charged with a para-religious significance, so that having the ability to transgress the border between physical and metaphysical by actual interpersonal contact involves a connection between the metaphysical longing and the actual encounter on this level. A simple touch of hands can be connoted as an act of blessing, which the fan/devotee receives from the metaphysical relationship to the fan object.

"When his hand touched mine—I felt like I was struck by lightning." (Mathis, 41)

Another Dimension: Paisley Park

This interrelation of metaphysical and physical levels can also be examined focusing on places of interaction from concert venues to associated places, but especially when focusing on fans' relationship to Paisley Park, Prince's studio complex and home built in 1988. Deriving from the idea of metaphysical connotation, I would furthermore like to focus on Paisley Parks' physical connotations for the fans and their metaphysical relationship comparing the connotations of pre-death and post-death times of the artist.

Considering fandom in connection with faith and religious practice raises the issue of a physical place for community gatherings. Since concert venues are highly temporary, another space is needed to express community, faith practices, and metaphysical focus. Paisley Park, which Prince had built in Chanhassen, a suburban area of Minneapolis, in 1998, had been designed by the architecture company BOTO Design Inc. from California. It contains two, live-music venues, rehearsal and recording studios, archives, and private living spaces. It has always been partly open to the public, and for other musicians to use as a recording studio. It has also served as a space for small concerts, dance parties, and fan gatherings organized by Prince. Within the last few years (2012-2016), Paisley Park was intensively used for dance parties, which had been organized and announced at short notice by the artist himself. In the early 2000s, fans were invited for celebrations of different albums and projects, which were released at the time or stayed unreleased even today. In January 2016, he kicked off his *Piano and A Microphone* tour in this venue, his home. Precisely four months after the concert, he was found dead in the elevator.

Paisley Park has always given Prince's stardom a stable, highly visible anchor in the physical world, allowing fans to visit the idea of Paisley Park physically and metaphysically, as described in the 1985 same-titled song "Paisley Park," (featured on the record *Around the World in A Day*, his follow-up record after his mainstream success of *Purple Rain*). Starting with the phrase "There is a park that is known / 4 the face it attracts," and considering "The smile on their faces / It speaks of profound inner peace," shows that Paisley Park, in which these colorful people, the

fans, share "a lifetime lease," opens up a religious dimension. We see this metaphysical dimension in more of the song's lyrics: "Admission is easy, just say you / Believe and come to this / Place in your heart / Paisley Park is in your heart."¹⁷

"Paisley Park" is believing in the metaphysical narrative of an imaginary world in which everyone is accepted in their diverse individualities. The narrative of "Paisley Park" includes freedom of social rules and normativity: "Come 2 the park / And play with us / There aren't any rules."¹⁸ In "Paisley Park," the idiom of believing in the transcendental place of Paisley Park affects the perception of Paisley Park even today. Fans who were able to visit Paisley Park when Prince was still alive described the experience as life-changing: "There is no place like Paisley Park. You feel so welcomed, and it's just like paradise." (Joan, 50)

The metaphor of Paisley Park comes to life in the tangible materiality of the building itself, containing all song, stardom, and fandom-narratives. The materiality of Paisley Park structures the immaterial narratives and feelings combined in fandom practices. Even if never actually visited, the reality of Paisley Park as a building allows fans a place to go, a place where to turn if they feel lost in the world. This way Paisley Park combines both dimensions: the church where the devotees come together to seek closeness to the 'holy', regaining strength in communal singing and 'blessing' (through performance); and the community center where groups of fans have the ability to practice their fandom together in an open space, which is seen as protected from other influences.

"Being at Paisley Park was kind of being in a hide-out to me. I never wanted to return to normal life." (Claudia, 38)

Considering the notion of escapism, Paisley Park served as an immaterial and material anchor for fans. Being in Paisley Park, being able to walk through the same entrance and to visit the same rooms, gave fans the ability to become part of an otherwise textual universe. Being a guest at Paisley Park also meant to conform to the rules of the house, which, for example, excluded any kind of photography or recording. Just as in a religious space taking photographs are normally prohibited. Fans knew the rules, so they even corrected each other if there were a violation

of any rule. Taking Hills' statements into account, one could understand Paisley Park as follows: with Paisley Park "...the significance of [in this case, Prince]—something which would otherwise tend to be free-floating, and incidental to processes of signification—can be contained or 'anchored' in a visible, physical, and public fashion."¹⁹

That Paisley Park shares physical and metaphysical dimensions has also been discussed by Unsie Zuege, a multimedia journalist working for the Eden Prairie News, in a column published on April 7, 2016, just before Prince's sudden death. She explains how Paisley Park made it to the "Final Four" in the "Tournament of Fictional Places"—even though it was the only actual place on the list (featuring, for example, Hogwarts, as well). In the end, Paisley Park won. In considering Paisley Park as a fictional place, the journalists of the Eden Prairie News draw their attention to the fact that Prince had written a self-entitled song, "Paisley Park" in 1985, which constituted Paisley Park as an imaginary place before its physical existence.

Since the death of Prince, Paisley Park in its imaginary components gained my attention. I decided to interview the journalist Unsie Zuege via mail. She explained her understanding of Paisley Park as follows:

My view is that Paisley Park is a state of mind, outlined so well in its song lyrics. A place where everyone belongs, and there is love and peace. And if that place could exist, we'd all choose to live there. And, yet, it does exist, and is now available to the public and to all his fans around the world. They can come to the physical Paisley Park, made of mortar and stone, so to speak, and visit it, and imagine how Prince saw his world. It is a magical, artful, and spiritual space that Prince created to enhance his creative energy and focus on his work. No distractions. Just surrounded by everything he loved; the space was designed so that where ever Prince was in Paisley Park, when the muse hit him, he could plug in his guitar or electric piano in any room—any room in the building—and record whatever crossed his mind, anytime of night or day.

Zuege's text shows that Paisley Park is understood as both the physical place of the building, and the metaphysical dimension mediated in the song lyrics and in a lot of fan narratives and discourses. The importance of Paisley Park was highly stable, and over the years it was a place to turn to for fans: "Sometimes, I just wish I could hop a plane, go to Paisley Park—and never return." (Barbara, 41)

That Prince died at Paisley Park serves as a form of consolation for many fans, which is also a reference to a song's narrative. In "Let's Go Crazy," one of Prince most frequently performed songs, the lyrics are as follows: "Never let the elevator bring U down / Oh no / Punch a higher floor."²¹ In fan culture, there seems to be a connection between the song's narrative and the physical events concerning the death of their idol. The "punching of a higher floor" involves the notion that Paisley Park is seen as closer to a holy dimension than any other place within the culture. This narrative is continued by the family's decision to place Prince's ashes in an urn in Paisley Park. The urn is custom-designed as a miniature model of the actual building, including details from both exterior and interior (e.g., a purple piano). The decision to put his urn on display²² became a highly controversial issue within the fan culture:

"I feel glad that he's home." (Anna, 41)

"Putting an urn on display is so tasteless, he was such a private person." (Tom, 48)

"He is where he belongs—and all of us have the chance to pay a visit." (Maria, 38)

Concerning the connection with religious practices, many churches and spiritual places of community contain the remains of their spiritual or religious leaders, which are also places of remembrance. Knowing that Elvis has been buried close to Graceland allows fans to remain in "physical" contact with the deceased. Having Prince inurned in a miniature form of his own home strengthens the significance of Paisley Park for the community. Paisley Park now functions as the epitome of a re-envisioned past coming to life. Death, especially under these circumstances, allows the re-telling of the para-religious narrative and reinforces the meaning of

Paisley Park for the community.

Fans are now able to book tours through Paisley Park, which makes fan pilgrimage easier to arrange than at any time before. I would like to draw a parallel to Elvis and Graceland, in saying that Paisley Park “has had a significant and largely unacknowledged impact on the shape of his stardom”²³ and especially for his fan community, which echoes the importance of a real-time space.

Conclusion

In engaging with the idea of a para-religious structure in the fandom around Prince, one has to revisit the fact of many fans being long-term fans for the course of over thirty years. Since the fandom memberships stayed very stable over the years, fans had the ability to adapt to the artist’s demands, ethics, and religious significations. They grew and they changed with him and developed a shared canon. Now after his death, they express their responsibility for his legacy and their respect for his property. They criticize the company running Paisley Park as seeming to care less about his property after some fans used the change to climb a piano during a tour. The dimension of criticism resembled desecration of religious artifacts.

Even though Prince is no longer physically reachable, all interviewed fans addressed the topic of life guidance. Especially after his death, many of the participants felt like he “transcended into another dimension,” still giving advice and counsel in times of emotional trouble. Focusing on the para-religious narrative, Prince fans seem to engage closely with the idea of the metaphysical. The metaphysical importance of particular places of coexistence with their fan objects (like concert venues, clubs and also Paisley Park itself) will continue for years to come. Also, these places will always carry a certain significance in the individual fan narrative.

The relationship to associated places and objects already is and will be highlighted as more time passes. For the fan culture, their metaphysical relationship to Prince—who guided them through a diversity of life decisions,

plans, and happenings—will stay intact. For others this dimension will overlap with the physical dimension over the course of time, preserving an ideal figure constructed for their individual needs of worship. For some fans after his death, the textual world of his songs appears even more linked to the mediated fan narratives, some combining it with the trope of self-fulfilling destiny in which song lyrics gain a tangible reality in the happenings around the 21st of April 2016:

“He died in April, like in the words of ‘Sometimes it Snows in April,’ in which he mourns his imaginary friend, Tracy, which used to be the family name of his character in the movie *Under the Cherry Moon*. In the night of his death, there was a full red (cherry) moon over his hometown and a rainbow the next day, just like it can be found on the cover of *Around the World in a Day*. I am sure that destiny fulfilled itself with him twittering a few days before his death, answering the health concerns of his fans with—*Wait a few days before U waste any prayers.*”
(Maria, 46)

Touching upon the connection of happenings and song narratives, I would like to end this article with a quote by another participant, summing up religiously connoted meanings and song narratives, reminiscent of the words in the song, “Let’s Go Crazy”: “I would like to believe he did not die in this elevator—he just punched a higher floor.”
(Paul, 46)



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Notes

¹Following Jenkins (1992, xiii), being an aca-fan describes hating and loving the same fandom object, building a relationship which deepens the connection to the fandom object. In the matter of Prince fans, this assumption follows the stance that Prince did not always treat his fans in a positive fashion and, as such, negating fandom practices and pleasures of fan-dom.

²Jennifer Otter Bickerdike, *The Secular Religion of Fandom: Pop Culture Pilgrim*, Sage Swifts (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 14.

³Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 515.

⁴Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*, Sussex Studies in Culture and Communication (New York: Routledge, 2002), 118.

⁵Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us*, 186.

⁷Bickerdicke, *The Secular Religion of Fandom*, 23.

⁸Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, Focus On Contemporary Issues (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 191.

⁹Prince and the Revolution, *Purple Rain*, Album (USA: Warner Brothers, 1984.)

¹⁰Prince, "The Love We Make," on *Emancipation*, Album (USA: NPG & EMI, 1996).

¹¹Prince, "Anna Stesia," *Lovesexy Tour—Live in Dortmund* (Westfalenhallen (Halle 1), Germany, September 8 and 9, 1988).

¹²Prince and the Revolution, "Darling Nikki" on *Purple Rain*, Album (USA: Warner Brothers, 1984).

¹³Touré, *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (New York: Atria Books, 2013), 46.

¹⁴Margaret Rhodes, "The Fascinating Origin Story of Prince's Iconic Symbol," *Wired*, April 22, 2016. accessed November 2, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2pZWNU6>.

¹⁵"Love4oneanother" was a charity organization founded by Prince in the mid-1990s.

¹⁶Bettina Fritzsche, "Pop Fans," *Studie einer Mädchenkultur* (Opladen: VS Verlag, 2003), 143.

¹⁷Prince and the Revolution, "Paisley Park," on *Around the World in A Day*, Album (USA: Paisley Park, 1985).

¹⁸Prince and the Revolution, "Paisley Park."

¹⁹Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 154.

²⁰Unsie Zuege, "Paisley Park, Where Fiction Becomes Reality," *Eden Prairie News*, April 7, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2MhCA9z>, and "2016 Tournament of Fictional Places," Half Price Books, accessed December 4, 2017, <https://bit.ly/1ZuKtFQ>.

²¹Prince and the Revolution, "Let's Go Crazy," on *Purple Rain*, Album (USA: Warner Brothers, 1984.)

²²Editor: Having visited Paisley Park in October 2017, I can confirm Prince's urn is not a spectacle that fans can approach or touch. The urn is on a landing, one floor above the atrium. The Paisley-Park-shaped urn can only be seen from the atrium's floor.

²³Gilbert B. Rodman, *Elvis After Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend* (London: Routledge, 1996), 99.

²⁴*Under the Cherry Moon*, directed by Prince (USA: Warner Bros., 1986, DVD 2005).

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Prince: A Spiritual Bioarchetypography¹ of Nondualism and Dialectical Psycho-Spiritual Healing Part I²

Pamela Ayo Yetunde

Introduction: "Could I be the salvation if I'm the sinner?" —Prince³

Prince Rogers Nelson (June 7, 1958–April 21, 2016) was an extraordinary musician and artist. Music journalist Alan Light says, "He shook the culture, musically and racially, sexually and spiritually, transforming possibilities and ignoring rules."⁴ "[Prince] released more than forty albums and almost a hundred singles, charting on the Billboard Hot 100 every year between 1978 and 1993. Nineteen of his songs made the top ten. Five went to number one...."⁵

Prince may be one of the best, if not the best-selling international funk-rock gospel artists of all times, even though he "didn't traffic much in traditional gospel."⁶ I contend his movie, *Graffiti Bridge*, is a gospel movie. Prince, in an interview with author Per Nilsen, claimed, "I'm not an R&B artist. I'm not a rock 'n' roller. I'm an artist and I do a wide range of music. If I deliver you rock 'n' roll, don't come back to me and say I can't do it because I'm Black."⁷

What if we were to say, “Prince, you also delivered gospel music. Can we listen to your music in this way too and tell the world what you were really about?”

Prince did not attend divinity school or seminary, nor was he ordained; yet Prince was a Christian theologian. No one I know, however, has ever called him a gospel artist or a theologian. Yet, upon close examination of his music through Seventh-day Adventists’ and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ theological lenses, readers may support the argument that Prince was indeed a theologian who used his music, movies, and videos to witness and proclaim his sexuality-reformist, Seventh-day Adventist, and then conventionally sexist Jehovah’s Witness theologies. The articles and books written about Prince are numerous and growing, making him eminently worthy of theological academic study, considering the number of people familiar with his music who have completely or partially missed his gospel of sexual pleasure in the face of divine destruction.

Prince’s music, largely played on R&B, funk, and pop radio stations (before downloading music became available), including much of his overtly sexual music, revealed his Christian views on the nature of the world, its imminent divine demise, and what to do about it. Journalist and cultural critic Touré claimed Prince had become a generational icon because he sought to answer the ultimate questions: “Can we have both reverence for God and fulfill the rawest of carnal desires? Can the spiritual imperative and the lustful urge co-exist in one soul?”⁸ Author Ben Greenman puts it another way, saying, Prince had a “deep and abiding commitment to exposing internal contradictions in the human experience.”⁹

Many of these contradictions are within Christianity itself. I agree with Touré that these were some of Prince’s questions, and Prince was working out “key schisms” of “Black or white ... straight or gay ... believes in God or himself.”¹⁰ I would add, according to Prince, at least early on, an overarching theological solution to our imminent divine demise—sexual pleasure—and Prince wanted us to get ready for the end days. Sexual pleasure had divine purpose, that is, until the rise of AIDS, the death of his child, and a retreat to religious fundamentalism, which changed Prince’s beliefs, perspectives, and mission.

In Part I of this article I explore Prince’s biography through his music and interviews, the Seventh-day Adventist’s theology related to ushering in God’s government, and the Jehovah’s Witness theology as it relates to the end of prophecy. I also explore the dialectics in Prince’s music, and in Part II, I offer a proposal for wisely using Prince’s music for dialectical psycho-spiritual healing. In my methodology for identifying Prince’s nondualistic theology and subsequent return to dualism, as well as my conclusion that some of Prince’s music might be useful in psycho-spiritual healing, I draw on principles in nonduality in Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Audre Lorde’s combination of I Ching and African-goddess spirituality, W. R. D. Fairbairn’s Object Relations Theory, and Marsha Linehan’s Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT).

Methodology—Nondual Consciousness

Authors Stan Hawkins and Sarah Niblock in *Prince: The Making of a Pop Music Phenomenon*, state in their methodology their reason for not writing an all-encompassing book:

We are eager to underline that this book does not claim to be an all-encompassing overview of Prince’s artistic output to date. Such a venture, we feel, would be near impossible. While we are both avid fans, the study does not compile lengthy lists of chronological facts, journalistic anecdotes, and performance stats. Others have carried out such tasks and are still doing this. ... Invariably, we return time and again to what makes our subject so profound. Why does Prince open up a special space for reconfiguring norms and attitudes?¹¹

I agree that an all-encompassing book is near impossible. An all-encompassing article is impossible. Hawkins and Niblock return to the profundity of Prince’s ability to reshape norms and attitudes. My question is, can we use Prince’s music, dialectically, for psycho-spiritual healing?

I bring to this exploration a consciousness trained in nonduality. My first training in understanding nonduality comes from the Tao Te Ching. In 1999 a colleague,

who thought I might appreciate it, gave me the Tao Te Ching by Lao-tzu (ca. 551-479 BCE). Poem 63 reads,

Act without doing;
Work without effort.
Think of the small as large
And the few as many.
Confront the difficult
While it is still easy;
accomplish the great task
By a series of small acts.

The Master never reaches for the great;
Thus she achieves greatness.
When she runs into a difficulty,
She stops and gives herself to it.
She doesn't cling to her own comfort;
Thus problems are no problem for her.¹²

Upon reading the *Tao Te Ching* in its entirety, I felt a peace of mind I had never known. The *Tao Te Ching* became one of my favorite books and one I have purchased many times to give to friends. I consult the book regularly. In addition to the *Tao Te Ching*, my mind training in nonduality was followed two years later, exactly on October 7, 2001, by teachings on "interbeing" from Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk and activist, Thich Nhất Hạnh. A friend gave me a copy of his book *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living*. In his book, Nhất Hạnh provides, in his words, "an exercise to help us in the practice of mindfulness that many friends have found inspiring and effective":

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.
In/Out.

Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.

Breathing out, I feel fresh.
Flower/Fresh.

Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.
Breathing out, I feel solid.
Mountain/Solid.

Breathing in, I see myself as still water.
Breathing out, I reflect things as they are.
Water/Reflecting.

Breathing in, I see myself as space.
Breathing out, I feel free.
*Space/Free.*¹³

The combination of mindfulness of the breath combined with the prompts of imagining myself as a flower, mountain, still water, and space allowed me to experience interconnection or "interbeing" with nature. As I began practicing mindfulness through reading Nhất Hạnh's book, I began volunteering for Zen Hospice Project where I would put mindfulness to the test; I was confronting my own existential crises while also being present for the existential dilemmas of others on their death beds. I have meditated nearly every day since October 7, 2001, and thus experience the Fairbairnian "pristine ego," or "no self" in Buddhist terms, regularly.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, my consciousness began to shift from Western, Christian-dualism to Eastern, Dharmic-nondualism. I brought both perspectives to my study of W.R.D. Fairbairnian Object Relations, a post-Freudian relational psychological theory. Fairbairn's theories are complex, yet for purposes of understanding his nondualistic perspective on ego formation, his theory on the endopsychic structure illuminates why Prince was often divided in resolving Seventh-day Adventists' foundational theology of The Great Controversy¹⁴ and the sexual-salvation situation of life itself. As one of his former girlfriends claims, "He seemed tormented. He was tormented. That's for sure. He was struggling with

this duality of good and evil. Sometimes, you'd get happy, fun Prince but more often you'd get complicated and heavy...."¹⁵ How can we understand this kind of psycho-spiritual duality?

In his chapter, "Endopsychic Structure Considered in Terms of Object-Relationships," Fairbairn holds to his view that the libido impulse (the energy of love) seeks an object, not pleasure as Freud posited.¹⁶ The consequence of the libido being object-oriented means that the origin of psychopathology is in the ego's object relationships during its developmental phase. Influenced by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, Fairbairn believes introjected objects and their continuation internally is proof that the libido seeks objects. Unlike Klein, Fairbairn prefers using the language of "satisfying" and "unsatisfying" objects over "good" and "bad" objects, because "good" and "bad" are rendered meaningless and are misleading. He wanted to avoid confusion between "good" and "bad" as "desirable" and "undesirable"—for a bad object can be desirable. The unsatisfying object has the capacity to be frustrating and seductive. Having been internalized, with both these qualities, it leads to ambivalence. The inability to tolerate these opposing poles results in the bad/unsatisfying object being split into the exciting (needed) object and the rejecting (frustrating) object.

A libidinal attachment remains to both objects by way of pseudopodia. The baby survives this ambivalent situation by "using a maximum of his aggression to subdue a maximum of his libidinal need." (The use of aggression to subdue libidinal need is a subject I return to in Part II.)¹⁷ In Fairbairn's endopsychic understanding, there is an unconscious moral defense established by the superego as an internal object that confronts the central ego's detached observer position. At this level of moral defense, the internal saboteur/internal persecutor, in the form of exciting or rejecting objects, manifest to attack the libidinal ego, cutting off the energy of love as expressed in object seeking. Did the study of Jehovah's Witness theology introduced shortly after Prince and his first wife, Mayte Garcia, lost their first child, lost their second pregnancy, leading to significant marital discord, work in Prince's mind as an internal saboteur/internal persecutor cutting off the libidinal energy of love?

There is much in Prince's music and movies to psychoanalyze, but the purpose of this paper is not psychoanalysis, per se, but understanding Prince's journey toward nonduality as the resolution to the Seventh-day Adventist's theological theme of The Great Controversy where, within The Great Controversy itself, we see the conflict between good and bad, as well as the antilibidinal internal saboteur's attack on all that is platonically and sexually libidinal. Put another way, Stan Hawkins and Steve Niblock claim Prince believed inner integrity could be achieved through the dissolution of "monogamy and gender fixity and adherence to religious doctrines and being defined by ethnicity."¹⁸ Furthermore, Prince's *Lovesexy* album was his most evangelical album during the height of his career.¹⁹ But he reversed his nondualistic, interreligious sexually liberating theology when he became a Jehovah's Witness—and it dampened his prophetic charisma.

In addition to the nonduality in the *Tao Te Ching*, Nhất Hạnh's *Touching Peace* meditation, and Fairbairn's endopsychic situation, my study of Black lesbian poet and activist Audre Lorde's spirituality taught me about the incorporation of *I Ching* nondualistic philosophy into nondualistic African goddess spirituality (with residual traces of her Catholicism).

Lorde, a woman of African-Grenadian descent, was born in the United States in 1934 and raised in New York City. She described herself as a black-feminist-lesbian, poet-warrior-mother. In nondualistic fashion, she also said about herself, "I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior."²⁰ In this statement, we see Lorde's understanding of nondualism and paradox. For Lorde, nondualistic thinking and identifying paradoxes was an interest and commitment, operating as a thread of thinking about herself and her worldview. Black author, activist, and biographer, Alexis De Veaux notes,

Ever since her days as a member of "The Branded," [Lorde's high school clique of "outcast" girls], Lorde had turned to occult practices such as astrology and the *I Ching*—an ancient Chinese divination system also known as *The Oracle of Change*—as ways of interpreting intuitions, dreams, circumstances, time, and destiny.

...

She'd consulted [when she was forty-four-years-old] the *I Ching* by proposing a question and had received this passage as her "answer," the twenty-ninth hexagram, K'AN, both trigrams of which denote "water, dangerous." Exactly what question she asked the *I Ching* is unclear, but her interpretation of the meaning of the twenty-ninth hexagram as "the abysmal" captures both the sense of a "perilous chasm" ahead and the ability of water to flow ever onward, maintaining its true nature even while running through a dangerous abyss.²¹

Throughout Lorde's life, she was busy with the project of integrating the spiritual teachings that held meaning for her. I identify these movements as self-preservation, rejection, migration, longing, exploration, positive encounter, relocation, integration, re-evaluation, and transformation,²² as well as letting go and deity exchange. Prince's spiritual journey included rejection, longing, exploration, positive encounter, relocation, integration, re-evaluation, transformation, and dissolution. If Prince's music is an indication of where he was religiously and spiritually, his journey never included a deity exchange. Jesus remained central.

An extremely brief synthesis of *Tao Te Ching*, Nhất Hạnh's Zen Buddhism, Fairbairn's endopsychic situation, and the study of Lorde's spiritual journey, all nondualistic philosophies from different disciplines and traditions, inform my interpretation of Prince's attempt to resolve The Great Controversy's theology of the Seventh-day Adventists through a nondualistic impulse to promote sexuality as good and sometimes even as good as God—until it was not. I begin this quest with a brief exploration of Prince's bioarchetypography.

Prince: A Brief Spiritual Bioarchetypography of Prince

Prince attended a Baptist church, a Methodist church camp, and a Seventh-day Adventist church. His parents were religiously strict, devout Seventh-day Adventists (although Mayte Garcia claimed his mother was Baptist).²³ Gayle Chapman, a member of Prince's band, notes,

Our first big break was as the support act on the Rick James tour. Rick would get his crew together backstage with booze and joints and they would chant, 'Shit, Goddamn! Get off your ass and jam!' I said, 'We should have our own way of preparing.' I suggested a prayer and Prince was OK with it. We'd hold hands and I'd say 'Lord, thanks for keeping us focused. Let us go out and really stomp tonight in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.' Pretty soon, Prince started leading the prayer. He was going on stage and singing about oral sex but he was acknowledging Jesus, too.²⁴

On Prince's self-titled 1979 album, he appears nude on the back cover, riding a winged, white horse (the wings of the horse block the view of his hips). Prince atop of a white, winged horse may be his first archetypal expression. The author of Revelation writes, "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." (Revelation 19:11 NKJV) Jungian psychoanalyst Joseph L. Henderson, argues that the winged horse is a composite of the gods Hermes (Egyptian; Greek) and Mercury (Roman). In Egypt, Hermes was known as the ibis-headed god Thoth, conceived as the bird form of the transcendent principle.²⁵ The transcendent principle is the phallus. "Hermes is Trickster in a different role as a messenger, a god of the cross-roads, and finally the leader of souls to and from the underworld."²⁶

Musician Lisa Coleman (of the musical duo Wendy and Lisa), a member of Prince and The New Power Generation claims,

Prince would *never* mess around with the devil. That's for sure. He can talk God all night and day, but don't give that ol' devil a single *second* of your attention! So, the safest, and the danger-est, would have to be God. The God angle! Everyone knows something about it, so the demographic is perfect! ... So there you have a culture of disaster obsession.²⁷

Furthermore, Coleman lists popular culture's explorations of imminent disaster,

including “Nostradamus, Orson Welles, disaster movie director Irwin Allen, and the film *The China Syndrome*.”²⁸

In addition to Prince on the winged, white-horse archetype, Prince used the archetype of water in *Purple Rain*—the song, the album, and the movie.²⁹ Regarding “The Ballad of Dorothy Parker,”³⁰ Touré writes that Prince uses the imagery of bathing as a “panacea or even a means to redemption or perhaps a sort of rebirth—of him or of the relationship—as part of change after immersion in water, also known as *baptism*.”³¹

In addition to the white-winged horse and water archetype is the ankh symbol, which after being redesigned, became Prince’s “name” during the contractual conflict with Warner Brothers.³² The ankh is the Egyptian symbol for life, universe, and humanity.³³ Prince used it in a more stylized form in the movie *Purple Rain* several years before he had it restyled, some say masculinized, to represent the harmony of female and male archetypal energies and principles.³⁴ The ankh symbol represents the Egyptian goddess Isis,³⁵ but it is not known whether Prince knew of this association. Prince was tapping into archetypes early in his career—until he was not.

According to Garcia, before every New Power Generation performance and other Prince performances,

We gathered in his dressing room to pray. No matter what else was happening, we came together and joined hands. He’d ask for God’s hand on us, that He would give us strength and send angels to protect us from injury, that the Holy Spirit would lift up the music, that the audience would be blessed and happy and safe from harm.³⁵

Furthermore, Garcia states Prince believed he had met her in previous lifetimes; the soul is born into the “same cycle” repeatedly.³⁷ Was Prince influenced by Hinduism? In a 1996 interview with Bryant Gumbel, Prince reported he believed in reincarnation.³⁸ When Gumbel asked Prince about the child he and Garcia lost, Prince said,

My obliqueness when people ask questions about that particular situation is that we both believe that thoughts and words can breed reality. How we look at the situation is very important. What we say about the situation is very important. All I can say is that we’re both enlightened individuals that know that if you leave things in God’s hands, you’ll find out everything, the answer to the plan. So anything that happens, we accept.³⁹

The word “enlightenment” is common in Dharmic traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism.

Prince wrote for his wedding ceremony to Garcia an instrumental piece called “Kamasutra.” The Hindu book, *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, is about the rules of sexual and spiritual engagement. Yet, without lyrics to his piece, we do not know what his instrumental piece “Kamasutra” actually meant to Prince. Garcia does not report using the book as a guide for their sexual life.

Garcia notes that Prince “was always a spiritual seeker ... fascinated enough in all possibilities to integrate the signs of the zodiac and third eye and reincarnation into the Christian beliefs his Baptist mother and Seventh-day Adventist father had exposed him to.”⁴⁰ After their child died and they began to rebuild their lives, Garcia describes Prince as engaged in soul-searching, while also “consuming one thick tome after another on Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam. He wanted me to read with him and discuss all the different types of scripture.”⁴¹

In 2008, Anthony Malzone, Prince’s art director from 2008–2013, interviewed with Prince for a possible web design project. Malzone claims,

We didn’t talk about the actual project for three hours. President Obama was about to be sworn in and that was on Prince’s mind. We did politics, race, and religion. He was like some kind of professor. He made my colleague and I read the same passage from three different versions of the Bible. The last one read something like, “I am

Jehovah. That is my name.” It was pretty clear he was trying to test my personality and figure me out.⁴²

Despite Prince’s religiosity and spirituality, those who were aware of only some of his music thought he was only promoting immorality or evil. The drummer of the musical group Roots, Questlove, writes about this misperception:

When I first got 1999, it was 1982, and I was eleven, newly in charge of my own record-buying habits. ... My parents were born-again Christians at that point, and Prince was a bridge too far. For starters, when you turned the album cover upside down, the “999” became “666,” the mark of the beast. They didn’t need more than starters.⁴³

Two years later, Tipper Gore, the then-wife to Representative Al Gore (D-Tenn.) who eventually became the U.S. Vice President, helped organize the Parents’ Music Resource Center (PMCR) to place warning labels on recordings they found morally objectionable for children.⁴⁴ Prince’s “Darlin’ Nikki,” a song about a woman masturbating in public, was the impetus for Mrs. Gore’s activism. The song ended “with a backmasked choir that when played forward put a messianic spin on the rest of the record: “Hello! How are you? I’m fine, ‘cause I know / That the Lord is coming soon, coming, coming soon!”⁴⁵

Prince became persona non grata and a beloved spiritually liberating megastar simultaneously! But perhaps being labeled as a sexual persona non grata inspired him to be more explicit about his religious and spiritual beliefs at concerts. Jason Draper writes,

Maybe he had been stung by Tipper Gore’s attacks; maybe he just felt that, with a much bigger fan base, he should become a more positive arbiter of social mores. Either way, the two-hour shows now incorporated a “conversation with God.” But there was still a clear conflict between a Prince who “tried to be good” and an audience that “love it when I’m bad.”⁴⁶

A few years later, as AIDS rates were still soaring, Prince argued for monogamy.⁴⁷

In 1998, after musician and Jehovah’s Witness Larry Graham and his family moved to Minnesota at Prince’s request to teach him about the Bible, Prince tour workers began distributing Jehovah’s Witness’ literature before the shows, and Prince changed lyrics on previously released songs to conform with his new belief system.⁴⁸ Musician Wendy Melvoin asserts that when Prince was in his fifties, he had changed from someone who was excited to someone who had lost that excitement: he “shape-shifted into this completely different person who reads scripture and tells you f***ing parables.”⁴⁹ The excitement about being a sexual liberator, even if he was still writing about sex, also waned. Alex Hahn also notes,

From the perspective of NPG keyboardist Tommy Barbarella, the continuing decline in Prince’s work reflected an internal struggle between his desire to be a serious artist and his tendencies toward bacchanalian excess. “At the time I left the band, he was becoming a vegetarian, and we started to have deeper conversations about spiritual issues. ... But then he’d go upstairs and write a song called “Good Pussy.”⁵⁰

But that was not the only thing a less-excited Prince was talking about. In 2004 Prince stated,

When you’re a young man, you think you’re the center of the universe. Later you see you’re just part of it. The world is only going to get harder. Me and my crew, we love having conversations about music, but when we get deep, we talk about the future, about what we’re leaving for the kids.⁵¹

I believe Prince left for “the kids” potential-filled material beneficial for psycho-spiritual healing. Little evidence exists, however, to suggest Prince knew how his music could be used dialectically. Rather, Prince was on a religious mission—to prepare us for the imminent coming of Jesus.

Seventh-day Adventism: Ushering in God’s Government on Earth

Prince, influenced by Seventh-day Adventism, seemed to believe in a government headed by Jesus, where the devout would be awakened from the sleep of death, and evil people would be destroyed. This belief is known as premillennialism. In many songs, Prince wrote about government, those that were destructive and those that were more ideal. For example, in “Controversy,” a song where Touré argues Prince wanted to be viewed more than a mere music maker, “but as a personal liberator,”⁵³ Prince sings,

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever

This chant repeats throughout the song:

People call me rude, I wish we all were nude
I wish there was no black and white, I wish there were no rules.⁵⁴

For the song “Sexuality,” Prince sings,

Stand up everybody, this is your life
Let me take you to another world, let me take you tonight
You don’t need no money, you don’t need no clothes
The Second Coming, anything goes
Sexuality is all you’ll ever need
Sexuality, let your body be free ...
New age revelation, I think we got a case⁵⁵

Prince pleads in “Ronnie, Talk to Russia”:

Ronnie talk to Russia before it’s too late
Before they blow up the world
You go to the zoo, but you can’t feed guerrillas [not gorillas]
Can’t feed guerrillas
Left-wing guerrillas
You can go to the zoo, but you can’t feed guerrillas
Who want to blow up the world⁵⁶

And then Prince sings in “Annie Christian”:

Annie Christian wanted to be number 1
But her kingdom never comes, thy will be done
She couldn’t stand the glory, she would be second to none
The way Annie tells the story, she’s his only son
Annie Christian wanted to be a big star
So she moved to Atlanta and she bought a blue car
She killed black children, and what’s fair is fair
If you try and say you’re crazy, everybody say electric chair
Electric chair
Annie Christian, Annie Christ
Until you’re crucified, I’ll live my life in taxicabs⁵⁷

In these songs, we see the theology of some entity attempting to be above God, yet that attempt will be in vain because, according to Seventh-day Adventist theology, only God’s kingdom on earth will become manifest.

Alan Light cites the *Controversy* album as erratic, yet also as the album where Prince came into focus, “marking the beginning of a fascination with the End of Days that would permeate his next few albums.”⁵⁸ Countless people did not allow their children to listen to Prince, and many adults refused to listen because of his explicit sexuality. To understand sexuality as pleasure in the face of divine demise, one needed to understand the theology that inspired it, as well as understand everyone has their own trajectory of sexual development.

Prince, like many children, was exposed to religion before he received his sexual education. In an interview with Chris Rock, Prince reported that his mother, in teaching him about sex while he was in his pre-teen years, gave him *Playboy* magazines while leaving other erotic literature lying around the house. He told *Rock & Soul* magazine he used to sneak into his mother's bedroom and read her pornography.⁵⁹ Prince also claimed he was subjected to incest by his older half-sister⁶⁰ with this experience leading to his 1980 song "Sister":

I was only 16 but I guess that's no excuse
My sister was 32, lovely, and loose
She don't wear no underwear ...
My sister never made love to anyone else but me
She's the reason for my, uh, sexuality
She showed me where it's supposed to go ...
Incest is everything it's said to be
Oh, sister⁶¹

Prince stated his sexual development was precocious and complicated by both his mother and half-sister. Was it true? Prince had been accused of lying about whom he was, racially and sexually, as well as withholding the truth when confronted, or of not caring about what others said about him. In any case, not knowing the entire truth about Prince, coupled with his extraordinary talents, his use of archetypes while continuing his religiously liberatory mission, made him a living mythical figure. Yet, why did he begin to introduce his religious and spiritual beliefs into his recordings after the successes of *Prince* in 1979 and *Dirty Mind* in 1980? Could it have been a growing awareness that free sex was resulting in death? By 1981, gay men were already dying of an unnamed disease.⁶²

Touré posits that the song "1999" (1982) was full of gospel tropes; the first time Prince "really takes us to church, giving us both his end-time philosophy and the structures of Pentecostalist or Holiness worship."⁶³ I, however, disagree on two points. First, the song "Controversy" (1981) was veritably the first time Prince took us to church, seminary, and divinity school; we just did not know we were in church because the funk was heavy. He was coming from the Seventh-day-Ad-

ventist-inspired, divine-demonic struggle theme of *The Great Controversy*, but it was lost on most of us. Second, Touré argues that Prince used several gospel tropes.⁶⁴ While it is true Prince used numerous Christian tropes, he also used his gospel messages literally—to be taken literally—so the complete meaning of his messages would not be lost. On this point, I agree with Touré: "So much of Prince's catalog is ready to be played in church on Sunday..."⁶⁵ Is the church ready to play it?

When the *Controversy* album was released in 1981, people were dying of sex, and a robust uptick in Cold War rhetoric entered the cultural ethos. This may have been the impetus for Prince evaluating his own spirituality and religious beliefs; for it was one thing for God to destroy the world, but unacceptable for a flawed and warmongering humanity to obliterate it.

Touré saw Prince's invitation to party as more of a "spiritual protest,"⁶⁶ but the album *1999* also includes "Free" and "Lady Cab Driver." In "Free," an uplifting song about cultivating emotional resilience and spirituality in the face of oncoming depression, Prince sings,

Don't sleep until the sunrise, listen to the falling rain
Don't worry about tomorrow, don't worry about your pain...
Be glad that you are free
Free to change your mind
Free to go most anywhere, anytime ...
So don't sleep until you're guilty, because sinners all are we
There's others doing far worse than us, so be glad that you are free⁶⁷

Greenman claims that while Prince was publicly advocating hedonism, by the end of the "1999" tour in 1983, "he was increasingly drawing inward toward a kind of spiritual stoicism."⁶⁸ With "Free" we see a spiritually maturing Prince. Dancing and having sex are now not the only way to deal with existential crises; providing comfort and counseling were additional options. In truth, dancing and sex were never the only ways to deal with the end times for Prince—prayer was critical and central. "Free" is a song about empathy and compassion and, ultimately, about

the true nature of being a human. We have agency to make decisions about our responses and reactions to life; empathy and compassion are also appropriate responses.

In “Lady Cab Driver,” Prince writes, in my interpretation, about a lady, an angel, who has the power to transport him from his life of pain and confusion, not in a real cab, but in a celestial vehicle he calls a “cab,” as in the “cab” Prince retreats to in the song “Annie Christian,” (where he vows to remain until “Annie Christian, Annie Christ is crucified”). He tells the angel about his fears, then surrenders to her commandeering:

Trouble winds-a-blowin', I'm growin' cold
Get me otta here—I feel like I'm gonna die
Lady cab driver, roll up our window fast
Lately trouble winds are blowin' hard, and
I don't know if I can last ...
Drive it, baby, drive it, drive
This demon out of me⁶⁹

Prince pays and repays the angel with sex. More important, his sexual aggression (sexual aggression to subdue libidinal need, a subject I explore in depth in Part II) is met with her pleasure—Prince’s way of driving the demons out of existence while also paying and repaying his female savior deity. When one reads the lyrics of the song found on the CD jacket cover, one will not find the “visceral lyrics” that are on the recording, where the lady cab driver and Prince are heard having sex—the lady cab driver having orgasms with each thrust and penetration. It is important to read each line to see how Prince is working through the sexual/spiritual dualisms. My line-by-line categorizations are in brackets:

This [thrust and penetration] is for the cab you have to drive for no money
at all [compassion]
This is for why I wasn't born like my brother, handsome and tall [self-pity]
This is for politicians who are bored and believe in war [hate]
This—Yeah, that's for me, that's who that one's for [self-gratification]
This is for discrimination and egotists who think supreme [hate]

And this is for whoever taught you how to kiss in designer jeans [lust]
That one's for—That one's for—for you have to live [love]
This one's for the rich, not all of 'em, just the greedy—[hate]
The ones that don't know how to give [hate]
This one's for Yosemite Sam and the tourists at Disneyland [silly and fun]
And this one—ooh! Yeah—That's the one
That's for—that's for the—the creator of man [love and devotion to God]
This is for the sun, the moon, the stars, the tourists at Disneyland
[reverence, devotion, and fun]
This is for the ocean, the sea, the shore [reverence]
This is for—and that's for you, and that's who that one's for [love]
This is for the women, so beautifully complex [love]
This one's for love without sex [love]
This is for the wind that blows no matter how fast or slow [resolution to the
trouble winds a blowin']
Not knowing where I'm going [equanimity with no direction]
This galaxy's better than not having a place to go [acceptance and
appreciation]
And now I know (I know) [the end of confusion]⁷⁰

The angel who rescues Prince from the troubled winds can handle all of it, all of Prince, sex with nondualistic intentions, collectively, bringing healing to Prince’s troubled mind. He repays her with love, combating the forces of evil with the same kind of pelvic thrust yet with different intentions—and the angel enjoys it all the same. This is not Seventh-day Adventist theology, although it is Prince’s budding nondualistic theology.

Prince grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To understand the teachings to which he may have been exposed as a child in the 1960s, I turned to *Doctrinal Discussions: A Compilation of Articles Originally Appearing in The Ministry, June 1960, 1961, in Answer to Walker R. Martin's Book "The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism."*⁷¹ I know Prince recorded songs about the end times, for I listened to his music as I grew up in the United Methodist Church from 1961 to 1980. As United Methodists, we learned a very similar eschatology and soteriology: God

will destroy the earth and its inhabitants, but to survive for eternity, we had to accept Jesus as our lord and savior. Being exposed to these teachings week after week, month after month, year after year, for eighteen years prepared me to hear Prince, my contemporary (he was three years older than I was) in a way in which I immediately detected his Christian religious themes, although I missed much of the sexual innuendo. (I was probably raised with the same mores Tipper Gore raised her daughter.)

I grew up listening and dancing to Prince's 1981 *Controversy* album, which introduced the songs "Controversy," "Ronnie, Talk to Russia," and "Annie Christian," as well as his 1982 *1999* album with songs "1999" and "Lady Cab Driver." His 1984 album *Purple Rain* intensified Prince's influence on me with the songs "Let's Go Crazy," "I Would Die 4 You," and "When Doves Cry." Prince's 1985 *Around the World in a Day* album included the salvation-themed song "The Ladder," and his 1987 *Sign 'O' The Times* album with songs "Sign 'O' The Times," "The Cross,"⁷² "America," and "Pop Life" continued the theme of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. God's destruction of the earth (and humanity's threats of nuclear war) with our responses to these existential crises were Prince's real concerns.

In *Doctrinal Discussions*, Edward Heppenstall, Professor of Systematic Theology at Andrews University, wrote an essay, "The Hour of God's Judgment is Come."⁷³ In this essay we learn that Seventh-day Adventists in the early 1960s, at least, placed great emphasis on the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation for marking the end times. Evidence points to Prince adopting these doctrinal understandings, beginning with Prince's self-titled 1979 album where he appears nude on a white, winged horse. (What this represents, that is, Prince as a prophet, as discussed earlier in the conversation on archetypes.)

In order to help us understand Seventh-day Adventists' end-times theology, Heppenstall cites several Bible verses: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, 21-22; 25- 26; Daniel 8:14; Revelation 4-7; 8; 9:11-21; 10; 11:2; 11:15-19; 14; 14:7; 15; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1,17-18; 19:7, 20; Romans 5:10; and Hebrews 6:18-20. From this essay, we learn that the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation are authoritative for Seventh-day Adventists in confirming an end time, when this divine judgment began, how it will

play out, how it is playing out, and what are the Christian obligations. Heppenstall writes about the Book of Daniel, a book interpreted by Heppenstall as a vision of the end times:

As one studies the controversy between good and evil forces in the eighth chapter of Daniel, two things relative to the sanctuary and its ministration are indicated.

First, up until the close of the 2300-year prophecy, 1844, men's [sic] understanding of Christ's priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary had been seriously impaired in its effectiveness on the earth at the hands of Satan's counterfeit priestly system. Describing the nefarious work of the little horn against the sanctuary of God, the Scripture declares, "by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down" (verse 11).

Second, the Scripture further declares that this will not always be so. So compelling is the work of this counterfeit system that the all-important question is asked, "How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?" (verse 13). There will come a change at the close of the 2300-year period, in 1844, declares the Scripture. "Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (margin, "justified"). "Then shall the sanctuary be restored to its rightful state." (RSV)⁷⁴

One thing Heppenstall's essay re-enforces for us is the meaning of the word "controversy," augmenting perhaps the reasons why Prince titled his first spiritual LP *Controversy*. Examining the lyrics from the song "Controversy," we see the following:

Do I believe in god? Do I believe in me?
Some people want to die so they can be free
(I said) life is just a game, we're all just the same...

(do you want to play?)
[Yeah, oh yeah]
Controversy
Controversy ...
Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,
Give us ...⁷⁵

In "Annie Christian," on *Controversy*, Prince sings,

Annie Christian, Annie Christ
Until you're crucified, I'll live my life in taxicabs⁷⁶

We see Prince working out and working through of the Book of Daniel. Perhaps he learned to think and write metaphorically because the stories of Daniel's visions along with John's visions in the Book of Revelation greatly influenced his spirituality. Regarding the Book of Revelation, Heppenstall writes,

In Revelation 4–7 we are taken immediately into the throne room of the heavenly sanctuary. The prophet John beholds the same judgment scene that Daniel saw in chapter 7, the setting up on the great heavenly assize in the heavenly sanctuary, the opening of the books of judgment that is so decisive for the destiny of the saints of God. It is here only that we see that in the sealing of the true saints it is God alone who knows and decides cases. Nowhere else can this be done, either by the Roman Catholic Church or any other church.

Before the angels are commissioned to sound the seven trumpets, and before the trumpets can sound, John is shown an angel inside the heavenly sanctuary, who fills the golden censer with fire and casts it unto the earth (Revelation 8). It is the action in heaven that determines the action on the earth.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15-19) ushers in the rule of Christ. ...

Revelation, chapter 10, is a chapter of superlatives connected with the finishing of the mystery of God on the earth. ...

Likewise the judgment of God upon the nations in the seven last plagues pictured in Revelation 15 and 16 is directed from God's throne in the heavenly sanctuary (chapters 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 5).

Revelation 19 pictures the time for the marriage of the Lamb (Christ) to His bride (the church). Christ is pictured as coming forth to receive His bride.⁷⁷

Prince and the New Power Generation's song "7" is an homage to the Book of Revelation:

All seven and we'll watch them fall
They stand in the way of love
And we will smoke them all
With an intellect and a savior-faire
No one in the whole universe
Will ever compare
I am yours now and you are mine
And together we'll love through
All space and time, so don't cry
One day all seven will die
...
And we will see a plague and a river of blood
And every evil soul will surely die in spite of
Their 7 tears, but do not fear
For in the distance, 12 souls from now
You and me will still be here - we will still be here
There will be a new city with streets of gold

The young so educated they never grow old
And there will be no death⁷⁸

Garcia, speaking about “7,” writes, “I hear a strand of myself: a Middle Eastern vibe and an almost scriptural sort of storytelling, a mythology spun from threads of our many long conversations.”⁷⁹

With Heppenstall’s commentary on the Book of Daniel, with Daniel’s visions interpreted as ‘fact,’ with the Book of Revelation and John’s visions interpreted as ‘fact,’ we can surmise that Prince, at least on his *Controversy* album, was making proclamations about the end times, the coming of Christ, preparing for judgment day, and the arrival of judgment day itself. These were some of the Seventh-day Adventist’s doctrines at play in the 1960s when Prince was growing up in church, but his early music was published in the late 1970s and 1980s. Did anything change about Seventh-day Adventist theology pertaining to the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation from the early 1960s to the late 1970s and into the early 1980s?

From the study of the *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, published in 1988, it appears nothing changed in the 1980s in Seventh-day Adventist theology related to the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. In *Seventh-day Adventist Believe*, the following is written:

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man (sic). In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. ... It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.⁸⁰

Prince and End Times

If these two books, *Doctrinal Discussions* and *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, are indicative of Seventh-day Adventist theology, their theology basically remained the same between the early 1960s and late 1980s. Moreover, if Prince believed in their end-days theology, then it is likely Prince held some belief that he and his followers were destined to die a gruesome death. Greenman thinks Prince, at least in the song “1999,” is following the chronology of Ireland’s seventeenth-century archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher. Ussher dated the earth’s creation at around 4000 B.C.E. Drawing on the popular belief of the time that the planet would exist 6,000 years and citing 2 Peter 3:8 that for God, a day is 1,000 years, Ussher arrived at 2000 C.E. as the end of the earth.⁸¹

In Prince’s spiritual evolution, if *Dirty Mind* was seen as a departure from his spiritual upbringing—and it certainly was—was *Controversy* a redemptive attempt? Did he transfer his notion of being Daniel the prophet on the white horse, bringing the prophecy of his dreams to his people, to intentionally become a savior? Touré asserts, using “Purple Rain” as his evidence, that the song was in part an attempt to position Prince as a Jesus figure. “More than just loving God and making Jesus a central part of his music, Prince occasionally slips into wanting you to think of him as Jesuslike. Actually, it is more than occasionally. Fans who paid close attention could feel Prince’s winking acknowledgment that he was their savior and that he may have thought of himself as a Messiah.”⁸² According to Dez Dickerson, a member of The Revolution, “There was a running subtext when I was in the band, ... a theme of ‘We were sent to help people see.’ ... It was this sense that there was a certain enlightenment that he, and we, ... were messengers of and we were there to bring this enlightenment to people who needed it.”⁸³ Did Prince consider himself a prophet or the Messiah, or both? Dickerson claimed the band were “the messengers of some higher understanding in the guise of punk funk. ... [Prince] had a sense of being called, if you will, of being a special messenger of some sort.”⁸⁴

Prince, in the early 1980s, had a plan for a tour documentary called *The Second Coming* that never came to fruition, at least not as originally planned.⁸⁵ Prince’s *The Second Coming* concept had been morphed into the *Sign ‘O’ The Times* movie

concept.⁸⁶ In the song “Purple Rain,” Prince sings,

You say you want a leader
but you can’t seem to make up your mind
I think you better close it
And let me guide you
To the Purple Rain ...”⁸⁷

I agree with Touré that Prince is not talking in God’s voice, rather emphasizing his willingness to lead.⁸⁸ Prophets and the Messiah lead, but Prince is not declaring himself to be the Purple Rain itself. Prince, explaining why he changed his professional name (which was his birth name) to a symbol where the Egyptian ankh (symbol for life, universe, and humanity)⁸⁹ is central, said,

In the Bible, ... what happens when a person changes? God changes their name. Abram became Abraham. Sarai became Sarah. Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and became Israel.⁹⁰

If Prince had moments when he thought he was the Messiah, then Prince, in his Seventh-day Adventism, would have seen himself as the anti-Christ in those moments. It is difficult to imagine his endopsychic structures could have maintained such a belief without him losing his mind and his ability to love. Yet, the prophetic voice of Prince was loud, strong, creative, and persistent—until it was not. But what about the loss of mind, or the threat of mental instability under the weight of a radical sexuality “ethos” conjoined with Seventh-day Adventist theology?

In “Let’s Go Crazy,” Prince writes a sermon for the beloved ones who have gathered together to learn how to deal with the existential crises and divine promises.⁹¹ Prince told Chris Rock in an interview that he had to re-write words to the song because “you couldn’t say ‘God’ on the radio. ‘Let’s go crazy’ was God to me—stay happy, stay focused, and you can beat the de-elevator [Satan].”⁹² Opposite the cab, the de-elevator is the vehicle for taking one to a place of suffering. Prince sings these lyrics:

A world of never ending happiness
You can always see the sun, day or night ...
This is “heaven” ...
So when you call up that shrink in Beverly Hills
You know the one - Dr Everything’ll-Be-Alright
Instead of asking him how much of your time is left
Ask him how much of your mind, baby

With that as an assurance, why engage in the foolishness of medical care?

‘Cause in this life
Things are much harder than in the afterworld
In this life
You’re on your own ...
Let’s go crazy
Let’s go nuts
Let’s look for the purple banana
Until they put us in the truck, let’s go!⁹³

Prince, in this song, espoused that doctor’s pills cannot compare to the coming, and we can presume, knowing Prince’s spiritual upbringing, the coming is the coming of Christ; or, for the unfaithful, it’s the coming of Dr. Everything’ll-Be-Alright (the medical establishment), coming to hospitalize those looking, perhaps, for something that doesn’t exist—represented in the song as the “purple banana.” It is a sad and tragic irony Prince died of an opioid overdose.⁹⁴ In the end, he succumbed to Dr. Everything’ll-Be-Alright, but it was dead wrong, as opioids killed more people in the U.S. in 2017 than did AIDS and the Vietnam War.⁹⁵

In Prince’s song, “I Would Die 4 U” he sings the following:

I’m not a woman
I’m not a man
I am something that you’ll never understand⁹⁶

Greenman calls this song messianic.⁹⁷ Prince begins with the duality of gross gender distinctions and includes a line of humility, suggesting a transcendence from the categorization of “human.” Even if Prince wondered whether he had a divine role, he did not present himself as ultimately being anything other than human, as evidenced through the consistent and persistent expressions of his sexual desires. Paradoxically, when Prince became older and began embracing Jehovah’s Witnesses’ beliefs, he also began losing his prophetic vision and voice, and, thus, his own mystic and archetypal power. Is that what he wanted to have happen? Did he need the Jehovah’s Witnesses to give him a landing place for taking himself down off the cross on which we had put him?

In “I Would Die 4 U” Prince sings, “And if you’re evil I’ll forgive you by and by.”⁹⁸ Those who have had a Christian faith and/or education know that unconditional forgiveness is within the power of Jesus or God to provide, and human beings are invited to attempt to follow this moral: “Cause you, I would die for you, yeah.”⁹⁹

Jesus is metaphorically the sacrificial lamb who, according to some Christian doctrines, allows us to enter the kingdom of heaven.

I’m not your lover
I’m not your friend
I am something that you’ll never comprehend¹⁰⁰

Again, this nonhuman being is beyond our understanding and comprehension. Prince, who may have attempted to portray himself as the ultimate lover, is no longer singing about his sexual prowess, but about the safety, peace, and love that surpasses human understanding. So, what is this presence?

I’m your messiah [of nondualism] ...
Be your fire when you’re cold
Make you happy when you’re sad
Make you good when you are bad
I’m not a human
I am a dove

I’m your conscious
I am love¹⁰¹

Prince is proclaiming the dove as a symbol of a seamless and unbreakable wholeness and consciousness, whereby people can dwell in an ultimate place of care and concern. He is singing *for* Jesus, not because he believes he is Jesus, as some have argued,¹⁰² for that would have been an unbearable sacrilege for which he would be psychologically, spiritually, and soteriologically punished. At minimum, it is reasonable to consider he would not take moments of wondering about his prophetic nature and then make them his reality to transmit onto others, not in the ultimate sense. I believe if he had done so, he would have had a serious mental and psycho-spiritual break.

With songs like “Let’s Go Crazy” and “1999,” for example, we know Prince’s message was an attempt to address the prophetic period of 2300 days from 1844.¹⁰³ Did Prince think it his duty as an artist to help prepare his fans for the end times? In Seventh-day Adventist Believe, it is written,

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour’s coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ’s coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times.¹⁰⁴

In Prince’s 1987 song “Sign ‘O’ The Times,” he sings about AIDS:¹⁰⁵

In France, a skinny man
Died of a big disease with a little name
By chance his girlfriend came across a needle
And soon she did the same

And regarding gang violence and use of recreational drugs, he sings,

At home there are seventeen-year-old boys
And their idea of fun
Is being in a gang called The Disciples
High on crack, totin' a machine gun

And between verses he chants,

Time
Time

Prince continues, singing about natural destruction on the planet:

Hurricane Annie ripped the ceiling off a church
And killed everyone inside
You turn on the telly and every other story
Is tellin' you somebody died

And the scourge of poverty with misplaced technological priorities:

A sister killed her baby 'cause she couldn't afford to feed it
And yet we're sending people to the moon

Rapidly, destruction is taking place:

In September, my cousin tried reefer for the very first time
Now he's doing horse, it's June

The lamenting chant continues, with urgency for change:

Time
Time

Sign 'o' the times mess with your mind
Hurry before it's too late
Let's fall in love, get married, have a baby¹⁰⁶

Losing the Prophetic Vision

Much has been made about Prince's conversion to a Jehovah's Witness, but little has been made about the possible loss or repression of his prophetic vision as the result. Wendy Melvoin notes that when they were composing the *Purple Rain* album,

[Prince] was still kneeling and praying to God, and he really believed in signs and certain things he was trying and then waking up going, "I know this and that!" calling us in the middle of the night going, "I've seen it! I know it—it's appeared!" He was so much more fearless about figuring it out. Now he's studied scripture, but when he was younger, he wasn't spouting scriptures and parables. It was just an abstract thing.

[Keyboardist, Lisa Coleman, remembers], [h]e was writing songs that were not confused, but searching. He wasn't limiting himself by his religion; he was allowing it to fuel his work.¹⁰⁷

Garcia writes about a dialogue she had with Prince regarding his visioning:

We sat on the piano lid talking as the sun went down and the stars came out over the ocean. Years later, in our wedding program, he wrote:

*All alone, staring at the ocean, he implores the heavens 4 an
answer—
"What is the symbol? What does it really mean?"
A voice says to him, "It's your name."*

He told me he'd heard this voice before when he was writing "Purple Rain," and he knew not to question it. I asked him where he believed the voice came from. "Was it God or an angel or some part of the subconscious?"

"Maybe all those things," he said. "Maybe the Holy Spirit. Maybe my own spirit."¹⁰⁸

One way to know whether the adoption of a no-individual/extra-Biblical prophecy Jehovah's Witness theology impacted his visioning is an examination of his 2000 album, *The Rainbow Children*, "an entire record about his faith." This recording is Prince's "devotion to duality, this time on the issue of race."¹⁰⁹ I contest this "devotion to duality," since the lyrics to the song "Family Name" on the album read as follows:

When a minority realizes its similarities on a higher level—not just "black" but—"PEOPLE OF COLOR," and higher still 'INDIGENOUS,' and even higher still, 'FROM THE TRIBE OF,' and yet higher—The "RAINBOW CHILDREN." When this understanding comes, the so-called minority becomes a majority in the wink of an eye.¹¹⁰

I submit that with these lines, becoming a Jehovah's Witness did not completely repress Prince's prophetic vision, yet it would be interesting to know how many unpublished songs he wrote after his baptism. Whereas in Seventh-day Adventism, the tradition and inspiration for prophetic visioning—beginning with Ellen G. White, one of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism—is established upon the prophetic, biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, Jehovah's Witness theology discourages people from continuing to engage in prophetic visions. On the Jehovah's Witnesses' website (JW.org), the following is written:

God has conveyed important messages to people in a variety of ways. In Bible times, he occasionally used dreams. But these were

not everyday vague, illogical dreams. Dreams from God were vivid and coherent, and they had a definite message. For example, in a dream, the prophet Daniel saw a series of beasts that symbolize political empires from Babylon down to our time. (Daniel 7:1-3,17) By means of a dream, God told Joseph of Nazareth, the adoptive father of Jesus, to flee to Egypt with his wife and child. As a result, Jesus escaped death at the hands of vicious King Herod. When Herod died, God disclosed his death to Joseph by means of a dream, at the same time instructing him to return with his family to their homeland. (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23)¹¹¹

Yet, in answer to the question, "Does God use dreams to communicate with us today?" the Jehovah's Witnesses' website answers:

"Do not go beyond the things that are written."— I Corinthians 4:6

...

The Bible 'completely equips' us in that it reveals all that we need to know about God, his qualities, his moral standards, and our place in his purpose for the earth. Hence, God no longer uses dreams to convey messages to humans. If we want to learn about the future and God's will for us, we need "not go beyond the things that are written"—that is, written in the Bible. Moreover, virtually all mankind [sic] can access this book and study its many revelations from God, including dreams.¹¹²

What happened that allowed Prince, a religious devotee and a master of artistic prophetic visioning, to be attracted to a belief system that directly threatened his charisma or spiritual gift?

Garcia gives an account of how Jehovah's Witness' beliefs entered their lives, with Prince eventually embracing Jehovah's Witness' views, and her rejecting their beliefs. Regarding Prince's encounter with Jehovah's Witness' beliefs, she argues Larry Graham's spirituality impressed Prince; Graham's faith was "certain" and had "no room for doubts or fears."¹¹³ Graham recalls the following about his

relationship with Prince:

[Prince] sent me one of his new releases in the mail. In return, I sent a book called *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. He called me and asked if he could make seven copies for the members of his band. I told him I'd bring him some books myself and we met up again in New York. ...

Every night, after the shows we would get together and talk about the Bible. Just before the tour ended, he asked if I'd think about moving to Minnesota to continue teaching him the Bible.

We started off with one-on-one study. Then he came to Kingdom Hall, sometimes three times a week, for group discussions. The more knowledge you gain, the more you want to dedicate your life to Jehovah and that's what he did. Baptism is a public declaration of that. When Prince was baptized, I was with him. It was a joyous day.¹¹⁴

Garcia says she was also taken by Graham's relationship with his wife, yet she remained uncomfortable with the religious talk Graham shared with Prince:

Larry sometimes went off on these long sermons about—I don't even know. I can't even tell you what they were about. These long-winded teachings were like no brand of Christianity I'd seen before. The more I heard about the Jehovah's Witnesses and The Watchtower and Armageddon and the pagan root of birthdays and Christmas, the less it appealed to me.¹¹⁵

She told Prince she would not raise their anticipated second child as a Jehovah's Witness.

When they learned their second child was at risk of not being born, her doctors

advocated for dilation and curettage. Prince dismissed the medical advice, saying, "Either we have faith or we don't. Larry is always saying—" ¹¹⁶ Garcia felt insecure, maybe even betrayed:

I looked at my husband, searching for something that felt like the protective stance that used to make me feel safe and sure of the world. There was only that same off-putting certitude that had troubled me about Larry—along with a solid refusal to place my physical well-being over his own self-righteousness.¹¹⁷

Prince did not agree with her decision to seek the recommended medical treatment. Did Prince's art and attitude in "Let's Go Crazy" presage his real-life medical choices regarding his wife and child? According to Garcia, the certainty of Graham's Jehovah's Witness theology deeply influenced Prince so much that the conversations she used to have with him about spirituality became a source of tension:

[W]henever I mentioned Akhenaten and Nefertiti, he explained to me how idolatrous and misguided they were. He kept encouraging me to hang out with Tina [Larry's wife], and I tried to participate in the study sessions, but it simply wasn't my truth. Men and women studied separately, and I believe faith should bring people together.¹¹⁸

Graham mostly replaced Garcia as "the center of Prince's personal life."¹¹⁹

According to Garcia, Prince's hardening religious beliefs was a great threat to their marriage:

He was hardcore into it and had gotten it in his head that God was displeased with the life he had lived when he was younger, and Amiir's [their son] death was part of the price he had to pay for that. He talked about David and Bathsheba and how David's sin had cost him the thing dearest to him, his son Absalom.¹²⁰

At this time in Prince's life, it appears his prophetic vision waned; he could not make spiritual or religious sense of his son's loss without likening his situation exclusively to a biblical situation. Whereas before he believed he would see his son again, this latter interpretation left him judged and punished. According to Garcia, of all the spiritual paths Prince explored, the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses came into greatest conflict with the sex and sensuality in his music. Perhaps, Prince saw it otherwise.

Prince was impressed with Larry Graham's certainty. As noted before, Graham sent him a copy of *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* and Prince requested copies for his band. Prince asked Graham to move to Minnesota and teach him the Bible, which Graham did. What was it about this book that Prince thought his band should read it?

Although the first human couple disobeyed God, thus proving to be unfit to live forever, God's original purpose did not change. It must be fulfilled! (Isaiah 55:11). The Bible promises: "The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it." (Psalm 37:29). (Revelation 21:3, 4 is also referenced.)

The very conditions in the world today show that we are now living at the time when the destruction of this entire system of things is due to happen. Yes, very soon now God will cleanse the earth of all who would ruin it. (Revelation 11:18). He will remove present-day governments to make way for his righteous government to rule all the earth. It is this Kingdom government for which Christ taught his followers to pray. –Daniel 2:44; Matthew 6:9, 10.

However, you must do more than privately tell Jehovah that you want to belong to him. You need to show before others that you have made a dedication to serve God. How do you do this? By getting baptized in water. Such water baptism is a public demonstration that a person has dedicated his life to Jehovah and is presenting himself to do His will.

A marriage of a family needs leadership. The man was created with a greater measure of the qualities and strengths required to provide such leadership. For this reason the Bible says: "A husband is head of his wife as the Christ also is head of the congregation." (Ephesians 5:23).

As the Bible says, the woman was made as a helper to her husband. (Genesis 2:18). In keeping with that role, the Bible urges: "Let wives be in subjection to their husbands." (Ephesians 5:22). Today female aggressiveness and competition with men have become common. But when wives push ahead, trying to take over headship, their action is almost sure to cause trouble.

Garcia gives us a peek into why Prince, who had been a spiritual seeker and pilgrim for many years, would adopt a tradition largely antithetical to his spiritual-sexual revolution and his charisma. Jehovah's Witness theology, represented by Graham as a certainty, came at a time when Prince and Garcia were grieving the loss of their child and perhaps the loss of a fetus, before even resolving the grief from their first loss.

Conclusion to Part I

Prince was a sex-sensational, international megastar of music, video, and film. He grew up Seventh-day Adventist and explored teachings in a variety of non-Christian traditions. His sex education, by his reports, was explicit. He believed his mission was to sexually liberate his fans, that is, until his spiritual upbringing, journeying, and spiritual charisma of visioning came virtually to a halt when he became a Jehovah's Witness. Prince used the archetypes of the winged white-horse, the ankh, and water to express his propheticism, and his use of archetypes helped cultivate the mythology of Prince as a messiah.

In understanding Prince's nondual theology and his return to dualistic religion,

I utilized the nondual traditions in Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Fairbairnian Object Relations, and my studies in Audre Lorde’s spiritual development where she incorporated nondual I Ching and nondual African goddess worship. To understand the authenticity of Prince’s mission, I briefly explored Seventh-day Adventist’s beliefs from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses book Larry Graham gave Prince. Part II of this series will offer considerations on how Prince’s music, used wisely, can support psycho-spiritual healing of intense endopsychic duality splits that result in the black or white thinking that labels sex as bad (and thus guilt and shame producing) and religion as good (and thus impervious to scrutiny when it results in harm).



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Notes

¹I am coining the term “bioarchetypography” to mean that this spiritual biography includes attention to Prince often portraying himself through music and in movies in the archetype of a prophet and/or savior. This term is inspired by Black-lesbian, activist-poet Audre Lorde’s creation of the term “biomythography” in the subtitle of her biography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography*, Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1982).

²Part I of this two-part article establishes an overview of Prince’s spiritual journey, his use of archetypes and symbols, as well as his attempt to be nondualistic as it related to his various religious traditions, spirituality, and sexuality. In Part I, I set up the methods for understanding the healing potential of Prince’s music; in Part II, I will offer a method on how some of Prince’s music might be used for dialectical healing.

³Journalist Touré wrote that this quote is in Prince’s song, “If I Were Your Girlfriend,” on the *Sign ‘O’ The Times* CD, yet it is not written on the CD jacket, nor was I able to hear it in the lyrics. Nevertheless, this quote sums up what this article on Prince’s quest for nonduality is all about. (Touré, *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (New York: Atria Books, 2013), 80.)

⁴Alan Light, *Let’s Go Crazy: Prince and the Making of Purple Rain* (New York: Atria Books, 2014), 1.

⁵Ben Greenman, *Dig If You Will the Picture: Funk, Sex, God, and Genius in the Music of Prince* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017), 3.

⁶Greenman, 135.

⁷Touré, *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (New York: Atria Books, 2013), 102.

⁸Touré, 10.

⁹Greenman, 5.

¹⁰Touré, 95.

¹¹Stan Hawkins and Sarah Niblock, *Prince: The Making of a Pop Music Phenomenon*, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

¹²Lao-tzu, “63,” in *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), np.

¹³Thich Nhất Hạnh, *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992), 12.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy: Between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1911), accessed April 3, 2018, <http://www.truthfortheendtime.com/SOPText/PDF/GreatControversy.pdf>.

"The central issue in the Great Controversy is over who can best run the universe, God or Satan. That issue must be resolved before the universe can be eternally secure. That is why the Christian's highest motivation is to help clear God's name ("Hallowed be thy name—Matthew 6-9); the plan of salvation is God-centered, not humanity-centered. The vindication of God is vastly more important than our personal salvation." (Herbert E. Douglas, "What Do Adventists Mean by the 'Great Controversy Theme'" (paper presented at the First International Conference on Ellen G. White and Adventist History, Battle Creek, MI, May 15-19, 2002), accessed April 3, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2M7dLK5>.)

¹⁵Touré, 49.

¹⁶W.R.D. Fairbairn, "Endopsychic Structure Considered in Terms of Object-Relationships," in *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London, UK: Routledge, 1992), 82. The paper originally written in 1946.

¹⁷Fairbairn, "Endopsychic Structure," 114.

¹⁸Touré, 97. See Stan Hawkins and Sarah Niblock, *Prince: The Making of a Pop Music Phenomenon*, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (New York: Routledge, 2011), 22.

¹⁹Touré, 134.

²⁰Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, revised ed. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 41.

²¹Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 206, 208.

²²Pamela Ayo Yetunde, "A New Spelling of Our Names: An Exploration of the Psycho-Spiritual Experiences of African-American Buddhist Lesbians" (Th.D. diss., Columbia Theological Seminary, 2016), 43.

²³Greenman, 121.

²⁴Mobeen Azhar, *Prince: Chapter and Verse—A Life in Photographs* (New York: Sterling, 2016), 19.

²⁵Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung and Marie-Luise von Franz (New York: Doubleday Windfall, 1964), 156.

²⁶Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man."

²⁷Light, 100.

²⁸Light, 100.

²⁹Derrick Choy, "Water Archetype," Prezi, November 29, 2016, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2v7oXjk>.

³⁰Prince, "The Ballad of Dorothy Parker," on *Sign 'O' The Times*, CD (Warner Brothers, 1987).

³¹Touré, 88.

³²Margaret Rhodes, "The Fascinating Origin Story of Prince's Iconic Symbol," *Wired*, April 22, 2016, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2pZWNu6>.

³³Carl G. Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung and Marie-Luise von Franz (New York: Doubleday Windfall, 1964), 55.

³⁴Rhodes, "The Fascinating Origin Story of Prince's Iconic Symbol."

³⁵"Ankh, Egyptian Symbol of Life and Its Meaning," *Mythologian.net*, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2PFpwx5>.

³⁶Mayte Garcia, *The Most Beautiful: My Life with Prince* (New York: Hachette Books, 2017), 124-25.

³⁷Garcia, 138, 139.

³⁸Greenman, 117.

³⁹Greenman, 118.

- ⁴⁰Garcia, 245.
- ⁴¹Garcia, 227.
- ⁴²Azhar, 121.
- ⁴³Greenman, xi.
- ⁴⁴Light, 78.
- ⁴⁵Greenman, 122.
- ⁴⁶Jason Draper, *Prince: Chaos, Disorder, and Revolution* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2011), 57.
- ⁴⁷Draper, 78.
- ⁴⁸Alex Hahn, *Possessed: The Rise and Fall of Prince* (New York: Billboard Books, 2003), 221.
- ⁴⁹Light, 266.
- ⁵⁰Hahn, 227. This song was never released. "Good Pussy," PrinceVault, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2vot0Y2>.
- ⁵¹Light, 276.
- ⁵²Touré, 141.
- ⁵³Touré, 96.
- ⁵⁴Prince, "Controversy," on *Controversy*, CD (Warner Bros., 1981), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://genius.com/Prince-controversy-lyrics>.
- ⁵⁵Prince, "Sexuality," on *Controversy*, CD (Warner Bros., 1981), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2M7ftev>.
- ⁵⁶Prince, "Ronnie, Talk to Russia," on *Controversy* CD (Warner Bros., 1981), accessed March 30, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2AzY5ho>.

- ⁵⁷Prince, "Annie Christian," on *Controversy* CD (Warner Bros., 1981), accessed March 30, 2018. <https://genius.com/Prince-annie-christian-lyrics>.
- ⁵⁸Light, 40.
- ⁵⁹Touré, 26.
- ⁶⁰Touré, 89.
- ⁶¹Prince, "Sister" on *Dirty Mind* CD (Warner Bros., 1980), accessed March 29, 2018, <https://genius.com/Prince-sister-lyrics>.
- ⁶²"History of HIV and AIDS Overview," Avert, last modified March 9, 2018, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2mMSesN>.
- ⁶³Touré, 120.
- ⁶⁴Touré, 123-124.
- ⁶⁵Touré, 123.
- ⁶⁶Touré, 65.
- ⁶⁷Prince, "Free," on *1999* CD (Warner Bros., 1982), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://genius.com/Prince-free-lyrics>.
- ⁶⁸Greenman, 125.
- ⁶⁹Prince, "Lady Cab Driver," on *1999* CD (Warner Bros., 1982), accessed March 29, 2018, <https://genius.com/Prince-lady-cab-driver-lyrics>.
- ⁷⁰Prince, "Lady Cab Driver."
- ⁷¹Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Doctrinal Discussions: A Compilation of Articles Originally Appearing in the Ministry, June, 1960-July 1961, in Answer to Walter R. Martin's Book "The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism"* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association), n.d.
- ⁷²Greenman thinks "The Cross" was Prince's most explicitly Christian song Prince had sung up to its release in 1987. If Greenman is right, Prince's first eight years of spiritual record-

ings have been “lost” and need excavation. (Greenman, 128.)

⁷³Ministerial Association, *Doctrinal Discussions*, 158-186.

⁷⁴Ministerial Association, *Doctrinal Discussions*, 158-159.

⁷⁵Prince, “Controversy.”

⁷⁶Prince, “Annie Christian.”

⁷⁷Ministerial Association, *Doctrinal Discussions*, 161-162.

⁷⁸Prince and the New Power Generation, “7,” on *Love Symbol* CD (produced by Prince and the New Power Generation, 1992), accessed March 28, 2018, <https://genius.com/Prince-7-lyrics>.

⁷⁹Garcia, 92.

⁸⁰*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...a Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988).

⁸¹Greenman, 124.

⁸²Touré, 109.

⁸³Touré, 112–113.

⁸⁴Touré, 113

⁸⁵Greenman, 28.

⁸⁶Draper, 89.

⁸⁷Prince and the Revolution, “Purple Rain,” on *Purple Rain* CD (Warner Bros., 1984), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2M5OzDK>.

⁸⁸Touré, 116.

⁸⁹Jung, 55.

⁹⁰Garcia, 167.

⁹¹Prince and the Revolution, “Let’s Go Crazy,” on *Purple Rain*, CD (Warner Brothers, 1984).

⁹²Light, 99.

⁹³Prince and the Revolution, “Let’s Go Crazy.”

⁹⁴Kory Grow, “Prince’s Cause of Death: Opioid Overdose,” *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 2016, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://rol.st/2vj8Xds>.

⁹⁵German Lopez, “In one year, drug overdoses killed more Americans than the entire Vietnam War did,” *Vox*, June 8, 2017, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2qU64w5>.

⁹⁶Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 U,” on *Purple Rain* CD (Warner Brothers, 1984), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LOX1dF>.

⁹⁷Greenman, 35.

⁹⁸Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 U.”

⁹⁹Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 U.”

¹⁰⁰Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 U.”

¹⁰¹Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 U.”

¹⁰²Light, 76.

¹⁰³See Ministerial Association, *Doctrinal Discussions*, 158-159.

¹⁰⁴*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...a Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*.

¹⁰⁵Prince, “Sign ‘O’ The Times,” on *Sign ‘O’ The Times* CD, (Warner Bros., 1987), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LFvo7G>.

¹⁰⁶Prince, “Sign ‘O’ The Times.”

¹⁰⁷Light, 101.

¹⁰⁸Garcia, 143-144.

¹⁰⁹Greenman, 138, 141.

¹¹⁰Greenman, 140.

¹¹¹*Awake!* "Dreams from God: Has God use Dreams to Communication with Humans," August 2014, 14, accessed March 28, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Llvz1Z>.

¹¹²*Awake!* "Dreams from God."

¹¹³Garcia, 233.

¹¹⁴Azhar, 94.

¹¹⁵Garcia, 234.

¹¹⁶Garcia, 236.

¹¹⁷Garcia, 236

¹¹⁸Garcia, 244.

¹¹⁹Hahn, 221.

¹²⁰Garcia, 250.

¹²¹Garcia 251.

¹²²Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1982), 9.

¹²³Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *You Can Live Forever*, 15.

¹²⁴Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *You Can Live Forever*, 252.

¹²⁵Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *You Can Live Forever*, 15.

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Prince’s Spiritual Terroir: Relational Spirituality Rooted in Minneapolis

Lianne Raymond

Winning Academic Paper

Abstract: This article proposes that Prince’s spirituality embodied a feminine, relational principle. It asks the questions: What does a relational spirituality look like? What does an intimate relationship with the divine do for our soul and what happens as a result of that intimacy? It draws on the work of D. W. Winnicott and Ann Ulanov to explore spirituality as a transitional space in general, and as a space of creative growth for Prince in particular.

When I heard the title of the University of Minneapolis’ conference “Prince from Minneapolis,” it struck me both how obvious and how deep that connection was—how one can hardly think of Prince without thinking of Minneapolis and vice versa—and that this deep connection spoke to the unique character of Prince’s spirituality in a way that seems best described by the essence of the concept of *terroir*. In the agricultural world the term *terroir*, (from the French *terre* meaning “land”), speaks to the unique character of a crop stemming from its environmental context including soil, climate, and other specifics of the habitat in which it grows.

Similarly, the deepest part of our spiritual selves is rooted in a matrix of nature and culture and relationship, a *terroir* of the soul. In examining the soil, the climate and the growing conditions in which Prince’s soul was rooted, insight is offered into his unique expression of spirituality.

Rooted in the Feminine

Although Prince was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home, there is evidence he was exposed to other denominations including Baptist and Methodist. He had

not an insignificant connection to the United Methodist churches in Minneapolis, attending their church camps as a teen and choosing to have his first marriage ceremony at Park Avenue United Methodist Church.¹ This seems to have resulted in a non-dogmatic approach to Christianity and an openness to an improvisational spirituality. For much of his musical career, Prince had no specific religious affiliation, and though his love for the teachings of Christ was evident in his music, he also poked fun at what he saw as some of the trappings of organized religion.²

Prince’s spiritual expression has parallels with his musical expression. He was less concerned with the rules and conventions (he did not read music) and was more engaged with self-discovery and self-expression. In the case of his music, this resulted in a sound that had at its core the principle of integration—a bringing together of many different musical genres, approaches and sounds.

His spirituality had at its core a similar integrative principle, which could be described as a feminine principle of relatedness, grounded in love and leading to wholeness. Faith emerging from this principle is not primarily concerned with doctrine or theology, but rather with a relationship with the Divine, with God as a being. It is about feeling trust in God’s character, feeling held in God’s love, and longing to be in the presence of the beloved. In an interview with Chris Rock in 1997, while discussing his experience with religion, Prince articulated this rejection of dogma and his sense of being beloved: “As far as a message was concerned, a lot of it was based in fear—what will happen to you if you do something—and I don’t think God is to be feared that way. I think he is a loving God.”³

This relational view of spirituality grew from the soil of both Prince’s many positive mothering experiences and his connection to Minneapolis. These both metaphorically and literally grounded him in relational trust and in the feminine embrace of a God upon whom he could depend.

Much has been made of the trials Prince may have experienced as a child from his parent’s divorce to his relationship with his stepfather and his hypothetical abandonment by his mother. This is typical of a patriarchal view that sees the

nuclear family as a replacement for a village. When we turn the focus away from the circumstances of the family of origin and broaden it into the full relational realm of community, as Kimberly Ransom invites us to do in her work on black childhood, we see that there is a bigger story.⁴

This is not to dismiss the possibility of wounding in his childhood. We know the level of psychological wounding is not related to the experience alone, but more to the response and relationships around the experience. It is one thing to have a wounding experience; it is another to have no one to whom to turn or hold you in the wake of that experience.

Beyond his experience in his primary family, what is clear again and again in all accounts of Prince's life is the number of allomothers present in his young life. We know he often attended church with his grandmother. We know he lived for a while with an aunt. Bernadette Anderson, mother of his friend André Cymone, took him into her home in a way that has become central to the Prince story. Her home became a womb of gestation for his friendship and musical collaboration with André, as well as a playful space of experimentation, development, and dreaming. The mother of Morris Day, his bandmate, became the agent for their early band. And in his transition into adulthood and more independence, he had an older stepsister with whom he was able to live in New York as he was trying to make connections there.

In addition to these women who mothered Prince and provided nurturing spaces for his creativity, Minneapolis itself functioned as a mother to Prince. This may sound strange to western ears, but a deep connection to land and place as a feminine, mothering energy is a fundamental human experience. One of the most beautiful examples is found in the Maori language where the word for land and the word for placenta are the same word: *whenua*. In that image of land as "placenta," we are reminded of our nurturance by the land itself and our connection to soil, climate, and the other givens of place. Similarly, our English word, "matter" derives from the same Latin root as the word "mother." Etymologically we see the root of our understanding that the land we live on, the matter, is a mother to us.

One of Prince's most famous comments came during a 1996 interview with Oprah. When asked by Oprah why he chose to stay in Minneapolis, he confidently stated, "The cold keeps the bad people out."⁵ In Minneapolis he felt safe, he felt held, he felt protected. The climate itself was a nurturing presence. This love of land and place in all its aspects is apparent in his music, his movies, and his life, as well-detailed by Minneapolis journalist Martin Keller. He quotes Prince in a *Minnesota Monthly* 1987 interview:

I'm as much a part of the city where I grew up as I am anything. I was very lucky to be born here, because I saw both sides of the racial issue, the oppression and the equality. I got the best of all worlds here. I saw what happens here, and it's not like what happens in, say, Atlanta. I used to be part of a busing program that took me through Kenwood every day.... You can check it out in the song "The Sacrifice of Victor." That runs down the whole scene here.⁶

As he grew into a young man, he continued to be nurtured in both the black community of Minneapolis, the larger music community and in a school system with teachers who valued the arts and were supportive of the emerging musical talent embodied by Prince and his cohorts. During his time in junior high and high school, there was notable access to a plethora of musical instruments and Prince's music teachers understood and accommodated his desire to explore his own musical interests as opposed to forcing a curriculum on him.⁷

Prince's parents were not perfect (none are) and there were certainly stressful times in his childhood. Nor was Minneapolis, a predominantly white city with a corresponding undercurrent of racism, the perfect place for a young black person to grow up. But in both his extended family and his larger community there was enough of a sense of being held and nurtured to rest psychologically in a dependency that fostered creative expression and development. Jungian analyst Marion Woodman describes it well:

The child is able to feel that presence around it as it is growing. It loves

and moves through that love. It feels it is being seen as it is, not with the mother's agenda. Consequently, the child believes in itself, it doesn't have to twist itself in order to fit into what other people think. The conscious feminine is that presence that can hold whatever that child is.

Spiritual Playground

D. W. Winnicott, acclaimed psychoanalyst and visionary of child psychiatry, locates in this dependency and presence what he calls the transitional space. This is a numinous space between self and others (most often mothers) in childhood. As dependent children, this is the space in which we come into selfhood not entirely from within, irrespective of our circumstances, nor entirely from outside of ourselves but rather from the space in-between—the self forms in the space of relating to the other.

Psychologist Ann Ulanov expands Winnicott's insights to include religious experience. Our spiritual self, too, at its best, is not born from either exclusively within or without but also partakes of this numinous, transitional space of dynamic relationship. As Ulanov describes it, "In this space we discover and create ourselves as children of God. Winnicott's work on our earliest transitional spaces enables us to see our transition into self in relation to the Holy."⁹

In a 1998 interview, Melanie B (of Spice Girls fame) asked Prince where he got his inspiration, and his response illuminates just the kind of transitional space to which Winnicott and Ulanov refer. His first succinct response was, "My gift comes from God." He followed this with an elaboration: "I write so much because it is therapy for me, for evolving your spirit actually—every time you go back into the well and examine things. The more I write, the quicker I get to my destination."¹⁰

He receives a gift from God, and then that gift is transformed through his own psychic explorations and play, resulting in his own spiritual evolution—a gift back to God. In this way, music is both a gift from God and a dialogue with God. We can see evidence of the relational experience in how he talked about God to others.

He would often sign letters with "Love God." In a letter to his manager's daughter, he exhorted her, "Don't forget to say your prayers. God loves u."

Prince's spirit and spirituality blossomed in this transitional space that was his playground of becoming. A playground because at its best, the quality of the relationship experienced in this transitional space is playful; it is expressive, responsive, shameless, expansive, and connected to the imaginal realm.

This playground fosters a deep intimacy characterized by a relationship in which you are truly seen and truly known—which invites you to reveal all of who you are. It has no agenda for us beyond the organic fostering of our own becoming. It is not of the world of work or achievement or accomplishment—though those may be byproducts. This playground of becoming is where eros rises, where creativity lives, and where we feel our vitality. Ann Ulanov describes it well:

The space of playing offers us rest from the daunting ego task of trying to keep together outward reality and inward wishes and hopes. In the spaces in between, we take time off; we meander happily. We need not reconcile these opposites nor hold them in tension. Here we can relax, not needing to achieve performance or purpose. We surprise ourselves by what arrives as a communication we did not originate but which clearly addresses us.¹¹

In this way, Prince's music, rooted in his intimate relationship with God, made room for that which was otherwise unwell-come or forbidden or frightening. It made room for his aggression, his vulnerability, his pain, his grief, his frustrations, and his sexuality. It is worth noting that contrary to some commentary about Prince's music, it is not filled with sexual references or overt sexuality in spite of his spirituality, as some have posited, but rather because of it. The space in which he dances with the divine is not a space of splitting off or hiding or compartmentalization—it is a full embrace, a space to bring it all together. Music was his relationship with God, and his relationship with God was such that the invitation was there for him to be fully, authentically, and intimately known.

When we can view Prince's spirituality not as a question of what religion he

belonged to or what beliefs he held, but as an understanding of his experience of the relational God that held him and danced with him in the feminine space that is designed to make room for all of who we are and enlarges as we live into it and from it. In this sense, psychologist Carol Gilligan says, “[T]he ‘I’ becomes part of a ‘we’ that, rather than erasing the sense of self, calls it fully into existence. Like voice is called forth by resonance.”¹²

Spiritual Dissonance

It can happen that along our journey this transitional space disappears, or at least contracts. We see this with Prince’s journey when, in the midst of this feminine relational spirituality, there is a dramatic shift in Prince’s spiritual expression with his conversion to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The door seems to close on play, on dialogue, and where there was once a vitality there now seems to be a deadness, a finality. The feminine energy is overwhelmed with a legalistic, inflexible, stern paradigm. Carol Gilligan has theorized that the sacrifice of relationship is the ritual of initiation into the Patriarchy. The pleasure of play has been replaced by the laws that “lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.”¹³

It is not unusual for this to happen at times of distress—and it is worth noting that this conversion began shortly after Prince and his then-wife, Mayte, lost their one-week-old son, Amiir, culminating with Prince’s baptism into the Jehovah’s Witnesses shortly after the death of his father. According to his friends, during Mayte’s pregnancy Prince was the happiest and most relaxed they had seen him. He had fully entered into preparing to welcome his child into the world and imagining his child playing with other kids around Paisley Park. During this time, he had an outdoor playground constructed and an indoor playroom fully furnished. When his son died, according to bandmate Morris Hayes, “Oh man, that was devastating. He was devastated. It’s like he never had any foresight that anything could ever be a problem.”¹⁴

In childhood, the transitional space can be interrupted by the nurturing parent’s sudden absence due to illness or death or family dysfunction or breakdown. In the spiritual transitional space, we can feel similarly abandoned by God in times

of our distress. In this case, it seems possible that Prince felt something like this abandonment and so rejected the relational experience of God for something that in its rigidity, felt more certain and less vulnerable. As developmental psychologist Gordon Neufeld puts it, he became “defended against his own vulnerability.”¹⁵ Perhaps he even, like Saint Augustine, perceived his own playful spirit as evil and an impulse he had to counter. But rigidity lacks resilience and what feels certain can, over time, begin to feel constraining, especially for a spirit as vibrant as Prince.

It may also be that on some subconscious level, Prince was asking the questions of God that arise in all of us, according to Ulanov:

What we all want to know is: Is there anything we can really count on? If it goes away, will it come back again? Is this reality recoverable if lost? Will it survive the test of time, and my neglect of it, my forgetting it, even my abandoning it? Will whatever we believe in survive my defection from it or destruction of it and come back to me, notice me and attend to me out of itself?¹⁶

The depth of a relationship shows itself not in its “goodness” but in its ability to be repaired when broken.

Way Back Home

There is evidence in the last few years of Prince’s life that such a repair of his relational experience of God was underway. Josh and Hannah Welton, two young, vibrant Christians, had entered his world and appeared to outsiders to be more concerned with sharing the love of God than imposing dogma. They could be seen as embodying a space between his Jehovah’s Witnesses experience and his relational spiritual experience of God.

Erica Thompson, who has conducted numerous interviews with people, connected to Prince in researching a book about his spirituality, has also expressed the opinion that he was moving away from the Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹⁷ Also, a

wide-ranging interview conducted in 2014 for *Rolling Stone* magazine contained hints that the feminine, relational spirituality was re-emerging. He marvels at the power of forgiveness. He speaks of the expansion of his religious thinking, talks about chakras and claims:

“We’re in the feminine aspect now,” he says. “That’s where society is. you’re gonna get a woman president soon. Men have gone as far as they can, right? ...I learn from women a lot quicker than I do from men.... At a certain point, you’re supposed to know what it means to be a man, but now what do you know about what it means to be a woman? Do you know how to listen? Most men don’t know how to listen.”¹⁸

During that same interview he shared a yet-to-be-released song that moved him deeply and demonstrated his vulnerability:

He ends by previewing a couple of songs from what will become *Art Official Age*, excusing himself from the room when he gets to the wailing ballad “Breakdown.” The breakup-themed lyrics seem particularly personal.... Afterward, he confirms that the song comes from a “sensitive...nude” place: “You could touch it and it would just hurt instantly.”¹⁹

And one of the most touching songs on that album is “Way Back Home”:

Most people in this world
Are born dead
But I was born alive
...
When I can see (Until I)
(I find my)
(My way back)
My way back home ...

I am going to assume he did just that.

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Notes

¹Touré, *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2013,) 138; Helen Kennedy, “Rocker’s Princess Bride,” *New York Daily News*, February 15, 1996. accessed January 31, 2018, <https://nydn.us/2BxC2bx>.

²Prince, “When the Saints Go Marching In” (video), June 06, 2016, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2P0x74T>.

³Prince, “Prince Chris Rock Interview” (video), May 29, 2016, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2BAplHy>.

⁴Zachary Hoskins, “The Crazy Things You Do—a Conversation with Kimberly C. Ransom” (MP3 podcast), January 26, 2018, *Dance/Music/Sex/Romance*. accessed January 31, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2MqGs4z>.

⁵Prince, “Prince and Wife Mayte On Oprah-Part 2/4 (1996)” (video), May 12, 2016, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OXkUOm>.

⁶Martin Keller, “Portrait of the Artist as a Native Son,” *Minnesota Monthly*, March 1997, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2N3iwoY>.

⁷Andrea Swensson, *Got to Be Something Here: The Rise of the Minneapolis Sound* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), location 2199-2213, Kindle.

⁸Marion Woodman and the Conscious Feminine: Marion Woodman in Conversation with Marlene Schiwy. Directed by Lael McCall. Performed by Marion Woodman and Marlene Schiwy. Canada: Principia Productions Ltd., 2012. DVD.

⁹Ann Ulanov, *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 21.

¹⁰Prince, "Prince Interview Mel B 1998 Paisley Park," (video) July 10, 2017, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2MrdyWn>.

¹¹Ulanov, 15.

¹²Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure: A New Map of Love* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 173.

¹³Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New York: Random House, 1997), 33, quoted in Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure: A New Map of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 172.

¹⁴Chris Heath, "Prince's Closest Friends Share Their Best Prince Stories," *GQ*, December 8, 2016. accessed February 10, 2018, <https://www.gq.com/story/prince-stories>.

¹⁵Gordon Neufeld, and Gabor Maté, *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers* (New York: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2014), 105.

¹⁶Ulanov, 19.

¹⁷Zach Hoskins, "I Know That the Lord Is Coming Soon—Erica Thompson on the Salford Purple Reign Conference." (MP3 podcast). *Dance/Music/Sex/Romance*, September 15, 2017. accessed February 10, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2lGD620>.

¹⁸Brian Hiatt, "A Final Visit with Prince: Rolling Stone's Lost Cover Story" *Rolling Stone*, May 2, 2016, accessed February 10, 2018. <https://rol.st/2N2jwtn>.

¹⁹Hiatt, "A Final Visit with Prince."

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He's Your Messiah: Prince's Purple Rain as an Expression of Christianity and Internal Conflict

Erica Thompson

Abstract: Prince is largely known for the erotic image he projected at the height of his fame in the 1980s. Understandably, people are not sure what to make of the religious fervor he exhibited after converting to the Jehovah's Witness faith in 2003. Although many would find it hard to believe, Prince always explored spirituality in his life and music, even at the peak of his career during the *Purple Rain* era. Prior to that period, lasciviousness and Christian ideology lived in harmony within his music and performances. Then, he seemed to express that sexuality and spirituality were two conflicting worlds. This article analyzes *Purple Rain* as Prince's first Christian-leaning album and argues that the project, along with Prince's tour, were expressions of his internal struggle with the sacred and profane. As part of her research, the author conducted interviews with Prince's friends and colleagues, as well as studied Prince's media coverage, lyrics, performances, audience, and previous biographies.

In the midst of the darkness, a man utters a desperate sentence.

"I'm so confused."

"Don't be confused," a robotic voice answers. "There's only one Lord: Jesus."

"I'm so confused."

A brief silence follows, and the troubled man speaks again. "I'm sorry. I'll be good. I promise."

"If you believe, he'll forgive you."

"I'm so confused, so confused..."¹

That scene could easily describe an intimate conversation between an ordinary man and a trusted, religious confidante. Instead, the man is Prince: a rock superstar with a hit movie and album. Also, his conversation with the invisible robot takes place in front of thousands of people.

The scene is acted out on stage during a segment of Prince's 1984-1985 *Purple Rain* tour. In *Between* sexual songs, Prince cries out to God and berates the audience about forbidden apples and life and death. "God" responds through stage lighting and sound effects. Prince openly expresses his anguish over the explicit content of his music and blames the audience for demanding it.²

With his *Purple Rain* film eventually pulling in \$80 million at the box office and the album of the same name selling five million copies in four months, Prince was at the peak of his career.³ Although he was genuinely happy to be a superstar,⁴ he seemed to be experiencing a period of spiritual turmoil. Until *Purple Rain*, lasciviousness and Christian ideology lived in harmony within his music and performances. Now, he seemed to express that sexuality and spirituality were two conflicting worlds.

This article analyzes *Purple Rain* as Prince's first Christian-leaning album and argues that the project, along with Prince's tour, were expressions of his internal struggle with the sacred and profane. As part of my research, I conducted interviews with Prince's friends and colleagues, as well as studied Prince's media coverage, lyrics, performances, audience, and previous biographies.

Literature Review

There are several biographies on Prince that cover his life and career, but none has provided an in-depth look at his spiritual development. In his *Implicit Religion* journal article on Prince and religion, Rupert Till does not address Prince's person-

al spiritual beliefs; he focuses on the artist as an icon worshipped by fans in a manner comparable to traditional religion.⁵ Davin Seay and Mary Neely's book, *Stairway to Heaven: The Spiritual Roots of Rock 'n' Roll—From the King and Little Richard to Prince and Amy Grant*, acknowledges a spiritual change in Prince but does not explore his lifelong spiritual progression.⁶

Much of the literature on spirituality and African American popular music explores the categorization of secular music as "evil" within the African American community. Most scholars have focused on the blues, which was popularized by W.C. Handy in the early 1900s,⁷ although the condemnation of secular music existed prior to the development of that art form.⁸ Blues was widely referred to as "the devil's music" by elders and other Christians in the African American community. Adam Gussow explores this trend in a two-part series in *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies*: "Ain't No Burnin' Hell: Southern Religion and the Devil's Music" and "Heaven and Hell Parties: Ministers, Bluesmen, and Black Youth in the Mississippi Delta, 1920-1942."⁹

As blues developed into R&B, soul, and rock-and-roll,¹⁰ those new genres were considered to be evil, like the blues.¹¹ While blues musicians did not typically feel conflicted about their craft,¹² many of their predecessors bought into the old idea that secular music was truly "the devil's music." Prime examples are Little Richard, Al Green, and Marvin Gaye, who struggled with the sacred and profane in their art. Their journeys, outlined in their biographies, closely mirror Prince's path.¹³

With highly sexual—and often explicit—previous albums *Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, and *1999*, Prince embraced the profane with no reservations. Some Christian concepts were peppered in those projects, but *Purple Rain* was Prince's first in-depth exploration of the religion on an album.

While Prince thanked God in previous album liner notes, he mentions the deity multiple times in the *Purple Rain* booklet. He also writes, "may u live 2 see the Dawn," which he would later define as "a time of greater consciousness and spiritual understanding."¹⁴

The pop-rock album opens with "Let's Go Crazy."¹⁵ At the beginning of the song, Prince positions himself as a preacher, speaking about Heaven, or "a world of never-ending happiness." At first listen, one might compare the song to "1999," in which Prince advocates partying in the midst of Judgment Day. However, in a later interview, he revealed the song was about God and Satan ("the de-elevator").¹⁶ At the end of the song, Prince likely references the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when he says, "Hang tough, children / He's coming, He's coming, He's coming."¹⁷

The album arguably includes a more direct reference to Jesus on "I Would Die 4 You." Just as the Christian religion proclaims Jesus to be God in human form, the song's protagonist states that it is not a human, but a dove—which is a symbol associated with the Holy Spirit in the Bible. (Matt. 3:16 AV) The Christian religion indicates that Jesus sacrificed his life so men and women could be forgiven for their sins. According to the Bible, men and women must believe that information about Jesus in order to be accepted into Heaven. The song's protagonist also expresses a willingness to forgive sins and sacrifice its life for its loved one, as long as the loved one "believes." Finally, the protagonist calls itself "Messiah," the Hebrew name for "Savior," which is applied to Jesus in the Bible.¹⁸ (Jn. 4:25-26 AV)

Some may believe Prince is calling himself a Messiah in the song and using the story of Jesus as a metaphor to express the strength of his love for his mate. However, when performing the song live on the *Purple Rain* tour, Prince changes the lyric to "He's your Messiah," and points upward, indicating the song is likely about Jesus.¹⁹

Prince also references Jesus at the end of the album's sole sexually explicit song, "Darling Nikki," with a message recorded in reverse: "Hello, how are you? I'm fine, because I know / That the Lord is coming soon, coming, coming soon."²⁰ The message, an announcement of the Second Coming of Christ, is almost like a method of repentance for the lewdness of "Darling Nikki."

There is a possibility that Prince mentions Jesus, yet again, on "Computer Blue." In the song, Prince complains that he has not found love, singing, "Until I find the

righteous 1 / Computer blue.”²¹ Prince may be using “righteous 1” as a code word for Jesus or God. Prince includes a message from the “righteous 1” on the lyric sheet for the song: “Poor lonely computer ... it’s time u learned love and lust.”²² This message is also spoken aloud by a robotic voice during the *Purple Rain* tour.²³ The message may be another covert indicator of Prince’s struggle between sexuality and spirituality.

On “Purple Rain,” Prince sings, “Let me guide you to the purple rain,” possibly referencing a more fulfilling life or state of mind.²⁴ Additionally, in concert, Prince changed the lyric to “Let the Lord guide you to the purple rain.”²⁵ Therefore, Prince may have had Christian ideology in mind when writing the song.

Some of the album’s B-sides also utilize religious references. For example, in the song “God,” Prince refers to the Bible’s Book of Genesis, crediting God with the creation of Heaven and Earth. Prince’s engineer Susan Rogers shared that the song was recorded on a Sunday, the Sabbath, or a day of rest and worship, for most Christians.²⁶

In “Erotic City,” Prince uses the term “sinner,”²⁷ acknowledging a religious notion of right and wrong, and again references “the dawn” in the extended title of “17 Days” (“The rain will come down / Then U will have to choose / If U believe / look 2 the dawn and U shall never lose”).²⁸

Even *Rolling Stone* highlighted the religious imagery on *Purple Rain*. In the 1984 cover story on Prince, Kurt Loder wrote, “The album is rife with messianic overtones, from the opening sermon of ‘Let’s Go Crazy,’ to the suggestively titled ‘I Would Die 4 U.’”²⁹

Although the *Purple Rain* album is a soundtrack for the *Purple Rain* film, the latter does not include any Christian elements. The *Purple Rain* tour was where Prince further expressed his new religious phase—emphasizing the tension between sexuality and spirituality.

As the tour progressed, Prince’s lighting and set designer Roy Bennett noticed the

God talk increased. “It just kept getting longer and longer and longer, these little speeches,” he said. “We all were kind of going, ‘What’s going on here?’”³⁰

Video footage of Prince’s show in Syracuse, New York, likely captures the religious content at its peak. After sharing that he has a “bad case of sexual temptation” and referencing orgasm, Prince is interrupted by jarring notes on the piano and spotlights, which represent God. “I know I said I’d be good, but they dig it when I’m bad,” Prince tells God.³¹

He then launches into an emotional performance of “God,” bathed in blue light. Next, he preaches to the audience (a portion of the speech is also printed on the back of the *Purple Rain* vinyl album):

**Did it matter who ate of the apple first? The end result was negative.
What are you looking at? Oh yeah? If I gave it to you, what would
you do with it? ... What’s the difference between life and death? God!**³²

Prince then looks upward, smiles, and clasps his hands in prayer. “Yes, I believe in you. Yes, I trust in you. Yes, I’ll be good,” he says.³³

However, Prince immediately breaks his promise by asking the audience if they want to spend the night with him and take a bath.³⁴

The audience continues to cheer throughout Prince’s speeches. “I think they just kind of dealt with it just so they could get to listen to all the other songs that they wanted to hear,” said Bennett.³⁵

Overall, there was enough exciting, high-energy content to keep from alienating the audience. “[Prince] took the risk of losing his audience as he filled the arena with an interior dialogue,” Richard Cromelin wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*. “But the payoffs are worth the risk and losses.”³⁶

According to Bennett, Prince was religious offstage. Speaking about Prince’s faith, Bennett said, “I don’t know if he suppressed it, or [if] he was sidestepping it for a

while when he did the whole *Dirty Mind* phase. [But] during *Purple Rain*, it started to become very prevalent during some of those shows.”³⁷

Bennett believed Prince needed a way to remain grounded after becoming an international superstar. “Probably God and religion and Christianity was something that was maybe internally helping him out with that,” Bennett said.³⁸

Bennett also believed religion helped Prince with the darker side of his personality. “He did have demons,” he said. “I think religion started becoming a bigger part [of his life] because he needed some balance there somewhere.”³⁹

Regarding a possible struggle between the sacred and profane within Prince during the 1980s, Bennett seemed uncertain. “There might have been if he’s getting religious and he’s singing about sex,” he said.⁴⁰

According to background vocalist Jill Jones, Prince did not appear to be religious offstage. However, she does not rule out a possible internal struggle between the sacred and profane, though she did not witness it. “He really wanted to be famous so much,” she said. “And whatever came with that is what came with it.”⁴¹ Perhaps Prince did not want to be risqué, but believed he had to be to retain his fame.

Prince did continue one tradition he may have learned from his childhood at Glendale Seventh-day Adventist Church: charity work. “I’m thinking that some of that from our church may have rubbed off on him,” said former Glendale member Don Keith.⁴²

Prince donated a portion of the proceeds from the *Purple Rain* tour to Marva Collins’ West Side Preparatory School in Chicago.⁴³ He also performed benefit shows for children who were deaf and handicapped,⁴⁴ and held food drives for the needy throughout his tour.⁴⁵

Prince adhered to Christian doctrine by not publicizing his efforts. For instance, the Kings James Bible states, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

(Matt. 6:1 AV) In his 1986 interview with *Ebony*, Prince said, “We try to do a few things for people in need ... but that is not something you speak on.”⁴⁶

During the *Purple Rain* era, Prince also habitually signed autographs “love God.” “I’ve witnessed him do that several times and that’s the way he would always sign things if people asked him,” said Devin Devasquez, who met Prince in December 1984 and later dated the artist.⁴⁷

If Prince were truly experiencing an internal struggle between the sacred and profane back in the mid-1980s, one has to wonder if his colleagues’ own religious beliefs had influenced him. For instance, according to Craig Rice, who was an assistant director on the *Purple Rain* film and a road manager on the *Purple Rain* tour, Prince worked with a lot of Jehovah’s Witnesses, including Jill Jones, Earl Jones (Jill Jones’ uncle and Prince’s hairdresser), one of Prince’s security guards, and The Revolution’s bassist, Brown Mark.⁴⁸

Prior to leaving the band, guitarist Dez Dickerson had expressed concerns with the tension between his own spirituality and the sexual content in Prince’s music. “I began to feel what I first assumed was a kind of ‘righteous conflict’ within me about the lewd nature of much of the music we were doing,” he wrote in his autobiography.⁴⁹

Several Prince biographers claim Gayle Chapman, Prince’s keyboardist and member of Christian group The Way International, left the band in 1980 for religious reasons. She insisted those accounts are false. “I left because it was time for me to grow,” she said.⁵⁰

Still, the fact that Prince was surrounded by so many people who were or later became Christians is quite interesting. Chapman even believed God led her to work with Prince. Before meeting him, she claimed she heard a voice “from the sky” informing her that he needed a band. “It was a spiritual experience,” she said.⁵¹

There are other coincidences. After leaving Prince’s girl group Vanity 6, Denise Matthews gave up her “Vanity” persona and committed her life to ministry until

her death in 2016.⁵² Prince's bodyguard "Big Chick" Huntsberry also became an evangelist after leaving Prince's camp.⁵³ Additionally, Prince's protégé, Sheila E., embraced religion later in life.⁵⁴ The transformations within Dickerson, Matthews, Huntsberry, and Sheila E. bear a resemblance to Prince's own spiritual rebirth years later. As a Jehovah's Witness, Prince stopped performing much of the old material against which Dickerson protested.

Prince's explicit content was also criticized outside of his inner circle. In a 1984 interview with *People* magazine, Minnesota minister, Dan Peters of the interdenominational Zion Christian Center in North St. Paul, called Prince "the filthiest rock 'n' roller ever to prance across the stage."⁵⁵ Miami religious leaders were also displeased with Prince because he performed one of his "sexually provocative" *Purple Rain* concerts on Easter Sunday in Miami's Orange Bowl.⁵⁶ Even Little Richard, who left rock-and-roll for the ministry, weighed in. At the MTV premiere of *Purple Rain*, he arrived with two gifts for Prince: A Bible with Prince's name on it, and a book called "Steps to Christ."⁵⁷

Perhaps more significant than Christians in his band or outside criticism was the presence of Prince's father, who had returned to Prince's life after a period of estrangement. According to Roy Bennett and Jill Jones, John L. Nelson was very religious.⁵⁸ In the past, he had scolded Prince for his explicit lyrics. Prince may have embraced religion, or at the very least *appeared* to embrace religion to please his father.

Prince's press agent, Howard Bloom, did not believe Prince was trying to please his father as much as he was *becoming* his father, literally and figuratively. Bloom felt Prince was subscribing to that which he had been rebelling against since his *Dirty Mind* period: conformity; social norms; sexual inhibition; and censorship. He did not interpret Prince's transformation as a religious conversion, but a common maturation phase that everyone experiences, to some degree, in their lives. "My guess is that he was not ideological about any specific religion at all," Bloom said.⁵⁹

Prince's one-time music collaborator, Chris Moon, asked, "What are the two strongest forces that people will mostly connect with?"

It's their religion and their sexuality, and if you harvest those strong emotions with song and music, you have more of a pipeline into the subconscious of the individual. ... Think about it, after you've done a marketing campaign based on sexuality, what's the one group of people you know you don't have?⁶⁰

Rice strongly disagrees with the idea that Prince's "God segments" during the *Purple Rain* tour were just for entertainment or marketing purposes. "I think there is a struggle [between the sacred and profane] and it was never for show," he said.⁶¹ "He made decisions based on voices that came from God," said press agent Robyn Riggs, who admitted to spinning those decisions to the media so Prince wouldn't appear "quirky and odd."⁶²

According to Rice, Prince believed in a higher power but was not "religious" at that time. "I think he was a spiritual person," he said. "He hadn't found [a religion] to speak to him." Prince's engineer, Chuck Zwicky, said, "When I looked at what Prince's spirituality was, I kinda saw it as a combination of just a standard, American, God-fearing sort of Christianity, and his own mix of feeling a divine inspiration and attributing it to what he calls God."⁶³

Rice said he had spiritual conversations with Prince "all the time."⁶⁴ "If something bad would happen, he would ask, 'Do you think that's a sign from God?'" Rice said. "We had conversations about 'Should we stop this?' or 'Should I stop this?'"⁶⁵

On the other hand, Zwicky said he and Prince never had those conversations. However, Zwicky said he knew Prince opened up about God to some of the women he dated. "They didn't particularly like his mentioning God and being spiritual because they thought he was kind of hypocritical," Zwicky said.⁶⁶

Though just a friend, Carole Davis witnessed that contradiction in Prince's behavior when she began spending time with him in the mid-1980s. "Prince was a hyper-religious person and a non-conventional religious person in the sense that he cherry-picked what he liked about religion for his purposes and rejected

things that he didn't like," she said. "It excited him to shock and provoke; it was his way of getting attention. But he knew that it was inappropriate from a religious standpoint."⁶⁷

Like Rice, Davis had conversations with Prince about religion even though she was an atheist: "Every fight we ever had was about God, his non-belief in science, and his rigid and naïve belief that everything is exactly like it says in the Bible."⁶⁸

There is a theory that Prince was doing more to present *himself* as a God, rather than convert people to Christianity. Though he believed Prince was genuine in his exaltation of God, Bennett saw that Prince, himself, had become a God-figure. "Basically, if you're a rock star or pop star that is of that caliber and that level, you can control your audience," he said. "He started to realize the power that he had."⁶⁹

Rupert Till devoted a scholarly article to this topic: "The Personality Cult of Prince: Purple Rain, Sex and the Sacred, and the Implicit Religion Surrounding a Popular Icon." Till wrote, "Prince uses techniques used by religions to create an onstage character that is godlike in that it engenders worship from his fans."⁷⁰ Additionally, like Moon, Till believed Prince's approach to performing was merely a calculated way to attract audiences.⁷¹

In the past, journalists had acknowledged Prince's combination of the sacred and profane in his music, but they either did not believe he was religious or did not seem interested in discussing his faith. However, during the *Purple Rain* era, they began reporting on his religion. For example, *Ebony* magazine's Lynn Norment wrote, "Those close to Prince emphasize that he is very religious and credits his success to God."⁷²

When *Rolling Stone* editors put Prince on the cover for the second time on August 30, 1984, they positioned him as a religious man and devoted a whole section to exploring his faith. Kurt Loder interviewed Prince's associates about Prince's religion: "The strange dichotomy between Prince's compulsive carnality and his spiritual yearnings apparently isn't puzzling to those who've gotten close to him."⁷³

Though journalists reported Prince was a religious man, they seemed less certain about the authenticity of his struggle with the sacred and profane, as portrayed on the *Purple Rain* tour. For example, in a concert review for *Rolling Stone*, writer Christopher Connelly relayed some of Prince's spiritual dialogue but did not provide a detailed analysis.⁷⁴ *Ebony* magazine did not elaborate on Prince's internal struggle; writer Lynn Norment just chalked Prince's sermons and conversations with God up to his uniqueness as a performer.⁷⁵

The *Los Angeles Times*' music editor Robert Hilburn decided Prince was trying to sustain his reputation as a rebel rather than communicate a real internal struggle.⁷⁶ The *Los Angeles Times*' Richard Cromelin recognized that Prince was expressing a "struggle of spirit versus flesh," but did not say whether or not he took the struggle seriously.⁷⁷ The *New York Times*' music journalist Robert Palmer was more dismissive, calling Prince's sermons and conversations with God "quasi-philosophic aphorisms."⁷⁸ He did not go into further detail.

Prince, of course, did not respond to the media's comments about his religion. He was avoiding interviews. Like many of Prince's friends and associates, journalists were left to draw their own conclusions.

During the *Purple Rain* era, Prince seemed to be moving more toward Christian ideology in his music. In his *Purple Rain* tour performances, he showed the transition as necessary, but difficult; he had begun to view the sacred and profane as opposing forces, yet he likely understood that his lasciviousness had played a role in his rise to superstardom. Only Prince could confirm whether he truly was a religious man who battled an internal struggle between sex and spirituality offstage—there is evidence, including testimonials, to support both sides.

Erica Thompson is an assistant editor at *Columbus Alive*, a weekly arts and community magazine serving central Ohio. She recently received a 2017 Ohio Excellence in Journalism award from the Press Club of Cleveland for her reporting. Her articles have appeared in *Billboard* magazine and on Billboard.com. She also wrote for *Sister 2 Sister* magazine before the publication folded in 2014. She has interviewed numerous high-profile celebrities such as Wyclef Jean, Dionne Warwick, Larry Graham, Anthony Hamilton, Chilli, and Monica. A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Thompson has a Master's degree in journalism from Ohio University's acclaimed E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, where she completed her thesis on Prince. She presented the first phase of her research on Prince's spirituality (1958-1988) at "Purple Reign: An interdisciplinary conference on the life and legacy of Prince" at the University of Salford, UK, in May 2017.

Notes

¹*Prince and the Revolution Live*. Performed March 30, 1985. Syracuse, NY: Warner Music Video, 1985. Videocassette (VHS), 1 hour, 56 min.

²*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

³Lynn Norment, "Ebony Interview with Prince," *Ebony*, July 1986, 32; Robert J. McNamara, "Prince dominates sales," *Rolling Stone*, October 11, 1984; The *Purple Rain* soundtrack album went on to sell thirteen million copies in the U.S. "Purple Rain (Soundtrack)," accessed February 19, 2011, RIAA <https://bit.ly/2BGC9PX>.

⁴"He's really happy now," said Prince's protégé Sheila E., in a *Rolling Stone* article. "He's been working for a long time, and he's very happy that finally it's his turn." Kurt Loder, "Sheila E.: Prince's Latest Protégé Discovers that Life can be Quite Glamorous," *Rolling Stone*, September 12, 1984, 41.

⁵Rupert Till, "The Personality Cult of Prince: Purple Rain, Sex and the Sacred, and the Implicit Religion Surrounding a Popular Icon," *Implicit Religion* 13, no. 2 (2010), accessed March 25, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1558/imre.v13i2.141>.

⁶Davin Seay and Mary Neely, *Stairway to Heaven: The Spiritual Roots of Rock 'n' Roll—from the King and Little Richard to Prince and Amy Grant*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 97.

⁷Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 332.

⁸Adam Gussow, "Ain't No Burnin' Hell: Southern Religion and the Devil's Music," *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 41, no. 2 (2010): 85; Teresa L. Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 6.

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¹⁰Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 514, 517.

¹¹Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 90.

¹²Gussow, "Ain't No Burnin' Hell," 83.

¹⁵Charles White, *The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Authorised Biography*, 3rd ed. (London: Omnibus Press, 2003); Al Green and Davin Seay, *Take Me To The River* (New York: HarperEntertainment, 2000); David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye*, First Da Capo Edition. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1991).

¹⁶Martin Keller, "Portrait of The Artist as a Native Son," *Minnesota Monthly*, March 1997, n.p.

¹⁷Prince and the Revolution, "Let's Go Crazy," on *Purple Rain*, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1984, CD.

¹⁸"Chris Rock The Artist Interview," YouTube video, 13:35, from an interview televised by VH1, posted by "egoggles," August 7, 2011, <https://bit.ly/2Ph69XB> (accessed March 25, 2014).

¹⁹Prince and the Revolution, "Let's Go Crazy."

²⁰Prince and the Revolution, "I Would Die 4 U," on *Purple Rain*, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1984, CD.

²¹*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

²²Kurt Loder, "Prince Reigns," *Rolling Stone*, August 30, 1984, 47.

²³Prince and the Revolution, liner notes, "Computer Blue," on *Purple Rain*, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1984, CD.

²⁴Prince and the Revolution, liner notes, "Computer Blue."

²⁵*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

²⁶Prince and the Revolution, "Purple Rain," on *Purple Rain*, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1984, CD.

²⁷*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

²⁸Alan Leeds, liner notes, *Prince: The Hits/The B Sides*, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1993, CD.

²⁹Prince and the Revolution, "Erotic City," *Prince: The Hits/The B Sides*, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1993, CD.

²⁸Prince and the Revolution, "When Doves Cry/17 Days," Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1984, vinyl recording.

²⁸Loder, "Prince Reigns," 47.

³⁰Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

³¹*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

³²*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

³³*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

³⁴*Prince and the Revolution Live*.

³⁵Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

³⁶Richard Cromelin, "For Prince's Concert, It's a Reign of Rock," *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1985, I1, 10.

³⁷Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

³⁸Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

³⁹Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

⁴⁰Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

⁴¹Jill Jones, phone conversation with author, July 25, 2013.

⁴²Don Keith, phone conversation with author, November 1, 2012.

⁴³Christopher Connelly, "You Saw the Movie, Don't Miss Him Live," *Rolling Stone*, January 17, 1985, 34.

⁴⁴Michael Goldberg, "Prince Plans to Take a Break from Touring," *Rolling Stone*, May 9, 1985, 10.

⁴⁵Goldberg, "Prince Plans.,"; Christopher Connelly, "Prince In Minnesota: Home For The Holidays," *Rolling Stone* (February 14, 1985), 12.

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⁴⁷Devin Devasquez, phone conversation with author, May 2, 2016.

⁴⁸Craig Rice, phone conversation with author, July 1, 2014.

⁴⁹Dez Dickerson, *My Time With Prince* (Nashville: Pavilion Press, 2003), 199.

⁵⁰Gayle Chapman, phone conversation with author, December 16, 2010.

⁵¹Gayle Chapman, phone conversation with author, December 16, 2010.

⁵²"Vanity Denise Matthews Inside Edition Interview 1993," YouTube video, 4:03, posted by "segapink," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1r-jOyE66U> (accessed December 14, 2013).

⁵³David Fricke, "Meltdown in Minneapolis," *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1990, 20.

⁵⁴Sheila E. and Wendy Holden, *The Beat of My Own Drum* (New York: Atria Books, 2014), 258.

⁵⁵Barbara Graustark, "Prince's Purple Rain," *People*, November 19, 1984, n.p.

⁵⁶Robert Hilburn, "A Prince Surprise on 'World' LP," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1985, 5.

⁵⁷"MTV Premiere Party," *Purple Rain Two-Disc Special Edition*, DVD (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2004).

⁵⁸Jill Jones, phone conversation with author, July 25, 2013; Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

⁵⁹Howard Bloom, interview by author, Brooklyn, NY, July 3, 2011.

⁶⁰Chris Moon, phone conversation with author, July 24, 2013.

⁶¹Craig Rice, phone conversation with author, July 1, 2014.

⁶²Robyn Riggs, phone conversation with author, December 7, 2016.

⁶³Chuck Zwicky, phone conversation with author, April 29, 2016.

⁶⁴Craig Rice, phone conversation with author, July 1, 2014

⁶⁵Craig Rice, phone conversation with author, July 1, 2014

⁶⁶Chuck Zwicky, phone conversation with author, April 29, 2016.

⁶⁷Carole Davis, phone conversation with author, May 14, 2016.

⁶⁸Carole Davis, phone conversation with author, May 14, 2016.

⁶⁹Roy Bennett, phone conversation with author, August 15, 2013.

⁷⁰Till, "The Personality Cult," 153.

⁷¹Till, "The Personality Cult," 155.

⁷²Lynn Norment, "Prince: What is the Secret of His Amazing Success?," *Ebony*, June 1985, 163-164.

⁷³Loder, "Prince Reigns," 47.

⁷⁴Connelly, "You saw the Movie, Don't Miss Him Live," 33.

⁷⁵Norment, "Prince: What is the Secret of His Amazing Success?," 164, 166.

⁷⁶Robert Hilburn, "Prince Revs 'Em Up in a Cold Motor City," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1984, 7.

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⁷⁸Robert Palmer, "Rock: Prince at the Nassau Coliseum," *New York Times*, March 19, 1985, C12.

I Am Fine: Eschatology in Prince's 1999 and Purple Rain

Chris Johnson

Editor's Note: Chris Johnson gave this paper to the presenters from United Theological Seminary at the University of Minnesota Symposium for the Theology of Prince. We welcome its inclusion, although we do not have an abstract or biography of Chris Johnson.

Hello, how R U?
I'm fine, 'cause I know that the Lord is coming soon,
Coming, coming soon....

—Prince, in the backward outro to
"Darling Nikki" on *Purple Rain*

The political climate in the U.S. was full of tension at the outset of the 1980s. The Cold War with the Soviet Union was still raging, and new President Ronald Reagan was developing a nuclear satellite platform, code-named "Star Wars." The threat of nuclear war was real; everyone felt it, including young Minneapolis musician, Prince Rogers Nelson. A song on his 1981 album *Controversy* stood out as a punk-rock plea for diplomacy: "Ronnie, talk 2 Russia before it's too late / Before they blow up the world."¹ It was a plea amidst great political tension, through which a spiritual struggle was born in Prince's psyche.

Prince had been raised according to the strict Christian doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventists. If indeed the End were near, that meant the impending return of the

Messiah. In the short term, though, it meant seizing the day, making the most of whatever time was left on Earth. As such, Prince was moved to express both spiritual and sexual freedom in his work. The lyric, "If I gotta die / I'm gonna listen to my body tonight,"² expresses this freedom.

This paper will explore a three-year period in Prince's career saturated with eschatological images and themes that explore the concept of the End Times and the ultimate destiny of humankind. This eschatology, which is heightened by the political *zeitgeist*, is marked by both spiritual and sexual undertones, illustrating Prince's personal belief that sex and faith are not mutually exclusive concepts, and should not be treated as such. Through an examination of two of his albums, *1999* (1982) and *Purple Rain* (1984), as well as a couple other songs recorded during this period, I will attempt to clarify Prince's personal vision of the End of Days.

Sometime in the summer of 1982, Prince saw a program about the year 2000 possibly being the end of the world.³ That became synonymous in his mind with the nuclear paranoia of the 1980s. Looking seventeen years into the future, he perhaps asked himself, "Is the world actually going to end when 1999 becomes 2000? What do you do, then? What do you think about in those last moments?" The song "1999" is Prince's response to those questions.

In the song, he talks about the coming apocalypse, and the sky being purple, which is a mixture of the sky's normal blue color with the red of human blood. People are running everywhere, fleeing chaos and destruction. Prince, meanwhile, wants to focus on dancing, making love and making the most of the time he has left on Earth. He tells us, "If U didn't come 2 party / Don't bother knockin' on my door."⁴ Literally, this means, "Don't come to my party if you're going to drag my energy down." More abstractly, it implies, "Don't associate with me if you're not going to live to your fullest potential (as I am)."

Even God seems to endorse this message in the song's intro: "Don't worry, I won't hurt U / I only want U 2 have some fun."⁵ Part of the "fun" being talked about has to do with the concepts of sexual freedom and liberation. Is Prince using the notion of the End Times as a way to reconcile sex and spirituality within his own mind?

There's a sense of urgency when one speaks about the End Times: there is only so much time to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh before it's time to go. For some, the act of sex itself is spiritual in nature: the union of bodies in the physical realm translates to the union of souls in the spiritual realm.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Prince ends three of his most hypersexual songs of the early 1980s—"Let's Pretend We're Married" (1982), "Darling Nikki," (1984), and "Temptation" (1985)—with references to God or Jesus. All three songs deal with intense, promiscuous sexual encounters, yet all three have outros exploring Christian concepts: a love for God in the face of death, finding comfort in the knowledge of Christ's Second Coming, and being forgiven by God for being lustful.

One of the songs that best illustrates the interplay between sex and faith in Prince's work is the opening track of *Purple Rain*, "Let's Go Crazy" (1984). The song, which echoes the *carpe diem* message of "1999," begins with a pseudo-sermon about the difficulty of life, and a description of the Afterworld: "A world of never-ending happiness / U can always see the sun, day and night,"⁶ and be relieved of worldly troubles. In the second verse, this pleasant vision of Heaven is seemingly contradicted by the lyric, "When we [die] / what's it all for? / U better live now / Before the grim reaper comes knockin' on your door."⁷ Although it may seem as if Prince is questioning the existence or incentive of the Afterworld, he is actually giving merit to a life well-lived while acknowledging the ultimate goal of entering the Afterworld—Heaven does exist, and it's great, but life is great, too, while it lasts.

Prince revealed in a 1997 television interview that the words "let's go crazy" were code for God, and "de-elevator" was a code word for the devil.⁸ So, "Let's go crazy!" means, *Let's embrace God!* and the lyric, "Are we gonna let de-elevator bring us down? / Oh no, let's go!" means, "Are we gonna let the devil drag us down? / Oh no, let's turn to God!"⁹

A large part of Prince's vision of the End Times is founded upon God's status as Creator and Master of everything, and also Jesus Christ's status as the Messiah and Savior of humankind. Together with the Holy Spirit, these two figures make

up the Holy Trinity, of which Prince takes on the narrative voice in the song, "I Would Die 4 U," also on the *Purple Rain* album. If the lyrics to each verse are closely read, one can see that the points of view shift from God to Jesus to the Holy Spirit, respectively.

In the first verse, Prince sings, "I'm not a woman, I'm not a man / I am something that you'll never understand."¹⁰ God exists beyond gender, and even beyond human understanding. So, Prince has taken on the narrative voice of God in this verse. In the second verse, he sings, "I'm your Messiah, and you're the reason why..."¹¹ Here, Prince has taken the point of view of Christ (this is made all the more evident when comparing the lyrics to live performances of the song, where Prince sang in the third-person: "He's your Messiah..."¹² In the third verse, he sings, "I'm your conscience / I am love." Love and consciousness are more so abstract, elemental constructs than tangible, physical ones. In this context, their presence is spiritual. So, it is very likely Prince has taken on the voice of the Holy Spirit in this verse.

Another aspect of the End of Days according to Prince is the salvation of the soul prior to ascending into Heaven, which is discussed in "The Ladder" from *Around the World in A Day* (1985). "The steps U take are no easy road," Prince admits in the chorus. "But the reward is great / 4 those who want 2 go."¹³ In other words, the path to salvation is difficult, but the end result is well worth the struggles experienced. And what is at the top of the ladder? "Purple Rain."

Earlier, it was established that purple is the color of the apocalypse. Rain is the dispersion of water, and in the Bible, it symbolizes the concepts of destruction and renewal (think the Great Flood and the rite of baptism). "Purple Rain," then, can be seen as a metaphorical renewal or rebirth of the soul upon the coming of the apocalypse—a sort of preparatory cleansing of sin from the soul before its ascent into Heaven.

As the 1980s wore on, Prince's spirituality evolved as the urgency of an impending end gradually gave way to a peaceful sense of trust between himself and God. Indeed, after Reagan left office and the Cold War ended, nuclear paranoia vanished from Prince's music. But the musician was still a believer, and still focused on

spreading the message of love for God and hope for a blissful afterlife.

Following a great spiritual crisis brought on by the death of his infant son and the dissolution of his first marriage, the turn of the millennium saw him officially baptized by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, an apocalyptic-Christian sect sharing common threads with the Seventh-day Adventists of his childhood. His renewed faith seemed to bring with it a sense of confidence, as Prince had appeared to finally find the path to “The Ladder,” the salvation of his soul. He exuded this confidence even to the very end of his life.

Prince’s final single, the soulful mid-tempo track “Free Urself,” (2015) harkens back to the days when he would look at the present as an indicator of the future. It shows an older, wiser man who is at peace with his destiny. Even as he affirms that life is short and the planet is only our temporary home, he reminds us not to be afraid. He tells us, “There’s nothing left 2 fear / No need 2 hide or run / Heaven on Earth’s right here.”¹⁴ We don’t have to wait for the Afterworld; we can find bliss right here in the Now, if we choose to look for it.

Notes

¹Prince, “Ronnie Talk 2 Russia,” on *Controversy*, Warner Brothers, 1981, vinyl recording.

²Prince, “1999,” on *1999*, Warner Brothers, 1982, vinyl recording.

³Prince, interview by Larry King, December 10, 1999. accessed April 4, 2018, <https://cnn.it/2B1Z0XY>.

⁴Prince, “1999.”

⁵Prince, “1999.”

⁶Prince, “Let’s Go Crazy,” on *Purple Rain*, Warner Brothers, 1984, vinyl recording.

⁷Prince, “Let’s Go Crazy.”

⁸“VH1 to One: d.” VH1 to One. Dir. Bill Flanagan. Viacom Productions, 1997.

⁹Prince, “Let’s Go Crazy.”

¹⁰Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 U,” on *Purple Rain*, Warner Brothers, 1984, vinyl recording.

¹¹Prince and the Revolution, “I Would Die 4 You.”

¹²Emphasis is mine.

¹³Prince and the Revolution, “The Ladder,” on *Around the World in a Day*, Warner Brothers, 1985, vinyl recording.

¹⁴Prince, “Free Urself,” NPG Records, 2015, vinyl recording.

Following Jesus, Finding the Muse: The Gospel According to Prince

Fred Shaheen

Editor's Note: Prince's music and performances have always drawn on elements of his religious background, specifically that of Bible-based Christianity. Throughout his career, he was never hesitant to express those beliefs through his songs, although there were times when his zeal was more pronounced than others. However important religious faith was to Prince, he ultimately saw the drive to create music as an even higher power. In his last few years, his passion for God may [have] gone unexpressed, but Prince's fervor for music as the Highest Power of all burned strong till the very end.

The voice inside tells u when there is a song 2 be born.

—Prince, from a poem printed
in the *Diamonds and Pearls*
and *Act 1* Tour Programs

Amidst the guitar feedback and squealing synth effects of "Cybersingle," Prince steals a play from Jimi Hendrix's repertoire and spits out the lines, "Purple haze, Jesus saves" in an ominous, electronically altered voice. The track, released in 2000, remains a largely forgettable musical excursion; however, it demonstrates a motif that recurs throughout the artist's catalogue. "Cybersingle" is one of a number of songs in his astoundingly vast repertoire that addresses conventional pop music themes within the framework of his religious background, specifically biblical Christianity. On this, Prince's first Internet-only release, the topic is the dissemination of music in the digital age, and he references both Jimi *and* Jesus with equal aplomb. Examining his 38-year recording career, we see that even when Prince presented himself as a sexual libertine, his lyrics and images were rooted in his

Christian upbringing. His belief in God may have colored his work, but ultimately for Prince, artistic expression—specifically, making music—is what drove it. For Prince, music *was* religion. And though he would so often use biblical images and language in his writing, this artist ultimately saw musical creativity as the Highest Power.

The Woman Who Invented the Kiss

Christian themes such as temptation, redemption, and spiritual deliverance are addressed in "Thunder," the opening track of *Diamonds and Pearls* (1991). A bombastic Eastern-flavored rock number, "Thunder" tells of a dark night of the soul that leads to a spiritual revelation. At the song's climax, the identity of the expected messiah is ambiguous. Despite a "promise 2 see Jesus in the morning light," the epiphany is sparked by the presence of someone else: a woman whose kiss runs through his veins, and who claims "only the children born of me will remain."

Prince had spoken before about such a real-life epiphany, in oblique terms, explaining his decision not to release *The Black Album* in 1987.¹ Some of his associates had credited a spiritual awakening in him to Ingrid Chavez, the poet-songwriter who co-starred in *Graffiti Bridge* and whose album Prince produced in 1991. Allegedly, she and Prince met at Rupert's, a nightclub in Minneapolis, about one week before the slated release of *The Black Album*;² they had a long conversation about God, after which Prince saw clearly what the direction of his next album should be.³ Other associates claim Prince's "conversion" was nothing more than the result of his being frightened by a bad ecstasy trip.⁴

Regardless, those close to him noticed a change in his outlook. Says former tour manager and president of Paisley Park Records, Alan Leeds, "This is a guy who had an awakening and made a major decision that he was gonna change his focus..."⁵ He goes on to say that after Prince canceled the release of *The Black Album* and began work on *Lovesexy*, "His attitude in the studio changed. It was joyous music and he enjoyed making it." Significantly, then, a spiritual

revelation—perhaps even a religious epiphany—signals a major change in Prince’s attitude about creating his art. Religious conviction often alters a person’s behavior or how they relate to others. With Prince, the change was most evident in the thing he held most sacred of all: the way he made music.

From Revelation...to Exodus

Prince’s use of biblical language and metaphors is best illustrated by “7” on *Diamonds and Pearls* (1992), which borrows phrases from the Book of Revelation: “We will see a plague and a river of blood / ... There will be a new city with streets of gold.” In the song, Prince positions himself and his love interest, Princess Mayte, against those who would separate them from one another, and he justifies their love⁶ and their victory using apocalyptic imagery.

Artwork and lyrics from the New Power Generation’s *Exodus* (1995) draw on another Scriptural parallel, the delivery by God of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity. The epigram “The Exodus Has Begun,” with which NPG Records was launched in 1994, aligns Prince, who at the time had been struggling to free himself from his contract with Warner Brothers, with God’s chosen people more than 3000 years ago. Reinforcing a similar idea on “Undisputed” from *Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic* (1999), Prince claims he does not follow trends, “... they just follow me / Just like the Israelites through the Red Sea.”

On *The Rainbow Children* (2001), which along with *Lovesexy* (1988), is his most overtly religious album, Prince tells a parable about The Wise One, his woman, and a covenant with God that was broken when the woman was deceived by the Resistor. The narrative, which employs Watchtower terminology such as “new translation” and “accurate knowledge,” has been widely interpreted to signify Prince’s conversion to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, with the “Banished Ones” being anyone who did not follow those specific doctrines. In the tale, “[the woman] and five others were banished from the Rainbow... forever.” Another interpretation is that this story is about Prince the *artist* and *musician*, his broken marriage to Mayte, and his conflict with Warner Brothers, the latter having occupied much of his creative energy in the 1990s.⁷ “The Rainbow Children,” then, can represent

either the followers of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ doctrine, or more likely, Prince and those who support his vision of musical freedom and artistic independence. The ambiguity opens it up to both interpretations—religious doctrine *and* artistic expression—and reinforces that the creation of his art was sacrosanct to Prince.

Welcome 2 the Dawn

The symbol he adopted as his name in 1993 hints at the nature of Prince’s own religious beliefs, particularly his eschatological expectations. Born Prince Rogers Nelson in 1958, raised a Seventh-day Adventist, and later a Jehovah’s Witness, the artist famously stopped using his given name professionally but instead adopted a symbol that had no pronunciation. The figure that cuts across the middle of Prince’s name/symbol looks like a horn and suggests the inauguration of the Last Judgement from the Book of Revelation. The epilogue to Prince’s film *3 Chains O’ Gold* (1994) states that the name change anticipates a period when “all will have no spoken name, to differentiate the Ineffable One who shall remain.” The unpronounceable aspect of his name, then, is an act of self-negation on the part of Prince that mirrors that of the poet Dante before God: the hyper-prolific creator is transformed into a name that makes no sound but can only be expressed visually.

And yet Prince never stopped recording, nor did he slow down after he changed his name. He would claim that “Prince” retired in 1993; then later he would state, “Prince is dead; long live the New Power Generation.”⁸ Even with his identity subsumed into the NPG, as a band or as a collective, Prince the artist remained as hyper-creative as ever. After changing his name, he continued to seek out inspiration and to discover new ways of getting his music into the hands of people who wanted to hear it.⁹ And yet all of this—the retirement of “Prince,” the name change—had been presented under the guise of a spiritual revelation.¹⁰

In 1996, the same year he was granted freedom from Warner Brothers, Prince launched a website called *The Dawn*, the purpose of which was to introduce new music from *Emancipation*. A term that had been incorporated into his work since 1984,¹¹ “The Dawn” has a variety of connotations: the end of the world, spiritu-

al fulfillment and, most important to Prince, artistic freedom. That he associated “The Dawn” so closely with his independence from Warner Brothers suggests that since the completion of his contract in 1996, *The Dawn* was a state of present reality for Prince. Once given total artistic freedom to record and release what he wanted, whenever he wanted—and most importantly, to retain ownership of his creation—he could now claim with absolute surety that what had been an expectation was right here, right now.¹²

Controversy

Prince’s songs have always explored beauty, physical attraction, and human sexuality. Early on, the juxtaposition in his work of the sexual and spiritual was fraught with tension. In later years, Prince seemed to come to terms with the coexistence of matters of the flesh and of faith. As he phrased it in “My Name Is Prince,” the opening track from *Symbol* (1992), “I’ve got 2 sides and they’re both friends.”

From the start, Prince had grappled with duality—male/female, black/white, sophisticated/streetwise (see *Under the Cherry Moon*), and perhaps, most important, sacred/profane. It is a tension that has often fueled his work (see “Temptation” (1985)). After becoming a Jehovah’s Witness in 2001, Prince would edit certain songs that were sexually explicit and he stopped performing others altogether. He also quit using profanity on stage. Still, he never completely gave in to any one side of the duality, but only covered up the “dirty” parts. Attempts made to definitively resolve that tension seemed perfunctory and lasted only until his next project. For example, take the transition from the spiritual parable of *Graffiti Bridge* (1990), the film Prince has called “the purest thing he has ever done,”¹³ to the lascivious, *Caligula*-inspired clip for “Gett Off,” the preview single from *Diamonds and Pearls* (1991).

Prince, who had always toyed with opposites, and seemed to even revel in the tension, was ultimately unwilling to forsake one side purely and definitively for the other. For this musician who answered ultimately to his artistic muse, what he has called “the voice inside,” it would always be both sides at the same time.

Throughout his career, Prince never hesitated to exploit the multiplicity of his stage persona. His songs courted ambiguity and provoked thought; they merged issues of sexuality and spirituality and often blurred any distinction. The title track to *Controversy* (1981) addressed issues of sexuality and race in a provocative, albeit cursory manner. Most significant is that the song’s elastic groove culminates in a purely solemn recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, and that becomes the album’s definitive statement: if the world is a battlefield between conflicting ideologies,¹⁴ then only prayer—specifically the way Jesus taught in Scripture—offers resolution.

In “Sexuality,” from the same album, Prince shocked listeners by equating sexual liberation with the Second Coming. But in the song, he also called for leaders who could effectively inculcate into young America the values of love and acceptance. Anyone who has watched a daytime talk show within the last twenty years would be struck by the astute accuracy of the song’s lyrics: “Don’t let your children watch television until they know how to read / or else all they’ll know how to do is cuss, fight and breed.” With Prince, the opposition between the spirit and the flesh, often seen as a dichotomy in the Christian faith, finds resolution only in the artist’s unwillingness to choose one side over the other.

The quest for salvation in the face of overwhelming loneliness, desolation, and temptation is a theme Prince developed most fully on *Lovesexy* (1988). In “Anna Stesia,” the album’s centerpiece, he implores an apparition to “Come to me, ravish me / liberate my mind.” Before the end, he recants and calls out to Jesus by name. The song’s coda, surely one of the most thrilling musical moments in Prince’s catalogue, features a crescendo of electric guitar bursts, a pummeling beat, and a hypnotic refrain of “Love is God, God is Love / Girls and Boys love God above.” During concerts on the *Lovesexy* Tour, “Anna Stesia” would conclude the first set featuring his more sexually-charged material. Prince would tell audiences that he performed those songs “because you expected me to.” Then following an interlude, he would play the new songs from *Lovesexy*, prefacing the second set by saying, “but this is where it’s at!”

Prince's religious practice, specifically prayer, was such that he didn't hesitate to share it with band members and associates. Trumpeter "Atlanta Bliss" (Matt Blistan) recalls how before each performance, Prince would summon the band into his dressing room and lead them in prayer together: "We would always pray for a safe performance and to positively touch lives through our music." He called Prince's religious conviction "very strong" and said he felt "honored to share his faith with him."¹⁵ It is telling that Prince would allow something so deeply personal as his religious faith to shape the way he expressed himself artistically: on record, on stage, and through his interaction with other musicians.

Girls & Boys

In 1996, shortly after his marriage to Mayte Garcia, Prince revealed to Oprah Winfrey in a televised interview that a therapy session had uncovered in him two distinct personalities. The bombshell was that, according to Prince, professionals had been unable to determine the sex of the other person. That piece of news confirmed what had been apparent to listeners of his music for years: that Prince identified with both the masculine and feminine sides of his persona. Prince's music, along with how he presented himself on stage, in videos and in photos, had always balanced rock-star machismo with intuitive vulnerability. His symbol took its visual shape largely from a combination of the biological symbols for male and female, which had been part of his iconography since the early 1980s, years before he adopted it as his professional moniker.

"If I Was Your Girlfriend" (1987) might be the most incisive and intriguing tackling of male/female opposition ever in a pop song. It uncovers a startling level of emotional maturity on Prince's part even as it flirts with provocation. In the song, Prince, singing in a positively girlish voice,¹⁶ asks his lover why it is difficult for them to experience the same closeness she has with her best girlfriend. The song does not suggest a desire to experience a *ménage à trois*, or to become a woman. A man merely wants to be able to relate to his lover as fully and completely as possible, with increased intimacy, unencumbered by the politics of gender. To be sure, the performance toys with misunderstanding and flirts with the listener's sensibilities. But once the veil of ambiguity lifts, what is revealed is the expression

of a deeply personal sentiment rarely explored in popular songs. Significantly, after having scored a major multi-format hit with the title track, Prince elected to have "If I Was Your Girlfriend" released as the second single from *Sign 'O' The Times* against the advice of his management and associates;¹⁷ it proved to be too quirky for its own good and its chart failure even sabotaged the momentum of the album. Although it flopped as a single, "If I Was Your Girlfriend" has proven to be one of the most enduring numbers in Prince's catalogue.

Do U Believe in God?

There is a scene in *Under the Cherry Moon* (1986), Prince's second feature film—and his first as director—in which "Tricky" (Jerome Benton) asks "Christopher" (Prince) a sobering question over lunch. The pair had been hustling rich women in the South of France when Christopher begins to get serious with Mary Sharon, a multi-million-dollar heiress; her above-the-law father is powerful enough to have both Tricky and Christopher disappear without a trace. "Are you afraid to die?" Tricky asks. "I ain't afraid to die," Chris responds with a cocksure expression. Then, shoving a forkful of food into his mouth, "I ain't afraid of shit!" Suddenly, Tricky looks up from the table in the café as his eyes widen with horror. "Well...are you afraid of bats?" he adds. Chris turns around and looks up as the scene cuts to a nest of oversized bats hanging in a corner of the café's beamed ceiling. "Ahhh-hhh!" Christopher bellows in fright as he, Tricky, and a hundred or so café patrons scramble for the exit with their heads lowered. The frantic scene is straight out of Looney Toons—and the moment is pure Prince: at the precise point where a too-serious dialogue could sabotage the narrative's momentum, he inserts comic relief with a striking playfulness and unique brand of cartoon fun. It is the cinematic equivalent of Prince's impassioned assertion to his beloved in "Adore" that so crucial is his condition that it wouldn't matter if she "burn up my clothes, smash up my ride," and then—on a dime—reconsidering the part about his car: "well, maybe not the ride." *Under the Cherry Moon* was deemed a critical failure upon its release in 1986; yet it is difficult to deny Prince's ability to check the serious elements of his art with a sense humor, an extraordinary feature of some of his best recordings, rearing its goofy head right here.

The discussion in the café scene about life, death, and the eternity of love is ultimately a theological one. “Are you afraid to die,” really asks, “Do you believe in God?” What his character in *Cherry Moon* believes about God speaks volumes about Prince’s own convictions. As a creative person who consistently claimed his songwriting and musical abilities were a gift, Prince expressed his most intimately held beliefs about life, love, death, and God most definitively through his art. If you want to know Prince, the Theologian; then listen to Prince, the songwriter, musician, and performer. In that, we glean from him a theology that is rooted in Bible-based Christianity and disarmingly naïve: “God made you / God made me / He made us all equally,” he sings in “God,” the B-side of “Purple Rain” (1984), sounding like a lesson from the pages of a Sunday-School primer. On the *Lovesexy* album and in the tour program, Prince acknowledges the dark side of his persona and calls it “Spooky Electric,” a name that evokes Darth Vader more than it does Satan. And during the “Conversation with God” segment of concerts from the *Purple Rain* Tour, he defends his bawdy material and stage act in a mock confrontation with the Almighty: “We’re just trying to have a good time!” and then recants: “I’ll be good, I promise.”¹⁸

But of course, nothing changed the next night; or the next tour, album, or video. Ultimately, we get the impression that, although he was a person with strong religious convictions, Prince’s , or rather, Highest Power, was his music; the one thing in which he was absolutely fearless. Prince was possibly the bravest, most gutsy musical artist who ever achieved mass popularity. So confident was he in his ability to create something new and exciting, so prolific in his vision and its execution, that he routinely forsook record sales and commercial potential in favor of simply getting his latest work out as quickly as possible. “I don’t think he had any fear,” said Mo Ostin, former CEO of Warner Brothers Records, of Prince.¹⁹ According to Alan Leeds, for Prince, music was something akin to a newspaper: it was relevant for a very brief time, as long as it was fresh and current, after which the creator needed to move on to the next thing; another day, another batch of songs.²⁰ “How long can you keep creating? How many songs will you record?” asked a stunned Oprah Winfrey after Prince revealed that he had some one-thousand songs already recorded that were as-yet unreleased. “Hopefully, one a day till I die,” he

responded, sounding at once sheepish and utterly confident.²¹

The Bravest Artist Ever Sold

In 1984, *Purple Rain* occupied the top spot on the *Billboard*® charts for nearly six months straight. That summer, “When Doves Cry,” “Let’s Go Crazy,” and “Purple Rain” dominated the airwaves of Middle America; Prince graduated from artist-on-the-verge to bona fide superstar. Prince reacted to *Purple Rain*’s success by doing what he always did: he ignored *Billboard*® and made the record he heard in his head. Not only did he purposefully avoid repeating himself, but he didn’t wait to see what would happen with *Purple Rain* before completing the follow-up.

Where his former records, especially 1999 and *Purple Rain*, had been focused and sure-footed, *Around the World* sounded like a murky, free-floating pastiche. Experimentation continued on *Parade* (1986), his third outing with The Revolution. Despite generating a couple of hit singles (“Raspberry Beret” and “Kiss”), both albums were seen as relative commercial disappointments.

Around the World in a Day, released on April 22, 1985, represents the most paradigmatic move of Prince’s career. At the height of *Purple-Rain*-mania, pitching such a musical curveball reinforced Prince’s determination to follow his singular vision and not pander to the expectations of a fickle music audience. His doggedness to produce the unexpected first emerged in 1980 and became his *modus operandi*. He scored a major hit with “I Wanna Be Your Lover” from his second album. Following that, Prince turned in a batch of sexually explicit, New-Wave-tinged demos as his third record (*Dirty Mind* (1980)), leaving his management and record label the task of figuring out how to market it. The biggest hit of his career, “When Doves Cry,” managed to top *Billboard*’s Pop, Black, and Dance charts simultaneously despite Prince’s having excised its bass line at the eleventh hour. And in 1987, he opted not to release a new record (*The Black Album*) after enough excitement had been drummed up by the media to ensure a commercial hit.

Within the canon of popular music, Prince’s place as both a supreme musical innovator and a warrior for creative freedom is forever fixed. More so than any of

his contemporaries, Prince was willing to risk anything for the sake of a musical challenge and the discovery of something new. His vow in 1998 to re-record all of his Warner Brothers albums sounded absurd to many, yet in that determination, we realized just how seriously Prince regarded the sanctity of the relationship between a creator and his art.²²

Between 1993 and 2000, when he had adopted an unpronounceable name, “The Artist” became the media’s preferred shorthand for “the Artist Formerly Known as Prince.” Calling Prince “The Artist,” we could apply anything written or said about him to “the artist” in an abstract, idealized sense of the word. The boldness of that association isn’t accidental or misplaced. “The Artist” fits him perfectly. Rare is the musician who can scale the heights of pop stardom seemingly at will; yet confident enough in his art to trust solely, without question or hesitation, his own vision.

Welcome Home, Class

Although Prince never shied away from addressing his religious beliefs in his songs, there were periods in which his fervor for the faith seemed more pronounced. In the latter part of the 1990s, after being introduced to the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses via one of his musical heroes, Larry Graham, and certainly after his conversion in 2001, Prince routinely incorporated those specific beliefs into song lyrics. “S.S.T.,” (2005), for example, a benefit single for Hurricane Katrina relief, mentions calling God by His name as opposed to “confusing” Him with a Trinity. It became routine for him to give “All praise and glory 2 the Most High—Jehovah” in album credits.²³

Oddly, there is nary a mention of God, Jesus, or religious faith of any kind on Prince’s last four albums, *Plectrum Electrum* (2014), *Art Official Age* (2014), *HITnRUN Phase One* (2015), and *HITnRUN Phase Two* (2015). In “Way Back Home,” the centerpiece of *Art Official Age*, the lyrics suggest that he has arrived at a long-sought-after destination and finally achieved peace. He confesses what it is like to be Prince: his bed is made up at night, he says, “because in my dreams I roam.” Now, however, he is no longer wandering; nor does he feel like a separate

entity from anything or anyone around him. It is a remarkable sentiment and one Prince had rarely, if ever, expressed with such conviction. In that resolution, paradoxically, God is most apparent in his absence. *Art Official Age* is arguably the strongest album, the most focused musically and lyrically, that Prince made in his later years. And while it was not the last collection of songs he recorded, it ends on a note that feels definitive and final. Especially in “Way Back Home,” listeners are left with the impression that, after this, there is nowhere else to go.

In the spring of 2015, Prince wrote and recorded “Baltimore” in response to two separate, well-publicized incidents in which a young black man died while in police custody.²⁴ The song was also included on *HITnRUN Phase Two* as the lead track. Whereas in 1981, Prince addressed social conflicts and offered prayer as the definitive answer, he now seemed to be questioning everything. “Does anybody hear us pray?” he asks, and it sounds not like the proclamation of a convicted believer, but rather like the reasoning of one who is not so sure anymore. If the answer could no longer be found in his religious faith, Prince did not hesitate to offer listeners a glimmer of hope in the thing that always mattered most: “It’s time to hear the guitar play,” he sings before launching into the song’s muscular, majestic lead line.

Epilogue: In Love There Is No Death

Prince died unexpectedly at his home in Chanhassen, a suburb of Minneapolis, on April 21, 2016. That morning was a cold and rainy one. As soon as the news of Prince’s death broke, folks began gathering outside Paisley Park to mourn, to seek comfort in each another, and to pay tribute to their hero. Soon, small crowds turned into droves, with long lines of people standing outside for hours, putting their flowers, cards, and other souvenirs on the fence outside Paisley Park. By afternoon, the sun had come out and a perfect rainbow appeared over the masses convened outside the fence. The scene bore an uncanny resemblance to the inside cover of *Around the World in a Day*. And in that multi-hued image, a sea of heartbroken fans, reeling from the news, were given the encouraging sign of a

covenant made and a promise kept.

Some zealous fans have speculated on the significance of the date of Prince's passing, showing how numbers can add up to seven, a favorite of his; or seeing it as some variation on "3121." These sound like attempts to find continuity between Prince's art and his death, perhaps some permanence, something more than coincidence. It is difficult to argue any of these points seriously. And yet, since his death, "Sometimes It Snows in April," a deep album cut from *Parade* (1986), has come to be regarded alongside the best-known hits in Prince's catalogue. The song is a meditation on the death of a friend: "Tracy died..." And much like Prince himself, this friend was anything but ordinary: "Those kind of cars don't pass you every day." Was "Sometimes It Snows in April" purely a work of fiction? Who was it about? "Tracy" is understood to refer to Prince's character in *Under the Cherry Moon* ("Christopher Tracy"); it is the same who dies at the end of the movie, after which "Sometimes It Snows in April" plays somberly. With this song, Prince is finally the *cineaste par excellence*: he writes a character and casts himself to play the role; then with an intimate band of his closest collaborators²⁵—and significantly on April 21, 1985—he eulogizes himself in a song. The closing track of *Parade*, Prince's third and final album with the Revolution, captures brilliantly that which his foray into motion pictures never could.

Art often mirrors life. Curiously, sometimes the inverse is true as well. "Sometimes It Snows in April" is the sound of art anticipating life by precisely thirty-one years.

FRED SHAHEEN

The Very Reverend Father Fred Shaheen was born in Toledo, Ohio.

He received his B.A. (1995) and M.A. (1997) both in English Literature from University of Toledo. In 2002, he received his M.Div. from St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. Fred was ordained to the Holy Priesthood in 2004 and elevated to the dignity of Archpriest in 2014. He currently lives in Iowa with his wife, Michelle, and their five children. He has been the pastor of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Cedar Rapids since 2006. In 2010, he contributed an essay to the collection, *Arab Americans in Toledo* (University of Toledo Press). Fred has been an avid Prince enthusiast since 1982. Over the years he has seen Prince perform fifteen times, the most recent of which was an intimate show at Paisley Park six months before the artist's death.

Notes

¹Neal Karlen, "Prince Talks," *Rolling Stone*, October 18, 1990. accessed January 30, 2018, <https://rol.st/2MnOdfO>.

²The original title of the album was *The Funk Bible*.

³Per Nilsen, *Dance Music Sex Romance—Prince: The First Decade* (London: Firefly, 1999), 247.

⁴Per Nilsen and Joozt Mattheij, *The Vault: The Definitive Guide to the Musical World of Prince* (Uptown: Linghem, 2004), 87.

⁵Alex Hahn, *Possessed: The Rise and Fall of Prince* (New York: Billboard, 2003), 124.

⁶In the tale, Princess Mayte is allegedly sixteen-years-old.

⁷Following this interpretation, the "five others" represent the five major record label families: WEA, CBS, MCA, Capitol, and Polygram.

⁸Mayte speaks the phrase in Spanish between "Endorphinmachine" and "Shhh" on *The Gold Experience* (1995).

⁹*Glam Slam Ulysses* (1993), an interactive musical, and the *Interactive* CD-ROM (1994) are two early examples of Prince using alternative methods to getting his new music aired.

¹⁰Prince and Mayte's Wedding Program featured on *The Dawn* website and in the credits to *Kamasutra*, relate a story of Prince's changing his name "on the advice of his spirit."

¹¹"May U Live 2 See the Dawn" closes the credits of *Purple Rain*, both album and film.

¹²"Welcome 2 the Dawn" first appeared in album credits in 1994. After being released from his Warner Brothers contract, Prince recorded a song with that title and released it on *The Truth* (1997).

¹³Karlen, "Prince Talks."

¹⁴The print-ad for *Controversy* stated it was "a musical outrage and a sincere statement of opposing views from Prince."

¹⁵Matt Blistan, emailed to author, February 1, 2018.

¹⁶The voice, used on numerous Prince recordings, was an electronically-altered affectation credited to "Camille."

¹⁷Alan Leeds has said, "Prince ultimately chose the singles. He'd solicit opinions...but at the end of the day, he called the shots," accessed January 1 30, 2018, <http://prince.org/msg/7/171968>.

¹⁸A similar exchange appears in the coda of "Temptation" (1985), the closing track of *Around the World in a Day*.

¹⁹Jem Aswad, "Former Warner Brothers' CEO Mo Ostin Recalls His Long Relationship with Prince: 'He Was a Fearless Artist,'" *Billboard*, April 26, 2016. accessed January 24, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Mv8D5T>

²⁰Alan Leeds, "R.I.P. To My Friend Prince: A Requiem from His Longtime Tour Manager," *Cuepoint*, April 24, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2vSu3jU>.

²¹*The Oprah Winfrey Show* (original air date November 21, 1996).

²²The purpose of re-recording his work was to retain ownership of the masters.

²³This phrasing appears in the credits of the physical CD booklet of *3121* (2006) and the electronic booklet of *Planet Earth* (2007).

²⁴Michael Brown (died 2014) and Freddie Gray (died 2015) are both named in the lyrics.

²⁵The album version of the song features Prince accompanied only by Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman.

Dancing before the Prince of Peace
to the Sound of Prince:
“Working” toward the Integration of Spirituality
and Sexuality within a Worshipping Community
Alisha Michelle Tatem

Abstract: Dance has been a form of expressing one’s religious beliefs since the beginning of time and has been evident within the history of Jewish-Christianity. However, due to dualistic understandings of the body/mind/soul, dance has also been denigrated within Western Christianity. Furthermore, this disembodied spirituality has impacted how worshipping communities within the West have viewed sexuality. Given the pop icon Prince’s ability to fuse spiritual and sexual themes within his music, it is my intention to explore how the inclusion of his music within a liturgical dance repertoire of music could foster a holistic understanding of oneself and a deepening appreciation and integration of sexuality and spirituality within a worshipping community.

My first encounter with Prince’s music was on MTV. Every Saturday my brothers and I would watch hours of music videos, learning the new dances and hearing the latest songs. At the time when MTV first came out in the 1980s, only a few black artists that were featured; so my brothers and I as black kids growing up in an all-white suburb were hungry to see brown faces in-between the white sea of artists. Among the handful of featured black artists, Michael Jackson and Prince were two of the most prominent. While Michael had an innocence about his style and music—that you would not mind your parents who were devout Christians walking into the room to hear you listening to—Prince, on the other hand, would probably cause a stir. Prince was known for his racy clothes, lyrics, and dancing.

Rupert Till in his article, “The Personality Cult of Prince: Purple Rain, Sex and the Sacred, and the Implicit Religion Surrounding a Popular Icon,” makes the claim that Prince “consciously adopted an overt sexuality as a deliberate marketing ploy,” knowing that sex would sell.¹ However, Prince also infused his work with themes of spirituality, making references to Jesus and the crucifixion on songs like “4 The Tears in Your Eyes” and “The Cross.”²

Given Prince’s propensity to fuse spiritual and sexual themes within his music, in this article I will explore how the inclusion of Prince’s music within a liturgical dance repertoire of music could foster conversation and a deepening appreciation and integration of sexuality and spirituality within a worshipping community. I will begin this discussion by briefly outlining a major contention within the church regarding dance, followed by a re-framing of liturgical dance, using Nadine Graves concept of “working it out.” I will conclude this essay with a consideration of how ministering to Prince’s song, “Anna Stesia,” can assist a worshipping community in working towards wholeness and an integration of sexuality and spirituality.

Facing the Opposition to Dance within the Church

Liturgical dance scholars and practitioners acknowledge that the Bible and Jewish-Christianity are replete with examples of dancing; from the children of Israel being led in dance by Miriam after the Exodus to the early church dancing in processions, during the singing of hymns in worship, or at festivals. However, throughout the church’s history, there has always been a segment of the church that has been cautious and/or vehemently opposed to the inclusion of dance in worship.

In his book, *Liturgical Dance: An Historical, Theological and Practical Handbook*, J. G. Davies begins his discussion of the history of liturgical dance in the church by examining the condemnation of dance from the patristic period up until the twentieth century, noting opposers of dance viewed dancing as idolatrous, lewd, pagan, and anti-intellectual. Davies observes that these views were not representative of the Jewish-Christian scriptures. He states,

This negative attitude is all the more surprising because there is nothing in the New Testament to compel rejection of dancing and there are numerous examples in the Old Testament to encourage it. Some explanation is imperative and it is to be sought in the culture of the patristic period. Christianity is never indifferent to a prevailing culture: at one extreme it can conform to it and at the other it may reject it. Dance in the early days of the church was embedded in the culture of the Roman empire and reflected the spirit of that age—as it does in any age—and to that extent the nascent religion tended to oppose it.³

In an effort to distinguish themselves from the culture of the Roman empire, the early church fathers took on a more ascetic lifestyle and began to view the body as in conflict with the soul; therefore, in order for there to be spiritual progress, the body and its pleasures and even needs had to be under restraint.⁴

To further the denigration of the physical, in the Enlightenment period, the church in the West integrated Rene Descartes' ideal that "the way to truth is exclusively through pure reason," leading to a divorcing of the body and mind.⁵ This increasing split between the body and soul, and the body and mind shaped how Christians came to experience God in worship and live out their faith. Davies comments that from the patristic period into the twentieth century, "Worship shifts increasingly from active physical participation—as in dancing—to contemplative looking-on, and towards a conscious meditative internalization which excludes physical activity and renders it unnecessary. Dance was then denigrated as something to give up as one advanced and became more civilized."⁶

Liturgical Dance as Worship and Work

As one can see, the increasing split between the body, soul, and mind impacted the view and inclusion of liturgical dance within the walls and worship life of the church. However, I would argue that the split between body/soul/mind and the ensuing severing of our spirituality from our sexuality within worshipping communities can be remedied through liturgical dance. In order for this to occur, it is important for us to gain a broader understanding of what liturgical dance is.

The etymology of the word liturgy or liturgical comes from the Greek words *laos* (people) and *ergon* (work), leading us to define liturgy in its literal sense as the work of the people. In a faith context, the liturgy represents the order of the worship service, or the work entered into by the people to create an atmosphere of worship and to thereby worship God through invocation, song, offering, preaching, etc.

Liturgical dance, as a part of the worship service, is a stylized, **expressive**, and meaningful pattern of bodily movement that communicates stories, feelings, and ideas as it relates to an individual's or faith communities' relationship with the Divine and one another. This type of dance is about the work of the gathered people, the work of the dancers, the work of the community in service to God and God's work in them. Stephanie Scott, in her article exploring liturgical dance as a language in African American worship, states that liturgical dance "gives testimony to God's work in the life of the dancer (and the faith community) and the dancer's work in service to God" and the larger community.⁷ The work embedded in liturgical dance is not only about worship of and communication with God, or testimony about God's work in the life of a community, but the work can also be broadened to include working something out in order to bring about healing and wholeness within the worshipping community.

In *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out*, Nadine George-Graves studies the work of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (the founder and choreographer of Urban Bush Women) and the Urban Bush Women dance troupe. Throughout the book, she describes the ways in which the choreography assists in helping the dancers and the audiences work through social issues such as racism, gender, and politics. Nadine suggests that dance serves as a mechanism to open up dialogue about these social anxieties. She states,

Performing artists can speak politically or socially and culturally in a way that no others can. Black female herbalist healers are also called root workers because they take what nature provides and work it into healing substances. I argue that dance, particularly the

work of Urban Bush Women, has a metaphorically similar impact. When we talk about healing, we talk in terms of the body—illness, health, scars, fitness, et cetera. We also talk in terms of the soul—spiritual and emotional wellbeing. Likewise, the dances of Urban Bush Women attend to the bodies and souls of individuals and communities. Healing happens when one works the roots, works the body, works the soul, works the tangles out.⁸

This concept of “working it out” can also be applied to liturgical dance. The question that must be explored is, “What is being “worked out” through the dance, in the community, in the dancer, with God?” And the question we are considering in this discussion is how can issues of sexuality and spirituality be worked out in worship through dance, leading to greater integration.

Moving Towards an Integration of Sexuality and Spirituality

J. G. Davies in his continuing discussion about the history of liturgical and sexuality states that Christian worship is concerned with bringing “human beings to wholeness.” Therefore, worship and different forms of worship such as liturgical dance “should be a medium for them to come to terms with their sexuality and integrate it within a physical spiritual unity.”⁹ Unfortunately, the history of liturgical dance within the church has been wrought with controversy because of the erotic nature of dance, and the dualistic philosophies that shape our understanding of our bodies.

Joy R. Bostic, author and associate professor of religious studies, contends, “In contemporary culture, many Christians continue to believe that bodies and human sexuality are at war with whom Christians aspire to be spiritually.”¹⁰ In an effort to dispel these beliefs both Bostic and Davies reframe our understanding of the erotic by lifting up the Greek origins of Eros. Eros refers to “divine love and also to human love for God. To behave in an erotic fashion meant to conduct oneself lovingly.”¹¹ Furthermore, Eros is the energy that affirms, celebrates, and perpetuates life even in the midst of tragedy, death, and the complexities of life. It is this

energy that gives way to creativity, passion, and connection.¹² Eros is the energy that cascades through a dancer’s body, igniting her to leap or swirl, and it also is the energy that magnetizes two lovers to one another.

The Song of Solomon is a biblical image of the erotic love experienced by the Beloved and her Lover. Miguel A. De Le Torre in *Lily Amongst Thorns* writes of this narrative:

No other biblical book better exemplifies the celebration of sexual pleasure than the erotic poetry known as the Song of Songs. Contrary to the “pleasure as sin” mentality prevailing in the development of Christianity, the Song is unique because it vividly describes sexual yearning, refuting the prevalent fear of desire. Here, sex is not reduced to the singular act of copulation, but encompasses the pleasure and passion that build toward a final release.¹³

This love poem not only speaks of the sexual relationship between two lovers but it has also come to represent God’s relationship with Israel, and God’s relationship with the church.¹⁴ All throughout the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, God’s relationship with God’s people is described in covenantal language and likened to a marital union. In the New Testament Jesus is described as the groom and the church as his bride, revealing God’s desire to be one with God’s creation. Miguel De Le Torre believes that given God’s desire to be one with us, human sexuality “becomes the means by which to understand the mystery of our oneness with God.”¹⁵ If we agree that human sexuality is the means by which we understand this oneness with God mystery, it becomes clear why God is concerned with how we express our love and sexuality in all of our relationships.

Mark Yarhouse in *Sexuality and Sex Therapy: A Christian Appraisal* contends that the purpose of sex and human sexuality is manifold. He highlights the traditional view of sex as necessary for procreation, and also a gift from God to unite a couple in marital union. But he also goes on to state that an additional purpose of sex might include “gratification or pleasure associated with sexual intimacy” that

leads to “increased emotional closeness.” He also considers sex as enlightening when it comes to humans understanding our “longing for completion in another” which reveals how we have been created in God’s image, as relational beings.¹⁶

Yarhouse affirms that “as we experience that longing, we experience a desire that is only incompletely met in relationship with others, including those with whom we are sexually intimate.”¹⁷ Because this longing can never be fully met solely in relation to another human being, we must turn to the source of this longing and desire, which is God. This search or mutual pursuing of a relationship and experience of God, the divine, or transcendence is the hallmark of our spiritual journey.

From a Christian perspective, this journey is about moving towards a deeper love of God and humanity, and this love requires that our heart, mind, soul, and bodies be engaged.¹⁸ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon in their book *Urgings of the Heart* state, “A spirituality that neglects the body, as if it were of no importance in our love life with God and others, fosters in us a dualistic split that undermines our spiritual growth.”¹⁹

Dancing to Prince’s “Anna Stesia”

In order for us to grow spiritually with integrity and wholeness, we must bring to our worship experiences all the bodily experiences, feelings, angst, frustrations, doubts, joys, sorrows, and pains before God. Paul admonishes believers in the book of Romans: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” (Rom. 12:1 NASB) Hence, when liturgical dancers are preparing to minister and invite the congregation into worship, they must minister to songs or scriptures that encapsulate the full reality of our human experiences before God.

Rosalie Braningan, a certified director of music in the United Methodist Church, also suggests that, along with the music we choose, our choreography must express the breadth and depth of our existences:

Dance choreography does not have to be pretty or sweet. In fact, in worship it should never be either. Our lives run the gamut from extreme love and joy to rejection, despair, and death. All of these experiences are present in the worshiping community on any given Sunday. While we may express beauty or happiness, we do not have the right to trivialize any emotion. Observing how real people move when experiencing intense feelings can bring to choreography an authenticity to which people of all ages will respond.²⁰

Therefore, liturgical dancers should have a holistic view of the human experience, including spirituality and sexuality, when considering the music and choreography.

One of the many songs in Prince’s canon of music that explores the complexities of sexuality, human relationships, experiences of loneliness, and the longing for love is the song “Anna Stesia.” This song is on his 1988 album *Lovesexy*, which is filled with songs about love, sex, and relationships. The title of the song “Anna Stesia” is a play on the word ‘anesthesia’, which is an insensitivity to pain once a drug or another substance has been applied to a person’s body. Usually, an anesthesia is used to numb an area that will be worked on during surgery. Outside of its medical usage though, individuals can consume other substances, activities, or even relationships to suppress emotional, mental, or spiritual anguish. Given the themes that run throughout this album, one can conclude that sex, might be the channel that has been selected to quell the pain of loneliness. Prince starts the song by asking the listener: “Have you ever been so lonely / That you felt like you were the only one in this world? / Have you ever wanted to play with someone so much / You’d take any one boy or girl?”

These opening lines give voice to the desire to be in an intimate relationship and the tendency for our desire to turn into desperation when our desires for intimacy go unfulfilled. The loneliness that ensues can lead us to be indiscriminate with whom we enter into a relationship, sexual or otherwise, and foster misuse and

even abuse of our sexuality.

In the next lines, we see that Anna Stesia is summoned to assuage this loneliness and provide an escape.

Anna Stesia come to me, talk to me, ravish me
Liberate my mind
Tell me what you think of me, praise me, craze me
Out this space and time

Between white and black, night and day
Black night seemed like the only way
So I danced
Music late, nothing great
No way to differentiate
I took a chance

Gregory looks just like a ghost
Then a beautiful girl the most
Wets her lips to say
We could live for a little while
If you could just learn to smile
You and I could fly away, fly away

One would think flying away would have been the option that the character in the song chooses, but instead of flying away with the beautiful woman there is an unexpected turn—a turn that suggests the desire to re-order one's love:

Maybe, maybe, maybe I could learn to love
I mean the right way, I mean the only way
Perhaps you could show me, baby ...
Maybe, maybe, maybe I could learn to love
Ah, if I was just closer to somethin'
Closer to your higher self? I don't know

Closer to heaven? Maybe
Closer to God, yeah, closer to God.

In this verse, Prince sings about a search for love and loving the right way. At first, he is not sure what is necessary, what he needs to approach to learn this love, but then he finds himself in a progression: closer to a higher self, closer to heaven, and then closer to God. Miguel De Le Torre would define Prince's turn and search to the "right way" of loving as *orthoeros*. "Correct erotic sex, *orthoeros*, occurs in a familial relationship of love and commitment, vigilant against any suffering of other due to that relationship. *Orthoreros* focus is on strengthening, securing, and supporting a mutually giving and vulnerable familial relationship. This familial relationship is not so much a set of rules but a way of being."²¹ This way of being is predicated upon us feeling loved by God, knowing and loving ourselves, and then being able to share that love with others.²²

After recognizing that correct love begins in God, in the final verses, Prince cries out to the Lord to save him:

Save me Lord, I've been a fool
How could I forget you are the rule
You are my God
I am Your child, oh yes I am Your child
From now on, I shall be wild
I shall be quick, I shall be strong
I'll tell Your story no matter how long
No matter, no matter, yeah

We're just a play in Your master plan
Now, my Lord, I understand
Love is God, God is love
Girls and boys love God above.

The salvation of which Prince sings is not from a life on earth, or from his bodily experiences or feelings, but this salvation is ultimately about his identity and purpose, which ultimately is what wholeness is about. Au and Cannon

describe wholeness as having a “wholehearted commitment to always being on the way rather than having it all together. A whole person values consciousness and is committed to being aware and reflective about how his or her actions, thoughts and feelings affect the life of love.”²³ In this song, the character comes to this consciousness and recognizes how his actions have been foolish; but more important, he begins to understand himself as God’s child with a purpose to demonstrate and spread a message of God’s love to others.

Conclusion

What makes Prince’s song, “Anna Stesia,” instructive in the integration of spirituality and sexuality, is he takes you through a process from loneliness to wholeness. He is honest and authentic about his feelings and his actions. In a lot of ways, Prince is like the Psalmist David, who often bore his soul to the Lord, sparing no emotions. This transparency usually led to clarity about where God is in the midst of our human experiences of joy, pain, love, suffering, passion, sickness, pleasure.

In my opinion, what takes a liturgical dance from being a nice addition to the worship service to a ministry that gives way for reflection and further conversation is the depth of its authenticity and relevancy to people’s lived realities. If the song that is being danced reflects life in its rawest form, people are more ready to connect to the emotions and stories reflected in the song and dance. I believe this authenticity and transparency about where one is on their spiritual journey as it relates to their sexuality are what Prince’s music can offer any faith community that embraces liturgical dance and views this form of worship as a way to bring about wholeness and integration of one’s spirituality and sexuality.

ALISHA MICHELLE TATEM

Alisha Michelle Tatem was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania to Pastor Melvin and Minister Jacqueline Tatem. In 2004 she attended Messiah College where she received her Bachelor’s degree in Social Work. After graduating from college, she accepted her call into the ministry and began working with the youth and women’s ministry at Grace Deliverance Baptist Church, located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. While in Pennsylvania she served as a conference speaker, teacher, child development partner with Early Head Start and founder/coordinator of a creative arts summer program for young people. In May 2006 she was licensed to preach and the following year she moved to Decatur, Georgia to attend Columbia Theological Seminary for further ministerial preparation. In 2010, Alisha graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree and went on to work as a chaplain at Emory University Hospital. She was ordained as an Elder at Grace Church International and served as the Christian Formation and Discipleship Director, as well as a counselor at the Care and Counseling Center of Georgia. In 2015 Alisha was awarded a fellowship through the Forum for Theological Exploration in order to work on her doctoral dissertation, which focuses on the impact stereotypes have on African American women, and how being a part of a liturgical dance group can help African American women create more holistic identity narratives. As she works on her dissertation, Alisha is also serving as a chaplain in a long-term care community in Reading, PA.

Notes

¹Rupert Till, "The Personality Cult of Prince: Purple Rain, Sex and the Sacred, and the Implicit Religion Surrounding a Popular Icon." *Implicit Religion* 13, no. 2 (July 1, 2010):145, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1558/imre.v13i2.141>.

²Till, "The Personality Cult of Prince," 142.

³J. G. Davies, *Liturgical Dance: An Historical, Theological and Practical Handbook* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1984), 22.

⁴Davies, *Liturgical Dance*, 24-25.

⁵Davies, *Liturgical Dance*, 33.

⁶Davies, *Liturgical Dance*, 33.

⁷Stephanie Scott, "The Language of Liturgical Dance in African American Christian Worship," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 27, no. 1-2 (September 1, 1999): 250.

⁸Nadine George-Graves, *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out*, Studies in Dance History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 3.

⁹Davies, *Liturgical Dance*, 107.

¹⁰Joy Bostic, "Flesh That Dances: A Theology of Sexuality and the Spirit in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" in *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires and Sexuality in Christianity*, ed. Margaret D. Kamitsuku (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 288.

¹¹Davies, *Liturgical Dance*, 102.

¹²Joy Bostic, "Flesh That Dances," 280, 294.

¹³Miguel A. De La Torre, *Lily Amongst Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexuality* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 59.

¹⁴De La Torre, *Lily Amongst Thorns*, 60.

¹⁵De La Torre, *Lily Amongst Thorns*, 65.

¹⁶Mark A. Yarhouse, *Sexuality and Sex Therapy: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 34.

¹⁷Yarhouse, *Sexuality and Sex Therapy*, 34.

¹⁸Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 12.

¹⁹Au and Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 117.

²⁰Rosalie Bent Branigan, "Movement and Dance in Ministry and Worship," *Liturgy* 22, no. 4, (August 23, 2007):35, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/04580630701551347>.

²¹De La Torre, *Lily Amongst Thorns*, 59.

²²Au and Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 117.

²³Au and Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 8.

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Between Communism and Kabbalah:
The Theological-Political Prince
Elliot A. Ratzman

Abstract: Prince's few references to politics revolve around explicit—and cryptic—references to Communism and the Cold War. This paper traces those references, showing how they track trends in his own theological conceptions of technology, nature, the just social order, and the possible dystopia. In Prince's corpus, dualisms of politics and theology are related but fail to adequately resolve themselves. This paper also suggests that concepts from Jewish thought can help illuminate a resolution of the theological-political tensions in Prince, as well as reframe Prince's own play with letters, names, and transformative visions.

Prince. The Revolution. The New Power Generation.

These are political names.

Signs 'O' the Times. Controversy. Chaos and Disorder.

These are both political and religious references.

In Touré's fine study of Prince, *I Would Die 4 U*, the author insists that Prince can be explained by a generational shift in the understanding of marriage: namely, divorce.¹ While this is a fruitful lens from which to see Prince's art and his own early biography, equally compelling generational phenomena helps us understand the shift of some theological themes in Prince's art: the threat of nuclear war and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Prince's early period—roughly from 1980 to the late 1990s—can be read through shifting theological and political themes, images, and logics. Here we see in stark relief the utopias that Prince's art suggests: the dystopian possibilities and the temptations that lie between as motivated, in part, by Cold War anxieties—a certain reading of Soviet modernism reflected in Prince's theological canvas.

In what follows, I will show how Prince's theological imagination is partially informed by this cluster of concerns emerging from the end of the Cold War. While the relationship of sex and sensuality to salvation and theology has been often noted in commentaries, I will suggest we can see a theological-political logic in Prince, that with the aid of certain Jewish theological concepts, can help illuminate some of the implicit logic of Prince's lyrical imagery.

The Last Temptations of Communism

Prince's early music, from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, has several distinct political points that, if threaded together, form a picture of a particular stance toward Communism as Prince understood it.

Beginning with *Controversy*'s "Ronnie Talk to Russia" (1981), Prince explicit comments on politics are confined to the Soviet Union. Prince urges the newly elected US president, Ronald Reagan, to "Talk to Russia / Before it's too late / Before they blow up the world." Another stanza asserts that it is "left wing guerillas" who "want to blow up the world."

While it is not evident to whom the "left-wing guerillas" Prince is referring—the phrase seems to be deployed to pun on the word "gorillas," as to "not feed" them—it may be that news headlines around 1979 and 1980 refer to the various Latin American guerillas—such as in Columbia, El Salvador, and Guatemala—that the Reagan administration would target. Alternatively, European Marxist organizations, like the Red Army Faction, were active and in the news in the late 1970s. In any case, Prince's lyrics do not seem to be sympathetic to what the left would see as "liberation movements" in Latin America, or the perceived belligerence of the incoming Reagan administration. One might imagine that Prince could ask

Ronnie "not" to blow up the world, seeing Reagan as holding the power to blow up the world, rather than to talk reason with the Russians.

Two years later, Prince's "1999" (1982) paints a well-known vision of partying in the face of nuclear destruction: "But when I woke up this morning I could have sworn it was judgment day / The sky was all purple / There were people runnin' everywhere / Tryin' to run from the destruction / And you know I didn't even care." The association of nuclear war with the Christian apocalypse (judgment day) has been commented on before.² "War is all around us, my mind says prepare to fight," but for Prince, instead of fight, "I'm gonna listen to my body tonight."

Communism is explicitly referenced once again in "America" (1985): "Communism is just a word / But if the government turn over / It'll be the only word that's heard." While some have taken this lyric as ironic, the surrounding lines are more ambiguous. For example: "Little sister making minimum wage / Living in a one room jungle-monkey cage / Can't get over, she's almost dead / She may not be in the black / But she's happy she ain't in the red." While Prince will also punctuate songs with concerns for people, specifically Black Americans—plagued by poverty, ghettos, addiction, and violence—this last line submits that even though "Little sister" is poor, it is better than being in the "unfree" situation of "being in the red": a play on being in debt or living under Communism. While one might interpret this as a sophisticated commentary on "false consciousness" of Black Americans resisting left-wing ideas, other verses do not share the same irony: "Nothing made Jimmy proud / Now Jimmy lives on a mushroom cloud" is a reiteration of the fear of nuclear death, only framed as a rejection of the virtues of America.

While this reading requires us to interpret an unironic voice in "America," I do not think this forces Prince into the position of being read as a hopeless reactionary and an American patriot. Communism seems to be a stand-in for a set of symbols both political and theological.

The most striking reference to Communism, however, is, surprisingly, in the *Batman Soundtrack* (1989). Here "The Future," the album's first track, is an

interpretive key to the categories with which Prince is wrestling in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *The Batman Soundtrack* and its accompanying videos proffer a symbolic dualism, first promoted by the neo-gothic Batman of the 1980s, but picked up and repurposed by Prince through the film. Batman and the Joker were, according to one reading of Frank Miller and Alan Moore's 1980s work, two expressions of the same symptoms: mutations of urban decline and rampant injustice with its corresponding individual pathologies.³ Tim Burton's *Batman*, while extending this dynamic, that both Batman and the Joker are dangerous and disturbed, also hearkens back to a hypermodernist urban scene.

Prince, by portraying himself as both Batman and the Joker in the "Batdance" video, plays on this tension and makes of it a political-theological twist. The theological is the echo of the good/evil dynamic—that there is in each the temptation of villainy and the possibility of heroism. Prince's Joker is not only a "Partyman" but also a symptom of Gotham—The Modern City, as such, gone awry—an urban nightmare that produces its own deeply disturbed hero: Batman.

The danger of unchecked modernism is signaled by Prince's song "The Future," an ironic song where he sings, "I've seen the future and it will be / I've seen the future and it works." The future "will be" can be taken as the inevitable march of technology. But the future "works" is profoundly ironic. The phrase "I've seen the future and it works" is a quote made famous by liberal journalist Lincoln Steffens regarding the Soviet Union. Steffens visited the Soviet Union in 1919, shown a highly deceptive "Potemkin village" version of Soviet society and publicly praised Communist achievements. The Soviets brought "fellow travelers" through the Soviet Union to demonstrate the superiority of the Soviet system.⁴ Steffens reporting that the Soviet Union was "the future" and that "it works" is now repurposed by Prince, referring to the technologically monstrous future. Lyrics evoking drugs and urban violence, paired with the joyless, robotic drums in "The Future" punctuates this point.

Let me review Prince's political conception of Communism. Communism is world-destroying, threatening, a realm of unfreedom. Communism is homogenizing ("the only word that's heard"). Communism is the society of

technological danger—the future society that is soulless, loveless, of imposed conformity. It is, as Cold War propaganda would have it: Godless.

While Prince is no political theorist, and though his reference to the obscure Lincoln Steffens quote is impressive, what Communism means to Prince is crucial to his political theology: how he imagines proper social arrangements.

The Organic and Orgasmic Utopia

Cornel West has asserted that Prince "promotes and encouraged an orgiastic way of life in which sex is an opiate of the people."⁵

West's dismissive assessment of Prince is accomplished by punning on the early Karl Marx's famous quote about religion being "the opiate of the people." Yet West puts his finger on an important dynamic running through Prince's early lyrics. Namely, that sex/sensuality is a dangerous drug, but a religious recasting of sex/sensuality can mitigate the harm resulting from the taboo, the sinful, and the transgressive. Prince's lyrics too hold up as the enemy to a certain conception of Communism—a sort of technology of unfreedom—which too is an addiction.

West's evocation of addiction is in contrast to Prince's repeated disavowal of drugs, of images of addiction as signs of decline, despair, and death. West's argument that Prince's (alleged) vision is a sort of nihilism elides a subtle reading of Prince's actual vision of social harmony.

Prince's image of utopia differs sharply from, say, the utopian imagination of rap, which pictures materialist excesses of conquest and consumption—"Big Pimping"—as the desired social order. While Prince's lyrics do not shy from the sensual, rarely are visions of material excess in effect. Consider "Glam Slam" (1988) where Prince insists "We need a power structure that breeds production / Instead of jacks who vandalize." This new "power structure" replaces a city of violence (Detroit) and its attendant drug use, gangs, and crime. On "Graffiti Bridge" (1991) we hear "let democracy take you higher."

What's needed in this fallen urban world? A "love that's gonna last" ("Little Red Corvette" (1982)) and "New world needs spiritually / That will last" ("The Future" (1989)). If Communism is godless—technologically sterile, sensually soulless, constraining and violent—Prince's social vision is the opposite: "Love and honesty, peace and harmony" ("Positivity" (1987)) and a multicolored utopian Eden of "Paisley Park" (1984): "The girl on the seesaw is laughing / For love is the color / This place imparts (Paisley Park) / Admission is easy, just say you / Believe and come to this / Place in your heart."

Prince's utopian imagery is fairly conventional. Humans desire transcendence, which can only come through love and God and a turning of the heart. Alongside the appeals to transcendence via triumphalist Protestant Christian and Seventh-day Adventist symbols ("The Rapture" ("Scandalous! – Part 3" (1989)), "The Cross" (1987), "Seven" (1992)), nature images reappear. Bucolic images pervade Prince's lyrics and increasingly in his album artwork: *Lovesexy's* (1988) resurrected Prince-lotus. Prince's suspicion of technology shows up especially in *Lovesexy*: if God is freedom and peace—a still, small voice—by contrast, the tempter 'Spooky Electric' ("I No" and "Positivity") is loud and controlling. 'Spooky Electric', the villainous tempter, is held at arms-length by a non-materialist spirituality.

But Prince's dualism does not reject the world, the world of nature. "Mountains" off of *Parade* (1986) evokes a "land called Fantasy" where "17 mountains stood so high." In contrast to the despair of "Africa divided, hijack in the air," the chorus leaves us with, "It's only mountains and the sea / There's nothing greater, you and me."

"Raspberry Beret" (1982) contrasts the drudgery of low-wage shop work with the plaintive pleasures of pastoral sex: "Rain sounds so cool / When it hits the barn roof / And the horses wonder who you are." Note too the contrast between technology and nature in "Little Red Corvette" (1982) where horse imagery reappears but perverted by irresponsible—and tempting—sexuality. She needs a love "that's gonna last," and Prince concludes, "Move over, baby, gimme the keys / I'm gonna try to tame your little red love machine"—a transformation of technology toward the good, away from the unbalanced and uncontrolled.

This transformation of dangerous technology to responsible harmony (with nature, with sexual appropriateness) will reoccur in Prince's lyrics.

By 1990, *Graffiti Bridge* and the introduction of "New Power Generation," we find a last dig at Communism: "You think that if you tell enough lies they will see the truth? / I hope they bury your old ideas the same time they bury you"—the "bury you" is clearly a gesture toward the famous line attributed to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 where he told Western diplomats, "History is on our side! We will bury you!" This last dig is followed by hopeful constructions, perhaps inspired by the end of the Cold War: "Love is there if you'd just open up to it / If you'd just believe your whole world would change / New power generation, you've got to rearrange / We are the new power generation, you've got to give up all the fight / We got to try to love one another."

However, the opposite of Communism is not the USA—also the realm of a decayed urban landscape—but a new, perhaps post-political, Eden. Prince, in his musical affairs and in his lyrics, in the imagery of album covers and videos, is no democrat. Prince sits on top of a hierarchy, playing all of the instruments, refusing to be accountable to others, a moving-and-grooving mover who only answers to a higher power. In this sense, we can better situate the ambiguities of Prince's persona as a savior—"I'm your messiah" ("I Would Die 4 U" (1983)), "But on the 7th day he made me" ("My Name is Prince" (1991))—rising renewed in the video of "When Doves Cry" (1985), hands reaching out like a vision of salvation, arms raised, before his later-in-life conversion, as in a crucifix. Prince's sovereignty is a sensual alternative to the cold reign of technology and lovelessness symbolized in Communism (a dark dystopia) and to the bleak state of affairs.

For Prince, true community is sensual, triggered by love, even if it is lured by sex. This tension—between sex and love—has often been pointed out as Prince's lyrical themes, but missing in those analyses is the solution that Prince seems to arrive at, one which can be illuminated through Jewish concepts.

An Aside: A Judaic Consideration of Prince's Dualisms

In Cincinnati, Ohio, on the *Lovesexy* tour of 1988, I heard Prince announce to his stadium audience something like, "We are all part of God and God is in each one of you." I remember this because at the time I was a young college student studying philosophy and religion, and harboring an amateur interest in Eastern Religions.

If my memory serves me, and if this is true, it indicates Prince was considering a sort of pantheism or—more accurately—a *panentheism*, announcing it like a new revelation. This makes sense inasmuch as Prince's corpus wrestles with the guilt over sexuality (as sin) yet wants, somehow, to redeem passion (as sensuality). The dualism running through Prince's imagery—it seemed not to have completely worked itself out conceptually. When I heard him insisting that "we are all part of God and God is in each one of you," I thought this might be his way of reconciling the natural sexual inclinations—his animal side—with a lingering suspicion of sex: it all comes from God.

Now, after considering what seems to be the other major dualism running through Prince, a political dualism, between technology/communism (the carnal Dystopia) and nature/paisley park (the Just Princedom), I am wondering if the real rend in Prince's work was left unresolved in those waning days of the Soviet Union. I write this because of Prince's clear embrace of technology: electronic instruments, the Internet which lingers, dangerously, on the periphery of his work. Like a Golem, an out-of-control human creation, technology threatens to be 'Spooky Electric'.

One way we might resolve this tension in Prince is to read his best thrusts as a non-binary political theology, one which resists understanding phenomena—sex, technology, freedom—as confined to either the side of the devil or the angels (from "Thunder" (1990): "Is this my sweet savior or the devil in disguise?").

In "My Name is Prince" (1991), he confidently, boldly, announces the situation: "I know from righteous I know from sin / I got two sides and they both friends." But what if those two sides need not linger in détente, but can be resolved, reconciled, and redeemed?

Jewish theology, specifically Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah), here provides a helpful framework and, as well, explains or expands on some of Prince's distinctive, yet confounding choices around questions of names, creation, and the proper ordering of social relations. What if Prince thought of his artistic work as an act of *Tikkun Olam*—an act of mystically healing the world?

Judaism, unlike some conceptions in Christianity, does not hold human desire to be intrinsically evil. Rabbinic anthropology posits that the human soul is composed of two inclinations: the *Yetzer harah* and the *Yetzer tov*, often translated the Good inclination and the Bad or evil inclination. The *Yetzer harah* is understood as the material inclination, the part of the soul which is concerned with self-protection and self-flourishing; this includes appetites, desires and so forth. The *Yetzer tov* is the "spiritual" inclination that pulls us outside of ourselves, out of our own ego-concerns toward the needs of others. Unlike some forms of Christian theology, which (to caricature) alienates and seeks to destroy evil—indeed, embodies it as demonic, seeking through asceticism to extinguish desire—the Jewish approach acknowledges the necessity of the *Yetzer*. Summed up in this quaint rabbinic tale:

The ancient Sages decided that they were going to capture and imprison the Yetzer HaRa. [He is captured] ... He ... the Yetzer] said to them, "Realize that if you kill me, the world is finished." They held him for three days, then they looked in the whole land of Israel and not an egg could be found. So they asked, "What shall we do now?" ... So they put out his eyes and let him go. (Yoma 69b).

No Yetzer, no eggs.

Rabbi Nahman said in Rabbi Samuel's name: 'Behold, it was good' refers to the Good Desire; 'And behold, it was very good' refers to the Evil Desire. (It only says 'very good' after man was created with both the good and bad inclinations, in all other cases it only says 'and God saw that it was good'.) Can then the Evil Desire be very good? That would be extraordinary! But without the Evil Desire,

however, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children.... (Bereshit Rabbah 9:7)

One possible way Prince's theology could be worked out is to see the dangers of human life—sex, desire, technology, passion—not as intrinsically evil, but necessary for human flourishing with the proper spiritual discipline. A dangerous inclination turned toward good ends—spiritual ends, peaceful ends—can be redemptive, salvific. Again, a religious recasting of sex/sensuality can mitigate the harm resulting from the taboo, the sinful, and the transgressive, mobilizing its powerful energy toward the Good and toward God. The very title of the album *Lovesexy* hints at Prince's playing with this idea, that two poles of human practice are intertwined. The two sides then, need not just be "friends" but work together to uplift human relations in the just Princedom.

Perhaps by happy chance, Kabbalistic notes of world-transformative powers can also be seen in Prince's lyrics and persona. In "Alphabet Street" (1987) Prince sings, "We're going down, down, down, if that's the only way / To make this cruel, cruel world hear what we've got to say / Put the right letters together and make a better day."

The idea of putting letters together in order to transform the world is a Kabbalistic notion. In the Jewish mystical tradition, God creates and orders the world through the holy alphabet (Aleph – Bet) of Hebrew. God creates out of "chaos and order"—the *Tovu va-vohu* of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis—where Prince also reached into for creation imagery and, by virtue of his 1996 album, *Chaos and Disorder*, for the decreation of the Prince/Warner Brothers connection.

Letters are so powerful, some can't be pronounced as in the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God—Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay (YHWH). In *Lovesexy's* "I No," Prince sings, "But my Lord he is so quiet when He calls your name." Within a year, of course, Prince will have replaced his name with an unpronounceable glyph, known at times as the "love symbol," forcing confounded journalists to refer to him as "The Artist"—a substitute name familiar to Jewish taboos over pronouncing or spelling out the name of God.

The power of naming and arranging, of putting the right words together for "a better day" seems to be the redemptive work of Prince's best albums. Mirroring Prince's obsession with controlling his own musical (and visual) output, Prince attempts to Repair the World (*Tikkun Olam*) through music: by transforming soulless technology into an instrument for soulfulness; by transforming gender ambiguity and sexual diversity into a celebration of love's certainty; by transforming a blighted urban landscape into a bucolic assemblage of natural virtues; by transforming the persona of Prince as a substitute savior to the posture of pilgrim, pointing listeners—the Christian ones at least!—toward devotional humility toward the one true King.

Conclusion

Prince. The Revolution. New Power Generation.

These are political names.

Prince diagnosed his times. The signs: urban violence, poverty, drug use. Yet over the City loomed the larger threat of nuclear annihilation and communist takeovers.

By the time the Cold War thawed with Perestroika and the Soviet Union dissolved, Prince was seeking to free himself of his contract with Warner Brothers, changing his name, and then in a few years marrying, converting, and moving on to new directions in both the content and distribution of his music.

Prince, at his most political, was most reactionary, even royalist, attributing sovereignty—and freedom—to God and his soteriological plan, enacted through Prince's own hand, his artistry, his ability to move audiences toward the funk and toward the light, the cross, the ladder. At his most apostate, Prince positioned himself as an incarnation of the spirit, another mediator between the King and His Subjects, a Prince, seeking to create a Princedom, an Edenic "Paisley Park."

These politics were articulated with the anxieties of Cold War threats, of a Godless social order.

The revolution was not a political one—in the sense of redistributionist visions—but a sexual one. Prince was a revolutionary in the realm of sexuality—pushing the envelope on popular expressions of what we call today queer sexuality, images of BDSM, and explicit lyrics enough to rouse the ire of senators’ wives. All the while, Prince’s lyrics harbored a radical guilt and ambivalence about the passionate forces at play.

The New Power Generation heralded a resolution of the tensions between freedom and license, righteousness and sin, as Prince matured as the Cold War expired.

From Prince’s evocation of Communism (or anti-Communism) to the possibilities of Kabbalah: Prince sought to integrate sexuality and the body with the sacred, resisting—never completely—the contention that sex was sinful. A Jewish way of understanding the necessities of the body and the sanctification of sex might have been a way for Prince to come to a resolution. Prince seems to have made his peace with his ambivalence about technology.

Signs ‘O’ the Times. Controversy. Chaos and Disorder.

These are both political and theological terms. The early Prince never quite resolves the binary or the tension, but the beauty and power of his struggle made for some of the finest popular art of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

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Notes

¹Touré, *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (New York: Atria Books, 2013), 22-23.

²For example, see the review of Prince’s early imagery in Richard E. Wimberley, “Prophecy, Eroticism, and Apocalypticism in Popular Music: Prince,” *Black Sacred Music* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 125-132.

³See, for example, the early scholarly commentaries collected in Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁴On this see David Cauter, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), especially page 27, 295ff.

⁵Cornel West, “Sex and Suicide” in *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 156.

An Examination of Three Aspects
of Theological Love in the Lyrics of Prince
C. Liegh McInnis

Abstract: For many people, the Jewish-Christian theology or the Abrahamic (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) religions are rooted in discipline, sacrifice, suffering, and punishment as the core values of earning God’s love and grace. Yet, through his work, Prince is able to show that the Jewish-Christian ideology is not rooted in fire and brimstone but in love, specifically love as the quality that enables one to overcome the iniquities of selfishness, greed, insecurity, hatred, and violence.

For many people, the Jewish-Christian theology or the Abrahamic (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) religions are essentially rooted in discipline, sacrifice, suffering, and punishment as the core values of earning God’s love and grace. Yet, through his work, Prince is able to show that the Jewish-Christian ideology is not rooted in fire and brimstone but in love, specifically love as the quality that enables one to overcome the iniquities of selfishness, greed, insecurity, hatred, and violence. As the Christian New Testament asserts in 1 Corinthians 13, love is the most important aspect of life because it gives life purpose, meaning, and value:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have a faith that can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. ...

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13: 1-3, 13 NIV)

Additionally, this message of the importance of love is essential in the other two Abrahamic religions as well. In Proverbs 10:12, of the Tanakh or the Old Testament of the Christian Bible asserts that “Hatred causes conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.” Proverbs 3:3-4 instructs believers to “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.” Deuteronomy 15:7 (NASB) implores believers that “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother.” And, finally, the Qur’an teaches, “God does not love evil/corruption.”¹ Further, the Qur’an instructs that believers must learn to love those within and beyond their immediate communities: “We have appointed a law and a practice for every one of you. Had Allah willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you. So compete with each other in doing good. Every one of you will return to God and He will inform you regarding the things about which you differed.”²

It is this aspect of the Abrahamic understanding of love that Prince spent his entire career promoting. Whether it is love being the force that enables a young male to embrace the responsibility of unplanned parenthood in “Baby,” or showing what happens when the world rejects love and embraces the selfishness of evil in “Annie Christian,” or even offering Jesus as the blueprint of how to love in “4 the Tears in Your Eyes,” at the core of Prince’s message is the power of love to make right the world.

And, in his work, Prince always presented three of the theological aspects of love: as a complete state of being, as a force, and manifest as a physical being. These three aspects show that Prince did not view love as merely a fleeting feeling, but as a tangible power of metaphysical and natural phenomena that enables humanity to cross or transcend the gulf that separates them from their Higher Power, allowing them to reduce the iniquities of life—such as crime, poverty,

racism, sexism, and violence—that are all symptoms or manifestations of a lack of love, or an underdeveloped or perverted metaphysical or spiritual self.

Songs, such as “Thunder” from *Diamonds and Pearls* (1991), present love as inner peace and completion:

Love, nobody know just how it was born ...
Jumped up in my body with an attitude
Kissed me on the mouth, and said “Your leader take me to”
‘Twas like thunder all through the night
And a promise to see Jesus in the morning light
Love say “Take my hand; it’ll be alright
C’mon save your soul tonight.
Love’s kiss was running all through my veins
The bed started shakin’, I don’t know who to blame
...
Like rain falling on a window pane
Tears came to my eyes when I asked her name
Made me hollow when it finally came
Said “Only the children born of me will remain”³

With “Thunder,” Prince is proclaiming that life is unfulfilled and meaningless without love. Love is the energy, passion, and comfort that gives humans the ability to reach the potential of their awareness and growth. With this energy, humans no longer are forced to wander aimlessly through life without purpose and can use their passion and creativity to bring joy and healing to others through the arts and sciences.

Similarly, “👁️ No” from *Lovesexy* (1988), Prince is admitting to having been in the dark and to having found the light, which will guide his music to make a better world. His desire is to share this love and the news that love is fulfilling and hate will destroy the soul, physically and spiritually:

👁️ know there is a heaven, 👁️ know there is a hell

Listen to me people, I got a story 2 tell
I know there was confusion lightin' all around me
That's when I called his name don't u know he found me

...

But I know love is the only way

...

No—everybody say—if u can't find your way

...

Say no—if u want a drug other than God above

...

Say yes—if u want this thing called love

...

We know a better way 2 have some fun"⁴

Furthermore, "Anna Stesia" from *Lovesexy* (1988) addresses the loneliness caused by being incomplete, not of man or woman but from being disconnected from God. This loneliness causes humankind to surrender to the body as a substitute for inner peace, which keeps humanity from reaching its potential. "Anna Stesia" is the positive equivalent of "Annie Christian" from *Controversy* (1981). "Annie Christian" is about surrendering to one's own, physical will, which leads to self and world destruction: "Annie Christian wanted to be number one / But her kingdom never comes, thy will be done... / She moved to Atlanta and... / She killed black children... / She killed John Lennon; shot him down cold / She tried to kill Reagan."⁵

In contrast, "Anna Stesia" celebrates submitting to God's will and connecting to love, which is to connect to life. The song advocates for the interpersonal relationship people should have with God by showing the depression one suffers when absent from God. "Anna Stesia" addresses humanity's constant straying from God and forgetting that people are just a part of God's master play. Prince shows that when one strays to follow one's own will, one removes oneself from that protective blanket and leaves oneself open to the hardships of the world:

Have u ever been so lonely
that u felt like u were the
only one in this world?
Have u ever wanted 2 play
with someone so much u'd take
any one, boy or girl?
Anna Stesia come 2 me
Talk 2 me, ravish me,
liberate my mind
Tell me what u think of me
praise me, craze me
out this space and time

...

Maybe I could learn 2 love
if I was closer 2 my higher self,
closer 2 Heaven, closer 2 God.
Save me Jesus, I 've been a fool.
How could I forget u are the rule

...

We're just a play in Your master plan
Now, my Lord understand⁶

"Lovesexy" is Prince's declaration of love, sex, and spirituality as a divine trinity much like the Hebrew word "Eloheem." "Lovesexy" exists in the plural like Eloheem because it provides complete physical and spiritual emancipation, completion, and inner peace to every aspect of life. It is the physical, emotional, and psychological experience of love, sex, and spirituality, which is the answer to the pain and disillusionment felt in "Anna Stesia" and "Dance On." "Lovesexy" depicts sex as a metaphor and a microcosm of God. In a sense, if God is love, He is also sex. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16 KJV)

God manifested Himself through the womb of a woman, through a method the human mind could only perceive as sexual intercourse. Even Mary and Joseph

had to be given divine wisdom to understand:

...[Jesus'] mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, and unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home on account it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matt. 1:18b-21 NABRE)

God is perpetual creation, perpetual sex, because of his perpetual love for humanity. Through the Immaculate Conception, God is equated with the procreation of humanity and life. Thus, God is equated with sex. It is the sense of knowing that no feeling is like the feeling one gets from being touched by God. As such, "Lovesexy" declares that once one has been touched by God, nothing else will do:

New Power, give it 2 me
...
It put my name upon my thigh
It makes me laugh; it makes me cry
And when 🙈 touch it, race cars burn rubber in my pants
This feeling's so good in every single way
🙈 want it morning, noon, and night of everyday
...
With it 🙈 no heaven's just a kiss away
...
Anyone that's ever touched it
They don't want nothing else
And 🙈 got 2 tell the world
just can't keep it to myself

...
Come on and touch it, 🙈 no u will love it
...
Everybody no,
when love calls, u got 2 to go.⁷

Combined, these four songs make it clear that the societal ills of the world, such as drug abuse, violence, robbery, murder, and suicide, are all results of people not embracing love as the answer to all their problems.

After showing that love is the essence of life, Prince proceeds to implore his listeners of their responsibility to manifest that love to make life better. He presents love as the only tool or force to change the world. During the *Lovesexy* tour, Prince would state "God lives inside of us; he just wants to come out and play." This notion of our duty to manifest and unleash love onto the world is articulated in "The Love We Make" from *Emancipation* (1996), in which Prince declares love as the answer to all humanity's problems. Yet, it is also a plea for humanity to stop looking for love and to start making love: "The only love there is—is the love we make."⁸ As long as humanity is waiting on something or someone to make the world better, the world will never evolve into what it should be.

This is more affirmation that love is an action verb that only exists if humanity brings it into being. There can be no love without humanity making love: "Desperate is the day that is 2morrow / 4 those who do not know the time has come / 2 whip the dogs that beg, steal, or borrow / From the table God set 4 His son."⁹

It is time to be counted. As the often-quoted adage asserts, "A man who stands for nothing will fall for anything." Accordingly, a man who stands for nothing is worth nothing. Prince is asserting it is time to stand for love: "Wicked is the witch that stands 4 nothing / All the while watching 2 see u fall / Deeper than the ditch that bred your suffering / The one being dug right now by them all."¹⁰ Love is a metaphysical element that will manifest itself in the physical world only when

people act as a catalyst or a medium for it: "Happy is the way 2 meet your burdens / No matter how heavy or dark the day / Pity on those with no hope 4 2morrow / It's never as bad as it seems until we say."¹¹ Humans have the power to order their lives to commune with God: "Precious is the baby with a mother / That tells him that his Savior is coming soon / All that believe will cleanse and purify themselves / Put down the needle, put down the spoon."¹²

Prince ends by defining love as something that works for the collective. Yet, it is the individual who must journey to access this power to change the world, with the understanding that making the world a better place improves the condition of the individual: "Sacred is the prayer that asks 4 nothing / While seeking 2 give thanks 4 every breath we take / Blessed are we inside this prayer / 4 in the new world, we will be there / The only love there is—is the love we make."¹³ The only way to know this love is to get free from the physical, emotional, and psychological shackles.

Similarly, *Lovesexy* ends with "Positivity," which promotes remaining focused through positive thinking, positive living, and depending on faith to give one the strength to survive, mentally and physically. In addition, Prince is asserting that all need faith in God and in their fellow brothers and sisters. God manifests himself through humanity, so the song is an encouragement to treat all people equally, for all are characters of the same play. Humans need each other. It is a reminder that what affects one person on Earth affects all people. So, people must start viewing all others as brothers and sisters, and defeat the common foe, which is 'Spooky Electric,' Satan, evil personified.

Moreover, each person must understand that all have a bit of 'Spooky Electric' in us with which all must constantly do battle to reach their final evolution. When people realize this, they become more compassionate and understanding of their fellow humanity who is fighting the same internal war. This understanding should cause people to be more willing to have empathy for their brothers and sisters, assisting each other, understanding that every person they help is another person who is able to help them: "Is that a good man? / Why do U dog him? / Tell me; if that was your father, would U dog him then?"¹⁴ 'Spooky Electric,' Satan, is

the greatest foe known to humanity. Humanity's salvation is the treasure in the battle between God and Satan for human souls. Being mindful of this, there is joy in knowing that the lovers of society have come a long way, but they must realize that they still have a long way to go:

Positivity, YES

Do we mark U absent or do we mark U late?

...

"In every man's life there will be a hang-up

A whirlwind designed 2 slow down ...

Give up if U want 2, and all is lost

Spooky Electric will be your boss"

...

Don't kiss the beast

...

Hold on 2 your soul, we got a long way 2 go¹⁵

Once people know that the love that they need is inside them, then it can be manifest into good works or a tool to change society as in "The Work, Pt. 1" from *The Rainbow Children* (2001). The theme of "The Work, Pt. 1" is foreshadowed in "The Rainbow Children," when Prince states, "With the accurate understanding of God and His Law / They went about the work of building / A new nation: The Rainbow Children."¹⁶ The work of love and the lovers of the world is to rebuild the world in the image of love. Thus, in "The Work, Pt. 1" he is noticeably using a James-Brown-inspired riff that echoes soulful, black-power semantics, which he laces with lyrics about the "hard" but necessary "work" that must be done for "revelation to come to pass."¹⁷ The music sets a mood of the black-power struggle; then, Prince infuses his notions of a metaphysical struggle, which exists alongside the physical struggle: "Every time I watch the other people news / I c a false picture of myself, another one of u / They try 2 tell us what we want, what 2 believe / Didn't that happen in the Garden / When somebody spoke 2 Eve?"¹⁸

This connecting the black struggle to the metaphysical is quite essential to Prince's own theory, as evidenced by how he uses the term 'Devil' throughout *The*

Rainbow Children to refer to the physical devils who exploit people for their wages. He then uses those physical devils as a trope for the metaphysical 'Devil' in "Rainbow Children" and "Muse 2 The Pharaoh," because in Prince's theory the ultimate battle is in the metaphysical realm and not the physical realm, as also evidenced in the tracks "Digital Garden" and "The Everlasting Now." Ultimately, for Prince, when Jesus ascended from the grave, he liberated humans from spiritual and physical enslavement, which are often embodied in police harassment, discriminatory hiring and promoting practices, and discrimination in the judicial system, especially as it relates to sentencing practices, as well as in rape, bullying, theft.

Along with defining love as the essence of life and as a force to improve the world, Prince provides Jesus as the physical embodiment of love so listeners have a blueprint to follow in "4 the Tears in Your Eyes" (1985). Christianity is centered on the belief in Jesus as the Son of Jehovah who came to earth to sacrifice His life so that all may be saved from damnation. As such, Christians attempt to live in a manner that follows the teachings of Jesus, which are based on two commandments: love God with all one's ability and love one's brother and sister as one loves oneself. In doing this, Christians try to follow Jesus' teaching in John 12:32 that if Christ "be lifted (taught and celebrated), I will draw all men unto me." Prince does this in "4 the Tears in your Eyes" by promoting the power, love and peace, and salvation offered by Jesus. If more people were to embrace the song's message by making Jesus their savior and blueprint, there would be less anxiety, pain, and confusion, which would reduce issues, such as theft, poverty, homelessness, murder, and suicide.

Prince begins by celebrating Jesus' power: "Long ago there was a man / Changed stone to bread with the touch of His hand / He made the blind see and the dumb understand."¹⁹ Many people suffer daily and feel powerless to change their lives. This feeling of powerlessness often intensifies how they feel, which leads to them making bad decisions. One person may decide that crime is the only way to improve one's circumstance. Another person may decide that, since there is no hope, suicide is the only answer. However, Prince's words offer hope because they offer a source of power that can help people when all else fails. In the chorus

Prince adds, "4 the rising sun that assures us / The meek shall inherit the earth."²⁰ The combination of these lines increases a listener's hope that tomorrow will be better, enabling one to endure current problems because one has faith that "weeping endures for a night but joy comes in the morning," according to Psalm 30:5b. With this hope, issues, such as crime and suicide, will decrease. Also, more people will become productive, adding to the tax revenue, which can be used to improve schools that can produce more critical thinkers who can cure diseases, such as AIDS and cancer, allowing the power of Jesus to manifest fully in every aspect of life.

Prince continues with, "Many people came from all around / 2 hear this man preach with glorious sound / He spoke of man in harmony and love abound."²¹ These lines show Jesus as a teacher of love and peace, providing a blueprint for what humans should be. Yet, they also inform listeners that becoming a loving and peaceful person is not something that just happens but something that can only be accomplished through study and effort. Prince does not present a Jesus who magically or spiritually fills people with love and peace to change their mentality or behavior. No, Jesus is presented as a teacher, as someone who provides instruction on how to be better. This is why the Apostle Paul writes that one must in 2 Timothy 2:15.

As such, listeners learn that becoming a better person takes work/effort, but the good news is that there is a blueprint to becoming a better person. This knowledge can serve to comfort and motivate people when they feel as if they will never be able to become the person they desire to be. Rather than remaining disappointed or dejected in their errors, they can be assured that, if they keep trying, Jesus is there with them, helping them to become a loving and peaceful person. This can reduce violence, especially violence caused by the desire for revenge or because someone feels disrespected by another. Knowing they have the ability to be better than their situation and even better than themselves, believers and followers of Jesus can know they have the ability to defuse a situation before it becomes violent, which can lead to a reduction in bullying and police altercations resulting in death as well as domestic and gang violence. Furthermore, this message can teach people that they can work with others

despite their differences, allowing more people to unite to develop plans and technology that can save lives from natural disasters, or grow and deliver more nutritious foods to feed the hungry.

Finally, Prince ends with, “Faith is a word we all should try / Describing the man who willingly died / Believe that your hunger, sorrow, and fears / Is less than the tears in your eyes, your eyes.”²² With these lines, Prince is asserting that just having faith in Jesus is enough to change one’s life from bad to good. As the Christian New Testament teaches, Jesus sacrificed His life so all of humanity can be saved from damnation. It also teaches that when Jesus ascended from the grave, He awoke with all power in His hands, and that power extends over every aspect of life. This is the ultimate good news and hope of Christianity. Those who accept Jesus as their lord and savior have hope for everlasting life and have a “peace that surpasses all understanding” according to Philippians 4:7.

This does not mean that Christians will not endure negative circumstances. It means, however, that welcoming Jesus into one’s heart will enable one to maintain a loving and peaceful attitude even when enduring the most hellish times. This is salvation from eternal damnation and salvation from a physical life mired in depression, which can lead to madness/insanity. For one’s “hunger, sorrow, and fears” to be less than the “tears in [one’s] eyes”²³ means that with the power of Jesus nothing can cease one’s joy or keep one from accomplishing whatever one desires, as long as it parallels Jesus’ will.

This comfort also gives one the faith to help others because one believes that one will be protected even if one gives others one’s last as a way to glorify the goodness and power of Jesus. As such, issues like homelessness and poverty can be reduced because people will have faith that Jesus will protect them when they are sacrificing themselves to help others.

Even though Prince is known by many of his fans as “His Royal Badness” because of his sexually explicit lyrics, his body of work also includes songs, such as “Annie Christian,” “Free,” “Paisley Park,” “Temptation,” “The Cross,” “👁️ No,” “Anna Stesia,” “Lovesexy,” “Positivity,” “Still Would Stand All Time,” “Thunder,” and

“The Sacrifice of Victor,” as well as an entire album, *The Rainbow Children*, which all demonstrate an artist who desired to use his work to have people learn of and acknowledge that Jesus is real and an answer to all of one’s troubles. Prince’s life and work, like most people, was an ongoing process that, by the end of his life, was one in which he released more songs that reflected his desire to connect to Jesus as the perfect example of love as well as to teach others about the power of love.

To this end, “4 the Tears in your Eyes” is significant because he released this song at the height of his fame in 1985. At a time when he could have released any song he desired, he chose one focused not on achieving worldly pleasure but on achieving spiritual fulfillment. If more people embrace its message, as well as the message of all of the aforementioned works, fewer people will waste their time seeking the physical world and spend more time asking themselves what are they doing to develop their spiritual selves. This can lead to a world with less pain, decreased by a reduction of violence, theft, poverty, and homelessness, which will give more people the motivation and time to pursue constructive endeavors, such as building better schools, creating more jobs, and building better hospitals.

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Notes

- ¹Qur'an 2 (*al-Baqarah*): 205.
- ²Qur'an 5 (*al-Ma'ida*): 48.
- ³Prince and the New Power Generation, "Thunder," on *Diamonds and Pearls*, Warner Bros, 1991, CD.
- ⁴Prince, "No," on *Lovesexy*, Paisley Park/Warner Bros, 1988, CD.
- ⁵Prince, "Annie Christian," on *Controversy*, Warner Bros, 1981, CD.
- ⁶Prince, "Anna Stesia," on *Lovesexy*, Paisley Park/Warner Bros, 1988, CD.
- ⁷Prince, "Lovesexy," on *Lovesexy*, Paisley Park/Warner Bros, 1988, CD.
- ⁸Prince, "The Love We Make," on *Emancipation*, NGP/EMI, 1996, CD.
- ⁹Prince, "The Love We Make."
- ¹⁰Prince, "The Love We Make."
- ¹¹Prince, "The Love We Make."
- ¹²Prince, "The Love We Make."
- ¹³Prince, "The Love We Make."
- ¹⁴Prince, "Positivity," on *Lovesexy*, Paisley Park/Warner Bros, 1988, CD.
- ¹⁵Prince, "Positivity."
- ¹⁶Prince, "The Rainbow Children," on *The Rainbow Children*, NPG, 2001, CD.
- ¹⁷Prince, "The Work, Pt. 1," on *The Rainbow Children*, NPG, 2001, CD.
- ¹⁸Prince, "The Work, Pt. 1."

¹⁹Prince and the Revolution, “4 the Tears in Your Eyes,” on *We Are the World*, CBS, 1985, CD. [Editor: In March 1985, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie wrote the single, “We Are the World,” for the USA for Africa charity. A line of the lyrics reads, “As God has shown us by turning stones to bread,” remarkably similar to Prince’s open lyric in “4 the Tears in Your Eyes”: “Long ago there was a man / Changed stone to bread with one touch of his hand.” (Prince wrote “4 the Tears in Your Eyes,” for the compilation charity album, *We Are The World*. (1985). <http://princevault.com>.) Both song’s lyrics, however, are inexplicably discordant with the biblical text of Jesus’ temptation found in Matthew 4:3-4. “The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (NRSV) No passage in scripture has Jesus turning stone into bread.

²⁰Prince and the Revolution, “4 the Tears in Your Eyes.”

²¹Prince and the Revolution, “4 the Tears in Your Eyes.”

²²Prince and the Revolution, “4 the Tears in Your Eyes.”

²³Prince and the Revolution, “4 the Tears in Your Eyes.”

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_____. “ No,” “Anna Stesia,” “Lovesexy,” and “Positivity.” *Lovesexy*. Paisley Park/Warner Bros 9 25720-2, 1988, CD.



VISUAL ART

Front cover: Prince Rogers Nelson's Parade

Vernell Garnett

Open Submission Winning Visual Art

mixed-medium artwork of oil pastel, acrylic, and collage on watercolor paper

accompanying poem

The Departure of the Prodigal Son

To go forth now
from all the entanglement
that is ours and yet not ours,
that, like the water in an old well,
reflects us in fragments, distorts what we are.

From all that clings like burrs and brambles—
to go forth
and see for once, close up, afresh,
what we had ceased to see—
so familiar it had become.
To glimpse how vast and how impersonal
is the suffering that filled your childhood.

Yes, to go forth, hand pulling away from hand.
Go forth to what? To uncertainty,
to a country with no connections to us
and indifferent to the dramas of our life.

What drives you to go forth? Impatience, instinct,
a dark need, the incapacity to understand.

To bow to all this.
To let go—
even if you have to die alone.

Is this the start of a new life?

Rainer Maria Rilke, "May 6: The Departure of the Prodigal Son," in *A Year with Rilke: Daily Readings from the Best of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 125.

VERNELL GARNETT

Vernell Garnett was born in Chicago and raised in a neighborhood where the wrong word to the wrong person might cost your life. It was a district deemed the most dangerous place in the nation, and those who resided there were given only a two-percent chance of emerging from it. Reared in a single-parent household with eight other siblings, (each uniquely and artistically talented), he survived through unassailable familial love and an inherited fanciful escapism. His mother didn't discourage his abilities as idealistic oddities but fostered them with an encouragement that he could be anything he willed to be.

His current style echoes those of Robert Rauschenberg, Romare Bearden, and Franz Kline, but one shouldn't assume that what they see now is what they always will. He has no ego about his approach and process. He sees both freedom and constraint as fundamental pliable strategies to be employed, and not static ways of life to bed down in. He's willing to be of service to the appropriate language that delivers the congruous visual message. By expressing from an ever-evolving essence, he hopes to produce a career of work that informs and invigorates while it progressively challenges limitations. His work and life are dedicated to the education, proliferation, and dispensation of creations that serve as an antidote to the reductive default of status-quo ideologies.

All Excited

Lisa Myers

United Community Winning Visual Art



LISA MYERS

photograph

Lisa Myers is a Master of Divinity student at United, dual concentrating in Theology and the Arts and Inter faith Chaplaincy, and will be graduating in the Spring of 2019. She serves as Worship Arts Ministry facilitator at the Unitarian Universality Church of Minnetonka, MN, where it is her goal to integrate the arts, pastoral care, and worship into deeply meaningful and resonating worship experiences for her congregation. After graduation from United, it is her goal to continue serving her home church congregation and the wider community in congregational ministry and spiritual care, while continuing and integrating the artistic (photography, in particular) pursuits within her ministry.



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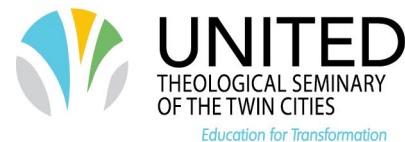
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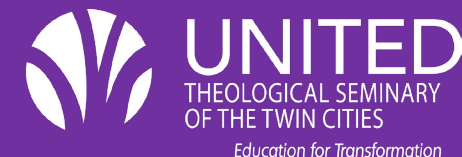
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