

PRINCE AND SPIRITUALITY

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

The supremely unique musician Prince died under mysterious circumstances. Some reports say he allegedly overdosed on drugs six days before he died. If true, this is hard to fathom. The Purple One had a reputation as a physical fitness fanatic. He was a vegetarian, did not smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, and was not known to use illegal drugs. He considered his body to be a temple, and in 2001, he became a deeply religious Jehovah's Witness – so much so that he stopped performing sexually explicit songs from early in his career.

In all probability, Prince was the most multi-talented musician/dancer in the history of any genre of music. He had a glorious voice and could sing anything from bass to falsetto. He could play anywhere from 17-24 different instruments. He would write, compose, arrange, and produce an entire album all by himself – including doing all of the vocals and playing all of the instruments. He could dance like James Brown and Michael Jackson. He was that rarest of all musicians – a *true* solo artist.

Like Michael Jackson, Prince idolized James Brown. So given his mind-blowing musical talent, how could the pride of Minnesota go wrong? And in his later years, Prince became more like Brown by becoming racially conscious. He expressed Black pride and said that Black artists should have the rights to their music. He performed for fans in Baltimore after a Black male, 25-year-old Freddie Gray, was killed by police in April, 2015.

Early in his career, Prince was known as the nasty rocker. He sang about masturbation, incest, oral sex, and so on. Due largely to his music, parental advisory stickers were placed on albums and CDs to warn parents about music containing strong sexual themes and other objectionable material.

However, as he slowly matured and started taking religion more seriously, his music was far less irresponsible. He reportedly would go door-to-door as a Jehovah's Witness, trying to share his faith with others.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have unconventional beliefs, to say the least. Many of them reject evolution. Their most controversial belief is the idea that it goes against God's will for people to get blood transfusions. Rather, they believe in the power of prayer over the best medical care from human beings. Sadly, and not surprisingly, some of them have died as a result of this belief.

This is where religion becomes especially controversial. Children die because their well-meaning parents withhold life-saving medical treatment from them. This is grossly unfair and inhumane. There is certainly the possibility that the children of Jehovah's Witnesses could grow up and reject their religion. However, if their parents withhold life-saving medical treatment from them, obviously, they will never have that opportunity.

This is why Richard Dawkins has stated in his book *The God Delusion*, that children cannot choose their religion. As part of his consciousness-raising program, he writes:

Speak of a "child of Catholic parents" if you like; but if you hear of anybody speak of a "Catholic child", stop them and politely point out that children are too young to know where they stand on such issues, just as they are too young to know where they stand on economics or politics. (p. 3)

If everyone followed Dawkins' line of reasoning, there would be no religious adults sending their children to early deaths, because they would understand that only adults should be able to make such decisions *for themselves*.

Many people complain that Jehovah's Witnesses go door-to-door to share their faith. Some people even go so far as to sic their dogs on them! However, people should welcome others to share their beliefs, religious or secular. Why would it be so bad if scientists went door-to-door to share their views on evolution? Or what would be so bad about church/state separationists going to people's homes to educate their fellow citizens? If people are too busy to engage in such conversations, they could just respectfully decline the invitations, or invite them to come back later.

It would be great to know what makes people accept non-mainstream religions like the Jehovah's Witnesses. What is particularly logical about such beliefs? Could

it be the sense of community or the missionary zeal they offer? To most people outside such religions, the beliefs seem too hard to accept. However, if one is raised under religion since early childhood, it would not be surprising if she accepted even the most bizarre claims of the faith.

Finally, it seems that most fans of Prince do not realize that his great song “1999” was completely wrong. He sang about Judgement Day and was of the opinion that it was to come near the start of the new millennium. Many others believed this as well, which is what the Y2K madness was all about. Yet Jesus never returned. This will not, however, deter most Christians who believe in the rapture. They will simply double down on the irrationality and believe it is bound to happen one day. This despite the fact that the biblical Christ said it would happen during the lifetimes of some of his original followers. (That is to say, the prophecy has already utterly failed!)

Prince has died but his music continues to live, as will his religion. It will be interesting to see how – or if – his religion and others adapt to changing times, changing circumstance and changing cultures.