

# Annamarie White: Prayer and Prophecy

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26 July 1998

## Prayer and Prophecy

The only thing I really like about the nasty neighborhood I live in is the silver maple tree in the backyard of my small townhouse. It is a tall climbing tree, with long friendly leaves, green on the front, silver on the back, and I have leaned against it nights when I've been sad. On the night of the triple digit heat, I climbed up it and watched the hot activity of the neighborhood from on high. I saw a small gang of boys try the locks on a string of car doors, sharing smokes as they went along. I saw an old guy walking his dog throw a pint bottle into the bushes. I heard a door slam and saw a girl run out of a beat-up car and into a house. A few seconds later, her father ran out but the car was gone. I saw glass bottles of Corona thrown out of passing car windows, smashing on the street as women tried to keep their toddlers out of the way with one hand and their sticky veils on with the other. The various sounds of Arab, Asian, and Spanish shouting mixed together and diminished as the syllables wafted upwards to my perch.

It was getting dark and I thought that when the stars came out I'd best go in and work on my sermon. "Lord, teach us to pray," the disciples asked. And Jesus taught them Our Father. How would He answer this question today, as we approach the year 2000?

Just then someone tested the latch on my back gate and came through. My heart jumped but I sat tight and silent. I didn't

recognize the man, but he didn't look like a criminal either, so far as I could see in the dark. He crept over in the direction of my tree, and then sat down under it. I thought it might be one of my college son's friends, since he didn't seem like he was casing out the house or anything. I sat tight. Looking down at him from the tree, I could see that he was actually older than my son's pals, his hair was thinning on top, and the moon reflected off it a bit, making it seem like he had a halo. Perhaps because of the suggestiveness of that visual effect, and the fact that he just sat calmly on the ground Indian style with his hands folded, I too calmed down. This guy just needed a place to wait for a while. Not surprising, in my neighborhood. So, I'd just wait him out.

It's very hard for me to sit still, but I did. I concentrated on moving my eyes only, and gave the man a thorough checking out. He had an aquiline nose, a short trim beard, and long fingers like the leaves of my tree. I could not see his eyes. He was wearing a sweatshirt and jeans and had worn-out sandals hanging onto his feet by threads. He looked like the kind of guy I knew wads of back in college when we were busy revolutionizing the world in the late sixties. But grown up. He sat more immobile than I did.

Then suddenly without turning he said, "What are you doing up a tree?"

"I'm figuring out a sermon," I said, not knowing why I felt compelled to tell the truth.

"What on?" he asked.

"How Christ would answer the question today of 'Teach us how to pray.'"

"Oh, that," he said. "Why don't you make one up yourself?"

"I don't have a clue," I said. "I've started exploring what prayer seems to be these days, but I haven't figured out the

pattern yet. I'll probably default into sharing what I've found with the Seekers and hope they can create one collectively, for me."

"Uh. Collaborative theology," he said. "So what have you found so far?"

"Well, being a writer, the first place I looked was the dictionary and after that to other writers. The three main areas of prayer seem to be praise, thanksgiving, and petition. That made me realize that prayers are a lot like poems. (Why was I telling this stranger this?) And of poems, Barbara Kingsolver says "They are everywhere, but easy to miss." They are grace. They are mystery."

I was getting wound up and started to tell him how Barbara Kingsolver is a best-selling –

"I know her," he said. "But this culture does not value mystery or understand grace."

"Yeah," I said. "Still, according to a Gallup poll, the percentage of Americans who believe in God or a Universal Spirit has gone up from 94% in 1976 to 96% in 1994. And it'll probably jump to 110% for a few hours on New Year's Eve 2000." What a lame joke it is. And I couldn't believe I was admitting that I'd looked up such statistics. But it didn't matter. Now he was humming something and beating time on his knee.

*What if God was one of us?*

*Just a stranger on a bus  
Trying to make his way home...*

*Would you want to see?*

*If seeing meant believing*

*In things like Heaven...*

*And the prophets...\**

“What, what?” I demanded, ready to jump down and ask him to leave my yard.

“Just some words I heard on the radio,” he said. “Now let’s get down to business. So you noticed that Jesus ushered in a new point of view for his time. Now the approaching millennium offers you a new beginning. So what do you see as the emerging patterns of culture today?”

One minute he’s singing, the next he’s a professor, I thought. But I answered him. “Global consciousness,” I said, “is batted around in every magazine you pick up.”

“Yes, he said, “thanks to fiber optics you know what kind of toothpaste the French use.”

“All right then. How about ecological concern,” I offered.

“Are the marines protecting the rainforests yet?” he said.

“First-hand spirituality, then,” I said. “People aren’t using priests or gurus anymore, but having first-hand experience with the divine.”

“Yes,” he said, “have you noticed how everyone at your office rolls their eyes up and meditates every couple hours? No? Then you really do need a new prayer.”

“How do I start?”

“Well, you are a writer. Why don’t you dissect the old prayer in the light of global thinking and see how far you get.”

“Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

“Okay. Who’s the Father?”

"The Father is God."

"Are you sure?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Jesus is addressing a hallowed, or holy, Father in a place called Heaven. But God is neither anthropomorphous nor locality-bound, but larger, universal, and beyond-all-Knowing."

"So, who could Jesus have been referring to?"

"Well, there are people around the globe who believe that the phrase "Our Father" is a reference to the Return. See, Jesus addresses "Our Father" and not "Our God." This suggests a relationship between Jesus the Son and an unknown future figure of the "father." The titles "Son" and "Father" are on the same scale, and thus have analogous functions in relation to people and to God."

I was losing track of his argument. I was thinking that a handsome man with an aquiline nose who uses words like "anthropomorphous" and "analogous" could not possibly be a robber. Relieved, I started swinging my legs for circulation.

"See," he explained, "if the "Son" is a Manifestation of God, then the "Father" would be a similar Manifestation of God, or prophet, at a future time when Humankind has grown in maturity."

"Oh," I said, "like Christ coming to fulfill the law was about Christianity fulfilling Judaism. Judaism was the law of God, the Ten Commandments, and Christianity was the spirit of the law, "Do unto others..." Moses was the earlier revelation, Christ was the subsequent revelation. Now "Who's on first'?"

The man laughed. "That's called progressive revelation. It is important to study the sacred writings of all cultures, the words of all prophets, prophets around the globe."

"Oh!" I said. "Sonya mentioned revering prophets worldwide a couple Sundays ago. We have the promised return of the world's major religions. And the plurality would fit in with the mystical body/network idea originally cited by St. Paul even though in a different context."

"Manifestations," he said, "like Christ, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Mohammed, take on a human form so people can hear the message God sends through them. God's message is present in all countries. The Bahai writings, for example, say that the Father is a prophet who has come in our time."

I chimed in. "You can hear it in reggae. You can see it in the sweltering faces of India where there is a nuclear bomb but no air conditioning." I wanted to bring his rhetoric down to earth.

"Pay attention to all the prophets," he said. "If you don't go to them, they will come to you." He turned for the first time and looked up at me. The moonlight made his eyes a penetrating purple-blue, and he had great eyelashes such as you don't see on many men. Uh, oh. I was bent on impressing him now. But I stayed up in the tree, for safety.

"All right," I said. "I'll give you an example. Get this. My daughter and I went to the Tibetan Freedom Rock Bands Festival last month at RFK, where a young woman was struck by lightning a couple sections away from us. A couple hours earlier, a string of long-suffering Tibetan monks, shaved, bony, and dignified in spite of being swathed in that orange old testament garb they wear, had been on stage intoning their deep resonant "Ommmmmm." Then came the bands. Dave Matthews Band was performing "Eat Drink and Be Merry, for Tomorrow we Die" just before the weather turned. I noticed that the monks were spreading themselves throughout the stadium, as one came and sat a row ahead of us on the end. Wow, I thought, they're so cool, coming around the audience to hear the bands. But the one near us didn't look like he was listening to Dave

Matthews. He looked like he was meditating. The first bolt of lightning was the one that struck. I saw it in the air to my right and it came down and into the stadium. It sounded like an explosion and there was a strong smell of gunpowder from the burns of the woman. The concert was suspended and people dispersed, stunned. (The woman survived after being technically dead for 5-7 minutes.) I don't have a meaning for what we experienced at that concert. It's just one experience. A sort of eastern realization of divine consciousness, or union with God within oneself, and recognizing it within the people around us."

But I'd lost my stranger again. He was singing:

*Look at the crowd and tell me whether  
all are surrounded  
but none are together*

*If you're awake look all around  
at all of the people...  
melt with your minds  
melt with each other  
don't be surrounded, don't be so alone. \*\**

I came down a little lower in the tree and he stood up, so we were now eye-level. I wanted to focus him, yet I had the strangest feeling that he was focusing me.

*"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

"Whether you go with kingdom come as past, present, or future tense, you have to agree that this section of the prayer is about Time and Space," I said.

"What do you know about Time and Space?" he asked.

"The Hubble telescope shows us we are a small planet in an immense cosmos. Distance shrinks and time is "now" thanks to

electronic technology.”

“Isn’t it ironic,” he said, “That electronics precedes emotional connectedness.”

“That’s just what Meg said a couple weeks ago,” I told him. “So, how do our emotions catch up with electronics?”

“Think of the electronic interconnection of nations already happening through Internet, satellites, etc. Think of this as the ‘global nervous system,’ connecting the various parts of the Body so that it is able to act as one entity. This has never been possible before in recorded history. St. Paul’s image of the Body of Christ was a prophetic vision for the coming together of all humanity with one corporate body. As this body develops, people will be more able to see the significance of world unity and interrelated ideas like Gaia, the sacred earth, etc. Don’t scoff at technology. It has helped people understand, like Einstein did, that Time is non-local. That synchronous experiences between people separated by great distances are possible. This is confirmed by telephone and e-mail, and runs counter to our detached, mechanically uniform clock-based view of time.”

“As in, ‘the kingdom of God is at hand, ’” I said.

“Yeah, I mentioned that already, didn’t I?” he said.

“Anyway, heaven and earth become mirror images,” I said, now feeling like we were on a roll. “And environmentally entwined. God is within.”

“Sure,” he said.

“Yes,” I continued, examples leaping into my head. Holistic health shows us how to have a mind-body connection. There has been a shift in values away from hierarchical authorities, and toward our own intuition. Gurus and priests can no longer provide the same meaning as our collaborative theology can.”



"You already told me that," he said.

"Okay, there is a desire for meaningful work, a greater tolerance for diversity. But the biggest shift is occurring in how we perceive and value Time. 28% of Americans in the last 5 years "downshifted" to fewer hours at work, and are spending more time in their communities."

The man sat down again under the tree. I hopped down, stood in front of him, and kept talking. I felt I was on a soapbox, and it didn't quite fit the occasion (what WAS the occasion?) but I persisted, and told him about a survey Audrey and I created recently when we asked 60 teenagers what they would do to make the world more fun and more beautiful. Teenagers always express whatever's on the cutting edge. Almost every one, in one way or another, championed a paradigm shift in how Time is used. Their comments ranged from "more time for relaxing," "more frequent vacations," and "let people structure their own time" to suggestions for using time more creatively, like "make walking mandatory in the city," and "have intergenerational dances every Friday with a live band". They also included sage realizations like "you can't pin a definition of life's work to one event or one time period, your whole life is your work." There was only one pessimist, who said, "I think the world is soon coming to an end" and only two jokers, one who argued for naked schools, and the other for more sequins. (A drama major!)

"It's been a long time since I was a teenager," the stranger said, "but they really do know everything. Now slow down and tell me what Time means to you." Well, now I felt stupid hopping about in front of him, so I sat down under my tree next to him. I thought that if I looked him straight in the eye, I wouldn't be able to think straight, so I stared at his hands as I spoke. In spite of his fine academic talking, he had workman's hands, scarred and cut up again. It was pretty dark now, but the moon made his cuts glow.

I told him that I had recently found out that Time really isn't locality-specific. One day last month I was driving along in Herndon singing to the radio when I suddenly felt very clearly that someone was in trouble in Texas. I have a close friend who happened to be in Texas that week making a business proposal to a scientific community. I felt that it was not he directly who was in trouble, but that somebody was hurting and that it caused a derailment of my friend's presentation. I stopped the car and sent prayers toward Texas. I noted the time (2:15) and then went my way and forgot about it. That night on the phone I asked my friend what happened at 2:15. He said, oh, nothing, but one hour earlier, at 1:15 the man who had invited him to do the presentation had gone into what everyone thought was a heart attack, and the only doctor around was a chiropractor who had some Reiki experience. She asked my friend to pray while she worked on the man. He said he concentrated on the name of God. She was able to re-channel the energy around the man's heart and he was not only okay again, but bubbling over with excitement about the same matter that had minutes before been stressing him. 'Too bad it wasn't 2:15' I commented, and then we realized there is the one hour time difference between Texas and here."

I looked at my visitor. He put his hand on my shoulder. "The power of prayer and intercession is strong indeed," he said.

"May it not be that each of us has some way of plugging into other dimensions, or the paranormal, each of us in different ways, some auditory, others through touch or visualization, and that we will learn how to develop these through our spiritual journeys in the next millennium?"

"I hope so," he said.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

"You can outdate that line," he waved his hand, "which is about individual survival, simply by recognizing that the

problem is not production anymore, but distribution. If you use divine principles for the stewardship of the earth, all primary physical needs can be satisfied throughout the world by applying science universally.”

“Thanks,” I said. “Now, what about ‘forgive us our sins as we forgive those indebted to us.’”

“Here we see the beginning of an ethics that goes beyond individual spiritual growth and into the interpersonal realm. Two weeks ago Dan talked about the Good Samaritan and pointed out that help goes both ways.”

“How’d you know about Dan?” I asked.

“I know Dan,” he said. “Anyway, you remember the example of getting bread from a neighbor if you harangue the neighbor enough. God, by contrast, simply gives. But you are so used to thinking of “bread” in its broad metaphorical sense. Remember bread is a very specific thing too. The more specific the things you ask for, the sooner you’ll receive them.”

“That’s what my sister in Detroit says!” I told him. “She says just as a parent anticipates the child’s excitement at Christmas when opening the exact present he or she wanted, so God gets a kick out of giving you your specific desires. We wouldn’t like it if our kids said “Oh, just give me whatever you think is best for me, or just give me what you think I deserve,” no! That takes all the fun out of it for the giver. Some people call this asking for specifics, the law of attraction, or magnetism, that when you ask, the universe makes way for it to come to you,” I said.

“I’d call it the law of not depriving God of fun,” he said.

*When here in my mind  
I have been blind  
emotionally behind  
I have faith I will find*

*the mercy in You. \*\*\**

At this point we sat on the ground under the silver maple, each with our legs tucked, our hands folded, and our faces solemn. All we needed was a pipe to share the tobacco. I'm 1/16 Sioux Indian and one of the main ways I feel it is whenever I get solemn with anyone, I want to share tobacco. It occurred to me that I couldn't remember whether there are 16 or 20 cigarettes in a pack.

*"Deliver us from evil."*

I think we just sat for a while. I didn't say anything. The last part of the Our Father is the toughest for me, the idea of evil, all of the fighting in the world, especially war in the name of religion. I don't have answers deep enough to solve these things. Could countries be part of the Body of Christ?

As if reading my thoughts, the man said, "Don't forget that countries have already cooperated to eradicate diseases – smallpox, polio, diphtheria. It's a matter of stopping the micromanaging and establishing a larger-scale guidance by Faith. True Faith won't take over the individual governments but will provide a moral guidance that makes real diversity, or plurality, possible. A source of exchange rather than conflict."

"How do we go from individual to global?" I asked.

"Well, how did Roy go from inspiration to production, with the M.U.K.A. alliance (South African homeless actors), of "The Gift"?

"Through Seekers. Oh – did you go to a performance at the Source?"

"I was there. I saw that Roy is much beloved. What else could heaven be but the ability to freely play with infinite

creative potential and worshipfully work using God-given gifts?"

"Is this possible in our time?" I asked, "the fulfillment of each individual's potential in work and play?"

"Well, that would be heaven on earth," he said. "It would mean the end of the Age of Prophecy and the beginning of the Age of Fulfillment. Think about it."

And he stood up and started to go. The moon shone down upon the back of his tee shirt and jeans and his feet in the ancient sandals shuffled soundlessly through the ivy groundcover in my backyard. I jumped up and said, "Wait!" I was about to take a long shot here. "Do you," I asked, "do you know that passage in Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov where Christ comes to talk with the Grand Inquisitor?"

He turned and looked at me with amusement in his eyes. "Now, I tell you, Annamarie, if Christ was willing to talk to the least of these fictional characters, how much more does he want to talk with you!" And he touched me on the forehead gently with his thumb, then disappeared.

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So I never wrote the sermon. I believe Christ would probably say it is time to create our own prayer. Seekers are uniquely qualified to create a new prayer. Not just because of collaborative theology and social awareness, but also because Seekers already know how to be interpersonal. That's what I notice distinguishes this community from all others I've tried in the DC area, an area known for its lack of any real interpersonal connecting. Seekers already understand the world as global. Seekers' perception of Time expands the envelope of Space. Seekers know that the manner of prayer is no longer relegated to the strictly intellectual realm of words or meditation, but belongs also to kinesthetic and emotional realms, to dance and body prayer. Seekers are already endeared

to the environment, respect alternative healing, have traveled to many countries, and are ready to walk the labyrinth.

Who was my fugitive visitor under my maple tree? Well, as Willa Cather said, "Miracles rest not so much upon healing power coming suddenly near us from afar, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for the moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what has been around us always."

\*"One of Us" by Joan Osborne

\*\*"So Alone" by Offspring

\*\*\*"Mercy in You" by Depeche Mode

Thanks to Frank J. Lucatelli for explication of the Bahai writings, progressive revelation, and science and technology.